

Policy and Programme Failures in Nigeria: The Case of UBE and Out of School Children

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Abstract

The research explores why Nigerian governments policy and programmes on Universal Basic Education which provides for free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age, as contained in the Universal Basic Education Act 2004 legislation which also mandates that every parent shall ensure that his/her child or ward attends and completes primary and junior secondary school education as well as that stakeholders in education in a Local Government Area shall ensure that every parent or person who has the care and custody of a child performs the duty imposed on him/her under the Act is not yielding the desired results. The research relies on primary and secondary sources, involving personal observation, roundtable discussions, one-to-one discussion and content analysis of other people's views, government official statements and declarations associated with Universal Basic Education (UBE). The result is presented qualitatively.

1.0 Background of the study

All Nigeria governments (past and present) have always placed top priority on making basic education a crucial part of their educational policies. This indicates that there is a link between the past and present in the educational development of Nigeria. Three main educational traditions, the Indigenous, Islamic and the Western (with the arrival of the Wesleyan Christian Missionaries at Badagry in 1842 are known to have flourished at various times in Nigeria (Mkpa, 2013). Each type of education served its purpose for its consumers but also had its problems. Historically, Western education in Nigeria can be traced to the colonial period, when Nigeria, adopted the British form of education, which consists of primary, secondary, as well as higher education (Fabunmi, 2005). Between 1842 and 1914, about ten different Christian missions had arrived and begun intensive missionary and educational work in Nigeria. Schools were built and the missions struggled for pupils/members such that there was a proliferation of primary schools established by different missions. Although literary education in the '4Rs' (reading, writing, arithmetic and religion) was predominant, this new missionary education prepared the recipients for new job opportunities, as teachers, church evangelists or pastors, clerks and interpreters (Mkpa, 2013).

However, the Islamic education had been in the Northern Protectorate before the amalgamation in 1914, so the Christian missionaries that came into the country through the Western Region were restricted from spreading both Christianity and Western education to the Northern region (Labo-Popoola, Bello and Atanda, 2009). From 1960, i.e. after the independence, a lot of Education Laws, policies and edicts were put in place, depending on the type of government in power in the country. In 1979, the Constitution puts education on the concurrent list, which implies that the responsibilities and authority in education would be shared among the three tiers of government i.e., federal, state and local governments. Between 1983 and 1999, decrees such as Decree No 16 of 1985, Decree 26 of 1988 and Decree 36 of 1990 were promulgated in Nigeria to guide and regulate the conduct of education in the country.

A major policy made by the Federal Government was put in place in 1977; this was tagged the National Policy on Education. This policy was the outcome of a seminar convened in 1973 after the National Curriculum Conference. The 1977 policy has been revised thrice i.e., 1981, 1998 and 2004; the crux of the policies stipulates that every child has a right to equal educational opportunities, irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities, which supposed to equalize opportunities so that any individual, regardless of background, can achieve success. In 1999, the Federal Government introduced the Universal Basic Education (UBE) aimed at providing greater access to, and ensuring quality of basic education throughout Nigeria. To reinforce this effort, free Universal Basic Education Act 2004 legislation was passed into law, which permits the Federal Government's intervention to provide assistance to the States and Local Governments in Nigeria for the purposes of uniform and qualitative basic education throughout the country (UBE, 2013).

The situation is such that most out of school children lack the much desired recognition, capacity, organization and resources to voice out their plight and demand accountability. Children living on the streets, orphans and other groups of vulnerable children are also deprived of their right to basic primary education, face stigmatization, encounter violence and are vulnerable to many dangerous situations (UNICEF, 2013). In direct

response to this issue, the federal government through legislation came up with the Universal Basic education. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme is a Nine (9) year basic educational programme, which was launched and executed by the government and people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo flagged off UBE on 30th. September 1999 in Sokoto State of Nigeria. The Programme is Nigeria's strategy for the achievement of Education for All (EFA) and the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The implementation process of the programme has been on since 1999. To create the enabling law for the execution certain programmes of the policy, President Obasanjo signed the UBE Bill into law on 26th. May 2004, following its passage by the National Assembly. The UBE Act 2004 makes provision for basic education comprising of ECCE, Primary and Junior Secondary Education. The financing of basic education is the responsibility of States and Local Governments. However, the Federal Government decided to intervene in the provision of basic education with 2% of its Consolidated Revenue Fund. For states to fully benefit from this Fund, criteria were established which states are to comply. The Act also provides for the establishment of the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) to co-ordinate the implementation of the programme at the States and Local government through the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) of each State and the Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs). The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) was formally established on 7th. October 2004.

The Government's Vision is that at the end of nine years of this continuous education, every child should acquire appropriate and relevant skills and values and be employable in order to contribute his or her quota to National Development. The mission is to serve as a prime energizer of National Movement for the actualization of the nation's Universal Basic Education (UBE) vision, working in concert with all stakeholders, thus mobilizing the Nation's creative energies to ensure that "Education for All" becomes the Responsibility of all. The scope of UBE encompasses, early childhood care and education, Six-year Primary Education, and three (3) years of Junior Secondary Education. The objective is to:

- ❖ Ensure unfettered access to nine (9) years of formal basic education.
- ❖ The provision of free, Universal Basic Education for every Nigerian child of school going age.
- ❖ Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system, through improved relevance, quality and efficiency.
- ❖ Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Despite the elaborate policy and legal framework of basic education in Nigeria, It is estimated that over 10 million children are out of school in the country (UNESCO, 2013). Nigeria is today ranked high among nations where large populations of school children are not in school (EAGMR, 2013), i.e. Nigeria tops the table of '12' countries with which it accounts for 47% of the global out of school population. Of the 10 million out of school children in Nigeria, half of the numbers are from the Northern part of the country where security challenges (insurgency) have continued unabated, with numerous deaths so far recorded (UNESCO 2013). More disturbing is the ratio of the girl child. For example, "In the North-West, 70 per cent of women between 20 and 29 are unable to read, compared to 9.7 per cent in the South West. Also, only three per cent of females' complete secondary education in the Northern zone (Lamido, 2013). And, in the South East, the number of boys out of schools is on the rise alongside kidnapping and armed robbery. Hence, the need to examine the determinants of out of school children in Nigeria and the specific factors which contribute to the variations in the population of out-of-school children in the country by relying on primary and secondary sources.

3.0 Research questions

Now the question agitating the minds of policy makers/executioners, legislators and well-meaning Nigerians is that despite the obvious advantages education confers on the educated, why is the idea of enrolling their children in school still repugnant to some parents? Why is it that in spite of the Universal Basic Education Act, school enrolment appears to be on a downward slide? If education is free and compulsory up to the Junior Secondary Class (i.e. nine years) why are parents not willing to send their kids to school? And, are the schools not meeting-up the expectations of the parents and pupils? Are the facilities not good enough? Are the schools factoring in cultural and religious elements into the learning system that discourages parents and pupils? Why is it that while the enrolment figure in primary and junior-secondary schools is nose diving, the number of children engaged in child labour is on the increase? What is the federal, state, local, or private efforts implemented so far to address the factors associated with out of school children in Nigeria not yielding the desired result? What is wrong with the enforcement of the constitutional responsibility of educating every Nigerian child by the government? What

are the gender disparity of out of school children and its implications to National development? What are the national and regional or geo-political trends of out of school children rate in Nigeria? What is the strength of policy measure of basic education in the geo-political zones of the country? What are the major weaknesses of basic education policy implementation in Nigeria? How can gender balance be achieved/improved upon? Will amendment of the policy framework or UBEC legislation address the problem? Generally, the research intends to investigate the rising trends of out of school children in the country and its implication for National development. Primarily, it intends to explore the factors behind the policy and programme failures in Nigeria with special focus on the Universal basic Education (UBE).

4.0 Research Methodology

The research relies on primary and secondary data sourced through personal observation. The researcher utilises personal observation from Nigerian streets on how young children take to street trading, hawking 'pure water', kola nuts, sweets and biscuits selling or serving as motor conductors and food sellers' maids, not to mention the giving out by some parents their teenage daughters in marriage than allowing them to attend school.

5.0 Findings from Secondary/Primary Sources

Early marriage is common across Nigeria and West Africa (UN, 2005). According to FMWA&SD (2008a), it features most in a context of poverty. Parents view the process as a possible way out of poverty for the child and the rest of the family. Non-awareness of children's rights and other factors such as cultural and religious traditions also plays a part (ibid). The practice is especially common in rural areas and the Islamic northern states (Eze-Anaba, 2003; Sossou and Yogtiba, 2009). Data show that one-third of women in the North-West were married as adolescents, compared with less than one-eighth of women in the North-East and North-Central regions (FMWA&SA, 2008a). Southern women are particularly unlikely to be married at teens, with the South-West reporting rates as low as 5% (ibid). It is commonplace in northern Nigeria for a family to remove a girl child from school and engage her in tasks to prepare for marriage and caring for a family, such as smallholder farming and household chores (Eze-Anaba, 2003). As a long-established traditional practice, most parents and communities do not consider this a problem. According to Sossou and Yogtiba (2009), it is alleged that girls regard early marriage as a way to improve their economic status and gain social recognition and to escape their family and domestic responsibilities.

As a result of being pulled out of school, many girls grow up illiterate and feel intimidated by the Nigerian legal system, which demands the use and understanding of correct English. This paves the way for a future of marginalisation and vulnerability (Eze-Anaba, 2003). The Promoting synergies between child protection and social protection in Nigeria 17 Man Committee on the Rights of the Child (2004) highlights the dangers of early marriage, that denying girls access to education, which is detrimental to their mental and physical development and deprives them of control over their reproductive health. Giving birth at a young age can also cause vesico-vaginal fistula. This is particularly prevalent in the north, where early marriage is more common.

It is also common for children to be born or raised in a household where they are expected to undertake tasks for no pay. This is considered an essential aspect of growing up, whereby children learn life skills and the value of work. The demanding nature of the tasks they undertake can be exhausting and adversely affect their performance in school. Moreover, it can hamper their social and personal development (Okafor, 2010). The nature and characteristics of child domestic labour is a central factor in a National Baseline Survey on Child Protection in Nigeria (NBSCP), which focused on the exploitation of children and youth and issues affecting their rights (FMWA&SD, 2009).

Children with disabilities in Nigerian society are at risk of emotional and educational neglect as well as other forms of psychological abuse. West African cultural tradition attributes disability to the sins of the individual or family members. As a result, families with disabled children are frequently discriminated against and stigmatised (Ebigbo, 2003). To escape this shame, some families ostracise children with disabilities, and some even kill them (ibid; Sossou and Yogtiba, 2009). In most cases, children are hidden from public view. As a result, many of them are denied access to proper care and education and deprived of emotional and physiological support. In other cases, parents or guardians drop them off on street corners to beg for money (Sossou and Yogtiba, 2009). In the event that disabled children do attend school, many drop out as a result of ridicule and discrimination by fellow pupils and school staff (ibid).

Although there is much agreement among policymakers, researchers, and educators that adolescents should remain in high school until graduation, many young people leave before they complete high school. Because opinions about the socially detrimental effect of this educational phenomenon are almost universal, there is much interest in (a) explaining why students drop out of high school, (b) attributing blame for this loss to our nation's stock of human capital, and (c) developing social policies that will keep students in school. The most common explanations for out of school children focus on the personal characteristics of individual students.

The list of potential risk factors associated with out of school children behavior is long and quite consistent across a myriad of studies. Research that focuses on identifying these explanatory factors is often organized around comparisons of students who do and do not drop out. Such research typically highlights risk factors, which usually are grouped into three categories: (1) social background (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status [SES], family structure, and inner-city residence); (2) academic background (e.g., ability, test scores, grade-repeating history) and (3) academically related behaviors (e.g., engagement with school, school grades, course completions and failures, truancy, school disciplinary encounters).

Although the dropout rate has declined substantially since the early 1940s (Rumberger 1987), the loss of students from the nation's high schools is still unacceptably high. Current estimates of the proportion of adolescents who do not finish high school vary widely (from 7 to 16 percent), depending on how the rate is calculated (Rumberger 1987; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollock, & Rock 1986; Kaufman, McMillen & Sweet 1996; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 1992). Dropout rates in urban areas are much higher; one-third of entering 9th graders in large cities fail to complete high school (Council of Great City Schools 1994).

Social risk factors: The construct of risk, a characteristic of individuals, is common in studies of school dropouts (Natriello McDill, & Pallas 1990; Pallas 1989). Authors often divide this construct into two categories: academic and social risk. Social risk includes demographic factors associated with a higher likelihood of school difficulties: race, age, language-minority status, gender, family income, parents' education, and family structure. Students who are members of racial and ethnic minority groups drop out at higher rates than white students, as do those from low-income families, from single-parent households, and from families in which one or both parents did not complete high school (Rumberger 1987; Natriello et al. 1990). There is a difference between the exact moment when students leave school and the process of disengaging from school that often begins well before they arrive at the moment when they leave school. Some scholars suggest that the cumulative process of school disengagement may begin as early as the first grade (Entwistle, Alexander, & Olson 1997). However, most dropouts actually leave school sometime between the 10th and 12th grades (Frase 1989), in part because the legal age for school leaving is 16 in most states. Besides the cumulative nature of the school disengagement process, social risk factors themselves are seen as cumulative. That is, a student characterized by more of these factors is at a statistically greater risk of dropping out.

We characterize the schools in this study along three dimensions: social organization, academic organization, and school structure. In this section we discuss the social organization of schools. Although the construct is known by different names (e.g., teacher/ student relationships, social capital, social support, personalism, and communal relationships), the ideas behind them are quite similar. Both qualitative and quantitative studies suggest that students who leave high school before graduating often cite lack of social support as one reason for doing so. Unengaged students claim that teachers don't care about them, are not interested in how well they do in school, and are not willing to help them with problems (Fine 1986; Lee, Ready, & Ross, 1999; MacLeod 1987). Interviews with dropouts as they left school revealed that half said they were quitting because they didn't get along with teachers or other students (Caterall 1998). Qualitative studies have also shown that positive social relationships can create powerful incentives for students to come to school, even those who report that school work is difficult and expectations are hard to meet (Fine, 1991; LeCompte & Dworkin 1991; Lee et al., 1999; Wehlage et al., 1989). Two recent quantitative studies provide evidence for the importance of social contact.

One showed that social capital (measured as relationships between students and teachers and whether teachers reported talking with students outside of class) was strongly related to dropping out, even after taking students' social and academic risk factors into account (Croninger & Lee in press). Another study focused on one-year achievement gains for middle-grade students in Chicago (Lee & Smith, 1999). Although students' reports of social support from teachers, parents, peers, and neighborhood were positively but modestly related to learning, the effect of support on learning was contingent on the school's academic press. Students with strong social support who attended schools with low academic press learned almost nothing, whereas students who reported considerable support from these sources learned quite a lot if they also attended schools where they were pushed academically.

6.0 Analysis of Findings from Primary and Secondary Sources

There has been a growing interest in recent years in the out of school children in Nigeria. According to Elijah and Okoruwa (2008) empirical evidence shows that parental education may be an even more important predictor than poverty. While parents who are poor are also likely to be poorly educated, and parents who are poorly educated are more likely to be poor, educated parents – regardless of income – are more likely to place a value on education and insist their children focus on learning rather than income generation (Okpukpara and Odurukwe, 2006). The Nigeria Child Labour Survey (NCLS) found that maternal education is a more powerful driver of this effect than paternal education (ibid). Educated mothers are more able to make an income sufficient to preclude the necessity of child labour. The same study also found that parental occupation is a key driver of

child labour (Okpukpara and Odurukwe, 2006). This is largely mediated through residence location, as farmers typically live in more rural areas, which suffer from broader and deeper poverty than urban environments. Furthermore, children in cities are more able to combine work with school; children of farmers are less likely to be enrolled at all, as they are needed in their parents' farms (Gockowski and Oduwole, 2001). Furthermore, non-farmers typically have some education and are more likely to recognise its benefits for their children (Okpukpara and Odurukwe, 2006).

Southern children are correspondingly more likely to attend school than northern children, full-time enrolment being 72% and 58%, respectively (ibid). There are a variety of explanations for these differences. Northern states are more rural and the prevalence of subsistence agriculture requires more labour support from children (ibid). They are poorer than southern states, and parents have fewer options to increase the family income. Overall, the NCLS found that rural children contribute a substantially larger share to the household than urban children. Over 15% of family income in rural areas comes from children's wages. In urban areas, this figure is less than 10% (ibid). Lack of enforcement capacity in rural areas also makes it difficult to stamp out child labour (Elijah and Okoruwa, nd).

Characteristics of individuals that define their academic and social risk are correlated; students at high social risk are more likely to manifest at-risk academic behaviors. Despite their statistical association, we suggest that these two sorts of risk factors are conceptually quite separate. Students and schools have very little control over factors that constitute social risk (SES, race/ethnicity, gender, family circumstances), whereas such academic risk factors as absenteeism, retention, special education placement, and low performance are amenable to personal and school interventions. Both social and academic risk factors defining individuals are also linked to the characteristics of schools that are associated with students dropping out.

Some interesting extant research has rejected the more common focus on individuals' risk of dropping out, turning away from the "blame the victim for the problem." orientation of research that highlights risk factors. Instead, these studies explore school factors that are associated with dropping out. Several qualitative or interpretative studies have considered how schools themselves engage in practices or create conditions that push certain types of students out of school, especially those who exhibit the social and academic risk factors discussed above (Delgado-Gaitan 1988; Fine 1991; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez 1989). These studies go well beyond the well-documented findings that dropout rates vary widely between high schools (Pallas 1986) and between student populations within high schools (Rumberger 1987). Large comprehensive high schools, especially in urban areas, report the highest dropout rates (Bryk&Thum, 1989), even exceeding half of 9th grade cohorts in some urban high schools (CGCS 1994).

Another retrospective study explored the individual and school factors associated with student's not completing high school two years after their cohort had graduated (Rumberger& Larson, 1998). Most findings were focused on individuals, academic and social risk factors. Students who dropped out were considerably more likely to have changed schools, before or during high school. Beyond the usual social risk factors associated with dropping out (minority status, single-parent family status, and low SES), the authors also identified academic risk factors (low expectations, grade retention, high absenteeism, and low school performance). Surprisingly, school factors were generally unrelated to dropping out in these complex models. The authors also investigated the factors associated with the dropouts having obtained a GED in the two years after they left school. A third quantitative study used the HSES, which included augmented samples of students in a subset of NELS schools located in urban and suburban areas (the HSES) -- the same data used in this study (Rumberger& Thomas, 2000). Here the authors explored both dropout and turnover rates in urban and suburban high schools. They reported higher dropout rates in public (compared to Catholic and other private schools), in urban schools, and in larger schools. Findings about school resources were noteworthy: dropout rates were lower in schools with more excellent teachers (reported by students) and with lower student/teacher ratios. Unsurprisingly, dropout rates were higher in schools with low attendance and with more students who had been retained before high school.

Students who leave their high schools can either transfer to another school (or thus stay in school) or leave school altogether. Two studies examined these alternatives to staying in high school. Rumberger and Thomas (2000) used multilevel methods and the HSES data. Some school factors were associated with both higher dropout and school transfer rates (higher proportions of retained students, lower quality teachers), and some factors were related to higher transfer but not dropout rates (high minority enrolment, lower teacher salaries). It was interesting that non-Catholic private (compared to public) schools had lower dropout rates but higher transfer rates.

Lee and Burkam (1992) also conceptualized school transfer as an alternative to dropping out, and considered demographic, family, and school factors associated with either staying in school, transferring, or dropping out. Using data from High School and Beyond (HS&B), they explored separate but identical multinomial logistic models in public and private schools. Children in a stepfamily system are more associated with dropping out. Although the factors linked to transferring and dropping out (both compared to staying in the

same school) were quite similar in public schools, they were dissimilar in private schools. Thus, transferring schools (probably to a public school) represented a viable alternative to dropping out for disaffected students in private schools, whereas this option was a less viable alternative for public school students. They suggested that low dropout rates in private school might be explained by the fact that such students have the “drop down” alternative.

7. 0 Summary/conclusion

It can be argued that unemployment and poverty gave rise to the insurgency in the North, the rising armed robbery cases in the South-West and the kidnapping in the South-East but unless the syndrome of out of school children is fought with resolve and reversed, the current security challenges confronting the country would be a child’s play taking future trends into account (Olarenwaju, 2013). Although the major focus of research about students dropping out of schools focuses on students’ social and academic risk factors, there is a growing interest in how schools influence these behaviors. Specifically, how schools are organized in terms of social relations among school members has been shown to influence students’ engagement with school and also the ultimate act of disengagement: dropping out. Although a growing body of research demonstrates the importance of how schools structure their curricula, all of this research investigates curriculum structure effects on student learning. The small but growing body of research that focuses on schools influence students’ decision to drop out has suggested that school structure-urban city, sector, and size influence this important decision. This research is meant to build on, and expand, the small but growing body of research that focuses on how the organization and structure of primary and Junior Secondary schools links to students’ decisions to drop out.

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