AN ASSESSMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA AND THE IMPLICATIONS ON ACCESS TO QUALITY PRIMARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT
School enrolment figures based on number of schools: Geo-Political zone; gender disparities; number of classrooms and teachers-pupils ratio in public and private primary schools are important statistical data essential for educational planning for access and quality basic education. The aim of the study was to examine the universal basic education in Nigeria and its implication on access to quality primary education. Four research questions guided the study. A pool of secondary source data from The National Bureau of Statistics, and Federal Ministry of Education (FME) was organized and analysed using descriptive statistics. Among other things, there was a wide gap in school ownership and school enrolment between public and private primary schools; gender disparity was so pronounced in regard to school enrolment; there were not enough teachers to implement UBE as the teachers-pupils’ ratio fell short of 1 teacher per 35 pupils as stipulated by UBE minimum standard. Also, the emerging issues with respect to UBE implementation such as concept of access, gender disparity and quality of basic education were raised and examined. It was recommended that the private sector be encouraged to establish more schools to increase access to education; more incentives to be provided for school age girls especially in the North to increase their enrolment to reduce enrolment gender disparity; more teachers should be employed; and funding of UBE should be improved upon.

Keywords: Universal Basic Education (UBE), Schools enrolment, Gender disparity, Equal access, Quality primary education

INTRODUCTION
All over the world, primary education has been regarded as the most important because it is the foundation of the whole educational pursuit, which is to provide literacy and enlightenment to the citizens. The importance of primary education can therefore be seen in the sense that all beneficiaries of the other levels of education by necessity have to pass through this level (Oni, 2017). What this means is that primary education is the foundation of all other
levels of education. It is defined as the education given in an institution for children aged 6-11 years plus which constitutes the bedrock upon which the entire education system is built. Indeed, the success and failure of the entire education system are determined by it. Basic education is also seen as the universalization of access of education.

The National Policy on Education (2013) provides the basis for Basic Education (BE) sub-section in terms of structure, meaning, goals and funding. The policy statement sees UBE as a safety net to the young ones which can be used to combat the twin problems of illiteracy and poverty as well as ensuring national integration, consciousness and development. Section 2, subsection 10, and 13a-e of the National Policy on Education (2014) referred to Basic Education as education given to children aged 0-15 years: Lower Basic Education, Primary 1 to 3, Middle or Intermediate Basic Education, Primary 3 to 6 and Upper Basic Education JSS 1 to 3. The goals of Basic Education according to NPE (2013) are to:

a. Provide the child with diverse basic knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship, wealth generation and educational advancement.

b. Develop patriotic young people equipped to contribute to social development and performance of their civil responsibilities.

c. Inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking, and who appreciate the dignity of labour.

d. Inspire national consciousness and harmonious co-existence, irrespective of differences in endowment, religion, ethnic and socio-economic background.

e. Provide opportunities for the child to develop manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child’s capacity.

Based on the above goals of Basic Education, it is obvious that education is a necessity for all, regardless of background, race and ethnic group. In recognition of the significance of basic education for sustainable development, the United Nations in 1948 declared education as one of the fundamental human rights, which should be accessible to all human beings, irrespective of their colour, gender, creed, religion, economic background and disability.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Due to the importance of education in all areas of human development, government at both federal and state levels had made concerted efforts in making policies and programmes for educational development. The government’s commitment to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty as well as stimulate and accelerate national development, political consciousness and national integration made government to adopt the UBE Programme in order to make education accessible to all citizens. However, the implementation since 2004 particularly in the
area of access and quality has experienced shortcomings. It is often said by many scholars that implementation is the problem of many good policies in Nigeria, especially where the intentions of the policy designers are undermined either by corruption, politics or lack of human, financial and material resources.

It is the light of the foregoing that this study set out to find out how access and quality can be assured and the factors militating against the successful implementation of UBE programme in Nigeria can be done away with towards making UBE a catalyst for sustainable development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to assess the implementation of the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria. The specific objectives are to:

1. assess the level of pupils’ school enrolment in the country;
2. examine issues of enrolment and gender disparity;
3. examine the level of UBE in the light of 1:35 teacher/pupil ratio as stipulated by the minimum benchmark of UBE;
4. examine emerging issues in UBE implementation; and
5. make recommendations for the way forward.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research methodology was adopted in the study. Relevant data were extracted from a pool of secondary source data obtained from: Nigeria Digest of Educational Statistics 2014 to 2016; National Bureau of Statistics 2017; Federal Ministry of Education; and UBE Minimum Standard Manual. The methodology employed historical approach spanning from 1960 to 2017 as the baseline years. This cuts across all the 36 states of the federation plus the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

The baseline year was chosen for the fact that UBE was an offshoot of universalization of UPE Programme that came into existence prior to and after independence which had a great impact on Nigerian basic education.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO UBE IN NIGERIA

The first education system of Nigeria as a British Colony started in Badagry where the first primary school was established by the Wesleyan Mission (Methodist Church) in 1843. The Nursery of Infant Church later became St. Thomas Anglican Nursery and Primary in 1845. The school was housed in the first storey building in Badagry before moving to its location in Topo, Badagry where the relics of the building can still be seen today (Kolawole, 2014).
For seven decades (1882-1952), the colonial government played a prominent role in the management and quality control of the nation’s primary and secondary education through the enactment of a number of Education Ordinances, Education Proclamations and Education Codes. The foundation for the nation’s basic organizational structure was laid in the Lyttleton Constitution, enacted in 1954. Each of the governments of the Federal Territory of Lagos, Eastern Region, Northern Region and Western Region enjoyed a measure of autonomy. Each government engaged in the management of the primary and secondary education systems in its jurisdiction (Oni, 2009).

Since independence, a lot of education laws, policies and edicts have been put in place, depending on the type of government being experienced in the country. In 1979, the Constitution put education on the concurrent list, which implies that the responsibilities and authority in education would be shared among the three tiers of government, that is, federal, state and local governments. Between 1983 and 1999 (a military era), 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 and 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 – 1981, 1998 and 2014.

As at independence in 1960, the nation had 15,703 primary schools with 2,912,618 pupils and 96,807 teachers, that is, an average of 30 pupils to a teacher and 185 pupils per school. By 1961, the number of schools grew to 15,743. However, the numbers of pupils and teachers went down to 2,803,836 and 95,696, respectively, that is, an average of 29 pupils to a teacher and 178 pupils per school (Federal Office of Statistics, 1963). By 1964, the number of primary schools and the pupils in attendance had gone down to 14,976 and 2,849,500 respectively.
Number of Primary Schools and Pupils’ Enrolment

Table 1: The Enrolment Pattern in Primary Schools Over the Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Schools</th>
<th>Pupil enrolment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>15,703</td>
<td>2,912,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>15,743</td>
<td>2,803,836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>14,976</td>
<td>2,849,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>14,901</td>
<td>3,515,827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>13,300</td>
<td>4,283,349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>134,266</td>
<td>11,540,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>33,796</td>
<td>12,690,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>48,242</td>
<td>16,761,591</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>41,342</td>
<td>17,397,553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>70,822</td>
<td>21,717,789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>65,731</td>
<td>20,469,395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>68,715</td>
<td>18,818,544</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Federal Office of Statistics (National Bureau of Statistics)

Since independence, the number of primary schools and pupil enrolment has been fluctuating as indicated in the Table 1. A few years after independence, the country’s educational system was criticized. According to Fafunwa (1984), there was the call for outright rejection of the educational legacy of the former British overlords. The agitation resulted in the conduct of the National Conference on Curriculum Development at the close of the decade, precisely 1969. The conference recommended a six-year primary school course, followed by three-year junior secondary and a three-year senior secondary course. The report of the conference, and the development afterwards, resulted in the National Policy on Education (NPE) published in 1977.

Another important milestone in the history of the nation’s primary and secondary education was the launching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme held at the Shehu Kangiwa Square, Sokoto, on 30th September, 1999. It was a remarkable coincidence that the same personality, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who started the Universal Primary Education scheme, also launched the Universal Basic Education, during his second term in office as Head of State, twenty-three years later. Basic education which is supposed to be provided by the government was designed to be free, universal, compulsory, and qualitative and to be enjoyed on full-time basis (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004; Lagos State of Nigeria, 2006).
Table 2: Summary of Statistics of Primary Schools (2011 to 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011/2012</td>
<td>60,085</td>
<td>31,999</td>
<td>92,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012/2013</td>
<td>60,064</td>
<td>32,187</td>
<td>92,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013/2014</td>
<td>60,131</td>
<td>26,075</td>
<td>86,206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014/2015</td>
<td>61,721</td>
<td>34,565</td>
<td>96,286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015/2016</td>
<td>62,184</td>
<td>34,717</td>
<td>96,901</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 2 shows number of schools owned by public and private individuals from the year 2011 to 2016. The figure revealed that there is a wide margin between number of schools owned by public and private individuals.

Research Question 1: What enrolment disparities exist between genders in primary schools?

Table 3: Gender Enrolment Disparity in Primary Schools 2011 to 2016 Academic Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/No</th>
<th>Academic Year</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2011/2012</td>
<td>13,167,067</td>
<td>11,726,375</td>
<td>1,440,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2012/2013</td>
<td>13,500,893</td>
<td>12,657,482</td>
<td>843,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2013/2014</td>
<td>13,255,789</td>
<td>12,555,208</td>
<td>700,581</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2014/2015</td>
<td>13,393,310</td>
<td>12,049,225</td>
<td>1,344,085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2015/2016</td>
<td>13,435,940</td>
<td>12,155,241</td>
<td>1,280,699</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 3 shows gender enrolment disparity in primary schools. The table revealed that gender disparity in enrolment was so pronounced to the extent that there is a difference of more than 1 million in the enrolment figures of male and female in 2011/2012, 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 academic years respectively. Also, academic years of 2012/2013 and 2014/2015 show a slight difference in the enrolment disparity between male and female pupils.

Research Question 2: Is there gender enrolment disparity based on geo-political zones?
Table 4: Gender Enrolment Disparity in Primary Schools Based on Geo-Political Zones 2015/2016 Academic Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geo-Political Zones</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Percentage of Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>2,081,582</td>
<td>1,886,684</td>
<td>194,898</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>2,016,459</td>
<td>1,663,805</td>
<td>352,654</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>4,482,199</td>
<td>3,721,406</td>
<td>760,793</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>1,334,443</td>
<td>1,326,035</td>
<td>8,408</td>
<td>0.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South South</td>
<td>1,053,644</td>
<td>1,058,092</td>
<td>-4,448</td>
<td>-0.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>2,467,613</td>
<td>2,499,219</td>
<td>-31,606</td>
<td>-0.64%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to table 4, gender disparity in school enrolment in the North East, North West and North Central Geo-Political Zones shows a difference of (10%), (9%) and (5%) respectively in favour of male pupils over their female counterparts. Interestingly in the South East (0.32%) South-South (0.21%) and South West geo-political zones (0.64%), female school enrolments are slightly higher than their male counterparts.

Research Question 3: Is there enrolment disparity between public and private primary schools?

Table 5: Enrolment Disparity that Exists Between Public and Private Primary Schools, 2011 to 2016 Academic Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/No.</th>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>Public Primary Schools</th>
<th>Private Primary Schools</th>
<th>Difference between public and private</th>
<th>Percentage of difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2011/2012</td>
<td>1,545,004</td>
<td>3,348,438</td>
<td>18,196,566</td>
<td>73.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2012/2013</td>
<td>22,281,502</td>
<td>1,946,049</td>
<td>20,335,453</td>
<td>77.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2013/2014</td>
<td>22,324,505</td>
<td>1,717,894</td>
<td>20,606,611</td>
<td>79.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2014/2015</td>
<td>20,788,190</td>
<td>2,304,897</td>
<td>18,483,293</td>
<td>72.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2015/2016</td>
<td>22,352,326</td>
<td>1,607,082</td>
<td>20,745,244</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From table 5, enrolment difference of public and private schools stood at 18,196,566 (73.1%) in 2011/2012, 20,335,453 (77.7%) in 2012/2013, 20,606,611 (79.7%) in 2013/2014, 18,483,293 (72.6%) in 2014/2015 and 20,745,244 (81%) in 2015/2016 academic years. These figures reveal a very wide margin between the enrolment in the public and private primary schools. This shows that there were more pupils in public schools than private schools.
Research Question 4: What is the level of compliance with 1:35 teacher-pupils ratio as stipulated by the minimum benchmark of the UBE?

Table 6: Teachers-Pupils Ratio in Public Primary Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/No.</th>
<th>Academic year</th>
<th>Pupils’ enrolment</th>
<th>Number of Teachers</th>
<th>Teacher-Pupils’ ratio (No of Pupils/No of Teachers)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2013/2014</td>
<td>25,801,197</td>
<td>429,888</td>
<td>1:60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2014/2015</td>
<td>25,442,535</td>
<td>476,446</td>
<td>1:53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2015/2016</td>
<td>25,591,181</td>
<td>466,465</td>
<td>1:55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources (Adapted) Nigeria Digest of Educational Statistics: 2014 to 2016

Table 6 shows that the teachers-pupils’ ratio was 1 teacher per 60 pupils, 1 teacher per 54 pupils and 1 teacher per 55 pupils in the academic years: 2013/2014, 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 respectively. The figure recorded regarding the teacher-pupil ratio fell short of the specification of the minimum standard as contained in the above document.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study included the following:

a. In 2013/2014, 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 academic years, the number of schools owned by the public were 60,131, 61,721 and 62,184 respectively. For private ownership, the number of schools stood at 86,078, 34,568 and 96,701 respectively in the years under the review. This shows that there was a very wide margin between number of schools owned by public and private individuals, and the number of schools owned by the public outnumbered that of private individuals. Hence, government needs to encourage more private participation in providing education so that the burden will not be on the government alone.

b. Regarding the disparity in schools’ enrolment between public and private school. The enrolment difference stood at 73.1% in 2011/2012, 77.7% in 2012/2013, 79.7% in 2013/2014, 72.6% in 2014/2015, and 81% in 2015/2016 academic years. These figures also reveal a very wide margin between the enrolment in the public and private primary schools. More so, this has shown there were more pupils in public schools than private schools. The implication from the findings is that, the trends shown that parents prefer enrolling their children in the UBE than private sector of education.

c. Gender disparity in school enrolment between male and female pupils was so pronounced in 2011/2012, 2012/2013 and 2015/2016 academic years as the difference
in each academic year is more than a million. This simply means, there was gender inequality in the enrolment rate of male and female pupils in Nigerian primary schools.

d. The direction of the disparity in Nigerian primary schools’ enrolment is based on gender reflected in northern part of the country as North East, North West and North Central geo-political zones shows gender difference of 10%, 9% and 5% respectively in favour of male pupils over their female counterparts. Interestingly in the South-East, South-South and South-West geo-political zones, female school enrolments were slightly higher than their male counterparts’ school enrolment. This means there is no significant gender enrolment disparity in the southern part of the country. In other words, the southern part of the country engendered equality of both sexes in Nigerian primary school’s enrolment.

e. The teacher-pupil ratio fell short of 1 teacher per 35 pupils as stipulated by UBE minimum standard. The implication is that there are not enough teachers to implement UBE. These inadequacies will impact adversely on the teachers’ effectiveness and cumulatively on quality of Basic Education.

EMERGING ISSUES IN UBE IMPLEMENTATION
Concept of Access, Gender Disparity and Quality of Basic Education

Access to education according to Education Sector Analysis (ESA, 20013) implies making “it possible for everyone who is entitled to education to receive it”. It means that obstacles that prevent anyone from taking advantage of the opportunities should be removed. For this to be possible, it means that enough classrooms, laboratories and other human and material resources should be provided for everyone. A rather encompassing definition by UNESCO (2003) put “access to education” as meaning “ensuring equitable access to education institutions based on merit, capacity, efforts and perseverance”.

Also, the concept of gender refers to society’s division of humanity based on sex. Moreover, gender disparity in education is the direct or indirect prevention either of the sex particularly female to acquire education. According to Adamu (2017), gender disparity in education refers to education between male and female. In Nigerian context, it refers to the fact that, females have disproportionately low levels of access to all subsectors of educational system, vis-à-vis their male counterparts. This is influenced by gender stereotype, culture, religious beliefs. Meanwhile, education quality can be viewed as a set of elements that constitute the input; process and output of the education system, which provides services that
completely satisfy both internal and external strategic constituencies by meeting their explicit and implicit expectations (Pounder, 1999; Cheng & Tarn, 1997).

Generally, making basic education compulsory as contained in UBE act 2004 in relation to access typically refers to the ways in which government strive to ensure that pupils have equal opportunities to enrol themselves in the elementary educational system. Hence, increasing access generally requires government to remove any barriers that might prevent pupils from enrolling. Factors such as race, religion, gender, disability, language, family income community influence, geographical location or school facilities should not be allowed to hinder UBE. It then becomes imperative for all children of school age to enrol. Some factors militating against equal access to education, according to Adamu (2017), include the followings:

a. Inter communal conflict in some states discouraged parents from sending their wards to school. For example, Tiv-Jukun conflict in Taraba State;
b. Socio-cultural factors in some societies prevented the girl child from going to school hence, female enrolment remained low in some states;
c. The long distances involved in going to schools in the areas inhibited school attendance;
d. Some parents withdrew their daughters from primary schools for marriage, some refused to enrol them;
e. Many children kept away from school because parents could not provide some essentials such as school uniform, books and writing materials; and
f. Societal values, especially preference for quick money-making syndrome among boys and the level of employment of graduates at work various levels of education.

CONCLUSION

Disparities in school enrolment difference in school enrolment on gender basis in Nigeria in the light of geo-political zones as well as teachers-pupils’ ratio have been investigated. So also, some emerging issues were raised and discussed. It was established that primary education is the foundation of all education and should be regarded as fundamental to other levels of educational attainment. That was the reason the federal government of Nigeria launched the Universal Basic Education to give every Nigerian child equal access to quality basic education. More so, that one can never attain full education without passing through primary education, the importance of primary education cannot be over emphasized. Then all hands must be on deck to ensure successful implementation of the programme.
RECOMMENDATIONS

a. Private sector should be encouraged by the government to establish more schools to increase access to education;

b. More incentives should be provided for school age girls especially in the North to increase their enrolments so as to reduce gender enrolment disparity;

c. Teachers’ welfare should be given priority vis-à-vis prompt payment of salary, provision of other fringe benefits and payment of other allowances to increase their commitment to teaching and ensure quality;

d. In-service staff development programme such as seminars, workshops for and conferences for teachers to keep them abreast with the new teaching methods and techniques for the purpose of achieving quality primary education should be done regularly.

e. The problem of corruption, especially in education sector in Nigeria should be seriously tackled to implement this education policy to its fullest

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