FACTORS AFFECTING ACHIEVEMENT OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOAL ON UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION: CASE STUDY OF SOME LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper focused on the achievement of the millennium development goal (MDG) on Universal Basic Education, which seeks to ensure that by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. The paper is an attempt to reveal the inhibiting factors towards the accomplishment of the Millennium Development Goal on Universal Basic Education programme. The study employed the descriptive research design, while data were obtained through field assessment. The research revealed that the achievement of the Millennium Development Goal on Universal Basic Education is bedeviled with factors that are government related, school, parent, teacher and also pupil related. Therefore, to build a strong and virile nation, the nation's universal basic education scheme requires a more determined approach.

Introduction

Education has been severally considered to mean many things to many people. According to Akinola (2004), education can be thought of as the transmission of the values and accumulated knowledge of a society. Education is therefore hoped to enable recipients contribute to national development. The National Policy on Education (2004) observed that if the philosophy of education will be in harmony with Nigeria's national goals, education has to be geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity, as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological progress. The eight-millennium development goals to be achieved by the year 2015 are:

- eradicating extreme poverty and hunger;
- achieving universal primary education;
- promoting gender equality and women empowerment;
- reducing child mortality;
- improving maternal health;
- combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- ensuring environmental sustainability; and
- developing a global partnership for development.

To achieve the MDG on Universal Basic Education, there is the need to source required data, properly fund and to adequately monitor the programme to fast-track economic development of the nation, and ensure a shift from the production of unskilled and poorly integrated persons into the Nigerian complex society (George, 2005). Education, being an essential tool in the accomplishment of the eight-millennium development goals for the enhancement of national development, cannot be overlooked, neglected or handled with half-hearted commitment. It should be vigorously pursued with the desired zeal and commitment. This became necessary because the Universal Basic Education scheme of the Nigerian government had been observed to be bedeviled with so many inhibiting factors hindering the achievement of its objectives. The objective is aimed at equipping individuals with such knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable recipients to:

i) live meaningful and fulfilling lives;
ii) contribute to the development of the society;
iii) derive maximum social, economic and cultural benefits from the society; and
iv) discharge their civic obligations competently.

The universal basic education was an outgrowth of two previous attempts at mass literacy programmes – the UPE scheme launched on 17th January, 1955 in the Western Region of Nigeria by late Chief Obafemi Awolowo (the premier of the region); and the UPE scheme launched in 1976 by Lt. Gen Olusegun Obasanjo (then Nigerian military head of state). Further still, Nigeria, being a signatory to the 1990 Jomtiem Declaration of Education For All by the year 2000, and also a member of the Group of E-9 nations committed to the total eradication of illiteracy, seeks to achieve education for all. Despite the efforts of the government to eradicate illiteracy, Nigeria's literacy rate is still observed to be low, while Kwara State indicates a not-too-encouraging trend (KWASEEDS, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

This study seeks to determine the extent to which the MDG on Universal basic Education is being achieved in Kwara State, Nigeria and what needs to be done to actualize the dream of raising individuals who fit into the social, cultural, economic, political, scientific and technological changes in the world; and to produce pupils who will bring about the much desired economic development.

Discussions and Implications

Many factors militate against the achievement of the Universal Basic Education scheme in Kwara State. Some of these inhibiting factors, as observed on the field, include:

Government-Related Factors

There has been no serious improvement in the provision of basic education as revealed by assessment on the field. It is evident from the field assessment that schools still lack basic infrastructure like classrooms and furniture, as pupils in two separate classes share the same classroom in some rural schools, thus making it difficult for pupils to learn well. In addition to this, many schools in the rural areas are short-staffed, in which case schools with the six arms (primaries 1-6) have two or

three teachers who share out time to teach between two and three classes within the same school hours. This does not make for effective teaching.

Added to the above is the lack of the required textbooks by pupils, which makes it difficult for teachers to effectively teach some basic subjects like mathematics and English language. In addition to this, the one meal per child per school day is yet to commence in the schools visited. The one meal per school day is expected to encourage attendance at schools as well as keep pupils in school to learn. This s expected to cushion the effect of poverty on pupils from homes where parents have not benefited from the much-publicized "Poverty Alleviation Programme" of government.

Furthermore, the poor salary of teachers is not helping matters, as their morale is at the lowest ebb. Many of them are unhappy with the government, and doing very little to encourage pupils to learn. If this is allowed to persist, the aim of government on basic education will continue to be a mirage. Again the inability of government agencies and non-governmental organizations on basic education, and the lukewarm attitude of government to obtain correct information at the right time, also constitute a barrier to the accomplishment of the goals of primary education. Finally, there has been no rigorous campaign to enlighten both parents and pupils on the advantages of sound education for pupils and the larger society.

Parent-Related Factors

Parents contribute as well to impede the success of the Universal Basic Education by their non-challant attitude towards the education of their children in so many ways. Some of these include the non-provision of relevant textbooks and required stationeries for their wards/children, and the lack of proper monitoring of what the children learn in schools.

Parents sometimes hinder their children from attending to their school work (like carrying out pupils' school assignment), by forcing them to hawk after school. Thereafter, such pupils start to prepare the family dinner, after which they retire to bed for the day. This takes its toll on the poor performance of pupils and encourage non-challant attitude to school work. This sometimes results in pupils dropping out of school.

In some instances, pupils whose parents cannot afford to buy their school uniforms do not usually take their school work with seriousness; while those exposed to the hard task of earning a living for themselves and the family, skip school on market days, as they have to push wheel-barrows and carry loads for people before they can make purchases of school uniforms, sandals and sometimes to pay special levies (for excursion/field trips, etc).

Some other times, pupils are denied access to revising their school work because they are forced by parents to be apprentices in varying jobs (mechanic, tailoring, carpentry, etc). These hinder such children from concentrating on their school work, especially when parents encourage them to focus more on such apprenticeship training with the belief that it is the basic means by which they will eventually earn their living in later life. This has been found to be so because graduates from our tertiary institutions are unable to secure jobs, after the struggle to complete their education.

Added to the above is the factor of broken home, which has resulted in pupils' non-challant attitude towards school work, because close monitoring and appropriate discipline are not given to such pupils by single parent.

School Related Factors

School-related factors will include high handedness on the part of school administrators in handling disciplinary cases. Sometimes, the hard treatment meted out to pupils in schools discourage them from attending school regularly. In other instances, teachers severely criticize pupils, publicly cane them or sometimes insult pupils' parent in the presence of other pupils – all these make pupils stay away from school and may result in truancy, which makes the aim of the UBE scheme difficult to achieve.

Added to this is the unfriendliness of school environments, which does not encourage pupils' attendance at school. Many classrooms have peeled floors, dirty walls, leaking roofs and sometimes classrooms have no windows/shutters to protect pupils from cold.

Again it has been observed that primary school curriculum had been split into too many parts. For example what could have been taught as arithmetic at that level, has been split into quantitative study, verbal reasoning, mathematics etc. This leads to the problem of fragmentation and non-integration of knowledge.

Teacher-Related factors

Teachers' irregular attendance at school, especially in rural areas, make it more difficult to achieve the MDG on the universal basic education, as facts are haphazardly disseminated to pupils, making it difficult for such children to grasp the facts. At other times, teachers harass pupils and beyond that, tell pupils they are not intelligent enough to succeed academically. Sometimes, they advise such pupils to go and learn trades like carpentry, auto-mechanic, tailoring and the likes. This sometimes makes pupils less interested in school work and consequently, hinders the achievement of the UBE scheme.

Again, the inability of classroom teachers to master facts to be taught in their classrooms, especially the primary science aspects, results in teaching wrong things, thereby leading to pupils poor performances in examinations, their inability to master skills and develop right kinds of attitudes which could aid the achievement of the MDG on the universal basic education.

Pupil-Related Factors

Some pupil-related factors also militate against the accomplishment of the goals of the UBE scheme. Some of these include truancy on the part of pupils who skip school, and miss lessons taught. Such pupils find it difficult to relate new tasks with tasks earlier taught; which may make it difficult for them to cope, at times, with schoolwork thereby making them to drop out of school. At other times laziness on the part of the pupils hinder them from concentrating on their schoolwork, as they keep telling whoever cares to listen that they are not intelligent enough for formal schooling. At other times pupils' failure to carry out school assignment/home work for whatever reason does not afford them the opportunity to effectively grasp facts they were taught earlier in the class. This contribute to the number of possible fail-out in primary schools, thereby constraining the success of the scheme.

The effects of the discussed factors result in the production of unskilled and poorly equipped pupils in our communities. Such pupils are "half-baked" and they cannot contribute meaningfully to their societies, nor cope effectively with the varying technological innovations, which make life more meaningful and better enjoyed. In the bid to tackle these limiting factors, achieve the millennium

development goals and improve individual contribution to society, this paper offers the following suggestions/recommendations for a turn-around of the present situation in our schools.

Overcoming the Limiting Factors

To effectively achieve the millennium development goal on Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme, the following recommendations are made:

1. As enshrined in the UBE implementation blue print that specifies the roles of the varying arms of government and other stakeholders, there is the need to provide more infrastructure (classrooms and furniture) by the federal, state and local governments. Basic instructional materials also need to be adequately provided by government, while parents should not shy away from their responsibility of providing textbooks and stationeries for their children.

2. Since there can be no learning without teachers, the millennium development goals, particularly, on Universal Basic Education, cannot be achieved without adequate and well trained teachers. More teachers are therefore required while those already on the job will require in-service training to address teachers' incompetence. This will help them to effectively handle the ever-increasing surge of pupils yearning for education and as well provide a solid foundation for further education of the pupils.

3. The splitting of primary subjects into too many parts only compartmentalize and atomize such curriculum, thus limiting the development of broad ideas and their life applications. To address this problem, there is the need to bring curriculum experts together to fashion out a more integrated curriculum, to bring about unification of subject fields, which are related. This will help get a better grasp of the total field and bridge the gap between subjects.

4. There is the need to provide monitoring vehicles or motorbikes to effectively monitor happenings in schools, since the provision of allowances for school supervisors alone cannot work any magic. Addressing the observations made on the field should also be a means towards encouraging school supervisors. This becomes necessary because supervisors interviewed opined that their reports were usually jettisoned while erring teachers with godfathers go unpunished for their failure to perform assigned tasks.

5. There is the need to encourage teachers in rural areas to be effective on the job. This is possible where such teachers are actually paid meaningful "rural-teaching" allowance for teaching in such places or by the provision of free and decent accommodation as an incentive to work in such rural areas.

6. There is also the need to properly implement the school meal programme, especially not exclusively in rural communities. This will not only attract pupils to school, it will help pupils to concentrate on their studies since they are assured of at least a good meal per school day. It will also make them look forward to the next school day, thus becoming a motivating factor.

7. Again, to ensure the success of the UBE scheme, the host communities should be encouraged to monitor and get involved in the school programme of activities. They should also be encouraged to give constructive advice as well

as make reports on schools and staff, to curb the lackadaisical attitude of some teachers who do not go to their work places regularly, and make known to appropriate authorities the needs of such schools.

8. There is the need to encourage and put in place a standardized joint examination for schools in each local government area (i.e. for all classes), probably at the end of the third term. This will provide feedback to the supervising agencies and the mother ministry on the effectiveness of schools, and will help them proffer solutions to observed lapses in good time.

9. Government at all levels needs to re-awaken the media campaign for awareness on the importance of education, targeted at parents and pupils. If this is aggressively pursued and properly worded, pupils' attendance at school will improve and parents will see the need to help their wards in school work.

10. To encourage the development of basic skills in pupils and make education more relevant to recipients, it is suggested that "compulsory basic crafts" like basket weaving, carving, beads making, cane chair making, etc be introduced in the nation's primary schools. This is expected to encourage pupils to exploit materials in their localities to earn a living for themselves after graduation, in the bid to kick-start the much desired economic breakthrough.

11. To motivate learning in pupils, government officials and successful individuals in the society need to be encouraged to visit schools and share their success tips with pupils, and share how education has been of help to them. This is expected to motivate pupils and encourage hard work in pupils. Ultimately, this will help to raise a new generation of focused and determined individuals who will turn-around the fortune of the nation for the better.

12. On a final note and because education is an expensive endeavor, governments' funding of education will have to increase. This will make it possible to employ teachers for schools not adequately served, provide more classrooms, furniture and infrastructural facilities to enhance teaching and learning, and achieve the objectives of the Millennium Development Goal on Education.

In conclusion, it should be borne in mind that the achievement of the millennium development goal on Universal Basic Education by the year 2015 requires a more determined approach and concerted efforts. This alone would make the nation better placed at improving her economic base and set herself on the part to greatness among the community of nations in the world.

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