

UBE and English Language Teaching in the Primary School and the Nation's Educational Progress

Dr. (Mrs) J.I. Ndukwe

English Department Federal University of Education, Zaria. Nigeria

Abstract: *This paper sets out to examine the challenges of English language teaching in the primary schools and the language teacher educational progress in the UBE programme. It explores the effective ways of enhancing English language teaching in primary schools and suggests that the federal government, the state government, the local government, as well as PTA should assist in financing and supervision of the study conditions of primary school children.*

Keyword: *Universal Basic Education (U.B.E)*

I. Introduction

1. What is UBE?

UBE is the acronym for Universal Basic Education Programme, a programme which aims to give free and compulsory education to all Nigerian from primary to junior secondary school. The programme was borne out of the Universal Declaration Human Right that "everyone has a right to education" (Helicon 1998:814 quoted in Onyemelukwe, (2000).

Human Rights Declaration saw the light of the day in the French National Assembly in 1978 following the famous French Revolution and its slogan 'egalite et fraternite' (Freedom, Equality and Fraternity; Helicon 1998, 814 quoted in Onyemelukwe (2000). The rights, the author continues, include representation in the legislature, equality before the law; equality of opportunity, freedom from arbitrary imprisonment, freedom of speech and religion. In 1946, to these rights were added.

Equal rights for women, right to work, join a union and free education (ibid). Education, therefore, becomes a fundamental human right. In spite of this, over 100 million children including at least 60 million girls have no access to primary schooling; more than 1 million adults, most of whom are women are unable to read or write (ibid, 637). It has been established that Africa and Asia have the world's highest illiteracy rates (ibid).

With this prevailing situation, one can understand the world's deep concern for eradication of illiteracy in the globe and its declaration of Education for All (EFA). One can also understand the deep commitment to education projects of such organisations as United Nations Development Projects (UNDP). United National International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank. The World Bank project whereby some useful books are sent to targeted schools in the country is one of such commitments to educational growth and development with a view to eradicating illiteracy. The trend today as indicative of global trend is no more prioritisation of education but making it a must for all citizens.

The National Mass Literacy Campaign was launched in 1992. The aim was to extirpate illiteracy in Nigeria by the year 2000. The time is almost expired and yet illiteracy is still endemic in Nigeria. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme took off in September, 2002.

1.1 The Objectives of UBE:

- Achieve qualitative education for all as an effective instrument for eradicating illiteracy and poverty.
- Check the shocking drift of our country into an inglorious past of illiteracy.
- Check the all-pervading decay in education.
- Check the dwindling girl-child school enrolment in the northern state and the increasing school drop-out of boys in the south-east, south-west and south-south.
- Check the socio-cultural problem and their very serious disorientation and distortion of our value system.
- Develop a strong consciousness for education.
- Provide basic education for every child of school-going age.
- Vigorously pursue adult education.
- Divorce politics from education.
- Improve planning in primary education.
- Provide equipment and train teachers.
- Provide an adequate educational infrastructure.
- Provide adequate text-books, infrastructural materials and funding.

- Create opportunities for career orientation and realisation in the primary and junior secondary school section.

1.2 UBE: The Genesis

The UBE programme was launched on 30th September 1999 at Shehu Kangiwa Square, Sokoto by General Olusegun Obasanjo (President of the 3rd Republic of Nigeria). With the launching, compulsory and free education for all Nigerian citizens, under the name of UBE, a scheme first launched in 1976 as Universal Primary Education (UPE) was entrenched. This scheme was a brain child of Late Pa Awolowo. In doing this, Nigeria identified with the global frantic wave in the new millennium to eradicate illiteracy among other obstacles to progress. The Obasanjo administration as evident in the stated objective of the UBE is committed to the provision of free education to all Nigerians from primary to senior secondary school. It aims, in so doing, to purge its citizens of ignorance and liberate them from the shackles of poverty, disease, superstition etc, so that the nation will advance, cognisant of the fact that education is the gate way to civilisation and development.

Remarkably, the UPE failed woefully as it should because of defective planning, condition of implementation, inaccurate projection for a take off among others. This is to the extent that the scheme, in the words of Obasanjo, "only recorded an expansion in the number of children in primary school from six million in 1976 to 12 million in 1980 (Williams, 1999 page 21)".

Therefore, careful and adequate planning project as well as good implementation, become an imperative for the UBE to successfully thrive and yield qualitative education, and not just quantitative education. This also entails careful ex-ray of prevailing language teaching and learning situations in the classroom to enhance the success of the programme. This exposition will take a cursory look at the condition under which English language particularly is taught at both primary and secondary schools.

II. Challenges and the Way Forward

One of the foremost discussions in education today is that of its falling standards. The tremendous role that education plays in the development of every individual and nation, as well as a genuine concern for qualitative education in the country has led to a flood of reaction to the massive failures witnessed in recent years. The foregoing discovery makes many linguists better prepared to combat literacy problems i.e. problems of over-population in language teaching/learning classroom, problem of non-standard speakers, problem of language planning and language policy statements, problem of inadequate teaching/learning materials, problem of inadequate and unqualified staffing to mention just a few. The writer illuminates the contribution of the above challenges in English teaching/learning classroom to the falling standard of education. Thus, it is obvious that the country cannot develop without qualitative language education.

While Nigeria rushes to increase the number of schools and teachers in the country through the UPE and later the UBE programme, the quality and relevance of education often took a back seat. Quality is not complementary to quantity. According to Emenanjo, (1996, Olaofe, (1997) and (2000). "Quality is not an acceptable trade off for quantity." West African Magazine (1997) quoted in Olaofe, (2000) captured the situation this way:

Many young stars who are in school find themselves squeezed unto crowded benches in dilapidated classroom lacking even slates, while a teacher (sometimes in the midst 3 classes combined) drills lessons by rote. Data to back up this claim are also many. For example, 2.8 million pupils have no desk and benches in the Nigerian primary schools. A total of 4.896 primary schools in Nigeria have no buildings of any type and instructions take place under tree shades.

Worthy of note is Shaplin's (1969) report which notes the poor teaching of language in Nigeria, which has consequently created a serious unstable command of languages by learners. It specifically notes that instruction in the indigenous languages and English is either mechanistic or unsystematic. Identified also by Shaplin and Shaplin's (ibid) is the problem of overpopulation in many public schools and even in some private schools. As a result, pupils are taught under an unconducive atmosphere even while we are emphasizing that languages should be taught for use. These authors observed: "how can one cope with teaching 80-100 pupils in a class and how does he make provisions for the use of language?" This fact is collaborated by Armitage (1960) when he acknowledges that "overlarge classes resulting from population explosion of school aged children gives the teacher little chance to think in terms of his individual pupils".

From the explosion above, there is no doubt that there cannot be qualitative primary or secondary education without qualitative instruction. It is not accidental that the developed nation of the world have the most sophisticated and developed instructional techniques and materials. The seriousness put into the development of language such as Norwegian, Hebrew, Japanese, American English and the language of the "accident tigers" have, no doubt, contributed immensely to the development of these nations (Emenanjo, 1996). The writer expresses the fact that Nigeria has not given the teaching and learning of the language of education that is English the priority it deserves. The headmasters in their 43 annual congress in Umuahia (The Punch,

2000) were quoted to have started faulting the implementation of the programme. So many unresolved issues, such as infrastructural expansion, lack of adequate and authentic statistics of enrolment for planning purposes, the Nigerian factor of inflating statistics of enrolment for financial gains, the seemingly uncontrollable phenomenal increase in students population from primary to secondary schools or even in the primary school itself, and the insufficiency of teachers were raised. These were classified as evils that led to the failure of the former UPE programme and are still very much rearing their heads in the UBE programme. An effective UBE programme that would ensure qualitative not quantitative English language education, presupposes the proper and realistic handling of these problems. Failure to do this may mean recording another Universal Basic Education Failure (UBEF) (Olaofe, 2000). The primary school children are the most pitiable of all in today's Nigeria educational environment. He further sums it up as he laments the sordid condition of primary schools in Nigeria, saying that the system is in disarray. Of course, there cannot be any meaningful and qualitative learning generally and English learning in particular in such a situation. This is in turn largely responsible for the pupil's incompetent performance in the use of language.

III. Recommendations

For the success of UBE programme and for effective English language teaching that would meet the set goals, the following recommendations should be noted.

The government already has as one of its set goal the pursuit of infrastructural language teaching and learning facilities among others. This laudable goal should not be left at paper promulgation. The government should endeavour to implement it. To avoid diversion of the fund raised for such facilities, the Federal Government should sponsor, fund and supervise such projects. Contracts should be awarded directly and the local government where such projects are being executed should give progress report to the Federal Government. It is believed that when infrastructure, teaching and learning materials are available, school management with the help of expert language teachers, would organise English language classes into small groups, making provision for individual attention.

The primary and secondary school environment in general and English language classrooms in particular, should be enriched in terms of language teaching materials. The classroom should be made conducive enough for learning and should not be overpopulated. All learners should be comfortably seated.

The government should also consider the teacher factor as crucial to the success of the UBE programme; qualified teachers as well as enough staff should be given to schools. They should not just be employed; the condition of service should also be made appetizing and maintained. This will surely boost teachers' morale and make them to work harder.

Language teachers should teach communicative languages skills using activities that vary e.g. dialogues, debates, drills, interview, dramatisation, role playing, story telling, discussion, songs, poems, reading of newspapers, listening to news items on radio and television programme, describing objects, games, group work, essay writing etc. These activities are better done and supervised in small groups. Every member of the class should be made to participate. Teachers should improve where necessary.

Parents-teachers' associations and communities should assist in financing projects that would improve the study conditions of their children.

IV. Conclusion

Every nation in this modern age aims at eradicating ignorance completely through literacy programmes. But it is only effective teaching and good class management that can guarantee literacy in the real sense. Therefore, as we increase our effort to pursue the effective implementation of the UBE scheme, special attentions should be given to curbing the size of learners in English teaching/learning classrooms as well as implementing the suggestions recommended earlier, so as to enhance effective and qualitative instruction that would promote the overall development of the individual.

References

- [1]. Onyemelukwe, I.M. UBE: The Challenges of Language Teaching/Learning for the Headmasters. Lead paper presented at the refresher workshop for the primary supervisors, secretaries, language supervisors and headmasters at FCE, Zaria, 2000.
- [2]. Williams, J. Unplanned Basic Education. *New Nigerian*, October 21, 1999
- [3]. Emenajo, E.N. Language and Development: A multi-disciplinary approach. "Nigerian Language Studies". 1996. 49-59.
- [4]. Olaofe, I.A. Comprehension, Language of Education and Development Inaugural Lecture. Zaria: ABU Press, 1997.
- [5]. Olaofe, O.A. Enhancing Effective Language Teaching at Primary Schools for the Success of the UBE Programme in Nigeria. Lead paper presented at the refresher workshop for the primary supervisors, secretaries, language supervisors and headmasters at FCE, Zaria, 2000.
- [6]. Shaplins, M.L. and Shaplins J.T. (1969). Selected Aspect of Primary and Secondary Schools Language Curriculum Development in Nigeria with Recommendation. A Consulting Report, Lagos: Ford Foundation, 1969.
- [7]. Armitage, J. (1996). *Language Teaching and Learning*. Onitsha: African FEP Publishers Limited, 1996.
- [8]. The Punch. Headmaster fault implementation of UBE, Friday 18 August, 2000.