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Socio-cultural and Instructional Considerations of Universal Basic Education (UBE) for Poverty Alleviation Programme: Lessons from a Correlational Study of Income Level and Literacy Rate

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Abstract

The liberating and domestication functions of education become relevant when the felt needs of the people are met. Poverty, ignorance and illiteracy constitute a triangle of enslavement for a large majority of Nigerians, considering the country's current literacy rate (57%) in the face of rapid population growth rate of 2.8%. This paper correlates the literacy rate and income per capita (which represents the poverty level) of 21 African and 19 non-African countries and establishes a significant positive vis-à-vis obvious sociocultural and instructional deficiencies of UBE. It proposes some radical strategies for a qualitative UBE capable of kick-starting poverty alleviation programme on a better footing.

Introduction and Objective

Although the problem of poverty is universal, its pains and pangs seem to be worst felt in the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Central America. Attempts to solve the problem of poverty by the various governments and organisations, over the years, have not always been very successful. Education that seemed in the past to be the hope of the poor has recently become too elitist, too expensive and beyond the reach of the poor. Quite often educational ventures have left the poor, poorer. This is because all hope for employment in government, business or politics has always been a mirage, self-generated employment, a herculean task that has quite often remained unsolved. Worst if one is a woman as only 14% of the civil servants in Nigeria are of this sex.

The fear of poverty has driven many people to various forms of crime. Many others have channelled such fears into constructive virtues, purposeful ventures and creative values. Yet to live above the poverty line, which Anya (1998) puts at N3,290.00 for an average person or N13,462.00 per month for a family of five, still requires a life-long struggle.

This seems to be the general plight and the lamentation of the poor. Quite often poverty alleviation programmes seem to be limited to verbal and documented commitments with little or nothing to really alleviate the poverty. At other times such programmes are hijacked by the money-bags. Meaningful actions to address the root causes of poverty have hardly seen the light of the day.

Fortunately, the present government has adopted the multiple strategy including fertility reduction, status improvement for women and awareness programmes to alleviate poverty (Onwubiko, 1999). Ignorance and illiteracy as twin brothers of poverty must be properly addressed through education. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme launched by His Excellency, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, on 30th September, 1999 is a major strategy

that can attack poverty, roll away ignorance and increase the level of literacy which presently stands at 57%, far below the universal minimum of 70% according to Inyang-Abia (1999). Yet as presently conceived, the UBE is fraught with a myriad of problems so much so that its safe delivery becomes doubtful.

The study is therefore designed to critically assess some socio-cultural and instructional dimensions of the UBE as they relate to poverty alleviation programme (PAP) and propose viable but radical alternatives. Specifically, this presentation will answer the following questions.

- a) How do income level and literacy rate of the selected countries correlate?
- b) What socio-cultural and instructional demands of the UBE can kick-start the on-going poverty alleviation programme?

Methodology: This survey adopted library research strategy. The world almanac and book of facts (1998) was the main source of information.

Sample: Forty (21 African and 19 non-African) countries were randomly sampled to reflect the various sections of Africa and the other continents of the world. Table 1 shows the sample distribution.

Table 1

Sample Distribution by Continents

African continents		Other Continents	
North Africa	2	North America	2
East Africa	5	South America	3
West Africa	8	Asia	5
Southern Africa	2	Australia	1
Central Africa	4	Europe	8
Total	21		19

Statistical Framework: Pearson's 'r' was used for this correlational study. Both the average literacy rate and the per capita income of the selected countries were seen as continuous variables.

Findings and Discussion

This is based on each study question earlier presented.

- a) How do income level and literacy rate of the selected countries correlate?

Tables 2 and 3 summarise the data for the income level and literacy rate of the selected countries. Available data on Table 4 show that literacy rate and income level significantly correlate. With a calculated r-value of 0.31, $df = 38$ and critical r-value of 0.264 at 0.05 level of significance it becomes obvious that income level and literacy rate of the selected countries significantly correlate. This implies that an improved literacy level can generally usher in an increased income level and vice versa.

Table 2

Data from selected non-African Countries

S/N	Country	Average Lit.rate %	Income per capital
1	Argentina	96	8,100
2	Australia	100	22,100
3	Bahamas	96	18,700
4	Bolivia	83	2,530
5	Brazil	83	6,100
6	Britain	100	19,500
7	Bulgaria	98	4,920
8	China	82	2,500
9	Finland	100	18,200
10	France	99	18,670
11	Germany	100	17,900
12	India	52	1,500
13	Iran	72	4,700
14	Iraq	58	2,000
15	Japan	100	21,300
16	Pakistan	38	2,100
17	Switzerland	100	22,400
18	Taiwan	94	13,510
19	United States	96	27,607

Table 3

Data from Selected African Countries

S/N	Country	Av. Lit. Rate %	Income per capita
1	Algeria	62	3,800
2	Angola	40	700
3	Benin	37	1,380
4	Cameroon	63	1,200
5	Chad	48	600
6	Egypt	51	2,760
7	Eq. Guinea	79	800
8	Ethiopia	36	400
9	Ghana	64	1,400
10	Kenya	78	1,300
11	Liberia	38	770
12	Mali	31	600
13	Mauritania	38	1,200
14	Niger	14	600
15	Nigeria	57	1,300
16	Rwanda	61	400
17	S. Africa	82	4,800
18	Tanzania	68	800
19	Togo	52	900
20	Uganda	62	900
21	Zimbabwe	85	1,620

Table 4

Pearson's "r" on income level and literacy rate for 21 African and 19 Non-Africa countries

Variable	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r-cal
Literacy rate (x)	304.9	6541.63		24213.2	
Income level (y)	2743	215327			0.31

r-crit = 0.264 at 0.05 level, one tailed. df = 38

By extension, one can safely say that a successful UBE programme can ultimately lead to a better literate society which can encourage a higher per capita income thus reducing the tendency to live below the poverty line. In other words, the UBE as the poverty alleviation strategy, can have observable salutary effect on the citizenry. This re-emphasizes the need to take it more seriously, invest time, money and energy in it and work collectively towards its sustainability. The Editor of the Guardian (1999) emphasizes this. Major attention to human capital development is required for poverty alleviation. Moreover, Adetunmbi (2000) agrees that "the solution to poverty requires more than money "because poverty is both a cultural and structural problem" (IFAD, 1993).

b) What socio-cultural and instructional demands of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) can kick-start the on-going poverty alleviation programme?

An analysis of the context of the UBE programme reveals a wide variety of socio-cultural and instructional demands. Some of those highlighted below can contribute to improved poverty alleviation programme.

- i) The Socio-cultural demands of UBE
- a) *Free access to educational opportunities* Demands that financial constraints should not deprive any Nigerian child of educational opportunities. This implies that funding of the programme must be centrally borne. How realizable this demand can be, will only be ascertained when there is adequate commitment.
- b) *Localization of the curriculum.* Contents and materials is an attempt to relate the curriculum contents and materials to the differential demands of the vested interests and stakeholders: the special-learners, the migrant farmers and fishermen, the nomadic cattle rearers, among others. The textbooks and other instructional materials must reflect the local and peculiar demands and characteristics of the beneficiaries.
- c) *Democratic values* Are very essential for a successful society. The UBE curriculum must not only reflect these values but must more importantly apply them in the day-to-day operation of the programme. Democratic values encourage individuality and competitiveness both of which are essential ingredients for poverty alleviation.
- d) *Attitude to teaching* Demands a more positive outlook and commitment if UBE must attain the initial interest and momentum. All stakeholders must co-operate to ensure improvement in this direction.
- e) *Teacher recruitment strategies* Need to be modified so that recruitment by portfolio rather than by mere paper qualification can be emphasized. Recruitment by portfolio demands exhibition of teaching skills, capabilities and instructional

material design and utilization ability during the recruitment interview.

- f) *Renewal of teaching license:* Demands that for one to qualify for a teaching job there is need to be current. Currency in teaching licesnse can be adjudicated through periodic certificated refresher courses which should focus on the current poverty problem.
- g) *Classrooms structural re-organization:* Is necessary because the current set-up and furnishing are too formal to facilitate changing seating arrangements which have to be adopted for a wide variety of activities demanded by the new educaiton culture.
- ii) The instructional demands of the UBE
- a) *Inclusiveness of the curriculum:* Content, practice and methodology dictates the comprehensiveness and interrelatedness of the curriculum so that at the end of the programme the Nigerian child can exhibit knowledge and skills that can enable him or her function adequately in the society. This is informed by the fact that for some, it is the terminal educational programme.
- b) *Programme objectives* Need to be redesigned to reflect changing societal needs. They need to be tied to the activities that have meaning in the society. What stops having programme objective stated thus.

During and at the end of primary three, at least 90% of the pupils should be able to read any Nigeria newspaper in English Language with 90% accuracy and 85% comprehension.

When programme objectives are thus stated, it not only provides for a national outlook but more importantly becomes an incontrovertible basis for adjudication and evaluation.

- c) *School media centres* Are where teachers can loan out or stay to modify instructional materials for use in their classroom presentations. Such centres are vital for each school if the objectives of the UBE scheme must be realized especially as related to skills and value orientaton.
- d) *Open learning system and distance learning programmes.* Are educational structures that encourage learning without direct face-to-face contact but maximizing the benefits of communication gadgets and processes. These must be fully integrated into UBE scheme to provide opportunities for adult learners and the probable UBE drop-outs to continue learning at their own while maintaining their jobs but within an informal and non-threatening atmospheres.
- e) *Introduction of marketable skills* Into the UBE programme can be a safety value for poverty alleviation. This should be at the last three years of the programme. Emphasis is therefore on the reassessment of introductory technology to include computer literacy and other marketable skills.

Summary and Conclusion

Ambivalent policies, rapid population growth rate (2.83%), resources mismanagement, unsustainable developmental efforts, marginalization of women, exploitative intermediation, internal political fragmentation and civil strife must be properly addressed if the UBE programme can ever kick-start the poverty alleviation programme in Nigeria.

The UBE curriculum contenet, space, personnel, methodology and materials must be tailored to current national issues including poverty alleviation, UBE must be pursued with the urgency of a revolution now.

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