

Implementation of the Free and Compulsory Primary Education Policy in Public Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria: Evaluation

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Abstract

The launching of the Universal Basic Education scheme in Nigeria in 1999 was the country's response to the global call for universalization of access to basic education. The Universal Basic Education Act, enacted in May 2004, serves as the legal framework for the programme and it provided for primary education to be free and compulsory. Much has been done by different tiers of government to ensure the achievement of this objective. This study evaluated the extent to which primary education was free and compulsory in public schools in Ogun State, Nigeria between 2004 and 2012. The findings show that though tuition was free, pupils still paid for Development Levy and Parent Teachers Association Levy. The findings also show that parents purchased textbooks, exercise books, uniforms, sandals, socks and other school materials for their wards. Furthermore, the results show that more than half a million children of school-going age in the state were out of school during the 2012 – 2013 academic session. These show that primary education was neither free nor compulsory in the state during the period under study. The implication is that Nigeria's objective of achieving national primary education goals within the global EFA context had not been achieved.

Keywords: Evaluation, Implementation, Policy, Primary Education, Basic Education

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Introduction

Background to the Study

Increasing efforts towards the achievement of education for all has been one of the greatest developmental challenges of the early twenty-first century. This, perhaps, is a result of the realization by the world education community that education is a basic human right. According to Matsuura (2004), if children are excluded from access to education, they are denied their human rights and prevented from developing their talents and interests in the most basic of ways. Matsuura posits further that education is a torch which can help to guide and illuminate the lives of children. It is, therefore, the responsibility of all governments to ensure that everyone is given the chance to benefit from it. It is also in the fundamental interests of the society to see that this happens since progress with economic and social development depends on education.

The right to education, as a basic human right, has been affirmed as far back as November 1948 when the nations of the world made a declaration about the nature and extent of human rights. Amongst many others, the right to education was acknowledged for all people. Furthermore, it was declared that elementary education would be free and compulsory and that the higher levels of education would be accessible to all on the basis of merit (United Nations, 1948, Article 26).

The educational commitments made in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights have also been reaffirmed on many occasions over the intervening years. During the 1960s, a set of regional conferences convened by UNESCO

established target dates for the achievement of universal primary education (UPE) by 1980 in most of the developing regions of the world. By 1990, however, millions of children were still out of school for a variety of reasons, and the World Conference on Education for All, which held that year in Jomtien, Thailand, set out an expanded vision for education, and restated the Universal Primary Education goals for achievement by the year 2000. However, the EFA 2000 Assessment shows that at the beginning of the new target year, more than 113 million children had no access to primary education, 880 million adults were illiterate, gender discrimination continues to permeate the education system and the quality of learning and the acquisition of human values and skills were well below the aspirations and needs of individuals and societies. Youth and adults were denied access to the skills and knowledge necessary for gainful employment and full participation in their societies (UNESCO, 2000). In 2000, 164 governments assembled at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, adopted another set of ambitious goals in education. The Dakar Framework for Action pledges to expand learning opportunities for every child, including the pre-school child, youths and adults and to meet targets by 2015. With the deadline over, it is pertinent to examine the extent to which the set objectives have been achieved.

The response of the Federal Government of Nigeria to the international call for the provision of education to every child was in form of the introduction of the Universal Basic Education scheme in 1999. The programme was considered to be the

most important strategy for sustainable educational development in Nigeria. The concept of universal basic education may not be a totally new idea to Nigeria. The old Western Region of Nigeria had launched a Universal Primary Education programme as far back as 1955, and the Federal Government of Nigeria had also introduced the Universal Primary Education scheme nationwide in 1976. The current Universal Basic Education scheme may, therefore, be regarded as an offshoot of the 1976 effort.

The Universal Basic Education programme is a policy reform effort of the Federal Government in the basic education sector. Its mission is to serve as a prime energizer of national movement for the actualization of the nation's developmental visions. It was designed to mobilize the nation's creative energies to ensure that education for all becomes a reality in Nigeria. Part of its objectives is also to ensure unfettered access to nine years of formal basic education (comprising six years of primary schooling and three years of junior secondary education), the provision of free and compulsory 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, and 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 lifelong learning.

The UBE programme was also meant to be free and compulsory (UNESCO-IBE, 2011). The UBE Act, which was enacted on the 26th of May 2004, serves as the legal framework for this

provision. The enactment of the Act has a legal implication, which makes it compulsory for provision of universal, free and compulsory six years of primary education and the first three years of secondary education (Labo-popoola, Bello, and Atanda, 2009). By being free, it is expected that tuition would be abolished, and required textbooks, instructional materials and educational support services would be provided free for all children. However, the questions to ask are: if the UBE is free, do pupils still pay for charges of whatever kind in public schools in Ogun State, Nigeria? Are the required books, materials and services provided free for pupils in public schools in Ogun State, Nigeria?

The UBE programme is also intended to be compulsory. It is expected that, by its compulsory nature, all children of school age are enrolled in formal pre-primary and primary schools. Also, by this compulsory nature, it emphasises that parents have an obligation to send their children to school, and furthermore, sanctions will be imposed on persons, societies and institutions that prevent children from attending school. Again, the questions to ask are: are all children of primary school age in Ogun State, Nigeria, attending formal schools? Are there no out-of-school children in Ogun State, Nigeria? This study investigated the extent to which primary education was free and compulsory in Ogun State public schools between 2004 and 2012. The study raised and answered two major questions: (a) To what extent was primary education free in public schools in Ogun State, Nigeria, within the period of study? (b) How compulsory was primary education in Ogun State, Nigeria, between 2004 and 2012?

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used for the study. Ogun State, Nigeria, was first stratified along three senatorial districts – Ogun East, Ogun Central and Ogun West. Simple random sampling technique was used to select seven local government councils from the twenty that exist in the state. Ten schools were also randomly selected from each of the seven selected local government councils. Purposive random sampling technique was employed to select five teachers who were parents and who had children attending public primary schools in Ogun State, Nigeria. The total sample was 350 teachers. A checklist of items that pupils paid for was designed and

administered on the selected teachers/parents. It must be stated that 330 participants returned their responses. There was a shortfall of 20. Data obtained were analysed using frequency count, percentage, mean and standard deviation. The researcher also visited the state's Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, the State Universal Basic Education Board, the Central Department of Statistics (Ministry of Finance) and the National Population Commission, all in Abeokuta, the state capital to obtain data.

Results

Research Question One: To what extent was primary education free in public schools in Ogun State, Nigeria, between 2004 and 2012?

Table 1: Items Pupils Paid for in Primary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Items	No		Yes		Mean	SD
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
1. Tuition	252	76.4	78	23.6	.24	.425
2. Development levy	137	41.5	193	58.5	.58	.493
3. PTA levy	40	12.1	290	87.9	.88	.327
4. Text books in core subjects	233	70.6	97	29.4	.29	.456
5. Exercise books	125	37.9	205	62.1	.62	.486
6. Uniform	99	30.0	231	70.0	.70	.459
7. Tables and chairs	292	88.5	38	11.5	.12	.320
8. Mid-day meal	119	36.1	211	63.9	.64	.481
9. Sports/games	199	60.3	131	39.7	.40	.490
10. Health services	229	69.4	101	30.6	.31	.462
11. Computer	246	74.5	84	25.5	.25	.436
12. Library services	305	92.4	25	7.6	.08	.265
13. Examination	192	58.2	138	41.8	.42	.494
14. Counselling services	303	91.8	27	8.2	.08	.275

Table 1 shows that 23.6% of the respondents claimed that they paid tuition fee for their wards, 29.4% that they paid for books, 11.5% that they paid for chairs and tables, 39.7% that they paid for sports/games, 31.6% that they paid for health services, 25.5% that they paid for computer. In addition, 7.6% claimed that they paid for library, 41.8% paid for examination.

Furthermore, 58.5% of them paid for development levy, 87.9% for PTA levy, 62.1% for exercise books, 70% for uniform and 63.9% for mid-day meal. From this analysis, it is clear that pupils still paid for levies and other cost of education. It can, therefore, be concluded that education was not free in public primary schools in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Research Question Two: How compulsory was primary education in Ogun State, Nigeria between 2004 and 2012?

Table 2: Estimated Number of Out-of-School Children in Ogun State, Nigeria, 2004 – 2012.

Academic Session	No of Pupils in Public and Approved Private Primary Schools.	Estimated Population of Children of Primary School Age (6-11 years)	Estimated No of Out-of-School Children
2003/2004	532,274	918,543	386,269 (42.1%)
2004/2005	547,842	948,908	401,066 (43.2%)
2005/2006	581,343	980,278	398,935 (40.7%)
2006/2007	681,443	1,011,644	330,201 (32.6%)
2007/2008	631,940	1,044,016	412,076 (39.5%)
2008/2009	653,705	1,077,424	423,719(39.3%)
2009/2010	786,502	1,111,901	325,399 (29.3%)
2010/2011	636,286	1,147,491	511,205 (44.5%)
2011/2012	674,742	1,184,210	509,468 (43%)

Sources: *Ogun State Universal Basic Education Board, 2013; Ogun State Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2013; National Population Commission, Abeokuta, Ogun State, 2013; Central Department of Statistics, Ministry of Finance, Abeokuta, Ogun State, 2013.*

Table 2 shows the enrolment of pupils in public and approved private primary schools, the estimated population of children of primary school age, and the estimated number of out-of-school children in Ogun State, Nigeria, between 2004 and 2012 academic sessions. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) defines the number of out of school children as the difference between (i) the number of children of official primary school age who are registered as enrolled in a formal primary school, and (ii) the estimated primary school age population

(UIS/UNICEF, 2005). Although this method gives room for interpretation of basic parameters such as definitions of pre-primary and primary education, sources of attendance and enrolment information, and the sources of population data, it is still widely acknowledged as the most reliable method of determining the number of out - of - school children. Going by this, an estimated 509,468 (43%) children of primary school age were out of school in Ogun State, Nigeria in 2012. It, therefore, means that primary education was not compulsory in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Discussions

The findings in Table 1 show that tuition was virtually free in public schools in Ogun State, Nigeria. They also show that there were other costs of education which pupils paid for. They show that tuition was just a part of the total cost of education. This means that abolition of tuition alone may not completely eliminate parents' financial difficulties in enrolling and sustaining their children in school. It is reasonable to assume that text

books, exercise books, uniforms, sandals, writing materials and others would cost more than tuition once did. These findings are in tandem with those of Tsujita (2009) and Lincove (2009). Tsujita found out that poor people still claimed inability to send their children to school even when primary education tuition had been abolished. According to him, many children from indigent homes dropped out of school with lack of money being the main reason. This is because tuition

was just one part of the cost of education as parents must also pay for development and Parent Teachers Association levies, and buy uniforms, text books, exercise books, sandals, socks and other materials. Lincove also found out that in Nigeria, poor parents no longer regard tuition fee as the big constraint but the cost of other materials. He also reported that the cost of these materials discouraged parents from sending and keeping their children in school.

These findings have implications for primary education in Ogun State and Nigeria in general. It means that pre-primary and primary education was not free in Ogun State. Free education implies the abolition of all forms of payment and removal of all obstacles that can prevent a child from benefitting from it. Every child of school going age has a right to basic education and so should have access to the opportunities available. Abolition of tuition alone cannot remove all the barriers that prevent a child from going to school, and if it cannot do this, education cannot be said to be free. Although, it was reported that the Ogun State Government supplied pupils with free text books, the reality is that it was only for a few subjects that text books were supplied. Besides, parents still had to pay for uniforms, exercise books, sandals and socks, writing materials and others. In addition, they still had to pay for Development and Parent-Teachers Association levies. With the costs of school materials, and the levies still the responsibility of parents, pre-primary and primary education in the state cannot be said to be free.

The UBE programme is also intended to be compulsory. It is expected that by its compulsory nature, all children of school age are enrolled in formal primary schools. The UBE Act of 2004 stressed the compulsory nature of the programme by stating that parents have an obligation to send their children to school, and that sanctions will be imposed on persons, societies and institutions that prevent children from attending school.

The results of this study, however, reveal that an estimated 509,468 children were out of school in

Ogun State, Nigeria, in the year 2012. It means that these children had no access to either approved private, or public primary schools. This revelation finds congruence with Obanya's (2004) observation that 90% of Nigerian children had no access to preschool education, and the 2011 EFA Global Monitoring Report which reported that with an estimated 8.6 million (UNESCO, 2011), Nigeria was the world largest contributor to global out-of-school estimate. The fact that thousands of children remained out of school shows that no compulsion had been enforced anywhere in the state. This may be due to lack of political will to enforce compulsion. It may also be due to lack of adequate facilities in the existing public primary schools. Several studies (Ajayi, 2001; Sulaiman, 2004; Oguntimehin, 2004; Awoyele, 2005, Ajayi, 2007; Ajayi & Adeyemi, 2007, 2011) have reported inadequacy of facilities such as classrooms, furniture, educational support services, and instructional materials in Ogun State public primary schools. This means that there was already pressure on the existing facilities. Enforcing compulsion in enrolment and school attendance would therefore create more problems for a school system that was still grappling with the problems of unavailability and inadequacy of facilities in public primary schools.

It can, therefore, be concluded that the compulsion component of the Universal Basic Education Act 2004, which demanded compulsory primary education for all children of school-going age, and sanctions for parents and organizations that prevent children from attending schools, has not been implemented in the state. Since the enactment of the UBE Act, no report has been given anywhere in the state of parents, bodies or institutions that have been sanctioned for preventing their children or wards from going to school.

The inadequacy of facilities in the existing public schools means that compulsion in enrolment and attendance may not be enforced, either now or in the nearest future. This has implications for primary education in the state. It means that the children who

are presently out of school may never enter school or have access to basic education. It also implies that, with the current state of public schools, characterized by inadequate facilities, more children would remain out of school. The consequence of this is that Nigeria's goal of achieving national primary education goals, which the UBE seeks to reinforce, and meeting set targets for attaining universal primary education within the global EFA context as contained in the 2001 EFA Country Report may not be achieved.

Conclusion

The Universal Basic Education programme in Nigeria was introduced as a strategy for ensuring that every

child has unfettered access to basic education of good quality. Part of the provision of the UBE Act, which was promulgated in 2004 is that primary education shall be free and compulsory. The findings of this study have shown that primary education in the state between 2004 and 2012 was neither free nor compulsory in public schools in Ogun State, Nigeria. The results showed that pupils still paid for some levies and other costs of education. They also showed that more than half a million children of school-going age were not in school in the 2012 -2013 academic session. The implication of this is that achieving national primary education goals within the global EFA context would remain a distant goal.

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