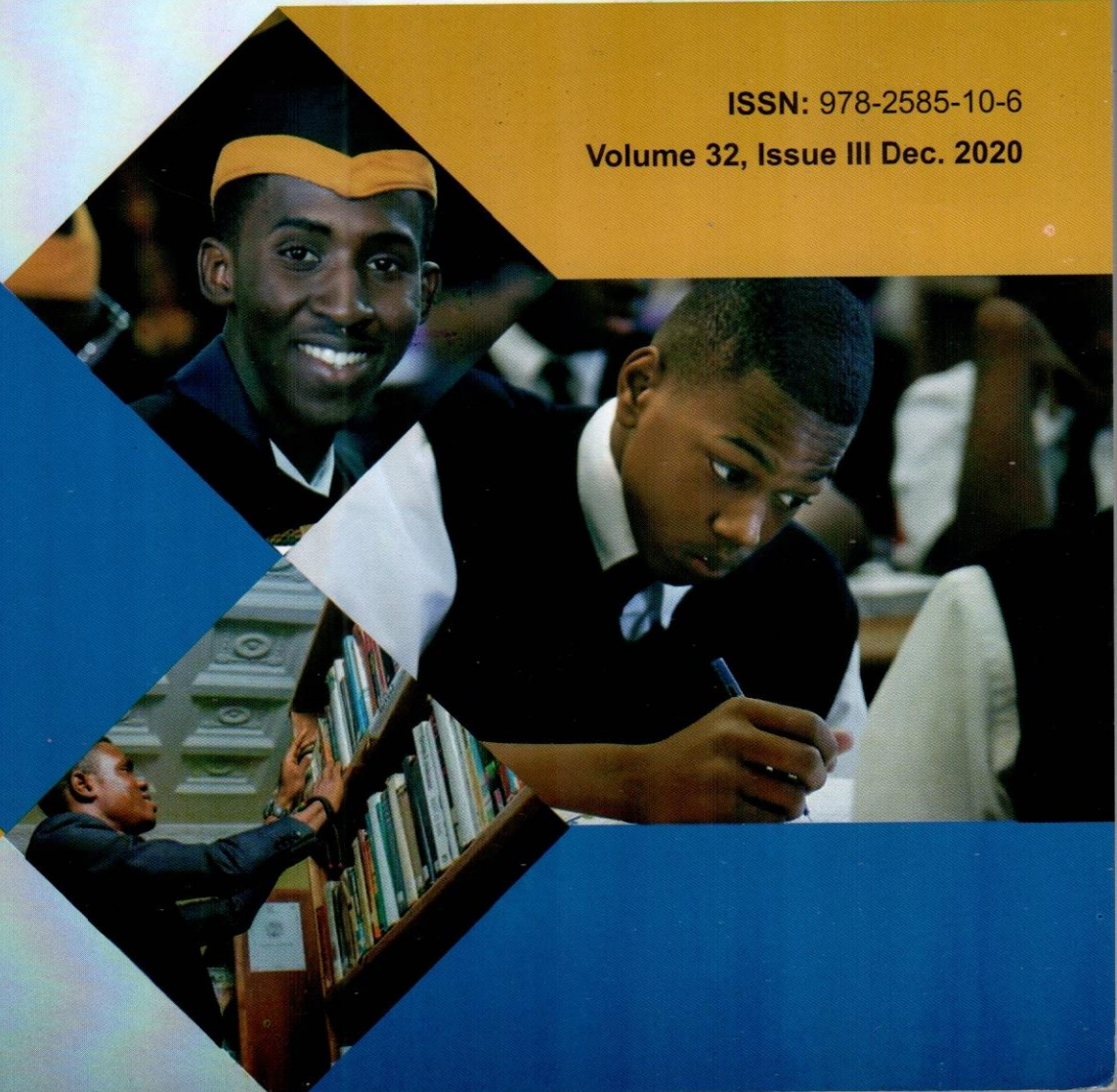


Review of Education

Institute of Education Journal,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

ISSN: 978-2585-10-6

Volume 32, Issue III Dec. 2020



CHALLENGES OF ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH EFFECTIVE UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

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Abstract

Gender inequality has become a global concern. It is a situation whereby one gender (male or female) is regarded either as inferior or superior to the other. Though in most cases especially in Africa and Nigeria in particular the male is always seen or regarded as superior to his female counterpart. Gender inequality as a global phenomenon, has unarguably influenced all aspects of human life. It has for example affected our political lives and behaviour, our economic lives, religious and spiritual lives, educational and professional lives and so on. Gender inequality starts from the small family setting and then spreads to the public space. So, having realized how fundamental the issue of equality between the two genders (male and female) is, this paper sought to find out some of the challenges of achieving gender equality using education. Therefore, the title of this paper is; challenges of achieving gender equality through effective Universal Basic Education Curriculum (UBEC) Implementation. This paper looked at the concept of universal basic education and its objectives, the structure of the UBEC as given by the National Policy on Education and concept of effective curriculum implementation. It also explained the concept of gender equality, looked at equality and UBE curriculum implementation and the challenges of gender equality and UBE curriculum implementation. The paper concluded and suggested some of the ways forward.

Keywords: Universal Basic Education; Curriculum; Gender; Gender equality and Curriculum Implementation.

Introduction

Education is a channel through which man develops and solves the various problems that are confronting humanity using the available scarce resources that nature has provided. Education according to Urenyere, Anyanwu and Nwachukwu (2017), is an essential phenomenon through which human and natural resources are harnessed for the common good of humanity. This means that for there to be effective and efficient use of both human and material resources, education is the key. It is also through the good use of both human and material resources that these problems that humanity is confronted with can be solved or managed.

Among these various problems confronting humanity is gender equality. The issue of gender, in the recent past has assumed a concerned dimension. It is discussed among the politicians, religious people, academic, in the business fronts and to some great extent, has

influenced the way recruitment for jobs both in the public and private sectors are done. In fact, there is no day that passes without a discussion on gender in both electronic and print media. To further underscore the importance or the proportion gender equality has assumed on the global scene, the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls according to Urenyere, Anyanwu and Nwachukwu (2019), forms goal number 5 of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

However, this goal is important and laudable but can only be achieved through education especially the basic education platform. It is in line with the above that the implementation of Basic Education curriculum as a tool for the achievement of gender equality is the focus of this paper. According to Macdonal in Obih, Ejeh and Azubuike (2019), curriculum is a plan of action and a plan of learning respectively. Curriculum is a very important document in any formal education setting or programme. No wonder Apologun cited in Urenyere, Anyanwu and Nwachukwu (2019), observes that curriculum is fundamentally related or connected to the entire education system. This is because the curriculum contains the role of the teacher, the activities of the learner, the objectives both the teacher and learner within a given school system should always strive to achieve. The curriculum also, states what the content of education should be, organization and method of teaching the content and the evaluation method. Since the curriculum contains the goals or objectives of education it then means that the effective implementation of the curriculum can proffer solution to societal problems even the problem of gender inequality. This may therefore mean that to really arrest the problem of gender inequality, efforts should not be spared in starting the campaign at the grass root. It is at the early stage of life of the girl-child that inequality between the girl and the boy can be addressed. That is the low-self confidence of women and girls. Collins (1991), cited in Anuonye, Chikwe, Eleba and Ike (2019,p.417), identified what she called the "we can but I can't paradox". This is a situation whereby girls believe that they have the ability to do something as a group but not seeing their own individual potentials in doing something or making choices. So solving the problem of gender inequality at the senior secondary school or tertiary education level where and when it will be either difficult or impossible to reconfigure the mindset of the girl-child is the reason why the Basic Education level is considered in this paper. The author therefore, intends to look at the: objectives of the Universal Basic Education (UBE), structure of UBE curriculum, concept of effective curriculum implementation, concept of gender equality, gender equality and UBE curriculum implementation, challenges of gender equality in UBE curriculum implementation, conclusion and the way forward.

Concept of Universal Basic Education and its Objectives

The Nigerian nation as of today runs a 9-3-4 system of education. This means that every Nigerian child must spend 9 years at the basic education level (Pre-nursery to junior secondary school), three years at the senior secondary level and four years at the tertiary level. Therefore, the Nigerian child is expected to spend 16 years within the current 9-3-4 system before graduating from the university. Considering the importance of education in the lives of citizens and society at large, the federal government of Nigeria during the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 came up with the Universal Basic Education (UBE) policy. This means there should be nine years compulsory education for the Nigerian child. The scheme was launched in Sokoto by the president on the 30th September 1999. The UBE programme aims at eradicating illiteracy, ignorance, and poverty as well as stimulating and accelerating national development, political consciousness and national integration (Onuoha-Chidiebere, Nwokocha and Nwanonin 2017). UBE programme is a strategy for the achievement of Education For All (EFA), which has been canvassed at global level. The introduction of the UBE programme into the Nigerian

Education system has the following objectives to achieve, according to National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013,p.17):

- Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- The provision of free Universal Basic Education for every Nigeria child of school going age;
- Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system through improved relevant quality and efficiency'
- Catering for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education; and
- Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as ethnical, moral and civil values needed for laying a solid foundation for life-long learning.

Having looked at the concept of UBE and the objectives of UBE, it has become important to consider the structural arrangement of the UBE curriculum.

The Structure of the Universal Basic Education Curriculum (UBEC)

Curriculum is the official document that contains the needs and the aspirations of the society and how to achieve these through the learners in a systematic manner. Curriculum is the official document for the education of the child. It specifies the role of both the teacher and learner in making sure that the goals and aspirations of the society are achieved. Curriculum refers to organized educational experiences which are planned and orderly carried out to the benefit of the learners in particular and the society in general which are made up of ideas and decisions for the learners' well being (Ali-Okoro, 2017; Akaraonye 2017). Universal Basic Education Curriculum (UBEC) is therefore the official educational document that directs the implementation of the UBE programme.

For the easy understanding and implementation of the UBE curriculum in schools, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) (2013:17) arranged the curriculum thus;

Table A: Structure and content of the UBE curriculum

Primary (1-3) curriculum	Primary (4-6) curriculum	JS (1-3) curriculum
1. English language	1. English language	1. English language
2. One Nigerian language	2. One Nigerian language	2. One Nigerian language
3. Mathematics	3. Mathematic	3. Mathematic
4. Basic Science and Technology	4. Basic Science and Technology	4. Basic Science and Technology
- Basic science	- Basic science	- Basic science
- Basic technology	- Basic Technology	- Basic Technology
- Information Technology	- Information Technology	- Information Technology
- Physical and Health Education	- Physical and Health Education	- Physical and Health Education
5. Religion and National values	5. Religion and National Values	5. Religion and National Values
- Christian Religious studies	- Christian Religion studies	- Christian Religion studies
- Islamic studies	- Islamic studies	- Islamic studies
- Social studies	- Social studies	- Social studies
- Civic education	- Civic Education	- Civic Education
- Security education	- Security Education	- Security Education
6. Pre-vocational studies	6. Pre-vocational studies	6. Pre-vocational studies
- Home Economics	- Home Economics	- Home Economics
- Agriculture	- Agriculture	- Agriculture

7. Cultural and Creative Arts	7. French Language	7. French Language
8. Arabic (optional)	8. Cultural and Creative Arts	8. Cultural and Creative Arts
	9. Arabic (optional)	9. Business studies
		10. Arabic (optional)

Source: Federal Republic of Nigeria, National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013); Lagos: NERDC Press

The above is an x-ray of the UBE curriculum structure and contents for a 9-year basic education. This curriculum is to take care of the various strategies within the period of the 9 years of this basic or foundational programme. For example, for primary;

The UBE programme, has been designed to meet up with the needs and aspirations of the Nigeria society such as, value re-orientation, poverty eradication, job creation and wealth generation and guarantee access and quality. UBE programme also was designed to ensure Education for all (EFA). In addition to all these, the Universal Basic Education Act (2004) has made education free and compulsory for the Nigerian child (both boy and girl). The essence of making education compulsory is to ensure that there is equality of educational opportunities for the boys and girls, men and women so as to stamp out ignorance from the face of the Nigeria society. However, the UBE curriculum will remain a mere paper work if it is not implemented at the school level.

Concept of Effective Curriculum Implementation

The word "implementation", means bringing into reality something that has been either planned, or designed or conceived. Obih, Ejeh and Azubuike (2018), define implementation as the putting of something worthwhile into practice. Therefore, curriculum implementation is the means through which a planned or designed curriculum can be put into practice. It may also be seen as the process whereby the teacher who is the interpreter of the planned or designed document (curriculum), can engage the learners in meaningful activities as stipulated by the curriculum with the sole aim of achieving the desired and stated education goals. Curriculum implementation is the transmission of the contents of the curriculum document by the teacher to the learners. Akuma in Obih, Ejeh and Azubuke (2019), has defined curriculum implementation as the state in the midst of learning activities, teachers and students are involved in negotiation aimed at promoting learning. Afangideh cited in Charles-zalakolo (2017), in his own view has described curriculum implementation as the actual engagement of learners with the planned opportunities. Therefore, planning or designing a curriculum that will not be implemented is equivalent to waste of time, energy and resources.

So, for the UBE programme in Nigeria to achieve its stated goals, its curriculum should not just be implemented, but its implementation must be effective. The curriculum is said to have been effectively implemented when there is a proper interpretation and passage of the contents of the curriculum from the teacher to the learners using all the necessary and available instructional resources. Chukwuma-Nosike and Mbakwem (2017) describe effective curriculum implementation as the thorough transmission of the contents (theory and skill) of any course or subject as well as its application to the learners.

Therefore, a Universal Basic Education Curriculum (UBEC), that is effectively implemented will help develop in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion. It will also eliminate or reduce drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system because there is efficiency and quality in the system. However, the issue of efficiency will be hampered if in an attempt to implement the UBEC there is inequality between the male and female.

Concept of Gender Equality

Gender is a core part of human identity. It shapes our aspirations, social interactions, understanding about what our life should be about. Human beings assume roles in relationships based on what they have learnt about men and women, fathers and mothers, boys and girls or male and female. The question now becomes what is gender? Akani in Nzewi (2017), refers to gender as sets of relationships, attributes, roles beliefs, and attitudes that define what being a man or a woman is within the society. According to Aydon (2015), gender may be defined as the social phenomenon of distinguishing males and females based on a set of identity traits, it is a social, not physiological or biological construction. Also, in the view of Mondesire (2013), gender could be referred to as socially constructed roles of and relations between men and women. Still on what the meaning of gender should be, Mutunga (2012) submits that gender refers to social attributes that are acquired or learned during socialization and define activities, responsibilities and needs connected to being male or female and not to biological identity associated with masculinity and femininity.

Equality is a situation or condition of being the same in size, value, quantity, etc. with someone else or something else. It is the direct opposite of the word "inequality". According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 6th edition, equality refers to the fact of being equal in rights, status, advantages among others.

From the foregoing, therefore, gender equality, may be seen as a situation or condition whereby both male and female are considered equal in rights, status and advantages. This means neither the male nor the female should be allowed or be subjected to any form of denial or unfair treatment in the scheme of things. Gender equality, is not just a fundamental human right but also essential to achieve peaceful societies, with full human potential and sustainable development. For this equality between the male and female to be achieved and sustained, the campaign has to start from the grass root.

Gender Equality and UBE Curriculum Implementation

One of the objectives of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) is, ensuring the acquisition of appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills, as well as ethical, moral and civil values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning. In all, UBE scheme sees education for the Nigeria child as a right and not a privilege and as such nothing should pose a barrier to the Nigerian child accessing not just education but a quality and sustainable one (Charles-Zalakoro, 2017).

Since the Universal Basic Education scheme is aimed at providing both quality and sustainable education the implementation of the UBE curriculum should be done in such a way that gender equality is reflected among the pupils. In African societies and Nigeria in particular there has been gender disparity in social roles between the male and the female child. This imbalance affects the nature of curriculum implementation at all levels of the Nigeria education system. For instance, Mezieobi, Oyeoku, Ezegbe and Igbo (2012), found out that teachers used masculine terms in teaching social studies. They went further to observe that some social studies curriculum concepts are gender insensitive. In a situation whereby the teacher uses masculine terms to implement the curriculum at the Universal Basic Education (UBE) level, the message that is being passed across to the pupils especially the females is that "we are in the men's world". This will skew the level of participation against the female pupils thereby making the male students or pupils feel free and belonged to participate fully and actively in class activities more than their female counterparts. Furthermore this situation of placing the boys above and ahead of their girls' counterpart, while implementing the curriculum will have a far reaching implementation problem. For example, active participation of the learner in classroom activities

leads to increase in learning which also results into better performance academically. Finally, in the contemporary Nigerian society, education is supposed to be functional. So for the UBE programme to be functional, its implementation must respect the principle of gender equality.

Challenges of Gender Equality in UBE Curriculum Implementation

Some of the challenges of UBE programme in attaining Gender Equality include;

1. **Poor public enlightenment:** Public enlightenment is a channel through which awareness can be created on how UBE programme can be used to address inequality between male and female. It is only when people are enlightened on UBE programme that they will realize the potency in the use of the programme to bridge the gap between boys and girls in terms of acquiring formal education.
2. **Inadequate competent UBE Teacher:** Most UBE teachers lack the competency that is required for effective implementation of the UBE programme. When incompetent teachers are use to implement the UBE curriculum, problems will always arise. This can give rise to a situation where the teacher male masculinize classroom activities thereby making the girls not to feel belonged.
3. **Inadequate Data for planning:** When there are no accurate data for planning, any decision that comes from it will be faulty. Dare, Onekata and Auwal in Onuoha Chidiebere, Nwokocha and Nwanorim (2017), pointed out that the National population census, for instance which is expected to provide the most reliable data for educational planning and implementation has always been politicized. It is common knowledge that after each head count, census figures are manipulated in favour of a particular people. This has made it difficult for government to have accurate data for UBE programme. No available data can give accurate information on the number of boys and girls that are in school in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. This is a big challenge towards addressing gender inequality through the UBE programme.
4. **The traditional role assigned to the girl-child in Africa.** Traditionally the girl-child is expected to stay at home to perform some domestic chores while the boy is free to move about or even go to school. This notion is still being held strongly in some states and communities in Nigeria. The UBE programme has as one of its objectives to ensure free education irrespective of the child's gender, religion and ethnic divides but today there is problem with the implementation of the scheme because of this long aged held notion.
5. **Large class size:** The teacher: Pupils/students ratio in UBE scheme shall be 1 :25 for nursery, 1:35 for lower and middle basic and 1:40 for upper basic education (FRN, 2013). Practically, these ratios are not obtainable in most UBE schools. In some schools classes have up to 70 pupils/students. This is a big challenge to the UBE programme and will not be effective in addressing the gender inequality in educational attainment. A class that is too large will make it difficult for the teacher to control and teach effectively, it hinders the actualization of equality of the boys and girls in acquisition of formal education which is being clamoured globally.

Conclusion

Education has been identified as a channel through which man can confront and solve some of the problems of humanity. Policies of government in the recent past have been geared towards making education relevant to address some of the emergent issues around the globe. One of such emergent issues is that of inequality between male and female in accessing education which has persisted over the years and has assumed alarming proportion. The introduction of a diversified Universal Basic Education Curriculum (UBEC) at the early stage of education is aimed at among other things to correct the perceived inequality in the Nigerian society. While the

objectives of this scheme are laudable, the issues that border on implementation have hampered the attainment of its objectives. These issues include: poor public enlightenment, inadequate competent UBE teachers, inadequate data for planning, the traditional role assigned to the girl-child as well as large class size.

The way forward

In the high of the afore-stated, the following recommendations are made:

1. The traditional role assigned to the girl-child in Africa should be revisited so that she can enjoy some level of freedom and independence within the society as this will also influence her level of reasoning and participation in classroom activities.
2. UBE teachers who are saddled with the responsibility of implementing the UBE curriculum should be trained in such a way that they will be gender sensitive as they implement the curriculum at the school or classroom level.
3. The National Population Commission (NPC) should always update their data as they concern every aspect of the Nigerian society as this will enable the government and other major stakeholders to be armed with any disparity between the girl-child and boys enrolment in school. This will provide useful information that can be used to bridge the gap.
4. There should be adequate public enlightenment by government and even non-governmental organizations (NGOs) informing parents and the girl-child about the importance of education at least at the UBE level.
5. Government should employ more teachers and erect more classroom blocks so that the recommended 1:35, 40 teacher-students ratio can be observed and maintained in all the UBE schools.
6. The girl-child parents should effect the required change of equality in the educational development of the male and female children within the family.

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