DELIVERING BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: FROM ELITISM TO BRICOLAGE

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Abstract
Attempts at providing basic education by various governments in Nigeria proved unsuccessful. Large number of boys and girls as well men and women still remain illiterate. This is mainly attributed to elitist approach at providing education for all. The results have been poverty, low enrolment, insecurity, drop out and general failure of basic education. For a change, this paper recommends that policy formulation and implementation should reject elitism and adopt bricolage as its theoretical perspective. This is justified as the state alone cannot deliver basic education alone but only with active participation of the people and imitating beneficial interventions from other countries.

Keywords: education policy in Nigeria, UBE in Nigeria, education in Nigeria, education and bricolage, elitism in Nigeria

Introduction

The 1990 World Conference on Education for All (WEFA) and its subsequent reaffirmation at Dakar Framework of Action of 2000 brought to the fore the issue of universal basic education in recent times. These efforts drew attention to the need for international, national and local cooperation and collaboration to actualize education for all. Worldwide, the delivery of education is widely seen as the responsibility of government in recognition of education as human right. Underlying this global initiative is that qualitative, free and compulsory basic education should be provided to all most especially the disadvantaged children in all developed and developing countries.

In Nigeria, efforts at western education witnessed various interventions until the reinvented universal basic education. But what is the state of basic education in Nigeria? Of what relevance is the application of theoretical bricolage to the delivery of basic education in Nigeria?

Understanding Universal Basic Education

Basic education is the concern of every country as shown by different efforts around the world. The United Nations Development Project (2004) shows that these attempts:

> Aims to develop this critical mass and equip society
> with basic knowledge and skills –whether for going
> on to higher levels of education, earning a living
> making choices or being able to benefit from
> technological advances and compete with other
> countries.

The .... ication which are geared at equipping its beneficiaries to live meaningfully in a globalized world. Basic essential skills at this level include reading, writing, mathematics as well as basic knowledge in sciences, civics, and the working of modern governments.

In Nigeria, basic education programme is nine years. The primary education segment is for six years while the junior secondary is for three years. This important education is not limited to those between the age of 6 and 11 but is expanded to include education that is provided for all citizens both youths and adults to transform them from natural beings to social and technological beings who can contribute to and benefit from local, national and global environments (Federal Ministry of Education, 2000). But how is basic education delivered in Nigeria?

The State of Basic Education: Elitist Analysis

The UBE policy in Nigeria as implemented over the years is better understood within the ambit of elitism. Notable elite theorists include Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Wright Mills. Common to all of them is that in all societies "two classes of people appear – a class that rules and a class that is ruled" (Braungart, 1976). The first class, always few and monopolizes power and enjoys all the benefits power brings while the second class, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first class. In this ruler – ruled relationship, the ruling class operates in a manner that is now more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent, and supplies the first, in appearance at least, with material means of subsistence and with the instrumentalities that are essential to the vitality of the political organism.

The above elitist proposition has serious effects on education policy in general and UBE policy in particular. The application of this theoretical discourse provides perceptual understanding of origin, direction, and ultimately, the destination of UBE policy in Nigeria. The UBE Policy conception was done by political actors, the globalized elite who attended educational conferences without representation of traditionalized poor who were seen as mere basic education consumers to be mobilized to support the policy they made no inputs. Locally, the policy involved conferences, workshops and contracts for supplies and construction for new buildings and materials. These were awarded to elite class that made exorbitant returns and poor quality services at most. Outstandingly, UBEC (2002) reports that "some contractors abandoned the classroom building projects with little or no efforts to ensure completion".

Further, the UBE policy saw the establishment and consolidation of many agencies such as the National Teachers Institute (NTI), Nigerian Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), National Commission for Nomadic Education (NCNE) among others. These agencies primarily served the interests of elite as they shared topmost appointments with micro benefits tickling down to few members of the masses.

The elite apathy for the masses was further evidenced in the politicization of UBE data. The Teaching Chronicle (2002) observes that "schools, local and state governments deliberately inflate enrolment figures given to UBEC with the intention of attracting more federal funds". This situation of having different UBE data for ulterior motives by elite class at various levels of government demonstrated decadent elite values that worked against the interests of the masses. This data distortion served elite's interests as they fraudulently got more money in the name of UBE policy simply to use for self-enrichment.

More so, the elitist operation of the UBE policy was seen in the stance of government on private schools:

> In democracy and a free-market economy, private schools will be allowed. They will however have to operate in accordance with laid down procedures and regulations by the appropriate authorities.
>
> Eventually, with a full-blown UBE, which should guarantee quality, private schools will cease to be attractive (Education Today, 2000).

This official desire was contradictory with the responses and attitudes of top government officials to UBE. Their children and wards attended high class private schools, within and outside the country, with high costs as no barriers. The hope of private schools decaying was wishful thinking going by the high level of patronization by the elite class.

Rather, it was feared that instead of 'full-blown UBE', it was likely to weaken as more private schools were being licensed to cater for burgeoning elite class. The appropriate authority would continue to make 'appropriate regulations' to protect and promote elite interests.

Policy contradictions were also found in actual financial commitment to UBE. Economic Issues (2004) shows that "public resources were diverted from basic education to institutions of higher education that served the elite or public resources were shifted from education altogether into big-ticket item like road construction" since funding them was easier to divert and more so such projects are likelier to involve kickbacks. The existence of this situation in Nigeria explained the deplorable state of basic education.

In 2001, according to the World Bank (2002), "primary school teachers were on strike for several months because of government's inability to pay their salaries". Local governments that had constitutional responsibility for primary education had fewer resources needed to support schools. Physical facilities needed were mostly in deplorable condition and students were normally very large and overcrowded mostly in urban schools to allow for qualitative teaching and learning.

Khemani (2001) observes that the sustainability of this anti-people practice was partly possible because "corrupt practices by local governments and diversion of public funds were better organized and easily facilitated due to the relative absence of media scrutiny and lack of checks and balances from higher government agencies". This made Tooley (2006) to conclude that "Free primary education in Nigeria isn't much for the poor to get excited about" as it has been hijacked by elite at all levels of government.

Though the federal elites enacted the UBE Act in 2004, five years after its launch in September 1999, the operation of Nigerian federalism backed by the 1999 Constitution, the product of the elites worked against the poor and the UBE policy. The provision of the Act applied only in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja and not nationwide. This was because 'children' form part of the residual list in which only the states had legislative power.

The proliferation of weak states by elites through state creation with no self-sustaining capability saw conflicting reactions to the UBE Act. For instance, Uwais (2005) expresses concern over Zamfara State that introduced discriminatory fees for non-indigenes. At primary school level, "boys were to pay N5000.00 and girls N10,000.00". In Niger and Bauchi States, indigenes were charged fees though those of non-indigenes were higher. Ultimately, elite operations resulted in a situation where:

> Millions of Nigerian children, being of the more vulnerable, voiceless category, face especially extenuating problems of disadvantage, discrimination, abuse, harmful traditional practices and cultural beliefs and exploitation, which only serve to compound their chances for basic survival and natural development, let alone their being enabled to achieve their fullest potential through quality education (Uwais, 2005).

nce, it was incapable of providing a way forward for the delivery of education for all through basic education policy. Ultimately, elite theory, according to Macrine (2005) "constitutes a sterile theoretical cul-de-sac with no political programme for transformative change". At this moment, there is need for a search for alternative arguments to challenge the status – quo and reinvent basic education in Nigeria.

This involves understanding our historical realities and tailoring any transformation policy or strategy, for without so doing, Nigeria would perpetually kick-start the search for national repositioning in education generally and basic education in particular. Hence, Renway et al, (2003) draws attention to the need to stitch "together ideas from sociology,

cultural studies and educational policy studies in attempt to understand the multi-dimensional ways in which education is being reshaped in current times". This is where bricolage is inevitable.

Bricolage and Bricoleur

The concept of bricolage was introduced by French anthropologist Levi-Strauss in 1962 in his book ***The Savage Mind***. According to Strauss, bricolage is synonymous with 'mythical thinking' that allows thinking through problems by using materials at hand. Specifically, bricolage involves arranging and rearranging of materials by 'tinkering' with data or materials at hand. Bricolage methods are bottom-up as differentiated from top-down; and they have concrete as opposed to formal and abstract (Fazio-Fox, 2002). Polit and Beck (2004) note that by bricolage "qualitative researchers put together a complex array of data derived from a variety of sources and using a variety of methods". Cunha (2005) adds that it is the invention, improvisation, organization, reorganization of data, information or materials to solve unanticipated or critical problems while bricoleur is a person that engages in bricolage by creating things from scratch, is creative and resourceful; a person who selects information and things and then puts them together in a way that they were not originally designed to do (Wikipedia, 2006). Similarly, Carl (1997) recognizes bricoleur as a practical person or group of people who performs odd-jobs and do-it-yourself projects. The bricoleur takes whatever materials she or he can find that are lying around to fashion a particular project and bricolage as the process of assembling these concrete bits and pieces into a form or structure.

Conville (1997) writes extensively on bricolage/bricoleur. To him, bricolage refers to raw materials upon which bricoleur draws; and that everyday life's experience serves as the context and content of bricolage. Further, the work of a bricoleur requires effort and the ability to be smart and develop heightened sense of possibilities for various materials. Since bricolage requires 'smartness', it is "more likely to be practiced by experienced rather than by inexperienced people" (Cunha,2005). Here, experience means the process through which the experienced researcher or education officer develops skills which allows him to act according to personal experience rather than formalized explicit or established knowledge. It is in view of this that improvisation is an outstanding characteristic of bricolage. Hence, a bricoleur is an improviser.

Intellectual bricolage operates in a complex environment that calls for active involvement of the bricoleur, the researcher, in the process of meaning creation. According to Kincheloe (2005), such complexity is embedded in notions of:

a) Explicate and implicate order of reality – explicate order involves identification of persistent simple patterns and invariants which repeat themselves in similar ways and possess recognizable locations in time and space. Implicate order focuses on hidden forces that are not easily discernible and which the bricoleur is much interested.

b) The questioning of universalism – involves subjecting individuals and groups in different social setting for their conceptualization of issues or policies.

c) The living process in which cultural entities are situated – this implies that researcher has to understand the sociocultural world of a phenomenon in its past in order to project the future.

d) Intersecting contexts – recognizes that every complex problem operates from multiple contexts. Hence, the bricoleur avoids reductionist or monological notion of definitive or final comprehension of an object of study.

e) Multiple epistemological – realities are diversely seen and understood depending on the viewing location. Knowledge creation by a bricoleur allows for asking new questions of epistemology and the research act.

f) Intertextuality – making meaning in a research act involves intertextualization, that is, narratives from texts make meaning not only by their relationship to the material reality but from their connection to other narratives.

g) The fictive dimension of research findings – no research narratives are simple truth or pure. Fictive dimension may be influenced by a number of forces such as linguistic factors and cultural prejudices among others.

h) The cultural assumptions within all research methods – research methods used and the resultant knowledge produced is the function of time and cultural place. Hence, as bricolage pursues complexity, it influences how the research attempts to see how cultural assumptions shape knowledge produced.

The above notions show the dynamics of bricolage in attempting to provide reliable solutions to social problems. In this capacity and in the spirit of intellectual modesty, bricolage is not theoretical messiah; rather, according to Kincheloe (2005), it promotes understanding, communication, and creates structures that allow for a better informed and more rigorous mode of knowledge production and remedial intervention. But, how does this provide the perspective for viewing, understanding, and improving basic education in Nigeria?

Bricolage and Basic Education

The use of bricolage as theoretical perspective for policy study and specifically educational policy analysis is very scanty. This notwithstanding, Freeman (2006) captures its usefulness and applicability. In the same direction, Ball (1998) justifies its suitability by noting that national policy is basically the process of bricolage, a matter of borrowing and copying bits and pieces of ideas from elsewhere, drawing upon and amending locally tried and tested approaches, cannibalizing theories, research, trends and fashions and not infrequently flailing around for anything at all that looks as though it might work. Ball further notes that most policies are ramshackle; compromise hit and miss affairs, that are reworked, tinkered with, nuanced and inflected through complex process of influence, text production, dissemination and most importantly, re-creation in contexts of practice.

From the above, it is possible to isolate two outstanding features of bricolage that can help to understand and reposition UBE to become beneficial to the people for whom it was designed in Nigeria. These are:
a) Imitation and tinkering
b) Arranging and rearranging

Imitation and tinkering

Imitation outrightly involves copying from others what is thought to be beneficial and tinkering involves synergizing 'bit and pieces of ideas from elsewhere, drawing upon and amending locally tried and tested approaches. This is the situation in the realm of policy making and implementation that has to be adequately factored into UBE policy. This policy is concerned with access, retention, and completion of all those qualified for basic education. In order to realize this, parent or the child has no financial obligation. In practice this has not happened as expected, hence, the need to imitate other countries. Federal Ministry of Education FME (2015) reports that "participation in education is still low in comparison with primary school age population with enrolment being particularly problematic especially in some Northern States". This is partly attributed to poverty and associated child labour.

In attempt to enhance parents' choice on schooling, some countries had developed and implemented policies that were in agreement with parental interests for long-term well-being of their girls and societies. Access has been enhanced in many developing countries by reducing or eliminating school fees. This has been the experience in the first year of fee cancellation in Uganda as enrollment rose from 3.4 million to 5.7 million students in 1996; from 5.9 million to 7.2 million in Kenya in 2003; and from 1.5 million to 3 million in Tanzania in 2002 (Sperling,

2005). In Ethiopia, a massive drive saw a leap in enrollment from three to nine million in the last decade. (Campaign for Education, 2004).

The policy of transfer payments or stipend programmes provided additional incentives for parents to release their girls for primary education. This policy found in countries such as Bangladesh, Mexico, Brazil, Turkey, and Pakistan took the form of scholarships and conditional cash transfer (to female headed households). Also, school-based health and nutrition programmes such as school meals proved successful as they raised attendance by 30 percent and boost test scores (World Bank, 2005 and Sperling, 2005). The government in Ethiopia had a plan to get the hardest-to-reach segments of the society, especially poor girls in rural areas to school. The government also established Girls Advisory Committee whereby representatives of these groups went to parents who were seeking early marriage for their daughters and encouraged them to keep their children in school (Earth Policy Institute, 2003). Here, community members played the role of bricoleurs as advocates of adjusting cultural beliefs and practices to favour basic education. This explains why Hubik (1997) concludes that even unskilled and untrained individuals with detailed knowledge of the problem get into the roles of experts.

Arranging and Rearranging

Bricolage does not recognize absolute intervention to provide a one-time remediation for any problem. This is because 'the bricolage exists out of respect for the complexity of the lived world'. In view of this, UBE applied "pragmatic planning" which according to Obanya (2000) involves:

- Planning while ongoing action remains uninterrupted;
- Planning while you adjust the activities earlier agreed upon, adding new inputs, changing directions when necessary; and
- Keeping all options open, since the ultimate goal is to turn problems and constraints into challenges and opportunities.

In the implementation of UBE policy, issues of finance, security, teacher factor, and adult literacy need reconsideration and rearranging. All levels of government failed to make adequate budgetary allocations for the provision of needed infrastructure. Even what was allocated faced "poor utilization, transparency, and accountability in the management of funds by the Federal Ministry of Education and its parastatals in the implementation of related projects and programmes (FME, 2015). This resulted in no payment of teachers' salaries for months and those that retired had their pensions accumulated.

In the North-East Geo-Political Zone, security concern was the major impediment to basic education. The conflict led to interruption of schooling, destruction of estimated 425 schools, and death of teachers and students (Education Development Trust, 2016) and majority of teachers were internally displaced and citizens were unwilling to take up teaching appointments (Abdulrasheed, Onuselogu and Obioma, 2016). It is only with restoration of peace and security that teaching, learning, and family supports would be harnessed to bring about education for all in the zone.

The teacher factor as important component in the teaching environment has to be tinkered for the delivery of functional basic education. Publisher's Note (2001) observes that:

> Teacher quality has continued to be seen in the narrow sense of certification, not training, and remuneration. But teacher quality involves placing the teacher in the proper role of the key player in the provision of education and having facilities, enrolments and other in-puts as contributing elements to the quality of his work.

Placing a teacher in this comprehensive position calls for determining the relatedness of various elements involved in assisting the teacher to perform this unique role. Such determinants as identified by the Publisher's Note include policy issues, curriculum issues, physical facilities, support services, environmental issues, quality assurance as well as administration and training. Therefore, rearranging the teacher extends to emphasizing a shift from certification to training. This is logical as:

> Training involves quality assurance in respect of performance while certification is the display of pieces of paper as evidence of being trained. Certification relates to pre-service training while in our context, training involves ensuring ability to perform specific tasks such as teaching (Publisher's Note. 2001).

This shows that as important as certification and registration of teachers are, they are not enough to sustain productivity. As such, periodic in-service training is inevitable to improve the capability of teachers in facilitating learning. For desired results in teaching and learning, support facilities and services have to be provided in the right quantity and quality at the right time.

Conclusion

Nigerians need basic education for personal improvement which is necessary to contribute to national and global development. Attempts by governments to deliver this important education proved unsuccessful under the auspices of elitism. Hence, the need to make adjustment in policy design and implementation so that the beneficiaries are actively along with state efforts to reinvent and reposition basic education. This calls for restoration of peace and security where necessary, imitation of success interventions from other parts of the world and reposition of the teacher so that he can champion the facilitation of learning at the basic education level.

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