

## Universal Basic Education and Cultural Development in Nigeria

R.O.A. Aluede

*Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Ambrose Alli University  
P.M.B. 14, Ekpoma, Edo State, Nigeria  
E-mail: raymond\_aluede@yahoo.com*

**KEYWORDS** Universal; basic; education; culture and development

**ABSTRACT** The paper examines how Universal Basic Education affected cultural development in Nigeria. It employed the analytical approach in explaining how the Universal Basic Education Scheme in Nigeria underrated the importance of language in its curriculum. It concludes that since language is a very significant element of culture, for the school system to help to bring about national development, it should employ its own language for easy understanding of concepts taught in schools.

### INTRODUCTION

There is a growing awareness of the need for education to foster cultural development. In fact, National Education Programmes are geared towards evolving cultural development using education as its major instrument for realizing the cultural development. This perhaps may explain in part, why the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme has been launched by the president Obasanjo's administration. This paper examines the concepts of Universal, Basic, Education, Culture and Development. It looks at the possibility of ensuring cultural development through the Universal Basic Education Scheme that has been launched by the Obasanjo's administration. In other words, the paper is out to assess what is in place and the programme itself to know whether it is capable of achieving the desired cultural development through its current educational programmes. Specifically, language, an important element of culture is examined.

In trying to achieve the above, the paper employs the analytical approach as its research method. This method of analysis is considered most appropriate to use here because it will enable the researcher to actually analyse the concepts and how the Universal Basic Education Scheme has imparted on the concepts or *vis a vis*. It will also allow the reader understand how the researcher arrived at his conclusions particularly as this method emphasizes clarity.

### THE NEED FOR UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION

The desire to ensure that children are taught

the culture of the society brought about the need for Universal Basic Education (UBE). Universal, which literarily means the whole without exception, does not suggest covering its entire clientele here. Basic goes beyond the foundation in this context, to include middle as shall be applied to the Nigerian educational system. While Education will be interpreted to mean the act of bringing up or training as of a child, through instruction and in the process bring about the strengthening of his powers of body and mind to be able to understand his culture. Education is also seen as instrument for conserving, transmitting and renewing culture. Education therefore is the sum total of a person's experience. (Mallinson; 1980; Moore, 1982; Aluede, 1993).

Culture implies the generality of the way of life of a people. That is, the way they live, dress, eat, speak, dance, relate with one another, and the tools with which they live. A culture therefore, is the configuration of learned behavior, and the results of behaviour whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society (Ottaway, 1962; Onwueme and Ugbor, 1994; Aluede, 1998). From the above, culture could be said to be a type of civilization or a level of refinement which cultured people are said to have acquired.

While trying to define development, we need to bear in mind that it could mean or attract different interpretations to different people. In the past, people talked of development in relation to economic growth with emphasis on per capital income and gross national product. Today, development could mean more than it is defined above. Goulet (1975) said that development is not a cluster of benefits given to people in need but

rather a process, by which a populace acquires a greater mastery over its own destiny. Guitierrez (1973) also defined development to mean the same with liberation. He is of the view that real development can only happen when people have control over resources. Development could be said to have taken place in a society when all members of that society have been fully liberated from the oppressive forces and are able to have full development of the human personality and begin to take control of their lives. For the purpose of this study, the above definitions of development will be adopted and adapted.

From the above, it can be said that basic education is essentially a cultural activity and is fundamental to cultural transformation. Basic education provides opportunity for schooling. It can be claimed that schooling is to modern society what initiation rites were to traditional societies. Youths of today are incorporated into modern societies and life, including its values, norms, hopes and aspirations through schools. It follows therefore that basic education hold the keys to new social and economic roles, so what students are taught, and especially the way they are taught, essentially defines for children the values needed to be initiated and incorporated into the new culture (Carnoy 1994). The point being made here is that schools play a very important role in transmitting the culture of both modern and traditional societies to children. In fact, traditional families depend on schools to a large extent, to socialize their children into the culture of literacy and numeracy of modern society. At this juncture, it will be necessary to understand the basis for Universal Basic Education in Nigeria. The Federal Government of Nigeria is conscious of the need to inculcate in her citizens the knowledge of literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate. The Government is also conscious of the need to lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking, character and moral training and development of sound attitude, and above all develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment, (National policy on education, 1981)

It is obvious that the school system occupies a very important position if the objectives for the primary and secondary education as stated by the Federal Government will be realized. This therefore necessitated the introduction in September 1976, of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme by the Federal Government.

It should be noted that the scheme was not

effectively implemented between the period it was introduced and now. This necessitated the introduction of the UBE scheme; which was expected to correct the abnormalities that were associated with the UPE scheme.

The UBE scheme was therefore expected to develop and project Nigeria's Culture, Art and language as well as the world's cultural heritage among others. It is important to note that the success or failure of the schemes will be assessed in terms of whether it was able to achieve the stated objectives.

### LANGUAGE AND CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

It is worthy of note that the importance of language in a plural society need not be over emphasized. Language is very important not only because it is a medium through which people communicate but also because it plays a major role in cultural transmission. Language is considered here as a very important element of culture, language can help to integrate a people. In fact developed and developing societies have placed importance on language as a medium for unification. In the United States of America and Australia immigrants are persuaded to adopt the use of the English Language as their medium of communication. In the schools children come across the same language as the medium of instruction and communication. The federal Government of Nigeria in appreciation of the importance of language in the educational process and as a means of preserving the peoples' culture and unity stated in the *National Policies on Education* (1998:9) that "each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue. In this connection, the Government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba." However, although the policy has been criticized because it assumed that Nigerians have only three basic cultures which the Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba symbolizes, it has however recognized the importance of language in the identification of culturally homogeneous groups. Ezewu (1982:74-76) gave a detailed analysis of the importance of language which is considered very appropriate here. In his words, "language is not only the medium through which a given culture expresses itself, thus guaranteeing its performance. It is also a measure of what is

intelligible within the culture. Therefore, the place of language in any culture is the total verbal expression both oral and written of each cultural experience. For the school curriculum to transmit the culture of a given society, it has to teach the language of the culture, which alone is capable of expressing the given culture” Ezewu went further to declare that “any attempt in Nigeria to continue to transmit Nigeria culture through English or French is a failure before the beginning”

It is the view of this author that Ezewu’s position as stated above is very significant because children will not comprehend the various concepts which they are taught in schools rightly if there is a clash between the language of instruction in schools and their culture or indigenous language. It should be noted that the development of a language structure and its consequent effect on the understanding of concepts of which children are taught in schools are in most cases related to the culture of the child. Whatever children do or expose themselves to are to a large extent influenced by their cultural backgrounds. In the study of the Natural Science, children build the concepts of materials in his environment through the language of communication around him. The moment this language is different from the language of instruction in schools when the child starts to engage himself in formal learning, there could be interference and conflict of ideas. This could go a long way in leading to misinterpretation of some of the basic concepts which make up the school curriculum. It could as well affect the level of understanding of the concepts and the overall performance in the school programme (Adesoji 2000). The point that has been made here is that acquisition of concepts on a general note; that is whether scientific or non-scientific is a function of the level of understanding of the language of communication in schools. Problems could arise and develop if there is significant difference between the child’s indigenous or cultural language and the language of instruction in schools.

The language of communication in Nigeria schools has come to occupy a significant position in educational debates. The language of communication has implications for Nigeria’s educational development and her overall National development. In an attempt to transmit the culture of the Nigerian society, three local languages namely, Ibo, Hausa, and Yoruba were adopted. This policy has since been queried by Kosemani (1992a),

when he declared, “this particular policy assumes that Nigerians have only three basic cultures which the Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba symbolize”

It should however be noted that the three regions are not culturally homogeneous. There is the problem of reducing about 513 languages in Nigeria to just three through a national language policy. The major ethnic groups have distinct languages and cultures as could be found among the following groups.

It should be noted here that twenty-six major ethnic groups identified above are not themselves homogeneous. In other words with in each group

**Table 1: Ethnic groups in Nigeria by population %**

S.No.	Ethnic group	Population in million(s)	%
1.	Hausa	11.653m	20.9
2.	Yoruba	11.320	20.8
3.	Ibo	9.246	16.6
4.	Fulani	4.784	8.6
5.	Kanuri	2.259	4.1
6.	Ibibio	2.006	3.6
7.	Tiv	1.394	2.5
8.	Ijaw	1.089	2.0
9.	Edo	0.955	1.7
10.	Anang	0.675	1.2
11.	Nupe	0.656	1.2
12.	Urhobo	0.639	1.1
13.	Igala	0.582	1.0
14.	Idoma	0.486	0.9
15.	Igbira	0.426	0.8
16.	Gwari	0.378	0.7
17.	Ekoi	0.345	0.6
18.	Mumuye	0.294	0.5
19.	Alago	0.250	0.4
20.	Ogoni	0.203	0.4
21.	Isoko	0.200	0.4
22.	Higgi	0.177	0.3
23.	Bura	0.172	0.3
24.	Efik	0.166	0.3
25.	Chamba	0.162	0.3
26.	Other Nigerians	5.040	9.1

Source: The Guardian vol. 8, no. 5357 of March 21, 1992, p.2.

there are many varieties of spoken languages. But basic education and the culture of literacy need to be shaped by local influences such as languages values teaching and learning styles identified desirable or appropriate by the local community. these, it should be noted, vary from family to family, community to community and region to region, just as there hopes and aspirations do vary. The Nigeria situation is complex because of the very many spoken languages and differences in cultural backgrounds. It is a problem for Nigeria to decide how much to adapt schooling to local culture. It is also a problem to

decide which of the local cultures schooling should be adapted to and which of the local languages to use for instruction. The problem of having trained teachers with knowledge of the local languages needed for instruction in schools still exist. The situation therefore is that instead of schools using local languages for basic education and thus develop second language education only in higher grades, second language is used at all levels of our education in Nigeria. Thus our schools are only copying the language of international culture and the substance where as, basic education at its best, ought to be local in the way it develops teaching capability and in the material it uses (Carnoy, 1994) Nigerian children surprisingly learn basic education in English language which is different from the one they speak at home. This hinders academic advancement, it disfavors the various ethnic groups. studies have shown that it do lead to high drop-out rate for these groups, it brings about adult social marginalization and national disunification-which is directly the opposite of what the Universal Basic education policy was intended for in Nigeria (Carnoy, 1994; Kosemani, 1992b)

### CONCLUSION

Universal Basic Education is desirable. There is the need however, to recognize the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic formations in Nigeria that speak variety of languages. There is therefore the need for the programme to adopt the language of the local communities to be able to bring about the advancement of the various communities. For education to be able to transform the people, it should be able to reflect on the community's culture as could be expressed in their language, tools and values. These are considered important if indigenous technological break through is to be achieved. The present situation is only encouraging the copying of Western civilization and culture. This is not what Nigeria should be aiming at in the present dispensation. If the Universal Basic Education is still to perpetuate the coping of Western ways as expressed in there

education, civilization and culture, then there will be a great need for a rethink in Nigeria's educational policy.

### REFERENCES

- Adesoji, F.A 2000. "Language as a function of concepts comprehension in science." *A paper delivered at the national Conference of Philosophy of Education Association of Nigeria (PEAN)* held at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> October.
- Aluede R.O.A. 1998. *A Comparative Analysis of Some Compensatory Education Schemes in Australia, Canada, Nigeria and the United States of America*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt.
- Aluede R.O.A. 1993. "Vocational Education for Development: An Examination of the Role of Vocational Education in the Development of Nations." *Edsu Journal of Vocational Education* 1(1): 45-51.
- Aluede, R.O.A.1999. "The Multi-ethnic / Multi-cultural background to contemporary educational disparity." *The Progress of Education* , LXXIV (3): 55-63.
- Carnoy, M.1994. *The Case for Investing in Basic Education*. New York, UNICEF, Education Section, Programme Division.
- Ezewu, E.E.1982. *Towards a Culture-Loaded School Curriculum Education*. Dakar: UNESCO Regional Publication Service.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria 1981. *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: Government Printers.
- Goulet, D. 1975. *The Curel Choice: A New Concept in the Theory of Development*. New York: Atheneum.
- Guitierrez, G. 1973. *An Introduction to the Study of Comparative Education*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Kosemani, J.M.1992a. "The Ethnic Factor in Educational Disparity in Nigeria." *Bensu Journal of Education*, 3 (1): 15-25.
- Kosemani, J.M. 1992b. "Education is a pluralist society; the social-cultural dimension" in S. C. Oriafio and U. B. Gbenedio (eds.), *Towards the education in Nigeria for the year 2000*. Benin City: University of Benin Press.
- Mallinson, U. 1980. *An Introduction to the Study of Comparative Education*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Moore, T.W. 1982. *Philosophy of Education: An Introduction*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul
- Onwueme, M.S. and O.Ugbor. 1994. *Education and Society: The sociology of Education*. Benin City: Nigerian Educational Research Association of Nigeria.
- Ottaway, A.K.C. 1976. *Education and society: An Introduction to the Sociology of Education*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.