



Reevaluating the **UBE Act** of **2004**

Universal Basic Education (UBE), UBE Act of 2004, Out-of-school children, Quality of education, Literacy and numeracy skills, Education financing.

Author: Precious Ebere and Century E Favour
Co-Author: Uzoma Ezeson

Executive Summary

This policy paper addresses the reevaluation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Act of 2004 in Nigeria. The UBE program, initiated in 1999, aims to provide unrestricted access to quality basic education for every Nigerian child. Despite its noble intentions, there are numerous challenges hindering the program's success. These challenges include hidden costs associated with basic education, a lack of government funding commitment, and socio-cultural norms discouraging education in certain regions. The cost of transitioning from junior to senior secondary school is another major factor contributing to the high number of out-of-school children.

Various organizations, both international and local, have been contributing to the UBE program. However, more needs to be done to address the identified challenges and fulfil the UBE Act's objectives. Recommendations for reevaluation include redefining basic education to encompass up to 12 years of instruction, extending the Universal Basic Education Commission's mandate to cover senior secondary education, increasing education budget allocations, adopting a progressive universalism approach to funding, and establishing Committees of School Management for community ownership.

In conclusion, stakeholders must collectively work towards reevaluating the UBE Act in line with the provided recommendations. Failure to do so will perpetuate the challenges and prevent the UBE Act from achieving its intended goals.

Introduction

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) is a program initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria on September 30, 1999, to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance, and poverty in the country. It was also intended to act as a catalyst for national progress, political awareness, and national integration (Mohammed and Yahuza, 2018). The UBE program builds upon the earlier Universal Primary Education (UPE) program that ran from the 1970s to the early 2000s.

The former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, launched UBE in Sokoto, Sokoto State, as a plan to attain Education for All (EFA) and the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The UBE bill was signed into law after it was passed by the National Assembly on May 26, 2004. The UBE program covers Early Childhood Care and Education, Six-Year Primary Education, and Three Years of Junior Secondary Education, with the goal of ensuring unfettered access to nine years of formal basic education. Its mission is to improve the capacity of states, local government agencies, and communities to provide unrestricted access to high-quality basic education. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) was formally established on the 7th of October, 2004 (UBE Act, 2004).

Scope

The UBE program encompasses Early Childhood Care and Education, Six-Year Primary Education, and Three (3) Years of Junior Secondary Education. Its objectives are to ensure unfettered access to nine years of formal basic education, provide free, Universal Basic Education for all Nigerian children of school-going age, reduce drop-out rates, and ensure the acquisition of essential skills and values.



Challenges in Achieving Universal Basic Education:

Analyzing the Persistent Issue of Out-of-School Children Despite the UBE Act of 2004

Despite the good intentions of the UBE Act, various loopholes have been uncovered as a result of real-world circumstances. The number of youngsters who are not in school continues to be alarming. Malam Adamu Adamu, the minister of education, stated in the National Assembly in 2019 that there were 10 million out-of-school primary school students and 6 million out-of-school secondary school children, totaling 16 million out-of-school children (Noble Missions, 2019). This alarming rate can be attributed to several factors like hidden costs associated with basic education, security issues in the northeast and northwest region of the nation, lack of government funding and socio-cultural norms. We will examine each factor in turn.

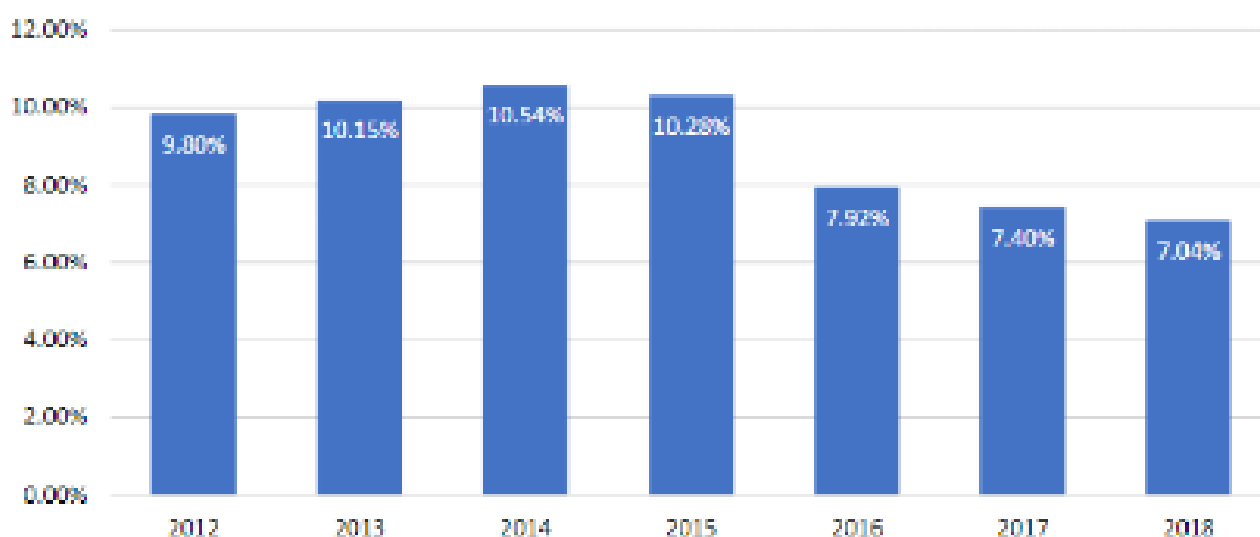
Lack of Government Funding Commitment

Since the 2016 recession, Nigeria's recovery has been sluggish, with domestic income plummeting by a cumulative 23% from 2011 to 2017. This, combined with the country's low tax revenue and the economic repercussions of the recent Covid-19 pandemic, has led to reduced resources for funding public services.

In the last three years, the federal government has allocated only 1.4% of its gross domestic product to Education, falling significantly below the 4-6% benchmark recommended in UNESCO's Education 2030 Framework for Action to achieve inclusive, equitable, high-quality education and lifelong learning for all.

Insufficient public investment, coupled with Nigeria's high population growth rate of 2.7% annually, which surpasses the continental average, constrains the nation's ability to provide quality education to all eligible children and youth. Presently, more than half of Nigeria's 200+ million population are of school-going age, all competing for the limited resources allocated to the education sector. In the past decade, the school-age population has surged by 23 million, intensifying the pressure on the government to meet the resource demands of education, particularly for running educational institutions, ensuring an adequate supply of teachers and instructors, among other essential needs (International Institute for Educational Planning, 202

Expenditure on education in Nigeria 2012-2018



In 2018, education expenditures in Nigeria accounted for 7% of the overall Federal budget. Between 2012 and 2018, the percentage of the federal budget spent on education increased. Overall, the highest percentage was obtained in 2014, when the education sector received over 10 percent of the national budget.

In addition, the Nigerian public education financing system is characterised by its complexity, involving all three tiers of government – federal, state, and local. However, responsibilities are not neatly divided among these tiers. Secondary and tertiary education is financed by both the federal government and the states. In theory, primary education should be primarily funded by local governments, but, in practice, they have relinquished management responsibilities to the states. Moreover, the specific arrangements and funding allocations can differ from one state to another, and there is no mandatory requirement for states to transparently report their education expenditures at the federal level. Consequently, it remains a considerable challenge to compile a comprehensive overview of public education spending that encompasses all levels of government (The Cost of Universalizing Basic Education in Nigeria Key Messages, n.d.).

Hidden Costs of Basic Education

One of the key challenges affecting the success of the UBE program is the presence of hidden costs associated with basic education. Despite the promise of free basic education, children in elementary schools are nonetheless compelled to pay for some services and commodities (Noble Missions, 2019). Inadequate public education funding forces parents to cover education costs, which increase with the level of schooling. International Institute for Educational Planning, (2021) identified these expenses to include school fees, uniforms, textbooks, teaching materials, and transportation, consuming over 50% of family budgets.

According to the National Education Data Surveys (NEDS, 2015), monetary costs accounted for 26% (23 percent public school and 49% private school) of students who stopped attending school in 2015, and this has been the top cause for dropping out of school since 2004. (See Table 1). Similarly, Table 2 reveals that 18 percent of children of school age who are not enrolled at all cite financial costs as the third most important factor, behind distance to school and household labour demands. Even after more than 15 years since UBE's start, many occurrences of out-of-school children are still traced to financial costs (Adeniran, 2019).

Table 1: Top Reasons for Dropping out

Reasons	2015			2010	2004
	Government School	Private School	Total		
Monetary cost	23%	49%	26%	33%	31%
Labour need	15%	11%	14%	17%	21%
Poor school quality	15%	2%	13%	6%	17%
School too far	7%	3%	6%	8%	10%
Engaged/ married/pregnancy	5%	1%	5%	--	--

Table 2: Top Reasons for Never Attending School

Reasons	2015	2010	2004
School too far	23%	32%	20%
Labour needed	21%	32%	34%
Monetary cost	18%	25%	23%
Poor school quality	14%	17%	14%
No interest in school	10%	10%	8%

According to the 2018 Nigeria Living Standards Survey, 46.4% of Nigerians live in poverty, with 53% earning less than US\$1.90 per day. Limited income pushes education down the priority list, making primary education far from free and compulsory, leaving around 10.5 million children (ages 5-14) out of school, with approximately 22% citing cost as the primary barrier.

A grim outlook awaits impoverished households, constituting 80% of the population in Northern Nigeria. These families grapple with the financial burden of education, resulting in just approximately half of the region's children being able to access primary education.

Even with family contributions, Nigeria's total education spending falls below regional and continental averages, underscoring the urgent need for increased public investment in education to ensure quality learning.

Insecurity Threatens School Attendance

Nigeria is among the countries where conflict affects children the most in the world with the highest number of children recruited by armed groups.

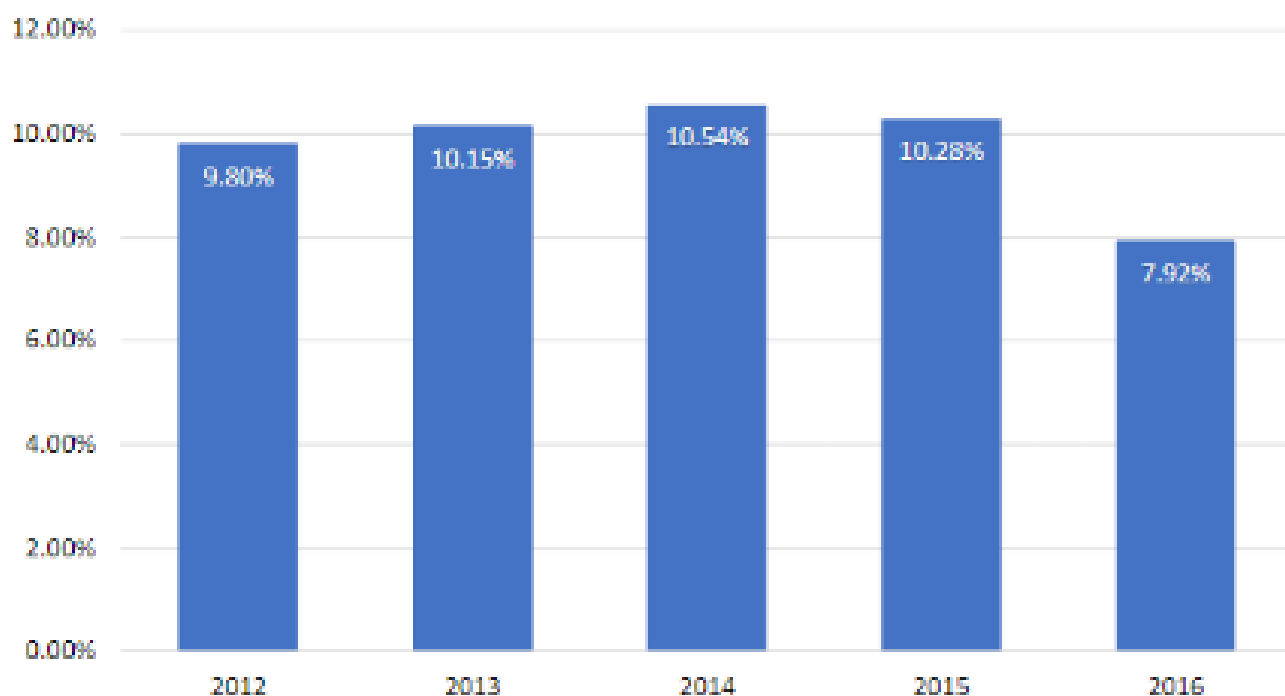
Repeated attacks on schools and universities as well as on teachers and students by Boko Haram have undermined the entire education system. It is estimated that more than 1,400 schools have been destroyed, damaged or looted primarily in the northeast and more than 600,000 children have lost access to education.

As a result of the ongoing insecurity in the region, nearly 300 school girls from a boarding school in Zamfara state were kidnapped in February 2021. They were later released unharmed but the event throws into sharp focus the need to guarantee the security of school children and their teachers and prevent the destruction of infrastructure, so that parents will feel it is safe to send their children to class (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2021).

Low Transition from Junior to Senior Secondary School

Still considering the factors influencing the number of out-of-school children, the cost of transiting from junior secondary school to senior secondary is an important factor to be considered. According to UNESCO'S review, the number of enrollments at primary and junior secondary school has greatly increased since the year 2000, however, the transition and completion rates remained below 70%.

Gross enrollment ratio in upper secondary school in Nigeria 2012-2016



In Nigeria, the gross enrollment ratio in upper secondary schools has decreased in recent years. In 2016, only 38.6% of the population in the senior secondary school age group was enrolled (Varrella, 2021). Also, Noble Mission noted in her article that the high cost of continuing from junior secondary school to senior secondary school is a contributing factor to the increasing number of out-of-school children in the country.

Inefficient Tracking of the UBE's Data

There are indications of basic education data being tracked and measured by the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) post-2007. Nonetheless, it's worth noting that the monitoring and measurement of educational progress have historically been lacking, with only marginal improvements occurring since the inception of various education initiatives (Centre For Public Impact (CPI), 2022).

UNESCO's Education assessment of Nigeria in 2015 underscored this challenge as a significant impediment to making advancements. "The 2002 Global Monitoring Report highlighted the absence of data on Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Nigeria, placing it among the sub-Saharan African nations lacking this crucial information. The report also revealed that Nigeria had insufficient data on both Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER). Furthermore, Nigeria was classified as one of the 11 African countries facing a severe risk of not achieving the UPE goal. The evaluation of progress toward the UPE objective relied on each country's Net Enrolment Ratios (NERs), with these countries registering NERs below the 80% benchmark."

Additionally, various research papers examining this initiative have highlighted the inadequacy of the existing monitoring systems. They've emphasised that effective performance management systems and streamlined monitoring and evaluation mechanisms within the government can provide a basis for assessing advancements in key educational policy priority areas. However, it is noteworthy that these have not been effectively put into practice."

Socio-Cultural Norms and Practices

Temitope Yewande and Ayokunumi Olawunmi (2023), posits that in certain regions, especially in the northeast and northwest of Nigeria, socio-cultural norms and practices discourage attendance in formal education, particularly for girls. These cultural barriers perpetuate the problem of out-of-school children in these areas. Traditional beliefs and practices in Northern Nigeria have a significant impact on the educational opportunities available to women and girls, creating a challenging environment for female education throughout Nigeria (Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013).

According to Uyanga (2009), the Northern region, with its diverse cultural heritage, is predominantly characterised by an authoritarian and patriarchal system, which poses a substantial barrier to women's education. Girls, in particular, face the adverse effects of the alarmingly high rate of out-of-school attendance in Northern Nigeria. Societal beliefs and practices serve as substantial obstacles to female education in this region. Many women in Northern Nigeria are unable to complete their education due to factors like early marriage, gender-based violence, and limited educational options (Mshelia, 2021). These challenges inevitably hinder women's educational prospects. An examination of the reasons behind girls dropping out of school in Northern Nigeria reveals that early marriage and motherhood are primary contributing factors.

Additionally, deeply ingrained cultural beliefs perpetuate gender disparities in education within the region. According to Jayachandran (2021), these norms and beliefs act as significant barriers, upholding gender inequalities and contributing to the persistence of sexism. Practices like "Purdah," which mandates that women must cover themselves from head to toe, limit their mobility and obstruct their access to education. Furthermore, a widespread cultural consensus that schools are unnecessary for girls' personal development and societal participation further restricts girls' educational opportunities Windels & Mallia (2015).



Case Studies 1: Uganda

This case study examines Uganda's transition from an elitist education system to one focused on inclusiveness. It highlights the evolution of education policies in Uganda, with a particular focus on the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE) programs. The study explores the impact of these policies on access, affordability, and equity in education. Lessons learned from Uganda's experience can provide valuable insights for reevaluating Nigeria's Universal Basic Education Act of 2004.

Introduction

In the late 1980s, Uganda embarked on a journey to reform its education system, transitioning from an elitist approach to one that promotes inclusiveness. Education was recognized as having both intrinsic and instrumental value for development, prompting the government to prioritise education as a central element of its Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP). The commitment to providing universal primary education (UPE) marked a pivotal moment in Uganda's educational landscape.

Universal Primary Education (UPE)

In 1997, Uganda took a significant step by abolishing primary school fees under the UPE program. This initiative aimed to ensure that every child enrolls at the appropriate age and successfully completes the full primary education cycle. One of the primary goals of UPE was to reduce inequalities in access to education related to income, gender, parental education, and geographic location. It successfully made primary education more affordable for poor households, resulting in increased access and reduced disparities. This translated to increased student enrolment into school and attendance in class.

Universal Secondary Education (USE)

Building on the success of UPE, the Government of Uganda introduced the Universal Secondary Education (USE) policy in 2007 to address inequities in post-primary education opportunities. USE was designed with shared responsibility in mind, involving parents, schools, and the government. The government's role in implementing USE included subsidizing secondary school costs, covering school fees, providing textbooks and instructional materials, and funding co-curricular activities, school administration, and maintenance.

Impact and Outcomes

The implementation of the USE policy led to a substantial increase in secondary school enrollment. The number of students enrolling in USE schools continuously rose. Enrolment into senior one (S1) increased from 161,396 students in 2007 to 251,040 in 2013, demonstrating the policy's effectiveness in expanding access to quality secondary education.

Lessons Learned

1. **Equity through Access:** The UPE and USE programs significantly reduced inequalities in education access associated with income, gender, parental education, and geographical location. Nigeria's policy should prioritise addressing such disparities.
2. **Affordability for All:** Making primary education affordable by abolishing school fees reduced barriers to access. Nigeria should consider similar measures to ensure that cost does not deter children from attending school.
3. **Government Commitment:** Government involvement and financial support were crucial in implementing USE successfully. Nigeria should allocate sufficient resources to fulfill the goals of its Universal Basic Education Act.
4. **Shared Responsibility:** Inclusive education requires a collaborative effort involving parents, schools, and the government. Nigeria can consider similar co-responsibility models to enhance its education system.

In conclusion, Uganda's transition from elitist education to an inclusive approach through UPE and USE policies offers valuable insights for Nigeria's reevaluation of its Universal Basic Education Act of 2004. By prioritising access, affordability, equity, government commitment, and shared responsibility, Nigeria can work towards a more inclusive and effective education system that empowers its youth for a brighter future.

Impact and Outcomes

- 1. Redefine Basic Education:** The government in conjunction with policy makers should expand the definition of "basic education" to include up to 12 years of instruction, aligning Nigeria with other African countries.
- 2. Extend UBEC's Mandate:** Policy makers should extend the Universal Basic Education Commission's mandate to cover senior secondary education, which is currently not included in the program.
- 3. Increase Education Budget Allocations:** Government at all levels - federal, state and local - should
 - Increase the proportion of the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) dedicated to education to between 3-5%.
 - Roll back on recent budget cuts to education that have adversely affected the sector.
- 4. Adopt a Progressive Universalism Approach:** Governmental and non-governmental education interventions should prioritise support for marginalised populations, particularly girls facing barriers to education, and provide targeted financial and in-kind assistance to help them attend secondary school.
- 5. Implement a Robust Institutional Framework:** To enhance education in Nigeria, government and policymakers should create an effective institutional structure. This framework must focus on monitoring and regulating education outcomes while eliminating duplicative agencies with overlapping responsibilities.

6. Adopt Public-Private Partnerships

Expanding the private sector's role in education alongside increased public spending can enhance access. Over two-thirds of junior secondary schools in Nigeria are privately owned. Maintaining this investment is crucial. Implementing public-private partnerships and subsidies, similar to Uganda's model, could yield substantial savings, up to US\$ 42.1 million (NGN 15.2 billion) annually for Nigeria.

7. Adopting a Data-Driven Education Intervention Model

A data-driven model in measuring UBE's success in curtailing the rate of out-of-school children in Nigeria will be a game-changer in Nigeria's education system. It will cover data gaps that has resulted in the ineffectiveness of UBE's efforts. A good example of this data-driven education intervention model is the Edudata by DO.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the challenges facing the full actualization of the UBE Act's objectives are substantial, but they can be overcome with concerted efforts. The UBE program is a crucial foundation for Nigeria's future, and reevaluating the UBE Act in line with the recommendations provided is essential. If these steps are not taken, the current issues will persist, and the UBE Act's objectives will remain unattained, perpetuating the problem of out-of-school children in Nigeria. It is imperative for all stakeholders to work collaboratively to address these challenges and ensure that every Nigerian child has access to quality basic education.

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