

## **Implementing Universal Basic Education (UBE) through the Strategic Provision of School Library Services**

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### **Introduction**

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights asserted that everyone has the right to education. Over 40 years later, it is clear that many people are still being denied this basic human right. Indeed, the 1980s saw more backward than forward movement in most countries of the world. It was at that point that a *World Conference on Education for All* was held in Jomtien, Thailand, for the purpose of forging a global consensus and commitment to provide basic education for all. Universal Basic Education (UBE) is the programme which grew out of that Conference (Dike, 2000).

President Olusegun Obasanjo formally launched the UBE in Nigeria on 30th September, 1999. The programme is intended to be universal, free, and compulsory. Since the introduction of western education in 1842 (Eya, 2000), regions, states, and federal governments in Nigeria have shown a keen interest in education. This can be seen in the introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in the western region on 17th January, 1955, its introduction in the eastern region in February, 1957, and in Lagos (then Federal Territory) in January, 1957. Other developments include the publication of a *National Policy on Education* in 1977, launching Universal Free Primary Education on 6th September, 1976, and the subsequent launch of UBE in 1999. The goal of all these programmes is providing functional, universal, and quality education for all Nigerians irrespective of age, sex, race, religion, occupation, or location.

UBE is broader than UPE, which focused only on providing educational opportunities to primary school age children. UBE stresses the inclusion of girls and women and a number of underserved groups: the poor, street and working children, rural and remote populations, nomads, migrant workers, indigenous peoples, minorities, refugees, and the disabled. The formal educational system is only one of six components included in basic education in the implementation guidelines of the Federal Government. Others relate to early childhood, literacy and life skills for adults, nomadic population, and non-formal education or apprenticeship training for youth outside the formal education system (Nigeria 2000).

In 2000, Nigeria's literacy rate was 52 percent (Babalola, 2000). In 1998, only 40% of all heads of households in Nigeria had any education at all, 21% had only primary education, 14% had up to secondary education, while only 5% had post-secondary education (UNDP, 1998). Data from the Federal Ministry of Education, Education Statistics (1996) showed that only 14.1 million out of 21 million school-age children are enrolled in primary school. UBE was born from these startling statistics, to promote education among all citizens.

Efforts by governments to promote education and literacy in Nigeria have failed because there was no provision for school libraries in the implementation of these programmes. The successful implementation of the UBE has serious implications for school libraries. It indicates an expanded vision for school libraries to include not only libraries in primary and secondary schools, but also libraries for early childhood education (in homes, communities, daycare centers and nursery schools), in skills centers for out-of-school youth, in adult education centers, in schools for nomadic peoples. Some of these may take very different forms from traditional school libraries. We must learn to think of school libraries in new ways. In the words of Dike (2003):

If we want children, and all citizens to acquire literacy, we must provide reading materials the abundant and pleasurable reading materials found in libraries. If we want learners to develop skills for lifelong learning, we must give them opportunities to enquire, to search, to explore, to practice, to solve problems – such as are found in libraries. If we want to introduce them to the world of knowledge and teach them to handle information in many forms, we need the resources of a well-equipped library.

School libraries are basic to the successful implementation of UBE in Nigeria. This article explores the implications of UBE for effective library service in terms of resources, facilities, personnel, and users.

## **The Concept of School Libraries**

School libraries are found in schools, but achieving UBE requires looking more broadly at the concept. The school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to successful functioning in society and gives students lifelong learning skills develops the imagination, citizenship, critical thinking skills, and ability to use information in different media (IFLA, 2000). School library materials enrich textbooks and teaching materials. When librarians and teachers work together, students achieve more. School library services serve everyone in the community, including those, such as people with disabilities, who need special materials and services. Censorship should not be tolerated. The crucial importance of school libraries in literacy, social, and cultural development demands that they be supported by legislation, policy, and funding. School libraries must be free of charge and, if they must share facilities with another library type, the school library's unique needs must be considered (IFLA, 2000).

The school library helps children learn to enjoy reading, learning, and using library resources as lifelong habits, and gives them the chance to evaluate and use information. It exposes them to a range of thoughts, opinions, and ideas, and gives them awareness of other cultures.

## **Library Development in Nigerian UBE**

UBE has five sponsoring bodies: the World Bank, the Department for International Development (DFID), the federal government of Nigeria (FGN), state governments, and local governments (Iheagwara 2005). Local governments have had less ongoing interest and are not currently contributing to the programme. The World Bank provides the Infrastructure, the DFID provides training and capacity building. The FGN and the state governments provide matching funds. In 2003, each participating state received five million dollars (N670m) for a 3-year programme implementation. Each state submits work plans for approval by the World Bank. Funding for library development depends on project priorities of individual participating states. No fixed percentage of funding is allocated to library development. While some states have library development in their project priority list, others, for example, Imo State, do not.

## **School Library Services and Nigerian UBE**

Effective school library services for the successful implementation of UBE in Nigeria hinges on the facilities that support library services: materials, personnel, and space. UBE implementation guidelines (Nigeria, 2000) call facilities (including classrooms, libraries, etc.), “the physical and spatial enablers of teaching and learning.” For school libraries to provide an environment for teaching and learning, we must first consider our educational objectives. According to the World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO, 1992), basic learning include both tools and content. Tools include literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving, while content includes knowledge and values. The tools and content are needed for lifelong learning and development and quality of life. UBE objectives include the acquisition of the basic tools of learning and development of life skills and work aptitude. According to the guidelines, stronger emphasis should be placed on “communication skills, the spirit of enquiry, team-work, information literacy, and computer literacy.” These are familiar themes from the education literature and education policy documents. The philosophy that education should be learner-centred, self-directed, active, resource-based, skills-oriented, functional, etc., that brought the school library from the periphery to the centre of education (Dike, 1993).

The school library is a learning laboratory where users interact directly with resources and develop research skills for lifelong learning. School libraries encourage active and participatory lifelong learning. The library environment facilitates teamwork and cooperation. Its role in voluntary reading and personal development through literature is well-known.

UBE covers learning in school and in other places. For this reason, the vision of school library service and facilities must expand. Nursery schools and primary schools can have libraries, but if we are concerned with the programmes for early childhood, we will be concerned with home libraries and services to community and daycare facilities. School library service for nomadic populations will necessarily be mobile, and serving the basic education needs of out-of-school adults and youth will require co-operation with public libraries, with school libraries as access points or providing shared facilities.

This expansion is an arduous task that can be achieved in the following ways:

### **Building**

Library buildings must house the collection as well as staff and users. A library is more than a building, but appropriate buildings are necessary, because it is difficult to develop a library with a location. A school library is part of a school. It should have space for the collection, and should not share space with other things. The environment is very important: light, ventilation, humidity-control, and relative quiet are essential. Obviously, there must be shelves for books and journals, display racks for magazines, filing cabinets for pamphlets and clipping files, storage for graphic media, audio-visuals and equipment, as well as space for viewing and listening to media, and large tables for maps, computer workstations, etc.

### **Extension services**

Extending school library services to unserved populations is essential for UBE. Portable school libraries offer real possibilities for extending library services to nomadic populations, remote communities, rural primary schools, community and daycare centers. This type of library is transported by buses in some countries including Nigeria, by boat in Nigeria and Venezuela, by camel in Kenya, donkey in Peru and Zimbabwe, and by cart in Nicaragua (Books for All Calendars, 1997, 2000).

### **Information sources**

According to Correa (1997) the library is “the place where teachers and pupils come into contact with ‘the world’, that is, where they acquire the general knowledge which forms the basis for all further learning”. Users come to the library in search of information and materials for various purposes. The information sources should include non-book media. Since learners are more likely to retain and recall with ease a greater percentage of what they hear, see, and manipulate at the same time, emphasis should be placed on media, which enhance such activities. Ekere (2000) identifies the non-book media in school libraries as audio player/cassettes, video cassettes/player, film projectors, slides, overhead projectors, computers, transparencies, disks, ink, and video compact disc player.

### **Library workroom**

The school library is a laboratory for the development of skills for lifelong learning. It is also a workroom for carrying out projects and for individual or small group assignments. This lends itself to active and participatory methods, enquiry, teamwork and problem solving, as advocated in UBE. As a learning laboratory, the library should be busy with activity, not silent as a graveyard. Resources for the assignments may be taken to the classroom, instead of bringing the class to the library.

### **Recreation**

Paterson (Elaturoti, 2000) calls the school library a refuge, “a port of call for readers in search of adventure, a tree for children who climb high on the process of discovering life.” As such, the school library should be a comfortable, pleasant environment with informal seating (mats, cushions, soft chairs), a quiet atmosphere for pleasure reading and socializing. Dike (2000:5) describes the school library as “an oasis of informality.” Social activities include story hours, playlets, drama, film, music, and debates.

### **Classroom libraries**

The classroom library is an alternative to the central school library. Especially as an addition to the resources of a central school library, classroom libraries should encourage voluntary reading and transform teaching and learning. They consist of a book corner or library shelf with resources for use in the classroom. Classroom libraries bring books and reading very close to the children, especially younger children in nursery and primary schools, and so encourage reading. Having resources in the classroom can also make it easier to integrate the library with the curriculum. Where security is a problem, small classroom collections can be stored in a safe place overnight. The main disadvantage is in the duplication of materials. Also, when primary school classes are held in large halls, the environment is not conducive to the learner-centred methods advocated by educational reformers and the UBE programme (Dike, 2000).

### **Resource-sharing**

Resource-sharing offers another approach to the problem of expanding school library services in support of UBE. In this case, the school library and public library share resources or facilities. In countries without an extensive network of public libraries, as is the case in Nigeria, schools often offer the most viable facility for community information services. This kind of resource-sharing is promising for the successful implementation of UBE in Nigeria for adult learners and out-of-school youths. It has been practiced successfully in Botswana, Mozambique, and Cote d'Ivoire (IFLA – ALP, 1995).

### **Conclusion**

UBE in Nigeria borrows heavily from the internationally accepted concept of Basic Education, which sees education as more than just schooling, as a broader concept with a systematic relationship between in-school and out-of-school learning. UBE stresses access for all. The ideal school premises are an integrated space of classrooms, laboratories, farms, play fields, and a library. To accomplish this, school remodeling and construction must include space for libraries. The Annual Conference of Nigerian School Library Association says that the use of the library is a culture that needs to be developed in our youths through a well-planned library education programme. To ensure that library use becomes a lifelong habit, it is necessary that the national curricula for primary and secondary schools include library use education modules (Elaturoti, 2001). All schools must also have a qualified school librarian. The school renovation and construction project of the UBE programme did not include provision of space for libraries. Failing to provide this essential facility will work against the objectives of UBE in Nigeria .

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