

Policy of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria: An Examination of its Effectiveness on Implementation and Management

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Abstract

The intention of this paper is to thoroughly discuss the universal basic education in Nigeria, from its overview, how it was in the past to its expected outcome. In this paper, we examine the effectiveness in terms of aims, implementation and plan of action regarding Nigerian policy of universal basic education. The paper further discusses alternative courses of action to enhance parents understanding on the importance of education so that they can share the same value to their children. In addition, we also emphasize the provision of training and education for teachers is to increase their teaching competency and enhance their influential in the quality of basic education in the country. The presence of transparency and accountability especially from the management of funds which come from donors, such as private individuals and significant international actors is significantly emphasized.

Keywords: Universal basic education, effectiveness, implementation, management

1.0 Introduction

Education is regarded as having paramount importance, basically because of its ability to aid in improving the quality of life and in the progress of the society in general. It has also been seen as a good way to narrow the existing gap between the members of the society who are from the affluent line and those who are suffering from poverty. Different governments and international actors are encouraging many children, including those from the poorest countries, to attend school to be assured of having a bright future ahead of them. These actors provide assistance, including financial aid and other educational resources, although they are sometimes deemed as insufficient, especially for people are suffering from extreme poverty. Many countries are demonstrating their active initiatives in the current time to be assured that education is being provided to all citizens, in recognition of the fact that it can be influential in the achievement of national progress. Concerned parties, like national governments, design a universal basic education plan, along with the commitment to provide the necessary resources which are needed to implement the education plan and the presence of transparency and accountability in its implementation (Brown, 2008).

Nigeria is an example of one country which has demonstrated its strong commitment to the possibility of improving its universal basic education. The call for the implementation of a better educational framework in the country is attributed to allowing its citizens to take advantage of the economic opportunities which might come along their way but have always been limited because of inadequate education. After the country's achievement of democracy in its history, the national government has been increasingly pressured to allow the people to have access to high quality and adequate public services, including universal basic education. The government prioritizes this need for the framework for universal education basically because of the need to produce educated and highly knowledgeable citizens who can prove to be highly influential and significant in the overall growth of the national economy.

The federal, states, local governments, and other private actors have worked closely with each other in the past years to be assured that the universal basic education is keeping up to its objectives and that the country is not left behind in terms of educational progress. The current educational system in Nigeria makes people doubt its potential effectiveness. This therefore calls for more action from the government to fully realize the development of the nation and its citizens (Radwan & Pellegrini, 2010). In the remaining parts of this paper, the discussion will be geared towards the context of universal basic education in Nigeria, including its past, current and future contexts. More importantly, the author will identify what courses of actions have been implemented in relation to the aims of universal basic education in Nigeria, the effectiveness, and a recommendation for alternative courses of action in order to improve the quality of basic education in the country.

2.0 Overview of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria

The national education system in the case of Nigeria has been a witness to numerous changes in policies, programs, and frameworks. Some of these changes are favorable in the eyes of other people. However, in other instances, it is simply seen as a reflection of a fragmented system characterized by the failure to deliver anticipated benefits and achieve its specified goals. Up to this point, however, the current context of universal basic education in the Nigeria is bound by uncertainty, and such pose serious threats to the country and its citizens basically because their future is vague as well (Aluede, 2006).

To be provided with a quick overview on the most significant developments of the universal basic education in Nigeria, refer to the timeline in Figure 1 below:

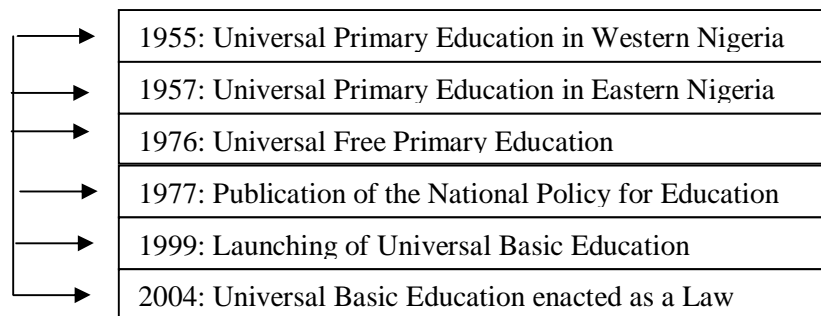


Figure 1: Developments of the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria

2.1 The Past

The current contexts of universal basic education in Nigeria can be traced from as early as 1955 from the Universal Primary Education Scheme which stipulates a variety of comprehensive laws in the field of education in West Nigeria. In the following years, both the Eastern and Northern Nigerian governments also had in place their respective universal education programs. However, the federal government entered the scene only in 1976 with the commencement of the universal primary education in all of the regions within the country. It has resulted into the provision of a unified and singular framework for educating Nigerians. Although education at the primary level has been made available for free during the period, a number of criticisms became evident because of its perceived failure to deliver the goals which are anticipated. In 1977, the National Policy for Education was introduced. It is expected to guide the initiatives of the government in the provision of education to its citizens who outline the commitment of the government towards strategies which can help in the presence of a better education system.

In September 1999, the universal basic education has been finally launched (Adeyemi, 2002). The universal primary education in Nigeria, recognized as the predecessor of the universal basic education scheme, has been directed towards the possibility of increasing the number of attendance or enrolment in schools, as well as the provision of an excellent opportunity to correct the current imbalances. The goals have been met at some angles. However, it has been criticized that it did not consider some of the basic problems which have become evident. These problems include the availability of competent educators, the provision of a conducive learning environment, textbooks and other resources, curriculum development, and classroom supervision and management, among others (Asagwara, 1997). The universal basic education in Nigeria was passed into a law in 2004 as an implementation of the government initiative to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in education, specifically the area which deals with the presence and provision of Education for All.

This is also a government effort to enhance horizontal democratization of education through massifying the basic education in Nigeria. Prior to this policy related to universal basic education, Nigerians needed to study six years to complete their primary education, three years for junior secondary, three years for senior secondary, and four years to finally complete tertiary education. One of the reasons on why its success rate has been very limited is the fact that attendance to the educational institutions of children who should be already going to schools has not been made compulsory during its implementation (Ejeh, 2009). The universal basic education in Nigeria has experienced various failures in the past, attributed to a variety of reasons. For instance, the country's large population, the style of governance (often being attributed as lacking transparency and accountability), and the multitude of thrusts towards such educational framework have all made it harder for its goals to be realized. The last problem identified is in line with the fact that numerous policies and initiatives have been in place, in the absence of adequate support and funding, making them result into very limited level of success. The presence of over 350 various languages and two main religions have also been highly influential in the low level of success in the initiatives of the regional and federal government to make education better in the country (Brown, 2009). These problems have been addressed, although not sufficiently, through a multitude of initiatives, such as the establishment of the universal basic education scheme.

2.2 The Present

Without a doubt, the current universal basic education in Nigeria is a product of the past scheme which has failed to deliver significant success rate. It has been replaced with a new scheme with the anticipation that it will be able to deliver more positive outcomes than what has been previously implemented. Under this framework, all of the tiers of the government have been obliged by a mandate to provide free access to education for all the citizens of Nigeria. Students are required to attend compulsory 9 years in primary education and junior secondary education, in which the former should be completed for a period of 6 years while the latter should be completed in a period of 3 years. Under the current ruling of the legislations about this educational scheme, parents are endowed with the responsibility to enroll their children and ensure that the years they spend in school are completed. Apart from the fact that the national government provides assistance in terms of having free tuition, there are also free educational services which can be enjoyed by the students (Ejeh, 2009). The universal basic education implemented in Nigeria can be broken into three different components. According to a study, the "universal" component of the program specifies that it is for all the members of the Nigerian society, regardless of their economic status and how they are perceived in the country. The word "basic", moreover, denotes that it serves as the foundation of further education for the citizens.

It is also regarded as the foundation of a brighter future which waits ahead of them. Lastly, "education" connotes the transmission of knowledge into various generations of Nigerian. The last component also presents a culture of highly competent and individuals who are vital for the development of the nation (Uko-Aviomoh, Okoh, & Omatseye, 2007). In the current time, the Universal Basic Education Commission is one of the areas of the government which holds prime responsibility in the management and development of the educational scheme in the country, including the provision of an assurance that the desired goals are being achieved at a significant level. Although the said commission is the one with the authority in primary basic education, it cannot be denied that there are also other actors who are currently acting as highly influential. Some of these other actors include the National Commission for Nomadic Education, State Universal Basic Education Boards, Local Government Education Authorities, and other branches of the country's national government. The overlapping and overarching presence and functioning of the various actors in the education scheme currently in place has often been attributed as one of the main reasons why it does not yield significantly effective results compared to the education systems of other countries (Kelleher & Isyaku, 2008). This simply means that there is no clear identification of authorities and function, in relation to the implementation of universal basic education. There is a tendency to lead into multiplicity of roles ending up into confusion as to who should be responsible for some specific initiatives.

2.3 The Future

The government and other significant actors in the implementation of the universal basic education in Nigeria envision its strengthening and its ability to deliver the goals which have been earlier specified. In the future, one of the possibilities which can be considered in the case of Nigeria would be the execution of the necessary modifications in its current curriculum to be able to make the mode of education more responsive of the current time and needs. Changes in the content of education in the future are anticipated to also alter the ways at which teachers currently handle their students and execute their lessons.

A change in perspectives in classroom management, as well as on the things which are being thought, are seen as being necessary to be able to improve basic education in the country. In addition, it is also anticipated that new technologies will be integrated into teaching and classroom management in the future. This will make the education scheme more effective and can also help in increasing the skills and competence of the students. It is also anticipated that teaching models will be changed as well as changes in curriculum development to help make universal basic education more comprehensive and to prepare the students for further education in order to help them be provided with a more extensive knowledge (Ajibola, 2008). Most importantly, teacher education in Nigeria is also a priority for strengthening universal basic education because of the belief that the success of the entire education scheme will be largely dependent on the competency of these teachers and their ability to engage students in a more effective learning program (Durosaro, 2006).

3.0 Examination of its Effectiveness

This part of the paper reflects the focal point of the discussion. This section includes an identification of the current universal basic education in Nigeria, including strategies initiatives, goals, and most importantly, an assessment of its effectiveness.

3.1 The Goals

The main goal of the implementation of the universal basic education program is to make basic education, which is basically composed of nine years of schooling at different levels, accessible and available for free for the benefit of every Nigerian child. Its objective is to promote the presence of objective thinking, relevant judgment, improvement of communication skills, increasing productivity within the family and the society, and understanding the role of the individual in relation to the pursuit of national progress and development. In addition, this kind of basic education scheme is also expected to allow children have a way of thinking, skills, and attitude which can help them, in the future, to advance in the society at which they belong (Adeyemi, 2007). In the work of Edho (2009), the author has noted that the vision of the universal basic education in Nigeria is to allow every child, after spending the required 9 years in education program, to demonstrate skills related to numeracy, literacy, communication, and manipulative and life skills. This will be useful not only for the child but for the entire society as well. It should be achieved while having the necessary civic, moral, and ethical skills. Furthermore, the mission of universal basic education in the country is to act as being a rational energizer for having an assurance that the goals are achieved and that all the parties concerned are working in support of each other for the eventual realization of its motives.

The Federal Government of Nigeria (2004) in the National Policy on Education recommended the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program. The policy states that:

Basic education shall be of 9 years duration, comprising 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. It shall be free and compulsory. It shall also include adult and non-formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary education levels for the adults and out-of-school youths

(Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004, p.13)

As highlighted in 2.2, the section 3 of the National Policy on Education 2004 identified Basic Education as type of education involving first 6 years of primary school, and 3 years of junior secondary school. This covers both adult and out-of school youths. As the name bears the UBE has three main components universal, Basic, and Education. Been universal make it for everyone in respect of anything such as class, tribe, religion or culture. (Aluede, 2006, Eddy and Akpan, 2009). Continuously, the word basic stands that it's a fundamental right that must be given or had. Therefore, this had made it right not a privilege to every individual of a particular society within the jurisdiction in which the policy operate. Specifically, the following are the identified goals of this education scheme: to ensure the continuous access of Nigerians to 9 years of basic education; having this education scheme free and accessible to all the citizens of the country who should be going to school at their current age; improving the efficiency, quality and relevance of education in the country to reduce the likelihood that students will discontinue from their formal schooling; and ensure that the rights skills and values are embedded on the students to help them in their life-long education endeavors (Edho, 2009).

3.2 Implementation and Plan of Action

The UBE Act of 2004 was enacted on the same year to formalize the said education scheme and to finally have it translated as a law which is directed towards the provision of compulsory basic education to all Nigerians, with support coming from the government and other important actors.

Under this Act, the federal government holds the responsibility to provide the necessary assistance to the different regional and local governments along with their endeavor of setting up an education system which will be provided and accessed for free by the Nigerians in 9 years of their basic education. The Act also made it possible for the Universal Basic Education Commission, as earlier described, to be established as a means of ensuring the goals of the scheme are met. In addition, the local and regional governments are also closely working with other groups like the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Center to provide the necessary resources, as well as the human development, to be able to effectively carry out the goals of the program. It is seen that its implementation will result into the eradication of illiteracy which has been a long time problem in the country (Arhedo, Adome, & Aluede, 2009). In order to properly implement the initiatives and the necessary courses of action under the universal basic education scheme, there are three main funding sources which are expected to help in the achievement of the program's many endeavors: from federal government, from federal-guaranteed credits, and from various local and international donors. To be assured of the wide-scale implementation of this project, sanctions have been in place for parents who fail to send their children to school. In addition, to be assured that poverty is not a building block to the scheme, free resources are being provided from various funding sources to meet the requirements in the provision of the educational services to the public (Labo-Popoola, Bello, & Atanda, 2009).

Different activities have been included as part of the implementation of the universal basic education in the country. One of them is the recruitment and training of new teachers. To be able to permanently improve the literacy, numeracy, and communication skills of students, there is a need to recruit and train teachers who will make such highly possible (Adeyemi, 2007). Apart from the addition of new teachers to those who are already currently employed, there is also a need to retrain those who are already in their respective positions to be assured that they have the necessary competence to aid in the achievement of the goals of the universal basic education. Frequent seminars, workshops, and professional contacts with the members of the teaching force in the country have been some of the activities which were undertaken to make the teachers more influential in the achievement of the goals of the education scheme. It is important that the government hires the right persons for this job because they will be the most influential in the achievement of the learning outcomes, as well as with the success of the education scheme (Nakpodia, 2011; Kazeem & Ige, 2010). To make sure that the right people are employed to help the government deliver the goals from the universal basic education program, the following activities also remain part of the endeavors of the government, at all levels: improvement in supervision and support system; continuous professional development; and full involvement of the members of the teaching force to the educational development programs (Federal Ministry of Education, 2005).

In addition, the establishment of new schools, provision of new equipments and resources, venturing into strategies to be able to increase enrolment, and insurance of various school properties are also some of the other activities which have been initiated as part of the implementation of the universal basic education in the country. According to the policy Act, the total financing of basic education is the sole responsibility of states and local governments. However, the federal government is intervening with 2% of its Consolidated Revenue Fund.

Data from document from Universal Basic Commission revealed that from 2005 to 2014, the government of the federation has injected N493,902,151,000.00, while the millennium Development Goals (MDGs) contributed N51.8bn to implementation of UBE program, (Yusha'u, 2014; UBEC, 2014). The year 2014 provisional allocation of UBE matching grants for each states and FCT was N952, 297, 297.30. It is further revealed that the commission has already received grants for the 1st and 2nd quarters of the 2014 of N16, 837, 500, 000.00 respectively, which translates into N455, 057, 567.56 per state. Also, from 2005 to 2014, the commission has received N8.45billion as Special Education Fund and out of the figures N7.14bn has been accessed, while N1.20 remained un-accessed, (Yusha'u, 2014; UBEC, 2014). In 2009, the universal basic education commission newly constructed a total of 41,009 and renovated 59,444 classrooms all over the country. Furthermore, it has also constructed 14,769 toilets and provides over one million different types of furniture to schools, while 1.5 million teachers have been trained from 2005 to 2009. According to statistics in the document obtained from the universal basic education commission, Ebonyi State has not been accessing the UBEC funds since 2009, while Abia, Benue, C/Rivers, Enugu, Kogi, Nasarawa, Ogun and Osun states have failed to access the funds since 2011(Yusha'u, 2014; UBEC, 2014). While only Adamawa, Anambra, Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Lagos, Sokoto, Taraba and Zamfara states have accessed the 2013 funds, the rest of the 27 states have not accessed theirs and, for 2014, only Sokoto State was able to access its share, the document revealed (Yusha'u,2014; UBEC, 2014).

The government anticipates that these plans of action will prove to be sufficient and effective enough to achieve their educational development goals. In addition, it has also been regarded that the following actions will be necessary to be assured of the success of the program: ensuring the proper analysis of data and statistics in assessing the program; proper management of the funds which will be used to achieve the goals of the program; effective activities in relation to planning, monitoring, and evaluation; the presence of sufficient funding; the provision of proper and adequate facilities and infrastructure; and the encouragement of participation and mobilization. Lastly, it is also anticipated that the earlier mentions plan of actions will lead into increasing the rate of human development in the country, as it has been consistently ranked in a low position in the past years (Nakpodia, 2011; Okiy, 2004).

3.4 Assessment

In relation to the initiatives and actions which have been earlier identified, this part of the paper will be directed towards an examination of the effectiveness of the universal basic education, as well as the challenges and problems which served as hindrances in the achievement of the desired goals of the educational scheme. One of the ways to assess the current effectiveness of the scheme is to look at the availability of the infrastructures needed for its implementation, such as classrooms. In one study, it was noted that there are infrastructures which were provided to be able to deliver basic education to Nigerians, however, like any other resources, like books and other learning materials, they are insufficient to meet the goals of the program, and to ensure access by everyone. There is also a shortage of space to accommodate the requirements of the universal basic education. This is basically because the education facilities did not expand in accordance with the growth of the student population. Many of the buildings are already deteriorating, resulting in the creation of learning environments which are not conducive at all (Moja, 2000). In addition to the insufficiencies which have been influential in limiting the potential success of universal basic education, there has also been a poor state of school libraries, among other educational facilities which should have given children the opportunity to be educated (Okiy, 2004).

It has been noted by Igbuzor (2006) that the process of learning and teaching which has been practiced in Nigeria were not able to yield the anticipated results such as the increase in the productive and technical skills of the students. In addition, many of the teachers were also incompetent and therefore not able to effectively carry out the functions which were anticipated from them. It has also been noted that one of the things which have contributed to the lack of efficiency of the education system in the country is the insufficient integration of information and communication technology. Factors such as poor internet connectivity, poor knowledge and technical skills in information and communication technology infrastructures, lack of time, lack of financial requirements, and reluctance from both the teachers and the learners have all been highly influential in the failure to integrate such technology in education (Adeosun, 2010). Furthermore, there were also problems when it comes to the funding requirements of this initiative. There are claims which support the assumption that the current funding policies in place, even coupled by private and international donors, are insufficient to be able to support the goals of the program.

The yearly average allocation for the educational sector in Nigeria has been in a decline. It caused many educational services to be significantly damaged, especially in consideration of the fact that they are provided by the government for free to its citizens. In some states, private individuals are not even involved in the funding of the program, allowing the education scheme to suffer more setbacks (Eddy & Akpan, 2009; Jaiyeoba, 2007). It is also assumed that the presence of poor planning and implementation is another thing which has limited the success of this education scheme (Adeyemi, 2007). For instance, one of the things which have contributed to such is the fact that faulty census systems are in place resulting into the inability to determine the best estimate of the actual population of the country to aid in better planning activities for the education programs and other public services delivered by the government. This has resulted into the inadequacy of population data and has also been one of the reasons for the failure to determine the actual number of resources, such as textbooks, which will be needed in the provision of free education for all of the citizens of the country (Labo-Popoola, Bello, & Atanda, 2009).

4.0 Alternative Courses of Action

In the discussions which will follow, the author will provide a variety of recommendations which are supported by available literatures to be able to be provided with the means to be able improve the current system of universal basic education in Nigeria and to be assured that its goals will be met by both the current and future generations. The problems which have been mentioned in the previous section can still be resolved, in spite of the presence of the identified barriers. In fact, with the proper cooperation and the execution of the right actions from the people and the government, the challenges can prove to be surmountable and positive outcomes will be yielded. It is important to take note of the fact that the universal basic education program has been made for the benefit of the people; therefore, the people should also work closely with each other and with the government to realize the multitude of benefits which it promises. The parents should be taught on the importance of education so that they can share the same value to their children. On the other hand, the government must be proactive in its efforts to pursue the highest standards for basic education in the country to be assured of yielding the best outcomes (Labo-Popoola, Bello, & Atanda, 2009).

Apart from looking for more sources of funds in the future, the government should also be more cautious of the activities it undertakes and should assure the public that such has been directed towards the betterment of the general population and not simply for the interests of the chosen few. In addition, the government can also provide the opportunity for technological integration to make the educational system at par with other countries, especially those which are at the level of Nigeria. These technological advancements can help enhance the way educated is provided, and can also prove to be highly beneficial in increasing the competency and ability of the students. Laboratories, computer centers, and other technologically-advanced facilities should be provided. This can help in the provision of significant learning and teaching opportunities to strengthen the knowledge-base of the citizens of the country. If there is reluctance towards the adoption of these technological advancements, there is a need to develop public awareness campaigns highlighting its benefits and how they are essential in improving the quality of life, including education (Aderinoye, Ojokheta, & Olojede, 2007).

As it has been highlighted in the earlier section, another thing which can prove to be a very significant help in the progression of universal basic education in Nigeria would be the provision of training and education to teachers to increase their competency and to make their actions become highly influential in the provision of quality education in the country. The presence of teachers who were poorly trained and unmotivated has been apparently one of the main reasons on the failure of this educational scheme. Although the government has already claimed the responsibility for teaching and training the educators, such has not been sufficient in order to make them more skilled and competent in their jobs, especially when it comes to the integration of technology into their profession (Edho, 2009). The initiative can also be improved through the presence of an increased level of transparency. The presence of transparency and accountability is important, especially from the management of funds which come from donors, such as private individuals and significant international actors (Federal Ministry of Education, 2004). Even with the adequate distribution of funds by the government, there is an absence of transparency on where these disbursements are leading (Jaiyeoba, 2007).

The presence of a transparent and accountable financial management will give an assurance that the goals will be achieved without the need to incur costs larger than what has initially been planned and while making the most out of all the available financial resources, no matter how limited or abundant they may prove to be (Ejere, 2011). Quality assurance and quality control should also be evident during the different stages of the implementation of the universal basic education program. There is a need for proper monitoring and evaluation to be assured that all actions and initiatives are able to yield positive outcomes or generally improving the quality of education in the country. Social mobilization and enforcement or the ability to trigger a more active participation from the community should also be encouraged. This educational program may be assumed as something which is ambitious, with far-reaching results which will be felt in the long-term. Because of this, rigorous planning and execution, as well as monitoring and improvements, should be done to ensure its long-term effectiveness and success (Ejere, 2011). After all, however, in spite of the inefficiencies inadequacies, when taken from the larger context, many still agree with the assumption that the universal basic education in the country has been highly influential in changing the political, social, and economic context of the country. This educational scheme, although leaving enough space for improvement, has provided a number of benefits for Nigeria which could have not been possible if they have adhered to the practice of the old educational scheme (Jaieyoba, 2009).

5.0 Conclusion

The discussions presented in the earlier parts of this paper provide a good overview of the universal basic education which is being currently implemented in Nigeria. This is one of the means of the federal, regional, and local governments to increase the productivity of their citizens and make their educational systems at par with that of other countries. As a replacement to the now defunct universal primary education scheme, this educational system seeks to provide free and compulsory education services which shall comprise of 9 years of basic education, to all citizens of the country who are of school age. Some of the unique features of this program include the fact that it can be enjoyed and accessed for free and that parents who fail to cooperate by bringing their children into schooling will be legally liable for such acts. The current context of the universal basic education in the country is characterized by a number of inefficiencies and insufficiencies which can be seen as more than enough reason on how it has demonstrated limited extent of success in the past years. Some of the reasons on why it can be assumed that such educational scheme has demonstrated low level of success, if not significant failure, include the following: insufficiency of funding, inability to be provided with adequate resources and learning equipments, failure for technology integration, incompetency of teachers due to lack of training and education, huge student population, and poor planning and implementation.

The combination of these problems has resulted into the inability of the universal basic education to fully achieve its desired objectives, as of the time being. In the future, however, it is anticipated that such will be possible. To be able to provide a solution to the current inefficiencies and insufficiencies of the education scheme in the country, one of the sections in the paper has also provided a brief discussion on some recommendations and courses of action which will be necessary in order to aid in its improvement and progression. For instance, it has been suggested that full cooperation from the people and the government should be evident, especially in recognition of the fact that this is a program for the benefit of the entire population; therefore, everyone should be working towards such program. In addition, the recommendations also include more transparency and accountability on the part of the government, more funding, heightened attention to the training and education requirements of the members of the teaching force, social mobilization and enforcement, quality assurance and quality control, parent education, technology integration, and encouraging a higher level of participation.

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