



Accessibility of Basic Education to Children from Low Income Families in Rivers State

WEY-AMAEWHULE, Blessing

**Department of Educational Foundation
Faculty of Technical and Science Education
Rivers state university, Port Harcourt, Nigeria**

ABSTRACT

The study investigated access to basic education to children from low income parents in Rivers State. The population of the study consisted of 94,010 students and parents of JSS III in all the 266 Junior Secondary Schools in Rivers State. A sample of 3,760 students and parents of JSS III were randomly selected drawn from 27 sampled junior secondary schools in 9 local government areas in Rivers State. The research instrument used for data collection was a 15-item modified Likert Scale questionnaire validated with a Cronbach Alpha reliability index of 0.72. The research questions were analysed using the mean and rank order statistics while the z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. It was revealed that prohibition of school charges positively influenced admission of children from low income parents, and provision of teaching and learning materials was inadequate. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that government should prohibit school charges on admission of children from low-income families; government should also provide adequate teaching and learning materials for the UBE programme.

Keywords: Education Accessibility, basic education, access to education for low income families

INTRODUCTION

Education is a human activity and a tool that stimulates development. The federal government of Nigeria (2004) in the National Policy on Education stated that education is the greatest instrument for quick development of its economic, political, social and human resources. One of the problems of the developing countries in the world is the lack of quality basic education for a large number of the poorest children in the world's poorest countries. An estimated 110 million children between the ages of 6-11 years do not have access to basic education while another 150 million children are likely to drop out before completing primary education. This is even worst in the rural and farming communities (Ghana Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaires, (CWIG) 2003).

Access to education implies making education possible to everyone who is entitled to education to receive it (Education Sector Analysis (ESA), 2003). Access to basic education implies making education possible for everyone that desires to receive it; for this to be possible, it means enough classrooms, laboratories, instructional materials, facilities etc should be provided for everyone. It also means that obstacles that prevent anyone from taking advantage of the opportunities should be removed. Jaiyeoba and Atanda (2005), defined access to mean, making education to be within the reach of every citizen of the nation. According to Dada (2004), access to education means opportunity and right to receive formal education. It also refers to the provision of equal opportunities for those who are qualified to receive universal basic education irrespective of socio-economic background, religion, sex etc.

Access to quality education is a sine qua non for the introduction for UBE. Education does not only provide children, youth and adults with the knowledge and skills to be active citizens but to contribute directly to poverty reduction. It is estimated globally that poverty will drop by 12% if all children in low income countries could read and write. In order to create access to UBE programme the European parliament (EP) had called for 20% of EU aid expenditure to be devoted to basic education.

Education is an indispensable tool for personal development and that of a society and the major engine for sustainable development. It is widely acknowledged that education is the key to economic prosperity and a vital instrument for combating diseases, poverty and supporting development of the citizenry (Amaewhule, 2015).

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme of the Federal Republic of Nigeria was launched on the 30th of September 1999 in Sokoto by President Olusegun Obasanjo. It is a nine year programme which is aimed at universalizing education for all children of school age, irrespective of sex religion ethnic background etc.

The idea of universalization of education is to direct educational policies to include children of school age as well as young adults who may not have opportunity to attend formal school, to engage in non-formal education to acquire skill. It is also to ensure equal and adequate education opportunities to eradicate illiteracy.

Basic education is the foundational aspect of education that is made available to everyone (Adunola, 2008). According to Maduagwu (2006) basic education signifies the bottom part, the lowest on which something could rest upon. It is the type of education in quality and content that is given in the first level of education. This concept changes from country to country, depending on the socio-economic dispositions of that country. In Nigeria, basic education includes primary, Junior Secondary, nomadic education and adult literacy.

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) is aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- Developing in the entire citizenry a strong conscious for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- Provision of free universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school age;
- Reducing drastically the incidence of dropout from the formal school system through improved relevance, equity and efficiency;
- Catering for the learning needs of young persons who for one reason or another have had to interrupt their schooling through appropriate forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education and
- Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy education, and ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life long learning.

The universal basic education was introduced to correct the various mistakes associated with the UPE and the 6334 educational policies and to address the educational needs of the country. Studies have shown that the enrollment and completion rates of schooling is very low in many of the development countries. This may be as a result of poor funding, lack of proper planning as well as poor implementation of educational policies.

Statement of the Problem

The introduction of universal basic education programme was to ensure free and compulsory education for all children of school age in order to eradicate illiteracy and to universalize education, but over the years, the rate of street hawking by children of school age is becoming alarming. It is most worrisome that despite the introduction of the UBE act 2004, no fine or imprisonment prescribed by the act for defaulting parents has taken place. The need for stakeholders to improve on access to basic education becomes important for the realization of the goals and objectives of the UBE programme. Available literature on the implementation and access to UBE programme reveals that stakeholders lack knowledge on the admission of children into the UBE programme as well as the state of infrastructure, teaching and learning materials in the schools. The researcher is concerned about the provision of equal access and opportunity for all children of school age irrespective of socio-economic background as applicable in Rivers State.

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the accessibility of basic education to children of low income families. Specifically the study sought to:

1. Examine which of the school charges are more deleterious in accessibility of low income families into UBE programmes in Rivers State.
2. Assess the provision of learning materials for effective UBE programme administration in Rivers State.

Objectives of Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the accessibility of basic education by children of low – income families in Rivers State.

Specifically, the study is designed to:

1. Examine which of the school charges have more harmful effect on accessibility of children from low-income families into UBE programmes in Rivers State.
2. Assess the provision of learning materials for effective UBE programme administration in Rivers State

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to give direction to the study:

1. What are the school charges that influence accessibility of children from low-income families into UBE programme and the reactions of students and teachers to them?
2. What are the materials provided for effective UBE programme administration in Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.5 level of significance.

Ho₁: There is no significant difference between mean scores of parents from high and low socio-economic status on how school charges influence admission of children from low-income families into UBE programme in Rivers State.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of parents from high-income and low-income families on how learning materials are provided for effective UBE programme in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of 90,010 students and parents of JSS III students in all the 266 junior secondary schools in Rivers State. The sample was drawn using the cluster sampling technique to select a sample size of 3,560 parents and students of JSS 3 (1780 parents and 1780 students). The instrument had a total of 15 items and was patterned using the modified Likert rating scale of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) . The instrument was validated by four experts in Educational Management and Administration and its reliability was computed at 0.72 using Cronbach Alpha. Data collected from the study were analysed using mean and rank order statistics for the two research questions and z-test statistics to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS

The result of this study is provided below:

Research Question 1: *What are the school charges that influence admission of children from low-income families into UBE programmes?*

Table 4.1: Computed Mean and Rank Order Scores on how School charges could Influence Admission of Children from Low-Income Families into UBE Programmes.

S/n	Questionnaire Statement	Students (n = 1,780)		Parents (n = 1,780)			Weighted mean		Rank Order
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	Remark	SD	\bar{X}	\bar{X}	
1	School fees are free	3.35	0.34	3.21	Agree		3.28	Agree	3 rd
2	Examination fees are free	3.24	0.33	3.12	Agree	0.31	3.18	Agree	7 th
3	PTA levies are discouraged	3.46	0.35	3.01	Agree	0.30	3.24	Agree	4 th
4	Continuous assessment fees are prohibited	3.61	0.35	3.12	Agree	0.31	3.66	Agree	1 st
5	Results fees are prohibited	3.18	0.32	3.21	Agree	0.32	3.20	Agree	5 th
6	Local craft fees are prohibited	3.68	0.35	3.22	agree	0.32	3.45	Agree	2 nd
7	Sports uniform fees are discouraged	2.21	0.21	2.31	Disagree	0.22	2.26	Disagreed	8 th
8	Development levies discouraged	3.25	0.32	3.13	Agree	0.30	3.19	Agree	6 th
9	Admission fees are prohibited	3.14	0.32	3.22	Agree	0.32	3.18	Agree	7 th

Criterion mean = 2.50

The data in the table 1 above showed that items 1-6 and 8 & 9 had weighted means scores above the criterion mean 2.50. and thus, were accepted that absence of school charges positively influence admission of children from low income into UBE programme in Rivers State while item 7 had weighted mean score below the criterion mean of 2.50 and thus was rejected as a school charge that positively influence admission of children from low income families in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: *What are the materials provided for effective UBE programme in Rivers State?*

Table 4.2: Computed Mean and Rank Order Scores about the materials provided for effective UBE programme in Rivers State.

S/n	Questionnaire Statement	Students (n = 1,780)		Parents (n = 1,780)		Weighted mean		Rank Order	
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	Remark	SD	\bar{X} \bar{X}		Remark
1	Free uniforms	2.12	0.21	2.38	Disagree	0.24	2.25	Disagree	4 th
2	Provision of seating desks	2.51	0.25	2.50	Agree	0.25	2.51	Agree	2 nd
3	Provision of free books and writing materials	3.22	0.32	3.64	Agree	0.36	3.43	Agree	1 st
4	Free bus services/ transportation	2.21	0.21	2.31	Disagree	0.22	2.26	Disagree	3 rd
5	Free school meals	2.12	0.22	2.36	Disagree	0.23	2.24	Disagree	5 th
6	Conducive school buildings	3.01	0.30	3.87	Agree	0.38	3.43	Agree	1 st

Criterion mean = 2.50

The data in the table 2 above showed that items 1, 4 and 5 had weighted mean scores below 2.50 and thus were rejected as materials provided for effective UBE programme in Rivers State while items 2, 3, 6 had weighted mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, and thus were accepted as materials provided for effective UBE programme in Rivers State.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant different between mean score of parents from high and low socio-economic status on how school charges influence admission of children from low-income families into UBE programme in Rivers State.

Table 3: Z-test analysis of the mean scores of parents from high and low socio-economic status on the impact of school illegal charges on students' admission

Parents Socio-Economic Status	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
High (≥ ₦1m + p.a.)	680	2.83	0.32	1,778	1.75	±1.96	Accept Ho ₁
Low (< ₦1m) p.a.	1,100	3.72	0.33				

Note. N = 1,780; Degree of freedom = 1,778; level of significance

SES = Socio-economic Status
 High SES = Earns ₦1m. or more per annum
 Low SES = Earns less than ₦1m per annum
 p. a. = Per annum

The data, in table 3 showed a summary of mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between parents of high and low socio-economic status on the impact of school illegal charges on students' admission in junior secondary schools in Rivers State. The z-test statistics calculated and used in testing the hypothesis stood at 1.75 while the critical z value stood at 1.96 using the degree of freedom of 1,778 alpha level of significance. Since the calculated z-value is less than the critical z-value, the null hypothesis therefore was accepted. By implication, there is no significant difference between the mean scores

of parents of high and low socio-economic status on how school illegal charges influence students' admission.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of parents from high-income and low-income families on how learning materials are provided for effective UBE programme in Rivers State.

Table 4: Z-test analysis of the opinion mean scores of parents from high and low SES on the provision of learning materials for effective UBE programme.

Provision of effective learning materials	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Parents from high SES	680	2.85	0.27	1,778	1.84	± 1.96	Accept Ho ₂
Parents from low SES	1,100	3.872	0.38				

Note: N = 1,780; Degree of freedom = 1,778; level of significance = 0.05

SES = Socio-Economic Status
 High SES = Earns ₦1 m or more per annum.
 Low SES = Earns less than ₦1m per annum
 P.a. = Per annum

The data in table 4 showed a summary of mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between parents of high and low socio-economic status on the provision of learning materials for effective UBE programme in Rivers State. The z-test statistics calculated and used in testing the hypothesis stood at 1.84 while the critical value stood at 1.96 using the degree of freedom of 1,778 at 0.03 alpha level of significance. Since the calculated z-value is less than the critical z-value, the null hypothesis therefore was accepted. By implication, there is no significant difference between the mean scores of parents from high and low socio-economic status on the provisions of learning materials for effective UBE programme in Rivers State.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings are summarized as follows;

1. The absence of school charges has positive impact on admission of children from low-income families into UBE programme.
2. The provision of teaching and learning materials was inadequate.
3. There is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of high income families and low income families on the influence of school charges on admission of children into UBE.
4. There is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of high income families and low income families on the provision of learning materials for effective UBE programme.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study identified the influence of school charges on accessibility of children from low income families into UBE programme. This supports the findings of Okugbe (2009), Rose (2007) and Ezeh (2005) in their independent studies. Okugbe (2009) argues that there was an increase in the enrolment of students in Delta State when school charges were abolished. Rose (2007) noted that there was significant increase in the enrolment of students in the UBE programme due to the abolition of fee charges. Ezeh (2005) is of the

view that high cost of schooling affects access to basic education to children from low income parents.

Finally, the study identified that the provision of teaching and learning materials was inadequate. This supports the findings of Theobold (2007), Ekong (2002) and Obong (2006). They independently argue that the provision of teaching and learning materials was not adequate. They concluded that absence of teaching and learning materials as well as dilapidated classrooms would invariably affect access to the UBE programme. They noted that UBE is a gigantic national enterprise, the success of which depends to a large extent on how envisaged problems such as the provision of books and writing materials are catered for in order to create access to all those who are qualified to receive basic education.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concludes that absence of school charges has positive influence on the admission of children from low-income families into UBE programmes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the researcher recommended that;

1. The Rivers State Ministry of Education should prohibit school charges in all UBE programmes.
2. Government should provide adequate teaching and learning materials for the UBE programme.
3. Educational managers and administrators should encourage equitable supply and distribution of teaching and learning materials based on the needs and enrolment of students' in each school.

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