

## THEORY AND PRACTICE OF FREE BASIC EDUCATION IN KANO STATE: A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE

### UBA KABIRU PhD

Educational Foundation Department,  
Faculty of Education,  
Federal University of Education, Kano  
E-Mail: [kabiruuba88@gmail.com](mailto:kabiruuba88@gmail.com)

### ABBAS A. MUHAMMAD PhD

General Studies Department,  
Faculty of Education,  
Federal University of Education, Kano  
E-Mail: [abbasfagge@gmail.com](mailto:abbasfagge@gmail.com)

### USMAN YUSUF PhD

Educational Foundation Department,  
Faculty of Education,  
Federal University of Education, Kano  
E-Mail: [usman.yusuf19@yahoo.com](mailto:usman.yusuf19@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

*Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of social justice and development. Since Nigeria's independence, successive governments have introduced several educational reforms, including the 1976 Universal Primary Education (UPE) and the 1999 Universal Basic Education (UBE) programs, aimed at making education free, accessible, and compulsory at the basic level. Despite these initiatives, challenges persist, including issues with implementation, enrollment, facilities, and funding. This paper reviews the historical perspectives of the UPE and UBE programs, assesses their successes and challenges, and critiques their philosophical underpinnings, suggesting that improved management, reduced corruption, and increased funding are essential for enhancing the effectiveness of free basic education in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Education, Theory and Practice, Free Basic Education, Philosophical Critique

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### Introduction

Education is a transformative force and the most significant investment a nation can make for rapid development across economic, political, social, and human resources (Mandela, 2006). As highlighted by Muhammad et al. (2023), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emphasized achieving universal primary education by 2015 and addressing gender disparity in education. Reflecting this commitment, Nigerian governments have focused on providing qualitative and affordable education through principles of self-reliance and creativity, as outlined in the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 2014. This paper explores the historical context of free universal primary education, examines the educational landscape in Kano, evaluates the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program in Kano State,

offers a philosophical critique, and presents a summary of logical assessments and recommendations.

### **Historical Perspectives of Free Universal Primary Education**

It is important to note that prior to Nigeria's membership to the United Nations in 1960, there were several regional and national attempts at universalizing basic education in Nigeria. Olubodun (2008), stated that the struggle for basic education started with the anti-colonial struggles in Nigeria, followed by the defunct Western region's free education provision of 1955, and the free education provision of the defunct Eastern region in 1957, the early 1960s free education in Northern Nigeria which was not in a large scale due to resistance to western education. The Universal Primary Education (UPE) for all Nigerians by the Federal Government in 1976. This was with the implication for making primary education free and compulsory throughout Nigeria in order to achieve the following objectives as according to UBEC (2022), these are:

- i. To establish, provide and maintain quality education as the basis for promoting the necessary human resources development;
- ii. Transforming society in a fundamental and positive way;
- iii. Providing the minimum necessary facilities and resources to enable every child to enter and complete the whole Primary Cycle;
- iv. Making basic education accessible to the learner and relevant to his/her needs so as to meet national goals.

Despite the rapid expansion and long history of Universal Primary Education (UPE), existing literature indicates that previous attempts to achieve UPE in developing countries faced challenges due to supply-driven policies, unclear mechanisms, and low quality of education. Past experiences in countries like Nigeria and Kenya show that UPE policy implementation was often hindered by economic crises (Sifuna, 2007). Nevertheless, UPE led to a significant increase in pupil enrollment at the primary school level nationwide. For instance, Tahir (2001) noted that UPE resulted in a remarkable rise in enrollment from 6 million in 1976 to 12 million in 1980. Furthermore, from 1983 to 1999, pupil enrollment increased to approximately 87 million.

Universal Basic Education (UBE) represents a type of education in both quality and content provided at the initial levels, though it varies from one country to another. In Nigeria, basic education previously consisted of six years of primary schooling but has now been extended to include three years of Junior Secondary Schooling. UBE is designed to encompass formal education up to age 15, as well as adult and non-formal education, including education for marginalized groups within Nigerian society (UBEC, 2022).

Additionally, on September 30, 1999, former President Olusegun Obasanjo inaugurated the UBE scheme in Sokoto State, making it a key policy reform of the Nigerian Government. This initiative aligns with the objectives of the 1999 constitution, which states in Section 18 that the government shall eradicate illiteracy. To this end, the government is mandated to provide, when practicable, free and compulsory universal basic primary education, free secondary education, and free

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adult literacy programs. The specific objectives of the UBE as stated by the Federal Ministry of Education (1999) are:

- i. Developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- ii. The provision of free UBE for every Nigerian child of school age;
- iii. Reducing drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through relevance, quality and efficiency);
- iv. 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;
- v. Ensuring the acquisition of the appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for lifelong learning.

The 1999 UBE programme is the replacement of the 1976 erstwhile UPE, their objectives have similarity and the little added to the new programme is the lower basic attached to each primary school which is also the repetition of early 60s senior primary school, although the federal government lamented that adequate planning, coordination, and funding were made available for the take up of the scheme nationwide.

### **Kano Education Viewpoint**

The strongest characteristic of Kano's education system lies in its historical connection to Islamic tradition, with an established school system dating back to the 14th century. Colonial authorities introduced Western-style schools in 1909, including Kano Middle School, which was the first post-elementary school established in 1927, and the School for Arabic Studies in 1934. These institutions produced a prominent group of Western-educated elites who succeeded the colonialists in 1960 and administered the northern region, later becoming Kano State in 1967. At the time of Kano State's creation in 1967, there were only 248 primary schools with 1,374 classrooms and an enrollment figure of 49,583. Both colonial and post-colonial experiences led to the relegation of Islamic scholastic tradition to a non-formal education sector, resulting in a modified form of Islamiyya schools (Fafunwa in Uba, 2022).

In Kano State, despite the government's commendable efforts to provide basic education, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme faced numerous challenges. Among these were the Muslim perception that Western education was introduced by Christian missionaries, which created reluctance among parents to enroll their children in Western schools. Additionally, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program has been hindered by problems such as limited school access, poor quality, gender bias, inadequate facilities, insufficient funding, mismanagement of resources, corruption, and a lack of political will.

In November 2020, former Governor Dr. Umar Ganduje signed a bill mandating free and compulsory education across the 44 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Kano State. This law requires the state to sponsor all children from primary through secondary education, providing uniforms, reading materials, conducive classrooms,

and free meals. However, four years after the enactment of the law, many Kano communities still lack basic formal education. Areas such as Makama village in Tudun Wada LGA, Tsamiya in Takai LGA, and Rudasu in Albasu LGA continue to face significant educational challenges (Editorial, 2023).

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) reported that 10.5 million pupils were not enrolled in formal education during the 2022 academic session (Muhammad et al., 2023). This figure has sparked significant debate among scholars at the Kano Education Recovery Conference, held at Bayero University, Kano, in July 2024. Scholars expressed concern that Almajiri pupils of Quranic schools, who are literate, are also classified as out-of-school children, raising questions about the accuracy of the enrollment figures.

### **Kano and UBE Programme Implementation**

Evidently, the governments, the local and international donor agencies and individuals' persons are disbursing huge amount of money and effort on basic education programmes for better. Do these determinations and resources yielded results? The answer can be seen in the impacts of these programmes under the following indicators: the pupils' enrollment, numbers of schools and classrooms provided and teachers' pupil ratio as presented below:

#### **Pupils' Enrollment**

The UBE scheme in the North experienced a significant increase in pupil enrollment due to awareness campaigns and the construction of additional primary schools in towns and villages. In Kano State, despite low attendance in rural areas, primary school enrollment rose by 15% annually from 2001 to 2004 (Editorial, 2023). However, approximately 27% of primary-age children remained out of school in 2005, despite earlier estimates indicating a Gross Enrollment Ratio of 40.23%. The Gross Enrollment Ratios were notably high between 2000 and 2003, with figures of 104% in 2000, 120% in 2001, 129% in 2002, and 135% in 2003/04. From 2005 to 2015, the enrollment rate for primary pupils across the state averaged about 78% (Editorial, 2023). Below is the table showing primary school enrollment in Kano.

Primary School Enrolment Figures by Three Senatorial Zones from 2019 to 2023

<b>Years</b>	<b>Kano Central</b>	<b>Kano South</b>	<b>Kano North</b>	<b>Total</b>
2019	2,561,562	702,192	708,222	3,971,976
2020	1,982,340	1,453,000	160,000	5,035,340
2021	2,400,300	601,300	606,200	3,607,800
2022	2,432,100	1,431,000	1,300,220	5,168,320
2023	2,100,201	1,000,009	1,000,000	4,100.210

**Source:** Editorial, 2023

#### **Numbers of Schools and Classroom Provided**

Alongside the increment in pupils enrollment was expansion of schools in terms of an increase in the number of schools and classrooms. According to Kano State Ministry for Education (2020), the capital expenditure for the construction of classrooms and other facilities in primary schools' across the state was 10.4 million naira for the year 2019, while a total of 15 billion naira was also committed in building classrooms in

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primary schools between 2020 and 2022 years to ensure adequate classes, schools and other facilities to accommodate the augmented number of pupils.

### **Teachers' Pupils' Ratio**

One of the quality indicators of learning is teachers' students' ration; it is reported to be higher in Kano State. Official record shown that 40,053 teachers deployed in basic school across Kano State 31,690 are male, while 8,093 are female. Going by the number of students enrolled in the school 3,202,156 and the teachers availability on the time-table, the student teacher ratio is calculated to be 1:80 meaning that there are 80 students par every teacher, the figure is higher and worrisome and is par above the ideal ratio of 1:40 as recommended by UNESCO teacher students' ratio (Kano State Ministry of Education, 2020).

### **Philosophical Critique of UBE Programme in Kano State**

No nation can surpass the quality of its education, as education is a fundamental right; thus, governments must ensure the provision of quality education for all. The current indicators reveal serious issues, such as dilapidated school structures, an acute shortage of classrooms (forcing some urban schools to operate in morning and afternoon shifts), and the merging of primary pupils from grades 1 to 6 into single classrooms in some villages. Additionally, there is a shortage of resource materials needed for effective teaching and learning. These conditions contribute to poor performance among pupils and teachers due to overcrowded classes and overloaded subject allocations. Such problems highlight the dire state of many public primary schools in the region, necessitating immediate intervention.

This may explain the sudden declaration of a State of Emergency in Education by Governor Abba Kabir Yusuf in 2024. However, several questions arise: Why the state of emergency in education? Why has the UBE, introduced in 1999, encountered the same issues as the UPE, such as inadequate planning, classroom shortages, insufficient teachers and equipment, and underfunding? Given that these problems have persisted from 1976 to 2024 with minimal improvement, what actions did previous governments take in education that now necessitate an emergency response? What changes could the declaration of a state of emergency bring about?

Denga (2000) observed that universal access to education has been a key goal for Nigeria since the inception of the UPE scheme in the mid-1970s, which led to a dramatic increase in enrollment from 6.2 million in the 1975/76 session to 14.8 million in 1992. However, this rapid expansion was poorly planned and resulted in numerous issues, such as insufficient government funding, a shortage of trained and qualified teachers, and political instability, which rendered the UPE unsustainable, as noted by Achuonye (2004).

Furthermore, the theoretical evaluation focuses on issues such as inaccurate data for planning, insufficient funding, inadequate resources, unqualified teachers, and a lack of continuity.

### **Inaccurate Data for Planning**

This constitutes a threat to the envisaged benefit of UBE, the Nigeria's literacy rate is estimated at 52% of the population and about 21 million children were of school going age as at year 2000. The disturbing scenario arising out of the quoted statistical information above is quite daunting in Nigeria and the problems of statistics for planning are associated with a number of factors. Moreover the concurrent UBE scheme also faces the problem of planning because there is no accurate data of the facilities needed, for the taking up the programme, and no provision for ease transition from primary school to upper basic class, and statistic show that the number of pupils is above the capacity of some schools (Umana, 2018). This leads to improper planning, coordination and control that result to the failure of the scheme.

### **Insufficient Funding**

It was clearly stipulated that the government at all levels would provide the necessary funds to support the effective implementation of the UBE scheme. Unfortunately, annual budgetary allocations for education have consistently fallen short of the 26% benchmark set by UNESCO. From 1999 to 2016, the budgetary allocations for the education sector in Nigeria did not meet this UNESCO standard, as illustrated by the figures provided below:

#### **Federal Allocation for Education Sector from 1999 to 2024**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Allocation in Billion</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1999	#23.047	11.2%
2000	#44.225	8.3%
2001	#39.885	7.0%
2002	#100.2	5.9%
2003	#64.76	11.8%
2004	#72.22	7.8%
2005	#92.59	8.3%
2006	#166.6	8.7%
2007	#137.48	6.07%
2008	#210.00	13%
2009	#183.36	13%
2010	#249.08	12%
2011	#356.51	7.24%
2012	#400.15	8.43%
2013	#427.52	8.7%
2014	#493.45	10.21%
2015	#492	10.63%
2016	#483	7.92%
2017	#455	7.41%
2018	#496	7.04%
2019	#512	7.1%
2020	#541	6.9%
2021	#65.3	5.6%
2022	#87.5	5.7%
2023	#1.54 Trillion	5.3%
2024	#1.08 Trillion	5.98%

**Sources:** Adapted from Eme and Ike, 2017 with update by Uba, Muhammad and Yusuf, 2024.

The table above indicates that federal allocations to the education sector are insufficient to provide the facilities and human resources necessary for the UBE programme. The Education Rights Campaign (ERC) has criticized the 7.04% allocation to education in the proposed 2018 budget as unacceptable, strongly advocating for an increase to meet UNESCO's recommended benchmark of 26% (Olaniyi, 2017).

In Kano State, the education budget saw a moderate increase, with allocations rising to 16.5% in 2020 and 16.9% in 2021. This percentage represents the share of total state resources allocated to education, excluding local government income and spending. In 2020, Kano LGAs received N39.7 billion from the federation account, accounting for about 91% of all LGA income. In 2022, 17% of total LGA spending was allocated to education, similar to the proportion devoted by Kano State. However, this figure masks significant disparities; for example, Kano municipality allocated 29% of its total spending to education, whereas Albasu and Kibiya LGAs allocated only 5%. These allocations are insufficient given the large student population in the state, creating setbacks in the UBE programme's implementation (Editorial, 2023). This reveals a lack of compliance with UBE funding provisions by the government and remains a major obstacle to the programme's success.

### **Inadequate Resources**

The strain on the education system is expected to increase as enrolment growth continues to pressure the capacity of education providers. In 2022, the pupil-to-classroom ratio for primary schools was 74:1, significantly higher than the recommended standard of 40:1. There are notable variations across local government areas (LGAs), with severe overcrowding in eight metropolitan LGAs, where many children have to sit on the floor and some classes are merged. This issue is compounded by the seasonal migration from rural to urban areas and recent influxes from neighboring states such as Niger Republic, which further pressures urban infrastructure. Although the pupil-to-teacher ratio for primary education has improved over the past few years—from 76:1 in 2002 to 47:1 in 2005 (Umana, 2018)—the current teacher population, classrooms, and resources remain insufficient to meet the needs of the state, especially the ambitious targets of the UBE programme. This situation highlights the inadequacy of infrastructural provisions for the growing population and exacerbates the challenge of enrolling out-of-school children.

### **Unqualified Teachers**

The chronic shortage of qualified teachers is particularly evident at the primary level, where only 21.8% of teachers held the National Certificate of Education (NCE) in 2015. Meanwhile, 31.4% of teachers still had outdated Grade II (Pass and Referred) qualifications, and 22.1% possessed only Arabic and Islamic Studies-related qualifications. In contrast, the situation is more promising at the secondary level, where 65.8% of Junior Secondary School (JSS) teachers and 64.2% of Senior Secondary School (SSS) teachers had obtained a first degree or NCE in various specializations from 2015 to 2020. Despite this improvement, a significant number of teachers still lack at least an NCE. The State had set a deadline of December 2014 for all affected teachers to upgrade their qualifications to meet the NCE minimum

requirement. However, it remains unclear what support teachers will receive during this process and whether the deadline is realistic (Doguwa in Uba, 2022). This shortage of qualified teachers likely contributes to the poor performance of pupils at the basic level.

### **Lack of Continuity**

The initiative to provide free and compulsory primary education to all children in Kano State, along with the expansion to adult education, was originally launched by former Governor Alhaji Abubakar Rimi in the 1980s. However, differing political ideologies among subsequent governors led to the abandonment of many programs, which were replaced by new initiatives that often undermined societal interests and educational development. Although there has been significant progress, the political culture in the state remains unrefined (Fagge in Uba, 2022).

The socio-economic and political differences within the state make it challenging to reach a consensus on values that can effectively address pressing educational issues. The political system faces strains from mistrust, suspicion, insecurity, victimization, and biases (Uba, 2022), all of which directly or indirectly impact the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program and contribute to setbacks in basic education.

### **Summary of the Logical Assessments**

The most troubling issue is the persistence of challenges from 1976 into 2024, which continues to hinder the effective implementation of basic education despite advancements in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). In Kano State, the main challenges to the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program include: high pupil enrolment due to inadequate planning (despite the numerous private and public schools available), insufficient transition from primary to junior secondary schools caused by delays in policy implementation (even though the UBE policy aimed to remove transition barriers), the presence of unqualified teachers resulting from recruitment nepotism (despite the availability of unemployed National Certificate in Education (NCE) and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) graduates across the state), and dilapidated classrooms due to underfunding, mismanagement, and corruption (despite various state, national, and international interventions). Additionally, the use of inaccurate data stemming from neglectful attitudes and outdated data management practices (despite regular data collection by the Kano State Universal Basic Education Board) further exacerbates these issues.

### **Conclusion**

The aims and objectives of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program are to facilitate socialization and integration of the entire population. The curriculum is designed to instill values and attitudes that promote social cohesion and national development. UBE aims to prepare youth to actively contribute to societal development, fostering progress through human development (UBEC, 2022). However, assessments reveal that the program suffers from poor planning and implementation. Issues such as inaccurate data, unqualified teachers, inadequate facilities and instructional materials, insufficient funding, corruption,



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mismanagement, lack of political will, and the disengagement of beneficiaries all contribute to its difficulties.

**Suggestions**

1. State government should tackle the mismanagement and corruption and align with donor agencies and individuals to provide enough funding to eliminate huge problems facing the free basic education in the state.
2. The education culture must adequately stress a partnership between the government and stakeholders in securing, monitoring and supervisions of schools and resources by the state government.
3. State government shall ensure teachers' recruitment and appointment of key managers into the educational position on merit, experience and qualifications.
4. Ministry of Education shall guarantee adequate accountability and transparency from its agencies, and other key officials involved in educational management.
5. SUBEB shall ensure proper planning and adequate statistics on pupils' enrolment, teachers, buildings and other learning facilities need to be organises and manages using technology.

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