

Addressing The Challenges Of Climatic Change Through Environmental Education For Sustainable Universal Basic Education Programme In Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper examined how environmental education could help to address the challenges of climatic change for the sustenance of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria. The major focus of this paper was the role of environmental education in addressing the problems imposed by climatic change for effective implementation of Universal Basic Education. In order to achieve this aim, the paper considered the impacts of climatic change on the implementation of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme and how environmental education could help to address these challenges for sustenance of UBE. Finally, the need to integrate environmental education at basic education level as measure for ensuring a healthy environment was advocated and conclusion drawn on the subject matter.*

Keywords: *Environmental education, climatic change and Universal Basic Education in Nigeria.*

I. Introduction

Environmental education (EE) refers to organized efforts to teach how natural environments function, and particularly, how human beings can manage behaviour and ecosystems to live sustainably. This implies that environmental education is concerned with teaching individuals and communities ways of transitioning to a society that is knowledgeable of the environment and its associated problems in order to be aware of the solutions to environmental problems and be motivated to solve them. USA Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 2015), describes environmental education as a process that allows individual to explore environmental issues, engage in problem solving and take action to improve the environment. The components of environmental education according to the agency includes:

- (1) Awareness and sensitivity to the environment and environmental challenges.
- (2) Knowledge and understanding of the environmental challenges.
- (3) Attitude of concern for the environment and motivation to improve or maintain environmental quality.
- (4) Skills to identify and help resolve environmental challenges.
- (5) Participation in the activities that lead to the resolution of environmental challenges.

Environmental education could be seen as a process in which individuals gain awareness of their environment and acquire knowledge, skills, values, experiences and also the determination to solve present and future environmental problems. It is also a learning process that increases people's knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges, develops the necessary skills and expertise to address the challenges and foster right attitudes, motivations and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible action (UNESCO, 1978). Environmental education is aimed at producing a citizenry that is knowledgeable concerning the biophysical environment and its associated problems, aware of how to help solve these problems, and motivated to work toward their solution (Stapp, 1969).

The need for environmental education arises as a result of the poor attitude of people toward global environmental degradation and warming. Environmental degradation occurs when humans use nature in ways that both threaten the sustainability of the natural resources base and thus, create unwanted problems such as pollution, desertification, deforestation, landslides/earthquake, flood. These alteration of the ecosystem as a result of man's activities on earth culminate to global warming otherwise called the green house effect which is the rise in the temperature on earth as certain gases in the atmosphere trap energy (Anup, 2013). According to him, this warming leads to a change in climate termed climatic change.

Climatic change is a global issue and is evident in Nigeria because its impact has been associated with rise in temperature, erratic rainfall, rain/sandstorms, floods, draughts, desertification etc. Nwaka and Ezeoba (2012), note that climatic change affects education especially at the primary school level where they observe that academic activities are disrupted as a result of destruction of physical facilities and equipment due to storm or felled trees. They further averred that some students absent from school as a result of hunger and diseases while some have died as a result of floods etc. due to adverse weather condition. They maintained that

unconducive climate engender poor learning because to them the extent to which learning takes place depends on the environment with its attendant pressure or threats which can be changed or prevented through environmental education.

Ekpoh and Ekpoh (2011), observe that there are noticeable consequences of climatic change as a result of environmental degradation in Nigeria such as intense thunderstorms, widespread floods and incessant droughts with the attendant threat to health as rising temperature could bring about diseases such as chronic heat rashes, cerebra-spinal meningitis (CSM), stroke, malaria and other related diseases. Corroborating the above assertions, Osaat and Tom-Ekine (2014), maintained that since people lives impact the environment through various activities man is involved in, no matter where human beings live, the best way to protect the environment is to learn about how to sustain it. This means that the sanctity of the environment to the citizenry is incontrovertible.

Environmental Education and Sustainable Universal Basic Education in Nigeria

Universal Basic Education (UBE) is the transmission of fundamental knowledge to all citizens without discrimination. Adewole (2000) cited in Idiaghe (2011) affirms that universal connotes an education programme that is meant for all facets of the society the rich, poor, the physically fit and the disabled, the brilliant, the dull, the regular students and the dropouts including every other individuals that are ready to acquire knowledge, while the term basic relates to the base, take off point, fundamental, essential, springboard, bottom line they are required of course expected. He summarises UBE as the type of education that can help an individual function effectively in the society.

In Nigeria, UBE programme is an expression of the strong desire of the government to fight poverty, reinforce participatory democracy in Nigeria by raising the level of awareness and general education levels of the entire citizenry. It is also a visible evidence of Nigeria's response and commitment to Jomtiem Declaration (1990) as well as the Delhi Declaration (1992) which requires stringent efforts by the E9 countries (nine most populous countries in the world with the highest number of illiterate population) to drastically reduce illiteracy within the shortest possible timeframe, and the OAU Decade of Education in Africa (1997-2006) requiring African countries to generalize access to quality basic education as a foundation stone for sustainable socio-economic development of the continent (Okoro, 2010). The objectives of the UBE programme in Nigeria are to:

- (1) Develop in the citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- (2) Provide free, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age;
- (3) Reduce drastically the incidence of drop-out from the formal school system (through improved relevance, quality and efficiency);
- (4) Cater 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;
- (5) Ensure the acquisition of appropriate levels 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 (FME, 2000: 1-17).

Looking at the objectives of Universal Basic Education in Nigeria and the components of environmental education which include to create in people awareness and sensitivity to the environment and the challenges of climatic changes, right knowledge and understanding of the challenges of climatic changes, attitude of concern for the environment and motivation to improve or maintain environmental quality, needed skills to identify and help resolve environmental challenges and provide opportunities for people participation in the activities that will lead to the resolution of environmental challenges (USEPA, 2015). One may say that both Environmental Education and Universal Basic Education play a complementary role with a symbiotic type of relationship because all human beings need basic education to understand oneself and the environment, on the other way round the environment must be enabling for any meaningful teaching and learning to take place.

At this juncture, it may be necessary to x-ray specific ways environmental education could help to address climatic change challenges for the sustenance of the Universal Basic Education in Nigeria.

Environmental education helps to create an enabling atmosphere that could guarantee effective teaching and learning. Environmental education also help to provide information on the climatic change challenges peculiar to a place, community or society that will guide in designing appropriate learning programme.

Environmental Education as course of studies which could be taught through school curriculum in general science, debates, quiz and essay competitions, special lectures, symposia, workshops and research as well as through non formal settings such as peer group meetings, folklores, mass media like radio, television, magazines, newspapers and internet platforms are great importance in sensitizing the public and exposing them

to their environment and its problem (Okeke cited in Osaat and Tom-Ekine, 2014). This is akin to the realization of the objective one of UBE which intends to develop in the citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion. He maintains that Environmental education should be a continuous process from pre-school ages to school even out of school situation so that every citizen could have opportunity to acquire right knowledge and awareness about the environmental problems which impinge on the effective implementation of UBE in Nigeria. Similarly, Nwajiuba (2010) notes that there is need for UBE programme to develop in the learner a good understanding of the challenges posed by climate change on events or school activities and install in pupils/students adoptive strategies to environmental problems in Nigeria. This is in line with the major thrust of environmental education which is to transform the prevailing negative mindset of people to environment which will translate to sustainable universal basic education in Nigeria.

On the other hand, environmental education helps to create the needed awareness in the people about environmental problems such as drought, flood, pollution, desertification, deforestation, storms etc. which when averted has a multiplier effect on UBE for instance when people are helped to manage their environment well through environmental education, there will be improvement in agricultural production for food sufficiency and poverty reduction. This invariably prepares people for UBE. Also many diseases associated with environmental hazards could be averted when people are motivated to maintain environmental quality. This will serve as palliative measure in reducing disease and raising a healthy society who will be alignable to the universal basic education. Furthermore, funds that could have been wasted in containing environmental challenges will be channeled to the UBE programme for its sustainability if people play their role well in resolving these environmental challenges. That is why Osaat and Tom-Ekine (2014) noted that environmental degradation and global warming have affected the flow of international subventions made available to aide the wholly implementation of development-based global projects and programmes for the developing countries like Nigeria.

It is on the basis of this that the paper tried to highlight how sound knowledge of the environment could guarantee sustainable universal basic education in Nigeria considering the increasing adverse effect of climatic change on our collective lives as a people.

Conclusion/Suggestions

In conclusion, evidence abounds that the challenges of sustainable Universal Basic Education in Nigeria can be reasonably addressed through environmental education (EE). It is pertinent that with good knowledge of our environment, teaching and learning will be enhanced which is the haul mark of every education programme including the UBE.

Base on what have been discussed so far, there is no doubt that environmental degradation and its attendant climatic change has implications for sustainable universal basic education in Nigeria. It is therefore necessary to suggest that:

- (1) The existing government policies, programmes and actions on environmental sustainability should be made known to citizens of Nigeria through the mass media continuously as part of awareness campaign on how climatic change impact people's lives.
- (2) Government should provide schools with funds and basic climatic change materials and facilities to carry out necessary responsibilities in their efforts at environmental sustainability.
- (3) Ministry of Education as well as various school boards should develop teaching and learning materials in areas of environmental education for different levels of education.
- (4) Effort should be made to incorporate environmental education (EE) into school curriculum to complement the present status where environmental education is taught as part of citizenship education.
- (5) Above all severe sanction should be metted on individuals or cooperate organisation that violate environmental laws to serve as deterrent on others as these will go a long way in ensuring the sustainability of our environment and in extension the universal basic education in Nigeria.

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