

A Comparison of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme in Nigeria and the Grundskola of Sweden

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Abstract

The Universal Basic Education Programme in Nigeria and the “Grundskola” Education Programme of Sweden are situated within the large context of a global quest for Education for All (EFA). Both programmes have a fundamental principle in common, that is everybody must have access to equivalent education and both are comprehensive and co-educational. Consequently, this paper compared the UBE with the Grundskola by examining the similarities and differences, the unique features of each programme and the extent that the Nigeria UBE can benefit from the Sweden’s Grundskola proclaimed as one of the best primary education in the world. The paper discusses the objectives, curriculum content, methodology and organization and the teaching force. The paper therefore suggests that the UBE of Nigeria be strengthened with quality regulatory roles, ensure increased enrolment into the teacher education programme with quality training, ensure better funding, review curriculum to expunge irrelevant contents and include new ones in line with global demands, entrench innovative approaches of teaching and ensure proper adherence to policy implementation.

Introduction

Education has essentially been a social process in capacity building and maintenance of society since the creation of human beings. To cope with the changing realities and uncertainties of human life, education has been a weapon with which to equip the people to acquire relevant knowledge, skills and habits for surviving in the modern world. Herein the entire world has shown concerns for “Education for All” (EFA) since 1968 (Obayan, 2002). There was an International Conference in Paris with a theme titled “The World Crisis in Education”. This triggered off the process of developing the World declaration on Education for All. It was spread over several months and all over the world. Four agencies the World Bank, the United National Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) came together to sponsor the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtiem, Thailand in March, 1990.

More than 150 countries including Nigeria and Sweden, 32 UN and other inter-governmental organization and 137 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) gathered. For this conference, 1500 delegates and observers at the closing session of the 5-day conference read the declaration in their native languages on behalf of their countries. According to the Bernard Van Leer Foundation (1990), they also declared that:

This is the foundation of our determination, singly and together to ensure education for all. We commit ourselves to act cooperatively through our own spheres of responsibility taking all necessary steps to achieve the goals of education for all. Together we call on government concerned, organizations and individuals to join in this urgent undertaking. The basic learning needs of all can and must be met... there has never been a more propitious time to commit ourselves to providing basic learning opportunities for all the people of the world (Bernard van Leer Newsletter p.3).

It was a bold attempt to focus the resolve and resources of governments, international agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), teacher, parents, and communities on the need to improve educational opportunities everywhere. The highlight of the World Declaration on Education for All among other things includes:

...satisfying basic learning needs requires an expanded vision which encompasses, universalizing access and promoting equity, focusing on learning, broadening the means and scope of basic education, enhancing the environment for learning and strengthening partnership (Bernard Van Leer Foundation Newsletter p.5).

This assumption formed the springboard of the framework of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria in 1999 and “Grundskola” in Sweden in 1998. Both programmes are situated within the large context of a global quest for Education for All (EFA). Both have one fundamental principle in common, that everybody must have access to equivalent education.

The purpose of this paper therefore is to compare the UBE of Nigeria with the Grundskola of Sweden proclaimed to be one of the best primary school education programme in the world. The paper examined the differences and similarities and the extent that Nigeria can benefit from the Grundskola. The following questions were postulated to guide the discourse of the paper:

1. What are the nature and characteristics of UBE and Grundskola?
2. To what extent are the objectives similar or differ?
3. To what extent are the curriculum content, methodology and organization similar or differ?
4. To what extent are the teaching forces of both programmes similar or differ?
5. To what extent can Nigeria benefit from the Grundskola of Sweden?

Distinction between the UBE and Grundskola Programmes

Nigeria is a signatory to the 1990 Jomtiem Declaration of Education for All. She is also a member of the Group of E-9 nations, nations with the highest population of illiterates. The Nigerian educational statistics of 1996 showed that only 14.1 million children are enrolled in primary schools out of the 21 million children of school going

age (Federal Ministry of Education, 1999). As a response to EFA and the declaration, Nigeria repositioned its key role towards a new education vision by establishing the UBE programme which takes universal access to basic education as fundamental. This is in consonance with section 18(3) (a) of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution dealing with the fundamental principles of the state policy. It states that:

Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and to this end government shall as when practicable provide free, compulsory and universal primary education... (Nigerian Constitution, section 18).

UBE is thus planned as the right to have one's basic learning needs met in various setting such as home, community, school, out-of-school educational, cultural ... and everyday life activities. It also involves various agents such as family, local and broader community, State Government, civil society such as local associations like rural cooperatives, Parents Teachers' Association etc.

In the same vein, the Grundskola of Sweden is also a nine-year compulsory education programme (primary and lower secondary). As the name is, the programme takes the form of a 9 year comprehensive schooling for children aged 7 to 16. It is provided in one-all-through compulsory phase school known as Grundskola. Many children receive their compulsory schooling from one and the same school. Grundskola is non-selective, full-time and co-educational.

The similarities between the two programmes lie in the fact that:

- Both are compulsory, free, comprehensive, and co-educational and everybody has access to equivalent education. The Swedish Education Act stipulates equal access to equivalent education for all children and young persons regardless of sex, geographical location and social and economic circumstances (Sou, 1997). Grundskola programme consists of compulsory and comprehensive schooling with "Sami-schools for "Sami"-speaking children (Sameskolan), special school which comprises ten grades for children with impaired sight and those who are deaf or partially deaf with secondary handicaps, compulsory school for those with learning difficulties and compulsory school for intellectually handicapped. This is called Sarskola (Skolverket, 2000). Thus the inclusive approach to education is full embedded in the programme.
- Like the Grundskola, the UBE programme consists of formal basic education encompassing the first 9 years of schooling for all children, nomadic education for school age children of cattle rearers and migrant fishermen and literacy and non-formal education for out-of-school children, youth and illiterate adults. The duration of the formal aspect of the programme is 9 years. The 9 years consists of the primary and junior/lower secondary education. For the UBE, the primary level is a six year course for children between ages six years and eleven plus and the junior secondary is a three year course for children between 12 years and 15 years. Each of these levels of education is received in a separate school.

However, the differences exist between the two programmes. In the first place, the statutory school age of entering the formal aspect of the UBE programme is six years while that of Grundskola could be six or seven or even eight years but the most common is seven years.

In UBE, the formal aspect is divided into two levels, primary and junior secondary while that of Grundskola consisted of three levels. The first level is for children from age seven to ten, the second level is for children at the age ten often to the age of thirteen and the third level is for children at the age of thirteen until the age of sixteen (Statistiska Centralbyran, SCB, 1998). In other words, the internal structure of the programmes is different. In UBE, children receive the first 6 years of the nine years at the primary school different from the Junior Secondary which is of three years duration whereas the Swedish children receive the nine years of compulsory schooling in one and the same school.

Furthermore, there is a compulsory one year pre-education programme for all Swedish six year old children before they are admitted into the Grundskola at the age of seven. This is publicly funded. Whereas in Nigeria, there is a provision for early child care which ranges between ages 3 and 5 plus, but it is not compulsory but some State governments (Oyo and Osun States for example) have started to re-introduce this level of education to public primary schools at no cost to the parents. Many are still left in the hands of private entrepreneurs to run. National Policy on Education stipulates that “Government shall encourage private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education” (NPE, 2004 p.11).

Goals of the UBE and Grundskola Programme

The specific objectives of UBE in Nigeria as stipulated by the Federal Government of Nigeria include:

- Developing in the citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- Providing free, compulsory, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age;
- Catering for drop-outs from the formal school system through improved relevant adult literacy programme;
- Catering for drop-outs and out-of-school children/adolescents through various forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education
- Ensure the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulate and skills (FGN p.2).

Whereas, the goals of the Swedish Grundskola is to impart knowledge and help pupils develop into responsible persons and members of the society (International Programme Office for Education and Training 1997). The document further stated that education involves:

- Passing on a cultural heritage values, traditions and language, knowledge from one generation to the next.
- That the school has the task of preparing pupils for living and working in society.
- It involves providing pupils with opportunities for taking initiative and responsibilities as “we” and creating the pre-conditions for developing their ability to work independently and solve problems (Outbuildings Department, 1996).

Summing up the major tasks of the Grundskola, it is evident that the programme aims at harmonious development of the children by stimulating them towards self-development and personal growth. In the same vein, the UBE programme initiative is for acquisition of literacy, numeracy and skills for children. The programme is geared towards life-long learning which does not necessarily end with the formal aspect of the programme. This perhaps makes UBE differ significantly from the Grundskola.

Curriculum Content, Methodology and Organization.

In Sweden, the Ministry of Education defines the underlying values, basic objectives and guidelines of the school system. Then the head of each school in consultation with teachers and other staff draw up a school plan which is based on the national objectives (Lewy, 1996). Municipalities are responsible for the implementation of national curriculum. It is the teachers, together with the children that establish learning goals bearing in mind the needs and circumstances of different groups of children.

In Nigeria, it is the Nigeria Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) that is responsible for curriculum development. However, the Ministry of Education provides the guidelines and implementation strategies. Recently, the States created the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) which has been saddled with the responsibility of the control of the UBE programme. In Nigeria, the goals are already set out for teachers to work towards attaining them. Neither teachers nor pupils are sedomly involved in the drawing up the school plan to suit the needs of the locality.

In Sweden, the Grundskola education provides perspectives in all school subjects (Skolverket: <http://www.skolverket.se/>). The statutory curriculum consists of core or basic subjects. These are Swedish, English and Mathematics. These subjects are given prominence position in the subject time table. English is mandatory as the first compulsory foreign language. The teaching of English language begins at the third year or fourth year of the nine year programme. This varies from one municipality to the other. In the same vein, the core subjects of the UBE programmes in Nigeria include English language, Mathematics, Social Studies, General Science and Nigerian Language. However, English language is taught in the school as a subject in first: three years of the formal schooling but it becomes the medium of instruction at the third year of schooling. Thereafter, it is the language of textbook, examination communication etc. The reason for this cannot be far fetched. This is because English is a lingua franca in Nigeria. It is unfortunate that there is a language policy in the UBE programme which stipulates that “The mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment should be used as the

medium in the first three years". The basis for this policy is rooted in the fact that it has been established that children are better grounded in learning when they are taught in their mother tongue. This has been researched into and proven right (Fafunwa, Macaulay; Osokoya., 1989; Ande, 1983). Unfortunately, this policy is not implemented particularly in the privately owned Nursery and Primary Schools. Even in the public schools, the teachers use bilingual medium of instruction (English and mother tongue).

In addition to the study of English language in Sweden's Grundskola, other foreign languages that the children study include German, French, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Finnish, Spanish, and Chinese. In Nigeria it is only French that is another foreign language that is being studied in privately owned Nursery and Primary Schools but French is a compulsory subject at the Junior Secondary School.

Worthy of note are other subjects on the school curriculum of both programmes. There are practical arts subjects in Grundskola which include art, domestic science, home economics, sport/physical and health education, dance and craft which consists of textiles, woodwork and metal work. Other subjects in the programme are social sciences like geography, history, religious education and civics. The sciences include biology, physics, chemistry and technology.

These subjects also featured prominently in the UBE curriculum. However, the subjects are studied as integrated. For example, the introductory technology at the Junior Secondary School has elements of textile wood-work and metal work. There is the integrated science which consists of biology, physics and chemistry. A cultural and creative art has crafts, music and dance as part of its components. However, the subjects are not studied as individual subjects in Nigeria as it is done in Sweden.

Other special features of the Grundskola curriculum content are the values education, a special programme entitled "about this you must tell". It is designed to combat racism and focuses on modern history (Lewy, 1996). There are also Study and Vocational guidance staff called (SYO). These staff is to inform and instruct children. They are to provide them with personal guidance on the different educational opportunities and vocational options available to them after the compulsory schooling. In the Nigerian UBE, there are school counselors that perform similar functions. However, evidences of ineffectiveness abound in Nigeria because many of the products after the junior secondary do not utilize the opportunities of the various options open to them. Most of them move on to the Senior Secondary and end up not doing very well.

Another initiative of the Grundskola curriculum content is the introduction of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). This is principally being used as tools for teaching (Tommy Lagergren, 2000). It is on record that Sweden provides 60,000 teachers with multimedia computers and training programme using ICT in the classroom for about 40% of Sweden teachers improve internet access for schools. This no doubt would have created a greater variety in the work of teachers thereby transforming the learning environment of the school into more exciting workplaces for both teachers and children. Nigerian children are yet to experience and enjoy the benefits

of ICT in the classroom, classroom environment, the use of ICT as part of school paraphernalia is still far fetched. A national basic health scheme is still at the proposal stage and yet to be incorporated into the UBE scheme (Oduolowu, 2002). Whereas, these are already part and parcel of the Grundskola.

Methodology

“Freedom” is a concept which pervades methodology component of the Grundskola programme. The schools are free to make their own decisions regarding the organization of the school, the teaching arrangement, size of classes etc. For example, children may be taught in mixed ability, same age, mixed age or grouped by sex for same subjects particularly physical education and Swedish. There is a shift towards developing children’s democratic competence and their capability for self-assessment. So, there is a general tendency towards less “teaching from the front” and more individualization and group work. Team teaching is common and teachers team teach. They often use cross-curricular teaching and learning and problem-based approaches (Tommy Lagergren, 2000). These could easily be done because of the availability of learning and teaching resources in addition to the influence of the ICT. The teachers’ competence in the use of the current and up to date methodology is apparent.

In Nigeria the National Policy on Education (2004), stipulates that “the teaching method employed in the Nigerian Primary School de-emphasize the memorization and regurgitation of facts but encourage practical, exploratory and experimental methods (Oduolowu, 2002). This is found to be essential for children to acquire knowledge and skills needed to cope with the demands of the 21st century. However, evidences abound that abstract and learning by rote are predominant methods of teaching. The developments of the cognitive and problem-solving skills are still alien to the primary school system (Oduolowu, 1998). Even, when the teachers are willing to shift to modern approaches, this cannot be effectively utilized in poorly equipped classrooms which characterized Nigerian classrooms.

Organization

In Grundskola the normal school year begins at the end of August and ends early the following June – (Ministry of Education and Science, 2000). The exact dates vary from year to year and from municipality to another. The working year consists of 40 weeks and not less than 190 days. The school year is divided into two terms by the longest holiday in the academic year which is from 20 December to the beginning of January. Within the 40 weeks, there is also 12 occasional days’ holiday during autumn and spring in February or March and another one-week Easter holiday. There are 5 days a week from Monday to Friday for schools. A school working day consists of 6 hours for children in the first two years and eight hours for older children in the Grundskola (Lewy, 1996; Sou, 1997).

In Nigeria, there are three terms in a session for the UBE programme. Each term consists of minimum of 13 weeks of schooling. There are five working days a week in

the school calendar. Pre-primary, and primaries 1 to 2 children spend five hours in school per school day while children in primaries 3 to 6 and Junior secondary 1 to 3 spend 6 hours. The school calendar runs from Middle September to Middle of July. There are short breaks (between 2 to 3 weeks) in-between for Christmas and Easter Holidays while the long vacation of between 4 and 6 weeks comes up at the end of the third term (between Mid-July to Mid-September).

The difference in the timing of the school schedule lies in the time spent on task that is, the learning instructions. In Grundskola, more hours are spent on learning tasks (6,665 hours) (Eurydice, 2000). Children keep longer in school in Sweden than in Nigeria. This is easier for the children because free school meals are available to all pupils in the school programme in Sweden. In Nigeria, the Federal government launched the free lunch programme and for States governments to implement this in the different states. Out of the 36 states in Nigeria, only one state (Osun) has started the feeding programme.

After school centers called “fritidshen” for children ages 7 to 12 are open before and after school and during school holidays to provide after school activities and learning options in addition to the school curriculum for children in Sweden (Structures of Education, 1999). There are modern teaching approaches employed in teaching. There is a general tendency towards less teaching “from the front” and more individualization and group work. With the use of team teaching, cross and problem-based learning, teaching and learning are more exciting and interesting for both teachers and children.

The Teaching Force

The importance of teachers and the roles they play in the educative process are central to basic education. The teaching force is the foundation of quality and relevance of education at all levels. The summit of the Nine high Population Developing Countries held at New Delhi India in 1993 reiterated the relevance of qualitative teacher production in the quest for improved basic education for all (Lassa, 1999). In Nigeria, until the last decade, primary teacher production was the responsibility of Teachers Grade Two Colleges. However, outstanding reference to standards in teacher education viz “...no education system may rise above its teachers”. All teachers in educational institutions shall be trained (NPE 2004p. 33). The policy stipulates that the minimum qualification for teachers for the UBE programme shall be the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). Although, it is a sub-degree but it is a highly qualitative professional teacher education programme obtained after a three full-time programme at College of Education. In addition to the expansion of full-time programmes for the production of primary and Junior secondary school teachers, there are several part-time programmes either in Colleges of Education as Sandwich courses or by Distance Learning System organized by the National Teachers Institute for transforming serving Grade I teachers into NCE holders. There are two types of in-service training scheme for primary school teachers. The first type for up-grading the teachers while the second is for updating the teachers’ knowledge and skills. Another related in-service training is in form of organized seminars and workshops for serving teachers (Oduolowu, 2002). However, the

recruitment and retention of competent teachers is one of the greatest problems of teacher education in Nigeria (Lassa, 1999). Lassa, quoting Ukeje observed that: “the recruitment and retention of competent people into the teaching profession is a perennial problem ... which is particularly disturbing and serious in Nigeria”. He went further to observe that “teaching is fast becoming the last hope of the hopeless that is, the profession for those who have nothing else better to do...” (Ukeje, 1991 p.15)

Even though, the Nigerian Primary School teachers are professionally competent, but they have not adequately produced knowledge on best practice in teaching or carrying out research in their classroom practices or serving as resource persons in various capacity to enrich knowledge. Only 165 of sampled teachers indicated that they had attended workshops or seminars since employed (Ajiboye and Fabode, 2003). The bone of school management in the primary schools could thus be traced to the teachers. They are found to lack pedagogical skills and their commitment to teaching is low.

In Sweden, teacher-training programmes were revised in 2001 (Lewy, 1996). There is now one common programme with a core for all teacher categories. The initial teacher training towards better links between research, theory and practice was strengthened. There is only one teacher certificate. Although after some time in the programme, there are possibilities of specialization where teachers can settle on different age groups and or different subject. The teacher education programme also has on going training in ICT for teachers. Under the “for learning ICT programme” in this programme, 13 days are set aside for each teacher for in-service training. In addition, the National Agency for Education also offers in-service training in national priority areas. For example training programme for teachers working with young learners of English etc. The head teacher has overall responsibility for overseeing teachers planning. The National Agency for Education has some responsibility for quality assurance and review through national evaluation, national assessment, international studies, supervision and quality reports (Skolverket, 2004).

What Nigeria Can Benefit from Grundskola

There is no doubt in the fact that the Nigerian Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme has a lot to gain from the Grundskola of Sweden. Some of the issues are directly or indirectly entrenched in policy guidelines contained in the implementation blueprint for the UBE scheme. Which if properly implemented will enhance the programme to yield better results.

There is a programme of initiative for early child care and socialization for children below the statutory school age of six years in the UBE programme. However, the provision is neither compulsory nor free for children. As a result of this, only 47% of pre-school aged children benefit from the programme. Many factors hinder access to the programme. Such factors range from inability to pay to ill health of children (SAPA, 1993). The need to provide compulsory and free pre-school programme for these children, like is done in Sweden, cannot be over-emphasised. Among other things, it will establish a strong footing and provide uniformity of entry behaviour for all the children.

Often the argument of the huge financial implications is put forward. The provision could be limited to just one year prior to the statutory school year of the primary education.

Another area, where benefit could be derived from Grundskola is in the pattern that Swedish children receive their compulsory education of 9 years in one and the same school. The benefit of this lies in that the monitoring and follow-up work on the learners is more effective. This no doubt could enhance productivity. This might not be easy to implement in the Nigerian setting i.e. to make children receive the nine year programme in the same school. However, the principle of continuous close monitoring and supervision of the learning programme for a period of nine years cannot be underestimated. Even, with the Nigerian setting, there should be a follow-up or monitoring mechanism designed for these learners from primary school to the junior secondary level. These records could be kept by the various teachers. The information on each learner could be used to counsel and guide their development and progress.

The goals of UBE should be broadened to have an international perspective. This will enable the children to see their own reality in a global context and be able to create international solidarity. They will be equipped with closer cross-cultural and cross-border contracts like those of the Grundskola in Sweden. The demands of the 21st century have put a lot of pressure on the Nigerian children like all other children of the world. The Nigerian children can easily relate with these problems and from tender age proffer solutions to them. Thus, learning is made relevant to them.

Although the Nigerian primary education curriculum development is excellent, it is plagued with inefficiency. Ivowi (1999) asserted that it is overloaded, and that there are as many as sixteen subjects on the school time-table (SAPA, 1993). Ivowi doubted whether teachers can do justice to all of them or that six to eleven year old pupils can assimilate so much content. It is important therefore to review the curriculum – expunge irrelevant content and include new contents in line with global demands. In addition, programmes such as values education can be added. This could aim at combating perennial issues such as corruption, lack of patriotism, advanced free fraud 419 and religious and ethnic clashes that the nation is facing. Learning from the Grundskola experience, interdisciplinary teaching and thematic studies should be promoted. This however, has implications for teacher preparation and in-service training. In-service and pre-service trainees should be equipped with the skills of using these approaches. It will go a long way to solve to a great extent the problem of curriculum.

The provision of school health care is completely missing in the UBE programme and this is a very important component part of the Grundskola. It is pertinent to promote a holistic view of children by including nutrition, preventive health and encouraging healthy living. As it has been pointed out earlier on, many children do not attend school for reasons for ill-health (SAPA, 1993). It is therefore imperative to make provision for school health care even if it is only at the primary level. There should be school doctors who should carry out health checks and monitor children development and preserve and improve the physical and mental health of the children. There should also be school

nurses who could be involved in elementary nursing. Like the Grundskola, the nutrition of children could be supplemented through provision of school meal for them. The meal could cater for the inadequacy in protein in-take of a majority of the Nigerian children.

For the Nigerian children to cope with the demands of the 21st century, the place of Information and Communication Technology cannot be over-emphasized. Too little work is been done in this area in Nigeria. Like the Grundskola, it is imperative to train and re-train teachers in ICT and other modern approaches of teaching. Interdisciplinary teaching and thematic studies if introduced into the school setting will solve most of the problems inhibiting the successful implementation of the curriculum demands.

There is need to strengthen the regulatory roles of the various agencies responsible for the implementation of UBE. The Federal government needs to enact necessary legislation for the scheme, the state governments to initiate and execute specific projects for the local government to co-ordinate, supervise and monitor the implementation, local support and enabling environment for the execution of the scheme, voluntary agencies, non-governmental organizations and individuals to encourage and support increased enrolment, retention and completion by target groups in the programme of the scheme.

Finally, there is no doubt in the fact that the programme is expensive. UBE implies improved funding. Sufficient fund must be directed towards the magnitude of activities to realize the objectives. The available funds must be directed to areas that will make a difference such as school buildings, equipment, textbooks, teacher preparation, instructional materials etc. Above all, wasteful spending must be eliminated from the programme. If all these are taken care of, the UBE programme in Nigeria will produce the desired outcome which is the true dream of the nation.

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