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Are the Schools we HAVE the Schools we NEED In Ghana? A Contribution to the ongoing debate on Ghana's education reform.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the ongoing discussion on Ghana's education reform initiatives in the light of contemporary socioeconomic constraints, and linguistic and diversity issues. The Ghanaian education system today faces inadequate financial resources (for education programs) combined with the continuous unprecedented demand for access, the legacy of colonialism, longstanding economic and social crises as challenges that present a particularly difficult reality for education in Ghana. The goal therefore is to identify areas of concern and the need to address factors that have influenced education reforms in Ghana. By the early 1970s, Ghanaian educators and stakeholders in Ghana's education system observed and expressed concerns that Ghana's education system needed major reforms. According to critics of the education system, Ghana's education system was not meeting the needs of the changing dynamics of Ghanaian society (McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh, 1975; EAC, 1972; Nimako, 1976; Antwi, 1992). How does Ghana address these concerns as it embarks on another education reform in 2010?

Current debates on Ghana's education system and the desire to restructure Ghana's education programs to conform to foreign educational structures have been a topic of interest to many scholars as well as stakeholders in Ghana's education system. On a similar note, the effort to change names from Secondary School through Junior Secondary School (JSS)/Senior Secondary School (SSS) to Junior High School (JHS)/Senior High School (SHS) among others seem to indicate an effort to remove the scum and debris of poverty and sociocultural degradations left by the edifices of colonialism on neo-colonial Ghanaian educational system. However, as Ghana embarks upon another phase of education reform, the overall reality of inadequate financial resources (for education programs) combined with the continuous unprecedented demand for access, the legacy of colonialism, longstanding economic, and social crises are challenges that present a particularly difficult reality for education in Ghana.

In every given country, the goal of an educational system understandably is large and varied, even chaotic. Regardless this complexity, the education system reflects the history, culture, and values of the country itself. Hence, are the education programs we have today, the education programs we need for Ghana's socio-economic, cultural and political development and transformation? What is the relationship between Ghanaian culture and education? Does it have any implication for postcolonial cultural project of nation building in Ghana? What has various diagnostic studies carried out since independence, from regime to regime, on Ghana's education system unearthed as reasons for why the failure to have a comprehensive long-lasting education

system that relates to the intellectual and economic buoyancy always envisaged in such education reforms?

Today, Ghana is undertaking another step to restructure the education system to conform to that of western educational systems. Excellent as the idea may sound we must keep in mind that the African continent is dominated by academic institutions shaped by colonialism and organized according to the European model. It therefore seems our education systems in Africa are an artifact of colonial policies which also have shaped Africa's route of development. Bearing in mind that each educational system comes with a cultural baggage, Ghanaians may have to pause to understand the implications of 'restructuring' their education system to conform to a foreign educational structure, and the long term impact it may have on the country's intellectual and human resources as well as the socioeconomic and cultural experience. When our ancestors formulated the concept that "It takes a whole village to raise a child," we may ask, upon what praxis did they base their educational pedagogy?

The praxis for the pedagogy may lay in the fact that, we see education of the child in the village community to emerge from the child's involvement in the sociocultural and political consciousness of the society. From birth, through rites of passage, to adulthood, the Ghanaian child grows through a process, interacting with elders and peers at various stages. Through frantic experiences and challenges, the Ghanaian child is shaped emotionally, spiritually and temporarily in the ideas that make up the heritage of the community. To be successful and respected in this community, the child partakes in the wealth of the intellectual and moral resources, which make up the society's civilization. People's reactions to the child's performances and activities, both in and out of the home, channels the thoughts of the child to what the society articulates or eschew. Though this process is an unconscious holistic education in the heritage of the community, it gradually builds the Ghanaian child psychologically and sociologically and gets the child integrated in the community to become an inheritor of a wealth of identity, consolidated in his or her mother tongue or his/her source language. The belief that 'the public disgrace of the crocodile is equally the shame of the alligator' makes the entire community alert to the type of children they nurture for prosperity. Fact is children are the cultural ambassadors of the family and the community from which they emerge. It should be politically correct to say that the educated Ghanaian child today is often alienated from his or her community as he or she has to run away from the village to the city in search of white collar

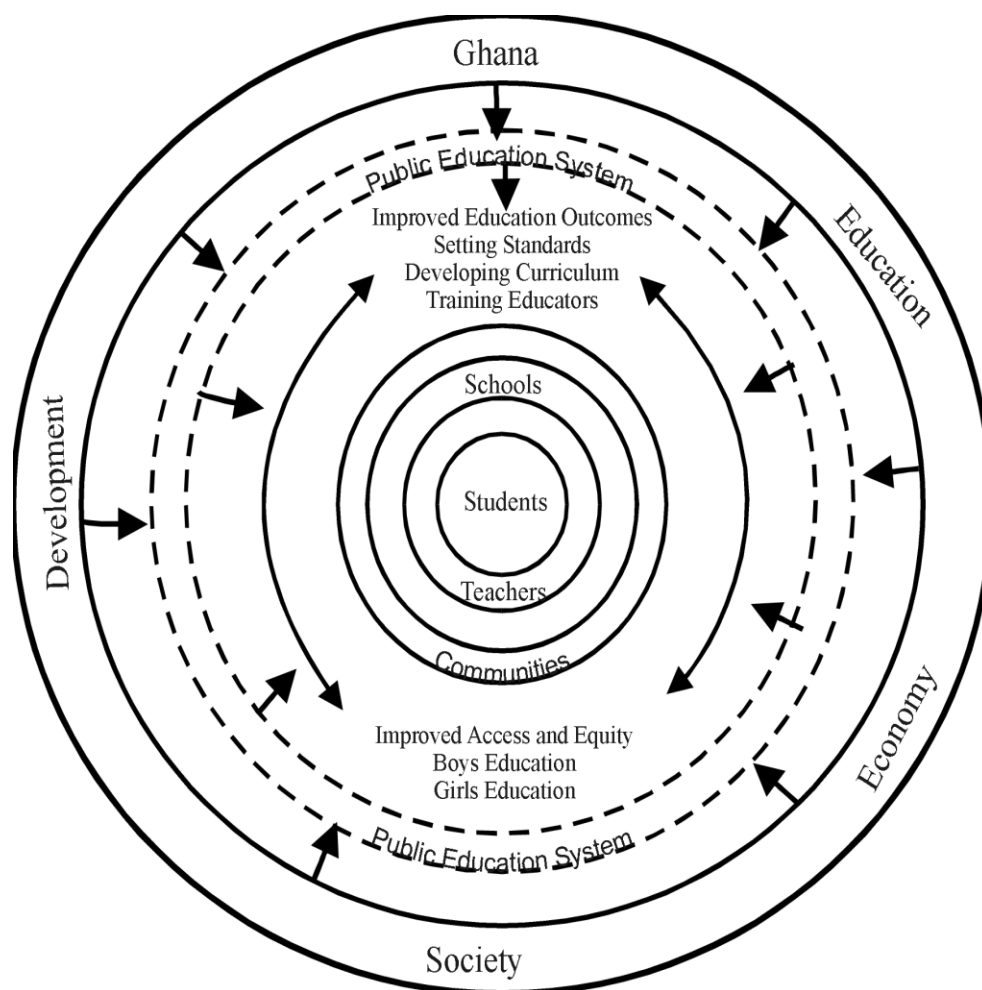
jobs. The ‘disinterestedness’ in his or her community reflects the greatest everlasting impact of legacies of an education system, not only in terms of the organization of the academe and the continuing links to the metropolis but also in the career orientation, language of instruction and communication.

It is hard to say whether Ghana’s education system has moved further from the western versions of European education inherited at independence. It is also difficult to ask whether education reforms have retreated from (i) the formal schools introduced by English representatives of trade in Cape Coast, (ii) mission schools instituted by English and Swiss Christian Missionaries, (iii) formal education systems implemented under British colonial policy and (iv) whether the education system we HAVE today is the education system we NEED in our pursuit of sustainable development for Ghana. Like other African nations, Ghana’s education faces unprecedented challenges. Not only is the demand for access unrelenting, even in the context of the dropout rates at all levels, but also the recognition of unavailability of job opportunities after higher education, something regarded as a key force for modernization and development. In Ghana, we have to congratulate governments for making education a priority and basic education compulsory. Not too many nations have such a political support. But to equally succeed as a country economically, culturally, and politically, the country must have a strong job market that competes with the high level of investment in education.

Given the recent expansion and ‘massification’ in the university system resulting in numerous students gaining admission to institutions of higher education, Ghanaians must ponder over factors that impact students’ disposition, retention, and academic performance in Ghana’s academic institution. The other challenge is, considering the world of education was flat, why does Ghana’s education system go in circles? In this era, the global world is being shaped by knowledge and information technology and these calls for investment in fiscal resources, building infrastructure for producing, publishing, translating, and developing teaching materials locally, making available basic resources for training of teachers as well as providing job opportunities for graduates in varied sectors of the economy. Any effort to measure the scope of challenges to education should consider all related factors present in the educational supermarket.

One other challenge in Ghana’s educational supermarket is that, a model of Ghana’s education system should have at its center the Ghanaian child, who is surrounded by teachers,

schools, policies, and varied communities. A diagnostic study of the UIS SCB initiative which started in 2003 in Ghana reveals staggering lapses in capacity building in Ghana's education system. In other studies, schooling process is said to be based upon the debatable assumption that all children learn at a similar pace, and that their ages correspond to a particular grade that in turn is organized in cycles. In effect, the education system is unable to respond to diverse needs of students, especially when the dropout rates suggest that a considerable number of children abandon school several years before concluding JHS and SHS. Although government, teachers and administrators designed strategies aimed at retention of students, yet the debate over the effectiveness of retention programs continues. The ever widening concentric community of circles affecting retention includes the expected societal educational outcomes, special curricular and program needs, training of teachers and an education system that addresses the societal and economic development needs at the national level of Ghana.



These circles can suggest an organized and coherent means by which often disconnected reform initiatives could benefit from past problems and result in improved educational reforms based perhaps on a set of common standards and common metrics by which to judge future successes of education reform initiatives in Ghana.

Discussion about education reforms in Ghana has over the years concentrated on issues of quality and relevance. However, the implications of foreign financing of education and the adoption of foreign educational systems and structures are yet to be given sufficient coverage and critical analysis. The paucity in efforts at discussing the long term implications for adopting foreign educational structures seems to be partially attributed to the myth that, the Western world has accomplished high quality standards in their educational achievements. Buying into this myth makes us see foreign educational systems as the principal means to achieve economic and social development in Ghana. Given the ‘conditionalities’ of the structural adjustment programs of stakeholders in Ghana’s education system and their effects, Ghanaians must begin to look critically at whether those foreign structures or aids have actually impacted educational finance and governance, planning, evaluation, and accountability, professional development; school curriculum, and social issues in Ghana’s education system for the better.

We must view these critical issues against the backdrop of the fact that, at a meeting with African vice-chancellors in Harare in 1986, the World Bank argued that higher education in Africa was a luxury and that most African countries were better off closing universities at home and training graduates overseas. It was at this point that social demand for higher education started increasing in Africa when the labor market for graduates at all levels were weakening; unit costs of higher education started to become extremely high; the internal efficiency of institutions became very low; and savings in expenditures for higher education, it was suggested, should be made through increased student contributions. In Ghana, it was the time when the then government wanted to shift part of the education cost to students and it was not well received. Even though we may see formal education that was introduced by the colonial administration as essential to the acquisition of skills for economic productivity and national development, what we need to realize is that skill training in colonial education was gender and language specific, thus the underdevelopment of human skills and the resources. What is Ghana’s effort today at keeping up with or developing its own modern pedagogy in education, a turn to indigenous learning methodologies, and local provisions of teacher training resources?

As Ghana embarks on restructuring the education system in this decade, Ghana's educational history can play a vital role not only as a vehicle for accelerating the implementation of governmental development policies and programs in Ghana. But that the exploration and implementation of new reform initiatives must focus on the aim of making education more relevant to Ghana's world of work and the development, and modernization of Ghana's culture and economy. On another level, Ghana's education system need be structured with caution, paying attention to implications that foreign educational structure, content, and objectives may pose. In neo-colonial Ghana, educational policies and reforms must aim at preparing the Ghanaian child to be able to take gainful employment after JHS and SHS or proceed to tertiary institutions after secondary education. The numerous gateways by which the Ghanaian child drops out of school after failing subsequent exams at the JHS, SHS and at other tertiary levels must be addressed to reduce the massive unemployment rate in Ghana.

There is something in cultural education which is an immaterial commodity-: something that cannot be seen or heard, bought or sold, lent or borrowed. Yet, it pervades a whole society and the community and its influence is so strong that without it none of the formal schools or the intended forms of educational systems and structures would be of the slightest use. This extremely important item we can call the spirit of a 'Ghanaian oriented civilization.' This spirit of Ghanaian oriented civilization can only be cultivated through an effective educational system centered on the soul of the Ghanaian people, who they are and whom they chose to be. It is this similar spirit of civilization that moved early hunting-and-gathering societies to a more settled, vibrant and hierarchically organized communities resulting in their technologically advanced economies. A critical evaluation of cultural issues in development of education in Ghana should raise questions about how educators (internally and externally) perceive Ghanaian culture and its shifting definitions, constructions and representations. Also critical are inquiries relating to education as a learning, instructional and cultural refinement process and product, its purposes and consequences. Today the growth of specialized wage labor, social mobility, urbanization and economically productive work necessitates that each individual in the Ghanaian family be remunerated and the need to make the Ghanaian child an asset, instead of being a liability, and this calls for a redefinition and focus of our obligations in education reforms in Ghana.

In conclusion, in our present quest for an appropriate education reform for Ghana, we need question ourselves whether the schools we HAVE are the schools we NEED for the future.

This will encourage the elucidation of, and, appreciation for Ghanaian culture, language and heritage. We need to look at the training of the 'whole person' for nation-building; examine the main architectural units of the educational system, develop human resources for meeting labor force needs; evolve truly Ghanaian institutions of higher learning dedicated to Ghana and its people, promoting a bond of kinship to the larger human society and emphasize a science and technology that can develop Ghana's own doctors and agriculturalists. In view of this, any new educational reform in Ghana should CRITICALLY look at the course contents of all programs, the duration of the courses, structures put in place to ensure effectiveness of the programs, and then the instructional curriculum as well. The course content should reflect what exactly Ghana needs to develop economically, culturally and scientifically not based on foreign education structures. It must embrace what can prepare the Ghanaian child to be marketable in Ghana first, before we think of his or her marketability elsewhere? Further, what can the education system offer the Ghanaian child in preparation for a good paying job in the Ghanaian job market? This means resources should be enough to go round every student in Ghana.

The overreliance on foreign donations without critical evaluation of the attendant regulations on how, when and where to use the donation needs be addressed. On the other hand, what do we do when foreign donations are exhausted? Do we continue with the program or we abandon it haphazardly? To answer this particular question, let's ask, how many schools (JHS) are still doing the practical agric, metal works, wood work etc? Another area needing attention is the duration of courses. Students come to SHS with grades from 6 – 30. It is expected that a grade 6 and 30 students should do the same number of years and face the same course content for 3 or 4 years and sit for the same exam. Do we need a policy that makes it that students with grades 6 – 15 should do 3 years, and 16 – 30, 4 years? What about students with disabilities? Classrooms, libraries, science labs, recreational facilities etc play vital roles in the education of the children. But in Ghana, there seems to be a disparity in the allocation or provision of these facilities.

Lastly, every reform in education in Ghana talks about importance of programs such as Science, Agriculture, Mathematics, English etc. After few years into the implementation of the reform changes start to surface in the programs. The changes are christened as “integration” of the subjects. Examples are the Science and Agric integrated as Integrated Science and this is done to the detriment of the course content in both Science and Agric. If Agricultural Science

has 20 topics and Science has 20 topics, the Integrated Science is not made up 40 topics, which means vital areas in the two disciplines are left out. Last but not the least, sufficient time should be given to any reform before changes start taking place. It is painful to say, anyone made to name himself in another person's language is always reduced to the shadow of the person whose language he or she appropriates to himself or herself. This is the case for importation foreign education structures into Ghana's education system. Hence, we can never progress in another man's shoes; we can only sag behind him.

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