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Ghana's education reform 2007: A realistic proposition or a crisis of vision?

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Abstract Ghana's recent "Education Reform 2007" envisions a system that strives to achieve both domestic and internationally-oriented goals emanating (1) from the Education for All (EFA) initiative, (2) from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and (3) from global trends in education. Emboldened by the implementation of foreign-donor-funded programmes such as EFA, the restructuring of the Ghana Education Sector Project (EdSeP) and the Science Resource Centres (SRC) project, both the education reform of 2007 and recent educational policy debates have reiterated the need to emphasise the teaching of science and information and communication technology to make Ghana's students/graduates more competitive in the global labour market. However, the bulk of Ghana's economic activity actually remains domestic or unglobalised. And given a weak economy and declining social spending due to strict adherence to the prescribed structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB), there is concern that a focus on international competitiveness may be a crisis of vision. On the basis of the Ghanaian government's failure to meet the stated goals of previous reforms such as that of 1974, and the education system's continuing dependence on foreign donor support, this paper argues that the goals of the new reform may be unachievable on a sustainable basis. It also argues that rather than subjugate national domestic priorities to a mirage of international credibility/competitiveness, Ghana should concentrate on capacitating her students/graduates to make maximum impact at domestic and local community levels.

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Keywords Ghana · Educational access and participation · Education reform vision

Résumé Réforme éducative 2007 au Ghana : proposition réaliste ou vision erronée ? – La récente « Réforme éducative 2007 » du Ghana prévoit un système qui s’efforce de réaliser des objectifs de portée tant nationale que mondiale, les derniers émanant (1) de l’initiative Éducation pour tous (EPT), (2) de la Convention des Nations Unies relative aux droits de l’enfant, et (3) des tendances mondiales dans le domaine de l’éducation. Stimulés par la réalisation de programmes financés par l’étranger - EPT, restructuration du projet relatif au secteur éducatif du Ghana (EdSeP) ainsi que du projet concernant les centres de ressources scientifiques (SRC) -, la réforme éducative de 2007 et le récent débat sur la politique éducative ont réitéré la nécessité de valoriser l’enseignement des sciences et des technologies d’information et de communication, afin d’accroître la compétitivité des étudiants et diplômés ghanéens sur le marché mondial du travail. Cependant, l’activité économique du pays est encore essentiellement concentrée sur le marché national et n’est donc pas mondialisée. Par ailleurs, étant donné la faiblesse de l’économie et la baisse des dépenses sociales due au respect rigoureux des politiques d’ajustement structurel prescrites par le Fonds monétaire international et la Banque mondiale, certains craignent qu’une focalisation sur la compétitivité ne relève d’une vision erronée. Eu égard à l’échec du gouvernement ghanéen à atteindre les objectifs fixés par les réformes précédentes telle celle de 1974, ainsi qu’à un système éducatif dépendant en permanence de donateurs étrangers, l’auteur de l’article avance que les objectifs de cette nouvelle réforme pourraient être irréalisables dans une perspective durable. Il préconise en outre que, au lieu d’assujettir ses priorités nationales à un mirage de crédibilité et de compétitivité internationales, le Ghana devrait s’attacher à doter ses étudiants et diplômés des capacités qui leur permettront d’exercer un impact maximal au niveau du pays et des communautés locales.

Zusammenfassung Ghanas Bildungsreform 2007: realistisches Vorhaben oder Wolkenkuckucksheim? – Die jüngste „Bildungsreform 2007“ in Ghana ist auf ein System hin ausgerichtet, mit dem sowohl innerstaatliche als auch international orientierte Ziele erreicht werden sollen, die sich (1) aus der Initiative Bildung für alle (EFA), (2) aus der UN-Konvention über die Rechte des Kindes und (3) aus globalen Bildungstendenzen ableiten lassen. Angespornt durch die Umsetzung von Programmen, die von ausländischen Gebern finanziert werden – beispielsweise EFA, das Restrukturierungsprojekt für den ghanaischen Bildungssektor (EdSeP) und das SRC-Projekt zur Förderung von Wissenschaftszentren –, wurde sowohl bei der Bildungsreform des Jahres 2007 als auch in den jüngsten bildungspolitischen Debatten immer wieder darauf hingewiesen, wie notwendig es sei, der Lehre in den Naturwissenschaften und in der Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologie mehr Gewicht zu verleihen, um die ghanaischen Studierenden und Hochschulabsolventen auf dem globalen Arbeitsmarkt wettbewerbsfähiger zu machen. Tatsächlich findet jedoch der Großteil der Wirtschaftstätigkeiten in Ghana nach wie vor

in innerstaatlichen, nicht globalisierten Kontexten statt. Und angesichts einer schwachen Wirtschaftsleistung und zurückgehender Sozialausgaben infolge der strikten Einhaltung der vorgeschriebenen Strukturanpassungspolitik des Internationalen Währungsfonds (IWF) und der Weltbank (WB) ist zu befürchten, dass die Ausrichtung auf internationale Wettbewerbsfähigkeit ein realitätsfremdes Hirngespinnst sein könnte. Da die ghanaische Regierung es nicht geschafft hat, die angestrebten Ziele früherer Reformen, wie zum Beispiel der von 1974, zu erreichen, und weil das Bildungssystem nach wie vor von der Unterstützung ausländischer Geber abhängig ist, wird in diesem Beitrag der Standpunkt vertreten, dass die Ziele der neuen Reform vielleicht dauerhaft nicht erreichbar sind. Statt die innerstaatlichen Prioritäten des Landes einer Schimäre der internationalen Glaubwürdigkeit/Wettbewerbsfähigkeit unterzuordnen, sollte sich Ghana lieber darauf konzentrieren, seine Studierenden/Absolventen so auszubilden, dass sie auf innerstaatlichen und lokalen Ebenen größtmögliche Wirkung entfalten können.

Resumen La reforma educativa de Ghana en 2007: ¿propuesta realista o crisis de visión? – La reciente “Reforma Educativa de 2007” apunta a un sistema que trata de lograr tanto los objetivos de orientación nacional como los de orientación internacional que parten de: (1) la iniciativa de Educación para Todos (EPT); (2) de la Convención sobre los Derechos del Niño de las Naciones Unidas, y (3) de las tendencias mundiales en materia de educación. Alentados por la implementación de programas financiados por donantes extranjeros, tales como EPT, la reestructuración del Proyecto para el Sector Educativo de Ghana (EdSeP) y el proyecto de Centros de Recursos de Ciencia (SRC), tanto la reforma educativa de 2007 como los recientes debates sobre política educativa han reiterado la necesidad de enfatizar la enseñanza de ciencias y tecnologías de la información y comunicación para mejorar la competitividad de los estudiantes y graduados de Ghana en el mercado laboral mundial. Sin embargo, en realidad, la gran parte de las actividades económicas de Ghana se siguen desarrollando a nivel nacional o no globalizado. Y en vista de una economía débil y de la reducción de gastos sociales debida a la estricta adhesión a las políticas de ajuste estructural dictadas por el Fondo Monetario Internacional (FMI) y el Banco Mundial (BM), existe la preocupación de que un énfasis en la capacidad de competir a escala internacional puede ser una crisis de visión. Basándose en el fracaso del gobierno ghanés en alcanzar los objetivos fijados por reformas previas, tales como la de 1974, y en la persistente dependencia del apoyo de donantes extranjeros que tiene el sistema educativo, el autor argumenta con este trabajo que los objetivos de la nueva reforma pueden resultar inalcanzables sobre una base sustentable. Además, sostiene que, antes que subyugar las prioridades internas de la nación al espejismo de una credibilidad y competitividad internacional, Ghana debería concentrarse en capacitar a sus estudiantes y graduados para lograr un impacto máximo en los niveles internos, nacionales y de comunidades locales.

Резюме Образовательная реформа 2007 г. в Гане: реалистичное предложение или кризис концепции? – В недавно опубликованном в Гане докладе «Образовательная реформа 2007 г.» представлена система, направленная на достижение как внутренних, так международно-ориентированных целей, проистекающих из : 1) инициативы «Образование для всех (ОДВ); (2) Конвенции о защите прав ребёнка и (3) глобальных тенденций в области образования. Вдохновлённые реализацией программ финансирования, осуществляемых иностранными донорами, как например ОВД, а также проектами по реструктуризации ганского образовательного сектора (ПОС) и созданию научных ресурсных центров (НРЦ), как образовательная реформа 2007 г., так и недавние дебаты по вопросам образовательной политики ещё раз подчёркивали необходимость сделать акцент на преподавании научных дисциплин и информационно-коммуникационных технологий с целью повышения конкурентоспособности ганских студентов и выпускников в условиях глобального рынка труда. Однако, в действительности, большая часть экономической активности Ганы сосредоточена внутри страны и не носит глобального характера. И с учётом недостаточной развитости экономики и сокращения социальных расходов по причине строгого соблюдения структурных обязательств и требований, предписанных Международным валютным фондом (МВФ) и Всемирным банком (ВБ), существуют опасения, что акцент на международной конкурентоспособности может отражать кризис самой концепции реформы. В связи с неспособностью ганского правительства реализовать заявленные ещё в 1974 г. цели в ходе предшествующих реформ, и продолжающаяся зависимость системы образования от помощи иностранных доноров, авторы отмечают, что, возможно, задачи, поставленные в ходе новых реформ, являются невыполнимыми и нежизнеспособными. Они также настаивают на том, что вместо подчинения национальных и внутренних приоритетов туманной цели международной кредитоспособности и конкурентоспособности, Гане следует сосредоточить свои усилия на содействии своим студентам и выпускникам в том, чтобы они могли приносить максимальную пользу как на национальном, так и на местном уровнях.

Introduction

Educational thinking, content and processes, like societies, are dynamic; hence the continuity of educational reform. In the last 50 years, education reform in many African countries has witnessed a significant philosophical shift from a focus on Africanisation and meeting domestic needs to a focus on matching international trends. Contributory to this outcome are the ratification of international protocols and the thirst to attract foreign aid and international investments as ways of offsetting declining economic prospects. Consequently, in many countries such as

Ghana and Uganda, recent education reform goals have been influenced by the unavoidable storm of globalisation and by the World Bank's modernist education policies around the Education for the Knowledge Economy (EKE)¹ initiatives. The application of modernist theory to education² has led to the notion of education as a driving force of global competition in which all nations should strive for universal values and ideals, including literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT), in order to ensure national economic growth and competitiveness (Olaniyan and Okemakinde 2008). This approach would make education a means to sameness or a means to eliminating other notions of the purpose of education.

Nancy C. Alexander (2001) observed that the application of this modernist education policy as enshrined in the World Bank's EKE policy has been problematic in developing countries, and education reform such as the "Continuation Schools' reform" agenda³ (prescribed by the National Liberation Council / the Busia government) and the 1974 education reform⁴), hardly ever achieved its stated goals (Government of Ghana 2007a). And when the national educational vision is influenced by outside forces and values, (such as the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and the World Bank), then there is good reason to be concerned; for the chances of achieving such goals may become complicated because of the need to meet additional demands.

Against this background, this paper discusses the issues besetting Ghana's educational system and asks whether the 2007 reform goals are achievable. It also examines the visions of the 2007 Ghana Education Reform and the World Bank's EKE policy and deliberates the appropriateness of the EKE philosophy to Ghana. Finally, it argues that developing countries such as Ghana should concentrate on using education as means of enhancing the potential of their graduates to make maximum impact at domestic and local community levels.

Setting the stage: Post-independence education in Ghana

Being the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to become independent, Ghana, propelled by the ideologies of self-determination and a new national identity,

¹ According to the World Bank website (<http://web.worldbank.org/>), "Education for the Knowledge Economy (EKE) refers to the World Bank's work with developing countries to cultivate the highly skilled, flexible human capital needed to compete in global markets – an endeavor that affects a country's entire education system".

² Modernist theory in education/as applied in the Education for Knowledge Economy (EKE) entails among other things a one-dimensional view, where educators are authoritative transmitters of knowledge to students from diverse cultural backgrounds trained in a shared language. This leads not only to cultural domination but endeavours to promote sameness across different contexts and cultures.

³ Continuation Schools, which focus on technical and vocational education, were introduced in 1968 in an effort to provide more practical training for school-leavers.

⁴ The National Liberation Council (NLC) was the government which followed the overthrow of the government under President Kwame Nkrumah in 1966 and preceded the government during Prime Minister Kofi Abrefa Busia's term of office (1969–1972). The 1974 education reform aimed to reduce average schooling from elementary to the end of secondary school by four years. It also aimed to introduce a curriculum with a large practical content so as to equip students with skills relevant to the needs of the country.

pursued a rapid expansion of primary education under the “Universal Primary Education” programme,⁵ which started in 1952. This was followed by the expansion of secondary, technical and tertiary education through the opening of several schools and two new universities (the University of Science and Technology, established in 1952, and the University of Cape Coast, established in 1962). There was also a change in educational thought.

At the core of the political and educational agenda of Ghana’s first president, Kwame Nkrumah, was an expressed identification with the post-colonial notion of ambivalence (Gandhi 1998; Loomba 2005). Ambivalence, in this context, refers to a complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterises the colonial and post-colonial relationships between the former colonisers and the colonised peoples. Western colonial power possesses potent symbolic appeal for non-western others, constituting the seemingly universal standard of human aesthetics, cultural values and social progress to which non-western others are compelled to conform “not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, but by the power of inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm” (Hall 1990, mentioned in Hooks 1992, p. 3). However, Leela Ghandi (1998) argues that in spite of this strong appeal, post-colonial nations hold both an attraction to and repulsion towards the West and it is evident that repulsive reactions/responses to western ideas and discourses are common nationalist reactions in non-western nations (Takayama and Apple 2008).

In a parallel attitude and action akin to what Richard Fox (1992) terms “affirmative orientalism”, Kwame Nkrumah redefined Africa’s position in relation to the West in his famous saying “the Black man is capable of managing his own affairs” (Nkrumah 1957). However, in actions including education, his attraction to and repulsion from the West could be seen in his retainment of some colonial school structures and a pragmatic use of collaboration with western institutions to execute national development programmes.

Riding on the euphoric wave of freedom and self-determination, the newly independent nation tried to conceptualise education as a vehicle for crystallising new national goals and visions. The attraction to and repulsion towards the West was apparent in situating the educational discourse within the framework of western cultural imperialism. And this understanding witnessed the Nkrumah government’s attempt to indigenise the curriculum through the use of Ghanaian languages and new reading materials and the later introduction of civics education by the Busia government in 1969. This anti-colonialist ideology embedded in the notion of ambivalence also crystallised into the slogan of self-reliance, and was pragmatized in the policies of import substitution and the “Operation Feed Yourself” programme by the Acheampong regime⁶ of the 1970s. Consistent with this philosophy, vocational and technical education was to be harnessed to make students/graduates

⁵ The “Universal Primary Education” programme was set up in 1952 as one of the first educational expansion programmes under the self-rule government of Kwame Nkrumah. It allowed many children to enrol in school from the early 1950s and so gave Ghana a great start in overall educational participation.

⁶ The Acheampong regime, under the military control of Lieutenant Colonel I.K. Acheampong, lasted from 1972–1978. He launched the “Operation Feed Yourself” programme promoting national self-sufficiency in food production.

employable, in order to achieve the government's vision of national redemption, reconstruction and self-sufficiency. Accordingly, the subsequent education reviews and reforms, including the Dzobo Report of 1973 (Ministry of Education 1973), which recommended a new education structure called the Junior Secondary School Concept and the New Structure and Content of Education 1974, reflected this vision. The content and outcome of education were about employability and self-reliance.

However, the point of departure from this purely domestic educational agenda began with the 1987 Education Reform Programme, which coincided with the decentralisation strategy (moving administrative decisions to local government jurisdictions) and the structural adjustment programme (increasing privatisation of health and education services etc.) linked to Ghana's acceptance of IMF/World Bank demands for economic recovery. From the mid-1980s, Ghana's education policy began to be influenced by market-oriented thinking, which was part of the IMF/World Bank demands calling for reduced public spending and cost recovery in education. These led to for example the institution of cost recovery measures across the sector and the setting up of the University Rationalisation Committee (URC)⁷ to restructure university education in terms of content and funding. Thus began the alignment of Ghana's educational policies towards the demands of international institutions.

Since the 1987 Education Reform Programme there have been a number of reforms and reviews of education in Ghana, including the University Rationalization Committee Report (Republic of Ghana 1988); the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) programme of 1996⁸ and the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFund) Act 581 (Republic of Ghana 2000).

Although these reviews and reforms have had some alignment with international trends, the most recent education reform of 2007 articulates this orientation more broadly through gearing the educational system and graduates towards international competitiveness.

Some key components of the 2007 education reform are:

1. Universal Basic Education shall now last 11 years, made up of 2 years of Kindergarten, 6 years of Primary School, and 3 years of Junior High School (JHS). At the basic level, emphasis shall be on literacy, numeracy, creative arts and problem-solving skills.
2. After Junior High School, students may choose to join different streams at Senior High School (SHS), comprising General Education and Technical, Vocational and Agricultural Training (TVAT), or enter an apprenticeship scheme with some support from the government.

⁷ The University Rationalisation Committee (URC) was set up by the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) government to formulate a policy framework for tertiary education. The final report was submitted in 1988 and formed the basis of the White Paper entitled "Reforms to the Tertiary Education System" issued in 1991. The report recommended among other items an integrated tertiary education, greater cost-effectiveness and cost-sharing for the financing of tertiary education, and greater relevance of tertiary education.

⁸ Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) was enshrined in the 1992 constitution and provided for free and compulsory basic education to all citizens. The programme was rolled out between 1996 and 2005.

3. Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) and cost-sharing at the senior high and tertiary levels shall be maintained.
4. Teacher training colleges will be upgraded (refurbishment of teaching and learning facilities including equipping some with science, mathematics and technology resources) and conditions of service of teachers will be improved, with special incentives for teachers in rural areas.
5. Greater emphasis will be put on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Science and Technology (Government of Ghana 2007a).

A critical look at these key reform goals raises some important questions: Is Ghana (which failed to meet past policy goals) positioned in any way to meet these more diverse reform goals? How achievable are the goals when the system is dependent on foreign donor support, which is on the decline? Is the vision of international competitiveness the right direction or focus? What should the education system prioritise? Answering these questions will be the focus of the rest of this paper.

The new education reform: Are the goals achievable?

Apart from what can be perceived as a potential philosophical dilemma (of whether to pursue a vision of international competitiveness or whether to focus on domestic-oriented education), the question of whether Ghana is able to achieve the stated reform goals is grounded in concerns about the chances of an effective implementation. These concerns hinge on the reality that many of Ghana's recent educational initiatives and projects emanating from new reforms, reviews and policies, such as FCUBE and the 2004 Ghana Education Sector Project (EdSeP)⁹ are heavily reliant on foreign credit donations. Further, many of these projects often fail to achieve their stated objectives (World Bank 2009a, online: para. 16) and the weak economy does not allow for allocating adequate resources to ensure that these projects deliver long-term services. Thus many problems become cumulative.

Several scholars, institutions and writers have criticised Ghana's education system, noting in particular that the existing system partly lacks critical components such as access, quality and relevance to local needs (IMF 2003; UIS 2008; World Bank 2010). These issues were targeted for improvement in the reform of 1987 and the FCUBE policy initiated in 1996. Nonetheless, the government of Ghana (2007a) and the World Bank (2010) noted that although earlier reforms had achieved some good results, the education sector was still beset with problems such as inadequate access to education, poor quality teaching and learning and weak management capacity at all levels (Government of Ghana 2007a, 2007b).

These three problem areas identified by the government of Ghana are examined in detail below to make a case for the argument that the goals of the new reform may be unachievable.

⁹ The 2004 Ghana Education Sector Project (EdSeP) was an education sector improvement project with a World Bank support of US\$ 78 million to promote equitable access to, and efficient delivery of, quality services in pre-tertiary education; as well as fostering innovation, relevance, quality and efficiency in tertiary education.

In terms of the problem of educational access, it has been reported that meeting the critical need for broad access to education in tandem with the requirements of the Education for All (EFA) policy and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs),¹⁰ is a challenge. Despite the good intentions and contribution of the FCUBE policy, many children of school-going age either fail to enrol in school, or they drop out of school for reasons of parental poverty and lack of teachers (GES 2008a, 2010).

The World Bank report on Ghana's education in 2010 showed that as a result of increased educational spending (more than 10 per cent of the GDP; World Bank 2010), many gains have been made in the education sector. However,

the education sector is under constant pressure from expectations that surpass the achievements ... Communities, parents and students have legitimate concerns with sub-standard schools, missing teachers, botched exams, lacking services ... many children are turned away from higher levels of schooling,, and many fail completing exams or finding post-basic or job opportunities (ibid., pp. i–v).

The World Bank's summary above mirrors earlier reports of clear inequalities in school access related to geography, gender and disability (Government of Ghana 2007b; GES 2008a; IMF 2003; World Bank 2004). For example, as late as 2009 there were areas in Northern Ghana where communities had no access to a local primary school and some schools were still holding their classes under trees (CARE International 2003; Kuyini and Alhassan 2009; Ghanaweb 2010, 2011a). The World Bank education report 2010 also exposes this problem, observing that geographical inequalities in the pre-tertiary system are huge barriers to access. These barriers are often associated with socioeconomic disparities and account for the fact that the poorest children are ten times more likely never to attend school than their richest peers (World Bank 2010).

Similarly, there have been and still are disparities between female and male education, and this disparity has been more pronounced in rural areas, where 41 per cent of all females have never been to school in comparison to 21 per cent of all males (IMF 2003, p. 21). In 2010, the World Bank reported that 21.2 per cent of the female population and 13.3 per cent of the male population had never received any formal education (World Bank 2010).

More importantly, there is a growing problem of access to quality secondary education. As the population of secondary school age students increases, there is need for more school places in a stable secondary school system. However, not only are there fewer places, but also policy makers are divided and confused about secondary education, including its structure and content. As a result, secondary schooling is one level of the education system that has been subjected to repeated confusion and resulted in experimentation with children's educational outcomes. This level of education has witnessed many changes in terms of curriculum and

¹⁰ The requirements of the EFA policy and the MDGs include access to basic education for all, reducing poverty, hunger, child mortality, improving maternal health and eradicating diseases such as HIV/AIDS and Malaria by 2015.

subject area combinations that should be offered (see Table 1). These changes (including the recent passing of the 2010 Education Amendment Bill, which reversed the previous government's decision to increase the number of years of senior secondary education from three years to four) have not only made it difficult for schools to get their staffing requirements right. Students progressing from primary to secondary also become confused about subject combinations which can lead to particular career pathways. Simultaneously, universities and other higher education institutions, including teacher-training colleges, have had to re-frame their training modules to incorporate the needs of students caught up in this flux. The lack of school places and the unstable structure and content are making secondary education the "weakest link" in Ghana's education system; and this hints at a muddled educational vision in Ghana.

Furthermore, the notion that access to education is much more than physical access to school buildings is manifest in the reality that other economic costs of education such as parental contribution (de Lange 2007) are limiting participation.

Table 1 Historical overview: Changes in the structure of pre-tertiary education in Ghana

| Period | Pre-tertiary education structure and processes |
|----------------------|--|
| Colonial period–1974 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pre-tertiary education structure is 6-4-7: (6-year Primary, 4-year Middle School, 7-year Secondary, including 2-year sixth form). • Total of 17 years of pre-tertiary education • Secondary School entrance examination Primary 6 and Middle School. |
| 1974–1986 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of Experimental Junior Secondary School (JSS) • The JSS runs alongside existing Middle School system. • Students completing the JSS join traditional 5-year secondary school in year 3. |
| 1987–1988 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Education Reform and • Structure of pre-tertiary Education (6-3-3): 6-year Primary, 3-year Junior Secondary School (JSS) and 3-year Senior Secondary School (SSS). • The 17 years pre-tertiary education reduced to 12 years • The University Rationalization Committee Report 1988 |
| 1991 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-year teacher training programmes replace 4-year training programmes • Entry requirement: 5-year secondary education |
| 1996 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) Policy introduced to ensure that all school-age children received free and compulsory quality primary education by 2005. |
| 1998 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of subjects to be studied for Senior Secondary School (SSS) education is reduced from seven to six subjects: • Students examined in four core subjects and minimum of two electives |
| 1999 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Secondary School students may choose to take four electives from 4–5 areas • Restriction on subject combinations relaxed, permitting elective subjects from the general arts and general science programmes. |
| 2007 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 6-3-3 Structure of pre-tertiary education changed to 2-6-3-4: consisting of 2-year Pre-School, 6-year Primary, 3-year JSS (Junior High School) and 4-year Senior High School (SHS) |
| 2010 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2-6-3-4 structure is reverted to 2-6-3-3 |

Reasonable and useful access to the curriculum by all students is also yet to be achieved. Indeed improvements in access put pressure on governmental capacity to effectively ensure quality learning outcomes (World Bank 2010). The issue of curriculum access is particularly serious in urban and semi-urban schools where class-sizes are averaging 45–55 students (GES 2008a; Kuyini and Desai 2007, 2008). In such situations the problem of poor quality teaching and learning (Government of Ghana 2007b) becomes more apparent; for not only are average students missing out, but more importantly, students with disabilities/special needs are unlikely to be catered for in any meaningful way (Kuyini and Desai 2007, 2008).

The problem of access is linked to the problem of poor quality teaching and learning, which is the second problem identified by the Ghana government. This has to do with the persistent problems around teachers' lack of adequate training, lack of teaching resources and teacher attrition, among others (Asiegbor et al. 2001; Cobbold 2006; GES 2008b; Kuyini and Desai 2008; World Bank 2010). The Ministry of Education and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Ghana have also noted the grave reality that a substantial percentage of teachers are untrained. For example up to 52 per cent of teachers in the Northern Region and over 35 per cent in the Eastern Region were untrained in 2008. These were part of a nationwide total of about 24,000 untrained teachers (GES 2008b). The World Bank wrote that the

Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) at the primary level has remained unchanged during the past decade ... Between 2001/02 and 2008/09 the number of primary teachers grew from 80,552 to 114,421. However, the portion of primary teachers who were untrained grew from 35.1 percent to 52 percent ... (World Bank 2010, p. vi).

All of these issues impinge upon the education system's capacity to sustain quality teaching and learning, and as the demand for education continues to outstrip the supply of teachers, the achievement of the reform goals becomes more remote. It is therefore evident from the foregoing that the 2007 reform goal of improving quality teaching for all students, including those with special needs, may be quite elusive for some time yet.

The third and equally important issue identified by the government of Ghana is weak leadership and management capacity in the education system. Martin Y. Zame et al. (2008) reported that leadership deficiencies were causing ineffectual use of resources to optimise student outcomes, and a lack of supervision of teachers. This has resulted in teacher absenteeism with about 57 per cent of trained/professional teachers absenting themselves from schools at least once a week in some districts (CDD 2008). The need for effective monitoring and strong leadership is critical for these reforms to have any chance of succeeding.

Since the 1990s, the government has attempted to address these issues of access, quality and leadership, which have persisted over the last two decades via a range of foreign donor initiatives. These initiatives include World Bank-funded projects such as EFA and the restructuring of the Ghana EdSeP. The latter received a World Bank credit of US\$ 78 million in March 2004 to promote equitable access to, and efficient delivery of, quality services in pre-tertiary education; as well as fostering innovation,

relevance, quality and efficiency in tertiary education (World Bank 2009b, pp. 2–4). Other donor projects include the Whole School Development (WSD) programme funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) to deliver the objectives of FCUBE in 1996; the Quality Improvements in Primary Schools (QUIPS) programme supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to support effective classroom teaching, train education managers and planners; Child School Community Progress in Education (Child-SCoPE) sponsored by UNICEF to improve children's reading, writing and numeracy skills in primary schools; Teacher Training Colleges infrastructure improvement funded under the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ)¹¹ and Science Resource Centre projects funded by other international bodies.

These initiatives since 1996 have been laudable. However, most of them are foreign-donor-funded programmes whose existence is often in jeopardy when the funds cease to flow. This reality, coupled with declining social spending between 1990 and 2002 (Foster and Norton 2002) and the government's inability to integrate the cost of integrating such programmes into national budgetary processes, as recommended by Thomas J. Bossert (1990), have brought the issues of sustainability to the fore. More recently, educational spending has increased drastically to about 10 per cent of GDP. However, increasing educational demand and cost (World Bank 2010), even with oil revenue remain part of the core issues hampering governmental capacity to meet educational goals.

The Ghana government may not have any other choice than to use donor funding until economic growth reaches levels at which the current annual budgetary supplement from the World Bank and donor partners is no longer needed and social spending can be independently sustained. Even with revenue from oil production, which began in 2010, Ghana is still heavily indebted and the IMF/World Bank require – through the annual memorandum of understanding – that public borrowing be kept to a minimum in order to maintain a healthy position that would allow Ghana to meet her debt obligations. This implies that the bulk of the oil revenue will need to be used to service Ghana's debt for some years.

Furthermore, the government has not managed to ensure that donor-funded programmes achieve all or most of the objectives; programmes are sustained beyond the initial international funding phase through the use of local funding avenues such as the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFund); and there is no effective management that consolidates the knowledge and skills gained from such projects. This is not in place because “only 59% of projects evaluated achieved their objectives” (World Bank 2009a, online: para. 16). There also appears to be a lack of management vision to ensure that these projects deliver long-term services and to avoid undoing the gains from such projects; as happened when the Ghana Education Service undertook mass transfer of District Directors of education and other staff, who had developed management capacity under the UK-funded WSD project (Akyeampong 2004, p. 25).

¹¹ The German Agency for Technical Cooperation; Deutsche Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) merged with two other organisations in 2010 and since 2011 is called the German Agency for International Cooperation: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

These issues lead to the ultimate question: "How achievable are the goals of the education reform, when the system is dependent on foreign donor support, and not being properly managed?" (World Bank 2009a).

Given these notable issues, the 2007 education reform may be caught up in the same vicious cycle of rhetoric without pragmatic action and the resources needed to back up the policy intents. It is therefore doubtful that the reform goals can be achieved within a reasonable period of time to benefit a huge youthful population.

Another important focus of the reform is to achieve the targets set in the MDGs and to ensure that Ghana becomes globally competitive. To achieve this goal, the government stated that:

Ghana, in spite of severe economic constraints, will continue to remain committed to efforts aimed at putting in place an efficient, credible and sustainable education system that will make the nation competitive in today's globalised economy which is increasingly becoming knowledge-driven (Government of Ghana 2007a, p. 3).

This aim sits firmly within the World Bank's EKE policy, which also recognises the role of ICT in education and is aligned with the recognition of the overwhelming impact of globalisation on all national economies.

The World Bank recognises education to be pivotal to development and is determined to help countries develop holistic education systems that can respond to national socioeconomic needs through the EFA and the EKE initiatives. The World Bank articulates this modernist educational vision thus:

Education is central to development ... the most powerful instrument for reducing poverty and inequality ... The Education for the Knowledge Economy (EKE) is aimed at helping developing countries equip themselves with the highly skilled and flexible human capital needed to compete effectively in today's dynamic global markets (World Bank 2009c, online: para.1)

The problem with this World Bank policy goal, which has been borrowed and/or accepted by Ghana, is that it makes a generalised assumption about the aspirations of all developing countries. Secondly, the argument that education should be used to enable developing countries' students/graduates to be skilled for the global labour market ignores the possibility that many individuals and countries may not find the participation in the global arena liberating; and that many countries may prefer or aspire to educate their citizens for good community living. In Ghana, this sits within the traditional philosophy of "living for community good" (integral to collectivist cultural aspirations), which the recent reform appears to be ignoring.

In the articulation of the EKE policy, education is presented as the "solution" to disadvantage, and the World Bank is solidarising with those who are excluded; through financial support that also requires adhering to the "principle of mutual obligations". In this sense, the World Bank assumes a position akin to the "Third Way" or social integrationist discourse on exclusion, in civil society debates. According to Jock Young (1999), the "Third Way" or social integrationist paradigm claims to be championing the ideal of social solidarity advanced by French

sociologist David Émile Durkheim, but it does not help and may not be helping those excluded from society. This is because social integrationists believe that the capitalist system is just; and problem individuals and groups “are cultural misfits rather than products of the system ... [and they] ... should be reformed by instilling in them, the values of social responsibility” (Young 1999, in Wilson 2006, p. 342). In other words, those in power assume that poor people and the powerless are a problem to the system and need to be taught how to live responsible lives through a value-creating process determined by the most powerful. It is expected that by these measures the poor and powerless would become useful to the system.

Similarly, the World Bank assumes that poor countries of the developing world must be led to develop systems, including education, like the developed world, so that they can become competitive. “It is this view of education ... that underpins both the discourse of equal opportunity ... and the conviction that education, through facilitating access to the labour market, is both equalising and liberating” (Bacchi 2009, p. 207). However, it ignores the deep structural asymmetries of power (Bacchi 2009) between nation states in the global arena, and the unique needs of each country. The World Bank and the developed nations, immersed in elitist and corporatist positions of power, are exercising their power over poor nations in subtle ways through structural adjustment programmes in developing countries, which call for trade liberalisation and export-oriented policies, cuts in government social spending and increased privatisation. And this manner of exercising power helps to maintain the status quo through enabling the “periphery of the world capitalist system to be ‘managed’ in the interest of the core countries” (Tikly 2001, p. 160, discussing Hoogvelt 1997).

In this situation, the global economic system hardly benefits the poorer countries. The inevitable outcome is the grim reality that developing countries are yet in any way to be firmly positioned to negotiate and influence the direction/flow of trade and investment; and therefore will for some time yet be unable to attain meaningful competitiveness in the global arena. Then, how realistic would it be to expect that students/graduates from developing countries would be well positioned to compete in the global labour market? And what would be the final cost of the orientation towards global labour market competitiveness to their attempts to meet unique domestic needs? Educationally, it is evident that in pursuing a global labour-market-oriented vision, there will remain issues in the dialectic relationship between the developing countries’ unique needs as cultures/peoples and the World Bank’s thesis of “meritocracy and try harder to become competitive”, which they are being asked to embrace (Young 1999).

Undoubtedly, the benefits of development cannot be disputed because the last five decades have seen spectacular improvements in health, education and access to basic amenities like water and food. However, development produces structural problems and destabilises traditional lifestyles of harmonious communities. And irrespective of the well-meaning intentions and outcomes of the World Bank’s favoured structural adjustment programmes that usually accompany economic reform measures in developing countries, the recipient populations never get completely “mended” by these programmes. Thus moving developing countries towards a formal market economy only pushes them into situations where many

citizens become uprooted from communities and become unprotected from the ravages of the modern economy.

Going by the above, it is clear that gearing educational goals towards international competitiveness may just as well leave countries and populations unprotected when they fail to attract adequate foreign investment and/or the engagement of their "skilled students/graduates" on the global market. These would then become part of the expanding population of EKE graduates, who are unlikely to secure jobs in a very competitive labour market, and also less well positioned to contribute to the increasingly neglected domestic needs of developing countries, including Ghana. The global financial crisis of 2008 clearly betrayed the problem of a global labour market. With millions of high-flying and experienced workers losing their jobs in the USA and Europe, employment opportunities for graduates from developing countries are going to diminish as preference is given to local graduates. This is happening even in an existing supply market which is yet to see the full effect of the neo-liberal EKE agenda, and other developing giants like China and India have yet to unleash their full potential onto the labour market. Undoubtedly, the graduates from smaller developing countries will become part of the large unemployed population of EKE graduates.

The alignment of Ghana's educational vision with that of the IMF and World Bank is underpinned not only by Ghana's commitment to international protocols/agreements but is also driven by her responsibilities within the framework of the IMF/World Bank-supported Economic Recovery Program (ERP) which began in the 1980s. And what is also of concern is the World Bank's idea that developing countries should rethink the role of the state; to steer away from the state as sole provider of education to one of enabler and quality assurer and try to strengthen labour market linkages. Applying this approach to educational development means commercialisation of education in these fragile economies; and one outcome is inevitable: It will only lead to the deepening of the existing inequalities, as happened when the IMF/World Bank forced the Ghana government to roll back the frontiers of welfare as part of the structural adjustment programme. The implementation of the structural adjustment programme entailed the cutback on government expenditure, especially on social spending, and the introduction of user charges for public sector services like health and education. The effect of these structural adjustment measures on education was a decline in school enrolments and educational participation among poor families and communities. For example a World Bank analysis cited by Trading Economics (2012), showed that primary school enrolments in Ghana fell from about 74 per cent in 1980 to 71 per cent between 1988 and 1991. They rose to 78 per cent in 1992 and again declined to 75 per cent in 1995/96. This period coincided with the first six years of the implementation of the IMF/World Bank structural adjustment policies.

With regard to the long-term effects on educational outcomes, such a policy aligned to EKE is more likely to result in a highly differentiated educational environment where "a top tier will benefit from a private education that will make them globally competitive; a middle tier will receive a 'good' but not 'world class' education, whilst the majority, third tier, will have a local, state education that will make them 'marginally competitive for low-skill jobs'" (Tikly 2001, p.161,

discussing Ilon 1994). This trend is becoming evident in the declining student performance at basic school certificate examinations across the country and more especially in poorer northern Ghana, where there are fewer private schools compared to the more affluent southern Ghana. For example the Tamale area in northern Ghana has for seven successive years slipped down the performance league table from a position of 60th in 2004, to 69th in 2005, 91st in 2007, 98th in 2009 down to 103rd in 2010 (GES Tamale 2011). This trend is also evident in the Volta region in southeastern Ghana, where the regional average of 38 per cent of students sat for the 2011 Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) (Ghanaweb 2011b). Nationally, over half of the candidates who took the BECE in 2011 failed to qualify for admission into Senior High Schools (SHSs) and Technical Institutes (TIs). The Co-ordinator of the Computerised Schools Selection and Placement System (CSSPS)¹² revealed that 176,128 candidates (representing 46.93 per cent of the 375,280 candidates who sat for the 2011 BECE) met the criteria for selection and placement into SHSs and Technical institutions (Ghanaweb 2011c, referring to statistics published by *The Daily Graphic*). The World Bank (2010) corroborated these findings, noting that many children fail to pass final exams and to find post-basic education or employment opportunities.

Surprisingly, the potential negative implications of this abysmal performance resonate differently with different public and private institutions. For example whereas the Ghana Education Service's Public Relations Officer said in an interview with JoyFM News that the 2011 examination results were normal and there was no cause for alarm, the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition (GNECC)¹³ said that it was a reflection of poor teaching and learning. The coalition then asked a very important question: "How many opportunities exist within the current system that we have to absorb the over 40 per cent of candidates who may not qualify to enter our normal senior high schools?" (JoyFM 2011) This question echoes and drives home more forcefully the main argument of this paper, namely that pursuing an EKE policy will leave many graduates in limbo.

It is important to acknowledge that increased global competition pressurises countries to adopt policies which will make them more competitive at the expense of policies that stabilise domestic economy and social cohesion (Castells 2004). Ghana has been pursuing such competitive policies including the adoption of a modernist educational policy, which has been found to be problematic (Alexander 2001). This is not the best philosophical approach to education for Ghana because the country is dealing with a huge domestic burden, and a focus on meeting local community needs should be the priority. As Martin Carnoy notes, "a high fraction of a nation's economic activities remain almost entirely domestic and distinctly

¹² The Computerised Schools Selection and Placement System (CSSPS) was introduced by the Ghana Education Service (GES) in 2005 to improve the selection process for placement into secondary schools.

¹³ The Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition (GNECC), according to its own website (<http://www.gnecc.org/>), "is a network of civil society organizations, professional groupings, educational/research institutions and other practitioners interested in promoting quality basic education for all. Formed in 1999, the coalition has steadily grown over the years with a current membership of about 200 organizations. Its philosophy is premised on the fact that education is a fundamental human right and key to breaking the cycle of poverty."

unglobalised” (Carnoy 2000, p. 45). This is more so in Ghana, where a large chunk of economic activity is rudimentary, and consequently the vast majority of students/graduates would still be engaged in supporting local community day-to-day activities and needs. To this end, education should be less of a means to global competitiveness and more of a means to meeting specific domestic needs and priorities. As the World Bank promotes and pushes for meeting the EFA and EKE goals, through a concentration on achieving basic literacy and numeracy, the immediate needs of communities around adequate food production, water conservation, health and environmental sustainability “must wait” until students/graduates are capable of playing their role in the global arena; then and only then will the much anticipated “abundance of manna” descend on them. The reality of educational outcomes in Ghana is that basic literacy and numeracy are not enough, and a real focus on skill and community resource development which will lead to sustaining local communities is paramount. Undoubtedly, a large number of students/graduates will remain at the lower tier of the educational outcomes scale and this cohort should have a chance of earning a decent living in the domestic and/or rural economy.

Consistent with the above, Ghana's education needs a focus on channelling educational skills training towards ameliorating these issues on a long-term basis and provide a sound footing for students/graduates to support health and sustainable community living. And unless these issues are taken into consideration in Ghana's educational vision, any reform is unlikely to have maximum bearing on long-term quality of life of the population. In light of this, the current reform is perhaps another attempt at re-organising a system that has been subjected to repeated confusion, fragmentation, ineffective execution of broad policy intents, underfunding and experimentation with the lives of children. It is also leads one to the conclusion that the reform may be nothing but a crisis of vision.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to elucidate the change in Ghana's education reform vision from a more domestic to an international orientation in the last 50 years. In examining the issues challenging the educational system, the realities of inequality in access and outcomes were highlighted, along with Ghana's heavy dependence on foreign donors to support her education system, limited government capacity to meet rising demand for education and serious problems with effective implementation. The paper then argued that the World Bank's EKE policy, which Ghana has adopted and which orients her education towards international competitiveness is short-sighted; one that subjugates national domestic priorities to a mirage of international credibility. This paper proposes that developing nations such as Ghana may need to consider alternative approaches to education in order to meet domestic needs. To this end, Ghana's education should aim to transform its students/graduates into a unifying current for redemption from hunger, disease and poverty within our local communities.

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