

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GHANAIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Introduction

“Ghana is endowed with a good education system” a statement made by BBC News monitoring Department. The History of education in Ghana dates back to 1592. Over the centuries education has had different goals, from spreading the Gospel to creating an elite group to run the colony. After Ghana gained its independence in 1957 the education system, then modelled on the British system, has undergone a series of reforms. Especially the reforms in the 1980's geared the education system away from purely academic to more in tune with the nations manpower needs. The present structure of education, which starts at the age of 6 years, consists of 6 years of primary education, 3 years of Junior Secondary School, 3 years of Senior Secondary School and 4 years University or courses at other tertiary institutions. The first 9 years form the basic education and are free and compulsory.

A brief history of Ghana's Education System

The Mercantile Era

As was the case in many colonies during the early colonial period, the main goal of education was to “Make civilization march hand-in-hand with evangelisation”. This statement gives a clear description of how education in Ghana was implemented. Initially it was the Danish, Dutch and English merchants who set up schools in their Forts (Christianborg Castle Accra – Danish, Elmina Castle – Portuguese then Dutch and Cape Coast Castle – British) to educate their mulatto children by native women. Unmistakably linked to the implementation of formal education in Ghana were the Christian Missionaries, who realized that in order to spread the word of God they needed well-educated local assistants.

John Von Richelieu, one of the Danish Governors to Ghana, approached the Basel Mission Society of Switzerland in 1828. They played an important role in establishing an education network in Ghana. Representatives of this organisation were able to convince the Chiefs of Ghana in 1832 to send their children to the Government School at Osu. Thus creating acceptance for formal education. They also concentrated on the interior of Ghana, away from the European influences on the coast.

Besides reading, writing and arithmetic, workshops were organised for students to acquire practical skills. Carpentry, masonry, blacksmithing, shoemaking and sewing for girls were taught, as well as practical agriculture and medical and health education.

One of the greatest achievements of the Basel Mission Society was the transcription of local languages (Twi, Ewe and Ga languages) to facilitate education and the spreading of the Gospel. By 1894, 62 years after their arrival in Ghana, they had established a Training College, 3 grammar schools, seven boarding schools for boys and girls and 98-day schools.

Continuing and complementing the work done by the Basel Mission Society were those she initially educated and those called to the cause of spreading the Gospel. Despite numerous pioneers succumbing to death due to the tropical diseases they encountered.

Colonial Era

In 1874 the British Government had full colonial authority of the Gold Coast colony. Already great progress had been made in the education sector. Various Mission Schools were now scattered over the interior of Ghana.

By 1881 there were 139 schools. However the education systems used varied widely. This prompted the government to draw up its first plans in the 1882 to guide the development of education. An Inspector of Schools was instated from 1887 until 1890. Then the office of the Director of Education was created.

In 1918 the first real targets for the development of education were set by Sir. Hugh Clifford:

- Primary education for every African boy and girl
- A Training College for teachers in every province
- Better salaries for teachers
- A Royal College

Ultimately the proposed targets and recommendations from several committee's such as "the Phelps-Stokes Fund" from America and the "1922 Committee" led to the opening of the Prince of Wales College in 1927. Later it became the Achimota College. It offered general secondary education as well as post secondary technical education and teachers training for both sexes. The former College is now a prestigious (secondary) school and the present University of Ghana has its roots in the Achimota College.

Great strides were made on the education front from 1922 till 1938. Several Industrial Schools were established, focusing on technical and agricultural education. A separate Department of Education was instated to bring the neglected Northern territories in tune. At the Prince of Wales College scholarships were awarded to students to continue their studies in British universities.

By 1933 an important emphasis was placed on the training of teachers by the government. Also several local languages were approved as examinable subjects for the Cambridge University School Certificate. Many different topics such as domestic science, child welfare, bookkeeping and typewriting found their way into the secondary education system.

The Second World War affected the progress of education as such that all the European inspectors, teachers etc. were mobilized for war. Consequently the first African Director of Education was appointed, Mr. V.A. Tetty.

Before Mr. Tetty Ghana had known other native education pioneers. One of Ghana's greatest scholars ever was Dr. James Kwegyir Aggrey. In 1898 he went to study in the United States on a scholarship. He obtained a string of degrees, including a B.A., a MBA and a Ph.D. On his return to the Gold Coast he was appointed Vice-Principal of the Prince of Wales College.

Dr. Aggrey campaigned with great commitment for women's education. He believed that educating a man was to educate an individual, while educating a woman had a far greater effect on family and society.

By the 1950's there were approximately 3000 primary and secondary schools in Ghana and 6.6% of the 4.2 million population was in School. The British laid a solid foundation for the formal education system in Ghana, however only a small group had access to it. The Nkrumah Government in 1952 saw education as a major instrument for national development and introduced the policy of education for all.

Post-Independent Era

The 1961 Act, (Act 87) initiated by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah was aimed at achieving Free Universal Primary Education. **The Act made Education compulsory and free.**

Section 2 (1): "Every child who has attained the school-going age (six-years) as determined by the Minister shall attend a course of instruction as laid down by the Minister in a school recognised for the purpose by the Minister"

Section 20 (2): "No fee, other than the payment for the provision of essential books or stationary or materials required by pupils for use in practical work, shall be charged in respect of tuition at a public primary, middle or special school."

The Ghanaian Education System at this point (end of the 1960's) consisted of six-years of primary education, followed by four-years of secondary education. At the end of the four years suitable students went on to do a two-year sixth form course that could lead to a three-year University course. Students who were not suitable to continue, completed two-years of pre-vocational classes.

The system was soon regarded as too long and too academic. Thus 1974 saw a reform of the system, instating the Junior Secondary School on an experimental basis. The Junior Secondary School introduced practical subjects and activities allowing students to acquire occupational skills, which after an apprenticeship lead to the qualification for self-employment.

Due to a wide range of factors such as the economic decline, bureaucracy and sheer lack of interest the JSS-system never went beyond the experimental phase. By 1983 the education system was in a state of crisis. It faced drastic reductions in Government financing, lack of educational materials, and deterioration of school structures, low enrolment levels and high dropout rates.

The Reforms of the 1980's

With the assistance of several development partners (World Bank, Department for International Development (ODA) and international grants) the education system was reviewed and proposals were implemented in 1987.

A brief summary of the objectives of the implemented actions:

- Increase access to basic education
- Shorten the pre-university education structure from 17 years to 12 years.
- Make education cost-effective
- Improve quality of education by making it more effective to socio-economic conditions

The Junior Secondary School structure was put in place on a nation wide basis. **Now 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary school were a standard 9 years of free and compulsory basic education.** The reforms saw further changes from hours spend at school to educational resources such as infrastructure of class blocks and libraries, school supplies and technical skills equipment

Although the reforms helped to solve some of the problems, the results achieved by students at the primary school level were low. The government then embarked on the BESIP/FCUBE (Basic Education Sector Improvement –or more popular- the Free Compulsory, Universal, Basic Education Program) program, which was aimed at providing every child of school-going age with good basic education.

Some of the objectives of the FCUBE program were:

- Improving the quality of learning and teaching
- Improving access to basic education facilities

The Tertiary Education sector also underwent reforms. By 1979 Ghana had 3 Universities with a number of research institutions and professional associations. The main objectives of the reforms were to improve quality, efficiency, access, equity, relevance and sustainability.

Current status of the Education system in Ghana

The present structure of education, which starts at the age of 6 years, is a 6-3-3-4 structure representing, 6 years of primary education, 3 years of Junior Secondary School, 3 years of Senior Secondary School and 4 years University course. Naturally students who successfully pass the Senior Secondary School Certificate examination can also follow courses at a Polytechnic, Teachers Training College or other tertiary institutions.

As mentioned earlier on, the first 9 years form the basic education and is free and compulsory. The basic education is designed to expose children to a wide variety of ideas and skills and install attitudes that will help them cope creatively with their environment and stimulate them to be an asset to their country.

The curriculum used in schools is work-oriented. The **Primary School level** curriculum consists of English, Ghanaian language and Culture, Mathematics, Environmental studies, Integrated Science, Religious and Moral Education and physical activities such as Music, Dance and Physical Education. The **Junior Secondary School level** makes a distinction between Agricultural and General science and incorporates subjects such as Pre- vocational Skills and Pre-technical skills. Also Social Studies and French as a 3rd language are added.

The **Senior Secondary School** curriculum has Core subjects and Elective subjects. Every student takes four core subjects: English language, Mathematics, Integrated Science (incl. Science, Agriculture and Environmental studies) and Social Studies (economics, geography, history and government). Students also choose 3 elective subjects from 5 available programmes: Agriculture Programme, General Programme (Arts or Science option), Business Programme, Vocational Programme and Technical programme.

Basic and Senior Secondary School run a 40 week school year and students are tested using an internal continuous assessment (30% of final score) and an external examination conducted by the West African Examinations Council (70% of final score).

The Future

Ghana aims to reach “the middle-income country status” by the year 2020. For this purpose she has developed a road map known as **Vision 2020**. The basic objectives of the Vision 2020 document are to: *“reduce poverty, increase employment opportunities and average incomes, and to reduce inequities in order to improve the general welfare and the material well being of all Ghanaians”*.

The Vision 2020 document contains an education policy with the objectives to *“ensure all citizens regardless of gender or social status, are functionally literate and productive at the minimum.”* It further states that in order to achieve Vision 2020, the education system must embrace science and technology as it is the technological era and countries that fail to recognise this will not be able to escape the clutches of poverty.

The education policy mainly extends to four major groups of the education system:

- a. Basic Education (FCUBE – Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education)
- b. Secondary Education
- c. Teachers Education
- d. Tertiary Education

The Vision 2020 education policy has objectives for each sector within the education system. Besides the objectives for each sector all sectors must embrace an increase in scientifically and technological education as well as making education more accessible to girls in order to obtain a gender balance.

The objectives for the Basic Education level (FCUBE) are:

- 1. Improving the quality of learning and teaching**
- 2. Improving access to basic education facilities**
- 3. Encouraging private sector participation in the provision of education facilities**
- 4. Improving management efficiency**