

Educational Reforms in the Recent Past in the Light of Functional Development – The Education Ghana Requires for Take-Off

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Abstract– The development of every country largely thrives on the quality of her human resource capital. This requires a robust and sustained quality education accessible to all. Empirical and statistical evidence suggest countries that have most of their citizens attaining satisfactory levels of education have experienced an appreciable level of economic growth and low unemployment rates. This has spiralled the need for countries to continuously reform and structure their education system to meet the changing needs of their countries. Since independence, Ghana's education system has gone through many reforms in the light of ensuring quality and equitable access to education. This among others is to ensure the country has a well-educated and trained human resource base to steer her development agenda. In spite of the many reforms the country's educational system has witnessed, there is widespread criticism that calls for curriculum restructuring. Many have argued and stressed the need for Ghana to draw inspiration from global best practices. Therefore, this study examines best practices from some of the top-ranked countries with a quality education system globally. The Singaporean, Finnish and Republic of Korea educational systems were studied as they are among the top-ranked globally. One thing worthy of notice in these educational systems is their flexibility and how they have been aligned to their national development agenda. This has played a major role in their development transformation over the years. Therefore, as part of the calls for new educational reforms in Ghana, many have proposed a curriculum change that focuses on pragmatism deviating from the highly theoretical nature of the education system. This is believed to set the country on a path of development realism that gives the country a sense of focus in the development transformation envisaged for.

Key words: Education, Reforms, Development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustained and meaningful access to education is critical to long-term improvements in productivity, the reduction of intergenerational cycles of poverty, preventive health care, the empowerment of women and reductions in inequality (Lewin, 2015). Knowledge and skills also contribute to an individual's ability to have a healthy and educated family and engage in civic life. Recent research shows that the level of skills in a workforce—as measured by performance on student assessments—predicts economic growth rates far better than do average schooling levels. A study by Hanushek & Wößmann(2010) concludes that an increase of one standard deviation in student reading and math scores is associated

with a very large increase of 2 percentage points in annual GDP per capita growth. Thus, for Ghana to develop, education is critical.

The Ghanaian education system has come under intense criticism amidst calls for curriculum change and reforms to the system. The current system is perceived to lack curriculum that promotes the development of required human capital needed to propel national development despite the many reforms undertaken in the past. These perceptions are evident from the 2015 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Global school rankings where out of 76 countries, Ghana's school system was ranked "bottom of the class" (<https://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2015/May-13th/ghana-ranks-bottom-in-latest-maths-science-survey-report.php>). Even though the Ghana Education Service has been consistent in their defence of the country's education system, there seems to be universal agreement that Ghana education system needs reforms including reforms in curriculum. This was made clear in the President's State of the Nation's Address in February 2019 when he briefed Parliament on proposed changes his government intends to make to better the education system.

Quality of students produced after school completion has been questionable. The educational system in Ghana is challenged with producing graduates who are fit for the world of work due to mismatch between the educational sector and industry, and a lack of knowledge and skills to make them employable in the current work market. Bawakyillenou et al (2013), established that there is a mismatch between tertiary education and the needs of firms. The mismatch has three major effects on the Ghanaian economy: in the labour market which is manifested in growing unemployment for young graduates without possessing job-relevant skills; the productivity effect on the part of industries, and the development effects in the form of high unemployment and dependency rate, and in increase in social vices in the economy. Also, there has been a challenge for school leavers/graduates to improve or have additional skills and competencies to enhance prospects of employability by obtaining additional professional courses such as ACCA in addition to their qualifications. Similarly, industries are compelled to spend considerable amount of resources in retraining newly recruited graduates.

II. EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN GHANA

Ghana since independence has undergone varied levels of educational reforms geared towards ensuring equal access to all, enhancing the quality of the educational system and its labour force. The first reform was in 1951 under Dr. Kwame Nkrumah - "The Accelerated Development Plan". The reform was geared towards achieving universal primary education. Then came the Educational Act of 1961, which provided legislation on the right to education and a structure on which Ghana's education was to revolve. The Act provided for 10 years of Basic Education comprising six years primary and four years of middle school.

In 1966 the National Liberation Council (NLC) cancelled all programmes and policies (including those in the education sector) established under Dr Kwame Nkrumah and set up an Education Review Committee under the chairmanship of Professor Kwapong to conduct a comprehensive overhaul of the entire educational system in Ghana. The Committee amongst others, recommended reforming and paying greater attention to the middle level of the schooling system covering secondary, technical, commercial and vocational and teacher training. The reform was considered elitist, as it was, on a selective system like the British grammar schools.

In 1974, The Dzobo Review committee introduced the concept of comprehensive junior secondary school (JSS). This concept was focused on teaching both academic and practical skills to all pupils as part of the "New Structure and Content of Education" (NSCE) which sought to reduce the length of pre-tertiary education from 17 years to 13 years. The aim of the reform was to make it possible for school leavers to leave at any point of exit from the system with skills that would enable them to be employable. The thrust of the content of the reform programme was to make pre-university education in Ghana more functional and oriented towards demands and challenges. It also constituted a bold attempt to reduce educational expenditure. Despite the laudable intentions of the NSCE, its impact on the educational system was limited due to many factors, some of which included: unqualified teachers in the education system, inadequate resources to support teaching and learning in schools, and challenges for teachers within the context and content demands of the curriculum.

By the 1980's, the educational system was near collapse with deterioration in quality, stagnation of enrolment rates and a drop of budgetary allocation to the education sector in relation to GDP (from 6.4% in 1976 to 1.7% in 1983), resulting in the mass exodus of qualified teachers to other parts of the continent. Basic education experienced a significant fall in the ratio of trained to untrained teachers.

The New Educational Reform Programme (NERP) was subsequently introduced in 1987, with a focus on the total restructuring of the entire pre-tertiary education system and on improving access through the provision of infrastructure whilst making the curriculum more relevant to social and economic needs. However, seven years after the inception of

the NERP, it was observed that the performance of pupils at aged 12 was poor, necessitating the establishment of yet another Education Review Committee to review the education system. At this time, only 6% of the pupils at grade six in public schools tested nation-wide, achieved a criterion score of 60% and above in English. Even worse less than 3% achieved a criterion score of 55% and above in Mathematics.

The Education Review Committee (Evans Anfom Committee) decided to develop and introduce new curricula for primary schools to reduce the content and ensure its relevance to the pupils' immediate environment.

In 2002, the Anamuah-Mensah Committee was inaugurated to help reform the educational system to respond to the human capital for industrial growth, preservation of cultural identity/traditional indigenous knowledge or creativity and improvements in science and technology. The reforms introduced a new educational system which did not only review the structure of the system but also extended the duration of Senior High School from three (3) years to four (4) years to ensure that teachers were able to complete the syllabus and give students adequate time to prepare for the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). Other highlights of the reforms included the inclusion of two (2) years Kindergarten into the Universal Basic Education hence making it eleven (11) years of Universal Basic Education; the review of the medium of instruction in Kindergarten and lower primary to be in Ghanaian Language; and the emphasis on Literacy, Numeracy and Creative Arts at the basic level. In 2009, the time span for the SHS was reversed from four (4) years to three (3) years. More recently, a policy was introduced in the 2017/2018 academic calendar to provide free Senior High School to all Ghanaian children so that no child would drop out. The legislation to the policy is expected to be passed soon to re-classify SHS as a part of Basic education.

It is evident numerous reforms have been made over the years to improve the educational system to support our national development aspirations. Furthermore, successive governments in Ghana since independence have placed much faith in education as a major instrument for rapid social and economic development.

III. EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Internationally there are several exemplary countries that have successful and effective education systems. For example – South Korea, Finland and Singapore. These countries differ in their approaches and systems but provide valuable lessons for Ghana to learn from especially, when consideration is given to their level of development.

The Singaporean System

The Singaporean educational structure is not entirely different to Ghana's system. However, there is an apparent difference in terms of curriculum arrangement. Education spending usually makes up about 20 percent of the annual national

budget. Singapore offers many different schools for all age groups and academic abilities, from primary up to college. There are different paths which lead to a university degree or a job. However, the first steps into the education system in Singapore usually start with preschool. Singaporean children attend preschool up to the age of six, getting prepared for primary school.

After six years of primary school, children move on to secondary school. The education system in Singapore allows students to choose a path at this point. They can decide whether they wish to attend a normal secondary school, a specialized school, an express school - which leads to the "O" Level in four years rather than the regular five years - or another school (such as a privately funded one), which offers a similar education. Post-secondary education usually takes between one and three years and offers a choice of schools, including junior colleges, polytechnics, and institutes of technical education.

The Specialised Independent Schools offer specialised education with different focuses. There are currently four specialised schools in Singapore.

1. *NUS High School of Mathematics and Science* focuses on Mathematics, Science, Technology and Engineering;
2. *School of Science and Technology, Singapore*, focuses on applied learning in Science, Technology, Aesthetics, Engineering and Mathematics;
3. *School of the Arts, Singapore*, focuses on Visual, Literary and Performing Arts; and
4. *Singapore Sports Schools*, focuses on Sports and Athletics.

The Finland System

The Finland education system is structured into;

1. Day Care: Age 2/3 – 7,
2. Pre-School: Age 6-7
3. Primary School: Age 7-13,
4. Lower Secondary: Age 13-16
5. Secondary Education
6. High School: Age 16-18
7. Tertiary Education

The main objective of Finnish education policy is to offer all citizens equal opportunities to receive education. The structure of the education system reflects these principles. The system is highly permeable, that is, there are no difficulties preventing progression to higher levels of education. The focus in education is on learning rather than testing. There are no national tests for pupils in basic education in Finland. Instead, teachers are responsible for assessment in their respective subjects based on the objectives included in the curriculum. The only national examination, the matriculation examination, is held at the end of general upper secondary education. Commonly admission to higher education is based on the results in the matriculation examination and entrance

tests.

Governance has been based on the principle of decentralisation since the early 1990s. Education providers are responsible for practical teaching arrangements as well as the effectiveness and quality of the education provided. Local authorities also determine how much autonomy is passed on to schools. For example, budget management, acquisitions and recruitment are often the responsibility of the schools.

Universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS) enjoy extensive autonomy. The operations of both UAS and universities are built on the freedom of education and research. They organise their own administration, decide on student admission and design the contents of degree programmes.

The Korean Education System

The Korean public education structure is divided into three parts: six years of primary school, followed by three years of middle school and then three years of high school. The curriculum is standardized so that students study technology and domestic science.

The primary curriculum consists of nine principal subjects: moral education, Korean language, social studies, mathematics, science, physical education, music, fine arts, and practical arts. English-language instruction now begins in the third grade, so that children can start learning English in a relaxed atmosphere through conversational exchange, rather than through rote learning of grammatical rules as is still the practice in many middle and high schools. The major objectives, as stated in a 1996 background report by the Ministry of Education, are "to improve basic abilities, skills and attitudes; to develop language ability and civic morality needed to live in society; to increase the spirit of cooperation; to foster basic arithmetic skills and scientific observation skills; and to promote the understanding of healthy life and the harmonious development of body and mind." The seventh annual curriculum, which began implementation in March 2000, kept these basic goals but updated many elements to reflect changes in Korean society.

Upon completion of primary school, students advance to middle school, which comprises grades seven through nine. The curriculum consists of 12 basic or required subjects, electives, and extracurricular activities. While elementary school instructors teach all subjects, middle school teachers, like their colleagues in the United States, are content specialists.

High schools are divided into academic and vocational schools. In 1995, some 62 percent of students were enrolled in academic high schools and 38 percent in vocational high schools. A small number attended specialized high schools concentrating in science, the arts, foreign languages, and other specialized fields. This is still the case.

The aims of education at the high school level are stated as "to foster each student's personality and ability needed to preserve

and strengthen the backbone of the nation; to develop students' knowledge and skills to prepare them for jobs needed in society; to promote each student's autonomy, emotional development, and critical thinking abilities to be brought to bear in and out of school; and to improve physical strength and foster a sound mind."

IV. EDUCATIONAL STATISTICS

Access

An analysis of enrolment numbers indicates that at all levels, increases have been recorded over the period 2002 to 2016. The increase in enrolment indicate a 43 percent increase in pre-school, while over the same period, primary and JHS indicate 58 percent and 54 percent increases respectively. Enrolment numbers also continue to grow for both the secondary (including TVET) and tertiary level. GER at all pre-tertiary level continue to be high while NER continue to be low, thus affecting the ability of the country to achieve universal primary education. Gender parity continued to be achieved at the basic level, however at the secondary and tertiary levels much remained to be achieved.

Quality and Performance

Despite the continued improvement in access, the quality of the educational system and related performance continued to be an issue. At the pre-JHS level, an assessment of the performance of learners using the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA), Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGMA) and National Education Assessment (NEA) tests indicate a horrific situation. The conduct of EGRA and EGMA reveals the learning gaps at the foundational levels of Primary Education, especially in English and Mathematics. The first and second of assessments, held in 2013 and 2015 indicated that only two percent of learners in P2 could read with proficiency in English and most learners were unable to read in their local languages. Similarly, in Mathematics, most P2 learners lacked the foundational skills for understanding the concepts in Mathematics. This was generally attributed to the poor methodology in the teaching of Reading and Mathematics. The NEA which assesses the performance of P4 and P6 in Mathematics and English confirmed the situation in P2. The 2016 NEA revealed that performance was noticeably lower for mathematics than for English, with only 22 percent of P4 pupils and 25 percent of P6 pupils achieving proficiency in mathematics compared to 37 percent of P4 pupils and 38 percent of P6 pupils achieving proficiency in English. Even more worrying is the observation that less than half of pupils in both P4 and P6 achieved minimum competency in both English and mathematics. The analysis reaffirms the general concern about the quality of teaching and learning of mathematics and English in basic schools.

An assessment of examination performance at both JHS and SHS level show varied results. While in 2016, 76% of students that sat for the Basic Education Certificate Exams (BECE) obtained passes in all the four core subjects, only 24.7% of students that sat for the West Africa Senior School

Certificate Examination (WASSCE) obtained passes in six subjects, including the core subjects (Math, English, Science, and Social Studies). The distribution of pass rates in the four core subject for WASSCE shows that Social Studies had the highest pass rate of 54.7 percent, followed by English (52.9%), and Integrated Science (48.9%), whilst the pass rate for Mathematics was significantly low at 33.6 percent.

The Pupil-to-trained teacher ratio (PTTR) has continued to improve over the period 2008 to 2017 for all pre-tertiary levels. At the KG level, the ratio decreased from 1:117 in 2008 to 1:63 in 2017; Primary from 1:59 to 1:43; JHS from 1:24 to 1:16; and SHS from 1:26 in 2008 to 1:24.4 in 2017 (EMIS, 2018). Despite the improvements, disparities exist between rural and urban areas as well as on regional basis.

V. EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Education is fundamental to development and growth. Lessons from history in the development of countries have shown that education is central to the achievement of economic growth. South Korea evolved from an aid recipient agrarian economy to an industrialized economy using education as the central plank of their strategy. During early post-independence, Ghana's GDP was fairly comparable to that of South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore. As at 1980, Ghana's GDP per capita was \$412 whilst South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore were \$1,711, \$1,900 and \$5,004 respectively. Four decades later, the situation is even worse as Ghana trails with a GDP per capita of \$265, behind South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia that have increased significantly to \$11,947, \$23,793 and \$4,287 respectively. This can be attributable to the decisive decision to shift from primary/agro-product dependency to secondary products such as manufacturing, industrial, and labour/skills (mostly knowledge-based). These countries have consistently invested significantly in education from primary to tertiary level, with special emphasis on vocational/technical education. Such commitments clearly paid off as the results show, with Ghana currently being a lower-middle income country (2015) having a per capita income of \$1,364 and Malaysia being an upper-middle income (\$9,360) and South Korea (\$27,663) and Singapore (\$52,961) being high-income countries. Holding all other possible influencing factors constant, a positive relationship between investment in education and economic growth of these countries can be observed. Although all the countries understudied in this section spent less than 10% of their GDP on education, expenditure on education per capita differed. Whilst Ghana spent \$24 per capita on education in 2001, South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia were spending \$439, \$766, and \$309 respectively (ibid). A decade later, the corresponding expenditure of these countries were \$108 (Ghana); \$1,125 (South Korea); \$1,628 (Singapore) and \$673 (Malaysia).

According to a global monitoring report, "The Education for All" (EFA, 2012), a contributing factor to the slow progress in education and corresponding sluggish economic growth in Ghana, is because of inadequate investment in education

and/or linking economic planning with skills development policies in Ghana. Although significant education and economic reforms have been made over the years in Ghana, these may not have been linked well enough for socioeconomic advancement that could place the country amongst the highly developed, or to a lesser extent, Ghana's contemporaries at independence.

VI. CONCLUSION

Economists and other researchers have accumulated a large amount of evidence that education increases workers' productivity and thus increases their incomes, which in turn leads to decreases in poverty. There are also many non-monetary benefits of education, such as improved health status and reduced crime (Lochner, 2011). At the country level, there is also a large amount of evidence that education increases the rate of economic growth (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2015). These analyses all highlight the value of improving Ghana's educational system and for that matter, Ghana's human capital. The much-needed educational reforms will be critical for needed investments in skills and human capital development of Ghanaians.

In the era of Ghana Beyond Aid, it is essential that the reforms in the education sector are targeted at improving foundational literacy, functional competencies and ethos for the workplace. In addition, the reform should seek to build a new Ghanaian that believes in our potential to develop; citizenry that responds to their civic responsibilities including the payment of taxes; Ghanaian that is well rounded in both the social and physical sciences; Ghanaian that know their culture and history; Ghanaian with skills that makes them competitive globally; Ghanaian who believes in themselves and belief in the improbable; and a Ghanaian who believes in the future of Ghana.

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APPENDICES

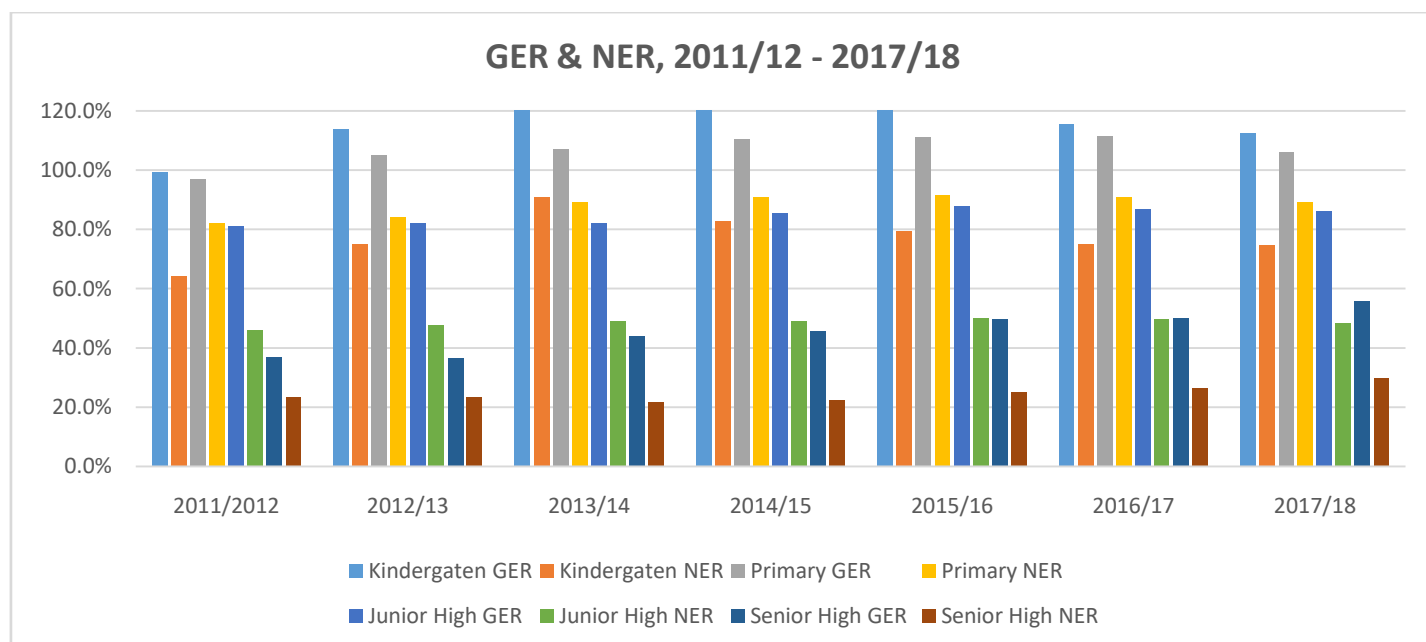


Figure 1. Enrolment Rates in Kindergarten to Senior High School

Source: EMIS Data 2018/Education Sector Performance Report, 2018

Table 1: Gender Parity Index, 2011/12 to 2016/17

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Kindergarten	0.98	1.03	1.01	1.04	1.01	1.0	1.0
Primary	0.97	0.99	0.99	1.00	1.01	1.01	1.0
Junior High	0.94	0.93	0.95	0.96	0.97	0.98	1.0
Senior High	0.87	0.86	0.91	0.91	0.94	0.96	0.92

Source: EMIS Data 2018/Education Sector Performance Report, 2018

Table 2: Trends in National Education Assessment, 2005-2016

Year	PRIMARY 3						PRIMARY 6					
	ENGLISH			MATHS			ENGLISH			MATHS		
	Below M-C*	M-C	Profi.	Below M-C	M-C	Profi.	Below M-C	M-C	Profi.	Below M-C	M-C	Profi.
2005	49.4	34.2	16.4	52.8	28.6	18.6	36.1	40.3	23.6	52.8	37.4	9.8
2007	49.8	35.2	15.0	57.4	28.0	14.6	30.3	43.6	26.1	53.8	35.4	10.8
2009	42.4	37.6	20.0	38.8	36.0	25.2	23.1	41.3	35.6	38.1	48.1	13.8
2011	33.7	42.1	24.2	47.4	34.4	18.2	21.1	43.6	35.3	43.1	40.8	16.1
2013	41.9	29.7	28.4	42.9	35.0	22.1	31.3	29.8	39.0	39.2	50.0	10.9
2016*	29.3	33.5	37.2	45.2	32.8	22.0	29.2	45.9	24.9	28.4	33.7	37.9

Below M-C = Below Minimum Competency; M-C = Minimum Competency; Profi. = Proficiency

2016*: Primary 4 pupils were assessed as compared to P3 in previous years.

Source: MOE, Education Sector Performance Report, 2017