

Schooling and Education in Ghana: Research Conversations

Samuel Amponsah
University of Ghana, Ghana

Lydia Kyei-Blankson
Illinois State University, USA

Ghana, a former British colony, known as the Gold Coast, is located in West Africa, south of the Sahara. With a current population estimation of 30 million and a functional adult literacy rate of 79% (Macrotrends, 2021; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] Institute for Statistics, 2020), eradicating illiteracy and dealing with issues affecting schooling and education in this country has always been at the forefront of academic dialogue and governmental policies.

Educational reform in Ghana can be traced to the Education Act of 1961, which yielded free universal and compulsory education (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). The government of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the president of the First Republic post-colonial rule, established this Act with the intent to increase enrollment and attendance, specifically at the elementary school level, and train teachers to cater to the growing number of school children. According to Sefa Dei and Opini (2007), the reform's central motivation was to decolonize Ghana's citizenry and make the nation's workforce more resourceful after the country gained independence from the British in 1957. Since then, Ghana has witnessed other major education reforms with the continued attempt to strengthen its human capital.

Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown in 1966 through a coup d'état, and the turbulence that followed in the political landscape could be correlated to the happenings in the educational landscape. The country experienced several successive coup d'états that consistently weakened the education system. It was not until after 21 years, and during the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) military government, that challenges in the education system were stabilized through the Evans Anfom Education Review Committee's constitution and eventually resulted in the promulgation of the Education Act of 1987. The principal focus was on the Whole School Development Program (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). The key métiers of this policy were the reduced duration for schooling, access to education for children of diverse geo-socio-political backgrounds, and a focus on adult learning needs for the first time (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016, Sefa Dei & Opini, 2007). Following this was the launching of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE) program by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in 1996 to make primary education compulsory and accessible for all Ghanaian children by 2005 (Nudzor, 2014).

By all accounts, the period between 1987 and 2000 is marked as a time when Ghana, as a nation, went through significant educational reform with full participation in global agreements and conventions. It was during this period that Ghana's MOE set "strategic objectives" to accomplish the following: 1. improve access to and participation in basic education, 2. Improve quality of teaching and learning, 3. improve management efficiency of the education sector, and 4. decentralize and cause the sustainability of the management structures, including the sector's budget for pre-tertiary education (Nudzor, 2014). The last education reform launched in 2007 was preceded by the establishment of a presidential committee on education led by Professor Josephus Anamuah-Mensah (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2016). Comparable to Nkrumah's era, this policy also focused on human capital development to drive Ghana's industrialization agenda, improve science education, and promote cultural identity through indigenous knowledge. Notable achievements of this policy were the revision of the pre-tertiary curriculum, the American senior high school nomenclature's adoption that shifted the existing senior secondary school education from three to four years, and the incorporation of two years of kindergarten into the Ghanaian educational system.

With these changes, the education system, which comprises basic education, secondary education, and tertiary education, now takes about 20 years to complete through graduate education. Basic education totals 11 years and includes two years of kindergarten, six years of primary education, and

three years of Junior High School (JHS) (Aheto-Tsegah, 2011). Educational reforms have allowed Ghana to boast of an enrollment rate of over 95% at this stage (Darvas & Balwanz, 2014). Upon completing JHS, students take the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) to enter the senior secondary school cycle for three years. Another option for students at this phase is Vocational and Technical education or post-basic skills development programs such as the National Apprenticeship program (Aheto-Tsegah, 2011). After three years of SHS, students again sit for another entrance examination, the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), and this time for admission into tertiary education.

The development of Ghana's tertiary education began with the implementation of recommendations made through the Asquith and Elliot commissions in 1943 per the British government's appointment (Daniel, 1997). These recommendations led to the establishment of the University College of the Gold Coast in 1948, which later became known as the University College of Ghana, and later was renamed the University of Ghana in 1961 after Ghana gained independence from the British (Effah & Senadza, 2008). The University of Ghana serves as the oldest and most top-quality higher education institution in the country. Other notable public institutions are the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, which opened in 1952, and the University of Cape Coast established in 1962. Later, a September 1987 education reform program led to the categorization of all post-secondary education under the umbrella of tertiary education (Daniel, 1997). Tertiary education in Ghana is now in the form of two to three-year polytechnics for specialized studies, teacher training colleges, or three to four-year college/university bachelor's degree programs, and graduate education (Aheto-Tsegah, 2011; Goode, 2017). Many other public institutions and private colleges and universities were later established and accredited through the National Accreditation Board with an increased demand for higher education due to the explosion in the population over the years (Yusif, Yussof, & Osman, 2013). Even with this expansion, tertiary education institutions in the country continued to be plagued with challenges that included limited access and participation. According to Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah (2013), "access has not been broadened to include all social groups. Available data suggest unequal participation among women, minorities, individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and spatial-based disparities" (p. 1). These challenges make the need for having more conversations crucial to understand the latent factors that underlie schooling and education in Ghana.

Besides the aforementioned major educational reforms, the Ghanaian educational landscape has seen other significant changes, including the

establishment of a new elementary curriculum in 2019, aimed to cultivate essential 21st-century skills like critical thinking and creativity among learners. Rapid technological development changes have also caused an explosion in knowledge as well as the incorporation of technology in education and the development of online and blended/hybrid education. With these changes, one would not be wrong to postulate the possibility of further educational reform in the near or distant future.

While Ghana has seen significant improvement in its education system with these reforms, evidence from past research indicates that the nation still has more work to do. Ghana is still bedeviled with poverty, gender inequality, and low education levels. A most recent World Bank Report's findings noted that without continued efforts, around 56% of Ghana's human capital could go to waste due to the low quality of education in the country (The World Bank, 2018).

To circumvent this and other challenges, adopting the United Nations (UN) 2030 agenda becomes a must for Ghana. Specifically, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) needs to be prioritized to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (The SDGs in Ghana, 2017). In fact, there is a need to achieve all ten of the UN SDG 4 targets to break all glass ceilings in the education system. In a bid to achieve the above, strong leadership is essential to inspire and challenge the formulation and implementation of policies to ensure equitable and quality education for all Ghanaians (Volckmann, 2012).

This special issue themed *Schooling and Education in Ghana: Research Conversations* helps give voice to this objective by necessitating and providing opportunities to encourage discussion and sharing and exchanging ideas by Ghanaian educational researchers, policy-making experts, and practitioners. This publication offers extensive analysis and documentation of empirical, theoretical, and practical research and critical reviews of Ghana's education system. The topics covered in the manuscripts included in this work are social justice, equity, assessment, management, community inclusion, curricula revision and pedagogical shifts, teaching and learning via alternative modalities, career choice, and human resource performance and development at the different levels of education. Most importantly, this edition presents recommendations for the advancement of schooling and education in Ghana.

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SAMUEL AMPONSAH is a Senior Lecturer with a demonstrated history of working at all levels of education in Ghana and South Africa. He is the Acting Head of the University of Ghana's Distance Education Department. He holds a Doctor of Education degree from the University of South Africa. Before joining the University of Ghana, Amponsah lectured at Esayidi TVET in South Africa and headed the Farming Management Department. Samuel's

areas of research interest are education, online learning, and adult learning. He is a fellow of the Global Challenges Research Fund and currently on a departmental project investigating the learning needs of Ghanaian adult learners. Samuel is also a Co-PI for two international projects on education funded by GCRF and the British Council. Email: SAMponsah@ug.edu.gh.

LYDIA KYEI-BLANKSON is a Professor in the Educational Administration and Foundations (EAF) Department at Illinois State University. Her expertise is in research methods, applied statistics, and psychometrics. Her teaching assignment includes graduate research methods and statistics courses. Also, she serves as Senior Research Fellow at NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising Center for Research at Kansas State University (KSU). Dr. Kyei-Blankson's research agenda focuses on the scholarship of teaching and learning, online education, and the implications of effective technology integration in teaching and learning at the K-20 level. Her research has been published in various educational journals and books. She has *co-edited eight books and* serves on the editorial board of many journals. Email: lkyeibl@ilstu.edu.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We appreciate the following reviewers for providing critical feedback on the first drafts of the manuscripts included in this special issue:

Ama Oforiwa Aduonum, Illinois State University
Joachim Jack Agamba, Nevada State College
Francis Atuahene, West Chester University
Isaac Abeku Blankson, Ghana Technology University College
Joseph Blankson, Ohio Northern University
Kwasi Boateng, University of Arkansas, Medical School, Little Rock
Godwin Dogbey, Campbell University
James Dogbey, Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi
Alex Kumi-Yeboah, State University-New York-Albany
Wisdom Mensah, University of West Florida
Ephraim Nikoi, University of Wisconsin-Superior
Anthony Owusu Ansah, Albany State University