

# **The dysfunctional and discriminatory nature of our educational system (Part 1)**

No one denies the significant contribution of education in the development of individuals, societies, and nations. Even if we do not experience this fact in our own lives and societies, we do see them happening in other people's lives and in some part of the world. Since the earlier centuries, we have seen that the love and practice of education have led to the development of the western developed countries and most of the emerging ones, especially in Asia and to some extent Southern America. Education has been evolving since the medieval period, through the enlightenment era, the industrial revolution, till this day of technology. All the nations that have succeeded in making progress in their economies have, as its philosophy, the upholding of education in national development. Those of us in the developing countries understand the growing importance of education in national development, but sadly we do not see the need for changing course.

We understand that education is the tool that will enable us to overcome the shackles of poverty, and also deliver us from slavery (economic and political). It is pathetic that after so many centuries, we have decided not to grow; and have thus accepted the slave mentality. We have not done anything so serious enough to ensure that our education system and practices ensure that we find solutions to the myriad of problems confronting us as a people. We have refused to understand and accept the fact that our education system has been discriminatory and dysfunctional. It has never worked, and if concrete steps are not taken to address the ills in our education system and practices, we will still be lagging even in this 21st century and beyond.

We should not deceive ourselves in believing that our education system has worked. If it has, where is the evidence? Nothing to show, folks! Maybe the evidence is the insults that we throw at people who dissent from our views; and this practice if not aborted will never let us see the light of day. Even in the United States of America and some developed countries in Europe such as Germany—countries where effective educational systems and practices have been the hub of their cosmic progress, both the government and civil society (especially educators and parents) are bemoaning the falling standards of education in those countries. After the second half of the 20th century, psychologists such as B. F. Skinner (Read beyond freedom and dignity, Skinner 1971) have been calling for the enhancement of education in America. And what we do in Ghana is sadly the politicization of every observation, even if it is meant for the good of the country.

If I should ask you the source of our educational stagnation or retrogression, I could guess your response—the government—and I agree with you 99%. Our governments have not done much to provide a workable education system that provides quality education to all pupils in the country. What they have succeeded in doing is to provide us with a system which is skewed towards only those pupils who are living in the cities and towns; which also excludes the poor. The probability of a child born into a village or living in a village becoming a failure or underachiever in the country is very high. That is the reason why I keep saying that it is a curse to be born into a village in the country, and in most developing countries. I have taught in the village before and thus know the plight of those chaps who receive their education there. Most of them, even at the junior high school, cannot read and write. Why? It is because they do not receive quality education at the preschool and primary level of education. I would explain why our education system has been discriminatory and dysfunctional.

Let us kick start with discrimination. So what is happening is that as a nation we are not fully utilizing the potentials of all the citizenry. The brilliant child born at Mile 18, Sudantia, Aduntia, Odumto, Hyia Y3 Ya, all hamlets in the Amansie East district, where I once taught would continue to be on the farms of their parents, or at best learn a trade, whilst the nation would be losing out on their abilities as a result of our discriminatory educational system. Most of our presidents and ministers of state could have been the brilliant chaps in our villages and those from poor homes, who as a result of the messy system we have been practicing over the years have been reduced to petty trading and occupations which do not reflect their natural abilities. That is the sad reality; instead of our leaders working assiduously to improve our system, what they know best is to play politics about the duration of schooling, whilst at the same time send their children to the best schools in town or abroad. And we sit down and allow this evil to go on. Our education system has been discriminatory to the point that most children, especially those situated in the rural areas and from poor homes are in most cases left behind.

Apart from the discriminatory component of our educational system, one other problem that needs mentioning is our approach in getting the best from the system. By this, I am talking about the dysfunctional aspect of our educational system. We seem to forget that in order for us to get the best from our school system; we have to take a look at the developmental paradigm in educating our kids. We have over the years neglected elementary education, especially preschool and kindergarten (Thank God the current system has this as a priority). Our educators and governments easily forget that the survival of any worthy system is the foundation. Get a very formidable foundation, and you can be guaranteed with continuity and progress. When kids are not properly trained or taught at the preschool level, they struggle with their education for the rest of their lives. We can be assured that a child who cannot read before grade 1 or at grade 1 will struggle to hold their own at school as compared with those who can, unless they are provided with interventions.

That is why I find the call by president Mills to invest in the youth as a necessary, but not sufficient condition to provide us with the educational interventions that we need to transform our economy and the country. If the moneys meant to be used to invest in the youth are used on children, especially from preschool till primary 4, we would end up making significant gains, and also save several millions of hard cash which would have otherwise been used on the youth.

Yes, it is good to invest in the youth, but much better before they get to adolescence. You just visit any preschool or kindergarten in the country, especially the government ones (and those in the villages); and you would discover that we are our own failures. At that level, you will not see any seriousness or motivation on the part of the teachers (the reasons are obvious). Yet, that is the beginning of the child's future. Any child that starts school is faced with one of two options: success or failure. Under the right environment, and with the best conditions, we can be sure of getting the best from the child. The second part which contains some suggestions for improvement follows shortly. God bless Ghana!!

## **The dysfunctional and discriminatory nature of our educational system (Part 2)**

The failure of our governments, educators, and policy makers to realize that our educational system has been dysfunctional and discriminatory will continue to result in the production of students who cannot contribute to the transformation of the country. The foundation of our education has been very weak since the last four decades. In Germany, since the turn of the century, their education system has been under attack, and they are doing the best they can through studies, debates, discussions (not insults), etc. to ferret out how they can address the problem. The falling standard of education in Germany compelled the Chancellor of the republic—Angela Merkel to summon all the state governors (Minister Presidents) in 2008 (August, if my memory serves me right; you can even refer to *The Economist* 2008) to discuss how they can improve kindergarten education in the country. They know that the “action” should be at the base and not the apex. To them the bottom up approach in improving education standards is the best option.

And how can we arrive at a situation where we would be able to reap the benefits of a functional educational system? Sincerely, most of the interventions that we have to put in place in achieving a functional system are obvious. We have been talking about them over the years, but the non surprising fact is that the improvement of the standards of education in the country has never been a top priority of our governments. Their priority has been to amass as much wealth as possible in order to get their children the best education outside the shores of the country or the best private schools in the country. If they admit that there is a problem with the system, then they should have programs to fix it. Instead of taking the bull by the horn in arresting the situation, what they tell us repeatedly is that the financial outlay needed in solving our dysfunctional and discriminatory education system is so huge, and yet we see them continuously living in affluence. Discussed below are some of the remedies that in my opinion are needed in solving the problems of discrimination and malfunctioning of our education system.

First, we need to employ a comprehensive approach in ensuring that all Ghanaian school going children receive quality education, thus reducing the disparity in educational provision. Till when will the acute shortage of teachers in the rural areas be solved? How do we solve the problem of teachers declining postings to rural areas? I am always happy and proud that when I was posted to Mile 18 to teach at the junior secondary school in that remote village in 1995, I did not decline. I remember one woman after she realized that I was from Kumasi during my interface with her said to me “I know that you will not come back when you go back”. I gave her my word that I would be back, and I was there to help the poor kids who also deserve the best. How do we ensure that children from poor families are giving a “push” so that by the time they start formal schooling, they will not be at a disadvantage as compared to those children from rich homes? Answers to these questions mean that we are nearing the solution of the problem of discrimination in our school system.

In the United States of America, there are several programs that are aimed at children from poor homes and those from poor neighborhoods to assist them so that they will not be left far behind. These programs are aimed at preparing these disadvantaged children in the communities to be developmentally ready before they start grade 1. If some of these interventions (especially compensatory education and early intervention programs) are adopted, we would reduce drastically the situation in our country where junior high school

students, especially those in the rural areas cannot read and write. Compensatory education are programs that are designed to prevent or remediate learning problems among students from lower socioeconomic status communities, whilst early intervention programs target at-risk infants and toddlers to prevent possible later need for remediation. Whereas compensatory education programs are meant to provide services to children after they have fallen behind, early intervention programs are meant to prevent children from falling behind in the first place.

In the village where I taught, I remember the pupils had been taught by an unqualified teacher, and this is no joke that the English word for “k3k33” is “plantain red”. Would you imagine if your kids were the victims? This is the state of our brothers and sisters living in the hinterlands, and I do not think we should allow this injustice to continue. So friends, join me in telling our President, Professor Mills that these disadvantaged kids also want to be presidents and ministers one day. Probably, some of them might hold the key to our economic emancipation!

Second, the dysfunctional aspect of our educational system could be solved if we begin to appreciate and understand that the real “dose” needed to promote educational effectiveness in the country, is not at the junior and senior high school level, not even at the universities; but rather at the preschool and kindergarten. If our governments, together with all the various stake holders in the education arena would invest more at that level of education, we would not only produce excellent students, but also creative and productive ones. The practice where we assign the preschool and kindergarten education to unqualified teachers should be stopped since it is a contributory factor to the inability of our educational system to churn out literates who are capable of bringing changes in our country.

Is it not weird that we have scientists in the country, who cannot create anything? Is it not ridiculous that in spite of the fact that we all learn the same theories and principles as those from the developed world, and even some parts of Asia, we are not able to break ground? And yet still, we continue to do the same things over and over again. The titles we do have are not the solutions, the solutions are the right knowledge we acquire from a functional educational system. At the company I work for—VoiceCash GmbH (a financial institution) in Munich, until recently, I was the first and only PhD holder there, but I can attest to the creativity and intelligence of most of my colleagues, at least those in my department. The reason is that they have profited from a functional and non-discriminatory educational system.

It is true, and I agree that money is needed to enable us to invest in infrastructure, pay teachers living wages, among others; I also think that although we have the money (though are misappropriated via corruption), it is not all about money. It is about doing the right things by identifying our priorities. I do not think that before the enlightenment that begun in some countries in Europe in the 17th century and the industrial revolution in the 18th century in Britain, these countries were rich. Nope, I do not think so. The right approach and practice of education inculcated in the people at that time effective ways of thinking (Reasoning) and learning that enable them to improve upon their environments. And when they acquired the knowledge, they got the money which has helped them to reach heights in the world and still searching for new ways of breaking grounds.

In winding up, I think we can make it as a country; I believe we are not created to be dependent on others. Because as long as you are dependent on others, not only do you lose dignity and respect; but also you would not see the need and significance of freedom and

independence. We do not grow when we are dependent, but do so when we are free. The question then is: why are we not growing even though we have been emancipated from colonial rule since 1957? The answer is simple; we are not mentally free due to our defective educational system and practices. If you think I am wrong, I will not take you far; just look at most of the comments to articles on this platform and others—insults, and only insults. God bless Ghana!!

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