

“WHAT SAYS THE STUDENT?”: A VIEW OF THE GHANAIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM THROUGH THE LENS OF TERTIARY STUDENTS

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Summary. Without a doubt, students are some of the most important stakeholders in Ghana’s formal educational system. After all, many facets of the academic structure are designed with students’ interests in mind to ensure that they are being provided with quality training and education. It is therefore of utmost importance that the experiences of students in each stage of the educational structure are rightly recorded for evaluation that would in turn inform augmentation where necessary. The University of Ghana was used as the research location in this study, with its students as participants. Data was collected through a qualitative method: phone interviews with 50 students. The findings of this study confirmed that Ghanaian University students’ experiences of education mostly occurred in and revolved around the formal classroom setting. The study also revealed a myriad of challenges that students encounter in the Ghanaian educational system, among which are both personal and structural challenges that hinder effective teaching and learning. For the purpose of policy making and the implementation of changes in the educational system, some recommendations are made and their implications on the practice of social work in Ghana are highlighted.

Keywords: education, Ghanaian student, educational system, Ghana, experiences, challenges.

Introduction

Education can be described as a structural method laid down to help an individual (child or adult) gain knowledge, skills, experience and a sound way of acting. There are three main types of education: formal education, informal education and non-formal education. Formal education usually occurs under predetermined conditions in the classroom or school; informal learning or education refers to the type of education that occurs independent of the classroom, that is at home or anywhere else, under more spontaneous conditions; and non-formal education refers to a planned form of learning that occurs outside the classroom, such as community or organization-based training.¹ The focus of this paper is on formal education at the tertiary level. In precolonial Ghana (as in many parts of Africa), training and learning were informal and non-formal practices, where knowledge was transmitted orally or through apprenticeships. This was backed by a strong socio-cultural milieu which ensured active participation in life. However, with the arrival of European merchants and Christian missionaries, the formal education system followed, which introduced reading, writing and arithmetic.² Then, the main purpose was to produce educated local people to work as storekeepers and clerks in commerce, industry, and government. Through these people, the roots of the country's formal educational system were planted. By the time Ghana gained independence in 1957, that educational system had greatly developed and was considered one of the best in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).³ Since then, the Ghanaian educational system has undergone numerous modifications, each an attempt to improve the quality, relevance and

1 Dib, C. Z., "Formal, non-formal and informal education: concepts/applicability", in *AIP conference proceedings*, American Institute of Physics Vol. 173, No. 1 (1988): 300-315.

2 Debrunner, H., *A History of Christianity in Ghana* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967). McWilliams, H. O. A. and Kwamena-Poh, M. A., *The Development of Education in Ghana* (London: Longman, 1975).

3 K. Acheampong, "Revisiting Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) in Ghana", *Comparative Education* 45(2) (2009): 175-195.

structures of the training being delivered. In the current educational structure, a child starts at the Basic School Level, which starts from Primary one to six, from age 6 to 12, and then continues with Junior High School from age 12 to 15. From this level, students then proceed to Senior High School for 3 years, then to the tertiary level for 2 to 4 years⁴. The secondary and tertiary levels offer vocational and technical education, training and job apprenticeship, and teacher training.⁵ The significance of formal education cannot be overstated. This is because education equips individuals with useful skills such as writing, good and sound communication skills, and employability skills which they make use of throughout their lifetime.⁶ Education also provides individuals with opportunities to study or learn about diverse things, which include how other cultures survive, and implement various ideas for the development of their societies. Being a very powerful agent, education promotes social and economic development by improving the health and wellbeing of individuals.⁷ This, in turn, contributes to social stability and improvements in the livelihood of individuals around the world.⁸ Parankimalil also attests to this fact through his assertion that education over the years has played significant roles in the development of every country, most especially in the development of its human resources.⁹ It is therefore no wonder that the advancement of formal education has been a priority for every successive government of Ghana.

The student plays a critical role in the educational system of any country, and

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- 4 Samuel Adu-Gyamfi et al. “Educational Reforms in Ghana: Past and Present”, *Journal of Education and Human Development* 5(3) (2016): 158-172.
 - 5 Adu-Agyem, J., and Osei-Poku, P., “Quality Education in Ghana: The Way Forward”, *International Journal of Innovative Research and Development*, 1(9) (2012).
 - 6 *Benefits of Education* (Retrieved from Education Encyclopedia - State University, 2020).
 - 7 *Benefits of Education* (Retrieved from Global Partnership for Education, (2020). <https://www.globalpartnership.org/benefits-of-education>).
 - 8 Abdulghani Al-Shuaibi, “The Importance of Education”, (2014). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/260075970_The_Importance_of_Education.
 - 9 Parankimalil, J. *Meaning, Nature and Aims of Education* (Retrieved from John Parakimalil, 2012, March 26). <https://johnparankimalil.wordpress.com/2012/03/26/meaning-nature-and-aims-of-education/>.

the same applies to the Ghanaian educational system. The ability and mindset of a student should therefore be of utmost concern to Ghana, and their issues should be properly addressed. An extensive evaluation of the existing literature attests to the fact that some significant research has been conducted into the experiences of students across various stages of the Ghanaian education systems. Admittedly, this research has produced mixed results, with some reporting positive findings and others reporting negative findings.

For instance, in his evaluative research into students' experiences concerning the teaching of Mathematics in Junior High Schools, Ampadu concluded that with respect to teaching techniques, students were highly appreciative of their teachers' use of both the teacher-centered approach (because it gave them access to adequate explanations of theories and prevented them from making mistakes) and the student-centered approach (because it enabled them to compare and discuss new ideas with their colleagues).¹⁰ An exploratory study conducted by Hanson and Asante also revealed that students of the University of Education in Winneba, Ghana, in particular regarded the introduction of a new hybrid approach to teaching and learning (which included online learning) in a positive light.¹¹ These participants indicated that the new hybrid approach helped them to learn better and increased their access to learning materials. In these and other instances, the experiences of students in the Ghanaian educational system were positive and encouraging.

On the other hand, Abubakari determined in an analytical study that many students from rural areas and deprived communities have similar experiences, such as frequent teacher absenteeism and difficulty in accessing their schools due

10 E. Ampadu, "Students' Perceptions of their Teachers' Teaching of Mathematics: The Case of Ghana", *International online Journal of Educational sciences* 4(2) (2012).

11 Hanson, R., and Asante, J. N., "An exploration of experiences in using the hybrid MOODLE approach in the delivery and learning situations at the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana", *Journal of Education and Practice* 5(12) (2014): 18-23.

to bad roads.¹² Gender dynamics have shown that female students have to live up to cultural expectations such as early marriages and the roles expected of them as females in Ghanaian society. However, in a study by Abubakari in 2018, it was revealed that among all of these, students persevere with the help of families and kinsmen (especially in cases where parents cannot afford their education) and their hopes for the future, helping them to strive hard for academic success.¹³ Students also attest to the fact that teachers in their respective schools are not adequately motivated. This is evident in a study conducted by Agbofa at the University of Cape Coast.¹⁴ The findings of this study revealed that around seventy percent (70%) of students expressed that their tutors were not motivated enough. All of the tutors confirmed this and explained that the University and Government do not adequately motivate them.

Students in Ghana, most especially slow learners and students who are not able to keep up with their peers, struggle to reach educational successes. They are victimized by their peers who mock them, whilst others refuse to associate with them. They face severe punishments from their teachers for not participating in in-class activities or not getting things right in class. There is minimal support from the family in times like these, leaving students to feel out of place and not wanted.¹⁵ This explains how the educational system does not accommodate students with learning disabilities and how all students are treated the same. This can largely be blamed on the large number of students crammed in classrooms, with very few teachers to teach them. Hence, particular attention is not paid to each student's needs to help the tutor understand the difficulties some students

12 Z. Abubakari, ““Not Giving Up”: Ghanaian Students’ Perspectives on Resilience, Risk, and Academic Achievement”, *Sage Journals*, (2018): 1-13.

13 *Ibid.*

14 F. K. Agbofa, *Challenges and Prospects Facing Students of Distance Education in Ghanaian Public Universities: The Case of University of Cape Coast Study Center* (Cape Coast, 2012).

15 Okyere, C., Aldersey, H. M., and Lysaght, R., “The experiences of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities in inclusive schools in Accra, Ghana”, *African Journal of Disability* (2019): 1-11.

face in assimilating what is being taught.

There is also the issue of an overloaded curriculum, mostly at the Basic School level and in the Senior High Schools. Students have to deal with a very broad and loaded curriculum within a very short period before taking exams.¹⁶ In the final exam for both the Basic School and the Senior High School (SHS), students are to commit to memory all they have learned for the past 9 years and 3 years, respectively, since exam questions span all these years of learning. Students then face the challenge of having inadequate time to learn the loaded curriculum, which also puts pressure on their tutors, since most teachers rush through the syllabus to finish within the allocated time and also prepare the students for the final year exams. The results of this review are a strong indication that the experiences of many students in the country are less than encouraging. Though there are reports of some positive feedback, they tend to be overshadowed by negative experiences. This indicates the need for more analysis and evaluation where students' experiences are concerned in order to ascertain whether this is indeed the real situation. More importantly, further analysis and evaluation would inform the creation of solutions to reported problems and suggestions for the improvement of systems that are already working.

For the quality of education that Ghana strives for, and to assist students to contribute their quota to the development of the country, it is of utmost importance to understand the views of students on the educational structure, including their experiences and challenges. Knowing the importance of education to the development of the country makes it essential for all stakeholders (such as government agencies, non-governmental organizations, students and teachers) to make a joint effort to ensure that exceptional educational tenets are implemented, and that higher rates of academic successes are achieved. To attain these and

16 P. H. Armah, *Overview and challenges of Ghana's educational system: How to fix it* (2017, September 15). Retrieved from academia.edu: https://www.academia.edu/34610399/overview_and_challenges_of_ghana_s_education_system_how_to_fix_it.

other goals, it is of utmost importance to ascertain students' experiences in the Ghanaian educational system. This will help understand what they face or go through as students and what needs to be worked on or improved upon in the formal educational system. Hence, this study examines the perspective of Ghanaian students on the educational system. Further, the impact of this study will inform policymakers and other stakeholders as to how best to solve our educational challenges.

1. Method

Research design

A qualitative approach was used to explore the quality of Ghana's educational system, the challenges being faced, and the way forward from the perspective of students. Specifically, the use of virtual interviews with a qualitative design was adopted. A phenomenological approach was also adopted to gain the participants' perspectives and to provide deeper insights into their thoughts.¹⁷ Thus, this approach helped the researcher gain a clearer understanding of the lived experiences of the participants.

Sampling technique

The sampling scheme adopted for the research was probability and non-probability sampling, under which stratified sampling was used. Stratified random sampling is defined as “a process in which a population is divided into subgroups and a predetermined portion of the sample is randomly drawn from each subgroup”.¹⁸ Thus, in this study, the division of the population into subgroups was based on the college system at the University of Ghana, including the various schools and departments under them. This provided a fair representative

17 M.Ibrahim, *Types of Qualitative Research* (2016, March 27). Retrieved from ResearchGate: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/299532851_Types_of_Qualitative_Research.

18 Panacek, E. A., and Thompson, C. B., “Sampling Methods: Selecting Your Subjects”, *Air Medical Journal* (2007): 75-78.

sample of the university and students' way of thinking according to what they study. This approach was also used as a means to ensure that the students who were chosen for the study were those who had actually gone through the normal Ghanaian educational system, which is from creche, to kindergarten, to primary school then through junior and senior high school and then into university. This was important since not all students in the university might have gone through this system of education; some were home schooled; others may not have been schooled in the country until the tertiary level; and some are foreign students only on exchange programs at the university.

Sample size

Fifty students were selected from the University of Ghana to participate in the research, out of which 14 were selected for the in-depth interviews and 36 for focus group discussions. There was an equal selection of both male and female participants for the study as per the University of Ghana's fair representation of both males and females.

Three students were selected from each of the four colleges, while two participants were selected from the city campus for the in-depth interview. Then, nine participants were selected for the focus group discussion from each of the four colleges, taking into consideration the various schools and departments within each college. This ensured that there would not be two or more participants from the same school or department.

Data collection and analysis

The primary data was the main source of data for the study, and was collected in the field among University of Ghana students. A semi-structured interview guide was used for data collection. The interview guide consisted of the demographics of participants, students' assessments of the educational structure, their experiences, challenges that properly addressed the needs and concerns of the students, and their suggested ways of improving the educational system. In

accordance with COVID-19 guidelines, the interviews were conducted via phone in hour-long calls. However, all ethical guidelines governing the conduct of research were observed. The data for the study was then analyzed based on the themes under which the findings of the study were organized.

2. Results

Six major organizing themes revolving around the subject emerged. This study aimed to examine students' experiences in Ghana's educational system. These organizing themes are: the pace of teaching in class; effective teacher/lecturer evaluation; identification of strengths and weaknesses; life as a Ghanaian student; the best part of the school; and the welcoming environment in the school.

2.1. Pace of teaching in class

Absorption rates differ per individual and based on the media used in giving information. The majority of the participants were of the opinion that the pace of studying in Ghana was neither too fast nor too slow, thus being acceptable.

One participant attributed this to the kind of teachers one encountered – some taught at a good pace, others at a slower pace:

“I have encountered teachers who are really fast in their teaching and don't mind if the students understand what they are teaching. But I have also encountered teachers who will take their time and don't care whether they finish with the syllabus or not. They mostly care about the understanding of the students. So, it depends on the individual teacher or lecturer” (Enoch – participant 38).

Several participants stated that studies in Ghanaian schools are conducted at a rapid pace as a result of teachers being in a rush to complete the syllabus in a short period of time, to the detriment of the students:

“I think our educational system teaches us to learn or grasp a whole lot of things within a short period of time. And I think it is not helpful. Because for my nursing

school for example, if you take the course outline, you will see that this topic has to be treated for the first week but you could realize that the first week, they will treat a topic that is supposed to be treated in the third week or the fourth week. So, we use the first week to treat all the topics. They expect you to learn everything within that time frame because they want us to finish early so that we will have time and have some clinical experiences from the wards too. So, I don't think it helps" (Christiana – participant 30).

2.2. Teacher/Lecturer evaluation

Participants mentioned that teacher evaluations were rarely done at the elementary, Junior High, and Senior High School levels, but were more common at the university level, where evaluations for lecturers were conducted at the end of every semester. Meanwhile, at this level, their opinions and responses were rarely taken into account. Some participants stated that they had not seen any results or changes as a result of their complaints:

"To be honest, I don't really see any changes because it is the same lecturers and the same mode of teaching that is rendered every year. So, we ask ourselves, is something really done about it, is it just done for them to put it down. I think something could be done about it because I don't really see any change" (Eric – participant 24).

In some cases, students had no idea whether or not their evaluations were taken into account because they took place at the end of the academic semester and they mostly had new lecturers teaching them the following semesters. Thus, they may never have the opportunity to be taught by these lecturers again:

"I don't know if the responses are being acted upon because I am evaluating a lecturer who teaches me this semester. Another semester, another lecturer altogether comes to teach me so I don't get the opportunity to assess the lecturer again. And I remember a lecturer who taught me in level 100 and has never taught me again and so if I conduct evaluation on him in level 100, I will never be given the opportunity

again to assess him in another level so I will not be able to tell if something has changed” (Ernestina – participant 41).

Participants’ comments were not all negative; some, though few, mentioned that they had the opportunity to be taught again by some lecturers and that they had noticed some improvements after evaluations:

“Some lecturers come to throw the papers on us and walk away without explaining to us so on the evaluation, in reporting the lecturer, I had to report the situation and the next semester she came and she was teaching, it was better; she did not come to just dump the stuff on us and walk away. She told us when she was available and when you go in there at that time, you will see her there assisting students so it was quite effective” (Mary – participant 21).

“Because I had instances where my lectures have evaluators come around to evaluate them and also discuss with the students so I know that our concerns are taken into consideration” (Brenda– participant 39).

2.3. Identifying strengths and weaknesses of students in the educational system

The concept of being empowered through education was explored. Participants were somewhat unsure whether education had helped them identify their strengths and weaknesses or provided an avenue for them to work on their strengths and weaknesses. A large number of participants responded in the affirmative and mentioned how education had built them up for both academia and corporate work as well as to face the real world:

“So, strengths and weaknesses, University of Ghana like this helps you in public speaking because we do a lot of presentations and I think it is the same for JHS; those times when you want to stand for a prefect position, you will have to write a manifesto and be able to speak out, convince people to vote for you. So, with that it helps you with public speaking” (Emefa – participant 10).

“I am not a mathematics person so due to the training that I have received, I

was able to discover that I am not a mathematics person but rather arts. So, I saw that my strength is in the arts and my weakness is in the mathematics and science aspects” (Martin – participant 7).

“We are providing them with knowledge, we are also trying to instill discipline in them, we are doing our best to teach them emotional intelligence and how to live with people, we are also teaching them survival skills” (Martin – participant 7).

Some participants, however, mentioned that education had not helped them to identify their strengths and weaknesses. They explained that some of the teachers do not help students to identify their strengths and weaknesses. These teachers do not care much about the students:

“Every teacher has his method of teaching students and for some, their focus is only on delivering the lesson and going their way. They don’t seek to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the students and find ways of helping to strengthen and then building upon them” (Sandra – participant 41).

2.4. Life as a Ghanaian student

The perspective of participants was also sought on how life has been for them under the Ghanaian educational system. The majority of the participants believed that education in Ghana is stressful and challenging due to inadequacies in academic mentorship, parental apathy, and the lack of systems to ensure students’ personal wellbeing. A few others expressed their discontent with the rigid and smothering nature of the academic calendar:

“Life as a Ghanaian student is quite tough because you have to be more for yourself, you have a few to rely on to prepare for examinations. When you are in school, you will decide on being like this or that and you will learn and pass your exams but things like mentorship that will prepare you adequately to be who you want to be are not there. It is all about learning what’s in the syllabus and going your way. Sometimes, you don’t even get assistance with the challenges that befall you. The

second point is, you have parents who don't care much about your wellbeing as a student because they feel it is your duty to study so whatever means you will use to study, they don't care about it” (Ernestina – participant 41).

“It is mostly difficult because as I was saying, if the things in the system were more flexible, we wouldn't find it too hard. There's always work to do and sometimes being a student, you don't even have time to breathe. You are just bombarded with too much to do and before you realize, time has already passed without doing or achieving anything. So, it is not always easy, it is hard” (Portia – participant 42).

Others, on the other hand, expressed satisfaction with the Ghanaian educational system, preferring it to those in place outside the country:

“I think it is not too stressful. I think it is just about learning what you have been asked to learn and producing it at the end of an academic semester or term and that is all. There is not too much to learn. You just have to reproduce what the lecturers are teaching and try your best to pass the evaluation” (Grace – participant 5).

“It is interesting, maybe for the course I read but it was interesting. It was interesting because we have to share each and everyone's opinion on things and I realized that we always have to agree on a particular root and you have to go to places and get to know people better. And in the long run, we developed ourselves and our country. So that is it for me” (Mary – participant 21).

2.5. The best part about school

Feedback from participants not only concerned the negative experiences of schooling in Ghana, but also how it had impacted their lives positively. The majority of the participants discussed how the educational system had exposed them to a lot of opportunities which had really assisted and exposed them to many things that they doubt they would have received otherwise:

“You are exposed to a lot of things like teachings on our cultural heritage which is really interesting so I think so far, that's what has interested me as a student” (Eric

– participant 4).

“So, the opportunities you get at the university are one of the best. It is one thing that is really nice about the university. The opportunities there are one of the best parts of the education system. For example, I had the opportunity to go for peer counselling classes, seminars and programs that sincerely speaking, if I were on my own, I would never have gotten it” (Gerald – participant 1).

“The same SHS has afforded people the opportunity to be able to socialize, meet people, establish real bonds and contacts, identify their challenges and potential opportunities. So that is all. I will say that it’s the SHS that has groomed me more than the university” (Ekow – participant 16).

Other participants mentioned how they had established both professional and informal connections during their educational journey which will go a long way to helping them in the future:

“You meet a lot of people and diverse cultures and you will learn a lot from people with different cultures and you are equipped with knowledge which is the basic thing. That is what I learnt from attending school in Ghana” (Emefa – participant 10).

“Within that free environment, you get to meet a lot of people and know more people and establish connections. It is a wonderful experience” (Anas – participant 2).

“One of the greatest things about them is the networking and exposure and I have lots of them from senior high school and the university. Maybe more exposure at the university” (Fidel – participant 33).

A warm and affable environment goes a long way to determining effective teaching and learning in school. Almost all participants agreed that they always felt welcome in school. Both their colleagues and teachers contributed to creating a welcoming atmosphere in school:

“I don’t know but I just feel like anytime I go to school, everyone is willing to pour out their hearts and teach you and even if they are not, it is about how you receive it.

You don't let people's behavior bring you down, you just have to focus on what you have come to do” (Enoch – participant 38).

“In the class, everyone is free; the lecturer is free with everyone and you are able to ask him any questions and there is no discrimination too. Everybody sees everyone as a sister” (Joyce – participant 13).

“Well, for one, my lecturers are accommodating and welcoming and they made us see the need to talk to them if we have any problem or anything. And well, my class is like a family sort of, where you can find comfort” (Akua – participant 15).

A few others had different opinions and expressed how the school environments they experienced were not welcoming:

“When I was in basic school, I didn't feel that was my place, because some of the teachers are really wicked, like very wicked because, I remember we had a math teacher and then, he had a problem with a student and he extended the problem to us, like he was really treating us badly, you couldn't ask any questions when he came to class” (Gyamaa – participant 22).

“It is only when you are unable to pay your fees and the head teacher is chasing you or harassing you or in instances where you are unable to provide for yourself educational material and you are asked not to ask anyone in the examination, that is when you don't feel welcome” (Nana K. – participant 9).

This indicates that, while some of the students had positive feedback regarding the manner of teaching, there was some negative feedback that shows the other face of this phenomenon to fully illustrate university life in Ghana.

Figure 1 indicates the basic and sub themes for each organizing theme.

3. Discussion of findings

Many students kept falling behind in class due to the fast-paced nature of delivery in their various classrooms and subjects. It was noted that a lot of pressure was mounted on them to understand everything that was being taught in class,

and in most instances it appeared their teachers did not have any sense of empathy because they moved on to teach other topics, thereby increasing the workload on them. For others, they simply replicated exactly what was being presented to them without having a proper understanding of what was taught. For them, their parents and teachers were only interested in seeing that they scored the highest grades, and they felt obligated to ensure that they produced results without necessarily worrying themselves with understanding and the implications it would have in their future lives.

In addition, most students are unable to grasp what they are being taught in class because it is overly theoretical, with no form practical backing to provide some form of support. What makes this worrying according to the majority of participants is the mode of delivery – they accused teachers of being in a hurry to complete the curriculum, as such not putting much effort into ensuring that students understood what they were being taught and that all students were benefiting equally.

These are reiterated in the findings of Armah, where he describes the educational curriculum as being fragmented and overloaded.¹⁹

Research by Eunita et al. explains how each country has its own planning and development procedure for curricula²⁰ that is either decentralized or centrally designed. The curriculum is centrally managed in some nations, like Burkina Faso, Ghana, France, and Zimbabwe, while it is decentralized in other nations, including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. This is evident in this research, where, from the perspective of teachers, the curriculum is packed, yet the time available for execution is very limited. In addition to this, teachers have been denied the rights to set questions for the final exams of their students. Now, because the examining body sets the questions based on the available curriculum, they try their best to complete the syllabus out of goodwill so that their students are able to attempt every question they are presented with and move on to the next level. As much as they would like to promote an equal understanding amongst students and subjects, this hinders the completion of the curriculum and the progress of students. From all indications, our educational system and its delivery is mainly concerned with completing the educational curriculum than developing the minds and personalities of individual students in the classroom. This is similar to the findings of Eunita et al., stating how under a system that is centrally planned instructors are simply given the mandate to implement curricula that they were not involved in creating.²¹

On the other hand, the evaluation of teachers is an activity that is not being performed or promoted in our schools. Teacher evaluations are not common in the basic school, Junior High School or Senior High School. Most students get

19 P. H. Armah, *Overview and challenges of Ghana's educational system: How to fix it* (2017, September 15). Retrieved from academia.edu: https://www.academia.edu/34610399/overview_and_challenges_of_ghana_s_education_system_how_to_fix_it,

20 Eunita, V., Chindedza, W., Makaye, J. and Mapetere, K., "Centrally designed curricula in developing educational contexts: Challenges and possibilities", *Standard Journal of Education and Essay* 1(3) (2013): 40–44.

21 *Ibid.*

the chance to evaluate their lecturers at the university level, although there are hardly any changes after their evaluation. This is not good, since evaluations are a platform for students' voices to be heard, and they often felt ignored. Alarming, these evaluations took place at the end of the semester when lectures for the semester had come to a close; hence, if there was a problem it had already been endured and would be of no use since most students had different lecturers the next semester. Students are not being given a chance to assess the services of the teachers that teach them. Moreover, even in advanced learning institutions where the opportunity to assess teachers is given, the outcome of such assessments remains unknown to students, since there is no feedback given to respective students. Because these evaluations are conducted at the end of the semester, students receive no opportunity to determine if changes have indeed been made. The cycle, however, continues, since there are no proper checks; no one is made accountable for the poor delivery of services. Bemile et al. also reported similar findings in their research on “Course and Lecturer Evaluation by Students at Higher Institutions: Review and Challenges (The Case of Methodist University College Ghana)”. Their study further reveals that, although not exclusively, there is a direct correlation between the standard of teaching and the standard of student learning.²² Hence, there is a need to assess lecturer-taught courses in order to boost teacher responsibility and enhance educational outcomes for students.

Life as a Ghanaian student is not a fairy tale – it is characterized by difficulties and different levels of stress. This can be blamed on the structure of the educational system, which is not so flexible, along with the lack of amenities, materials and the various challenges students face. All of these make life as a Ghanaian student very hectic and tough. However, in some instances, others experience some level of comfort with some interesting experiences. This indicates that there

22 Bemile, R. K., Jackson, O. A., and Ofori, J. B., “Course and Lecturer Evaluation by Students at Higher Institutions: Review and Challenges (The Case of Methodist University College Ghana)”, *OpenScience Repository Computer and Information Sciences, Online(open-access)* (2014): 1-13.

is also a benefit to having to attend school in Ghana, and there are many positive outcomes that come along with this, such as the establishment of connections, making lifelong friendships and exposure to many opportunities as a student.

The educational system does not just impart knowledge, but also helps in the identification of strengths and weaknesses. The educational system can be commended for helping students identify their strengths, building upon them, and identifying where their weaknesses are. Amongst all of these observations, it is clear that our schools provide avenues to grow and to make meaningful connections and build lifelong friendships, as well as to expose students to numerous opportunities.

4. Recommendations

The government needs to prioritize practicality over theory-based teaching or add skill-building modules to the curriculum. With this, the entire curriculum needs to be amended and positioned to be futuristic, providing syllabi and equipping teachers to teach students significant skills that are needed for the future and not things that are considered archaic in comparison with other countries. Also, the government must cover private schools in the free SHS policy and give them an avenue to provide free education to Ghanaian children. In order for free education to be accessible to all children, more schools need to be built and more trained teachers need to be hired, so as to reduce the numbers in classrooms. This would give teachers ample time to deliver and to ensure that each student's needs are met.

There should be an introduction of training for teachers in other areas like counseling, mentorship and other skills and methods that are essential in meeting the varying demands amongst students. This will be much more conclusive and in depth when research is prioritized and becomes the bedrock for development, decision making as well as policy making.

4.1. Implications for social work practice

In Ghana, there are social workers whose primary responsibility is to assist students going through problematic events in school. They are called school social workers. Social workers play a critical role in the educational system in Ghana. The psychological and social wellbeing of students is supported by these school social workers. The duties of the school social worker include engaging students, parents, and teachers, counseling pupils on personal and psychological issues, as well as addressing pertinent school topics such as teen pregnancy, illegal drug use, and social adjustment problems. The school social worker may deal with pupils individually, in groups, or in sessions that are held for the entire school.

As counselors, social workers can help with the various psychological and emotional stresses that the student faces. Students deal with various emotional stresses that come about due to academic work and troubles with student-lecturer or student-student relationships, which can affect their state of mental health. Hence, they can provide coping strategies for the student through counseling, assist them with some forms of classroom problems and provide a safe environment for the student amidst all the challenges that they might face.

School social workers can also serve as educators and equip staff in schools, especially the teaching staff, on the need to better understand circumstances that can hinder the academic progress of a student. This can be done by the social worker through training programs for teaching staff on how best to support a student to achieve higher academic success. A student can easily become distracted from their academic life or fail as a student as a result of many issues such as economic challenges, family problems or health issues. A well-informed teacher who understands the factors that can affect a student and make them perform poorly will be in a better position to assist the student in getting back on track.

The government alone cannot solve all of the problems confronting the

educational system, mostly in terms of the provision of amenities and educational equipment and materials. The social worker can liaise with various communities and help obtain resources from the community to meet some of these needs. The social worker can also serve as an advocate here in seeking support for community services, such as the community coming together to build more educational facilities to respond to the needs of students.

With the skills and expert knowledge the social worker possesses they can provide consultations on educational policies and help bring up policies that are in the best interests of the student. These policies can address students' needs effectively without further challenges evolving from them. One step further, social workers as policy analysts can assist in the better implementation of more educational programs (such as improved methods of teaching) that address each child's needs.

Conclusion

The Ghanaian educational system has granted educators the privilege of structuring the educational system, putting the onus on students to navigate it in order to succeed. If the system exists for the sake of their education, it must be beneficial to the majority. This study has revealed a plethora of challenges that students face in the Ghanaian educational system, and while these include both personal and structural challenges that impede effective teaching and learning, we must not make the mistake of choosing one over the other, as both factors work in tandem in students' pursuit of knowledge. More so, for the realization of the potential of students, there has to be not just structural and systemic changes but also effective communication and collaboration between professionals working in the educational sector in Ghana. Social workers in Ghana play vital roles in helping students achieve learning through balanced social, psychological and emotional health. Students also owe it to themselves to utilize the methods made

available to them in the teaching and learning process, and their views, challenges, and experience ought to form the basis for their education.

„KĄ SAKO STUDENTAS?": GANOS ŠVIETIMO SISTEMOS ĮVERTINIMAS REMIANTIS AUKŠTŲJŲ MOKYKLŲ STUDENTŲ NUOMONE

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Santrauka. Teigtina, kad studentai yra viena iš svarbiausių Ganos formaliosios švietimo sistemos suinteresuotųjų šalių. Atsižvelgtina į tai, kad daug akademinės struktūros aspektų yra sukurti atsižvelgiant į studentų interesus siekiant užtikrinti, kad jiems būtų suteiktas kokybiškas mokymas ir išsilavinimas. Todėl labai svarbu, kad kiekviename ugdymo struktūros etape būtų teisingai užfiksuota mokinių patirtis, kuri padėtų vertinti ir tobulinti reikiamas sritis. Tyrimo vieta pasirinktas Ganos universitetas, o jo studentai tapo tyrimo dalyviais. Duomenys buvo renkami kokybiniu metodu, telefonu iš 50 studentų. Šio tyrimo išvados patvirtino, kad Ganos universiteto studentų mokymosi patirtis dažniausiai susijusi su formalia grupe. Tyrimas taip pat atskleidė daug iššūkių, su kuriais susiduria studentai Ganos švietimo sistemoje. Tarp jų yra ir asmeninių, ir struktūrinių iššūkių, trukdančių efektyviam mokymui ir mokymuisi. Politikos formavimo ir švietimo sistemos pokyčių įgyvendinimo tikslais buvo pateiktos kai kurios rekomendacijos ir pasekmės socialinio darbo praktikai Ganoje.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: švietimas, Ganos studentas, švietimo sistema, Gana, patirtis, iššūkiai.

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