

**EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND
ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION
IN GHANA**

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ABSTRACT

It is estimated that only about 0.8% of Ghanaian children of relevant age groups are able to have access to University Education in Ghana. From all indications the trend will continue and may worsen if effective measures are not put in place to address some basic problems affecting access to Higher Education in Ghana. This paper examines opportunities and access to Higher Education in Ghana.

KEY WORDS

*Constitution
Syllabus
Infrastructure
Orphanage
Undergraduate
Commitment*

INTRODUCTION

Following the recommendations of the University Rationalisation Committee set up by the Ministry of Education in 1986, and approved by government, Tertiary Education in Ghana comprises the Universities and the University Colleges, Polytechnics and the Regional Colleges of Applied Arts, Science and Technology (RECAAST).

The RECAAST are yet to be established. The Polytechnics however, are currently in the process of assuming the status of Tertiary Institution. In the light of this, emphasis in this paper will be on University Education. The issue of equal opportunity and access to higher Education in Ghana shall be examined critically in the light of the prevailing realities. In doing so, education at both the Basic and General levels in the public and the private systems shall be looked at. This will enhance a clearer understanding of the situation at the level of Higher Education.

**FREE, COMPULSORY AND UNIVERSAL
BASIC EDUCATION**

Higher Education begins from basic Education, and for anybody to dream of pursuing Higher Education in Ghana, Basic Education and General Education together, should be the means to that end. If there should be equal opportunity and access to Higher Education, then the principle should start from the level of Basic Education. Where there is unequal opportunity and access to Basic and General Education, there cannot be equal opportunity and access to Higher Education in any meaningful way.

Present and past governments in Ghana have, at different times, attempted in diverse ways to ensure that education is made available to those who need it. But their efforts have not been enough to achieve the desired goals because of many factors, significant among them being economic constraints. Before Ghana's attainment of independence in 1957, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, under the 1951 constitution, had introduced the Accelerated Development Plan for Education to ensure rapid development of education at all levels. A free-tuition elementary education for children between the ages of 6 and 12 was introduced.

The government of the First Republic of Ghana set the tone with the 1961 Education Act which sought to establish free and compulsory Primary and Middle School education for all children of school-going age. According to Antwi (1994) as a result of such bold action, the number of pupils enrolled in Primary and Middle Schools doubled between 1961 and 1966. Within the same period, the number of students in Secondary Schools doubled. That of Training Colleges tripled and Technical Institutes quadrupled. The number of undergraduates in the country's three universities tripled. (1) Since then, various governments in Ghana have attempted, with varying degree of success, to provide facilities and opportunities for Basic Education for all children.



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In 1987 the PNDC government implemented a New Education Reform Programme which created a new structure of education comprising:

- (a) Basic Education, made up of Primary and Junior Secondary Schools;
- (b) General Education, made up of Senior Secondary, Technical, Vocational, Business, Commercial and Agricultural Institutions and
- (c) Tertiary Institutions, made up of the Universities, Polytechnics, and the Regional Colleges of Applied Arts, Science and Technology (RECAAST)

The 1992 Fourth Republican Constitution of Ghana has provision for Education Rights under the Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms.

Chapter Five Article 25 1, of the Constitution has the following:

All persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities and with a view to achieving the full realisation of that right-

- (a) basic education shall be free, compulsory and available to all
 - (b) secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education.
 - (c) higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular, by progressive introduction of free education.
 - (d) the development of a system of schools with adequate facilities at all levels shall be actively pursued.
- (2)

LEVELS OF EDUCATION

PRE-TERTIARY LEVEL

(i) BASIC EDUCATION

To be able to achieve the constitutional demands of ensuring equal educational opportunities and facilities to all persons, government is obliged to put in

place, the necessary machinery to ensure the availability of education to all children of school going age. In this regard, government is required to provide structures, teaching and learning materials as well as qualified teachers to carry out the process of education. Experience has shown that government alone cannot effectively shoulder these responsibilities, agencies like the religious bodies, local people, Parent-Teacher Associations and District Assemblies come in to assist by providing the necessary infrastructure for schools to function.

Basic Schools are spread throughout the country. The regional distribution as at the 1993/94 academic year was as follows:

REGIONS	NO. OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS	NO. OF JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS
Ashanti	1728	864
Eastern	1847	849
Volta	1508	667
Brong Ahafo	1384	616
Central	1137	673
Greater Accra	674	395
Western	1306	602
Northern	-	-
Upper East	386	155
Upper West	342	183
Total	10312	5004

TABLE 1 Basic Schools in Ghana (1994)

NOTE:

The recent ethnic conflict in the Northern Region has made it impossible to obtain accurate figures for the Region. Some towns were burnt down together with their schools.

The level of development and equipment of these schools, cannot be said to be the same. Some of them are well housed and adequately equipped, with enough qualified teachers. Others, particularly those in the rural areas are poorly housed and lack basic equipment like furniture and books. Some do not have enough teachers. The situation appears to be better in the towns and cities, where the schools are comparatively better equipped and have qualified teachers. One thing which is common to both developed and undeveloped schools is that they are required to follow a common syllabus and write a common examination.

(ii) GENERAL EDUCATION

General Education in this context comprises Senior Secondary Schools, Commercial Schools, Technical and Vocational Schools. Like Basic Education, majority of the schools are concentrated in the urban areas, and they are better equipped than those located in the rural areas. The Regional breakdown of Senior Secondary Schools is as follows:

REGION	NO. OF SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS
Ashanti	81
Eastern	67
Volta	63
Brong Ahafo	46
Central	46
Greater Accra	43
Western	38
Northern	30
Upper East	16
Upper West	13
Total	443

TABLE 2 Senior Secondary Schools in Ghana (1995)

Most schools in the urban areas have existed for a long time and have seen a lot of development in terms of infrastructure and facilities. Such schools turn to attract the best students and also the best teachers. Most of them are boarding schools. Standards in the schools are high and the students usually do well in their final examinations, paving the way for them to pursue Higher Education. It is generally expensive to educate children in such schools. Not all parents can afford the cost.

The rest of the schools lack adequate facilities as well as qualified teachers. Because of their location, they are almost always neglected by the Ministry of Education. Many of them lack basic infrastructure and social services like water, electricity and good toilet facilities. These schools serve mostly the rural communities and the state of the schools is only a reflec-

tion of life in the rural areas. Ghana General Public Investment Programme 1991-93 Volume 2.8 issued by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning in April 1991 acknowledged the serious deterioration of physical facilities in some second cycle institutions with the observation that,

The central government is responsible for the provision and maintenance of physical facilities for second cycle institutions.

However, its ability to provide and maintain these facilities were severely affected by the down turn in the economy in the late 1970s and early 1980's. Routine repairs and maintenance work could therefore not be undertaken with the result that a number of school buildings fell into a state of disrepair leading to abandonment of a number of classrooms, dormitories, staff bungalows and toilet facilities because of their poor and unsatisfactory conditions. (3)

Qualified teachers are not attracted to these schools and they have to do with whatever is available to keep the schools going somehow.

(iii) SPECIAL EDUCATION

Education in Ghana is so structured that the disabled children are also catered for. To this end, special schools have been established to cater for such handicapped children. Among such established institutions are the Akropong School for the Blind, Edwenase Rehabilitation Centre near Kwadaso Kumasi, Jachie Rehabilitation Centre, and Bechem School for the Deaf. There are also Orphanage Homes to cater for orphans.

These institutions are funded by government, philanthropic organizations, churches and individuals. The special schools are first and foremost designed to enable the students acquire skills which will help them to earn a living and be on their own. A few of them, however, manage to go beyond that and pursue Higher Education.

(iv) NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Provision is made in Ghana for non-formal education to a large number of Adult Ghanaians who, by various reasons, are illiterate. A unit of the Ministry of Education, Non-Formal Education Division, is charged with the responsibility of organising literacy classes for such people. The Division also has some limited facilities for elementary school drop-outs under the Integrated Community Centre for Employable skills, where basic skills like masonry, carpen-

try, metal work etc, are taught. One may question the rationale for employing a large number of people and spending huge sums of money on old illiterate people when many children of school going age cannot go to school, and those who manage to go to school drop out because their parents cannot afford the cost.

(v) PRIVATE EDUCATION

There are a number of private schools in Ghana, particularly at the Basic Education level. Most of them are located in the urban areas. These schools are run entirely by individual proprietors on commercial basis. They charge school fees covering tuition, boarding and lodging where applicable, text books and others. Their fees are usually high and only a small percentage of Ghanaians are able to afford the facility.

(vi) HIGHER EDUCATION

The population of Ghana currently stands at about eighteen million. There are five universities, two of which were established quite recently and are yet to operate fully. There are six Polytechnics located in Accra, Takoradi, Kumasi, Cape Coast, Tamale and Ho. The Ministry of Education has announced plans to establish Regional Colleges of Applied Arts, Science and Technology in all the ten regions of Ghana. This proposal is yet to take off. The Polytechnics are now being turned into Tertiary Institutions. The necessary infrastructure as well as the human and material resources are being put in place for the change over to be effective, for example, Kumasi Polytechnic is undergoing a massive rehabilitation. Some staff from Polytechnics in the country are being re-trained in South Africa and UST under a special programme.

COST OF EDUCATION IN GHANA

Education in Ghana is organised at two main levels. Public Schools, run and managed by the state, which form the majority, and the privately owned schools. In considering cost of education in Ghana, the two types have to be treated separately.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Public Schools, made up of Basic Education, General Education and Tertiary Education, do not charge tuition fees. Parents, however, have to contribute towards the cost of books and other materials. At the Basic Education level, parents have to pay some fees, buy school uniforms, provide tables and chairs in some instances, pay examination fees and meet other expenses.

Fees at the level of General Education, particularly Senior Secondary Schools with boarding facilities, are very high. Boarding and lodging fees now stand at about ₵90,000.00 per term. In addition, parents are required to pay other expenses such as Parent-Teacher Association dues, examination fees and development levy. Students entering boarding schools for the first time are required to pay a deposit of between ₵200,000.00 and ₵400,000.00. Besides, parents have to provide personal effects such as school uniforms, footwear, mattresses, and other items for their wards.

Day Secondary Schools attract less fees, however, depending on the location of the school, parents have to bear transport expenses, pocket money for meals and other expenses.

At the level of Higher Education, funding used to be the responsibility of government until around the mid eighties. This included boarding and lodging subsidies for students. In effect all students who entered the University were on scholarship. However, as a result of economic constraints and increased demand for Higher Education, it became obvious that the trend could not be sustained. To this end, measures had to be put in place by government to address the issue. The University Rationalisation Committee set up by the Ministry of Education in 1986, had a look at the issue of government subsidy on boarding and lodging for students in the University.

The Committee recommended among other things that:

- government should provide free tuition for all Ghanaian students who gain admission into any tertiary institution in the country.
- students should be required to pay a uniform maintenance charge to cover food, accommodation and recreational facilities.
- all students should be eligible for loans sufficient to cover the maintenance cost and repayable over the first 10 years of their working life after graduation.
- scholarships covering the full cost of tuition and maintenance may be awarded to students of exceptional promise.
- students prepared to fulfil predetermined manpower requirements of the country should be awarded bursaries.

The above figures clearly show that access to Higher Education, particularly University Education in Ghana is very limited. Higher Education facilities are generally limited in most developing countries. It is very expensive to maintain Universities and, faced with chronic economic problems, developing countries are unable to provide adequate facilities for Higher Education to benefit those who need it. It, therefore, becomes very competitive for candidates seeking access to Higher Education. Whereas British universities require two Advanced Level passes as their entry requirements, Ghanaian Universities require three Advanced Level passes plus a General Paper. One major factor militating against access to University Education in Ghana is the campus residential system. In most cases, the number of candidates admitted to pursue first year programmes is tied to the number of students completing their various programmes at the particular year. The three main Universities in Ghana, Cape Coast, Legon and Kumasi cannot boast of a total undergraduate students population of fifteen thousand. Each year, many qualified candidates are unable to have access to University Education because of lack of residential and academic facilities.

The Universities were established some years ago to cater for student population at the time. The number of applicants has increased considerably without any corresponding increase or major improvement in the existing physical infrastructure.

The University Rationalisation Committee Report stressed this by saying:

10.2.1

- (b) For the most part, infrastructure is at least 20 years old and in a state of disrepair. This could be attributed to a number of factors including insufficient allocation of financial resources from government and lack of a comprehensive maintenance programme within the institution concerned. (5)

Halls of Residence built some twenty years back to cater for a specific number of students at that time are now being stretched beyond breaking point. The only solution to this problem is either to provide more halls of residence or abolish the campus residential system in favour of non-resident arrangement. Considering the economic problem facing the country, the first option does not appear to have much chance. The second option seems to be the only way

out if the Universities should be able to admit more qualified candidates. The University Rationalisation Committee was of the same view:

11.4.5

- (i) The halls of residence should be converted into hostels and put under the direct supervision of the business manager as a self-financing commercial venture (6)

If more lecture rooms and laboratory facilities are provided and the main Library and the Faculty Libraries are expanded and well equipped, more qualified candidates could be admitted as non-resident. The Universities should divest themselves of student campus accommodation. They should not go beyond offering admission to prospective students. The issue of residence should be left entirely to the students to make their own arrangement. Such an arrangement will afford the Universities the opportunity to admit more qualified candidates.

Each year many qualified candidates are denied access to Higher Education through no fault of theirs. The following figures from the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi (UST) throw more light on this.

ACADEMIC YEAR	NO. OF QUALIFIED APPLICANTS	NO. OF APPLICANTS OFFERED ADMISSION	NO. OF QUALIFIED APPLICANTS LEFT OUT
1991/92	7418	1909	5509
1992/93	7541	881	6660
1993/94	8414	1645	6769
1994/95	8330	1558	6772
TOTAL	31703	5993	25710

TABLE 4 Admission to UST

The statistics portray a very gloomy picture having regard to the fact that most of the programmes run at UST are peculiar to the University. In other words, qualified applicants seeking to pursue programmes like Engineering, Planning, Building Technology etc, and who are unable to secure admission at UST have no chance of pursuing the programmes of their choices in any other University in Ghana.

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION BY INDIVIDUALS WITH DIFFERENT BACKGROUND

(i) MALES AND FEMALES

There is much talk of women liberation and gender equality these days. The recent United Nations Conference on women in Beijing, China, has given added impetus to the phenomenon.

Ghana's Constitution makes no discrimination against women in any form. It rather seeks to protect them. For instance, it is stated that women and children shall be given special care. Some people are of the view that more boys have access to formal education than girls because it is deliberate on the part of some parents to opt for their boys to go to school and leave out the girls when they cannot support all of them financially.

Girls are also said to be encouraged to enter into early marriage rather than pursue education. It is not easy to obtain reliable statistics in what the situation is throughout Ghana, but it appears that many girls who enter primary schools with boys gradually drop out as they advance the educational ladder and the number becomes very small at the level of Higher Education. The following statistics are of interest.

UNIVERSITY	1991/92		1992/93		1993/94	
	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
UST	391	8836	3606	768	3639	812
UCC	1577	427	1855	549	2004	648
TOTAL	5495	1263	5461	1317	5643	1460

TABLE 5 Disparity between males and females at UST and UCC (all courses)

Looking at the figures, there is no doubt that there is some disparity between males and females at the level of Higher Education, but one cannot say that the trend is deliberate in any way. The determining factor at this level is capacity rather than anything else.

(ii) CHILDREN OF RURAL AND URBAN AREAS

Like many developing countries, majority of Ghana-

ians, estimated at about 70% live in the rural areas. In spite of this, these areas are the least developed. Since independence, various governments have made effort to develop the rural areas, however, the impact has not been encouraging. Poor access roads, lack of good drinking water, lack of health facilities and other basic social needs have made life in the rural areas rather pathetic.

As Dr. Julius Nyerere, a former president of Tanzania once said:

Our emphasis on money and industries has made us concentrate on urban development... We spend most of our money in the urban areas and our industries are established in the towns. Yet the greater part of this money that we spend in the towns comes from loans. Whether it is used to build schools, hospitals, houses, factories, etc, it still has to be repaid. ... to repay the loans we have to use foreign currency which is obtained from sale of our exports, ... the foreign currency we shall use to pay back the loans used in the development of the urban areas will not come from the towns ... The people who benefit directly from development which is brought down by borrowed money are not the ones who will repay the loans ... The largest proportion of the repayment will be made through the efforts of the farmers. (7)

This is the case in all spheres of socio-economic life in Ghana. The best and well equipped schools are located mostly in the towns and cities. It is very expensive to educate a child in these well established schools and most rural dwellers cannot afford the cost.

Most of the rural folks have no fixed income. It becomes difficult, therefore, if not impossible, for the children of some rural dwellers to compete with their counterparts from the urban areas. Schools in the rural areas are poorly housed. Some of them hold classes under trees. In a recent Television news item, pupils in a school in the Northern part of Ghana had to lie down to write because there were no tables and chairs. Qualified teachers posted to such deprived areas do not turn up. These pupils are expected to write the same examination (BECE) with those in good schools in towns and cities. The problems in the rural areas go beyond the level of Basic Education. Senior Secondary Schools located in the rural areas have similar problems. In most cases, such schools lack good infrastructure, teaching and learning materials and above all qualified teachers. This

