

Theory-to-Practice

Strengthening Lifelong Education For Development: The Case of Ghana

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Abstract

Globally, lifelong education, has been identified as the most important driver of social, economic, political, technological, and environmental development. However, meaningful and realistic national development can only be achieved when sufficient attention is paid to strengthening the implementation of lifelong education. Therefore, it becomes imperative that governments and the private sectors in developing countries make substantial sacrifices in terms of resources, time, energy, and expertise toward the promotion of sustainable lifelong education. It is by this process that developing countries like Ghana can derive the fullest benefit from lifelong education and achieve the desired development objective of improving the quality of life of its citizens.

Introduction

Lifelong education, although an old concept, is currently in the limelight and receiving needed attention from governments all over the world. The concept of lifelong education has received many and varied explanations as there are many practitioners of education. Lindeman (1926), among others, first provided an intellectual basis for a comprehensive understanding of education as a continuing aspect of everyday life. He touched on varying existing traditions such as the French notion

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of *education permanente* and drew upon developments within adult education in Britain and North America. It was upon this basis, perhaps, that Lindeman (1926) described lifelong education as “life but not merely preparation for an unknown kind of future living.” By this he meant that the whole of life is learning, and education can have no ending.

To Faure, Herrera, Kaddoura, Lopes, Petrovsky, Rahnema, and Ward (1972), lifelong education should serve as the master concept for educational policies in both developed and developing countries. Jesup (1969) had earlier implied this when he stated that, “a man cannot achieve or even discover the potentiality of which he is capable unless he continues to learn; only so can he make most of himself” (p.18). Malassis (1976) also emphasized the relevance of lifelong education when he stated that lifelong education is the arena in which the battle to decide the fate of the rural world may be fought. In fact, lifelong education and lifelong learning are accepted today as overarching tools for human development in the 21st century.

Lifelong education may be viewed as all forms of education engaged in from birth (womb) to death (grave). It can be formal, informal, and non-formal and involves continuing education usually provided through short and long-term courses such as on-the-job and off-the-job training, apprenticeships, conferences, workshops, and seminars that enable individuals or groups of people to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes to build and improve upon their competencies and livelihoods. This paper examines the relevance and promotion of lifelong education in Ghana. It also highlights some of the existing challenges, and finally suggests steps to strengthen lifelong education in Ghana.

Relevance of Lifelong Education

For a developing country like Ghana, recognizing the relevance of lifelong education is, indeed, an extremely important issue. This is because the only national strategy for survival is to have a population that is as highly educated and knowledgeable as possible; thus, developing a population which has the capacity and the will to adapt to global change trends. Lifelong education becomes an indispensable educational strategy when appropriately planned, implemented, and managed. It can lead developing nations, including Ghana, to leap-frog to the middle level income economy for which they are all yearning.

Three key features stand out when examining lifelong education. First, lifelong education is seen as building upon and affecting all ex-

isting educational provisions from early childhood care and education through basic to tertiary levels. Second, lifelong education extends beyond formal educational provision and providers to encompass all agencies, groups, and individuals involved in all kinds of learning activities. Third, it rests on the belief that individuals are, or can become, self-directing, and that they will see the value in engaging in lifelong education (Tight, 1996). These observations about lifelong education are significant in today's globalized world.

Field (2000) observed that many adults now take part in organized learning throughout their lifespan, and that the post-school system is populated by adults as well as by young people. Furthermore, non-formal learning permeates daily life and is valued as an important aspect of lifelong learning.

Whatever the case may be, one thing that is clear is that in today's globalized world, the knowledge and skills acquired in executing jobs changes in rapid succession. This has largely resulted from the major breakthroughs made, and continuing to be made, in the field of information and communication technologies. In addition, the human mind has infinite capacity; hence, people can continue to learn throughout their lives to become useful to themselves in their everyday lives, especially in their roles as citizens, workers, and parents.

The observation above is imperative because nearly one billion adults in the world cannot read let alone write (Hinzin, 2008). Of this number, almost two-thirds are women and about 20% are young people between the ages of 15 and 24, most of whom live in extreme poverty. The majority of these people have been neglected by governments who signed the United Nations' declaration for a 50% reduction in illiteracy by the year 2015 (Hinzin, 2008 cited in IAE Report, 2009). According to the 2008 *General Monitoring Report on Education for All*, illiteracy is highest in countries and households with the greatest poverty where about 96 million children and young people of school-going age are not actually in school. In fact, the 2009 *EFA Global Monitoring Report* (UNESCO, 2008 as cited in Benavot, 2008), provides evidence of millions of students who attend several years of primary school, and even graduate, but fail to acquire a minimal toolkit of reading and writing skills.

Indeed, Benavot (2008) has observed that there is a pressing need for governments all over the world to address the unmet learning needs of young people and adults. He opined that significant portions of school children in recent decades have either been excluded from school or re-

ceived a low quality education. All these individuals have been failed by the past and current provision of formal education. This indicates that for people to become self-reliant, employable, and competitive in both local and global marketplaces, lifelong education must be strengthened, particularly in developing countries such as Ghana. Additionally, in the globalized world of today where knowledge and the processing of information are increasingly becoming a means of social mobility and economic progress, learning throughout life should be the norm rather than the exception.

Promotion of Lifelong Education in Ghana

Present and past governments, constitutions and laws in Ghana have all recognized the importance of education as an instrument for social advancement and have, thus, enshrined the right of every child to basic education as a fundamental human right (Addae-Mensah, 2000). The educational system in Ghana has therefore witnessed a number of reforms, ostensibly to make education more accessible to every segment of society.

The government of Ghana is the major provider of support in the form of funds, logistics, and scholarships for lifelong education in Ghana. Starting from public-funded basic schools including crèches and kindergartens, the institution of the Capitation Grant funds pupil user-fees. Learning begins before a child walks through the classroom door (UNESCO, 2007). The government of Ghana has therefore taken steps to expand educational provision at the pre-school level. Now all primary schools are mandated to provide kindergarten programs. Some schools also have crèches attached to them. This measure is aimed at helping to achieve the first Education for All (EFA) goal which calls for expansion and improvement of comprehensive early childhood care and education especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. Basic teaching and learning aids including textbooks, technical tools, and equipment, as well as one hot meal for pupils in some selected deprived schools through the School Feeding Program, have been introduced to help keep children, especially those of the poor, in school. Pupils also enjoy free bus rides to and from schools, especially in communities where metropolitan mass transport systems operate. In second cycle institutions, governments have provided bursaries and scholarships to needy but brilliant students to pursue secondary, technical, as well as

vocational education. Buses are also provided to almost all second cycle educational institutions. Infrastructure and facilities in many second cycle schools have seen massive expansion. Many schools are currently enjoying internet facilities and the teaching staff is being motivated to continuously build their capacities through different continuing education programs.

Similar developments are taking place in tertiary institutions in Ghana. All the 10 polytechnics and six publicly-funded universities in Ghana have witnessed the construction of new facilities on their campuses. All students benefit from the Students Loan Trust, a subsidiary of the Social Security and National Insurance Trust of Ghana. Additionally, many teachers secure scholarships to pursue further education abroad. All these developments are currently taking place because of the establishment of the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETfund) by the government of Ghana. The GETfund is an educational fund into which all educational taxes are paid for eventual disbursement by appointed administrators for the improvement of education.

The government of Ghana, through The New Education Reform has improved, extensively, facilities in the formal education system at the basic, secondary, and tertiary levels. The government has also strengthened apprenticeship training to build the skills and capacities of unemployed youth who could not further their formal education. Training in apprenticeship is organized around master craftsmen who typically adopt demonstrations, discussions, and some minimum amount of lecture in their training to improve upon employable skills and employability among unemployed youth and adults. The Skills Training and Employment Program, a modular system of skills training, was instituted in 2003. Through 2007, the program had trained 27,500 youth and adults (UNDP, 2007). Perhaps, proper management and the use of appropriate technologies would go a long way to comprehensively and permanently address seemingly insurmountable youth unemployment, low productivity in workplaces, and the thorny issue of streetism confronting the country.

The infrastructures of basic and secondary schools, teacher training colleges, polytechnics, universities, as well as private tertiary institutions are being established and expanded, and the print and electronic media comprising newspapers, magazines, books, and especially television and radio are currently being used extensively to aid teaching and learning in schools and other training institutions. The provision of lifelong educa-

tion through the aforementioned sources becomes important because “a mind is a terrible thing to waste” and “an employee is a terrible asset to waste.”

Additionally, the provision of motivational learning environments, including new facilities, and relevant teaching and learning aids such as well as qualified teachers has not only resulted in improved teaching and learning in educational institutions, but has also led to an increase in access to education in Ghana. The number of schools and enrollment rates in primary education have seen an appreciable increase in recent times. For instance, the number of kindergarten schools increased by 8.4% between 2006 and 2008 from 14,246 to 15,449. The reason for the increase is primarily due to the government’s policy that each primary school should have a kindergarten attached to it. Gross enrollment ratio (GER) increased at the kindergarten level from 54.6% in the 2003/04 academic year to 89.9% in the 2005/06 academic year representing an increase of 35.3%. This significant increase was possibly due to the Capitation Grant provided by the Ghana government to public schools. Over the same period, the primary and junior high school levels recorded marginal increases of 8.7% and 8.6% respectively (MoESS, 2008).

Since 1992, two million youth and adults between the ages of 15 and 44 years have graduated from non-formal learning programs, the majority being women (MoESS, 2008). Enrollment levels in Ghana’s 26 technical training institutes in the 2006/07 academic year were 18,000. Aside from the normal on-campus degrees and higher degree programs, all the six publicly-funded universities in Ghana—University of Ghana; Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology; University of Cape Coast; University of Education, Winneba; University for Development Studies; and University of Mines and Technology—engaged in some form of distance education. For instance, the University of Ghana’s distance education degree program, which started five years ago, has enrolled over 13,000 qualified students who have grades up to twenty-four or have passed the mature students’ exams but could not have access to on-campus education programs.

Sandwich programs at the certificate, diploma, degree, and master’s level, and other short courses are also organized for successful applicants during university recess. Large pools of students have therefore secured admission to engage in continuing education in the universities up to bachelor’s and master’s degree level through distance and sandwich education programs. All this notwithstanding, there are equally large numbers of Ghanaians who, for one reason or another, are not able

to take advantage of lifelong education opportunities which are presumably the norm in today's competitive global marketplace. The million dollar question however is, why can't every Ghanaian take advantage of lifelong education? Indeed, many individual Ghanaians and institutions involved in lifelong education are encountering some challenges that can only be addressed through a concerted effort by government and other stakeholders.

Challenges of Lifelong Education in Ghana

Notwithstanding the frantic effort the government of Ghana is making towards strengthening lifelong education, it appears measures taken so far are not solid enough to permanently address serious challenges confronting this important issue. This is because many of the challenges, including lack of access to educational facilities, inadequate infrastructure, untrained teachers, inadequate professionally trained adult educators, lack of motivation and commitment, as well as the general lack of a reading culture in Ghana as evidenced by the seeming neglect of a library system in the country, still lingers. Indeed, the reality is that Ghana has not yet hit the 100% mark in basic school enrollment. Basic school enrollment was 85.4% in 2007 (UNESCO, 2007). This is due to the fact that there are still some children in remote parts of the country, especially in the northern regions, who cannot access school facilities, either because there are no schools in their communities or they are socially excluded through policies. To observe that there are still some communities that have no school infrastructures and that some children attend classes under trees is, to say the least, unthinkable. Such a deplorable situation does not promote any meaningful and conducive environment for effective teaching and learning. Added to this is the fact that, currently, many of the schools in the remotest parts of the country are handled by untrained teachers who hardly get the opportunity to undertake in-service training as compared to their counterparts in the towns and cities who normally benefit from such training. There are also inadequate adult educators in the country to help adults to continue to learn to unearth their hidden potentials and improve upon their competencies in their various fields of endeavor.

Another challenge is that many employers in the private sector are not committed to sponsoring and motivating their employees to participate in short courses to acquire knowledge and new skills to improve

their competencies at their workplaces. There are also no comprehensive on-the-job training plans to enable them to keep up with the keen competition being experienced currently at the global marketplace. These unfortunate situations have led to many organizations producing below their capacities, hence, leading to low productivity.

In addition, many communities in Ghana do not have libraries and the few regional, municipal, and district libraries available lack current materials to encourage reading and continuous learning. The provision of library facilities is also an imperative because the social disengagement of people as they grow old would be mitigated if lifelong education and learning became an accepted habit. This observation goes to buttress the point made by Faure, et al. (1972) that knowledge should not be assiduously acquired just once. They advocated for learning how to build up a continuing, evolving body of knowledge all through life. This is what Faure called “learning to be.” It is also universally recognized now that what can be learned at school is but an introduction to life and that knowledge and skills in every sphere are accumulating and changing so rapidly that learning must of necessity be a continuing activity (Townsend & Keith, 1977).

Poverty is another challenge to many otherwise brilliant people who would have wished to continue their education or engage in skill training to acquire relevant skills to earn a decent living. The stark reality is that many Ghanaians do not have jobs and so would devote appreciable time to participating in learning if programs were available. In *The Psychology of Adult Learning in Africa Capetown*, Fasokun (2005) observed that many adults in Africa have limited financial resources; hence, they are more likely to invest in profitable and motivating programs. It is, therefore, very important for the government to permanently address the poverty situation Ghanaians face, as it is one of the determining factors in the success of lifelong education.

Some other challenges confronting lifelong education in Ghana include lack of financial support; inadequate parental, spousal and family support; high cost; and lack of participant motivation. The fact is that many lifelong education institutions are cash strapped and this impacts their mode of delivery and performance. Many of their clientele have financial difficulties in paying the fees and seeing themselves through their programs. Many participants need financial support to go through their program. Their families as well as their spouse’s financial positions are not sound and solid. Many of the institutions lack facilities, especial-

ly in rural areas. All these and many other challenges affect the smooth operation of many lifelong education institutions. That notwithstanding, the aforementioned challenges can be addressed through concerted efforts by government and other relevant stakeholders such as the private sector.

Strengthening Lifelong Education in Ghana

There are a number of steps to be taken to improve lifelong education in Ghana. An important step would be the creation of a comprehensive advocacy program for stakeholders—especially government, the private sector, and the local people themselves—to build new libraries and revamp the existing ones, providing them with information and communication technology facilities and books. Indeed, the government of Ghana must necessarily show genuine political will and commitment by allocating appropriate budgetary support to all the sub-sectors of education—primary, secondary, technical, vocational, tertiary, as well as adult and continuing education—to sufficiently build the requisite manpower to ensure sustainable growth and development in Ghana.

Additionally, access to basic education from kindergarten to junior high school must be provided to all children. This is because by 2015 every child of school-going age should complete a full course of primary education. This could be achieved when Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education is fully implemented to meet the socio-economic and cultural needs of the people, especially those in rural areas.

The School Feeding Program must also be expanded to cover all public schools, particularly in those schools where poverty is endemic. Added to this is the Capitation Grant instituted by the government of Ghana. This grant must be increased to meet the realistic needs of school children. The free bus system for school children should also be expanded to make it accessible to as many children as possible.

Indeed, government budget allocation to Ghana Education Service at basic level schools should be increased so that it will be able to build more schools and provide access to reading materials within a one kilometer radius from a child's place of residence. The situation whereby children have to walk for many kilometers to schools serves as a disincentive to parents and children. Reading materials should be designed to make understanding much easier, thereby motivating children to read and arousing their interest in staying in school.

Another important step is that the government should address the problem of inadequate facilities for lifelong education with all the seriousness it deserves, facilitating increased accessibility to lifelong education through the following sectors—primary, secondary, technical, vocational, tertiary, and continuing education. It is believed that it is only when prior attention is paid to all the sectors of education that lifelong education can be strengthened in Ghana.

Private stakeholders and religious groups should also be involved in the establishment and management of schools. For instance, as part of corporate social responsibility towards the rural development process, organizations could be made to pay extra tax for rural education development at the basic level. The government could partner with religious and other organizations to build schools and provide logistics and scholarships to needy but brilliant pupils. There is also the need to provide post-literacy materials to sustain learning.

The formation and growth of reading and debating clubs at the basic and high school levels would go a long way to instill and promote lifelong learning in Ghana. Indeed, the establishment of mobile libraries for neo-literates and out-of-school youth would help widen access to reading materials and encourage a reading culture amongst many Ghanaians. Oduro-Mensah (2004) has observed that education *is* development and is not *for* development. This implies that when Ghanaians are encouraged to learn continuously through the provision of library facilities in their communities, they will, in the long run, improve their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and understanding of the problems confronting them in their environment so as to permanently address them.

Equally importantly is that the culture of reading and learning throughout life in Ghana must be revamped. The relevant stakeholders in education should constantly be meeting and dialoguing on the appropriate ways in which lifelong education can be strengthened in Ghana to help permanently address the challenges of unemployment, underemployment, low productivity, and grinding poverty that confronts many Ghanaians.

The managers of the private sector must be sensitized to see the need to build the capacity of their employees through regular on-the-job and off-the-job training in order to increase productivity and profitability of their operations. In that sense, the employees' salaries and conditions of service would equally improve and Ghana would be better for it.

Furthermore, the high rates of unemployment and poverty confronting Ghanaians are likely linked to illiteracy, ignorance, and a lack of

appropriate employable skills. All these demand that the government of Ghana prioritize these challenges in their educational strategies and expand opportunities for lifelong education and training.

Conclusion

This paper has examined how lifelong education can be strengthened in Ghana by first looking at the concept of lifelong education and its promotion in Ghana. It has also examined challenges confronting lifelong education in Ghana, and finally suggested steps to be taken to address the challenges confronting lifelong education in Ghana. Lifelong education, which is the driver of today's globalized economy in terms of its impact on social, economic, political, environmental, technological, and sustainable progress, has seen some promotion in Ghana. However, for Ghana to sufficiently realize the fullest benefit of lifelong education, all stakeholders should provide the necessary wherewithal to get the system working on the ground. This demands that all the key stakeholders sacrifice their resources, time, energy, and expertise to ensure that Ghana produces excellent manpower so as to play a bigger role in the global village. This can only happen when lifelong education is appropriately implemented, managed, and strengthened in Ghana.

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