

Politicization of Education: A Bane to Ghana's Educational System and a Threat to Sustainable Development

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Abstract

The article underlines the threats to sustainable development because of the politicization of the educational system of Ghana. This paper also highlights the point that there is a correlation between national development and a nation's achievement in education. This is actually one of the explanations why most advanced nations put in so much resource in the education of its citizenry. Definitely with a high probable expectation of developing its infrastructural and human capital for national growth. This is so because of the fact that the education of the people in a nation is a sure bet of the rate of that nation's growth in both economically and sustainable development and the catalyst that brings about the needed revitalization of the people that makes up the nation. It also the force that forms a wall for a nation's defense. This therefore supports the perception that a nation's growth is always equal to the level of its intellects. In light of the above, there is the need for successive governments to always accord education the necessary support in terms of policy formulation and implementation, continuity of policy and proper management of government allocated fund to make the educational sector not only vibrant but also beneficial. Politicization of the Ghanaian educational system has been and continues to be a bane to education in Ghana as well as a threat to the sustainable development of the country and there is the urgent need to combat this menace before it gets out of hand. To avert this, useful recommendations are made.

Keywords: *Politicization of Education, Sustainable Development, Ghana.*

Introduction

Education whether formal or informal is very important to the well-being of every nation, as its contribution to the sustainable development of that country cannot be under pinned. However, the politicization of education in most African countries like Ghana has been a bane and has actually made it almost impossible for its contribution to the country's sustainable development. Education may be defined as a purposive, conscious or unconscious, psychological, sociological, scientific and philosophical process, which brings about the development of the individual to the fullest extent and also the maximum development of society in such a way that both enjoy maximum happiness and prosperity. In short, education is the development of individual according to his needs and demands in society, of which he is an integral part. (Y.K Singh, 2008) The main function of education is to develop the natural potentialities in the child to enable him function in the society according to his abilities, interests and needs. In general, education is exclusively used for the development of human beings in the cognitive, affective, psychomotor and psycho productive domains. It also involves a desirable approach in human behavior through the process of teaching and learning. Therefore, the single most significant complex of social control tools for national development is found in the educational system of a country, be it formal or informal. (Orji Kingdom and Job Maekae). Sustainable development has been interpreted in many ways. In its simplest form, sustainable development is the development that meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the need of the future generation. Sustainable development is the organizing principle for meeting human developmental goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depends. The desirable result is a state of society where living conditions and resources are used continuously to meet

human needs without undermining the integrity and stability of the natural systems. It is actually a method of development that looks to balance different and often competing, needs against the consciousness of the environmental, social and economic limitations we face as a society. There has always been the question of investing hugely in Ghana's education visa vis the perceived investment returns of education to the nation taking into consideration the fact that the process of education is an investment decision every serious government must take in order to continue the sustainable development of the country.

Methodology of the study

Both primary and secondary data were necessary in order to meet the intentions of the study. Primary data came from the observation of education trends in Ghana as initiated and executed by the various governments and secondary data came from the historical events and records that was used to make this research possible. These methodologies were chosen because of their unique contribution to the study. Observational technique provides the capability to observe and distinguish events as they occur while the historical technique was also used because of the need to critically investigate past events and their developments with respect to time in order to impeccably evaluate the current phenomenon. It is in this context that the observational and historical approaches are considered appropriate to appraise politicization of education system in Ghana.

Overview of education in Ghana

Before the arrival of the European colonists, Education in Ghana was mainly informal where knowledge, information and skills were transferred verbally and through apprenticeship. Formal education came to Ghana with the arrival of the European colonists, which provided a room, and book based education. The first group of students comprise of sons of local chiefs, wealthy traders and families of influential public figures. With the support of the Britain, the colonial masters of Ghana, missions that was the main provider of formal education flourished in a heavily decentralized system that left considerable room for pedagogical freedom but still remained the privilege of the few under the colonists. When Ghana attained independence in 1957, universal education became an important political objective under the new government of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah described education as the key to the future and announced a high-level university education backed by a free universal basic education. Therefore, in 1961, the Education Act (EA) introduced the principle of free and compulsory primary education and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology was established. The fall of Nkrumah in 1966 was followed by stronger criticisms toward the expansion of education at the cost of quality. Despite the rapid increase of school infrastructures, the Enrolment slowly declined until 1973. In 1974, however, education in Ghana saw attempts of reform based on reports made by committees instituted to investigate the decline in education. The year 1987 marked the commencement of new series of reforms. The Rawlings government had gathered enough funds from numerous international organizations (including the World Bank) and countries to afford massive changes to the educational system. The 1987 Education Act aimed at turning the 1974's (Dozbo Committee) measures into reality: a national literacy campaign was launched, pre-tertiary education was reduced from seventeen to twelve years and vocational education appeared in Junior High School. Education was made compulsory from six to fourteen. The reform succeeded in imposing a new education structure, as well as to increase the enrolment and the number of infrastructure.

The return to constitutional rule in 1992 gave a new desire to Ghanaian education by reclaiming the duty of the state to provide a free and compulsory basic education for all. Under this republic, the Local Government Act of 1993 initiated the decentralization in education administration. This was done through the transfer of power to district assemblies. The Free, Compulsory and Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) provided an action plan for the period 1996-2005, focusing on bridging the gender gap in primary education, while improving teaching by providing materials and better living condition for teachers. It was later completed by significant acts, like the creation of the "Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training" in 2006 to promote vocational education and the founding of the National Accreditation Board

(NAB) in 2007, among several others under the government of former president John Agyekum Kufuor. In its 2013/2014 report, the World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked Ghana 46th out of 148 countries for education system quality. In 2010, Ghana's literacy rate was 71.5%, with a notable gap between men (78.3%) and women (65.3%). Currently, education in Ghana is divided into three phases: basic education (kindergarten, primary school and junior high school), secondary education (senior high school, technical and vocational institutions) and tertiary education (universities, polytechnics and colleges). The language of instruction is mainly English with an academic year usually running from August to May each year.

Politicization of education in Ghana

Rudolph and Rudolph (1972) referred to politicization of educational institutions as the appropriation of educational structures and resources and displacement of educational goals by organized political and community (religion, caste, and locality) interests. In other words, Zargar (2012) defined politicization of education as the manipulation of education for political interests. Irrespective of the positive and great correlation that exist between education and sustainable development of a country, the positive impact has really not been felt in the case of Ghana because of some inherent challenges of education of which politicization of the Ghanaian educational system is one. The Ghanaian educational system has been one of the political tools that most political parties frequently use during the political campaign era in Ghana. Obviously, the politicians are aware of the importance attached to education by parents and the society at large and so always seek to play on that notion to indirectly win the support of the voting masses.

The politicization of the structure of Ghana's educational system has handicapped not only basic education but also secondary education. The second cycle education in Ghana was for a three-year period before former President John Kufuor's New Patriotic Party (NPP) administration started the 4-year Senior High School programme in 2007 based on research. The new system however lasted three academic years as the National Democratic Congress (NDC) assumed power in 2009 and reverted to the three-year system mainly on political grounds. In 2009, the NDC government just decided to truncate it and restore the three-year system without critically examining the outcomes of the four-year project which had been introduced by the Kufuor regime. This was done without analyzing it, or even without allowing it to run its full course from year one, two, three, four – examining the results and determining if it was something productive or otherwise. Even though most education connoisseurs were with the view that the short-lived extension of secondary education to four-years was a positive step, political expediency ultimately saw a reversion to the three-year system at the expense of quality education without recourse to the misery of the Ghanaian child, parent and the future of the nation. The issue here is that, the four-year system may not be the best but there should be empirical foundation for the cutting of it and should not be just political. The quality of the country's secondary education always becomes a persistent boiling subject when the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) results are released. A breakdown of the 2016 WASSCE results echoed the continuous struggle of Ghana's educational system backed by the poor performance of second cycle students in core subjects. For instance, in the 2016 exams, A total of 274,262 candidates participated and according to WAEC, a total of 125,065 students obtained A1 to C6 in English Language, which is 53.19%, 59,725 (25.40%) obtained D7-E8 whilst 46,595 (19.82%) had F9. For Mathematics, 77,108 (32.83%) obtained A1-C6; 65,007 (27.68%) obtained D7-E8 whilst 89,477 (38.10%) had F9. About 113,933 students obtained A1-C6 in Integrated Science which is 48.48%, 75,938 (32.32%) obtained D7-E8 whilst 42,519 (18.09%) had F9. It is rather troubling that the duration and accessibility of senior high school (SHS) education in Ghana is being played with politically. We have shifted focus from addressing the core challenges of inadequate funding, lack of equipment, educational infrastructures and clear educational policies among others, the focus had rather been on course duration and empty political promises.

The frequent impasse between educational workers like the University Teachers Association of Ghana (UTAG) and the government that has always been associated with an agenda of political parties and brings about the politicization of their issues raised is such an unfortunate situation for a nation like Ghana. When

educational workers try to register their displeasure on issues with government, it is always seen to be a politically orchestrated move to sabotage and undermine the government of the day by the opposition making it extremely impossible for such associations to be taken serious. Sometimes leads to demonstrations, press conferences and strike actions. This is very unfortunate as sensitive national issues are always stained with unimaginative propaganda. These are people who serve as the vessel through which knowledge is imparted and any discourse that is taken for granted will be at the peril of the nation bearing in mind the fact that they help shape the minds and the cognitive pattern of the students who will in turn take up the leadership mantle of the nation in the near future and others will also be used in feeding our industries. It is very regrettable that issues pertaining to national development like education, which are supposed to unite us as a people, are taking divisive dimensions because of the will to win political power at all cost. Education is a serious matter and should not be reduced to cheap campaign politics as it endangers the lives of the future generation. It is therefore a high time our politicians stopped the “try and error” with the future of Ghana.

Before the last government (NDC) left the corridors of power to opposition, they upgraded some selected polytechnics to technical universities and again this was met with a lot of political bullets and shields with the two main political parties being the major players. The Ministry of Education with the support of the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) under the previous government formulated policies to see the conversion into technical universities of polytechnics in Ghana. P.N.D.C L. 321 in 1992 raised the status of polytechnics to the level of tertiary institutions with the mandate to run Higher National Diploma (HND) programs. This was subsequently replaced by the Polytechnics Act, 2007 [Act 745] which mandated polytechnics to award Higher National Diplomas, and other certificates accredited by the National Accreditation Board. They were then to award degrees subject to the approval of the Polytechnic Councils. This brought about the bachelor of technology (B-Tech) programs in Ghana. The then opposition party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) politicized the move and argued that much effort has not been invested in researching on the implementation of the upgrade and that it is just a deliberate plan of the government of the day to score political points to enhance their chances in the 2016 general election, which was then approaching as a campaign promise they seek to fulfil at all cost. Even though the selected polytechnics welcomed the technical universities programme and even saw it as one of the possible ways to address the Ghana’s educational development gaps, the criteria that was used in selecting the polytechnics was alleged to have had a political manipulations. It is believed that the polytechnics when upgraded would be able to focus more on their core function of training technicians and technologists at a higher level to meet the demands of the rapidly changing, technology-driven work environment yet politics blinded some section of Ghanaians to argue against the implementation with a political lens.

The New Patriotic Party (NPP) in the 2012 political campaign proposed to implement free basic education program in Ghana should they be given the opportunity to serve the people of Ghana. In the 2016 campaign, they extended the promise to cover secondary education as well. The then party in charge of the country (i.e. National Democratic Congress) vehemently opposed the proposed program and gave a series of reasons as to why it extremely impossible for the New Patriotic Party (NPP) to achieve that feat and also gave plethora of challenges that outweigh the benefits, thereby rendering the programme unreasonable and unrealistic. They again argued that the programme has the tendency of further sacrificing the quality of education for quantity, only to begin the implementation of free basic education in their regime amidst all they said against the program. The reason for their ‘U’-turn on the matter was obviously political expediency. At the implementation of the same free basic education program by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) raised questions about the inability on the part of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government to efficiently and effectively implement the program, as they are not those who gave birth to the idea making a serious national issue a mere political debate.

Allowances due teacher and nurse trainees has over the years been politicized in Ghana contributing to the fallen standard of not only education but also the quality of teachers and nurses produced to impart

knowledge and administer health to the citizenry of Ghana. In the just ended 2016 political campaign, educational allowances was one of the main political card that was played by the two top political parties in Ghana. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) argued for the reasons of abrogating the allowances of both teachers and nurses and the intended long term beneficial of abrogation such allowances. The New Patriotic Party (NPP) on the other hand argued against the abrogation of the allowances and gave thoughtful reasons why the National Democratic Congress (NDC), which was the government of the day, should not do so. Every educational issue of a country is automatically a serious national issue and must not be politicized in any way. The National Democratic Congress (NDC) cited the ceiling of the number of intakes as one of the main reasons why the allowances must be abrogated to enhance more in takes to the teacher and nursing training colleges yet they actually resumed payment of the allowances in the heat of the 2016 political campaign.

Consequences of politicizing education in Ghana

The politicization of issues confronting the Ghana's educational sector is of grave concern to the nation. Education is about the future of the next generation and the country as a whole and that issues concerning it should be looked above political pigmentation. We must come together as a nation to stop politicians from joking with the country's educational systems. Politicization of education has undesirable consequences. Presented below are some consequences of politicization of education based on my personal experience and literature review on this subject matter.

The menace of politicizing education has affected and continuous to affect the delivering of coherent and good quality education in Ghana. Another issue is also the frequent policy changes merely for reasons of parochial political interest and advantage that has only contributed and succeeded in lowering country's education standards. There had also not been stability in the education system of Ghana due to the various reforms made by politicians that are mostly not researched based. At most every eight years, we see an education reform change depending on the political party in charge of the country. This has actually accounted for the failure to produce quality human resource to feed our industries and has led to high graduate unemployment.

Another profound consequence of politicization of education is the concern of continuous interruptions of academic programs at all levels of education. Educational workers especially at the tertiary level engages in strike actions to force the government of the day to improve working condition and allowances and demands. The disruptions more often leads to temporal closure of schools for weeks or months. Most times students are deprived of the opportunity to make up for lost times, as the academic calendar must be followed religiously. This results in low class of student educational accomplishments.

Way forward

The crunch that has submerged Ghana's educational sector centers on among others politicization of education and the frequent changes of political environment. Mentioned below is some recommended solutions to the politicization of the Ghanaian educational system.

Firstly, for any educational policy to work, it must be detached from partisan politics. In other words, the educational policy must be national in character instead of the current unnecessary politicization of education in the country. We must unite as Ghanaians devoid of political coloration to demand a comprehensive national educational policy to save the nation's ailing education. The change of policy with every new political administration had been unhelpful to efforts at maintaining quality standards and would have to end to bring about some consistency. Such policies must be protected against political interference and changes and that is how we can succeed as a nation.

Secondly, there is an urgent need for the setting up of an autonomous education commission to come up with a comprehensive blueprint for national education development that every government must accept to implement without any chance of compromise. Educational experts may be considered but the interference of political figures must not be tolerated.

Thirdly, all stakeholders in education including politicians, the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Services, the District Assemblies, private investors, traditional and religious leaders including parents must play their roles in every capacity to help reverse the canker that is destroying the nation's future and threatening to the sustainable development of Ghana.

In addition, allocation of funds by the central government to the sector must be looked at holistically. Proper funding of the sector where all divisions and subdivisions of the education sector are considered bringing to minimal the level of agitations by teachers and educational workers in general. Emoluments due to all workers in the sector must be well negotiated and paid where necessary to avoid complications with academic staffs and for them not to have any need to embark on strike actions to distort the educational life of our future generation.

Conclusion

Indeed education is key to sustainable development of any economy, and so there is the necessity for special attention to be given to the sector. We live in a society where more often than not the income of an individual is dependent on the level of education of that person. If people with education earned more than those without, then the same is true for nations. Therefore, for education to contribute outstandingly to sustainable development of a nation, it must be decouple of politics. The duration of second cycle education in Ghana, educational allowances due, basic education policy are some of the identified key areas that politics has taken over. Some consequences were also identified and recommendations made accordingly.

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