

THE UNENDING CYCLE OF EDUCATION REFORM IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the education reform policies of various Ghanaian governments since independence in 1957. It establishes that the reasons given by successive governments for introducing an education reform has been very similar. Ghana has had numerous education reforms and reviews of existing education systems. These reforms have largely not been able to deliver upon their promises, leading to recurrent calls for reforming the education system. The paper argues that the reform of education in Ghana should be seen more as a political programme rather than a well-planned and realistic attempt to resolve the challenges facing the education system. It is therefore unlikely the 2007 education reform will be different from previous ones.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce papier analyse les politiques de réforme d'éducation de gouvernements Ghanaïen différents depuis l'indépendance en 1957. Il établit que les raisons apportées par les gouvernements successifs pour présenter une réforme d'éducation ont été très semblables. Le Ghana a eu de nombreuses réformes d'éducation et des révisions de systèmes d'éducation existants. Ces réformes n'ont pas vraiment été capables de livrer sur leurs promesses, en causant des demandes périodiques du fait de réformer le système d'éducation. Le papier soutient que la réforme d'éducation au Ghana devrait être vue plus comme un programme politique plutôt qu'un essai bien planifié et réaliste de résoudre les défis faisant face au système d'éducation. C'est donc improbable que la réforme d'éducation 2007 se distingue des précédents.

INTRODUCTION¹

Since independence in 1957, Ghana's education system has been characterized by several changes. Successive Ghanaian governments have often been dissatisfied with the education system that they inherited from previous governments. Several attempts have therefore been made by various governments to review and/or reform the education system to make it, according to official parlance, "more relevant to national needs". This is evident in the numerous reform and review committees that have been set up by successive governments to examine the existing system and make recommendations for improvements.

Since independence in 1957, there have been three major educational reforms, that is, in 1961, 1967 and 1987 and there have also been several reviews of the education system, notably those in 1966, 1974, 1993 and 2002. The search for an 'ideal' education system for Ghana has, however, remained illusive. A current New Patriotic Party (NPP) government has also proposed changes in the education system and a new education system was introduced at the beginning of the school year in August 2007.

Education reform has been defined as "a plan, program, or movement which attempts to bring about a systematic change in educational theory or practice across a community or society" (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/education_reform; accessed 17th December, 2007). Education reforms have been carried out in different countries for a variety

of reasons. Some countries have aimed at changing the structure of the education system, the content or goal of education, or sometimes to rectify societal problems such as providing equal access to all citizens, or removing gender, class or racial discrimination.

A review of the education system, on the other hand, is generally considered to involve a less fundamental change than a reform. It usually involves having to examine aspects of the education system and making some improvements such as revising the curricula, removing administrative bottlenecks and providing technical support needed to improve teaching and learning outcomes. However, it is not always easy to differentiate between a reform and a review of the education system. This is because what commences as a review of education has sometimes ended up involving the introduction of major changes as is common in an education reform process. Furthermore, in some countries including Ghana, a review of education has frequently followed a reform process. Besides, the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably. The terminology used by governments or the education authorities may, therefore, not be as important as what changes are introduced and how they have transformed the education system.

The position taken in this paper which deals with the Ghanaian experience is that a reform involves major changes which typically include a change in the structure of education. A review, on the other hand, typically involves an appraisal of an on-going education reform, the identification of challenges and the introduction of new policy initiatives to resolve the challenges. It usually does not lead to a change in the structure of education. The 1961 Act of Parliament, for example, led to a major review of the education system but no major reforms were introduced by the

¹ This is a revised and shortened version of a paper presented at the African Studies Association of Germany Conference, Goethe University, Frankfurt/Germany, July 24-27, 2006.