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Review

Ghanaian Educational System: A Deviation from Cultural and Socioeconomic Structure; A Bane for Unemployment

George Obeng

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Ghanaian Educational System: A Deviation from Cultural and Socioeconomic Structure; A Bane for Unemployment

George Obeng*

Department of Accounting Education, Faculty of Business Education, College of Technology Education Kumasi, University of Education, Winneba, Kumasi, Ghana.

*Correspondence: georgeobeng29@yahoo.com

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Abstract

There is a growing concern of youth unemployment among tertiary graduates. Skills acquired in school provide an opportunity to grab. Unemployment sounds unusual in the preindependent colonial era when people learn the trade of the family. After independence, schooling for government jobs became a mantra. There is a shift from the culture and socioeconomic structure to governmental employment structure. This study determines how the population structure is outpacing public government business creating employment deficit and how the curriculum is defeating entrepreneurial development in Ghana. The literature is reviewed, and discussion with students as focused group addresses the unemployment problem. The study concludes that the educational curriculum that is not incorporating the traditional industries is creating unemployment.

Keywords: Curriculum; Unemployment; Youthful population; Indigenous businesses.

Originality: Primarily the study sought to determine the relationship between education and unemployment. It is affirming that the educational system that is not incorporating cultural and socioeconomic activities of any society eventually creates unemployment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Concerns are raised about unemployment in society worldwide particularly among the youth graduating from various educational institutions. People always have the conviction that once a person has gone through formal education that person should be offered a job by somebody preferably the government. People are also questioning the educational system as to its inability to inculcate in our youth and students the spirit of entrepreneurship to take the initiative of identifying the opportunities around, develop them, and establish their own businesses. The educational system is blamed for being theoretical and not directed to train students with the right skills and competencies to fit well and absorbed into the important sectors of the economy. In reality, the educational system and processes may not be well conceptualized on account of the situational environment to rake in the interacting variables and factors in the socioeconomic settings. This cannot give learners the appropriate framework to navigate and manipulate the system positively and progressively by setting any meaningful objective to direct their attention and focus as entrepreneurs and make their own life except depending on others. Overreliance on others for a job has created huge unemployment burden on society (O'Higgins, 2001). Youth unemployment rate worldwide is high with a global average of 11.9% in 2007, three times higher than adult unemployment rate; in 2009, it shot up to 13% (Dei Tumi, 2011).

2. YOUTH AND UNEMPLOYMENT OUTLOOK/STATUS

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly, the Commonwealth, and the World Bank have tried to homogenize the categorization of youth age to be persons in the age range of 15–24 years as prescribed by the UN and the World Bank, 15–29 years prescribed by the commonwealth, and 15–35 years as per Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sierra Leone (DeiTumi, 2011).

According to John Yaw Amankrah (2000, 2006a), Assistant Chief Statistician and Head of Labor Statistics, Ghana Statistical Research on youth unemployment, Ghana's population has a youthful structure with the youth defined officially (United Nations standard) as age 15–24 years contributing about one out of every four of the population. Amankrah (2006a) further observed that over the past 40 years, the number of the youth in the total population of Ghana has increased from 1.1 million in 1960 to 2.3 million in 1984 and to 3.5 million in 2000 constituting 22.6% of the economically active population.

United Nations Secretariat, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects (2008 Review) reveals that the population of young people (15–24 years) in Africa has recorded unprecedented growth overtaking Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean in 2010 and would show astronomical growth between 2030 and 2050.

When one looks at a large number of the people in the world being youthful, strong enough to contribute toward the development of our socioeconomic progress, we must sigh with relief and we should be proud to enjoy and celebrate for that. It should not, therefore, be surprising to say that the UN made a case to see to the proper development of the youth.

In 1965, the United Nation adopted the declaration on the promotion among youth the ideals of peace, mutual respect, and understanding between people, stressing the importance of the role of youth in today's world especially its contribution to development (UNDP, 1995: 172) cited by DeiTumi (2011). However, that is not the case, as the youth in today's world are saddled with chronic canker of unemployment.

According to ITU, a digital inclusion website for youth and children, "75 million young people are unemployed worldwide and three times as many are underemployed often those working in the informal sector facing low wages, no benefits and a higher probability of being laid off. A further 621 million youth are said to be idle, not in education or training and not looking for employment. Youth make up 17 percent of the world's population and 40 percent of the world's unemployed" (Culled 20/3/16).

Youth unemployment rate worldwide is high with a global average of 11.9% in 2007, three times higher than the adult unemployment rate. Moreover, in 2009, it shot up to 13% (DeiTumi, 2011).

ILO SEED Working Paper No. 76 in 2006 estimated that about 40% of the world population was below the age of 20 and 47% of all unemployed people worldwide are young men and women. The paper estimated that about 660 million young people will either be working or looking for work by 2015. The world has a population of about 620 million active young people between the ages of 15 and 24 according 2009 estimates. However, about 81 million were without jobs, a situation that can worsen as new entrants join the job market (ILO, 2008).

According to the workshop on Youth Employment and Unemployment Challenges in Africa, a case of Ghana, held on November 2011 by the Institute of Social Statistical and Economic Research (ISSER), 23% of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 years and 28.8% of graduates between the ages of 25 and 35 years wait for two years or more before they get employed.

About 300,000 young people enter the labor market every year. The formal sector is only able to engage less than 6000 (3%) leaving about 97% to survive in the informal sector or unemployed. More than 64 million are unemployed youth worldwide, and 145 million young workers are living in poverty: youth employment remains a global challenge and a top policy concern (ILO, n.d.).

In Ghana, the incidence and growth rate in youth unemployment is even more worrisome especially in the world of a seeming freeze in public sector employment and the general economic challenge. According to Prof. Kwesi Yankah (cited by Adjase-Cudjo, 2015), the number of unemployed graduates, a subset of the youth, in Ghana is likely to increase from the current 200,000 to 271,000 by the end of 2015. Now, let us look at the status of youth population and unemployment figures as revealed by census and other important state documents.

From Table 1, the youth population in Ghana from 1960 to 2000 of the age 15–24 years for both genders is between 22.6 and 26.7%. This is an indication of a good source of human resources with energies to carry

Table 1. Share of the Youth in the Economically Active Population of Ghana in Percentages.

Gender	Age group	1960	1970	1984	2000
Both genders	15–19	11.4	9.5	10.7	9.1
	20–24	15.2	14.5	16.0	13.5
Male	15–19	10	9.1	10.0	9.2
	20–24	14.5	13.6	14.8	12.7
Female	15–19	13.5	10.1	11.3	9.0
	20–24	10.2	15.7	17.1	14.3

Source: John Yaw Amankra Compiled from the 1960 to 2000 Census of Ghana (Statistical Service).

Table 2. Unemployed Population by Age and Gender in Ghana in Percentages.

Both genders	1960	1970	1984	2000
15–19	40.8	39.8	37.7	17
20–24	23.7	31.9	36.8	29.1
25–29	12.8	13.1	13.7	14.2
30–34	7.4	6.4	4.6	9.9
35–39	4.7	3.4	2.2	7.8
40–44	3.4	2.0	1.3	6.5
45–49	2.3	1.4	1.0	5.4
50–54	1.8	0.9	0.7	4.3
55–59	1.1	0.5	0.5	2.9
60–64	1.1	0.4	0.4	3.0
65+	1.6	0.6	1.1	0.8

Source: John Yaw Amankra Compiled from the 1960 to 2000 Census of Ghana (Statistical Service).

the nation to heights. If the traditional economic structures are appropriately developed to absorb these people into work, it means a lot in terms of production of goods and services for domestic and external consumption. However, they are idle with the possibility of engaging themselves in negative social practices.

The unemployed population has the youth in the age range of 15–34 years as 84.7% in 1960, 91.2% in 1970, 92.8% in 1984, and 70.2% in 2000. This also shows a weak economic system and structure (Baah-Boateng & Turkson 2005), which is not able to train its human resources and make good use of them. Nsawah-Nuamah and Amankrah (2005) in a survey compiled the profile of the Ghanaian unemployed youth, depicting a weak training prospects for the youth.

The profile of the unemployed youth in Ghana shows a little over 1% to have received tertiary education from the universities and polytechnics. The remaining, over 90%, are school dropouts, and those with Junior Secondary School (JSS) have no specialized skills to be absorbed into any organized employment environment. Amankrah (2000, 2006a) compiled the share of the youth in the economically active population and unemployment in Ghana as presented in Tables 1 and 2. It is not wrong to say that the Ghanaian economic

Table 3. Profile of the Ghanaian Unemployed Youth.

Profile and population (%)	Male	Female	Total
Young persons, illiterates and school dropouts, and not been to school at all	20.8	23.2	21.6
Young persons, have acquired skills from Technical and Vocational Institutions including Apprenticeship Training but need retraining to make them succeed in Ghana's changing labor market	6.6	3.5	4.7
Young persons, have completed formal education at various stages at nontertiary level (JSS products in majority)	65.3	66.3	65.8
Young persons, have completed SSS but unable to continue education or get employment due to deficiency in English, Mathematics, and Integrated Science	2.3	5.2	4.7
Young persons, have graduated from Universities and Polytechnics, and first time job seekers without right working experience after national service	1.6	0.6	1.2
Young persons who live, sleep, and work on the street and others	2.8	2.2	2.5
	100	100	100
Sample size	524,028	378,437	902,465

Source: Nsowah-Nuamah and Amankrah (2005). Report on Survey of Unemployment and Underemployment in Ghana 2001.

Table 4. Hopes and Aspiration of the Unemployed Youth in Ghana—2001.

Options and proportion (%)	Male	Female	Total
Those desiring to work but no work because of lack of work experience and opportunities to improve their lot	41.7	23.5	33.7
Unemployed youth desiring to set up own enterprises but for lack of capital, space, and competition against indigenous value added products from imports	30.5	50.3	38.5
Unemployed youth desiring to better their grades to continue education for formal sector jobs	9.9	6.2	8.3
Those desiring skills training and retraining, apprenticeship, job attachment for getting paid, or self-employment	16.3	19.1	17.4
Youth unemployed desiring to travel overseas for jobs.	0.7	0.4	0.7
Unemployed youth desiring reintegration into family or married life to get settled	0.4	1.2	0.9
Unemployed youth with other hopes and aspirations	0.5	0.3	0.4
	100	100	100
Sample size	524,028	378,437	902,465

Source: Nsowah-Nuamah and Amankrah (2005). Report on Survey on Unemployment and Underemployment in Ghana 2001.

**Table 5. The Structure of the Ghanaian Labor Market.
(Percentage of individuals by category of Employment)**

Category of employment	GLSS-1 1987/1988	GLSS-2 1988/1989	GLSS-3 1991/1992	GLSS-4 1998/1999	GLSS-5 2005/2006
Government	8	7.9	7.8	5.9	7.1
State enterprise	1.9	2.3	1.2	0.6	–
Private	7.4	7.9	6.4	6.7	6.9
Wage employees	17.3	18.1	15.4	13.2	14.0
Farmers	58.7	54.6	56.7	55.7	50.4
Nonagricultural employment	19.5	24.2	23.5	27.3	26.2
Unpaid family Ent.	2.2	1.1	1.3	0.3	–
Unemployed	2.2	1.9	3.2	3.5	2.7
	100	100	100	100	100
Labor force participation	0.87	0.89	0.89	0.86	–

Source: Ghana Living Standard Survey (GLSS) 1–5.

structure is not properly organized to make good use of its youth. The educational system is a failure in comparison to the precolonial era where people were engaged in the cultural and socioeconomic activities of farming, weaving, carving, poetry, beads making, construction, sawn mill, carpentry, and others. The youth were engaged in these economic activities of their parents or assigned to any family member for training. Artifacts from such trade and vocation had a ready market and attracted foreign trade and investment. If the Ghanaian educational curriculum had factored these, supported by modern technology, into its planning, it would have augured well for the economy. The use of technology (ICT) can enhance the skills and employability of our youth in way to reduce unemployment as observed Her Excellency Rhoda Peace Tumusiime. Recently, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in 2001 included, in its curriculum, a program for training students in Ghanaian herbal medicine (Gracia, 2018) and processing of Ghanaian fruits for the markets. Two other institutions, namely The Tettrh Quarshie Memorial Hospital and Center for Research into Plant Medicine, are also making strides in the industry (Gracia, 2018). These programs have gained currency with students easily absorbed into the system. Traditional herbal medicine has been a force in the health management of many Ghanaian societies. The trade in Ghanaian herbal medicine is of considerable economic importance. It seems that medicinal plants are used to complement or substitute Western medicine as observed by van An del, Myren, and van Onselen (2012). If the traditional industries, such as herbal medicine, have been developed into the academic curricula to train the people and develop technology for the production and distribution, the story would have been different. The earlier elite educated people saw herbal medicine as primitive and unhygienic and preferred orthodox chemical medicine to manage simple tropical diseases at a heavy cost to society. The story is now different. If other traditional vocations are researched and developed, it will help to control the unemployment problem in Ghana.

From the survey as presented buy Amankrah (2006a, 2006b) and Nsowah-Nuamah and Amankrah (2005) some statistical inference can be made as below

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|---------|
| 1. Average Share of Youth in the Population: | $(26.6+24+26.7+22.6/4)$ | 25% |
| 2. Average Unemployed Youth in the Population: | | |
| United Nations Standard (15–24 years) | $64.5+71.7+74.5+46.1/4$ | 64.2% |
| Ghana Standard (15–35 years) | $84.7+91.2+92.8+71.76/4$ | 85.115% |

3. Profile of the Unemployed Youth:

Illiterates with no education at all and school dropouts plus those living, sleeping, and working in the streets	24.1%
Those with education and skills	76.4%
Those with some education up to JSS	65.8%
Those with hopes and aspiration to be trained, work, and live in Ghana	97.9%

Ghana Living Standard Survey

Average Wage/Salary Employees: Government	8+7.9+7.8+5.9+7.1/5	7.34%
State Enterprises	1.9+2.3+1.2+0.6+0/5	1.2%
Private	7.4+7.9+6.4+6.7+6.9/5	7.08%
Total Average		15.6%
Average Population in Farming	58.7+54.6+56.7+55.7+50.4/5	55.22%
Average in Nonagricultural Activities	19.5+24.2+23.5+27.3+26.2/5	24.14%
Unpaid Family Enterprise	2.2+1.1+1.3+0.3+0/5	0.98%
Unemployed	2.2+1.9+3.2+3.5+2.7	2.7%

The inference from the survey of Amankrah, 2006a & 2006b, Nsowah-Nuamah and Amankrah (2005) and GLSS-5 on the hope and aspiration of the unemployed youth (as compiled by Nsowah-Nuamah and Amankrah (2005) and the statistics on the labor market demonstrate that the education system lacks focus and direction for the youth. The system should instill certain discipline and a sense of responsibility to own their life and not wait on others. The educational system should give the youth-specific direction and job opportunities that at any time they can engage themselves. This is possible when available local industries and economic practices are properly designed to take center stage of education as now done at KNUST by training students in herbal medicine. Most students graduating from this program are privately engaged.

3. CAUSES OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN GHANA

According to Amankrah (2006b), referring to the Ministry of Manpower, Youth, and Employment, the causes of youth unemployment in Ghana include the following:

- Introduction of the JSS and Senior Secondary School (SSS) system, without adequate planning for their integration into the trades/vocations and job placements in the Ghanaian job market,
- Education and training have no link to the needs of the important sectors of the economy,
- The near collapse of Ghana's industrial base due to ineffective management of the divestiture process, which resulted in the closure of many factories without a structural transformation of the economy to generate alternate jobs for the people,
- The shrinking of public-sector employment opportunities coupled with relative slow growth of the public sector and,
- The lack of coherent national employment policy and comprehensive strategy to deal with the unemployment problem.

Source: Ministry of Manpower Youth and Employment: Working to Build Our Future—March 2006

4. YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE EDUCATIONAL FACTOR

According to the Ministry of Manpower Youth and Employment, the causes of youth unemployment include the Introduction of the JSS and SSS system, without adequate planning for their integration into the trades/vocations and job placements in the Ghanaian job market, and that education and training have no link to the needs of the important sectors of the economy.

In Ghana, one popular adage is that “The best legacy to give to a child is Education.” With this, parents are encouraged to spend their last pesewa on the educational advancement of their children against their (parents) own interest, forgoing other social pleasures and excitement. Society and parents should be worried if after spending a fortune on their children, they have nothing to engage them for a living. After a whole period of about two decades spent on education and skill training, stakeholders are told that there is inadequate planning for the integration of learners into any trade and job placements in the job market. In a nutshell, there is a missing link between the educational process and the economy; it is a great burden and worrisome.

“When the youth struggle at the beginning of their careers the repercussion can last a lifetime. This is not a future we want for the next generation, making imperative that we take accurate steps to ensure youth have meaningful work opportunities and can lead productive and fulfilling lives,” says Brahim Sanou Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau (BDT) (culled 20/3/16).

In addressing this issue of youth unemployment, consideration needs to be given to the perception we have about education in the schooling or formal education system. Why should the educational structure of the junior and senior secondary or high schools not capably linked but lack integration into the trades/vocations and job placements in the Ghanaian job market, and that education and training have no link to the needs of the important sectors of the economy?

Over the years, a decade-plus, efforts have been made to investigate the perception of students and that of their relatives on education in Ghana. About two thousand students, both graduate and undergraduate, in a year have been involved in this exercise. It is very important and significant to hear from students and the public that a student is in school to acquire knowledge, get a certificate as evidential matter, and provide means of getting a job and contribute toward social progress and development. Quiz further it is realized that the perception and interest in going to school are all about the student getting a certificate, get employment from the public sector, and make money, either fair or foul to enjoy life at the expense of other members of the society. The idea of schooling, therefore, is not basically about the acquisition of knowledge for self-development and entrepreneurial disposition, be of service for the public good but for other peculiar motives. The further the knowledge acquired in the schooling process will go is at the exit point (gates) of the school. Everything is left on the campus, and the students go home with their certificates combing everywhere for a job. In seeking for a job, students and relations are selective with preference made for places in the public sector, where they think the systems of controls are weak, where they can do their own thing in advancing corrupt practices. We then do not create, but look what we met and squander whatever comes our way. This is quite intriguing and worrisome as such motives cripple and derail the process of socioeconomic development. Such attitudes do not ensure progress and growth in anticipation of adding any value, expand the economy, and open more avenues for future generations who take up the mantle of leadership. It is therefore not surprising that almost all state and public institutions and corporations are run inefficiently and cannot stand the test of time and in any competitive and challenging environment. This educational phenomenon has over the years been one of the problems identified and accounted for corruption at high places among public officers and the high youth unemployment rate in Ghana.

Another nagging factor and misconception about education is the idea that education is all about theory and not practical or linked to industry. You will hear employers, parents, government officials, politicians, civil society, and other opinion leaders and even the students lamenting on this issue of theoretical (abstract) nature of the educational system and that schools are not teaching students any employable skills. The idea that education is theoretical or teaching and learning being abstract could be erroneous. The unfortunate impression persists because students do not avail themselves to understand the basic fundamentals and concepts of the courses taught. The very things taught and learned in school are supposedly around and available in the communities and environments whereby the known is conceptualized and taught to the unknown. Naturally, education emanates instinctively through self-knowing facilitated by our immediate relations to understand the environment in which we live. Through this communal education, people adapt appropriately and pursue meaningful life as they interact with society and share with other stakeholders. By hindsight or default, some recordings and documentation are made fundamentally from the experiences, observations, and intuitiveness of earlier generations to serve as educational tools and medium. The forefathers (earlier generations) use these tools and medium to teach their off-springs, a practice facilitating education since creation before the advent of industrial revolution. These educational tools

as developed by the forerunners, from imminent interaction with their environment and relationships with the actors in the society, serve as a springboard for us to understand, live, and progress in a better, secured, and well-structured society.

The industrial revolution erupted because of a population explosion with many mouths to feed, and there was a division of labor to propel mass production to meet the demand of consumable, industrial, and other economic goods. Those things, done manually in an inefficient and uneconomic manner, were conceptualized and automated for a higher efficient production system. Mass education in school and on an official platform also became necessary to train people in the new order and conceptualization of production to acquire the necessary skills to fit well into the economic system. It is in order for Ghana to research the cultural and socioeconomic environment, conceptualize the behavior in there and develop the appropriate technology for efficient production, and teach the processes through schooling instead of the communal approach. In this case, schooling or education in this public sense should have been structured with the local industries being the focus.

In furtherance of this study and investigation, students were made to analyze cases of training young ones in society in different vocations trade or domestic activities and how to conceptualize the teaching and learning processes and their objectives. A sample of home settings of different environments as how ladies prepare different dishes (meals) and how the young ones are taught by their parents and mentors was considered. If in one home or another the local dish, meal, or menu prepared regularly is fufu, banku, tuozafo, or akple, the child in any of these homes will be taught and will know how to prepare that meal he/she is conversant with. If fufu is the main dish regularly prepared, a child will be comfortable in preparing fufu not tuozafo. If it becomes necessary for the woman to prepare fufu to teach the ladies from other homes where fufu is not prepared, she may have the choice of meeting the young ladies one on one or group them at a convenient place for teaching and learning to take place. This practice has been the bases of educating the young ones in a society, over the years, for various crafts and cottage industry, a system referred to an apprenticeship. Here, the resource person set his/her own standard and model of training. If this practice of preparing the fufu is researched into and conceptualized and standardized, it will be an academic exercise for fufu preparation to be a course to be taught in a school in an academic environment. Therefore, can there be any difference in the fufu preparation as taught in homes and in the academic set up? There cannot be any serious difference. The difference, if any, may be the conceptualization, documentation, and standardization of the processes in the academic environment as against the traditional set up in our homes. Second, any difference to arise in the school situation may come up as to the learners understanding and interpretation of the information provided at the learning situation. If the idea and concept are not properly understood, the learner will misinterpret the concept and not derive the expected benefit and outcome from the training and help others in the future. In this case, the problem is not about the concept of preparing fufu being abstract but that of the teacher and the learner not availing themselves for the task appropriately to facilitate and understand the learning situation and the idea behind fufu preparation as enshrined in the educational materials and documents. Transfer of knowledge is then obstructed. How then can the learner avail him/herself contingently, to manipulate the concept and thought for the purpose of meeting a demand or a challenge that may present an opportunity for grabs to progress and develop in a life full of competition? Today through this phenomenon local dishes are captured as part of catering and taught in schools alongside other continental dishes. The consensus was reached among the students in all the scenarios as indicated that the transfer of knowledge in our educational system is not properly conceptualized. More attention is given to examinations and certificates than to the knowledge required to develop the skills and competencies to fit well in the socioeconomic environment. Therefore, the perception is that a certain government got them to school and that the government should give them a job. If we cannot conceptualize our education and economic systems to meet our demands and taste in the current world of competition, economic, and technological advancement, then what kind of legacy is education are we talking about?

5. CONCLUSION

There is a relationship between the educational system and employment opportunities. Societies that are not structuring their educational system to capture the local cultures and socioeconomic activities and

behaviors stand at the risk of experiencing acute unemployment with time. Education basically conceptualizes behaviors of all facets of life to provide a logical flow of thought and give meaning to science and art to realize an objective. Society is abounding with opportunities that are exploited to the advantage of man to secure human existence. The opportunities may come from the cultural and socioeconomic environment. Through research and science, man unearths knowledge that is taught to the members of the society to understand their environment. The knowledge helps to identify economic prospects and how efficiently to harness them that create job opportunities. Any society that fails to structure its educational system to incorporate this phenomenon is doing a great disservice to its people. Ghana is failing when it comes to employment. Unemployment has been a problem beyond proportion because of copying other education system and not incorporating their cultures and their socioeconomic behaviors. Education is seen as being literate in foreign languages and identified with foreign cultures, pass examinations fair or foul, secure certificate, and get employed by a government and do your own thing. Gradually, Ghana has given out developing its production capacity for the consumption of foreign products. This behavior is giving out jobs to others and creating unemployment for its people. It is time for Ghana to look at the structure of its education in accordance with its cultural and socioeconomic environment to help control the social vice of unemployment.

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