

## ***Critical review***

# **Policy initiatives for change and innovation in basic education programmes in Ghana**

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## **Contextualisation**

The education system in Ghana has undergone enormous changes in the last 50 years. Over this period it has gone from being highly regarded among African nations, through a period of collapse and more recently rejuvenation, supported by a donor-funded reform programme (FCUBE). Underlying these ups and downs and, more recently, the recognition of the need for change, are changes more fundamental still: different ways of knowledge and different ideas about the nature, purpose, and scope of school subjects and how to meet the needs of a diverse student population have come to the fore. These remain among the many challenges facing the education system in Ghana. The paper that follows reviews this 'history' and the process, and events, which shaped and informed it. It concludes by examining recent developments and what still remains to be achieved.

**Abstract:** *Using an historical perspective, the recent history of educational policy making in Ghana, as it relates to the provision of basic education, is examined. Three periods or phases are identified corresponding to the situation prior to Independence, the period between 1951 and 1986 and the reforms instituted in 1987 and the years that followed. Despite the willing cooperation of various donor agencies and the availability of resources, progress has been limited. The policy and contextual reasons for this comparative lack of progress are examined in turn. The paper concludes with what can be learnt from these attempts at reform and suggests that, whilst the issues involved are complex, greater attention needs to be focused on the training and support of teachers in their classroom role rather than focusing on the provision of resources. Helping teachers to understand the desired changes in their practice and the need to make pupils independent learners, coupled with reforms of teacher training and support, and the nature and quality of teacher continuing professional development, can all be seen as key ways in which further progress may be made.*

## **Introduction**

This paper aims to trace some of the major changes which have taken place in Ghana's education system since the country gained Independence in 1957, ie, almost 50 years. Although Ghana's education system had previously been regarded as one of the most highly developed, and effective, in West Africa (Foster, 1965), by the 1980s it was in near collapse (Scadding, 1989; Peil, 1995) and viewed as dysfunctional in relation to the goals and aspirations of the country. The academic standards of pupils, support for teachers, instructional materials, school buildings, classrooms and equipment had declined through lack of financing and management. In 1996 the Ghanaian government embarked on a major donor-funded reform programme called the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) programme which touched all levels of the education system and attempted to address the perennial problems of access, retention, curriculum relevance, teacher training, provision of physical structures, and financing. What follows examines basic education in Ghana by dividing its policy history and practise into three major phases; that of the pre-Independence era, the period from 1951 to 1986 and the period from 1987 to 2003. Each of these is discussed in turn in the following sections.

## Basic education in the pre-Independence era

This first phase in the development of basic education policy and practise in Ghana can be described as having been dominated by missionary activities in relation to literacy for trade and the teachings of the Bible. Formal education in Ghana dates back to the mercantile era preceding colonisation. European merchants and missionaries set up the first schools and Christian missionaries are said to have introduced western-style education into Ghana as early as 1765 (Antwi, 1991a; Graham, 1971). Many of these institutions, established by Presbyterian and Methodist missionaries, were located in the south of the country in what became the British Gold Coast Colony. The main aim of these early schools was to facilitate the training of the local inhabitants as interpreters for purposes of trade and as a conversion of Ghanaians to the Christian religion. Thus the curriculum had a narrow focus on basic literacy with the Bible and scripture as the main texts of schooling.

Early attempts to improve the quality of primary education in Ghana (then known as the Gold Coast), by Sir Gordon Guggisberg in his role as Governor, took place in the period between 1919-1927. He emphasised a need for better teaching and improved management of schools but the shortage of teachers and inadequate funding meant that his plans for improving primary education were hardly achieved. Most schools in the rural areas were still based in unsuitable buildings, were poorly equipped and staffed or, in some cases, centred under trees!

## Major policy initiatives in basic education from 1951-1986

The second phase was characterised by instability in governance as a result of successive military takeovers. This political instability coupled with the rise in oil prices in the early 1970s resulted in economic decline in the country. It was a period of a harsh and repressive revolutionary zeal on the part of the military regime of 1981 and resulted in a significant number of trained and highly qualified teachers leaving the country (Nti, 1999). Education was therefore faced with political instability, *ad hoc* measures, and frequent changes in education policy. Teaching and learning in basic schools had deteriorated to the extent that the majority of school leavers were illiterate, and confidence in Ghana's once enviable education system was shaken.

In 1951 the first president, Dr Kwame Nkrumah, embarked on a massive expansion of the education system to speed the pace of educational development in the (then) Gold Coast. This was in response to popular demand for education and to the new Africa Government's intention to organise a planned campaign to abolish illiteracy. This initiative was followed by further developments with Ghana's Independence in 1957. In fact the next 35 years saw a wide range of developments and reform initiatives taking place in Ghana's education system. Within this period three significant stages can be discerned. These were the Accelerated Development Plans (ADPs) for Education in 1951 and 1961, the findings of the Dzobo Committee of 1973 and the following, New Structure and Content of Education Plan in 1974. The intentions associated with the new military government of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) in 1981 led to further changes. The first of these is discussed in the next section.

### ***The Accelerated Development Plans (ADP) for Education of 1951 and 1961***

The ADP, launched in 1951, gained legal backing through the introduction of the 1961 Education Act, which sought to provide free, universal and compulsory basic education (of 6 years duration) for all children from 6 years of age. The 1961 Education Act empowered

Local Authority Councils to be in control of educational management whilst parents and guardians were expected to make some contribution to the running of schools in their areas. Primary education underwent a rapid and steady growth and the number of schools rose from 1,081 in 1951 to 3,372 in 1952. Enrolment doubled in a period of five years and Ghana was acclaimed as having the most developed education system in Africa (Foster, 1965; Ghana Human Development Report, 1998; Scadding, 1989).

Realizing the importance of trained teachers for the expanded system, the 1961 Education Act opened new teacher training colleges, expanded those already in existence and made provision for the training of unqualified teachers in the field through various emergency and short-term in-service training programmes. Teachers' numbers increased by 1,000 between 1951 and 1953, with the yearly output rising from 420 to 1,108 trained teachers from teacher training colleges.

In 1961 the entire basic education system (primary and middle school education) was made free and compulsory, although uniforms and books were not free. However, even though school enrolments increased following the 1961 Education Act, the quality of teaching and learning appears to have remained the same. The changes that were effected to cope with the increased pupil enrolments had been insufficient to create a balance between the quantity and quality of the education provided. The most significant factor that affected the imbalance was an inability to provide schools with trained teachers. With the increase in the number of schools, more teachers were needed and so many 'pupil teachers' (ie, untrained teachers) had to be employed to teach, resulting in poor teaching and learning in schools during this period. Following this, the second significant source of policy development, mentioned earlier, arose through the Dzobo Committee of 1973 and The New Structure and Content of Education policy of 1974.

### ***The Dzobo Committee of 1973 and The New Structure and Content of Education of 1974***

Prior to 1972 the education system had been criticized as being elitist in character built, as it was, on a selective system similar to the British grammar schools. In 1973 the in-coming military government carried out a review of the educational system, and formed the so-called Dzobo Committee to recommend appropriate measures to improve the situation (Dzobo, 1974). This led, in 1974, to the government putting into operation the first major, post-Independence, reform in pre-university education. This reform is generally referred to as '*The New Structure and Content of Education*' (NSCE) and reduced the length of pre-tertiary education from 17 years to 13 years. The 6 years of primary education remained the same. The four years of junior school was reduced to three years. The five years of senior secondary school, lower stage was reduced to two years, and the period of senior secondary, upper level, remained the same (ie, it went from a pattern of 6-4-5-2 to one of 6-3-2-2).

The aim was to make it possible for school leavers to leave at any point of exit from the system with skills that would enable them to be employable. The reform was expected to raise standards at the various levels so that educational standards would not be compromised as a result of the decrease in the number of years spent in pre-tertiary education. The thrust of the content of the reform programme was to vocationalise pre-university education in Ghana and to make it more functional and oriented towards contextual demands and challenges. It also constituted a bold attempt to reduce educational expenditure.

However, despite its laudable intentions, the NSCE did not have any sustainable impact on the general education system of the country. There were still unqualified teachers in the education system, inadequate resources to support teaching and learning in schools, and challenges for teachers within the context and content demands of the curriculum. This again led to intense unease among parents, employers, academics and some politicians.

The significance of the Government's White Paper on the Committee's recommendations was the acceptance of 13-years duration of pre-university education for all. It endorsed the introduction of pre-technical and pre-vocational subjects in both primary and junior secondary curricula. The period also marked the establishment of the Ghana Education Service which brought together, for the first time, teachers, educational administrators and education sector workers into a new government agency, under the Ministry of Education, to implement the new structure of education. The third significant policy development in basic education provision arose from the virtual collapse of the education system and a further military takeover in 1981.

### ***The virtual collapse of the Ghanaian Education System and the PNDC of 1981***

December 1981 marked the takeover of yet another military government under the name of the 'Provisional National Defence Council' (PNDC). By 1983, Ghana's education system had seriously deteriorated in quality; enrolment rates stagnated and the percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) allocated to education dropped from 6.4% in 1976 to a low of 1.7% in 1983. Government resources were no longer available to construct, complete or even maintain the existing education facilities and the down-turn in the economy resulted in the mass exodus of qualified teachers to other parts of the continent causing a significant fall in the ratio of trained to untrained teachers in the basic education sector.

Abdallah (1986), then Secretary for Education, speaking on the state of the education system at the time, had this to say:

*'Over the past decade, there has been a sharp deterioration in the quality of education at all levels. There has been a virtual collapse of physical infrastructure in the provision of buildings, equipment, materials, teaching aids etc... To solve these problems, the PNDC has decided to embark upon a comprehensive programme of educational reforms' (p 1).*

Arising from the economic constraints that faced the country in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as the bureaucratic bottlenecks and sheer lack of interest and commitment from administrators, the new programme never went beyond the experimental stage. There was stagnation and near demise of the experimental Junior Secondary School (JSS) system. By 1983 the education system was in major crisis through lack of educational materials, deterioration of school structures, low enrolment levels, high drop-out rates, poor educational administration and management, drastic reductions in Government's educational financing and the lack of data and statistics on which to base any planning.

### ***The Military to the rescue - the 1987 education reforms***

Moving beyond the events just described, the third phase structuring this historical account embraces the period referred to here as 'the military to the rescue' phase and covers the period of major reform from which the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) reform of 1996 emerged. It was characterised by Ghana's participation in, and endorsement of, international agreements such as Education for All, the Declaration on the Rights of the

Child, the Beijing Declaration on Women's Rights and the Lome Convention. This meant that the Government had to remain committed to her constitutional obligations as a guide to policy and was influenced by the bilateral and multilateral negotiations it had taken part in.

Also significant in this period was the strong ambition of the government to reform the education system by leaving no stone unturned in restructuring the nation's economic base to bring it into conformity with the financial credibility criteria required by the World Bank. With this condition met, Ghana had the opportunity of negotiating for credits and grants to finance major education reform. Apart from the World Bank credits, several donor agencies came to the aid of Ghana in her reform implementation, a greater part of which was directed to basic education.

In spite of the fact that Ghana had successive military governments from 1966, 1987 marked a new phase in government thinking. In 1987 The New Educational Reform Programme (NERP) was introduced with a focus on the total restructuring of the entire pre-tertiary education system and on improving access through the provision of infrastructure whilst making the curriculum more relevant to social and economic needs. According to a Ministry of Education Report (MOE, 1988), the NERP sought '*...to salvage the educational system and make it more meaningful to the individual and the nation as a whole*'. It is therefore worthy of mention that, even though similar to the NSCE reform, in terms of structure and content, there was a marked improvement on the latter with a revised curriculum which reflected radical changes at the basic education level. The launch of the World Bank supported programme for education infrastructure also led to the building of 3000 pavilions to support the school system.

The goals of the 1987 NERP as summed up in the Sector Adjustment Policy Document of the World Bank (World Bank, 1986) included the following: (i) to expand access to education; (ii) to improve the quality of education; (iii) to make education more relevant in meeting the needs and aspirations of the individuals and the socio-economic conditions of the country; (iv) to re-structure pre-university education to 12 years (6-3-3); and (v) to ensure cost-effectiveness and cost-recovery.

A major thrust of the 1987 NERP reform was the diversification of the formal academic courses offered in pre-university institutions by the inclusion of practical courses. These changes were intended to correct the perceived elitist education that downgraded technical, vocational and agricultural education. This perception was captured in the address of Professor Dzobo, the Chair of the committee which had reviewed previous reforms, at a National Workshop on the 1987 Educational Reforms when he stated that:

*'In spite of the bold educational innovative measures of the 1920s and of the subsequent ones, Ghana's formal education system remained Western and predominantly academic and elitist. As a result of the Accelerated Development Plan of Education in 1951, the pre-university educational system has become increasingly dysfunctional as it turns out a lot of school leavers who have no marketable skills, neither do they have the mind to go into self-employment ventures. These leavers could see no bright future for themselves and they come to constitute a veritable economic and social problem for our society to solve...' (Dzobo, 1987).*

However, these strong sentiments, as expressed by Dzobo, were not themselves sufficient to ensure implementation of the 1987 Education Reforms, nor did they change the attitude of the public and the educational establishment. Further, like the English 11+ system, the elitist education system in Ghana still favoured the more academically prepared students. Basic Education was made compulsory for all children and was defined as the first nine years of

schooling (6 years primary and 3 years JSS). JSS 3 pupils sat the Basic Education Certificate Examination to determine their admission into the Senior Secondary School (SSS). It was expected, at the inception of the reform programme, that basic education would be made accessible to more Ghanaian children, 43% of whom were estimated to not be school before 1987.

In 1998, following the reform, Asante, then Minister for Education, in his address on the state of education in the country at the time, stated that the economic decline of the seventies, coupled with the mass exodus of qualified teachers to other neighbouring countries, meant that more than 50 percent of teachers of primary and middle schools had to be replaced by untrained teachers (Asante, 1988). He pointed out that the majority of students had neither textbooks nor exercise books. Buildings and furniture were in a state of disrepair, and enrolment levels had declined to the extent that many of those who went to school did not complete their studies, thus leading to two-thirds of the adult population being illiterate. With motivation and morale low, ineffective supervision became the norm. Finally, the much-needed statistics for vital educational planning were unavailable, leading to decisions taken on an *ad hoc* basis.

This was a period when Ghana enjoyed a lot of goodwill from developed wealthy countries and donor agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The reason for this financial support was the 'success story' of Ghana's Economic Recovery Programme of 1983. The reform was therefore supported by a World Bank Sector Adjustment Credit as well as grants from UNDP, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Norway, Canada and concessional loans from the OPEC fund (World Bank, 1990). This period reflected a policy climate conducive and committed to improving educational quality through giving schools the means and responsibility to respond to the change process being initiated at the time. The period also attracted bilateral donors within the education sector and thus witnessed the beginning of a USAID Primary Education Programme in the country.

In 1994, seven years after the inception of the New Education Reform Programme in 1987, the results of poor performance of school pupils at age 12 led to the setting up of yet another Education Review Committee to review the education system. At this time, only 6% of the pupils at grade six in public schools tested nation-wide, achieved a criterion score of 60% and above in English. Even worse less than 3% achieved a criterion score of 55% and above in Mathematics (MOE/PREP, 1994). The Education Review Committee decided to develop and introduce new curricula for primary schools since it was argued that a large proportion of the subject matter in the curriculum was not relevant to the pupils' immediate environment. In addition, it was criticised as being overloaded in content and too rigid and compartmentalised, thus reducing the effectiveness of the teaching and learning tasks. As a result of the 1994 review, a further major reform, the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education Programme (FCUBE) was initiated as a constitutionally mandated charge of the 1992 Constitution.

### ***The clarion call of the 1992 Constitution: the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education Programme (FCUBE) of 1996***

The FCUBE initiative was the Ministry of Education's response to a constitutionally mandated charge arising from Article 39 (2) of the 1992 Constitution of the Fourth Republic of Ghana:

*'The Government shall, within two years of parliament first meets (sic) after coming into force of this Constitution draw up a programme for implementation within the following ten years, for the provision of free, compulsory and universal basic education (Government of Ghana, 1992).*

One may therefore ask, 'how was the 1996 FCUBE reform policy different from the policies preceding it?' Even though the FCUBE policy was not 'new' in terms of themes and ideas, it was certainly 'new' in the emphasis it placed on its implementation. By requiring that all Ghanaians receive nine years of free schooling, the Government wished to ensure that all graduates of the basic education system were prepared for further education and skill training. Article 39 (2) of the 1992 Constitution entitled every child of school-going age in Ghana to a balanced and broadly based curriculum which promised to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society. It also aimed to prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. The expansion and reforms planned under the FCUBE were designed to equip future generations of Ghanaians with fundamental knowledge and skills, in selected Ghanaian languages, literacy and numeracy, in order to develop further, their talents through additional education or training (MOE, 1987, 1996, 1998). This was to be achieved through the four objectives of the FCUBE reform: (i) to improve the Quality of Teaching and Learning; (ii) to improve Management Efficiency and Sustainability; (iii) to increase Access and Partnership; and (iv) to decentralize the Management of the Education Sector (MOE, 1996, p 15).

According to the FCUBE Policy Document of 1996, improvement in the quality of teaching and learning would be promoted by curriculum review and development, the provision of textbooks, teaching and learning materials and books for school libraries. In addition, there would be the development of an assessment and evaluation system for pupil performance.

The school curriculum was envisaged to develop in pupils the following:

*'...skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing and knowledge of the principles and skills of the numeracy, measurement and of the relationship involving space and shape. In addition, knowledge and understanding of the cultural, economic and physical heritage of the people and their neighbours should be emphasised. Research and study skills, skills of enquiry, analysis and knowledge of healthy living plus issues of gender sensitivity in text of curriculum as well as in illustration should be pursued...' (MOE, 1996, p 17).*

In line with the policy document, the Basic Education curriculum was designed to achieve literacy, numeracy and to impart appropriate knowledge of culture and practical skills. In addition, exposure to, and hands-on experience in, technical and vocational skills were intended. At the beginning, the curriculum comprised as many as nine subjects. The Education Reform Review Committee later reduced this to five and six subjects in Lower and Upper Primary respectively. This was to allow more time for the development of writing, reading and numeracy skills after the Ministry of Education conceded that subject overload was a factor contributing to the dismal performance of pupils' learning outcomes. Changes to the curriculum were introduced in 1996. Currently subjects taught at Lower Primary are English, Ghanaian Language and Culture, Mathematics, Environmental Studies and Religious/Moral Education. For Upper Primary, Integrated Science (Science and Agricultural Science), Physical Education, Music and Dance are taught in addition to those in Lower Primary schools. The real challenge of the FCUBE is to provide and ensure that an education of comparable quality is made available to all through the evolution of a common school system.

The increasing concern for the quality of teaching and learning in basic schools (both primary and junior secondary schools) had brought to light serious problems of teacher education. In view of this concern, in 1996 the Ministry of Education tried to step up efforts towards effective teacher training, and even more importantly, to recognize that in-service training is an essential aspect of continued professional development.

On teacher education, the policy document stresses that:

*'The implementation of the FCUBE programme will require the services of a large number of well qualified teachers in the shortest possible time. The teachers should be well-versed in teaching, particularly in primary methodology', and 'teacher development will be more 'school based' so that emphasis can be placed on hands-on-training activities in schools' (MOE, 1996, p 25).*

It is worthy of note that the estimated number of teachers to be trained was not made explicit, although the reform made a major commitment to both pre-service and in-service development of teachers.

In-service training, as proposed, was also linked to the training of headteachers who would in turn train teachers:

*'After each phase of Headteachers' Continuing Education, Headteachers will organise 'school based' Continuing Education for teachers under the supervision of Circuit Supervisors. Circuit Supervisors will visit each school regularly at least once a month to support headteachers in the continuing education of classroom teachers. School Based Education for teachers will be organised at least twice a week.' (MOE, 1996, p 31).*

The importance of teacher education was emphasised by the pronouncement in 1998, by the Deputy Minister of Education responsible for Basic Education, Kyere (1998), that reform of teacher training was also on the agenda, along side devolution of control, curriculum reform, competency-based training, and a decentralisation of the educational bureaucracy in the country. It is worthy of note that the extensive implications of this target for training teachers in the system was not examined further.

Overall, there were two features of the 1996 FCUBE Basic Education Policy Document worthy of comment. The first was that the strategy for the revitalisation of quality education was linked to an over-emphasis on material inputs rather than to how teachers' attitudes and behaviours in the existing education system could be mobilised to handle the unfamiliar pedagogical issues embedded in the revised curriculum. Secondly, arrangements for the effective supervision and monitoring of the programme at the district level, and how provision was to be made for the necessary logistical support to make such supervision feasible, were matters still left unresolved. Thus the policymakers appeared not to take into consideration the attitudes and behaviours of teachers who were to implement the change. In the Ghanaian situation in particular, this ignored the need for change in teachers' practices rather than simply a change in their curriculum materials.

A comparison of the FCUBE reform with its predecessors reveals that the former has directly borrowed many of its ideas from the recommendations of the previous educational policies of past governments. Whenever conferences or commissions are called upon to form a plan for education in Ghana, the tendency seems to be to maintain the existing system with slight modifications. In some places, there is direct acknowledgement of the FCUBE reform's indebtedness to the previous education policies, as illustrated on language issues which always remain one of the most sensitive issues in any education policy in Ghana. For example, the FCUBE reform goes back to the Accelerated Development Plan of 1951, with a renewed commitment to the idea of free and compulsory education for all pupils of school going age. However, one of the major results of the FCUBE reform, in contrast to previous reforms, has been its impact on donor agencies.

## Interventions following the FCUBE reform

Following the FCUBE reform in 1996, a number of donor agencies contributed substantial funds for primary education projects in the country. These included the United Nation's Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF), the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom, the World Bank, the European Union, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA). The involvement of these agencies resulted in a range of intervention strategies.

A major donor was USAID, which introduced a range of initiatives aimed at rebuilding the Ghana education system. Among these, the so-called Primary Education Programme (PREP), introduced in 1990, provided essential inputs such as textbooks, in-service teacher training courses and national assessment systems to re-build an education system that had nearly collapsed during the 1980s. Its strategic objective was to assist the Government of Ghana to increase the 'effectiveness' of the primary education system. It aimed to do this through the establishment of 330 'Model Schools', with at least one 'Model School' in each district;

*'...designed to develop, demonstrate and replicate the conditions and processes that are required for improving school standards and ultimately, pupil learning throughout the education system.'* (USAID/GHANA, 1995, p 7).

In promoting effective teaching, USAID pledged to assist the Government of Ghana to train teachers to use pupil-centred instructional practices and assessment techniques and to improve school supervision by both circuit supervisors and school headmasters. Plans were made to create a sustainable in-service professional development system and to develop and test distance-learning technologies for teacher training and classroom instruction (USAID/GHANA, 1995, p 9). Success was to be measured by a specified increase in achievements of pupils in Model Schools, and a specified increase in enrolment and retention rates.

However, as stated in the Evaluation Report;

*'These inputs were necessary but not sufficient for improving school quality and learning outcomes. Likewise efforts to reform national policies to improve conditions at the district and school levels did not achieve the anticipated results'* (USAID/GHANA, 1995, p 1).

The approach adopted by USAID seemed to assume that a particular model or strategy can be implemented in many sites with good effect (see Quansah, 2000). However, as suggested critically by Fullan (1993) when discussing American schools;

*'In these projects we can predict that implementation problems will be massive, and that some very good ideas will be produced. ... [But,] the Achilles heel of the New Generation of American Schools is the assumption that producing model schools will change the face of education. They can make a contribution, but local development everywhere is what is going to count.'* (Fullan, 1993).

One therefore realizes that given this approach seems problematic in America, doubts about its effectiveness in Ghana are not far fetched. The USAID policy document suggested no clear communication by donors and the government teams to teachers in schools to help in the crucial implementation process. Lack of clear communication was something the external

assistance providers had found to be quite challenging when attempting to help a large number of teachers in schools without explicitly outlining the procedures with which they can '*produce competent teachers*' as desired. The current number of primary teachers nationwide in Ghana is estimated at 63,700, of which 13.5% are untrained, whilst the annual output of newly trained teachers is estimated at 6,000 with an annual attrition rate of 5% (Lewin, 2002b).

Although the UK has supported basic education in Ghana since the mid-1980s, mainly through DFID, this support appears to have had limited impact. It has been suggested that its impact on educational outcomes has been constrained because of a lack of a strategic focus (MOE/DFID, 1998). A major DFID response to improving teaching and learning was the Whole School Development (WSD) programme which was introduced in 1998. This is an implementation programme involving decentralizing and resourcing aimed at providing support to districts and schools to improve the quality of teaching and learning. It aimed to do this by promoting:

*'...Child-centred primary practice in literacy, numeracy and problem solving with the view to improve the quality of teaching and learning in basic schools, encourage community participation in education delivery, and to promoting the competencies of teaching and learning through school-based in-service training.'*  
(MOE, 1999, p 2).

The Whole School Development programme is a continuing process, providing support to headteachers and teachers in basic schools, providing a mechanism for districts and schools to develop teachers and their schools for effective teaching and learning. It places an emphasis on literacy, numeracy and problem solving. It is part of a DFID policy and strategy that places district plans at the centre of change. The core focus of WSD is the classroom where it is hoped that quality teaching provided by competent teachers would result in effective learning. For this to be achieved the school should have competent teachers and resources and the headteacher's capacity to manage the school effectively built up. Also, there should be continuing efforts at updating the competencies of the serving teacher.

WSD also envisages a new approach to teacher development or continuing in-service training. Under the new system being implemented the professional development of serving teachers' competencies does not depend on global in-service training designed by external bodies. Usually, in such top-down designs, the challenges identified do not reflect the needs of teachers. Under the WSD teachers themselves will be responsible for identifying their problems for solution through school-based INSET. Under the leadership of their respective headteachers teachers are required to find solutions to their problems through the use of lead curriculum/instructional leaders at the school level, and also through the cluster of schools arrangement. The District Teacher Support Team (DTST) which consists of headteachers and personnel from the district office is to provide support at the district level. A member may be selected from a Teacher Training College. Membership of the team numbers 10 members who would be selected at training workshops based on performance, creativity and leadership qualities displayed at the workshops.

In the Deputy Director General's Status Report on the WSD it was stated that;

*'...schools and cluster-based in-service training sessions, which were expected to take off in 1999 in all 30 phase 1 schools, have not started because of lack of funds'* (Akumfi-Ameyaw, 2000).

Also in the same document, it was stated that, 'the WSD coordinator, 3 Ghanaian primary teacher educators and 4 training supporters from the UK were to train the National Training

Group'. The training of 3,600 teachers nationally that was expected to take off early in 1999 has not yet been done. It has also been conceded that, in many districts, the DTSTs have not been able to provide in-service training to teachers, as funds were not made available. It is also expected that changes envisaged in classroom practice, such as critical and independent thinking and inquiry methods of teaching, will be brought about through school and cluster-based meetings under the leadership of headteachers.

## Some implications

The need for new understandings amongst teachers is particularly crucial in the case of current reform efforts in basic education because many of the ideas central to these efforts are foreign to Ghanaian teachers. Having grown up in a very traditional educational system teachers are now being asked to change, and as a result to teach, in ways that are unfamiliar to them and in ways that they did not experience as students. Furthermore, the reforms themselves are not based on a prescriptive approach of the kind that Ghanaian teachers have always experienced. Rather, in the reforms teachers are being encouraged to build on pupils' ideas and knowledge to help them develop conceptual understanding and relevant skills. While reformers seek more demanding and engaging teaching and learning, most instruction in Ghana is 'chalk and talk' as it has been for generations. Thus the kind of teaching and learning envisioned in these reforms is not something that most teachers in Ghana understand. The very people who must work on these reforms have little first hand knowledge or experience with this kind of education. Moreover, many see these reforms as visions created by others (such as policy makers), not programmes for practice (by teachers).

Reports from professional development projects have provided considerable evidence that the kind of learning that leads to fundamental change in teaching occurs over a long period of time, with extensive support and multiple opportunities to experiment and reflect (Loucks-Horsley, 1997). It is therefore hardly surprising that teachers are finding problems coping with the suggested methods and the pace with which the desired change is anticipated through the different implementation procedures adopted by USAID and DFID respectively.

Another obstacle to change is the practice whereby conclusions and recommendations of conferences, seminars and workshops, organised jointly by the MOE and donor partners (but donor funded), are taken as policy without going through the proper procedures of discussion to be considered and adopted as official policy. These *ad hoc* procedures seem to have contributed significantly to the deepening of the crisis at the basic education level. That is to say, the way that views of '*good practice*' are defined, transmitted and indeed enforced within schools, is very different from the ways such versions of '*good practice*' are responded to and enacted by Ghanaian teachers in classrooms.

## Conclusions

It is clear that educational reform in Ghana is an extremely complex task. Successive initiatives over several decades contained a number of internal contradictions and inconsistencies as seen in the various strategic approaches adopted by the Ministry of Education and its agencies and the various donor organizations. The policy text, viewed from the historical perspective adopted here is understood as having been continually rewritten by a number of policy makers and donors working together and compromising their original intentions in order to construct a text that was acceptable to a variety of interested parties. Due in part to conservatism and in part to lack of the financial capacity for more integrative action, both the government and donor agencies have had a tendency to seek change at the margins rather than at the core of established practice, relying on a plethora of small projects

and demonstrations rather than on more coherent and substantial redesign. Small projects being implemented in selected schools in different districts dotted around the country attest to this fact. Throughout the period 1986-1991, donor activity in Ghana in general, was uncoordinated resulting in the creation of several project implementation units within the Ministry Of Education (MOE) and a proliferation of micro education projects in the education sector itself (Action Aid, 2000).

Provision of in-service, continuing professional development, has been *ad hoc* and patchy over the recent reform period even though these initiatives represented a real attempt to retrain and re-skill teachers in curriculum areas which they might have never studied in depth during their initial teacher training programmes. Questions therefore naturally arise concerning what the impact of such courses might be on the teachers' grasp of subject methodologies and subsequent classroom practice.

The Ministry of Education (MOE), for its part, has also launched efforts to set goals and standards of various kinds, to create school reform networks, to decentralise governance and management, and to restructure schools. But efforts to promote teacher education and professional development that will lead to improved practice on a wide scale have yet to emerge. This is because teacher preparation for the reforms took the form of short in-service training courses for teachers aimed at enabling them to use the new syllabuses effectively and to sensitize them to the objectives of the reforms. The Ministry of Education demanded that teaching should focus on pupil understanding and not on memorising facts. It also wanted new forms of assessments to be introduced which asked students to perform complex tasks rather than to reproduce what they have been told. Evidence from the Education Review Committee of 1995 (MOE, 1995) and the expressed concern of the Vice Chancellor of the University of Education, Anamuah-Mensah (2003), who was also chairman of the Education Review Committee of 2002, had shown that there was still content overload in the curriculum, and only a minority of schools felt able to pursue the reform policy requirements.

Recent assertions by the Centre for Research into Improving the Quality of Primary Education in Ghana (CRIQPEG Report, 1995), at the University of Cape Coast, which suggested that programme admission standards into teacher training colleges were being raised, that the academic quality of students was improving, and that research was influencing teaching practices for the better, are yet to be verified. The quality, effectiveness and attitudes of the teaching force rest heavily on two factors: the type of person recruited to the service and the quality of the pre-service and in-service training they receive. Embedded in the policies and practices of these current innovations is the belief that pupils' outcomes are positively affected when traditional notions of teaching and learning are reconceptualized (Pryor and Stuart, 1997). Research suggests that educational practices resulting from such reconceptualizations obligate schools to re-tool and re-train their educators (Antwi, 1991b; Fullan, 1991b; Peterson, *et al.*, 1996).

The policy review document of the 1997 Education Review Committee following the FCUBE reform, and the government's initiatives following on from it, seem to be based on two principal, but interlinked, assumptions. First, that the basic education system had failed to provide an acceptable level of educational improvement for pupils in schools and, second, that teachers, especially teachers in basic education schools, were not helping in the government's effort to improving pupils' performance in line with the objectives spelt out in the reform agenda (MOE, 1997).

Overall, the reform policy arising from FCUBE demanded many changes: in standards, curriculum, assessment, and instruction. But underlying these were changes more fundamental still lying in three areas: different ways of knowledge, different ideas about the

nature, purpose, and scope of school subjects and the ways in which the needs of a diverse student population might be met.

It is thus apparent that there are a number of challenges facing the education system in Ghana. First, that there is a chronic lack of resources; the government has been unable to ensure the supply of basic education materials (chalk, exercise books and textbooks) for many schools despite available donor funds (World Bank, 1996; MOE, 1995; DFID/MOE, 1998). In addition, teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, teachers' guides and syllabuses are inadequate to meet the needs of teachers and pupils alike (Konadu, 1994; Karikari-Ababio, 2003). Secondly, there is a lack of staff of the right calibre and in sufficient quantities (Bame, 1991). Thirdly, the system of teacher training is under criticism for admitting students with poor senior secondary school leaving results. These trainees arguably also lack the motivation, commitment and aptitude for teaching. The training system itself is seen as deficient in its lack of focus on methods of teaching, and criticised for over-emphasising the academic knowledge of trainees (Awuku, 1998; Antwi, 1991b; Dramani, 2003; Gyasi, 2003; Nsowah, 2003). Further, pedagogical issues, such as the quality and nature of instructional delivery by most basic schoolteachers is viewed as non-interactive, encouraging pupils to learn by rote alone (Pryor and Stuart, 1997; Dramani, 2003; Gyasi, 2003).

Thus, even in 2003, it may be considered that primary education in Ghana is in the midst of a drastic decline in standards, in terms of quantity and quality (USAID/MOE, 1996; Avotri, et al., 1999; Dramani, 2003; Gyasi, 2003; Karikari-Ababio, 2003; Nsowah, 2003). The pedagogical changes facing teachers, particularly those in rural areas, are complicated by difficulties relating to the medium of instruction to be used for minority language groups, shortage of appropriate learning materials (Karikari-Ababio, 2003) and lack of professional training among teachers (Scadding, 1989; Nsowah, 2003).

In spite of the fact that Ghana's education system has come far, the increasing challenges of the twenty-first century demand that it be re-engineered if it is to provide quality professional support programmes to teachers at the basic education level. This would make them more responsive to national goals and aspirations as well as global demands. In this paper I have attempted to provide a historical and policy context for further research in this area and to highlight some of the issues faced by primary teachers in Ghana today.

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