

The Continuation School System in Ghana: Revisiting Technical/Vocational Education at its Best

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Abstract: The study is a historical analysis of the Continuation School System (CSS) in Ghana. An examination of relevant archival data retrieved from the offices of Public Records and Archival Administration Department (PRAAD) in Ashanti and Central Regions in Ghana were scrutinized. Three persons who were identified as having adequate knowledge of the CSS in the country also provided relevant information to aid the study. In addition, secondary data relating to CSS was also used to enhance analysis of the primary data retrieved. The major findings were that the CSS achieved its main goal of predisposing and equipping its beneficiaries with practical/vocational skills to make them productive in their future lives. However, the CSS policy was abolished with the introduction of the 1987 Educational Reforms in the country. Its total abolition was rather unfortunate since its ultimate goal and that of the New Educational Reforms were somewhat similar. One anticipated that it should have been overhauled to incorporate the new ideals of the New Educational Reforms. In particular, the utilization of the local non-professional artisans as teachers in the CSS could have been maintained to ensure adequate and continuous supply of local expert instructors without incurring much cost.

Keyword: *Continuation schools, Adinkra clothes, leatherworks, tailoring, dress making, local*

INTRODUCTION

The attainment of independence in 1957, from the British colonial rule could be described as a “mixed blessing”. In one breadth, the period was a moment of joy, relaxation and hope for the future; emanating from a deep sense of liberation from the shackles of colonial administration. The leader of the new born Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, flanked by his able collaborators and compatriots, on the eve of independence, brilliantly captured this new feeling of national consciousness and exhilaration in the following words: “Ghana your beloved country is free forever”. In another breadth, the period, was for sober reflection on the myriad of socio-economic challenges that confronted the country at the time and the urgent need for putting up pragmatic measures to deal with such challenges as low industrial capacity leading to low productivity, high levels of unemployment, excessive reliance on foreign goods and astronomical levels of rural-urban drift. Through the provision of numerous technical and vocational educational institutions in the country, Dr. Nkrumah sought, relentlessly to provide practical solutions to these socio-economic challenges ¹.

¹ ROSE HAZEL, “The Role of the Self-Concept in Aging,” *Annual Review of Gerontology and Geriatrics, Volume 11, 1991*:

Consequently, technical/vocational education (TVE) is recognized by successive governments as one of the effective means of solving the socio-economic challenges. Interestingly, different modes of TVE have, over the years, been implemented to deal with such challenges. One of them which was put in place between the 1970s and 80s was the Continuation School System (CSS), a kind of entrepreneurial training and skill acquisition training that was provided to pupils in the Ghanaian Middle schools during the period, would be focused on in this article. The justification for such a study lies in the fact that available literature on such an educational policy that lasted for almost two decades is scanty and somewhat uncoordinated. Again, the lessons learnt from such a historical study could be used to enhance the persistent national effort in providing technical/vocational education to ameliorate, if not totally eradicate the numerous socio-economic challenges Ghana is confronted with.

In May, 1967, a circular titled “The Continuation School Scheme” by J.W. E. Mills, the then Director of Education in Ghana, referred to a decision in 1962 to the effect that “the elementary school course in Ghana should be of eight years’ duration and that after the 8th class, pupils who could not enter secondary schools should proceed to a ‘continuation school’ and be pre-disposed to trades in preparation for life”². By this letter, there was going to be a reduction of the duration of the period for the existing ten years of elementary school which had six years of primary school and four years of middle school.

This decision, though, not implemented at the time the circular, clearly portrayed leadership’s thinking of a paradigm shift regarding elementary school during the period. Among other things, it was recognized that there was no clear-cut policy to tap the talents of pupils whose skills and aptitudes were veered towards TVE. Furthermore, it was clear that once there was no policy for such pupils, they were left on their own, after elementary school to “swim in the vast ocean” of joblessness and its attendant social evils. The policy to reduce the duration of elementary school to allow pupils who could have potentially become drop-outs, in a heavily dominated academic environment, to be predisposed to trades and vocations during this period, as contained in the above circular, was thus very realistic and commendable. Being pre-disposed to various vocations in one’s locality and acquiring competencies for productive living was both politically prudent and economically strategic.

By the time of its nationwide implementation, the suggested duration of the System had been abandoned and the already existing ten-year duration for the elementary school course was maintained. It meant that all pupils in Middle School should learn the pre-vocational skills for four years (the entire duration for Middle School). But in the course of the four-year duration at Middle School, if a pupil passed the then Common Entrance Examination, he could leave for secondary school education, meaning that the rest would continue to learn the syllabus of Middle School education and concurrently learn the vocational/practical skills (crafts) at designated time on the schools’ time table. Antwi³ explains that the Continuation Schools were in active operation in the 1970s and pupils in the then Middle Schools were learning the various trades and vocations in their localities to arouse their interests in the learning of local crafts and acquire the rudimentary skills in the vocations which could even make them self-employed after Middle School. In an interview with Oduro Amoateng, a former Continuation School

Behavioral Science & Aging 11 (1991): 110; HAZEL, “The Role of the Self-Concept in Aging”; Paul Bennell and Kwame Akyeampong, *Teacher Motivation in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia*, vol. 71 (DfID London, 2007).

² Ted Honderich, “Mill on Liberty,” *Inquiry (United Kingdom)* (1967).

³ Capital Avenue et al., “College of Education and Human Development,” *Harvard Educational Review* (2015).

Instructor in Adinkra (funeral) clothes at Sunyani Odumasi on the 18th October, 2020, explained that, all pupils at the Middle School level, all over the country, from 1970, were expected to acquire some pre-vocational or rudimentary knowledge and skills in the various vocations in the country, so that by the time they finished Middle School they might have been predisposed to the requisite knowledge and skills.

In an interview on 22nd of May, 2018 with Mr. I.K. Boateng, a former Assistant Director of Education at Afigya Sekyere District of Ashanti, Ahafo Ano North District of Ashanti, who also served as the Kumasi Metropolitan Director of Education, conceded that the Continuation School System was developed out of the need to train Ghanaian pupils in formal school setting, in the trades and practical skills of their communities; dependent upon the availability of raw materials in those communities. In the event that they terminate their schooling at the Middle School Level, they could create their own jobs and reduce the burden of government creating jobs for all school leavers.

The current District Director of Education at Bibiani Anwiaso Bekwai District in the Western Region of Ghana, Mr. Samuel Nyarko, who was a product of the Continuation School, was full of appreciation for the promoters and implementers of the Continuation School System. Explaining the rationale for CSS, he said, “in all educational programmes, the dropout phenomenon is likely to occur, and learning basic trades in the communities was bound to help those who would not be able to complete school, economically, thereby reducing the pressure on government to find work for all people in the country” (Interview with Mr. Samuel Nyarko, the District Director of Education of Bibiani-Anwiaso District, Western Region of Ghana, 28th May, 2014).

The paper discusses the background, objectives, philosophy, organization, methods and curriculum of the Continuation School System in Ghana; using the Adjamesu Asante Local Authority Middle Continuation School, Ghana, between 1970 and 1980 as a case study. Through an analytical and thematic presentation of data, the study reflects on the possible challenges that led to the demise of this rather pragmatic and cost-effective educational programme and examines what could have been done to sustain such an educational initiative in the country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of existentialism and Continuation School System

The term “existentialism” was coined by Jean-Paul Sartre⁴. According to him, existentialism, in simple terms, means “existence precedes essence”. He further explains that human beings have no given identity until they have made specific decisions and have chosen their work and have thereby defined themselves. In other words, existentialism can be described as a philosophy that is concerned with human beings in their concrete existence as active and functional individuals. Man is the creative realizer of his own potentialities. Thus, one important effect of existentialism is that it puts every man or woman in possession of him or herself as he/she is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders.

Obviously, the philosophy of existentialism puts premium on the fact that the learner should be given the freedom and opportunities to explore and discover their talents in order to develop them for their

⁴ Stephen A Stumpf et al., “Journal of Management Education” (1990).

own growth and that of their environments ⁵. In other words, the teaching and learning process should be a democratic process in which the student is offered with the opportunity to explore his or her unique talents and in line with the resources of the environments and localities, develop them for rapid socio-economic development. The CSS, as would be discussed subsequently, was largely a flexible curriculum in which all pupils were predisposed to a variety of crafts and vocations in their environments to develop interest and further facilitates the choice of future vocations and occupational opportunities.

METHODS

Content analysis was the main method used in this study. Consequently, a detailed description and critical review of relevant data collected from archival documents in various offices in Ghana and Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) were used. In addition, interview sessions were held with three knowledgeable persons on the subject matter particularly on the rationale for the provision and practice of educational programme under consideration. Secondary data was also used to strengthen the analysis.

To ascertain the reliability and validity, the data was subjected to both internal and external criticisms. Internal criticisms border on the evaluation of “the accuracy and worth of the statements contained in a historical document” ⁶. On the other hand, external criticisms deal the authenticity and genuineness of a document. In external criticism, elimination of forgery and going for original copies of documents are crucially important ⁷. These two important historical techniques were employed in the study. The documents used were official documents written at the time of events they describe by well accredited personalities and kept at districts, regional education and PRAAD offices in Ghana. The interviewees were also purposively selected because they were directly involved either in the policy formulation or participants in the provision and delivery of the Continuation School System in Ghana from 1972 to 1987. The data retrieved from both the archival data and interviewees have been thematically discussed in line with the objectives of the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Nature and Organization of the Continuation School System

It appears that the structure of the Scheme was a nation-wide replication of the Bekwai Arts and Crafts Centre in the 1940s ⁸, and thus a widespread phenomenon throughout the whole country. Every Middle School in the country within the period was required to put up a workshop through government and communal resources for the learning of the various handicrafts and trades. But in the semi-urban and urban centres, where there were quite a lot of Middle Schools, one workshop at a Middle School, strategically located, could serve a cluster of schools and depending on the capacity of the community, two workshops could be built; one for girls and one for boys. Where one workshop was built, separate

⁵ James W Pennebaker et al., “The Development and Psychometric Properties of LIWC2007,” *LIWC2007 Manuel* (2007).

⁶ W. R. Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, “I Identifying a Research Problem and Question , and Searching,” *Educational research: An introduction* (2006).

⁷ Meredith Damien Gall, Walter R Borg, and Joyce P Gall, *Educational Research: An Introduction* (Longman Publishing, 1996).

⁸ Kwaku Sarfo Frederick et al., “Information and Communication Technology Access and Use and Competency Level among Second-Cycle School Teachers in Ghana,” *Journal of Media and Communication Studies* (2016).

apartments were created in it for girls and for boys. Recruitment of instructors, who were mostly non-professional teachers, depended largely on the trade or skill, the management of the school, in consultation with the District Directorate of Education, wanted to teach. Furthermore, the availability of instructors and their skills, in some cases, determined the learning of vocations by the pupils. Significantly quite a lot of vocations and skills were taught at a Centre and pupils were at liberty to choose which areas of interest they preferred.

Like the Asante Bekwai Arts and Craft Centre in the 1940s, the periods for teaching the skills were structured in such a way that every class in the school had one session a week and therefore if a term had fourteen weeks, it meant that each of the four classes would have fourteen-week sessions. Thus, fourteen multiplied four classes (14x4) would be the total period; a school would have for a term. In semi-urban and urban centers, the same arrangements were made except that a form one class, for example, visiting the workshop would consist of form one pupils from all the clustered Middle School utilizing that workshop facility. Whereas boys were learning trades and other related skills such as Kente weaving, Adinkra Clothes, tailoring and knitting, basketry, leatherworks, and carpentry, charcoal production, the girls were concentrating on learning issues of domestic significance including sewing, needle work, cookery and others.

Curriculum and Training Methods of the Continuation Schools: The Adjamesu Asante Local Authority Middle Continuation School Experience.

Curriculum

Available records indicate that the following vocational skills were taught at the Adjamesu Asante Local Authority Middle Continuation School: Leather Work, Tailoring, Livestock, Dress-Making, and Adinkra⁹. For a school in a rural setting to have mounted five different vocational subjects to provide practical lessons for students to acquire relevant skills in the various crafts prevalent in their locations clearly showed that the CSS had gained considerable popularity among Ghanaian pupils within the period. It is important to stress that the curricula of the CSS were very broad and comprehensive in nature; reinforced by a high degree of flexibility. This certainly provided ample opportunities for all the pupils to democratically select and try their hands on the various crafts to facilitate the choice of whatever skills they considered appropriate.

Again, such an integrated curriculum approach was bound to make judicious use of time, expand the intellectual breadth of students and to deepen their vocational capacities

In other words, the purpose of the curriculum was thus two-fold: to pre-dispose the pupils to indigenous occupational knowledge and skills and to promote the phenomena of self-employment and job creation among school leavers. It is significant that the teaching of crafts/skills in the school was largely contingent on the local resources and the expertise available at the time. Within the broad framework of the curricula, a school such as Adjamesu could select three or four crafts/vocations for effective training. This modus operandi of the Continuation School System could be likened to one of the four approaches/mode of TVE described by Lillis and Hogan (1983) According to these authors, the “Components of Core Curriculum mode” emphasizes the acquisition “pre-vocational with an important

⁹ MN Nii-Dortey and A Arhine, “The Performing Arts and the Post-Colonial Ghanaian Experience: The Ghana National Symphony Orchestra in Perspective,” *Research Review of the Institute of African Studies* (2010).

attitudinal strand...intension is to encourage attitudes and skills conducive to acquiring employment skills”¹⁰.

It is worth noting that the practical “Component of Core Curriculum” approach adopted by the Continuation schools in the country, as illustrated at Adjamesu in the 1970s and 80s, was not a novelty in the country’s formal educational system. It is on record that from the late 1820s, the Christian missions, particularly the Basel, were so particular and vigorous in the provision and delivery of this mode of education in the country. For the Basel mission, “the spade was as important as the Bible” and all efforts were geared towards popularizing this type of curriculum in all schools they set up in the country¹¹.

A contemporary writer at the time of Ghana’s independence explains that “the older generation [in country] have for some reason the idea fixed in their minds that even skilled technical work and large-scale farming are not proper occupations for literate people”¹². He further provides the antidote to this misconception by saying that: “there are not enough white-collar jobs and if the hundreds of school lads leaving the primary and secondary schools are not to become loafers and vagabonds, they would be advised and should be encouraged, to learn the science of farming or a skilled trade”. Even though Amamoo provided a solution to the challenge, his restricted solution was expanded in the 1970s and 1980s to include most of the vocations in the localities in the implementation of the CSS. It could therefore be said that the curriculum of the CSS provided some suitable vistas for the younger generation to be equipped to create their own jobs and also provide employment opportunities for others. Illustrations from the Adjamesu School curricula discussed below could be instructive:

Manufacture of Adinkra Clothes

Adinkra, being part of the curricula of the Adjamesu School, deserves some analysis largely because of its potential for income generation; based on its enormous socio-cultural utility in the locality. Adinkra is a local Akan word, literally translated as bidding farewell to the departed souls in the community. So the costume or all the category of the clothes used for funeral rites is referred to as Adinkra.

The economic significance of learning how to make Adinkra cannot be overemphasized in Ghanaian traditional communities particularly among the Akan. Organizing elaborate funeral rites for the departed members of Akan communities was (is) a common feature of their cultural and religious practices. The production of Adinkra in large quantities was (and still is) a prosperous economic activity and it was therefore no surprising that, in almost all the Continuation Schools, the making of Adinkra featured prominently.

The vivid description of the work of Adinkra and its economic prospects at Adjamesu was significant, and there is no doubt that, it was reflective of the general trend in the country. The report reads as follows:

¹⁰ Kevin Lillis and Desmond Hogan, “Dilemmas of Diversification: Problems Associated with Vocational Education in Developing Countries,” *Comparative Education* (1983).

¹¹ Beverly Lindsay, “The Development of Education in Ghana by H. O. A. McWilliam and M. A. Kwamena-Poh London, Longman, 1975. Pp. 151. £1.05 Paperback,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* (1976); Peter BOAKYE and Kwame Osei KWARTENG, “Education for Nation Building: The Vision of Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah for University Education in the Early Stages of Self-Government and Independence in Ghana,” *Abibisem: Journal of African Culture and Civilization* (2018).

¹² J. G. Amamoo, “Fresh National Problems,” *African Affairs* (1956).

The Instructor was seen at work with four pupils. Kuntunkuni¹³ [bark of a tree] was being boiled with the children around listening attentively to the instruction on the process of dyeing. The children were very keen. They asked him some questions which were readily answered. Number of cloths dyed at the time of visit was twenty-five and these had been collected by their owners. According to records, the amount realized totaled ₵3,750. The expenditure involved ₵1,410¹⁴. (See Appendix 22 for a detailed Report).

The profits accrued from the Adinkra at the School were a lucid indication that those pupils who could produce Adinkra after school were likely to be self-reliant or wealthy. From the above report, it is crystal clear that teaching and learning materials were available and most significantly were readily and relatively cheaply acquired from local resources or raw materials so abundant in the Ghanaian forest zone. This was bound to promote the sustenance and maintenance of the learning of the craft for considerable period of time.

The utilization of the demonstration method in the teaching of Adinkra is noteworthy. Demonstration is the process through which students learn how to perform certain skilled actions. As evident in the passage above, the teacher explained all operations in the manufacture of the Adinkra in a logical, step-by-step progression. And once twenty-five clothes had been collected by their owners from the Adjamesu showed that the learning of the craft had been very successful; indicating that the students were given the chance to try the step-by-step procedures inherent in the learning of the craft. A palpable display of progress in terms of predisposing the students to the vocations and crafts in their neighborhoods.

Leather Works

Additionally, the fact that leather works served as a source of income for the school, provided an immediate and practical meaning to the economic function of the TVE through a mutual interaction between the latter and the community. The profits could be used to expand the facilities at the workshops and defray other expenses. With regard to the progress of other crafts at Adjamesu, the report was unequivocal. The Leather work instructor, Gyimah Kwasi, was not in school at the time of the visit, but his absence was as a result of going “on trek to sell the product of his work”¹⁵. According to the report, he had already generated an income of Two Thousand Cedis (₵2,000.00) with an expenditure of Nine Hundred Cedis (₵900.00) thus making a profit of One Thousand, One Hundred Cedis (₵1,100)¹⁶.

Indisputably, one of the cardinal functions of TVE as pointed by host of authors is economic development and social amelioration¹⁷. It has also been pointed out that, “the provision of Technical

¹³ Phyllis Forster, “Traditional Mourning Dress of the Akans of Ghana,” *Matatu* (2013).

¹⁴ Nii-Dortey and Arhine, “The Performing Arts and the Post-Colonial Ghanaian Experience: The Ghana National Symphony Orchestra in Perspective.”

¹⁵ Nii-Dortey and Arhine, “The Performing Arts and the Post-Colonial Ghanaian Experience: The Ghana National Symphony Orchestra in Perspective.”

¹⁶ Nii-Dortey and Arhine, “The Performing Arts and the Post-Colonial Ghanaian Experience: The Ghana National Symphony Orchestra in Perspective.”

¹⁷ J. Middleton, A. Ziderman, and A. Van Adams, “Skills for Productivity: Vocational Education and Training in Developing Countries,” *Skills for productivity: vocational education and training in developing countries* (1993); J. Middleton, A. Ziderman, and A. Van Adams, “Vocational and Technical Education and Training,” *Vocational and technical education and training* (1991); Arvil V. Adams, John Middleton, and Adrian Ziderman, “The World Bank’s Policy Paper on Vocational and

and Vocational Education Training is critical for the production of middle-level human resource required for socio-economic development of the country” (Government of Ghana, NDPC, 2011. p. 155). Thus, if an instructor of the school was out selling the handicraft of the students in leather works and could make a profit over hundred percent (100%), then two significant lessons could be drawn up. Firstly, that the students had become largely skillful and could be relied upon for a relatively mass production of the leather items under the guidance of the instructor. Secondly, that the Ghanaian public had, to a greater extent, generated interest and taste for made in Ghana goods and thus a strong signal to the Ghanaian policy maker and educator that the pervasive perception that the average Ghanaian is somewhat aversive TVE and made in Ghana goods could be unfounded especially when the appropriate climate and needed resources are provided.

Tailoring

Tailoring as one of the vocations was also receiving considerable attention at Adjamesu. The report indicated that the instructor, Nkrumah Adasa was seen at work. The methodology of teaching tailoring was superb. Like the making of Adinkra clothes, the demonstration method and co-operative learning strategy were utilized in teaching tailoring to the pupils. The methods were pupil-centered and actual skill acquisition was going to be facilitated. The systematic description of the methods of teaching here was quite fascination. The details were reported as follows:

“He [instructor] had his training material ready for work and the children had been divided into two groups. Each of the pupils in the first group was holding a needle and a piece of cloth. In this group the pupils were given instruction on hemming and making of button holes. The other group of pupils was doing pedalling on straight sewing on machine¹⁸.

The fact that the training material[s] were ready was an indication of serious business at the school. The division of the pupils into two group underscored the essence of co-operative learning strategy where students actively participated in the learning of the skill. Apart from the fact that this strategy was bound to buoy up the confidence of the pupils, it further allowed them to think, share and exchange ideas. Even though the reason for the division of the class into two groups to perform different functions in the teaching and learning of tailoring was not directly given, it could be deduced that this learning group was a heterogeneous one composed of different classes of different age groups who had already acquired some competences in the various skills inherent in tailoring. On the other hand, it could be that it was homogenous one composed of only one class but was considered expedient by the instructor to share the learning tasks for each of the groups so as to maximize the time allotted for the teaching of the skills in tailoring so that when each of the group had mastered the skills specified for them, then the pieces could have been brought together for a “holistic piece” of artifact. This pragmatic way of teaching to get results could be described as a model for replication in our school especially in the light of an unprecedented upsurge in enrolment levels in our educational institutions.

Technical Education and Training,” *Prospects* (1992); J. Middleton, A. Ziderman, and A. Adams, “Making Vocational Training Effective,” *Finance & Development* (1990); Bennell and Akyeampong, *Teacher Motivation in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia*, vol. 71, p. .

¹⁸ Nii-Dortey and Arhine, “The Performing Arts and the Post-Colonial Ghanaian Experience: The Ghana National Symphony Orchestra in Perspective.”

Equally important was the economic dimension of the teaching and learning of tailoring. It is to be noted that “no initial capital was given to the instructor but at the time of visit he had been able to earn an amount of Eight Hundred Cedis (¢800) to the school”¹⁹. The resourcefulness of the instructor is captivating and future entrepreneurs could learn a great lesson from this. The constant complaints of modern graduates of our school system of non-availability of initial capital and money as the cause of doing nothing could considerably be checkmated by this “can do spirit” in this instructor. No doubt the inspector of the school was full of appreciation when he made the above remark.

Dress Making

Dress making was also given attention by Adjamesu. Concerning dressmaking, the report indicated “that training materials had been bought and serious work was in progress. The only setback was that “some few girls had not bought their training materials but efforts were being made by the school to get them ready at the re-opening of the schools next term”²⁰. The comment that some few girls had not bought their training materials deserves some comments. The fact that the School was getting ready to procure machines for the girls is very gratifying. This attempt by the authority of Adjamesu to get them the materials in due course, to some extent, illustrate transformational leadership which focusses on addressing the needs of the marginalized and the vulnerable in society. Gender issues are critically important when such issues crop up in an environment that is highly male dominated. Traditionally, the Ghanaian society still nurtures the conception that the society should largely cater for the interest of boys more than girls and for the school during the period to have taken the decision to get the dress making materials for the girls to be economically empowered through the acquisition of relevant skill was most laudable.

Agricultural Activities

The agricultural activities of the Continuation school programme deserve some attention because of its potential to prepare the pupils for occupational opportunities and its income generating capacities and the availability of vast stretches of land within the locality. There were two practical subjects that comprised the Agricultural studies. These were farming and animal rearing. Given the fact that a substantial number of Ghanaians during the period were farmers, it was reasonable for the school to promote agricultural activities since such activities were going to provide numerous economic avenues for the pupils in future. It was reported that “about half (½) an acre of land was put under the cultivation of tomatoes [and] the tomatoes had been harvested and the amount realized was ¢965.00.” Apart from this, “there was one and half (1½) acres of cassava farm, about a quarter of mile away from the school”²¹.

The 1987 Educational Reforms and Collapse of the Continuation School System in Ghana

¹⁹ Nii-Dortey and Arhine, “The Performing Arts and the Post-Colonial Ghanaian Experience: The Ghana National Symphony Orchestra in Perspective.”

²⁰ Nii-Dortey and Arhine, “The Performing Arts and the Post-Colonial Ghanaian Experience: The Ghana National Symphony Orchestra in Perspective.”

²¹ Nii-Dortey and Arhine, “The Performing Arts and the Post-Colonial Ghanaian Experience: The Ghana National Symphony Orchestra in Perspective.”

The Continuation School System was eventually abolished in 1987 following the nationwide introduction of what is popularly known as the 1987 Educational Reforms in the country. Though the Reforms also focused on predisposing pupils/students at the Junior Secondary School level (now Junior High School), it was essentially a departure from the Continuation School System in at least three main senses. Firstly, all the local instructors in the crafts and vocations who were mainly non-professional teachers were dismissed. This meant that the vocational/ technical and craft skills were going to be taught by professional teachers who had already gone through pedagogical training for at least three years.

Secondly, unlike the Continuation School “graduates” who did not write any final examination for certification after three or four years of Continuation School training, the JSS students after going through the programme for three years were to write an examination that culminated in the award of certificates that could lead to further schooling. Thirdly, whereas the CSS was highly in competition with other parallel programmes concurrently run in the same school, the JSS programme was radically integrative and focused as the literary curriculum was largely seamlessly combined with the learning of the pre-vocational skill and pre-technical skills. The point worth emphasizing here is that whereas the JSS student was psychologically prepared right from the outset that he/she had a final examination that covers all the subjects (both literary and vocational) to write at the end of three years, the Continuation School “graduate” had other two examinations; one optional and other compulsory to write which could be distracting enough especially in an environment where academic/grammar education had been so popularized and famed as true scholarship.

The optional examination was the Common Entrance Examination (CEE) which could even be written by a pupil in Middle School Form one or Middle School Form Four was the logical terminating point for an elementary school graduate. The student who passed the CEE at any level or form could leave elementary School and continue his education at a second cycle institution. Those who continued to Form Four were required to write the Middle School Leaving Certificate (MSLC) which interestingly could not pave way for an entrance into a typical Ghanaian secondary school system, but could lead to other post middle professional training. Significantly, it was within these two parallel levels of programmes/examinations that the CSS was struggling to compete with. For example, the same pupil/student at Middle School Form One who was learning a craft in the Continuation School, which had become an integral part of the Middle School, also had the option of studying to pass the CEE at any form of the Middle school he/she likes and was also being prepared or studying for the ultimate MSLC which was indubitably the main goal of a Middle school. The distraction for such a student could be enormous! On the contrary, all students at the JSS were more focused on writing one common examination namely BECE only at the end of three years.

Reflections on the Challenges of the CSS

From the above discussions, it appears that one key challenge that confronted the Adjamesu Continuation School was the non-issuance of certificates for various skills achieved by pupils in a particular vocation or craft. Available information on the CSS in Ghana, including Adjamesu, does not point to any attempt to award certificates to pupils who achieved varying degrees of success in mastering the skills in the various crafts or vocations. This phenomenon, arguably, constituted a disincentive to students, and could easily develop or nurture the perception that such an educational system was inferior

to the purely academic literary programme of the Middle School Leaving Certificate that ran parallel to the Continuation School Programme. Undoubtedly The issuance of certificates for one's cognitive and skillful achievements has the potential of facilitating the process of getting employment opportunities in the formal sectors of the economy after school.

Another possible challenge to the products of the continuation school system was the popularity and patronage that the grammar and literary aspects of education had already received in the country during that time. The products or "graduates" of the school like their counterparts in the country could easily lose respect and prestige for terminating school after training in the Continuation school programme to establish their own businesses.

The option of searching for an admission into a prestigious secondary school was very irresistible. At the micro/family level, the average Ghanaian parent/guardian was more willing to borrow money at any cost to buy the items listed on secondary school prospectus for his or her child to attend secondary school than to spend money to sharpen the skills acquired by the child from a continuation school at a local industry or receiving training under the tutelage of a master craftsman. The social downgrading for the choice of the latter option was too bitter a pill to swallow by such parent. At the macro/societal/government level, the acquisition of initial materials or resources to start a job as a successful /brilliant products of the continuation school were going to be difficult especially during the 1970s and 1980s when the country was going through numerous socio-economic challenges and military interventions in political activities in the country ²².

For the Continuation School Programme to have been successful, the initial training of predisposing the pupils to skills in the communities should have received further sharpening in most if not all secondary schools in the country at the time, to have broadened the scope of the pupils' cognitive and dexterous capacities for more economically productive results. Contingent on this, it is argued that the parent/guardian would have been more willing to buy the materials and tools for the sharpening of skills for the pupil proceeding to secondary school than the one at home receiving further sharpening under the tutelage of a master craftsman. Admittedly, this would have been difficult, during the period, given the quantum of resources that could be utilized but the results would have been more cost effective. The model of using the expertise of local craftsmen in a formal setting as prevalent in the Continuation school system could have been adopted for pragmatic purposes. The utilization of the advantages inherent in the saying that "if there is a will, there is a way" could have been exploited. Significantly, the introduction of secondary/technical schools in the 1990s to provide an avenue of continuation for the graduates of the JSS system is recognized as a solution to the challenge that faced the continuation school graduates. The New Educational Reforms implemented nationwide in the country in 1987 which eventually dealt a lethal blow to the Continuation school system should have even in several ways augmented the continuation school system. The irony is rather startling! The 1987 Educational Reforms was primarily aimed at predisposing the pupils at the Junior Secondary School (JSS), (which later became Junior High School (JHS) to vocational, technical and life skills in the communities and neighborhoods of the pupils ²³.

²² Mike Oquaye, "The Ghanaian Elections of 1992 - a Dissenting View," *African Affairs* (1995); Mike Oquaye, "The Process of Democratisation in Contemporary Ghana," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* (2000).

²³ Naa Dodua Dodoo, Adriana A E Biney, and Mumuni Abu, "Methods in Population Studies," *Population Studies: Key Issues and Contemporary Trends in Ghana* 5 (2014): 260.

The local instructors in the Continuation schools who were technically not professional teachers but very adept, practically, in their various areas of specialization, were dismissed and their names expunged from the government pay roll at the inception of the JSS system. This action almost invariably created a psychological set among the populace including the pupils that school education was not for artisans and craftsmen. It thus further deepened the perception that once a person is not “certificated” in a formal sense, he/she, in this context, is not qualified for teaching in the formal education system. Reimer’s “diploma disease” almost caught up with Ghanaians with all its inimical ramifications. The school system the becomes an “ivory tower” situated in the midst of “thatched houses. There could have been a way for certifying these non- professional crafts instructors through the organization of pedagogical training sessions even in local languages for their practical skills to have been useful to the pupils/students.

It was a stark fact that adequate number of technical /vocational teachers had not been trained for the nationwide implementation of JSS concept. Even though workshops and refresher courses were organized for the JSS teachers, such training could be described as insufficient for teachers who had long been trained in academic/ literary school environments. So, the dismissal of the local instructors was largely unjustifiable irrespective of external pressures. It was therefore not surprising that the JSS programme which was largely aimed at inculcating vocational/technical skills into the pupils/ students eventually turned into literary/academic phenomenon.

In the light of the above, one would not have been far from right to have thought that the Continuation School should not have been abolished totally rather its basic elements such as the utilization of local non=professional instructors could have been maintained. What could have been done was to have given such instructors some pedagogical training to have sharpened their training skills. This particular feature of the Continuation School was vitally significant since the local instructors already had the expertise to share with the students/pupils. Undoubtedly skillful teachers are urgently and indispensably needed for the successful implementation of all new curricular policies at school. And since the local instructors were already at post and not much vocational and technical training had already been given to the certificated and professional teachers who were going to handle the students at the newly introduced JSS/ programme, it was just realistic and economical to have retained the local instructors for the newly introduced vocational / technical skills. What was to have been was to introduced a kind of pedagogical training that would have systematically the local instructors to gain more experience in the teaching and learning process⁷

CONCLUSION

From the above discussions, it is clear that the Continuation school system was one of the most pragmatic educational policies ever embarked upon by Ghana in the 1970s and 80s to find solutions to the excessive “pen-pushing” education which had largely failed to provide solutions to the myriad of socio-economic challenges that confronted the Ghanaian society during the period. However, with the introduction of the new educational reforms in 1987, the System was allowed to collapse. Admittedly, there could have been some inherent challenges in the operations of the System, it was however anticipated that challenges could have been addressed and most importantly integrated appropriately into the 1987 educational reforms.

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