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# Lifelong education trajectories and futures in Ghana: issues of policy, ideology and practice

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examined lifelong education and learning trajectories and issues of policy, ideology and practice that have underpinned the implementation of adult literacy and adult learning education strategies within a lifelong learning perspective in Ghana. Using documentary analysis, the paper noted that although the concept of lifelong education/learning has been used in some national development documents and educational policies, Ghana has no national policy on lifelong learning. The paper found that multilateral and bilateral organisations have influenced the direction and strategies captured in the national development documents and educational policies. The paper found that recommendations from International Conferences on Adult Education have often had very little influence on these national policy texts. For Ghana to be able to provide opportunities for lifelong learning for all there is the need for a vision of lifelong learning that is situated in the present and looks into the future. Ghana must work towards building a culture of lifelong learning. Policymakers need to understand that lifelong learning cannot be achieved when there are no clear-cut policies on adult literacy and adult learning and education, which are all critical components of lifelong learning. The learning needs of the youth and adults have to be given recognition in national development documents and educational policies.



## KEYWORDS

Lifelong learning; policy; developing countries; ideology; practice

## Introduction

Lifelong education has been around for centuries in many parts of the world including Africa (Omolewa, 2002). In several countries, lifelong education has been used synonymously with continuing education and adult education. This conflation has allowed lifelong education to face twists and turns and has morphed into forms and descriptions. Over the years, adult educators have tried to give distinctiveness to the concept of lifelong education and lifelong learning at international conferences dubbed ‘CONFINTEA’ (International Conferences on Adult Education). One of the significant observations from these conferences was the segmentation of formal schooling and the critical role that lifelong education could play in the democratisation of education.

Since the 1990s, the trajectory from lifelong education to lifelong learning as a global education development agenda has become pronounced at various international conferences such as the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, and the CONFINTEA V Hamburg meeting (UNESCO, 1997). At CONFINTEA VI held in Brazil in 2009, lifelong learning was identified as critical to ‘addressing global educational issues and challenges’ (UNESCO, 2009, p.

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37). In September 2015, member states attending the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in New York adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The objective is to mobilise all efforts to reduce poverty, exclusion and inequalities and ensure that no one is left behind (United Nations, 2015). Specifically, Goal 4 is to 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030' (UNESCO, 2015a). Achieving the SDG Goal 4 agenda requires a sound lifelong learning policy framework and strategies for efficient implementation (UNESCO, 2015a) of adult literacy, youth and adult learning.

What this means for developing countries is that they have to mainstream lifelong learning into their education system. In Ghana, the legislative framework that lays the foundation for lifelong education/lifelong learning is the 1992 Constitution. The 1992 Constitution guarantees equal educational opportunities for all Ghanaians and recognises education as a fundamental human right (Republic of Ghana, 1992). Article 25, Section (1) of the 1992 Constitution stipulates that 'Basic education shall be free, compulsory and available to all'. In addition, secondary education and higher education are to be accessible to all Ghanaians. The Constitution also made provision for functional literacy and lifelong education (Republic of Ghana, 1992). Indeed, what is significant about these provisions is that they guarantee all Ghanaians the opportunity to develop themselves through continuous learning. However, very little information is provided on the strategies to achieve lifelong education in Ghana.

Other national documents, such as the Education Act (778) (2008), called for a system of non-formal functional and lifelong educational programmes and the establishment of open colleges and lifelong educational colleges for skills training and formal education, with very little in terms of strategies and implementation (Republic of Ghana, 2008). Similarly, the Education Strategic Plan (2010–2020) advocated for the need to 'improve the quality of learning and teaching, and to promote the culture of lifelong learning at all levels and for all ages' (Republic of Ghana, 2009, p. 12), whilst the Education Strategic Plan (2018–2030) espouses the ambition of transforming Ghana into a 'learning nation'. What is missing in these expressions is how to use lifelong learning as an 'organizing principle' to transform Ghana's education system (Walters et al., 2014). Promoting lifelong learning for all must be anchored in a holistic overarching national lifelong learning policy with clear guidelines for implementation across sectors (Walters et al., 2014). Such a policy must delineate synergy between formal, non-formal and informal education.

Unfortunately, 'few countries in Africa have comprehensive policy frameworks for promoting lifelong learning, and actions to promote a holistic vision of lifelong', whilst actions to implement a holistic vision of lifelong learning are weak (Walters et al., 2014). Both the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL; 2020) and the International Labour Organisation [ILO] (2019) have noted that even in countries that have policies there is the lack of workable strategies for implementation due to resistance to change among the main stakeholders in the traditional system of education. Consequently, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL; 2020) has called for a culture of lifelong learning for the future.

The objective of this paper is to find out how international and internal contexts have shaped the formulation or otherwise of a holistic lifelong learning policy in Ghana. This paper examines efforts made by governments to mainstream lifelong education/learning in national development documents and educational policies and the future of lifelong learning in Ghana.

### ***Ghana's socio-economic and political context***

Ghana's socio-economic and political trajectory started in the 1960s after gaining independence from Britain. With a strong economy, the country laid a concrete foundation in education, health and infrastructure. However, rapid economic decline in the 1970s and 1980s due to inappropriate internal economic policies led to an economic downturn with a deleterious effect on all sectors of the economy. During the 1970s and the 1980s, poverty increased, learning outcomes among school children declined, whilst the rate of illiteracy rose. In the mid-1980s, the economy began a steady

growth path through stabilisation and structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These policies led to reforms in the major sectors such as health and education. The 1990s marked a turning point for Ghana as it embarked on a new democratic path after 11 years of military rule.

Since the introduction of constitutional rule in Ghana, the country has witnessed stable economic and political growth under the two major ruling parties, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP). Between these two political parties, various poverty reduction strategies have been implemented and various growth-oriented and sectoral reforms have made Ghana one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa. Poverty reduction strategies pursued by governments consolidated growth and poverty reduction between 1998 and 2012 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2017). In 2013, Ghana attained middle-income status (Ghana Statistical Service, 2017).

Despite these significant achievements, poverty reduction has been fluctuating. Poverty is still high in the rural areas and the three northern regions (Northern, Upper West and Upper West) and the Volta Region, among certain socio-economic groups such as women and those in the informal sector (Republic of Ghana, 2014; Cooke et al., 2016). Extreme poverty and inequality have also risen with economic growth revealing spatial inequities between the wealthiest and the poorest regions, and rural and urban areas. Statistics show that the number of people living in extreme poverty increased from 2.2 million in 2013 to 2.4 million in 2017 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2017). Poverty in the rural areas and poorest regions is driven by a lack of infrastructure and a low level of human capital (Ghana Statistical Service, 2017; World Bank, 2020).

One of the strategies adopted by governments to improve the human capital of the country is improvement in access to education at all levels of the education system and poverty reduction. In 1996, the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) was initiated in Ghana to improve access to primary education (Akyeampong, 2009). In 2002, a Presidential Education Review Committee was constituted and tasked to identify challenges facing Ghana's educational system and make recommendations to the government. In their recommendations, the Committee noted that:

The educational system must provide opportunities at both formal and informal levels for individuals to improve their competencies to meet the demands of the changing times. It should provide individuals with skills which will enable them continue to search for new knowledge in order to update themselves (Government of Ghana, 2002, p. 61).

The Committee called on the government 'to promote the culture of lifelong learning for all citizens who will continue to develop their intellectual capacities, technical skills and their abilities, to enable them to cope with technological and other changes in the global world' (Government of Ghana, 2002, p. 61). The recommendations of the Education Review Committee resulted in the passing of the Education Act (778) in 2008.

This Act was very significant in realising the vision of lifelong learning in Ghana. It made significant changes to basic education, secondary, technical and vocational education and tertiary education. Distance learning programmes were to be provided at each level of education where appropriate (Republic of Ghana, 2008). Furthermore, the Act indicated that there shall 'be a system of non-formal functional and lifelong educational programmes' (Republic of Ghana, 2008, p. 4). The Ministry of Education and the District Assemblies were tasked to establish open colleges or community colleges at the district level. The open colleges and lifelong educational colleges were to provide 'avenues for skills training and formal education as determined by the Minister of Education' (Republic of Ghana, 2008, p. 4) through a legislative instrument.

To reduce poverty, the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy document (GPRS1, 2003–2005) and the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II 2006–2009) were implemented under President Agyekum Kufuor's government that was in power in Ghana from 2000 to 2008. In line with the constitutional requirement that new governments outline their development agenda, the

NDC government introduced the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA I, 2010–2013) and the Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA II, 2014–2017). An election in 2016 ushered in another NPP government and the introduction of a medium-term national development policy framework for 2018–2021, *An Agenda for Jobs: Creating Prosperity and Equal Opportunity for All (First Step, 2018–2021)*. The document acknowledges international protocols, such as the Africa Union Agenda 2063, Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Change Agreement, which the country is required to consider in national development policies and educational policies (Republic of Ghana, 2017).

### **Lifelong learning**

Since 2000, lifelong learning has become a popular slogan in the activities of policymakers, researchers, and educational institutions around the globe. This increasing popularity is because of the realisation that lifelong learning can promote sustainable development. The precise definition of lifelong learning, like most concepts in education, has been influenced by its evolution (Aspin & Chapman, 2000; Schuetze, 2006; Schuetze & Casey, 2006) and ideological underpinnings (Lee & Friedrich, 2011; Lee & Jan, 2018). One cannot discuss the concept of ‘lifelong learning’ without mention of its antecedent concept ‘lifelong education’ (Borg & Mayo, 2005; Field, 2001).

Lifelong education gained prominence in the 1970s when the *Faure Report* (1972) was published by United Nations Scientific and Cultural Education (UNESCO) under the chairmanship of Edgar Faure. In the report, lifelong education was described as the ‘master concept for educational policies in the years to come for both developed and developing countries’ (Faure et al., 1972, p. 182). The definition of lifelong learning can be traced to the work of Dave (1975) who noted that:

Lifelong education is a comprehensive concept that includes formal, non-formal and informal learning extended throughout the lifespan of an individual to attain the fullest possible development in personal, social and professional life. (p. 43)

In the 1990s, the Delors Report was produced through UNESCO. Although the Delors Commission (1996) did not provide a comprehensive definition, it did provide a broad framework that has been insightful in our understanding of lifelong learning. Quoting the Delors Commission, Power and Maclean (2013) argue that lifelong learning implies ‘the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values throughout life, a continuous process of learning to know, to do, to live together and to be the ‘four pillars of education’ (p. 29).

Recently, the UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL) in their Technical Note posit that:

In essence, lifelong learning is rooted in the integration of learning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages (children, young people, adults and the elderly, girls and boys, women and men) in all life-wide contexts (family, school, community, workplace and so on) and through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal) which together meet a wide range of learning needs and demands (UIL, 2015, p. 2)

Other important sources of definition have come from the European Union and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) who have become very influential in the promotion of lifelong learning policies, especially in the industrialised world. Their definition is often tied to employability and active citizenship, which are critical for building a dynamic knowledge-based society. The European Commission initially defined lifelong learning as: ‘All purposeful learning activity, undertaken on an ongoing basis to improve knowledge, skills and competence’ (European Commission, 2000, p. 3).

Later, the definition was revised because of the strong emphasis on employment and labour market dimension to read: ‘All learning activity is undertaken throughout life, to improve knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective’ (European Commission, 2001, p. 9).

The breath of the current definition includes formal, non-formal and informal learning. It also focuses on personal fulfilment, active citizenship and employability, which are critical for building a dynamic knowledge-based society (European Commission, 2001). Power and Maclean (2013) have noted that the revised definition proposed by the EU has been the widely accepted definition among researchers and policymakers.

Beyond the definitions of UNESCO, the EU and the OECD, the World Bank that emerged as ‘a late-comer to the policy arena of lifelong learning . . .’ (Lee & Jan, 2018, p. 385). According to the World Bank: ‘A lifelong learning framework encompasses learning throughout the life cycle, from early childhood to retirement. It includes formal, nonformal, and informal education and training’ (World Bank, 2003, p. 3).

In their two publications, *Lifelong Learning in the Global Economy: Challenges for Developing Countries* in 2003 and *Education Strategy 2020 Learning for All: Investing in People’s Knowledge and Skills to Promote Development* in 2011, the World Bank has been quite unequivocal about the relevance of lifelong learning as education for the knowledge-based economy. For the World Bank, developing countries need to prepare their workers for the 21st century so that they can adapt to ‘continuously to changing opportunities and labour markets demands of the knowledge economy’ and that ‘lifelong learning is crucial for preparing workers to compete in the global economy’ (World Bank, 2003, p. xvii). In addition, developing countries need to ensure that their young people and adults have the right skills for the job market through youth and adult learning that provides a foundation for lifelong learning (World Bank, 2011).

## Methodology

The study adopted the documentary analysis approach (Atkinson & Coffey, 2010; Bowen, 2009; Coffey, 2014; Field & Schemmann, 2017). The study selected the content-analytical approach to documents (Field & Schemmann, 2017) to be able to analyse the trajectories of lifelong education/lifelong learning and its incorporation in national documents. The content-analytical approach was also adopted to understand what ideology and practices underpin national documents and educational policies. To analyse the official policy documents, the following questions provided the framework for the analysis: (1) What is the background context of the documents? (2) How is lifelong learning conceptualised in the documents? (3) What is the ideology on which lifelong learning is based? (4) Which similar words are used and what is the concept behind them? (5) Which audience is it addressed to? (Field & Schemmann, 2017). The next step was to decide on the parameters that would determine the inclusion and exclusion of documents about definitions and trajectories of lifelong education to lifelong learning. Databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus (Elsevier), OECD iLibrary, and World Bank data sources were searched for articles that referred to lifelong education and learning.

The Google Scholar and local databases (National Development and Planning Commission, Ghana Statistical Service, EMIS of Ministry of Education) were further used to identify documents on educational policies and lifelong learning policies in Ghana. The search led to the identification of several articles on educational policies and lifelong learning in Ghana. By continually reading through the initially sampled documents, we identified 10 documents that met the selection criteria. However, these national policy documents did not capture the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All Goals as did the Education Strategic Plans (ESP 2003–2015; ESP 2010–2020). Recently, the Education Strategic Plan (2018–2030) was formulated based on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The ESPs were selected because they encapsulate international goals and benchmarks. These documents reflect the significant influence and roles that multilateral and bilateral institutions have played in the development of education policies in Ghana. The documents selected included *Education Strategic Plan (2003–2015)*, Ministry of Education, (2009), *Education Sector Analysis and Education Strategic Plan (2018–2030)*.

## *Education strategic plans and lifelong learning in Ghana*

In analysing the policy environment of lifelong learning and the determination if Ghana has a lifelong learning policy, one adapted the framework of Youngman that identified three levels: (1) general economic and social policies; (2) education policies and strategies that support lifelong learning; and (3) specific policies that targeted particular aspects of lifelong learning (Youngman, 2003). Although Youngman (2003) identifies the general economic and social policies as relevant, this article focuses more on the education policies and strategies that support lifelong learning and specific policies that target particular aspects of lifelong learning in Ghana.

### *Educational policies*

#### *The period from 2000 to 2008*

At the beginning of the new millennium, two critical events occurred that influenced education policies globally: the Millennium Declaration that gave birth to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the World Education Forum that revised Education for All (EFA) Goals. At the Dakar Conference, the meeting noted that ‘starting from early childhood and extending throughout life, the learners of the twenty-first century will require access to high-quality educational opportunities that are responsive to their needs, equitable and gender-sensitive. These opportunities must neither exclude nor discriminate’ (UNESCO, 2000, p. 12). To achieve the MDGs and the EFA goals that were crucial to reducing poverty and ensuring learning throughout life, the Dakar Conference noted that resources should not be a barrier.

In 2002, the EFA Fast Track Initiative was launched between developed countries, multilateral and bilateral donors and UN agencies to ensure better-coordinated donor support to developing countries to meet the EFA goals and the MDGs (Allsop et al., 2010; Bermingham, 2011). To be eligible for FTI assistance a country had to have a Poverty Reduction Strategy in place and must have an education sector plan that is sector-wide (Allsop et al., 2010). Ghana was one of the countries in Africa that joined the Education for All movement, subscribing to the EFA Fast Track Initiative (FTI) guidelines and developing a long-term Education Strategic Plan to achieve a free, universal basic education in line with the EFA goals and the MDGs by 2015 (World Bank, 2010).

#### *Education Strategic Plan (ESP) (2003–2015)*

Ghana’s Education Strategic Plan (2003–2015) was an outcome of the EFA-FTI. The purpose of the ESP (2003–2015) was ‘to assist in the poverty reduction process through the development of a learning society, thereby enhancing Ghana’s human resource’ (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, [MOEYS] 2003, p. 13). The ESP was designed to provide ‘relevant education to all Ghanaians at all levels to enable them to acquire skills that will assist them to develop their potential, to be productive, to facilitate poverty reduction and to promote socio-economic growth and national development’ (MOEYS, 2003). The ESP was to allow Ghanaians to participate meaningfully and successfully in the education process, and young people and adults, who have hitherto been excluded, to access new opportunities for educational development (MOEYS, 2003).

The Plan outlined policy directions, targets and strategies for the next 13 years. The ESP was described as a whole sector plan; that is, a sector-wide approach in which ‘every subsector and every area of focus within the education sector is and in which all internal and external development partners are invited to play a part’ (MOEYS, 2003, p. 11).

The ESP identified four areas of focus, as follows:

- (1) Equitable access to education
- (2) Quality of education
- (3) Educational management
- (4) Science, Technology and TVET

In the ESP it explicitly stated that Ghana subscribes to the six Dakar EFA goals. The ESP paid attention to ‘provide pre-school education’; ‘provide fee-free tuition in pre-schools’; ‘provide access to free basic education’; ‘provide compulsory universal basic education (FCUBE)’; and ‘provide equitable educational opportunities, ensuring the full enrolment of hard-to-reach and out-of-school children by 2015’ (Ministry of Education, 2003, pp. 20–21). On the provision of conditions for universal functional literacy, the ESP was to ensure the development, validation and use of a national functional literacy test by 2006; and the literacy rate to improve by 3% points per year from 2008 to 2015 (Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 21). Since 1995, the government focus has been on primary education. This sub-sector of education was given top priority in the ESP with support from Development Partners (DPs). This allowed the government to access resources from the EFA-FTI to address challenges within the sector and accelerate the pace of achieving Universal Primary Education and gender equality (Allsop et al., 2010; Takyi-Amoako, 2012). One of the weakest points of the ESP was the little attention given to learning and life skills for out-of-school youth and adults (EFA Goal 3), although attention was given to expansion and improvement in post-basic education such as increasing Technical and Vocational institutions and tertiary education.

### **The period from 2009 to 2016**

#### **Ministry of education, 2009**

The second ESP was prepared before the life-cycle of the earlier ESP (2003–2015) had expired. To sustain changes in education made so far in the sector, the ESP (2003–2015) was replaced with a new Ministry of Education, 2009). The new ESP was influenced by the 2007 New Education Reforms and the Education Act (778) (2008) that made basic education in Ghana 11 years, comprising two years of kindergarten, six years of primary school and three years of Junior High School (JHS). Also, a four-year Senior High School (SHS) system that offers General Courses (Arts, Business and Science) and Technical, Vocational and Agriculture options for entry into tertiary institutions or the job market. After JHS, students may choose to go into different streams at SHS, comprising General Education and Technical, Vocational and Agriculture and Training (TVET) or enter into an apprenticeship scheme with some support from the Government. Finally, there will be the provision for non-formal and lifelong learning.

The guiding principles of the ESP include:

- (1) To eliminate gender and other disparities that arise from exclusion and poverty
- (2) To cater for excluded children in mainstream schools whenever possible
- (3) To improve the quality of learning and teaching, and to promote the *culture of lifelong learning* at all levels and for all ages
- (4) To modernise and extend ICT, science education, technical and vocational education and training, and skills development at all levels
- (5) To strengthen all forms of tertiary education
- (6) To develop an effective, efficient and properly rewarded teaching service
- (7) To devolve delivery and fiscal systems of 1st and 2nd cycle of education to District Assemblies
- (8) To ensure periodic review of education grants and allowances
- (9) To make efficient savings in the education system
- (10) To strengthen monitoring and accountability in the education sector (Republic of Ghana, 2009).

The ESP (2010–2020) focused on the achievement of Universal Basic Education through universal access to 11 years of quality basic education ‘with increased, affordable, equitable access to senior and tertiary education’ (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 22). The first policy objective of ESP (2010–2020) called for an ‘equitable access to good-quality universal basic education, by improving

opportunities for all children in the first cycle of education at kindergarten, primary and junior high school levels' (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 25). The policy further advocated for the bridging of the gender gap in access to education. At the secondary level, the ESP called for an increase in 'equitable access to high-quality second cycle education that prepares young adults for the various options available within tertiary education and the workplace' (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 25). Compared to its predecessor, the ESP (2010–2020) made a bold pronouncement of non-formal education requesting for the provision of 'opportunities for those outside the formal education system to have free access to meaningful high-quality education and training, whether through inclusive or complementary provision, approved or informal apprenticeships, distance education or technical and vocational skills development (TVSD)' (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 26). Expounding on this policy objective, the ESP called for the provision of universal functional literacy, equal opportunities for non-formal education and training for all out-of-youth children, young people and adults. In addition, there was a recognition of prior learning (whether formal or non-formal) as more Ghanaians have access to education and training opportunities.

### **The period from 2017 till now**

#### **Educational policies**

This period is very significant because both the EFA goals and the MDGs have been replaced with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals that came into force in 2016. The SDGs provide countries with the opportunity to offer inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels, i. e. pre-schooling, primary, secondary, tertiary, technical and vocational training and adult literacy. In 2018, the Government of Ghana introduced a new Education Strategic Plan (2018–2030).

##### *Education Strategic Plan (2018–2030)*

To keep pace with new reforms in the education sector, the new Education Strategic Plan (2018–2030) intends to make Ghana a learning nation and improve the quality of education for all Ghanaians (Ministry of Education, 2019a). The ESP has three main policy objectives. These are: i) improved equitable access to and participation in inclusive education at all levels; ii) improved quality of teaching and learning and STEM at all levels; and iii) sustainable and efficient management, financing and accountability of education service delivery. The ESP is structured around seven programme areas, namely basic education; secondary education; tertiary education; non-formal education; TVET education; inclusive and special education; and education management (Ministry of Education, 2019a).

### **Achievements and challenges facing the education sector since 2003**

Within 17 years (2003 to 2020), Ghana has made considerable progress in increasing access and participation at all levels of the education system. Programmes such as the Capitation Grant (which abolished school fees at the basic level), the School Feeding Programme (first implemented in deprived districts, but now a national programme) and the provision of school uniforms have all contributed to increased enrolment in primary schools in Ghana. Ghana's enrolment figures at the basic education (including early childhood education) and secondary education levels have increased significantly. Gross Enrolment rates (GERs) have exceeded 100% for Kindergarten (KG) and primary, and over 85% for Junior High School in 2018 (Ministry of Education, 2018a, 2018b). GER for secondary education is now over 50% because of the free Senior High School and Technical/Vocational policy introduced in 2017/18, which made secondary and technical and vocational education free for all students (Figure 1). Although there have been some increases in Net Enrolment Rates (NERs), these are much lower, indicating a significant number of over-aged children in school (Figure 2). The transition rate between JHS and SHS has also improved, reaching

68% in 2016/17 due to the free SHS policy. For Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Special Education and Tertiary Education, one can speak of modest Gross enrolments (Ministry of Education, 2019a, 2019b).

On adult literacy, a World Bank-funded National Functional Literacy Programme from 1992 to 2007 led to remarkable success in reducing the national illiteracy rate of 69% for Ghanaians aged 15 years and above in 1989 to an estimated 52% in 1997 (World Bank, 2007). In 2000, the literacy rate for the country's population of 15 years and above was 57.9%.

Despite these achievements, there are still inequalities and exclusion confronting Ghana's education system. There is inequitable access to and participation in education at all levels between females and males. These inequalities are further reinforced by location, for example, rural and urban areas and rich and poor regions. Girls are always at a disadvantage in access to and participation at the primary, JHS, SHS and tertiary levels. Girls' exclusion is 'reinforced when different sources of inequality – poverty, gender, geography – interact with one other' (Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 6). In terms of geographical location, there are over 450,000 children who are out of school (Ministry of Education, 2019a; UNICEF, 2019). These children are mostly from the poorest households and within the three northern regions (Ministry of Education, 2019a). One of the factors identified as keeping children out of school is the shortage of classrooms (Ministry of Education, 2019b). Males and females from poor households and the three poorest regions are more likely not to complete school due to the cost of financing their education, poor learning outcomes and teenage pregnancy. Evidence shows that out-of-school children of primary school age remains high at 19% and relatively lower in JHS at 7% and highest in SHS at 25% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2017). Another cohort that has been excluded in the education system is children with disability. Evidence shows that children with disabilities are not progressing through the education system. Children with disability lack facilities in basic and secondary school (Ministry of Education, 2019a).

Statistics on adult literacy in Ghana shows that despite the improvement in the literate rates, there are inequalities between males and females and between the youth and older Ghanaians. In 2008, the Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 5 [GLSS 5] (2008) indicated that 31% of Ghanaians have never been to school. A further 17% attained a level below Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). About 39% of adults have obtained BECE and only 14% of the population had secondary or higher level qualitative (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008). In relation to gender, the GLSS 5 showed that more females (2.7 million) than males (1.4 million) have never had education, whilst fewer females have secondary or higher qualifications compared to males (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008). In the GLSS (Round 6), 19.7% of the adult population had never been to school while 44.6% had attained a level below BECE. About 21% attained BECE, while only 14.7% had attained secondary education or a higher level qualification. In terms of gender, data showed that the proportion of females who have never been to school was 24.8% higher than that of the males (14.6%; Ghana Statistical Service, 2014).

In the GLSS (Round 7), 24.9% of the female population 15 years and above have never been to school, which was higher compared to 12.1% of males (Ghana Statistical Service, 2019). Between 2010 and 2018, the number of females who are 15 years and above who are not literate has not improved (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014, 2019). Today, about 1.2 million Ghanaians, the majority of whom are women and in the three northern regions of Ghana, cannot read and write.

Statistics from the Ghana Living Standards Surveys reveal that a large number of Ghanaians who attended school did not complete basic education. This large cohort of Ghanaians may not have the requisite skills for the world of work in 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is confirmed by Baah-Boateng and Baffour-Awuah (2015) that:

the level of education and skills of the Ghanaian working-age population remains quite low, with eight of every 10 having less than a secondary education. This does not seem to be enough to propel the country to economic transformation, and largely explains the high level of informal employment and vulnerable employment. (p. 6)

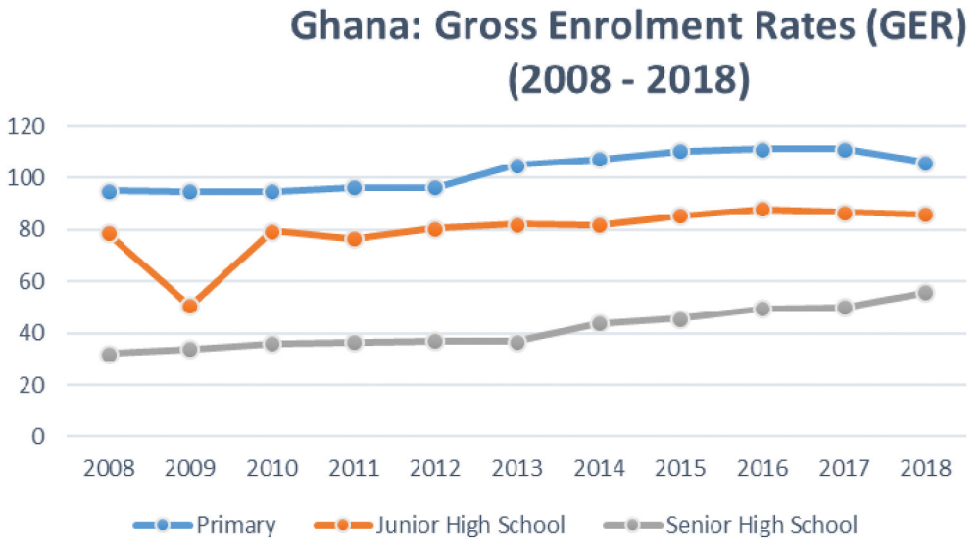


Figure 1. Gross Enrolment Rates (2008–2018). Source: Ministry of education 2013, 2015, 2016, 2018

Another entrenched inequality is the way education is financed in Ghana. Since 1995, primary education received the largest share of education expenditure until 2015, when it was overtaken by JHS, SHS and tertiary education (Ministry of Education, 2019a). The least funded education subsectors are TVET and non-formal education. This is due to the low recognition given to these two subsectors by policy-makers. Over the years, the TVET sector has suffered an image crisis over a public perception of being the refuge of students who are not academically endowed. Educational policies have failed to recognise adult literacy as an essential component of the foundation of lifelong learning. The United Nations in 2018 noted that ‘... literacy is crucial to the acquisition by every child, young person and adult of the essential life skills that will enable them to address challenges that they may face in life and represents an essential condition of lifelong learning’ (United Nations, 2018).

Ghana’s education is at the threshold of transformation as the government pursues policies and programmes to meet SDG 4. Addressing deep-seated inequities between females and males, rural and urban areas and between regions requires a holistic vision of learning throughout the life of their citizenry.

### *Issues of policy, ideology, and practice*

#### *Lifelong learning policy framework*

Although there are some statements in national documents such as the 1992 Constitutions and educational policies such as the Education Act (778), the ESP (2010–2020) and the ESP (2018–2030) that highlight specific aspects of lifelong learning, Ghana has no policy *per se* on lifelong learning (Mikulec et al., 2019; Tagoe, 2011). Despite the call that countries should develop and implement ‘fully-costed policies, well-integrated plans and legislation for addressing adult literacy, education for young people and adults, and lifelong learning’ (UNESCO, 2009, p. 7), Ghana is yet to have such a fully costed holistic overarching lifelong policy (UNESCO (Ghana Office), 2014). In 2009, the need for a lifelong learning policy in Ghana was raised by participants of the 60th Annual New Year School,<sup>1</sup> which was held at the University of Ghana in January 2009. At the meeting, one of the recommendations from the School was the:

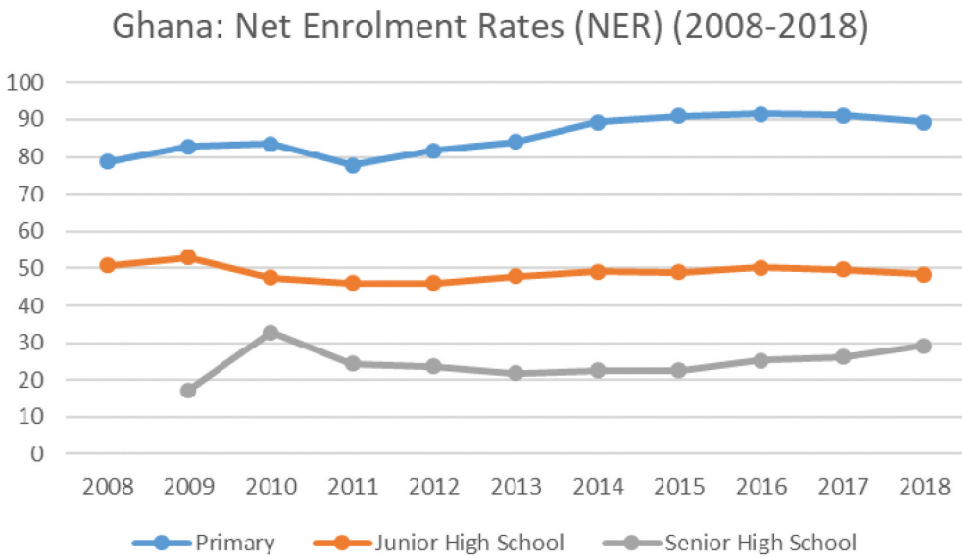


Figure 2. Net Enrolment Rates (2008–2018). Source: Ministry of education 2013, 2015, 2016, 2018

Need for a policy framework, which should provide a comprehensive, nationally consistent, yet flexible structure for all levels of education and training. The development of the policy should involve all stakeholders, including ministries and departments, the private sector, universities, local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other providers of education. This policy should include vision, principles, areas of learning, assessment and certification and financing. (Annual New Year School 2009)

As noted earlier, there is a large number of Ghanaians who do not have higher qualifications and need alternative pathways to continue learning (Ghana Statistical Service, 2008, 2014, 2019). Adult learning and education can provide these individuals with opportunities for continuing training and professional development (UNESCO, 2015b). However, the acquisition of skills can become relevant to national development needs when it is anchored in a National Qualifications Framework and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

Although Ghana has a National TVET Qualifications Framework (NTEVQF) and a Recognition of Prior Learning Policy, this is not encompassing enough because it focuses only on TVET qualifications (Baffour-Awuah, 2013). According to International Labour Organisation [ILO] (2019a), NQFs are evolving due to rapid technological, social and economic change. These changes have influenced the purposes and functions of frameworks. Unfortunately, Ghana's NTEVQF is restricted to TVET employees leaving out Universities and other learners and workers outside the TVET space. There is the need for a National Qualifications Framework and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) that will be used to validate and accredit formal, non-formal and informal learning and learning outcomes across all the levels of the education system.

### *Issues of ideology*

Issues of ideology have been associated with the concept of lifelong learning and its definitions. Some scholars have argued that lifelong learning, like education, is not neutral. Its trajectories have been shrouded in ideological underpinnings (Bagnall, 2000). Thus, any policy on lifelong learning must be situated in an ideology that is based on social justice, equality and inclusion. This type of ideology makes a radical departure from what Rubenson (2006) has described as the neoliberal economic policies of the Western countries and International Organisations such as the OECD, the EU and the World Bank that is oriented towards employability and driven by the human capital theory (Regmi, 2015a). For African Preece (2009, 2013) and Regmi (2015b) have argued that because Africa's problems are diverse and complex, and include issues such as inequality and

exclusion at the core, a more inclusive approach to lifelong learning must be the ideology of countries in Africa. What this means is that African countries should have lifelong learning policies that are holistic and based on a humanistic vision. The humanistic model of lifelong learning as an ideology focuses on emancipation, inclusiveness, human dignity and social harmony (Choi & Kim, 2018; Quane, 2011; Regmi, 2015a).

Developing a national lifelong learning is influenced by strong national ideologies. Ghana's political space has been driven by two main political parties, the National Democratic Congress and the National Patriotic Party. These two political parties have led Ghana since the 1990s espousing two different ideologies. The NDC's ideology is Social Democracy. The NDC party 'believes in the equality and egalitarian treatment of all persons irrespective of their social, cultural, educational, religious and economic relations in a multi-party, multi-ethnic environment . . . and the protection of the underprivileged and the upliftment of the socially disadvantaged' (NDC, 1992, p. 2). The NPP is a liberal democratic party with an ideology that seeks to 'liberate the energies of the people for the growth of a property owning democracy . . . in order specifically to enrich life, property and liberty of each and every citizen' (NPP Manifesto, 1996, p. 2). Education policies since the 1990s have been influenced by both national aspirations and International Organisations (IOs). Between 1990 and 2000, government was able to get the World Bank to support adult literacy and basic education.

Since 2000, there has been a gradual recession in the support for adult literacy in Ghana and an upsurge in the funds allocated to basic and secondary education. Support to the budget by multi-lateral and bilateral institutions based on their priorities has stifled other equally important subsectors, such as adult learning and education and adult literacy. A strong national ideology is crucial in the reduction of adult literacy and the promotion of adult learning and education.

### *Issues of practice*

Allowing lifelong learning to have a transformative effect is when its implementation is felt by the children, youth and adults. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has called for a 'joint responsibility, requiring the active engagement and support of governments, employers and workers, as well as educational institutions' (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2019a, p. 30). This places issues of governance and coordination at the forefront of the practice of lifelong learning in Ghana (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2019b). A lifelong learning policy alone will not ensure effective practice if inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral coordination and collaboration remain weak and fragmented. Several ministries are involved in the provision of education. They include the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP), the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. There are also private institutions and non-governmental organisations.

For TVET, the Education Sector Performance Report (2018) indicated that 'formal or institution-based technical and vocational education and training in Ghana is delivered under fifteen different ministries' (p. 35) thus describing the delivery landscape as fragmented. A similar situation pertains to implementation of adult literacy and adult learning and education. There are so many actors that operate independent of each other. The Non-formal Division of the Ministry assigned with the coordination of non-formal education in Ghana is incapable of providing leadership because of inadequate financial support from government. Furthermore, adult learning and education is implemented by both governmental and non-governmental organisations. The field of adult learning and education is diverse. Several programmes are implemented by both governmental and non-governmental organisations, universities and civil society organisations to ensure that Ghanaians have access to education and to learn continuously. There is a need for effective coordination and collaboration so that outcomes of programmes implemented can be captured in a national data system to monitor the progress towards achieving the SDG4. Collaboration and coordination will ensure that no one is left behind. Rather they will ensure effective participation by learners and inclusiveness.

## Conclusion

The paper has examined the place of a lifelong learning policy in Ghana's national development documents and educational policies. It noticed that although lifelong learning has been identified as critical to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and as a new educational policy agenda for the 21st century (Regmi, 2015a), Ghana has no general framework policy on lifelong learning. However, different national documents such as the Constitution, the Education Act (778), and the ESP (2010–2020) mention lifelong education and lifelong learning but none of these documents provide strategies for the achievement of lifelong learning. A lifelong learning policy in Ghana should be able to 'provide a unifying vision for education and training' (Youngman, 2003, p. 197) and must be mainstreamed in national development documents and educational policies. Such a policy must cover formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Any lifelong learning policy must address the issues of ideology. Lifelong learning is a contested concept; therefore, it is not neutral. The UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning (UIL) has observed that 'in a complex and fast-changing world, lifelong learning has become a philosophy, a conceptual framework and an organising principle of all forms of education' (UIL, 2010, p. 5 cited in UIL, 2017). For developing countries, the humanistic model has been suggested as the most suitable model to spur transformational development. The policy must be holistic and address issues of equity, exclusion, and discrimination. One of the challenges is the marginalisation of youth and adult learning and education (YALE) in national development documents. Special attention in any lifelong learning policy must ensure that non-formal education and learning and informal learning are core components of such policy. The new Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education's (2015b) revised definition of adult learning and education must reflect in the position of the Government and institutions in Ghana regarding the promotion of adult learning and education for the youth and adults. The new Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (2015b) must serve as the blueprint for the components of YALE in Ghana. In addition, any lifelong learning policy must recognise the change in the definition of literacy as a continuum of lifelong learning, which involves literacies such as media literacy, financial literacy, information literacy, civic literacy and scientific literacy. This position fits into what Torres (2002) and Hannemann (2015) have described as 'lifelong literacy'.

## Note

1. The Annual New Year School is a regular non-formal programme introduced in the 1950s and organised by the School of Continuing and Distance Education where Ghanaians meet to discuss issues of national concerns and make recommendations to Governments.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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