

## The New Educational Reform and ICT

It is an undeniable fact that ICTs play a very important role in the development of every nation these days. This is because growth is induced by the flow of information and this realization has led most economies into knowledge based ones. Developing countries have realized this and are rigorously pursuing the use of ICTs as a platform for socio-economic development. But are these countries getting it right? May be, may be not. It is also true that the critical workforce of these developing countries are the youth graduating from the polytechnics and the universities and the Professional training institutions but are these graduates trained adequately to handle critical information in a knowledge based world?

The Wikipedia suggests that at least three interlocking driving forces are changing the rules of business and national competitiveness: *Globalization* where markets and products are more global, *Information/Knowledge intensity* – efficient production relies on information and know-how; over 70 per cent of workers in developed economies are information workers; many factory workers use their heads more than their hands and *Computer Networking and Connectivity*–developments such as the Internet bring the “global village” ever nearer. As a result, goods and services can be developed, bought, sold, and in many cases even delivered over electronic networks. The application of any new technology depends on how it meets economic demand. It can stay dormant or get a commercial breakthrough. Human capital – competencies are a key component of value in a knowledge-based company, yet few companies report competency levels in annual reports.

This article examines our educational system, with emphasis on the New Educational Reform and the role it will play in helping leapfrog this nation into complete knowledge-based economy where about 70 per cent of workers are information workers rather than unproductive ones.

Ghana, has since independence made significant strides in its education system. The education landscape in Ghana today is the result of major policy initiatives adopted by past governments as well as the present one.

Some of the laws, policy documents and reports, which have helped in meeting the educational needs and aspirations of the people are:

- The Education Act of 1961
- The Dzobo Report of 1973 (Recommended the JSS Concept)
- The New Structure and Content of Education 1974

- The Education Commission Report on Basic and Secondary Education 1987/88.
- The Education Reform Programme 1987/88
- The University Relationalization Committee Report 1988
- The Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education Programme, 1996. (1992 Constitution)
- The FCUBE Policy Document and Programme of Operations, 1996
- The Ghana Education Trust Fund - GET Fund Act 2000. (Act 581) and now
- The New Educational Reform (takes off September, 2007)

Indeed these initiatives have not only helped in structurally transforming the education system but also improved considerably access, quality teaching and learning, infrastructure delivery as well as management efficiency. Despite the successes these reforms have had on the educational landscape of Ghana, it has not done much to address the need of the nation in terms of producing a human capacity with all the requisite training in ICTs. Realizing this, governments started introducing computers into Senior Secondary Schools in the late 1990s. This necessitated a statement from the website of the Government of Ghana which said, "The ICT revolution is having tremendous impact on the rapid development of world economies and making national economies more interdependent than they were some years ago. The Ministry is therefore committed to making Ghana a key player in today's digital age. To this end, the Ministry has embarked upon a programme to streamline computer studies in secondary schools. Already, a draft ICT policy has been prepared and submitted to Cabinet for approval. A curriculum has also been developed for ICT training and examination at the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE) Level. In addition, every effort is being made to provide telephone facilities to all senior secondary schools and training colleges to enable them have access to the Internet".

Countries all over the world have undertaken education reforms one time or the other to improve upon the content and delivery of quality education. Ghana has had her fair share of educational reforms spanning across five decades. President John Kufuor recently launched yet another educational reform based on recommendations the of Anamuah Mensah's Committee. Key among the reforms are 11 years of Basic Education comprising: Two years of Kindergarten education, six years of Primary Education, three years of Junior High School education. The Senior Secondary School duration has also been increased to four years against the recommendations of Anamuah-Mensah"s Committee.

The reforms prescribe a four-year programme for students and mandate them to study five core subjects, namely: English, Mathematics, Integrated Science, Social Studies and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Greater

emphasis is going to be placed on Science, Mathematics and Information Technology. President Kufuor said the Reform also acknowledged the mastery of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as a priority and that as skills in ICT had become crucial for the survival of the global world, government would extend the national broadband backbone connectivity throughout the country to facilitate the development of ICT infrastructure in schools. If this is the case, then it is good indeed because it will go a long way to solve some of the ICT access problems.

Funding of this reform is going to be a major headache for government though. Once it can be identified as one major hurdle to jump, this reform would be a great success. The total requirement under the reform worked up to ₦12.03 trillion annually with a financing gap of ₦2.6 trillion annually as at September 2005. Taking into consideration the emerging trends and challenges such as the implementation of the capitation grant, the 10-Year work plan for the Education sector was estimated in May 15, 2006 to cost an average of ₦13.8 trillion annually (\$1.5 billion) with the Basic Education component to be 56.6% of the total estimates for the sector. Government will need a lot of political will to finance this to the letter and with more concentration on local schools.

Looking at the New Educational Reform, ICTs would be introduced into the curriculum of the Senior High Schools as a core subject. I think this is commendable indeed. However, it is important to have it done as an elective. It will help students who want to train entirely in ICT have the requisite training before entering the tertiary institutions for a complete ICT training. Having said this, it is very important to make sure that these tertiary institutions have the adequate ICT infrastructure. It is also of paramount importance that our schools, right from primary levels have fully trained teachers who have ICT skills for this reform to be a complete success looking at it from ICT's point of view. The curriculum should be developed in such a way as to disseminate locally relevant teaching materials, and some in local languages.

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