

Book review

Amoako-Gyampah, A. K.; Lundt, B. & Agyeman, Ed. A. (2023). *Education in Ghana. History and Politics*. Bamenda: Langaa Research & Publishing CIG. ISBN-13: 978-9956-553-99-0

What role does Ghana's history play in its current educational developments and challenges? How has it (politically) shaped today's educational landscape? These questions are at the heart of *Education in Ghana - History and Politics*, published in 2023 and edited by Akwasi Kwarteng Amoako-Gyampah, Bea Lundt and Edmond Akwasi Agyeman. The book is divided into three thematic blocks, beginning with the first on history (Section 1), which then leads to current issues in Ghana's educational landscape, with particular focus on 'Subjects in School Teaching' (Section 2) and 'Issues in Tertiary Education' (Section 3).

Before proceeding with a brief content analysis, I would like to describe my positionality: As a white, able-bodied, cis-gendered PhD student from Germany, I enjoy privileges that shape my perspective on educational issues. This is of particular interest when these may not be part of this particular perspective(s). Emphasising this at the beginning of a book review is a by-product of the last few years of research on inclusive education in postcolonial relations, with a par-

ticular focus on inclusive education practice in Ghana. It's not just a comment on how to read and contextualise the following review, but also an explanation of why this book appealed to me, as I've been searching for a long time for relevant literature on the Ghanaian education system, combining historical influences with current educational practice and its challenges.

The book begins with a short introduction that provides the reader with important facts about the structure of the education system and its development in Ghana, as well as the structure of the book. Subsequently, 248 pages of the total 467 pages, or eight of the 17 chapters, provide a broad and nuanced account of the history of educational development. The authors of this section trace the origins of Ghana's education system from pre-colonial times, through the colonial period and the struggle for independence, to the present day, and provide valuable insights into the challenges and progress that have shaped Ghana's education system. This historical perspective is essential to understanding the state of Ghana's education system and the many challenges it faces today.

The second section, comprising six chapters, provides an in-depth examination of curriculum-related issues, teacher training and subjects taught in Ghanaian schools. Beginning with a chapter on teacher preparation and their continuing development practices and a statement on the need for coherent policy, the subsequent chapters focus on subjects such

as history in the primary school, geography, art or female education in pre-independence Ghana. The chapters are linked to the previous section on history, so that current discourses and debates on subjects in school education can be seen within a broader framework of historical traces and connections.

The final section, with only three chapters, focuses on tertiary education in Ghana. These chapters provide insights into the development of university education, the idea of teaching in a Ghanaian university, the role of expatriate academics in the higher education system over time, and on legal education policy. The section on higher education concludes the book and ends with valuable references that can be made to the previous sections, especially the second section on subjects, curriculum and teacher education.

Education in Ghana - History and Politics is a significant addition to the international discourse on education in Ghana, providing an overview of fundamental and seminal issues in Ghana's educational landscape in a collection of nuanced contributions. This comprehensive anthology brings together authors from diverse academic but education-related backgrounds - historians, social scientists, higher education, lawyers, geographers, curriculum and pedagogy studies or comparative education, to name but a few. 21 authors, 18 of them with a Ghanaian academic background, grouped in 17 chapters in three main sections (His-

tory, Subjects in School Teaching and Issues in Tertiary Education), thus promise a multifaceted and Ghanaian view of the subject. Moreover, this view is enriched by the international collaboration in which this book was initiated, going back to the cooperation between Ghanaian and German academics.

The introduction to the book sets the tone for the rest of the book and how it should be read and understood, as the reader's mind is sensitised by a powerful quote from Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana who led the Gold Coast to independence from Britain in 1957 (Lundt & Marx, 2016).

“If we have lost touch with what our forefathers discovered and knew, this has been due to the system of education to which we were introduced. This education system prepared us for a subservient role to Europe and things European. It was directed at estranging us from our own cultures to more effectively serve a new and alien interest.” (Obeng, 1979, cited after Amoako-Gyampah, Lundt and Agyeman, 2023, p. xi)

The strong emphasis on history, particularly on how history has alienated Ghanaian peoples from their cultural heritage in order to serve the interests of colonialism, industrialisation and capitalism, provides a framework within which the following chapters are to be read. This well-chosen, powerful quotation offers an early invitation to the reader "to consider education from multiple perspectives that reinforce the impact of political and ideological hegemonies over

time on the evolution of education" (Foreword, p. 1), as Sutherland-Addy, Associate Professor at the University of Ghana, states in the Foreword. At the same time, she underlines the importance and necessity of a nuanced knowledge of Ghana's (historical) educational development and its specific challenges in order to reorient national ideas and legacies.

In addition to the quote, the introduction encourages the comparative perspective of non-Ghanaian readers. If education in Ghana is linked to nation-building (p. xiii), if the Ghanaian education system states the need to apply a critical perspective to the education of global citizens (p. xiii), or if the private education sector is marked as an inability of the state's obligation to meet educational needs (xii), what is the situation in the readers' education system? In reading through the specificity of the Ghanaian education system, the perspective is constantly directed towards the reader's educational origins, which opens up reflective surfaces and spaces for different developments in terms of education from the past to the present. At the same time, it sharpens the eye for interdependencies and their ongoing influences on educational issues, which in turn sensitises for inherent questions of post/colonial discourse, namely power, positionality, representation, hierarchisation, construction of difference.

The book therefore provides an opportunity to reflect on and discuss the historical influences on the educational

system, the status quo, but also the normative framework of education, which the editors suggest by asking: "What function should education fulfil in the process of knowledge production and development of a society?" (p. 1) With this question, the editors refer to education as the general dichotomy of producing "conformist and servile personalities feeling inferior and helpless to strange powers on one side and independent and critical thinking, powerful personalities on the other" (p. 2). Given the inextricable links with historical developments, it is not surprising that the editors describe the core task of the Ghanaian education system as overcoming Eurocentrism in the production of knowledge and developing structural and political educational development.

One question that arises is what must necessarily replace Eurocentrism if, to quote Nkrumah, an alienation from Ghanaians' cultural roots is to be replaced by a more culturally appreciative relationship with what "forefathers discovered and knew"? (Obeng, 1979, quoted in Amoako-Gyampah, Lundt and Agyeman, 2023, p.xi) The introduction to the book itself gives an answer: it is about "enough realistic knowledge about the African countries" (p. 6). It is about feeding the counter-perspective of Eurocentrism with both the colonising vision of education and a pre-colonial and decolonising vision of education as a tool of decolonisation in the Ghanaian educational landscape. As such, the book addresses the urgent need for a systematic, up-to-

date and thorough analysis of the Ghanaian educational landscape, addressing challenges and issues of cultural identity in relation to historical developments in the educational landscape. As such, the book is invaluable to a wide range of stakeholders who are interested in gaining this "realistic knowledge" (p. 6), including researchers, policy makers, educators or scholars. As well as providing historical context, it also offers critical insights into the current state of education in Ghana, making it an essential resource for anyone involved in the country's education system.

Finally, I appreciated the book's ability to reveal thematic and historical relationships between sections, providing insight into the Ghanaian education system as a historically interwoven web of challenges, reforms, and current issues, as this contributes significantly to moving towards a holistic understanding. However, the presented issues are not analyzed in-depth as they are selectively considered due to limited space and a holistic orientation that is recognizable.

Nonetheless, tracing the history of education in Ghana and providing guidance on the interrelationship between past, present, and future issues has been successful at all levels.

Furthermore, interesting foundations have been laid for further work on specific topics such as an early idea of inclusive education in Ghana (chapter 2) or gender concepts (chapter 14), to name but a few, which invite the reader to reflect further. The book is therefore also

wonderfully valid as a basis for further, more specialised topics such as feminist, inclusive approaches.

The writing style and expression are as heterogeneous as the different authors, which makes the examination of this complex subject lively and varied. In conclusion, I highly recommend this book, as it guides the reader, in the sense of the Adinkra symbol 'Sankofa' (p. 11), to look back, learn history, understand present challenges and shape future visions. *Education in Ghana - History and Politics* (2023) is a comprehensive and timely exploration of Ghana's education system. It will leave the reader with new insights, stimulating ideas and follow-up questions, that will enrich the international comparative understanding, particularly in relation to comparison as a methodology, comparata, interdependence and issues of power, representation and the construction of difference.

References

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