

Access to Higher Education in Ghana: Role of Private Higher Educational Institutions

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Abstract

Education in developing nations faces numerous challenges. For most developing nations, a major challenge is to provide adequate number of universities and colleges to cater for the numerous students who qualify for such tertiary education. For long, the government has been the main supplier of such education and with the government facing financial constraints as a result of prevailing economic conditions it has been unable to ensure the expansion of tertiary higher institutions to meet the demand. It is in the prevalence of the above situation that the establishment of faith-based higher educational institutions (universities and colleges) have been embraced. These have opened up opportunities thus providing alternative choices for qualified students to attain the desired university education. In addressing the educational challenges of Ghana, faith-based private higher educational institutions have contributed immensely. The efforts of such institutions can only be commended.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been an improved effort to increase educational accessibility in Ghana. Various governments have initiated projects aimed at increasing the number of schools for their citizens, especially in the provision of higher education. (Fiske, 1996; Mumba, 2002). The demand for graduates in the economic sectors (both private and public) has greatly influenced the direction of education. This also calls for new ideas and ways of improving the quality product from our educational institutions. And to capitalize on this new demand and direction, private higher institutions have emerged. (Effah, 2003).

A critical look at the number of students qualifying for places in national universities suggests that public universities cannot admit every qualified person and hence some are turned away due to limited places. This has led to two scenarios. First, qualified students look to further their education outside their respective countries. Secondly, the above trend calls for a determined effort aimed at urging and encouraging governments to allow the establishment of private higher institutions to cater for those who may not be in a position to further their education outside their countries (Lugg, Morley and Leach, 2007). Although the flow of students to developed countries continues, to help curb the situation faced by students who have qualified for studies in higher institutions since not all students can afford to study abroad, private universities have been greatly welcomed. Consequently, numerous private institutions have sprung up to take up the prevailing challenge.

The objective of this study is to establish the contribution made by private higher educational institutions in creating accessible options for students who have qualified but cannot get access to public institutions. This is to be derived from the levels of enrolment over the period. An increasing enrolment level emphasises the significant role such institutions have played in opening avenues for students to pursue higher education, thus, contributing to the country's educational development.

Research Methodology

The study focuses on three main faith-based private higher educational institutions, namely, Valley View University, Central University College and Methodist University College Ghana. These form part of the leading faith-based institutions and are all located within the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. Moreover, data in relation to the study was easily available. Collectively, these institutions have significant effect on any analysis on private higher education.

The advent of private higher education

The numerous faith-based institutions could be classified as denominational, inter-denominational or non-denominational in nature. Among the various private institutions are those owned by various religious denominations (notably the Catholics, Presbyterians, Anglican, Methodists, Adventists, Moslems and other Charismatic denominations). In addition, there are those established as private business venture. However, it would have been expected that governments would take the initiative in establishing higher institutions but this has not been the case. The root cause has been governments' inability to provide adequate and necessary funds to finance existing institutions and also to open new ones. Consequently, private higher institutions have been on the ascendancy.

Altbach (1999) observes that "Private higher education is one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing segments of postsecondary education at the turn of the 21st century." (pg. 2). This has resulted from two main reasons. Firstly, there is an unparalleled demand for higher education that has never been seen before. This can be seen in the movement of students across various countries and continents to study in their numbers, especially movement of students from Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia. Secondly, there has been an increase in the number of private higher education that has culminated mostly from various governments incapability to offer adequate and appropriate support (financial and infrastructure) to improving the higher education sector. Consequently, private higher education has made significant inroads even in places where citizens have wholly relied on their governments as the main provider of education.

Profile of Selected Faith-based Universities/Colleges

Valley View University

Valley View University was established in 1979 by the West African Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists as Adventist Missionary College. Initially, it was located at Bekwai-Ashanti but in 1983 it was transferred to Adentan near Accra, where it operated in rented facilities until it was relocated to its present site near Oyibi (Mile 19 on the Accra-Dodowa Road) in 1989 and renamed Valley View College. Since its inception, the institution has been operating under the Seventh-day Adventist International Board of Education (IBE) and the Adventist Accrediting Association (AAA) located at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist headquarters located in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA. In 1995, the university was affiliated to Griggs University in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA. This allowed the university to offer four-year bachelor's degrees in Theology and Religious Studies. The Valley View University serves students from all over the world. It admits qualified students regardless of their religious

background, provided such students accept the Christian principles and lifestyle which form the basis for the university's operations.

Central University College

Central University College (CUC) was established by the International Central Church (ICGC) in response to the need to train transformational leaders for the nations. It began operations in October 1988 as a short-term pastoral training institute training pastors and other laymen for work in the church. In 1991 it was incorporated as a non profit making organization and subsequently named the Central Bible College. The institution's name was changed again to Central Christian College in 1993. The College later upgraded its programs to the baccalaureate level in line with its objectives and aspirations. Currently, its academic programs have been expanded to include an integrated and practice oriented business school (the School of Business Management and Administration) offering studies leading to a graduate degree in business administration. To reflect its new status as a liberal arts tertiary institution, the university in 1997 changed its name to Central University College. The National Accreditation Board (Ghana) has since accredited it as a tertiary institution. It is co-educational with equal access for male and female enrolment (pg. 5, Central University College, 3 Year Strategic Plan, 2006/7 – 2008/9).

Methodist University College

The historical background of the Methodist University College is deeply rooted in the work of the early Wesleyan Missionaries. Missionaries of the Wesley Mission Society arrived in Ghana in 1835. Since then the Methodist Church has been involved in the provision and development of education at basic, senior secondary and teacher training levels. The Church realized that the development of the nation and the Church hinges on a collection of factors instrumentally driven by human resource factors. As a result, it paid much attention to the provision and development of good educational institutions. (Principal's Report and Basic Statistics: 4th Congregation 2007).

Following this tradition, the Church resolved at its 37th Annual Conference held in Sunyani in 1998 to set up an educational institution at the tertiary level to help cope with the increased demand for such education in the country. Consequently, the Methodist University College Ghana (MUCG), which had been conceived at the 36th Annual Conference in Cape Coast, as it were, in 1997, born at the 37th Annual Conference in Sunyani in 1998, was finally christened and established as a multi-campus institution here at Dansoman in October 2000. (Methodist University College Ghana: Five-Year Strategic Plan). The Methodist University College Ghana began with a single campus in Accra, with plans to establish other campuses in the course of time. Currently it has three campuses: in Accra, Tema and Wenchi where the Faculty of Agriculture is based. The Accra campus is spread on a thirty (30) acre land located to the southern end of the Wesley Grammar School compound at Dansoman, Accra. (Principal's Report and Basic Statistics: 4th Congregation 2007)

Literature Review

The history of education in Africa is interwoven with the two main forms of religion mainly Christianity and Islam (Kitaev, 1999; Roth 1987). As the advocates of these religions moved into the African continent, they carried along their form of education hence, education became synonymous with religion. Scanlon (1966) observed that, the period of intrusion into the African continent (1880-1920) by the various European nations (such as England, Portugal, France, to mention but a few) was also a period in which major development of governmental and democratic foundations were being laid. Consequently, the colonialists saw as an opportunity the need to establish such governance in their colonies. Coupled with the development of governmental structures during this period was the influence of religion.

Missionaries embarked on spreading their religion to the new colonies and this was seen as a way of bringing civilization to these new territories. Hence, religion and the work of the missionaries

was an important tool towards bringing change to the colonized nations. To bring about the desired results of civilization, colonialists employed the process of education. This went hand in hand with the work of the missionaries. As the work of the missionaries expanded across the continent so did education as it was considered to be vital to the progress of the individual and the church. "Varying in degree from those who believed the most rudimentary knowledge was necessary for conversion to those who demanded as high an educational level as possible, agents of the church and the literacy movement marched in lockstep. In West, South and East Africa, missions might forgo many luxuries, but education was considered a necessity. Therefore, when the rapid expansion of mission work in the 1880s began, it was only natural that education should be expanded" (Ibid).

Although, this form of education being advocated by the colonialists was welcomed, it should not be ignored that, the natives had their own form of education which was at variance with this so called civilized education. With the passage of time, however, traditional (native) education was seen to be inferior compared to the education provided by the colonial masters. With the collapse of colonization, newly independent countries placed greater emphasis on education as it was seen to be the most appropriate tool for their development. This became evident in the adoption of the educational systems bequeathed by the colonial masters. New educational institutions were established and greater emphasis was placed on ensuring that the citizens benefited from education. Free educational policies were established all levels of education to help boost the need for education.

In some countries, efforts were made at sending some students abroad to acquire the requisite education then to return and help in managing the newly independent nations to greater economic and social development. Although all these were laudable efforts, ably supported by the public, they did not achieve their expected returns so far as the majority of the citizens were concerned. This is because "has not significantly improved the participation of low income groups" (Albrecht and Ziderman, 1992, pg. 46). Much so has been the premium placed on higher education. Johnstone et al (1998) commented that "Tertiary education has always been an important priority in the public agenda. It is a repository and defender of culture, an agent of change in this culture, an engine for national economic growth, and an instrument for the realization of collective aspirations" (pg. 2).

Although, the importance of higher education has been realized, the issue at stake then has been who should bear the cost involved in education. The governments of these newly independent countries took upon themselves the overall burden of establishing various educational institutions, financing education and in addition, seeing to the physical and infrastructural development of the various educational institutions. In his article titled "Increasing Access to Higher Education in Africa: Emerging Issues", Chris Nwamuo (2000) observes as follows:

At the attainment of independence, African governments were anxious to establish national universities for obvious reasons: to help produce the much needed qualified staff to take over from retreating colonialists, universities were seen as a mark of national identity and symbols of development. Governments as a result invested in university education, provided scholarships and other incentives to the potential nation builders. (pg. 1-2)

With the present economic conditions, marred with economic recovery programs and the inability of governments to meet its expenditure, private universities are being highly welcomed, although with a lot of concern and pride at stake, in the area of university education (in some countries it has not been considered at all).

Higher Education in Ghana

As with most developing economies, the state of higher education in Ghana can best be described as developing. It has evolved from the colonial era to its current state in the midst of the economic hardships and the numerous changes in government that has been experienced. The higher

education sector consists of the various teacher training colleges, professional institutes, polytechnics, and universities (including public and private). Morley, Leach and Lugg (2008) observed that education in Ghana “is a mixed economy of higher education in Ghana, with multiple delivery points. The tertiary education system includespublic universities, private universities, andpolytechnics.”

Although participation rates are relatively low, enrolments are growing. As the table below shows, student numbers increased during the 1990s as a result of reforms of the higher education sector at the beginning of the decade and the government’s renewed commitment to expansion (GoG, 1991). Girdwood notes that enrolment in higher education in Ghana increased by 80 percent between 1993 and 1998 (Girdwood, 1999). The polytechnics also offer vocational, non-tertiary diploma programs. In addition, there are approximately forty teacher-training colleges and fifteen nurses' training colleges.

Table 1: Increasing enrolment in Higher Education in Ghana, between 1993 and 2001

Type of HE Institution	Number of Students Enrolled		Percentage Increase
	1993/1994	2000/2001	
Public University	15,365	40,637	164.47%
Private University	0	1662	
Polytechnics	1,299	18,474	1,322.17%
Post Secondary Teacher Training Colleges	18,955	21,410	12.95%
Total	35,619	82,183	130.73%

Sources: Enrolment (Rows 1, 3, 4: GoG, 2007. Row 2: NCTE, 2006b): as quoted in Rosemary Lugg, Louise Morley, Fiona Leach in “Working Paper 3: A Profile of Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania” August 2007 an ESRC/DfID Poverty Reduction Programme funded Research Project.

Atuahene (2008) observed that “Higher education in Ghana has suffered a myriad of challenges such as accessibility, affordability, faculty recruitment and retention, and a deplorable state of infrastructure due to general poverty and macroeconomic instabilities of the country. ...each year over half the qualified applicants seeking entrance to universities and polytechnics do not obtain admission, due to limited academic facilities.” A former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana observed as follows,

... Every year, we are faced with the painful decision of having to reject a large number of highly qualified students. We have now reached, or probably even surpassed, the optimum number of students that our present facilities and staff strength can cope with. Last academic year the total population of the University reached about 14,600. Statistics available to me indicate that our population is over 15,000. In both absolute numbers and percentage increase in enrolment, the University has tried to meet the aspirations of a large number of the qualified students, but the sheer increase in the number of qualified candidates every year is making this a really daunting task (Addae-Mensah, 2001, pg. 47).

It is in reference to these circumstances that the emergence of private institutions and most significantly private universities which are thoroughly regulated by the National Accreditation Board have been warmly received. Tefferra (1999) commenting on the emergence of private universities on the African continent observes that they “are slowly but steadily emerging in several African countries. Private universities should be promoted so as to relieve governments of some of the burden of providing higher education for their citizens.” Morley et al (2008) observed that these institutions have become part of the Ghana’s educational system and most importantly, their number has risen gradually with students in such institution constituting about ten percent of the total students at the various

universities. Although, private higher education is fairly new, it has contributed to the increasing number of enrolment in higher education. Altbach (1999) made the following proclamation.

The 21st century will see private higher education grow in importance in many nations, especially in the developing and middle-income countries. Even in the wealthy countries of Western Europe and North America, private higher education will become more central to the academic enterprise. It is necessary to understand this phenomenon, and to ensure that private higher education serves the needs of the marketplace and society (pg. 14).

A study by the Association of African Universities (AAU) revealed that “there are about 70 of such universities in all the regions of Africa. With 20 in West Africa, 22 in East Africa, 11 in Southern Africa, 10 in North Africa and 7 in Central Africa. They comprise private denominational, private nondenominational, open, and virtual and gender universities. (Nwamuo, 2000). Levy (1979) depicts the main reason for the existence of private higher institutions in these words: “if Yale, as well as private higher education in general does not perform a mission sufficiently distinct from that of the University of Connecticut then, well, it may as well join it.” In addition, Levy (2008) asserts that “The basic causes of private expansion remain religion, social advantage, and absorption of the accelerated demand for higher education.” Massy (1996), however, concludes that “The growing demand for higher education stems from the people’s desires to improve their employment prospects and a conviction that obtaining more education will bring dividends in that regard” (pg. 16).

Faith-based Private Higher Educational Institutions

Although they exist to provide education, the uniqueness of faith-based private higher education is noted in their core objectives or mission which differs significantly from that of public universities. In a report to establish why parents send their kids to private schools, it was observed that “parents who think religion is important are more likely than those who do not to choose a private school.” (<http://andrewnorton.info/2007/02/why-do-parents-send-their-kids-to-private-schools/>). Interestingly, the study further observed that most private schools were owned and operated by religious denominations and they placed greater emphasis on religion in their curriculum. The study discovered the three main reasons why parents send their wards to private schools as the emphasis on religion, and discipline. In a [2004 ACNielsen/SMH survey](http://andrewnorton.info/2007/02/why-do-parents-send-their-kids-to-private-schools/) ‘better discipline’ was the single-most cited reason (31%) for moving to a private school, with ‘better education’ second on 25%. (<http://andrewnorton.info/2007/02/why-do-parents-send-their-kids-to-private-schools/>, April 25, 2008)

Religious (Faith-based) Educational Institutions can be broadly categorized into two, namely, Islamic and Christian. Afsaruddin (2005) emphasizes that Islamic education takes its root from “the foundational texts of Islam [which] emphasize the acquisition and dissemination of learning as a fundamental religious duty. Thus the Qur’an (3:79) states, ‘Be you masters in that you teach the Scripture and in that you yourselves study [it].’ The foundational texts of Islam emphasize the acquisition and dissemination of learning as a fundamental religious duty. Thus the Qur’an (3:79) states, ‘Be you masters in that you teach the Scripture and in that you yourselves study [it].’ (pg. 18).

Ajayi, Goma, and Johnson (1993) comments on the historical background of Islamic education and emphasizes that this differed from mission schools set up by the Missionaries in the sense that it operated within an integrated make up. Islamic education was solely based on the word of the Holy Koran which had to be studied and understood in the Arabic language. Teachers taught their pupils the rudiments of Arabic and the Koran. This gave it a sense of uniformity as a similar blueprint was carried along from one place to another by the teachers. Christian education in Africa is attributed mainly to the influence of the Missionaries. They deemed it their responsibility not only to introduce the natives to their Christian religion but in addition to introduce Christian education to ensure understanding in the Christian beliefs and doctrines. “From the beginning of Christianity in Africa,

missionaries and later the African Churches have been concerned with education, first of its converts, and secondly, as a contribution to the nation. This concern has taken the form largely of schools for general education; most of the schools systems in Africa were first started as mission or Church-related schools” (Megill, 1976, pg. 3). Sherrill (1955) examined that “Christian education is the attempt, ordinarily by members of the Christian community, to participate in and guide the changes which take place in persons in their relationship with God, with the Church, with other persons, with the physical world, and with oneself.” (pg. 82). It is no surprise; therefore, “the earliest colleges and universities in the United States, such as Harvard and Yale, were started by religious denominations to train clergymen. They tended to be located in nonurban areas and to differentiate themselves from competing institutions” (Fiske, 2003).

It could be concluded that religious education, no matter the religious affiliation, has some core attributes that it espouses. These include the inculcating of religious values in its student, preparation of the student to serve the world, teaching with emphasis on its mission and objectives and lastly evangelising through its educational institutions.

The Role of Private Higher Education in Ghana

The numbers of private higher educational institutions have witnessed significant increases over the years. Currently, the National Accreditation Board Ghana indicates that there are twenty-five accredited universities and colleges (accredited private tertiary institution). Of this number, fourteen (14), constituting 56% can be classified as faith-based and the remaining eleven (11) or 44% are not. (<http://www.nab.gov.gh/nabsite/downloads/ACCREDITED%20PRIVATE%20TERTIARY%20INSTITUTIONS%20AS%20AT%20FEBRUARY,%202009.pdf>). This goes a long to emphasise the significant role being played by such religious institutions in the educational sector of the economy.

Table 2: List of Accredited of Faith-based Institutions in Ghana (as at February 2009)

Number	Name of Institution (Faith-based)
1	All Nations University College
2	Catholic University College, Ghana
3	Central University College
4	Christian Service University College
5	Evangelical Presbyterian University College
6	Ghana Baptist University College
7	Ghana Christian University College
8	Islamic University College
9	Maranatha University College
10	Methodist University College, Ghana
11	Pan African Christian University College
12	Pentecost University College
13	Presbyterian University College
14	Valley View University

Source: National Accreditation Board Ghana Website. Excerpts from list of Accredited Private Tertiary Institutions (University Colleges) as at February 2009.

The increasing number of private higher educational institutions has consequently led to increasing levels of enrolments. In their study on Ghana, Lugg et al, (2007) observed that the increasing number of private universities in Ghana has a direct relationship with the total enrolment (see Table 2).

Table 3: Enrolment at private universities in Ghana, 1999/2000-2005/6

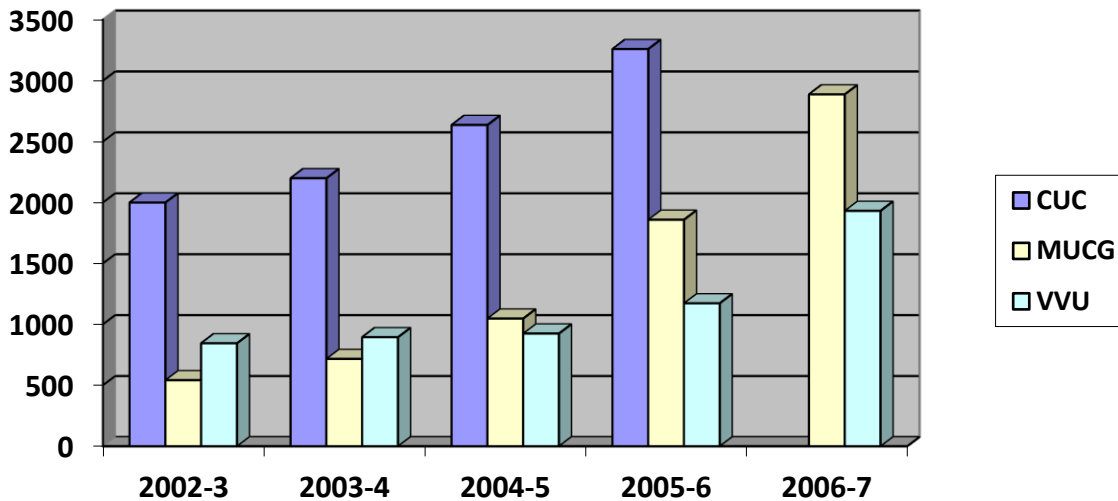
	1999/2000	2000/1	2001/2	2002/3	2003/4	2004/5	2005/6
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Number of private universities	2	4	4	7	8	9	13
Total enrolment	783	1662	1667	1901	2588	3470	9497

Source: Student enrolment NCTE (2006b) as quoted in Rosemary Lugg, Louise Morley, Fiona Leach in "Working Paper 3: A Profile of Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania" August 2007 an ESRC/DfID Poverty Reduction Programme funded Research Project.

The level of enrolment prevailing in the sampled institutions namely Central University College (CUC), Methodist University College Ghana (MUCG) and Valley View University University (VUU) for the period 2002/3 through 2006/7 academic year are analysed.

FIGURE 1: ENROLLMENT STATISTICS 2002/3 TO 2006/7 ACADEMIC YEARS



CUC Enrolment statistics for 2006/7 was not available.

Each institution depicts a steady increase in their level of enrolments over the period. From Table 4, the annual percentage increase in enrolment could be ascertained.

TABLE 4: STUDENT ENROLMENT ANALYSIS: PERCENTAGE INCREASE/DECREASE

INSTITUTION	2002-3	% Change	2003-4	% Change	2004-5	% Change	2005-6	% Change	2006-7
CUC	2000	10%	2200	20%	2637	24%	3260		N/A
MUCG	542	32%	717	46%	1048	77%	1859	55%	2888
VUU	845	6%	895	3%	925	27%	1173	65%	1932

The above table (4) and figure (1), depicts the increment in enrolment across the various institutions using the 2002/3 figures as a base year. MUCG has shown rather remarkable enrolment during this period with enrolment increasing by 533% from that of 2002/3 academic year to the figure for 2006/7 (from 542 to 2,888 students). This followed by VUU, with an increment of 229% (from 845 to 1932). CUC, on the other hand, has maintained a rather steady growth of 81% (from 2,000 to 3,260 students) in enrolment over the same period. Overall, all the three sampled institutions have attained significant levels of enrolment over the period. This confirms their contribution to being an alternative to the public universities and also their ability to attract students thereby reducing the number of qualified students who hitherto would have missed the opportunity of attaining university education due to inadequate places in the public universities.

Conclusion

The increasing number of faith-based higher educational institutions is highly welcomed. As the number grows, it is expected that they will absorb the large number of qualified students who do not gain admission to the public institutions as well as providing an alternative form of higher education to the citizenry. Although their current role is appreciated, there is the need to ensure that such institutions do not encounter similar problems that public institutions have encountered, most significantly, lack of adequate infrastructure development. Should this happen, then the quest of faith-based private higher educational institutions to contribute to the educational sector will be defeated.

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