

Prof. Joshua Alabi: Speech Delivered at the 3rd BPI National Lecture
Date: 23rd February 2017
at the Academy of Arts and Sciences

**ENSURING INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY
TERTIARY EDUCATION: THE KEY ISSUES**

Mr. Chairman,

Distinguished Personalities assembled here

Friends of the Media,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It gives me great joy to be part of this important discussion, a subject that has been core to my career for the past three decades. There is certainly no need to overemphasize the role of education in nation building and development. However, for Africa, the key issue is not merely about prioritizing education but rather the type of education. For long, tertiary education was relegated to the background with the then Millennium Development Goals that focused more on primary and secondary education to the neglect of Tertiary education mostly perpetuating semi-illiteracy in our part of the world.

It is instructive to note that Tertiary Education is strategic for national development, it is the head of the education enterprise and therefore should not be treated as the tail, if Ghana is to entrench its gains as a middle-income country.

Mr. Chairman, permit me to reflect on some historical narratives, which occurred prior to the establishment of the first post-secondary education system in Ghana.

Mr. Chairman, Baker the first Headmaster of the Accra Government Training College for Teachers founded in 1909, the first post secondary level college in Ghana, recount a conversation he had with his Excellency, Sir John Rogers the Governor of the then Gold Coast Colony. Baker recalls that during the discussion, “the conversation turned at once, not to the immediate question of the College but to the general *problems of an awakening and capable people*”. Baker adds “His Excellency envisaged a West African University with constituent colleges in Sierra Leone, The Gold Coast and Nigeria”. Baker further notes that, the College at Accra was but a small beginning in the mind of Sir John Rogers of a great educational scheme which would give Africans a full and adequate place in the scholarship of the world”¹. Prior to that conversation between Baker and the Governor, Baker had maintained that “Concerning education of the African, the best attempt of the white man to educate the negro would only be a makeshift until some BOOKER .T.

¹ Baker 1959, Address to the 50th Anniversary of the Accra College of Education, Anniversary Brochure

WASHINGTON arises, who having a grasp of the fundamental principles underlying the growth of education in Europe, is able to adapt them to the needs of the people”¹. The question is, have we been able to adapt Ghana’s tertiary education to the needs of its people? Why and Why not?

First and foremost our tertiary education is stranded around the tight ropes of its colonial roots. Ghana’s education system is not distinctly Ghanaian in a global context. From curriculum, to requirements for teaching in the tertiary sector, to textbooks, cases and examples to mention a few. Our tertiary education system is wound around what we have been made to aspire to be and not who we are and what we should be.

Mr. Chairman with this little historical background, I will like to be very practical and focus on the three thematic areas, I consider critical to this presentation. These are:

- **Inclusiveness or Access**
- **Quality**
- **Funding**

Inclusiveness or Access

I will like to crave your indulgence to limit inclusiveness to access, otherwise I will have to consider how inclusive, Ghana’s tertiary

education is, at the regional and global levels. As well as the strategies we have as a country to be regionally inclusive and globally competitive, which I believe will be a subject for another occasion. However, in discussing access, which is the key issue of inclusiveness at the national level, I may touch on one or two concerns at the international level.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- ***Access to Tertiary Education is a Right.***

I believe that Tertiary Education must be accessible to all who desire to have it and are willing and able to cope with tertiary level education because it is a right. After all basic and secondary education are not and should not be ends in themselves. Ideally, everybody should have access to some form of tertiary education. It at the point of tertiary education that many people discover their destinies and develop their abilities to contribute meaningfully to society. So why should anyone be prevented from finding true meaning in life?

Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, I do not think I will be here sharing my thoughts on how to create opportunities for others, if I had been short-changed of tertiary education. Only God knows what would have become of me without tertiary education, if my educational journey were truncated at the secondary level. As I grew up, I came to appreciate more the unmatched difference between the outcomes of tertiary and secondary

education, much less primary education. I therefore came to the conclusion that it should be considered proscribed to deprive anyone of tertiary education unless the person chooses to deprive himself or herself. The lack of access to tertiary education is an unfortunate loss of talent and valuable contribution to nation building.

Ironically, in Ghana, it is reported that we have a Tertiary Gross Enrollment Ratio of 12% against a global average of about 30% and 70-80% for developed countries. This means only about 12% of those willing and qualified to access tertiary education have access to tertiary education in Ghana. So Why is it so?

First and foremost, it is instructive to note that there are many self-imposed barriers that contribute to the restricted accessibility to tertiary education in Ghana.

Entry Requirement to the tertiary institutions are among the strictest in Africa according to Prof. Golam Mohhamedbhai a former Secretary General of the AAU as stated in his book *Effects of Massification on Higher Education*, (2008). Mohamedbnai, notes that “Ghana is an example of another Anglophone country, with the phenomenon of rigorous selection process which restricts access to the higher institutions of learning”. However, Ghana’s rigorous entry requirements can best be described as specifications and not standards as it is not clear what forms

the basis of our entry requirement into tertiary institutions as we have it now. Specifications are specific requirements that are developed either by an individual or group for a particular product. Standards on the other hand are generally accepted specifications accepted by the stakeholders affected by it

Mr. chairman it is very sad to note that applicants with D grade or lower in any core subject cannot enter a university in Ghana irrespective of their performance in other areas. However, other countries even the UK that introduced Ghana to tertiary education accepts them. Do we have substantial evidence to suggest that those with at least one D grade in any of the core subjects are not capable of tertiary education in Ghana?

On the contrary, Prof. Mohamedhai (2008) notes that international universities are generally lowering the entry requirements to enhance access. Lomas (2001), reports that, in the United Kingdom for example, many students were admitted without the usual minimum standard requirement of two GCE Advance Level subjects for undergraduate courses. Indeed, Rust (1997) gives the example of Liverpool John Moores University where the proportion of non-standard entrants was nearly 75%.

According to Trow's typology (2000), countries in North America and Western Europe had reached almost universal higher education, while

those in Central and Eastern Europe had mass higher education. Some countries in East Asia and the Pacific, for example Australia and Singapore, have also reached mass or even universal higher education. However, it is important to note that, for Sub-Saharan Africa, not only has the increase in the enrollment ratio been insignificant from 1991 to 2005 but also the ratio is by far the lowest than any other region of the world (Mohamedbhai, 2008). Do we in Ghana want to suggest that those who go through tertiary education in for example the UK with the same grades we reject here are not good enough when they graduate?

For example, while a student in the then Soviet Union, we realized after sometime that Ghanaian students in the universities in the then Soviet Union had entered with GCE A-levels while our counterparts from Nigeria had entered with GCE O levels. The Ghanaian students decided to enquirer from the management of the university why this was so. The Dean for foreign students who met with us (the Ghanaian) in response to our question asked a very simple question. This was the question. "What is the entry requirement to the university in Ghana"?With confidence , we replied "A Level". Then he added "in the protocol agreement between USSR and Ghana , we agreed on A level .You are right but in the chase of Nigeria we agreed on O level". We kept quiet and with some disappointment we moved out of his office. Interestingly , we all graduated and are serving our various countries at the moment.

When I was Chairman of the chairmen of polytechnic Councils in Ghana, there were times that reports indicated that some polytechnic could not get students to the extent that the requirements had to be adjusted to make the polytechnics viable. Why should we come up with requirements that we are forced to change to keep public institutions viable? Obviously, there is an urgent need for a re-consideration of the entry requirements to our tertiary institutions in Ghana, which restricts access.

The second key issue that restricts access to tertiary education in Ghana, is inadequate infrastructure and resources, which limits space. As a result the public institutions are not able to take more qualified students. Many of the public universities turn away students not because they are not qualified but because of the lack of space and resources. We definitely need to prioritize tertiary education to provide more resources to enhance access.

Mr Chairman, we cannot build more and more brick and mortar Universities to expand access. So Open and Distance education is one sustainable option. The Education Sector Report (ESPR 2015) emphasizes the use of the Open University System to address access in

the tertiary education sector. This should be pursued vigorously as it is one of the ways to enhance both access and quality if done well.

In this respect, a national draft policy on the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) should be developed, properly communicated at the national level and implemented. This will require the support of a National Qualifications Framework for mapping and recognition of Prior Learning as described in the Education Sector Performance Report (ESPR) pg. 40.

Which says that “Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a process to help people get formal recognition for what they learnt through their experiences and for what they can do, know and understand. The RPL process enables a person to gain qualifications and credits. RPL is an assessment process that takes place against nationally registered Unit standards and qualifications outcomes. The contexts within which RPL are practiced are as varied as the learners seeking credits for learning achieved. RPL can be used across the formal and informal sector as well as from pre-tertiary, workplace-based education to tertiary levels. It is an important strategy to address access to technical and vocational education and training for those previously excluded” (ESPR 2015, PG.40). It worthy of note that the ESPR 2015, indicate that this development has resulted in the development of a Manual on RPL. I wish to recommend that follow-ups should be done to ensure that this is rolled out. I will like

to call on the BPI to become watchdogs for accountability on tertiary education initiatives and policies in Ghana as many of the worthwhile policies on tertiary education do not get to see the light of day because there is no serious accountability in these areas.

Mr. Chairman , the dynamics of tertiary education has changed globally and Ghana needs to flow with the tide.

Another issue of access is the Lack of a National Qualifications Framework already mentioned. This makes it difficult to use other routes, like the TVET system for progression. Making TVET unattractive. Though TVET system under COTVET has developed a qualifications framework, it is not sufficient to allow for the needed progression. There is need for a comprehensive national qualifications framework and this has been on the drawing board for unduly too long. I wish to call on the NCTE and the Ministry to expedite action on this very important tool for quality and equitable education.

Though the introduction of Technical Universities can partly address progression of the TVET system it not sufficient because without the requisite policy recognizing the TVET as a normal route for progression to higher levels, there may still be gate keeping as usual. I wish to make a call for a national comprehensive qualification framework for

recognition of qualifications and establishment of equivalences of other qualifications to allow for progression.

Mr. Chairman, another issue that restricts access to the poor is ability to pay. Though contribution of students have proven to enhance both access and quality, like the case of UPSA. I must say that it is sad, really heart breaking to see some students struggle to pay fees. I therefore recommend a national mechanism to support the needy to access tertiary education in the form of scholarships and grants. In this respect, there is the need to look again at GETFUND's role in this process. We would have look at the operations of GETFUND vis-a-vis the law establishing it. Such an assessment is most timely and recommended.

Now to the Issue of Quality

What does quality education mean in Ghana? Do we know it? If we do, do we have quality in Ghana's tertiary education? If we have, is it working for us?

Quality I have maintained is what you want and what works for you. If you want it and it does not work for you it is not quality. So the question is what does Ghana want from its tertiary education and what works for it?

Do we want:

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- Employable graduates or graduate with employability skills
- Graduates with critical thinking skills that may not necessarily have an immediate use or
- Graduates with initiative and the drive to create and deliver value for national prosperity or
- Research that gather dust on the shelves, those only targeted at promotion or
- Research that results in innovation and advancement and can solve immediate problems

Again,

Is quality = Standards? or

Is Quality = Accreditation? or

Is Quality = Number of years a school is under tutelage?

Who judges quality of graduates?

Is Quality = Number of years students stay in school

Is it industry that judges the quality of graduates, the university or the regulatory bodies or the students themselves?

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

"A good quality education has been described as one that provides all learners with capabilities they require to become economically

productive, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual well-being².

According to UNICEF, quality education is defined by five elements:

- The learner's outside experiences,
- Learning environment,
- Content of education,
- Learning processes, and the
- Education outcomes. .

Currently the quality issues in the tertiary sector include but not limited to the following:

- ***Learning environment*** – Infrastructure and resource issues particularly human resource issues (Staff - Students Ratio), why the Staff –Students Ratio is low even with only 12% Gross Enrolment Ratio and funding of research.
- ***Content of education*** – Here, is the curricula we have generally, suited to our labour needs? Do we have Programmatic Benchmarks, if we, are the programmatic learning outcomes responsive to labour market needs? Obviously, there is urgent need for tuning of our various curricula to the needs of the labour market

² <http://www.voicesofyouth.org/en/connect/our-debates/about-the-quality-of-education>. Retrieved 04/02/2017

- ***Learning processes*** - Instructional Approaches, training and retooling of staff needed. This does not imply that we do not have quality in our learning processes but for continual improvement. Currently, there is over emphasis on research competence over teaching and learning competences as teaching and learning competence is not required for teaching in the tertiary institutions in Ghana. The Assumption is that once you can research well then you can teach.
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- ***The learner's outside experiences*** – internships for both staff and students, industry linkages and international exchanges and exposure
- ***Education outcomes*** – what are the outcomes expected, are they linked to national human resource needs? Are there any sound linkages between National Development Agenda and tertiary education outcomes? How do we improve upon this?

Generally, how can we make Tertiary Education Work for Us? Do we have the relevant labour market data that informs us about the relevant skills and competences that are required over the strategic planning horizon?

The ESPR 2015 stresses the following actions as interventions to enhance quality

- Industry linkages and incubators through operationalization of a well- functioning Work-place Experience Learning (WEL) Policy as stated in the EPSR 2015
- Review and revision of tertiary curriculum and instructional design and methodologies to make them more learning centered, learning oriented and needs based

Though these interventions will go a long way to improve quality of tertiary education in Ghana, we require a transformation of teaching strategies for quality to improve. This will require a complete paradigm shift that will require training and retooling of academic staff to make teaching at the tertiary level more practical and suited to the needs of society. It should also be problem and competency based. *Many academics will also need to learn how to facilitate learning not lecturing.*

A policy requirement that call for teaching and learning competencies will be required, to equip academics with skills in facilitating learning. At the moment the requirement for teaching in the university is a research master or PhD. The assumption is that once you can research well you

can teach. However at the secondary and primary levels teaching competences is recognized for differentiated salaries.

Last but not the least is Funding

Mr. Chairman, as we talk about quality and access, we should be guided by the fact that quality and access are not free. They cost money. So where should the money come from? The current situation is limited by:

- Inadequate funding from government to support effective tertiary education in Ghana
- Currently the main areas of funding covers personal emoluments though not 100% and to a lesser extent infrastructure
- Main operations of the public universities are really not funded
- So public universities are to find alternative sources of funding to fill the gap. This is where a lot of public universities have resorted to massification and cost sharing, which has its own quality and access implications.

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To address the funding gaps, government intervention will be greatly required. Here, more transparent policy directives on funding and cost cutting mechanisms is very timely.

Sharing of resources among the tertiary institutions is another strategy. Unfortunately in Ghana, the tertiary institutions see competition and not collaboration.

Private universities are unfortunately saddled with unnecessary fees charged by public universities, in the name of affiliation, making it very difficult for most of them to focus resources on essential quality issues. However, my candid opinion is that affiliation was a colonial concept at a time when there were no accreditation systems in place. With accreditation systems now firmly in place, one wonders the real value of affiliation. This is an area that should be critically revisited and I call on the NCTE to pay attention to the feed back from the private universities . Obviously, because of the income many public universities are making, contention is expected. Eventually the cost is passed on to the poor students in the private universities who have no subsidy from the state in the form of government support to the public universities.

Students are generally, over burdened with too much contribution towards their tertiary education and there is need for a strong national financial intervention to alleviate, this stressful burden.

One key strategy that many countries are using to cut cost and enhance their international presence and performance on global ranking is merging of smaller universities to make them bigger to raise their performance. Quality of university education is now equal to performance in rankings. For institutions to attract international students and become self sustaining and globally competitive they have to look good on global rankings.

The ESPR 2015 does not paint a progressive picture in this respect. The reports notes *“The new University ranking compiled by Thompson Reuters has ranked the University of Ghana, Legon as the 10th Tertiary Institution on the African Continent. The report looked specifically at University reputation, which reflects a University ability to recruit high-quality staff, and students, establish valuable international partnerships, and connect with greater funding prospects”*. One would have expected to see a more promising picture of how Ghanaian universities are featuring on the global rankings with plans for improvement in the report.

Many countries have developed national strategies for internationalization and ranking because irrespective of how we feel about these rankings, they are the new reality for universities across the world, and Ghana cannot be left out. Many countries are resorting to the merging of institutions to cut down on overhead cost and to improve their performance on global ranking and international visibility. Ghana can do the same. For example we should be thinking of merging institutions like Ghana Institute of Languages, Institute of Local Government, Ghana Institute of Journalism, NAFTI and University of Professional Studies into one big professional University, with satellite campuses all over. This will not only cut down on overhead cost but also enhance global ranking because of potential increase in research output.

The question is “Do we have a planned national strategy to enhance our inclusiveness? Tertiary education the world over has been commoditized under GATT/WTO and therefore requires well-planned marketing and strong promotional strategies.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, tertiary education should result in an “economically productive workforce, develop sustainable livelihoods, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual well-being”. But this cannot happen with an elitist tertiary education

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system, a system where only few can have access to tertiary education either because of entry restrictions, lack of space to accommodate all who qualify or ability to pay.

I will like to advocate for a critical look into how we can improve both access and quality of Ghana's tertiary education system. We should not look far. We should not think of a revolution but a radical evolution that can build on the existing systems to enhance both quality and access in a distinctly Ghanaian fashion. In this respect I believe the recommendation made in this presentation are worth considering.

We have to start the debate.

Thank You very much and God bless our homeland Ghana.

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