

College of Education
University of Ghana
70th Anniversary Colloquium
Celebrating Excellence:
Shaping the Future of Education in Ghana

Speech by Special Guest of Honor
Professor Kwesi Yankah
Minister of State for Tertiary Education
4th May, 2018

Prelude

It's a great privilege to be here this morning, to be part of an early celebration of University of Ghana's 's 70th year. Established in 1948 as a university college, this University now hits the 70th milestone and has already formally launched the celebration, an event I missed because I was out of the country.

On such an important anniversary, it has been significant for the University to have chosen a theme, that reminds the Community and the world at large about the high standards Ghana set for itself on the founding of this great institution, and measure achievements accordingly. 'Celebrating Excellence: Shaping the Future of Education in Ghana,' has been the theme declared by the University for

contemplation around the year. This should remind us all about the pace-setting responsibility assumed by any premier institution, or any first born for that matter, in setting targets as a role model, for the rest. If Legon excels as a candidate, so do the other universities excel, and so does Ghana. If on the other hand Legon fails, or falls, so do the rest; and so does Ghana.

Foundation Vision

Celebrating excellence is thus a theme that carries a heavy tag of responsibility. By saying we are celebrating excellence it is also to be assumed that we have kept faith with the agenda for excellence on which the University was founded.

But let me set the records straight with the parting words of the First Principal of the University College in 1957, when he finished his tour of duty. David Balme, after serving the University for nine years, made the following statement, that may have been the guiding principle, in shaping Legon's operating values. In June 1957, David Balme had said:

I know that full achievement (of a university) has not yet been reached, and it may still take a good many years, but I do believe it is now beyond doubt that we can make this a first rate university...If Ghana gets any second rate or bogus Institution, let

it not be the one at Legon. If it is, I shall come back and haunt you... (David Balme June 1957, parting words on his departure)

The mark of excellence was what the founding fathers sought as a guiding principle of Ghana's premier University, and that is what we should be celebrating 70 years on.

Extra Mural Agenda

Happily the College of Education has taken the lead in marking the anniversary, and is doing so with remarkable enthusiasm, through today's symposium. This in itself should signal the special significance the anniversary holds in the formal affairs of the College.

The University's profile and institutional set up have visibly changed over the past 70 years, with the addition of several more schools and departments, and the introduction of a collegiate system, leading to a constant reconfiguration of the University's structures and academic units. The truth however is that it is not every school or department in the University that can claim to be a living witness to the birth of the University College of the Gold Coast, as it was then called. One of the few that saw it all happen was the Department of Extra Mural Studies, that was later to be called the Institute of Adult Education. If the core part of that institution still exists, it is only natural that it should join the University in saying 'we are also 70 years old,' or 'we are even older than the University.'

The Gown in Town

In 1973, when the Institute of Adult education was celebrating its Silver Jubilee, it was for the first Ghanaian Vice Chancellor of Legon, Prof A A Kwabong to equate Legon with the Institute, and indeed salute it as one of the very few departments, whose birth indeed predated the University. In the words of Kwabong:

It is indeed appropriate that the Institute should precede the main university in the holding of these celebrations, since the Department of Extra Mural Studies was the first department of this university to get off the ground 25 years ago and have ever since occupied a special place in the hearts and minds of the people of Ghana and Africa. To many Ghanaians the Institute is indeed the University of Ghana.

Those were the words of Kwabong, and he said more:

...Our IAE has earned a special place among all who are interested in the cause of Higher Education. Not only has it been truly extra mural in bringing the University into the community outside the walls of the university, but equally importantly, it has brought the community into the university through its many activities and programs.

The words of Alexander Kwapong also bring home the ideals of any university that has abandoned the perception of the University as an ivory tower, quietly sequestered from the city, and in a leisurely manner creating knowledge for its own sake.

The main objective of the university in the classical sense was simply the 'discipline of the mind'. Intellectual development, as the cardinal function of the university, was perceived in itself as a contribution towards the advancement of society.

If the past concept of the ivory-towered intellectual has faded over time, it only means Universities have been pressured over the years, to make themselves relevant to the demands of society. In the words of Dr Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's premier while opening a seminar on adult education in 1954:

The purpose of education is to produce leaders of thought and action in the new national life of this country. This means they must take their full part in the country's affairs, whether in Government or voluntary bodies. While I subscribe fully to the vital principles of academic freedom, it is my view that a university must relate its activities to the needs of the society in which it exists. The ordinary people of this country look to the educated men for guidance and leadership; but the country does

not consist of an active majority. The educational system must bring knowledge within the reach of all.

The Institute's agenda indeed was in harmony with the CPP's own agenda to declare war on all obstacles hindering the progress of any community; and that meant an agenda to liquidate illiteracy in the shortest possible time, and along with it, ignorance, poverty, disease. The agenda paved the way for Nkrumah's Mass Literacy, Mass Education programme, that gave opportunities to adults, regardless of age, to learn to read and write. Literacy was considered a fundamental pillar to which Ghana's independence would be securely anchored. The ability to read and write, understand the course of events, and form judgment on government policy was an ideal any new nation state would cherish.

But the University also had its own role to play. It needed to undertake research and produce knowledge that would address issues and challenges across the nation, and ideally identify itself with the community through its programmes.

Mopping Up

The best embodiment of these ideals was the Institute whose agenda was to pick up people and talented individuals who may have slipped through the existing educational net, and missed the boat of formal education. It was ostensibly a mopping up agenda, a clarion call of 'no

talent should be left behind.' Indeed, it was a kind of 'all hands on deck' advocacy, that would at the same time help the university to build bridges, rather than erect walls around itself, which would have been a recipe for disaster. Thus between building walls and building bridges, the University chose bridges, enabling the gown to be taken to town rather than laundered and secured at the hill top.

That explains the avenues the Institute has chosen over the years to prosecute its agenda: the Workers College, annual New Year and Easter Schools, regional centers and the like.

Enter Nana Addo & Co

For me personally and several others, we have been tremendously enriched by these programmes over the past several years, either as participants or as officials performing administrative duties.

My own participation in the School goes as far back as the late 1980s, and more meaningfully in 1991, on the eve of Ghana's transition to Constitutional rule. On that occasion, I gave a talk on the 'Media and the Politics of Silence.' But that year, 27 years ago, I also chaired a very stimulating panel on constitutional governance, on which were speakers like Dr P. A. V. Ansah of blessed memory, the celebrated Director of the School of Communication Studies. But the panel also incidentally included one chubby, articulate young man in his 40s, who had been an incurable crusader against dictatorship in his youthful

days, and was still active in the struggle for constitutional democracy in Ghana. He was later to be a presidential candidate, and is now the proud President of the Republic, Nana Addo Dankwa Akuffo-Addo. It was at that forum, I met the now President of Ghana, for the first time.

Indeed, the New Year School, over the years, has had a knack for attracting eminent, and sometimes controversial personalities on the national scene, who were often carefully chosen to present critical issues at the bar of public opinion, as symbolized by the diverse groups and opinion leaders, the School attracted annually. These included, politicians, chiefs, queen mothers, District Assemblies, the Ghana National Association of Teachers, TUC, an increasing number of senior high school students, religious leaders, civil servant association, and ministries, departments and agencies of government, simply a wide range of opinion leaders representing virtually all facets of the Ghanaian experience.

Over a period of 70 years the New Year School has been a key instrument through which the University of Ghana has discharged its social responsibilities, and directly demonstrated its commitment to community life, extension work and development. Through the Institute of Continuous and Distance Learning, until recently called the Institute of Adult Education, the University has sought to diversify and indeed democratize access to intellectual and infrastructural resources it holds in trust for the people of Ghana.

Global and National Agenda

But perhaps, it is not by accident that the word Adult has been downplayed in the name of the Institute that organizes the New Year School. The re-orientation of the School, this time with greater emphasis on continuity in the learning process, is also timed to neutralize the concept of age in the learning process. Currently, certain parts of the developed world have eliminated date-of-birth from application forms for employment; and there have been numerous court cases where plaintiffs have sued corporate bodies for discrimination on grounds of age.

These developments are very pertinent for the contemporary Ghana national vision that aims at building an inclusive and well informed human resource base, that is endowed enough to drive Ghana's developmental agenda.

This squarely falls in line with the UN's Strategic Development Goal 4, which enjoins signatories to mount policies and programs that ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and also promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

It also conforms with the AU Agenda 2063, which advocates inclusive education, and seeks to mainstream the marginalized segments in the educational process, considering these as equally important targets and beneficiaries of the educational process.

This was again emphasized at the 1st African Higher Education Summit in Senegal in which I participated in 2015 on 'Revitalizing Higher Education for Africa's Future.' Here a call was made on stakeholders to aim at developing Higher Education systems that accommodate older learners and seek robust lifelong learning. The Conference also called for the diversification of the modes of delivery, including quality distance and online learning.

A major response to the strategic call for inclusive education has been the introduction by this Government of a Free SHS policy, which has extended Free education from Kindergarten through the secondary level, and has sought to bring the minimum threshold of education to the high school. This major intervention, the boldest since Ghana's independence, has made possible the enrollment of about 90,000 more students over the previous years.

Big Challenge, Low Budgets

But the call for inclusive education and lifelong learning policies has been very timely also because, it is coming at a time African countries have not adequately catered for non-formal education in budgetary allocations. In various parts of Africa over the years, educational expenditure has been increasing in all areas, except in non-formal education. In Ghana, this together with special education, has consistently attracted the least expenditure, often below 1% of total educational budget.

This has stifled the efforts of the Non Formal Education Department, and has led to rather low enrollment in the non-formal learning program, leading to the existing large geographical disparities in literacy rates across regions in Ghana.

Yet the job ahead is monumental. Ghana with a total population of nearly 29m, has a literacy rate of 76.6%. After basic education, however, only 54% of men and 43% of women have acquired literacy skills that have persisted through adulthood. There is hence a strong need for adult literacy programs even for those who have attended formal schooling. The main vehicle the MoE uses to improve literacy rates has been the national functional literacy program. The latest batch of the program enrolled over 17,000 learners which severely falls short of addressing the needs of the more than 1.2 million illiterate adults in Ghana who are mostly concentrated in the three northern regions of Ghana.

Doubtlessly, this is a challenge the Government has taken up in the current Education Strategic Plan.

But this should also provide opportunities for universities to strengthen institutions that are dedicated to non-formal education, to double their efforts towards formalizing the informal, thus enabling non-formal sectors of education to benefit from intervention programs aimed at improving access to quality education and training.

Stress and Opportunities

Such interventions are very important, for throughout the world there are celebrities, who have led successful materialistic lives, but still hurt, and feel stressed because they lack the capacity to read and write. Others, so late in the day, have sought remedies to overcome their plight.

There is the classic case in England of one John Corcoran, who graduated from College in 1961, and by 1979 had taught High School Students for 17 years. In the early 1980s, he developed over \$50m in real estate business. It was in 1987, John Corcoran learned how to read. His memoir, entitled 'The Teacher who Could not Read,' made him an overnight celebrity, and a great advocate for those who languished in illiteracy. His second book entitled, 'Bridge to Literacy: No Child or Adult Left Behind' is considered a powerful call to action to eliminate illiteracy in America.

But do I forget the legendary world boxing welterweight champion, Floyd Mayweather, recently retired after a 49-0 record, has done the unbelievable in retirement. He went back to school to work towards his High School Diploma. Rich as he is, he cannot read, and decided to fulfill his lifelong dream, and the wish of her dying mother. He said, "I got all these millions, but can't even read my check balance. If it wasn't for Forbes magazine, I wouldn't know what I got at the bank."

The stories of Corcoran and Mayweather are not different from those of great men in several nations, who made it in life without the skills of literacy, but could have done better and spared themselves decades of stress, anxiety and embarrassment if they had been lettered.

Indigenous Celebs

But you may also learn from stories of very successful men and women who could not read and write in our own environment. An example is the late famous Okyeame Baffuor Akoto, the celebrated Ashanti nationalist, who was also an Okyeame to the King of Ashanti and whom I extensively interviewed during my days as a doctoral student. He told me in spite of his fame and power, he never went to school. To the question why he never stepped in the classroom, he said his father told him that, 'If I go to School, I will die an early death.' And I need not refer to a number of politicians since the days of the CPP who achieved social and political power without the benefit of literacy.

Finally, a celebrated female politician in Senegal, who was stark illiterate, also explained her plight saying:

Our people did not like girls to enroll in school. School was a waste. It could corrupt one's soul with cunning and trickery. School was the place one could learn to win without being right. Girls were considered those who held to tradition, and would

preserve the culture. They were not to have any contact with the French school.

Protest

Other times, sages in traditional society have boldly lamented the absence of accreditation schemes that could translate in formal academic terms the rich traditional knowledge they possessed, without the gift of literacy. In an interview I did of him while pursuing my doctoral degree, another okyeame made bold to table a grievance. He lamented the denial of doctorate degrees to sages and knowledgeable people like him, who were not gifted with formal certification. He made the case for a PHD degree to be awarded to him, instead of so called scholars who were merely parasites expropriating knowledge from the unlettered. The traditional orator and linguist, implied that social science research in Universities is largely plagiarized material from non-literate informants, who are deprived of formal recognition mainly because they had used the oral medium in tabling their knowledge.

Beyond Literacy

Beyond literacy however, non-formal education has made heroes out of celebrities like Nelson Mandela who while imprisoned at Robin Islands, went to school. Indeed the use of prisons as virtual universities, is common, and is sometimes sustained by curricular developed by schools ostensibly for prison inmates.

Where life-long learning has been extended to prisoners, opportunities have thus been presented for the incarcerated, to condition themselves for integration with society when they come out of jail.

But let's not forget one of Ghana's illustrious president, Dr Hilla Limann who within a period of 12 years, managed to obtain two bachelor's degrees in economics, and history, and Ph.D in political science with constitutional law. While he obtained his degrees in economics and political science through formal schooling in London and Paris, the other degree he obtained in History, was by distance learning.

Limann's broad educational background quickly earned him a job at the research desk of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which took him to Togo, Switzerland, and his own country Ghana, eventually becoming President in the Third Republic.

Thus for those who for various reasons, personal and domestic, could not attain specific academic ambitions, non-formal education has always been available, to enrich their credentials. Other times, formal education has been accommodating enough, and fathers and mothers have sometimes caught up with their children in universities. In recent times a 53 year-old mother proudly decided to enroll in JHS, virtually joining children and grandchildren at school.

Non-Formal Interventions

But indeed, there is a general recognition that life's experience could be worth more than academic degrees, and that formal degrees and certification only constitute one channel for the recognition of achievement.

There have been other modes of recognition including the award of honorary degrees, where individuals may be recognized by a university for their distinguished contribution to education or society as a whole, regardless of their own formal educational status. While the University of Ghana has done this to various degrees, I cite the most recent honorary doctorate awards given by Legon to 12 distinguished individuals in March 2016.

Honorary Award

I refer specifically to the case of one awardee whose honor attracted the most attention, and virtually transformed the character of honorary doctoral degree awards in Legon, leading to a virtual celebration and a spontaneous explosion of joy at the Great Hall that day.

One Mrs Juliana Baidoo, of Adom Group of Companies earned an honorary doctorate degree for her distinguished contribution to industry. From humble beginnings in retailing fish in the market, she had over the years transformed petty trading in fishing to becoming a leading industrialist in the fishing industry and cold storage. She now

owned and operated a large fleet of fishing trawlers, and had employed hundreds of people across the country. She was also an educational philanthropist. Madam Baidoo achieved all this without any academic certification. She was a proud hardworking illiterate, who had been recognized and honored by Ghana's premier University, an institution she hardly thought would ever recognize the humble efforts of the unlettered.

This indeed was a major breakthrough for a University which in the 1980s had declined a suggestion that similar hard working poets and exponents of indigenous knowledge, be considered for doctoral honorary awards, even though unlettered. The University indeed has come of age, and we salute Legon's increasing efforts to build bridges with the community.

We indeed have to radically change our reactionary mindsets that completely separate education from real life, which may have led universities to develop academic policies and curricula which are often far removed from social reality.

Makola

Other aspects of intervention are not in the form of a search for real life equivalencies of academic certification, but humble initiatives in the adult education of the unlettered.

I cite the celebrated example of the Makola Institute established Mrs Oduro Nyarko whom I first met last November 2017 on a delegation of

Ghanaian Business women to China led by the First Lady, and on which I had been invited to explore educational partnership opportunities for the Ministries.

Mrs Nyarko established the Makola Institute to provide basic business management and technological skills in local language, to a large number of market women and (unlettered) small scale enterprise operators. The idea was to get the market women to formally imbibe the basic principles of contemporary business. The Institute offers free tuition in basic management and technological skills to traders and market operators, using Dagbani, Twi, Ga and Ewe as medium of instruction.

With a first degree from a Ghanaian university, the Founder herself was originally a trader at the Makola market in Accra. The Institute has offices in Makola and Kaneshie markets in Accra.

Winding Down

Winding Down, let me leave you a little food for thought. First of all, I congratulate the University of Ghana on its 70th anniversary, and salute the College of Education for playing a critical role in the process of democratizing learning in tertiary education.

Legon is indeed a quintessential example of all-inclusiveness in the learning process as follows:

- Achieving close to parity in gender enrollment
- Enrollment of students with disability

- Enrollment of students from Less Endowed Schools
- Enrollment of mature students
- Establishment of open and distance learning programs
- The City campus idea
- Extension of education to older adults and others through regional centers
- New Year Schools etc.

But I also salute Legon for your foresight in strategizing to cope with an anticipated avalanche of student inflows as from 2020, the likely outcome of the groundbreaking free SHS policy. Your plan, as announced in the recent Congregation, to possibly convert some of the regional learning centers into UG campuses is simply creative, and worthy of emulation.

Caution

But let me end on a note of caution, commenting on two important channels of student enrollment across universities, which partly responds to the agenda for inclusiveness in education, but whose affairs should be cautiously handled to avoid the subversion of quality in tertiary education.

Distance

All over the years, Distance Learning has been successfully adopted all over the world, to increase access, and make learning flexible for candidates far and near, defying distance, defying time zones and

defying social and economic circumstances. It has produced some of the greatest men in history, but it has also been noted to be liable to exploitation and gross abuse in this part of the world.

The time is long overdue to indeed rebrand distance learning in Ghana. I hereby urge universities to take steps to arrest the perception of low standard output from Distance Education programs, and urge the National Accreditation Board to tighten their vigilance to ensure the maintenance of quality and standards in distance learning.

Let loopholes be plugged to improve its image; for Distance Learning may be one important channel that could help the country to cope with the overwhelming influx of SHS graduates likely to knock on the doors of Universities, as from 2020.

Mature Students

Finally, the admission of mature students. Traditionally, this has been a great avenue to admit to universities, people above the average age for university admissions, who for one reason or the other missed the boat, and are willing and able to catch up in university education. The minimum age of 30 several years ago, was reduced to 25 across board, and 27 specifically in Legon; this was on the introduction of the JHS/SHS policy that reduced the average age for entry to university as well as for completion. In this mode of admission, respective universities are allowed to administer various entry exams.

Indeed the spirit of inclusiveness, would normally welcome and cherish such sources of diversification in the profile of university enrollments. But let me also lament how the category 'mature students,' has been abused over the years, and has now become a channel available to any student, mature or otherwise who has not passed his WASSCE exams. The cut-corner strategy has been for some failed candidates to simply wait for a few years, in order to fulfill the age requirement of 25 or 27, and simply walk into a University after a supposed entry exam, where in some cases, nobody ever fails. Indeed, applicants are today using the mature student route, even when they are immature, and in the absence credible identification and age check regimes, young boys and girls may simply increase or mark up their ages, and wear the artificial mask of maturity, while school authorities look elsewhere.

If mature student exams for entry to Universities, should be taken more seriously, they should perhaps be standardized across board, and administered by one credible examining body just like WASSCE, rather than administered by respective universities using different standards. It is long overdue for the mature student access exam to be rebranded.

Yes, we may be in a hurry as a nation, to revitalize our human resource base in order to effectively drive national development. But we cannot afford schemes that lead to the registration of great strides in enrolment ratios but, at the same time make a negative impact on the quality of national productivity.

This is a message that goes to all universities and tertiary institutions, but it should be embraced enthusiastically by pioneering institutions celebrating milestones such as Legon, where a deterioration may have a cascading effect on the rest.

Mr Vice Chancellor, Provost of the College, Deans, colleagues, invited guests, while I salute you for this symposium initiative, please be constantly guided by the parting words of the Legon's first Principal, David Balme, 60 years ago:

I do believe, and it is now beyond doubt, that we can make this a first rate university...If Ghana gets any second rate or bogus Institution, let it not be the one at Legon.

60 years on, let this caution keep echoing in the corridors of the College and the University, encouraging us to keep the banner flying.

On this note, let me congratulate the University and the College of Education once again, and declare this symposium formally inaugurated.

Thank you, and congratulations!

Prof Kwesi Yankah
4th May 2018