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# Socio-Economic Backgrounds and Beliefs of University Student in Ghana

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**Socio-Economic Backgrounds and Beliefs of  
University Student in Ghana**

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School for International Training  
Fall 1997 Semester

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## Acknowledgement

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I also take this opportunity to thank all student of the University of Ghana who gave me useful advice during my field work study which helped me put together all the data collected.

I want to thank those student also who helped me gain entry into the halls at the university. Without their help I would have not been able to find so many of my interviewers. These student facilitated my field work in great ways, since I had time constraints issues.

And finally, I would like to thank and show great appreciation to Mr. Sarpong-Nsia for his assistance and allowing me to use his equipment for my typing and printing of this final work.

## Abstract

The following paper discusses findings concerning the background of student from the University of Ghana, Legon. This paper presents the student's economic, religious, educational, and family's background.

In addition, the paper reports some of the students' beliefs on the sociology of the formal education they have received in Ghana. Some of the discussions are about the creation of a blended culture made up of Ghanaian styles as well as Western styles due to formal education.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction:

During the end of November, I conducted fieldwork in Accra at the University of Ghana, Legon. I was interested to either prove or disprove my belief that the majority of student at the University of Ghana, Legon came from high socio-economic background and had in many ways assimilated the Western/ European style and ways of life therefore my independent study projects was on the influence of families on education as well as the influence of education on the student themselves. I wanted to know how much was formal education to blame for the students assimilating Western style of life.

The education I studied was formal education at the university level. Once again, particularly conducted my research at the University of Ghana, Legon. And since factors of social change are not evenly distributed throughout Ghana, I restrict myself from making generalizations for the entire country based on these findings.

At the beginning of my research I believed that the level of education one's parents had attained and their economic background was a big factor in determining whether one would go and continue one's formal education as far as university level or drop out at an earlier level. At the end of research I found that this was not the case, but rather many other factors came into play influencing the education level Ghanaians students attain, besides the economic and educational background of the parents.

I interviewed thirty students (10 females/ 20 males) from the University of Ghana. My purpose was to find out their family background and how education had changed their attitude towards Ghanaian culture. And as I already mentioned, amazingly enough, my results were not in favor of my initial belief. Many factors came into play which determined the level of education a child in Ghana attains.

However, I still believe that to some extent the parents were an influence to the level of formal education attained by the student in this particular research projects.

## Chapter 2

### Methodology of research

The time limit of the independent study project (ISP) put a constraints on the range of topics analyzed and the depth of the study.<sup>1</sup> I divided the topics of the study into gender, age, village of origin, who sponsored the students, the work the parents do or whoever was sponsoring the child and religion. And regardless of the time constraint and the small number of students interviewed, I was able to draw some conclusions.

I also conducted interviews on the beliefs of the students towards formal education itself. I asked the students whether they believed their level of formal education influenced the way they thought about their own culture. I also asked them whether formal education itself was thought to create a gap between the students and the Ghanaian culture. At the end I allowed an open- ended question for the students to make more comments on their beliefs. I intended for the students to give me as much as their views on the sociology of their education, especially how they thought their formal education had changed their attitudes towards their own culture and foreign cultures.

#### *STEP 1:*

I began the project by first reviewing some literature already done on the subject. This way I found the focus of my project and also the questions that I should be asking the interviewees.

#### *STEP 2:*

I decided on the ratio of women to men that I wanted to interview and around what age. I made decisions on who my interviewees would be in order to make my small sample as representative of the university curriculum as possible. All the institutes, departments and hall of the university were listed. Using simple random technique, six of them were selected. These were institute of African studies, drama studio, Nursing department, political science department, Akafo Hall. In each place five students by means of simple random sampling from the student's list.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hoddinott, page 73

<sup>2</sup> The lists were provided by Dr. Ohene – Kunadu, professor at the sociology Department of the university of Ghana, Logon. He also helped in choosing the random sample of interviewees.

However, a selected student refused to be interviewed, one was picked from that stratum to replace the original one. In addition, I met some students by walking around, waiting at the phone booths, eating at the cafeteria, or, reading at the libraries who showed interest in my study and asked to be interviewed.

### *STEP3:*

Entering the field was the step I found the hardest, since entering the fieldwork and becoming accepted is not an easy step in fieldwork studies. Fieldwork is not easy to begin with, having to conduct fieldwork in a foreign country I believe is even more challenging.

This is due to having to prove oneself to be trustworthy and be viewed as part of the community. But again, the time limitations for the ISP period placed constraints in all these areas and steps. I had to gain entry, collect data, go back, finalized the study and type the results<sup>3</sup> All these steps had to be well planned in order not to waste any time.

Another challenge was getting interviewees at times that were good to them. I heard from a student that the best time to interview the students was at night. However, I was not staying on campus, therefore, by 5:00 pm I would be on my way home. The nights were the times when the students would be relaxing in their rooms or walking around and not having anything in particular to do. However, the halls were restricted to visitors. Anyone could not walk up to the halls and ask the porter for permission to enter the hall for research. I needed to have someone who I was going to visit; I could not be walking around on my own. Also, there was a time limit for visitors in terms of the duration of the visit and in terms of the hours they were allowed into the halls. Therefore I immediately needed to get acquainted to some of the students, learn their names and their room numbers in order to be able to enter the halls.

### *Handling my failures and the back- up plans:*

My option was to find the students who I had friendships established with already. There were students I had met earlier at the library, lunchroom, or while I had waited in the past to use the phone. I planned to use these students as asserts in entering the field. I thought that having Ghanaian friends with me will make it easier to be trusted by the other students who I would ask to let me interview them. I went to each of my friends hall rooms, only to meet their absence. Unfortunately, I found that all three of them were out in lectures. My second plan was to target people who were alone and did not seem to be doing school work. However, not having a trusted person by my side was not going to make my entry too easy. I decided to go to

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<sup>3</sup> Kent, page 3



the phone booths where people had to waste time waiting for the phone to become available. However, I did not find it easy to approach students in this setting either.

My third plan was the libraries, though I had foreseen this to be a problem, since most students go there to do work, and I thought I will be taking their time and space. I indeed tried, and it was once again another failure. I approached two students who were talking and told them of my research and they expressed the desire to be left alone. I asked the students on the next tables.

Another failure were two appointments made with students. I arranged the two appointments to meet with two students and I was left waiting for a minimum of half hour on each before I decided to go.

#### *Handling success and positive aspects of the field work experience:*

Outside the library of the African studies department on Monday, November 24, I was approached by a student who asked me what courses was I taking. I introduced myself to the student and told him I was with the department of sociology. We chat for a while and then I told him about my school project. He asked to answer my questions and once finished with the interview, he helped me find the other students for me to interview them. This positive part of my fieldwork gave me energy to continue through the day looking for interviewees. I had now experienced for myself what many anthropologists mean when they say that efforts can be doomed from the start without someone to serve as intermediary, someone trusted by the people who one is studying and in this case I am referring to the students.<sup>4</sup>

The next day, Tuesday, November 25 around 1:00 pm, as I was walking to one of the cafeterias on campus to have lunch, I was stopped by a lady around her late thirties. Mrs. X asked my name and told me that in the Ghanaian culture, people love to have many friends and that she wanted me to be one of her many friends. I could not help but laugh. I sat down and talk to her for about fifteen minutes, and during my introduction I told her that the reason why I was at the university in Legon was for research. I asked if she could help me find the students who had been randomly picked. She was very happy and honored to do so.

Another positive experience was outside the post office the last day of my interviews on November 28. I had been standing there for about half hour waiting for an interviewee who had agreed to meet me there. Just as I was planning on calling it a day, the person thought that since I was a foreigner myself, I could help him locate his friend. I was of no help to him, but he ended up being of great help to my research. He accepted to be interviewed by myself, and

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<sup>4</sup> Kent, page 20

also waked me to his hall and helped me find the last person on my list. This marked the end of my interview process at the university of Ghana.

#### *STEP 4*

Not all the experiences in fieldwork are positive. As I begun saying, a hard part of doing field work in a foreign country is making yourself by the people and seem trustworthy of their information. The field worker comes uninvited, and it can be perceived as an intruder.<sup>5</sup> Therefore some interviewees may hide facts, perhaps out of embarrassment or loyalty to their relatives and friends, or because they believed the researcher does not want to be bothered with details.<sup>6</sup> Also, the field worker comes to do research in which in return may not give anything back to the community he/she is studying. Therefore, many of the interviewees may had rejected on the notion that I was not giving them anything in return for their answers and their time. In fact, I saw myself forced to invite some of my interviewees for some minerals. When I asked two students if I could interview them, they replied that they were about to leave, but that if I invited them for some drinks then may be they could not and would not refuse my offer. Back to my entering the field while making myself seen as a trusted and worthy person for the answers, I continued my search for interviewees. I decided to make myself trusted by letting people know about my own background, especially ethnic background in order to create a link, and also by debriefing some of my objectives for the interviews.

The first day of interviews I got three reluctant responses in a row and it made me very sad and anxious. I began worrying about time constraints and finding all the information I needed from as many students as possible. I went to see a professor at the African Studies Department who I had chat with in the past. This professor gave me few ideas on how to enter the field more smoothly than I had been doing. Mr. W also gave me few tips on ways to approach Ghanaian students, especially female and middle age ones.

I learned from this conversations that since I may be viewed as an American because of my skin color, I may had encountered students who were prejudiced and suspicious about me. I also learned that Americans were many times viewed as rude and as impatient intruders in this land. I therefore changed my ways of approaching people. Instead of introducing myself as a researcher, I began making friends by just speaking to them first. Then if the right time came, I would let students know about my research. Not everyone I spoke with learned about my research since I did not see the opportunity to share this with them.

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<sup>5</sup> Kent, page 23

<sup>6</sup> Devereux and Hoddinott, page 26

#### STEP 5:

As I mentioned on Step 4, I had to debrief my project in order to become more accepted by my interviewees. I concluded my interviews with this step and an open-ended question which most of the times gave my interviewees the opportunity to add information to my research, since by this point I had become a trusted person to the them.

## Chapter 3

### Literature Review

1. *Family Influences on Education:*

The focus of this part is the way the economic and educational background of the family of the students had influenced their availability and affordability to attain university level of formal education. As G.K. Nukunya pointed out in his book Tradition and Change.

“secondary school education has become particularly expensive while the Government’s gradual disengagement from funding University education beyond tuition has started to bite. Added to this is the increasing inability of University graduates to get employment and remuneration and fringe benefits comparable to those of the qualification two or three decades back. In 1961, it was possible for a university student to buy a car one week after the release of the final degree results, that was a week after he had become a graduate. Today a graduate will be lucky to get a car ten years after graduation”<sup>1</sup>

This quote pointed out that getting a University Diploma is not as easy as it used to be. First the money is a problem, and secondly, once one has a diploma, it may be questionable what is it good for. The quote said that time ago it was possible to buy a car a week after graduation, but now it is almost impossible even after ten years. It can be questionable whether it is even worth it to get a diploma from a university, or simply get an average job. Getting an average job may mean continuing the cycle of not entering the elite class.

While the number of people who fall into the categories labeled under the elite group increases, the wealth, power and prestige associated with them in the past will be limited to fewer proportions. Again as access to higher education becomes restricted, recruitment into the elite category will gradually become difficult for children of those who are not yet of elite status. Conversely, since elite groups are in the habit of perpetuating their high status within their families, the recruitment process is likely to become less open.<sup>2</sup> This goes back to the previous quote. If the students are questioning the fact that their diploma from the university may not be of any use to them in the future, this student may simply drop out, by dropping out

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<sup>1</sup> Nukunya, page 197

<sup>2</sup> Nukunya, page 198

it makes it even harder to find a decent well paying job, and in the long run, this family will not be able to enter the elite class.

Another reason for the belief that only the elite group enters university level of formal education is because the elite knows how to limit their number of offspring in order to well care for them, in terms of providing the necessary tools to make sure their child enters a good well known university. “The elite also know what is required to make a child successful at school, the need to provide all the requirements and even go beyond these to get additional assistance in the form of extra books, equipment and private tuition”<sup>3</sup> Also, the elite knows that sending a child to a private SSS school well-known and accepted by universities will make it easier for the admittance of the child into the institution of higher learning.

In a study twenty years ago, de Graft Johnson suggested that ‘ the factors that will eventually determine the form of the social structure will be partly economic, educational and partly ideological’<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, education will become available to those who are in the high part of the social structure enjoying high economic status, high educational background, and the high ideological views and goals. In other words, this simply reinforces the belief that there is an elite class and that it has become harder and harder to enter this class. Also, the level of education will be higher among this class and the cycle simply continues.

## 2. *Education Influences on Student:*

The focus of this part was to find out whether formal education (in this case university level) separates the Ghanaian students from their culture and traditional ways of life. Tradition is described by G.K. Nukunya as “the beliefs and practices which express the values and purposes of society and help it organize its basic and essential resources. In terms of culture, tradition is an outlook or orientation that can show a long history and a lasting influence...Its essential ingredients are social institutions as well as values, ideas, ethos and certain material culture traits”<sup>5</sup> Nukunya also stated that once a generation finds a tradition unsuited to its needs, or when the tradition faces more efficient competing ones, there is the need to abandon the old one in favor of the new.

In this part of the project, the focus was on whether the students’ religious beliefs and their dressing codes differed from the Ghanaian traditional religious beliefs and dress codes. According to G.K. Nukunya, religious beliefs in Ghana included a supreme High God, small

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<sup>3</sup> Nukunya, page 198

<sup>4</sup> Nukunya, page 200

<sup>5</sup> Nukunya, page 3

gods, ancestors, witchcraft, oracles, magic and sorcery.<sup>6</sup> The ancestral rites would serve as means of social control, because of the belief in the ability of the dead to punish wrong doing and reward good behaviour. From the literature, it is believed that Ghanaians are adapting to new ways of serving their Gods. Now going to church is the norm. The predominant religious affiliations of Accra is Christianity. This in turn changes the old ways of sanctions. According to Nukunya, people now believe in a supreme God, Jesus Christ, who is the only that can judge and punish.

Also, a traditional part of the Ghanaian culture which seems to have changed is the dressing codes. Before, the men would wear the traditional cloth or a smock, apparently, the younger Ghanaian generation has began to find the traditional clothing unsuited and the European ways of life more suited and modern to them. It seems as though this change came once students entered higher and higher levels of formal education (i.e. universities).

From the literature reviewed on Nukunya books, one of Christine Oppong's works concluded that the levels of education is the key factor leading to the alienation of traditional practices. "This is because good education, especially in the past, went with high socio-economic status and, therefore, those who attained them would transmit this status to their offspring. Thus, the descendants of these early (scholars) are expected to be self-sufficient to a very large extent"<sup>7</sup> Oppong's works have also confirmed that the intensity and length of exposure to the factors of change are the main causes of the alienation from traditional values. Therefore, it will be acceptable to say that the longer and the intensifier a Ghanaian student spends in formal education, the more alienated this individual will become from the traditional values of his/her culture.

K. G. Kyei mentioned on his book Ghana – The road tomorrow, when families practice their culture and rituals, they may portray themselves as uncivilized.<sup>8</sup> The literature reviewed suggested that the formal education made the students looked down upon their culture. Many students after attending universities would believe that the traditional ways are rudimentary and uncivilized. Also, it may be viewed as unsuited for themselves, since now they are educated, they should act civilized and modern. This means, acting European. As Nukunya said "emphasis and foreign content of education combination to seriously alienate Ghanaian from his traditional environment and culture"<sup>9</sup> In addition, "traditional culture was not only absent from the school curriculum, but concerted attempts were made to prevent the pupils from following it"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Nukunya, page 53

<sup>7</sup> Nukunya, page 16

<sup>8</sup> Kyei, page 8

<sup>9</sup> Nukunya, page 140

<sup>10</sup> Nukunya, page 141

Many books I reviewed criticized these European ways. Wearing trousers was not accepted eight years ago. Kyei suggested that many people had given up trying to make the teenagers keep their traditional values. Another moral value which was criticized by Kyei is passing without greeting.

Also, many students who enter SSS level or even before find it to be in insult when called by their day names. “Call her simply Esi, or Mansa, and you pull out the greatest insult against her. For she prefers to be called: Ernestina, Angelina, Christiana, Priscilla, Dora, Rosina, Agatha, Mary Chickwood”<sup>11</sup> Being called by the day name used to be a tradition that should not be forgotten according to Kyei.

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<sup>11</sup> Kyei, page 9

## Chapter 4

### Data gathered from interviews:

Interviewing the students at the University of Ghana, I found different ways how students were being sponsored and different regions where students came from. I also found out a great variety of schooling background and economic background among the students' families. And the second part of the research was the way all this education affected the individual. I felt the students thought of themselves as other when speaking about what formal education can do to a Ghanaian students in terms of alienating them from their traditional ways, traditional beliefs and their culture as a whole. I acknowledge that this simple my opinion and my judgment. I understand that the field workers is also a person and would sometimes be subjective. But when giving the answers to my questions in this next section, I will remain as objective as possible.

#### *Villages of Origin*

Out of thirty students interviewed, twelve students came from Volta Region. The towns from Volta regions were Peki and Anyako. The remaining eighteen students came from Eastern, Central as well as Ashanti Regions. Some of the towns were Aburi, Salt Pond, Somanya, Yamoransa and Abuakwa.

#### *Sponsors of students:*

- I. *Males:* Out of 20 males interviewed, six were sponsored by their father only, four were sponsored by both parents, four were sponsored by their employer, three had loans (SSNIT loan) in addition to some financial help from their parents, while one had the SSNIT loan and an older brother helping him financially. Another student was sponsored by an uncle. The remaining one was sponsored by himself while also having some financial assistance from his job.
  
- II. *Females:* Out of the ten females interviewed, two were sponsored by their father, while one was sponsored by her mother. Two of the female students were sponsored by their employers while they were on study leave and another three were financially able to attend university through loans such as SSNIT. One of the students was sponsored by her older sister and the last one was sponsored by her aunt.



### *Type of Job Parents Held:*

- I. *Fathers of Male Students:* The majority of fathers were either civil engineers or accountants. Six of the parents were civil engineer, five were accountants, two were car mechanics, two were deceased and used to be farmers. There were also a student whose father did furniture work and two who had their own shop, while the remaining two fathers were teachers.
- II. *Mothers of Male Students:* The majority of the mothers were self-employed. Three of the mothers had shops of their own. Another three were seamstress, while four of them were traders. Another two were deceased and used to be farmers, while three were secretaries in government agencies, one was a teacher, and the other two are at home and do not work.
- III. *Fathers of the Female student:* For the fathers, two were deceased (a farmer and a mechanic), three were civil engineers, one was an accountant, one was a mechanical engineer, two were teachers, and the last one was a taxi driver ad also a mechanic.
- III. *Mothers of the Female Students:* For the mothers, the majority were self employed also. Six of them were either seamstress, traders, or had their own shops. Then two were deceased and were farmers, while the other two were teachers.

### *School Background:*

I included in my interviews questions about previous schooling years of the students who I had interviewed. I was interested in finding out whether students came from top private schools and whether this fact was a determining factor in their acceptance to the university or whether they had attended their hometown schools. Out of the thirty students, twenty-five of my interviewees attended the old system of schooling. The other students who has attended the new SSS system were one female and four males. The female attended Holy Child. Three of the males attended Mfantsipim and the other male student attended Adisadel College. The remaining students attended their regional schools.

### *Family Size:*

- I. *Females:* The data collected showed that the majority of females who attended the University of Ghana came from small families. One female student came from a family of six (2 boys and 4 girls), and two others came from a family of five (3 boys/2 girls and I boy /4 girls). These families may be viewed as a big family now a days.

However, the remaining seven females came from rather smaller families. One female student came from a family of four (3 boys and 1 girl), another one from a family of three (1 boy and 2 girls), and the remaining three came from families of two (1 boy and 1 girl).

It is also interesting to point out that the three female students who came from a larger family are all three last born and are being sponsored by either loans, themselves, their jobs, their older siblings, or a combination of these. However, the other female students are four of them the last born and are also being sponsored by combinations of the above, while the other three who are not last born are sponsored by their parents. I believe it is also important to point out that eight of these females were sponsored by their parents in their earlier schooling years. This is to prevail the belief that economic background plays a role in a child's education to some extent. This will be discussed with more details in later chapters.

- II. *Males:* The data collected on the males in relation to composition of family was not only different in terms of size, but on the person who is sponsoring the students to the university. One of the male students came from a family of seven, three boys and three girls. This male was second to last-born and it being sponsored by his mother. Two students came from family of six, three boys and three girls. Not surprising, neither of these two were last-born boys and in fact are being sponsored by their parents. Then there were four of these male students who came from families of five (3 boys and 2 girls or vice-versa) and only one of these was a last-born. However, these young men were sponsored by their jobs, older siblings, loans, themselves, or a combination of these, with the exception of one who was sponsored to the university by his father. However, all these men were sponsored by their parents in their earlier education years.

The remaining of the break down of families was six students who came from families of four, four came from families of three, and three came from families of two. From these smaller nucleus families, only two were lastborn children. Most were sponsored by their parents or related family members such as uncle or older siblings.

#### *Effect of schooling on the individual:*

In my interviews I had few questions concerning traditional beliefs versus foreign beliefs (Western). I asked my interviewees their religious beliefs, what type of church they were affiliated with, and whether they still remained knowledgeable about their traditional beliefs concerning the power of ancestor's spirits on them. I also asked questions concerning the physical appearance in terms of hairstyles. Clothing and accessories worn. I was interested

in finding out how Europeanized students at the university level were and whether they believed formal education had any influence at all on these changes.

Starting with the findings from the interviews on women, all of them enjoyed European hairstyles as well as clothing and accessories. However, the majority also informed me that they wore the traditional styles many times, especially for church and family outings. Most of the women I interviewed were wearing attires that showed the blending of both cultures. I asked the students whether it was a coincidence or whether this was their daily clothing type. They answered that it was just practical for school and that it made them fit in with the crowd. This clothing was believed to be in fashion at this point in time, and it was not according to the students interviewed, a factor of their education. Though some believed that their levels of schooling had affected them to some extent in choosing their daily wear.

The reason most of the females gave me for choosing the Western clothing style as opposed to the traditional ways was because it was prettier, in fashion, and it gave the knowledge to the rest of the people in the society that they were educated scholars. The majority of females believed that Western clothes in Ghana was associated with high levels of formal education. Uneducated village people were the ones who were strictly traditional clothes was the opinion of some of the interviewees. Some of the students however believed that it was a good thing to wear traditional clothing sometimes, especially on Sundays to remember the old ways and to associate yourself with the older generation.

I asked the students whether they believed that their Western styles came from formal schooling and about half answered yes and the other half answered no. The half that answered yes admitted that they began wearing western clothes when they were about to enter the university. They believed that to be “IN”, and accepted by peers, the Western clothes was the fashion now and it must be worn. The other half that answered no informed me that their parent always dressed them in European clothing since infancy and it was mainly a modernization factor rather than an educational one. These five believed that anyone now a days wears Western clothes or at least have combined the western clothing styles with that of Ghana traditional styles.

One of the female students believed that the fact that she is so westernized is caused by the formal education she has received. This student said that the formal schooling is a western institution in the first place and therefore it brings with it the western influence on students. “It is extremely hard, almost impossible not to at least assimilate some of the western institution, therefore its focused is western itself”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anonymous student from Performing Arts at University of Ghana, Legon.

When I asked the students whether they believed formal education created a gap between the students and Ghanaian culture, three students believed that yes to some extent, while the other seven believed it was an individual choice to become westernized or remain traditional in your way of dressing and your religious beliefs.

All the females were Christian. However, though there is a strong belief in God and his protection, seven of the students also believed in the ancestor's protection and punishment. They also attended their villages festivities.

For the male students responses, out of the twenty male students that I interviewed, they all wore traditional clothes at one point or another with the exception of two. The eighteen that admitted to wearing traditional cloth said that there were times however when the traditional clothing style was simply not suitable. The reason I received for the males wearing western clothing was that it was so convenient. The males believed that coming to school with the traditional cloth on will first make them look foreigners to the university and also to city life, and out of place. One of the student's comment was the following: "the cloth is not to be worn at the university, not even professors wear the cloth when they are in school"<sup>2</sup>

The majority of the male students commented that western clothing was not so much an influence of western culture, but in other terms just the modernization of the Ghanaian culture. Five students commented that the wearing of trousers did not come so much from the influence of western world but a simple factor of modernization. The students believed that the wearing of cloth has just become a burden in the every day activities and therefore Ghanaians had adopted other more modern clothing styles.

When asked about their religious beliefs, one student answered that he was Muslim and had not beliefs in the ancestors protection at all or their passing judgment and punishments. The remaining nineteen students said they were all Christians, though most did not actually attend church. Only three students attended church regularly while another two visited occasionally. The remaining called themselves Christians because they believed in God, but actually admitted they did not follow the Bible's command. They also called themselves Christians because that was what their family was or that was the religion the family knew and may be affiliated with. Out of the twenty, six students believed that there in the protection and watchful eye of the ancestors. They believed that the ancestors were always there watching their behaviours and that someday they will be able to be with them.

When asked if the formal education of Ghana had anything to do with the introduction of western ways to the students, thirteen replied "No", while the remaining seven replied "Yes". The seven that replied "Yes" believed that to some extent, formal education was the

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<sup>2</sup> Anonymous male student from Political Science Department at the University of Ghana, Legon.

reason why they dressed and acted so Westernized. Some students told me that they believed that even though formal education could influence a student to become Western, there was also a choice that the student had. Students could wear western clothes at school, since it is more convenient, but remain traditional the rest of the time. However, they also attributed the western influence to TV programs, radio, music lyrics, and beauty pageants.

There is definitely a gap that exists between students and the Ghanaian culture according to the interviews conducted. The students believed that times are changing and so are the youth. Times are becoming more modern, technology has entered Ghana, and therefore clothing styles are also changing. However, many of the students believed that societies change and it is not so much that Ghana is becoming Europeanized but that there are Ghanaians traveling abroad and are bringing back with them some modern ideas and introducing them to the country. The students however continued to believe that there is an individual choice to remain traditional or simply mend the two ways of life choosing the best from each culture.

*Open Ended Question:*

My last question on the interview was an open-ended question about the relationship between formal education and Ghanaian culture. I was interested in the students adding more comments on how the two go together and when to keep the two separated. This open-ended question was to allow the students to add anything to the study which may be of interest to the research, yet was not allowed to be said by the formal of the previous questions.

I also asked an open-ended question in order to avoid the obsession of filling the cells of the questionnaire and allow the respondents to share more issues or even stories not so related to the research. I also allowed the students to ask me questions about myself in order to establish links and a friendship since I knew that I would be on campus for the next two weeks. I knew this factor would cause me to run into the students again. I wanted a friendship to be established also because I believe that for the field work to go well one must establish and maintain good relations with the people who are being interviewed. I knew I would need Ghanaian students to be my friends in order to facilitate the research for interviewees and give me easy entrance to the halls with people who were trusted by other students.

Some of the responses given to my open-ended question by females were that formal education makes a person question the old traditional ways. For example, one of the female students told me that she feels that she was so educated that she does not want her family to intervene in her decisions. For example, when she is choosing her husband, she will not consult her family, because she believed she could pick the right guy herself. However, the majority of the students felt as if education was just a way to better themselves and their own

culture. Some of the female students believed that the formal education has allowed them to see their culture in a more objective way and they have chosen to mend the formal education lessons in with their everyday activities.

On the men answers, most believed that their peers are the cause of changing. One student told me that he used to wear beads around his wrist. However, once he came to the university his friends told him that the beads were a sign of uneducated folks, and that he must not wear them at all. The rest of the men as I mentioned before, believed that formal education can influence one's attitude towards their culture, yet, it still remains a personal choice. The best answer to the problem according to the male students interviewed it is to blend both cultures, do things from each, and take the best of both.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion of findings:

In this section I discussed the ways the answers from the interviews were similar to the answers from the literature read and in the ways the answers differed from both sources of data. I also added my opinion to these findings on this section.

#### *Similarities:*

Both sources of data agreed that formal education to some extent made a Ghanaian change their beliefs and ways of life. Education also showed how to imitate the Western countries in terms of fashion and everyday life activities. In fact, the sources agreed that the intensity and the higher the levels of formal education one attains, the more the person imitates Western ways of life. I also agree to these findings.

#### *Differences:*

Though both sources of data agreed that formal education is a cause for western assimilation, the interviewees believed that the students can continue their traditional ways and not be influenced in any way. The majority of the students believed that it was a choice made by the students. I personally do not agree. I believe that when a student enters a university, it is not possible to remain wearing completely traditional attires. As I walked in the university looking for my interviewees, I did not see a single man wearing the cloth and I did not encounter a single woman wearing the whole African attire – Kaba, slit and the atakado.

I believe there is a lot of peer pressure on the part of the students. Most students attending the university were wearing strictly European clothing styles. The remaining had somehow integrated the two ways of clothing.

In terms of the economic background the two sources were not in agreement. The literature stated that only a certain elite group attends university. And this elite group was becoming harder and harder to enter. However, some of the students interviewed had parents who were farmers or taxi drivers or mechanics. These jobs were not considered good jobs in terms of fitting into the elite group. Regardless these students were able to attend university and break the cycle of uneducated folks in their families.

In my opinion, I believe that not everyone can afford university education and that your families economic background can decide to some extent whether a person reaches university level of formal education. The reason why I believe so is that even though someone can put himself or herself through university regardless of one's parents economic status, in order to get some primary education when the person was young may have had to do with the

financial status of the family. During a pre-trial field study in Komenda, many of the people who I interviewed had dropped out of school at a very early age. According to the interviewees, the reason for dropping out was due to financial constraint. Though many had the desire to continue their formal education, they believed their lives would simply be working and getting their children to school. I believe that university money can be found by other means, but that the parents can make it possible for the children to at least get some schooling during their younger ages. However, I admit and agree that there are always exceptions. For example, the host family I spent a month with at Cape Coast was a childless couple. In exchange for the joy of having children in the house, this couple had put three village children through schooling. These children I believe were blessed and lucky and will have a chance in the future, regardless of their parents' economic status.

Also, the literature suggested that the possibilities of students attending universities were set since the students were young. This was due to the fact that the students at universities were chosen from the best Senior Secondary Schools of Ghana (SSS) and a young person going to the public schools would not be able to get admittance into the universities. Therefore, since most likely only people of high economic status would be able to attend such SSS schools, these would be the ones also attending universities. However, I was unable to prove this through my research.



## **Recommendations and Conclusion**

My recommendations are that the government should set aside more money for education and implement ways for education to be affordable to the rest of the community of Ghana. The constitution of Ghana already provides for free compulsory education at the basic level. I then encourage the government to implement this constitution and set if possible that it is extended to university level.

Though I know it is easier said than done I believe the public could also help. I would encourage those people who are wealthy enough to set up money aside for scholarships, because in the end, helping the people of your own country will help the country as a whole. Also there will be some benefits to the person providing the scholarships. Either paying some of the money back, or working in some other way for the person can bring some satisfaction in return for the favour of sponsoring few students to the universities.

On the subject of the children becoming Europeanized, I believe that yes, the student has a choice to some extent in not becoming Europeanized. However, I also believe it is impossible not to be touched in some way by the European influences seen in the formal institutions. As one student puts it, formal education is an European institution itself, therefore, it is focused to the European ways of life. It makes the Ghanaian students look down at their own culture and believe that many of their traditional ways are just rudimentary ways of life. On the contrary, it makes the European ways look as the modern and educated ways to live.

I am not saying that formal education is the cause of young Ghanaians adapting European ways of life. Societies are constantly changing their forms and functions in many ways. But there are ways of adapting to new conditions without losing one owns identity or abandoning one owns culture. Though I do not want to be judgmental in any way to the students who have assimilated the European ways to a high degree, I believe the student has a choice to at least remain traditional in some ways. Being at home for long periods of time and appreciating the traditional ways would be easier in keeping the Ghanaian identity is my opinion.

Another suggestion I have in order to keep the students related to the Ghanaian culture as much as possible is by having more Ghanaians write the books which the children use in schools. It would also be helpful if these Ghanaian writers will take the challenge of teaching the children themselves. Ghana has plenty of people who should become educated and educate their children. Why accept foreigners into the country to teach your own children about the world. The more educated people become about their own culture, the more they can teach their own children about themselves and how beautiful and rich the Ghanaian culture is.

As an outsider and having lived in the traditional culture of my island as well as the western culture of the USA, I believe students can learn to appreciate their own culture more when they are away from it. Being away from my island, I long to go back to my country. Being in another culture makes a person really desire the great things their own culture had. There are so many things taken for granted that will only be valued when one does not have it. The cultures of African descent to my belief are very rich and unique cultures which should be preserved. More African people need to be educated and become educators themselves for the sake of our children.

Teachers need to also be culturally focused to teach the children about their own self. Learning about other cultures and countries is important and part of a complete education. However, I also believe that the focus should be on one's own culture first, before the person can learn about other people's cultures. Ghanaian children should first learn their culture, their government structure and functions, their traditional beliefs, their history, and their geography. Students should be able to associate Ghana with the formal education they are learning in order to remain proud of their culture and as close to it as possible.

In conclusion, there is a certain group of people who are simply doomed not to reach university level of formal schooling from birth. The student's parents, especially those of the females did not have many children as it is usually the tradition in Ghanaian families. These parents must have been educated in some way to decide to have smaller families and be able to provide for most of their children.

However, I do not agree that only the children of those who belong to the elite have access to the universities. Coming from a poor family will be a challenge to attend university. However, through my interviews, I have changed my belief that coming from high economic status is the main factor that decides who attends university. Many of my interviewees were financing their education by other means besides their parents. It is therefore possible for other young children from lower family economic backgrounds to attend universities, but I believe is a greater challenge. I believe that though is possible, many things will have to be sacrificed as opposed to those who were either blessed or lucky to be born in a family who belongs to high economic social class of Ghana. The desire of a person to reach university level of education may be a great influence.

## Summary

The literature review reported that there is an elite class in Ghana which is becoming harder and harder to enter. This elite class is the one attending universities, becoming educated, attaining entrance to the elite class, and repeating the cycle once again. However, through interviews on the field at the University of Ghana, Legon, I found that students at the university came from different economic backgrounds and were sponsoring their education in different ways.

The literature review and the field work both agreed that the formal education of Ghana influences the way Ghanaians feel and looked towards their culture in comparison to foreign cultures.

Though maintaining the traditional Ghanaian culture or assimilating foreign styles can be a personal choice, formal schooling, as well as other types of media influences an individual to a great extent.

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