Student Engagement in Ghanaian Higher Education

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"Any system of education is impossible without respect for the educand." (Nkrumah, 1943, p. 38)

Student engagement and involvement in the decisions of an institution of higher education is critical to creating an equitable and responsive institution to students' needs. After all, the purpose of higher education is to prepare students to interact in the society in which the institution is placed. For many institutions of higher education in Ghana, there is a concern for students' well-being and success. Deans of students, student services, workers, faculty, and other administrators work to be sure that students have their basic needs met – food, shelter, academic support, safety – in order for them to achieve academic success. In many of these institutions, students serve on committees and on student governance councils to make their voices and needs known. Overwhelmingly though, students do not have these organized systems, and more so, if they do exist, they only exist in form and is not embedded in the institutional operation. As students are the next generation of leaders for the country, as well as for the continent, there is a need for institutions of higher education to provide in form, function, and action opportunities for students' voice. As Nkrumah (1943) so eloquently shared above, the institution cannot truly be one of education without respecting the individuals it purports to be educating.

This disregard for the voice of students is not limited to Ghana, and it does not operate in a vacuum, rather is part of a culture's attempt to ensure the proper education of its students (Boayke-Yiadom, 2012). Guiding leadership in Ghana is based on the chieftaincy model where the chief, elders, and family of a child are responsible for the child's rearing and upbringing (Obeng, 1986; Sarpong, 1974). They are responsible for ensuring that a child learns the ways of the family, clan, tribe, and nation as they will grow up to lead the country. This education extends to faculty and administrators in higher education operating in an *in loco parentis* or "in place of parents" for students. Faculty and administrators, then, become responsible for their safety and cultural/moral upbringing.

While the mores of a culture are essential to the continuance of that culture, students in higher education must also have a role in offering their perspectives and ideas as it relates to their education. For students, faculty, and administration, this need is even more critical as Ghana is on a precipice of maintaining itself as the champion of independence on the continent, having been the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to gain independence from colonialism. As the next generation of African leaders matriculate and progress through institutions of higher education, they must have the opportunities to provide their perspectives on their education and the environments that facilitate their learning. This can be done with taking the leadership of chieftaincy in to play thereby preserving the culture of the country.

References

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