Challenges with Building Christian Academy in 21st Century Africa: Dilemma of Promoting Discipline Character in Christian Tertiary Institutions in Ghana

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ABSTRACT—*The study was part of ongoing opinion survey, objectivised to ascertain the assumption that despite the apparent relegation and protestations against it by 20th century secularisation, disciplined character could be a core educational outcome in Christian tertiary institutions in contemporary Ghana. It was within the bigger domain of searching for a Christian academy for 21st century Africa, characterised with holistic and transformative rather than just the utilitarian education system of the secularised 20th century. Opinion collection targeted 575 people, belonging to three groups of stakeholders: students and alumni (as potential employees), and industrial employers. All the respondents (371) generally agreed to the proposal of promoting Christian values for development of disciplined character in university students. However, employers were more emphatic than both students and alumni, suggesting some hesitation of students in agreeing to the proposal. We recommended that while Christian universities could promote disciplined character formation of students, the programmes and pedagogy needs to be what works.*

Key words: dilemma, character promotion, educational core, tertiary institution, Christian academy

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1. INTRODUCTION: BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

1.1 Importance of Disciplined Character in Development of Civil Society

The American writer and philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), once said 'the true test of civilization is not the census, nor the size of cities, nor the crops - no, but the kind of man the country turns out'. In other words, the sustainable development or transformation of a country depends on the quality of human resource - as turned out through education, especially at tertiary level - rather than economic parameters. A transformed people constitute a transformed society - one in which the people develop appropriate, lifelong, just and peaceful relationships with God, self, others and environment, because they have discovered their *true human* identity and vocation (Bryant Myers, 2011). Consequently, people with disciplined character do matter more than economic success in a civilization (Huitt, 2004). Perhaps, this is because lack of disciplined character in the people can produce a stagnant or declining economy, corrupt laws, a lack of smooth transition of one political leader or a party to another after elections, and a corrupt military that takes control of the civil government etc. (McDowell and Beliles, 1995). As it often turns out, resolving many such related problems of gross indiscipline behaviour of people in society will require unplanned use of public resources and, hence, cripple even a successful economy and deprive many of their developmental happiness. Historically, the quality of a peoples' character forms the basis of happiness and a truly liberated state of a society (McDowell and Beliles, 1995).

1.2 Secular Education and Disciplined Character

However, secular liberalism, propagated by globalisation, virtually eroded disciplined character in most secular societies by outmoding insistence on practical religious pietistic moral responsibilities in the 20th century. The Vice-Chancellor of Liverpool Hope University, Gerald J. Pillay (2008) observes that secularism is an ideological determinant that has influenced the habits (or character), discourse, and languages of the Public Square in which Christians co-exist with others. It created a sphere of societal apathy to religion and marginalised Christian institutions and their emphasis on formative education. Thus, university education in the 20th century has become generally acknowledged mainly to train human resource and impart knowledge necessary for socio-economic development; being, then a utilitarian education. As

such, universities, especially in Africa, having been structured on secularised colonial western patterns, devote relatively more attention to the 'exterior' than the 'interior' aspect of students' lives, which in most cases is out of balance (Astin *et al.*, 2011).

Ironically, many of the great literary and philosophical traditions that constitute the core of liberal education are grounded, and rightly, in the maxim *know thyself*, yet the development of self-awareness receives very little attention in their colleges and universities (Astin *et al.,* 2011). In other words while universities have increasingly come to emphasize "outer" aspects of the student's development such as courses taken, grades and honours earned, and persistence toward a career degree, they have increasingly neglected the student's "inner" development—the sphere of personality formation with values, beliefs, emotions, morals, and self-understanding, – as an educational core (Astin *et al.*, 2011).

Yet to educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society (Theodore Roosevelt, 1858-1919). Moreover, it is disciplined character that enables a professional to do best what he/she best knows to do (Egyir, 2011), because) 'how a man governs himself internally affects his external actions (McDowell and Beliles 1995). In this regard, education, especially at university level, must not be concerned with only professional and intellectual advancement, but also be also proactive with character development of students (Hughes, n. d.; Berkowtz and Bier*,* 2005). For, what educational institutions of a country teach and impart, including the ideas and values that mould the peoples' character, lays the foundation for liberty or bondage of the society (McDowell and Beliles, 1995).

1.3 Christian Education and Disciplined Character

Character is a quality of life. It is the inherent complex of attributes, which determines a person's moral and ethical actions and reactions. It is the product of a combination of inborn traits modified by several environmental factors, including education, which subconsciously affects a person's consistent behaviour (Tim Lahaye*,* 2002). Character is primarily built through education informally, but also formally, as ideas, beliefs and values (character moulders) normative to the community consistently impart on the natural (innate) predispositions that underpin and result in a people's relational behaviours - with the transcendent, self, society, and the environment. Building the character of a transforming society needs education that promotes life value change 'at the heart of which is repentance and forgiveness…that most often finds its roots in the transformative power of faith traditions…and so is the work of the religious community' (Bryant Myers, 2011). This underscores why despite the uncertainties about how the 21st century will turn out, Pillay (2008) rightly suggests that Christian instituions must dare to be different by playing a missiological role in transformational development of truly liberated societies, through holistic education.

In Ghana the Basel Mission, now Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG), had established an educational system characterised, in the 19th century, with the quality of academic excellence, practical skills and moral discipline, in Primary, Middle and Seminarian institutions. This was an integral or holistic educational paradigm, based on a '3-H philosophy' of training the head, hands and heart at once, and produced "Presbyterian Disciplined" human resources. The term "Presbyterian Disciplined" described those who received character training and excellent academic education (Asare, 1995); that is, in the words of Astin et al. (2011), "development of both the 'inner' and 'outer' of a person" at the same time. With this badge of distinction on Presbyterian-trained scholarship, society cherished and both civil service and industry readily sought after them (Anthony Beeko, 2003).

However, "Presbyterian Disciplined" training declined, starting mid 20th century CE, when Mission management of their schools got taken up by the government (Asare-Danso, 2011), with political secularisation that eroded moral values from individuals; just as it occurred also in other places such as America and throughout the Western world during same period (Holmes, 2001). Through various politically motivated reforms in education, moral and religious education suffered threats of being and was finally removed from the basic education syllabus in 2007 (Asare Danso, 2011). By the start of the 21st century CE, "the Presbyterian Disciplined" education had virtually died out not only institutionally, but also socio-economically; and, at best, people mentioned it with a memory of past glory as 'the proverbial Presbyterian disciplined'.

The Presbyterian University College, Ghana (PUCG) was established in 2003, partly to help address the challenge of eroding morality and general discipline in Ghanaian society (PUCG Revised Statutes, 2010). The institutional vision was to re-produce the proverbial 'Presbyterian disciplined' scholars of yester-years whose match is lacking in present day Ghana such that the lives of men and women who pass through it would reflect Christian principles and values (PUCG Revised Statutes, 2010). That meant providing true education, which in the words of Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) was intelligence and disciplined character. Preaching to students of Presbyterian University College, Ghana (PUCG) to launch Chaplaincy week celebration in April 2012, at Abetifi, Rev. Herbert Anim Opong, Clerk of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana reiterated the singular reason PCG established PUCG. He remarked: "If the church, though not having resources like government, ventured into founding a private university it was for only one reason: that the church's university must dare to be different; it must be a Christian academy, having a hallmark of disciplined character based on Christian principles".

1.4 The Motivation and Challenge for the Current Study

Accordingly, since 2010, the Tertiary Education Committee (TEC) of PCG admonished and supported PUCG to launch a series of research for appropriate missiological approach to restoring disciplined character and Christian personality formation into the Ghanaian youth through formal holistic education, even at tertiary levels. This yearns for character education in higher schools was like what Dalton *et al*., (2011) described as a very interesting and unexpected thing happening in higher education institutions in many places since the last decade of the twentieth century. They observed that instead of becoming more secular and irreligious, meeting only their traditional mandate of providing knowledge, colleges and universities have increasingly engaged in the moral values and character development of their students. The Baha'i educationists explained the phenomenon, with their theology, as an imperative occurrence in the developmental history of humanity (Baha'i Topics, 2011). They believed that the progress of humanity's ever-advancing civilization, does not only stand now at the threshold of maturity, but is dependent upon humanity's moral as well as material improvement. For this reason, we must acquire new virtues, new moral standards, and new capacities in order to reap the benefits of the age. Thus, the increasing global movement for the formal cultivation of moral values and ethical behaviours in undergraduate education is in response to, not only observed deterioration of moral fibre of world nations, but also a religious belief of being a pre-requisite for the good of the age.

Despite this apparent increasing global movement for the formal cultivation of moral values and ethical behaviours in undergraduate education, attempts in Ghana by some private faith-based universities to inculcate Christian character values in students met outcry from both some students and some members of the public. The protesters tended to regard Christian character promotion programmes as unnecessary; imposition of institutional doctrines on students; infringement on their religious freedom and interference with their primary (or core) reason for coming to the university. The nagging question then was whether, in the face of political tendencies to relegate moral and religious education at basic schools, and the apparent protestation at tertiary levels, character education must be core in the education of modern Ghanaian citizenry and should be promoted in universities and colleges or not. This is a dilemma, especially for faith-based universities like PUCG, with mission mandate to promote values.

2. THE SCOPE AND EXPECTATIONS FROM THE STUDY

To resolve the dilemma about promoting character as educational objective at tertiary institutions a series of opinion surveys was initiated to ultimately determine the roles of character promotion programmes in a holistic education and formation of human resources at tertiary institutions in contemporary Ghana. In a previous study, Blasu and Kuwornu-Adjaottor (2013) noted that while, from the opinions of employers, there was a re-emerging trend of emphasis on disciplined character as a quality seriously demanded for entrée graduate employment, students seemed ignorant of it. Similarly, Blasu (2012) concluded that although a graduate's career success depended on his/her disciplined character, students tended to erroneously dismiss relevance of character training in college. The variance in the opinions and supportive reasons of respondents (employers and students) in those studies was thought could have important implications for both educators and industry, and so needed to be properly addressed.

Consequently, the current focus of the study was designed to categorically ascertain the assumption that despite the apparent relegation and protestations against it, disciplined character could be relevantly promoted as a core in tertiary institutions in Ghana today. The results would provide relevant information to students and management of institutions of higher education, employers, politicians and administrative staff dealing with higher education issues for the right attitude towards character development programmes designed to improve the quality of graduates.

3. STUDY TYPE AND PARTICIPATING STAKEHOLDERS

The study was a non-interventional, but quantitative and descriptive opinion survey. Many authors have employed similar approaches in the study of ethical issues (Peslak, 2008; Shaw, 2003; Hilmer *et al*., 2003). The target population, considered as direct stakeholders of education with respect to the study objective, consisted of Students, Employers and Presbyterian University College, Ghana Alumni.

The students were drawn from five Christian-based tertiary institutions belonging to the Conference of Private Universities in Ghana (CPUG), namely Presbyterian University College, Ghana (PUCG); Pentecost University College (PUC); Methodist University College (MUC) and Valley View University (VVU) as well as one public tertiary institution - Abetifi Presbyterian College of Education (ABETICO). These colleges belonged to churches known for promoting disciplined character through either formal education at pre-tertiary levels or informal Christian education at church levels.

The respondents from the Employers category included top leaders of churches that founded private tertiary institutions; senior managerial staff of member enterprises of the Employers Association of Ghana (EAG) and Association of Ghana Industries (AGI), as well as human resource managers at government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

The Alumni category consisted of the registered members from first and second batches of students that graduated from PUCG in 2007 and 2008, respectively. They were chosen for being the only ones (among all the participating educational institutions) readily accessible to give feedback on some exposure to character promotion programmes informally during their last years before graduating and entering industry. A total of 575 respondents consisting of 425 Students, 100 Employers and 50 Alumni of PUCG were contacted in the survey.

4. PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data was collected using structured and semi-structured interview questions. The questionnaire was pre-tested with students at Okwahu campus of PUCG; Mpraeso branch of Ghana Commercial bank and Okwahu-East District Assembly office. The pre-test assessed respondents' understanding of the interrogative items. This resulted in reframing some of them to be relevant for the objectives of the study. It helped also to change from using a Likert-type scale for self scoring to simple trinomial "agreed", "disagreed" and "undecided" type of answers for the closed questions. Alumni submitted their responses through e-mail within one month. For Students the questionnaire was administered immediately after a class session, upon soliciting their participation, and collected within one hour. Student participants were selected randomly from those present in the class through balloting. Some Employers submitted responses by e-mail; others were interviewed using the same questionnaires, with further interrogation for detailed explanations. Accuracy was cross-checked from voice recordings. Chi square test of goodness of fit of the responses was accepted at significance of $P \leq 0.05$ levels.

5. THE FINDINGS AND INFERENCES OF THE STUDY

A total of 371 (64.52%) responses were retrieved from the 575 contacts made, consisting of: Students 280 out of 425 (65.88%); Alumni 16 out of 50 (32%) and Employers 75 out of 100 (75%). Generally, none of the three categories of respondents indicated rejection (P<0.05) for character education to be included as a core in the curriculum of tertiary educational institutions due to insignificant chi square values (Table 1). However, reviewing the statistics suggested that employers (with χ^2 of 0.475 and CV of 0.681) were more emphatic and consistent than did students (with χ^2 of 3.523 and CV of 1.168). In other words, students were hesitant in accepting (i.e. getting close to rejecting) the hypothesis, implying with a larger population, students would tend to disagree with introduction of character promotion as a core in higher schools. The chi square value for Alumni (4.575) was more closely towards rejection of the null hypothesis, and hence, even more than Students, a higher tendency of disagreeing to mounting of character education programmes in tertiary institutions.

Table 1 Responses regarding mounting character education in tertiary institutions or not

RESPONDENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	UNDECIDED	TOTAL	Chi-sq. Value	CV
STUDENTS	161 (57.5%)	36 (12.9%)	83 (29.5%)	280 (100%)	3.523	1.168
EMPLOYERS	60 (80%)	7 (9.3%)	8 (10.7%)	75 (100%)	0.475	0.681
PUCG ALUMNI	8 (50%)	3 (18.7%)	5 (31.3%)	16 (100%)	4.575	

Test of goodness fit is not significant if P≤0.05; n = 2 $\chi^2_{critical, n=2}$ is 5.991   CV=Coefficient of variation

Apparently then, the majority (80%) of Employers out-rightly agreed, but Students (57.5%) and Alumni (50%) in this study only seemed to have, and so hesitatingly, agreed that character promotion as a core educational objective could be mounted in tertiary institutions in Ghana.

Students and alumni advanced no further reasons for their opinions so expressed. However, the participants in this study being the same as the two previous ones referred to earlier, we drew some inferences from the previous studies. In them, it was observed that students were ignorant of (Blasu and Kuwornu-Adjaottor, 2013) and so erroneously dismissed (Blasu, 2012) the importance of disciplined character development for entrée graduate employability and career success. In addition, the Alumni also explained that although they knew disciplined character was an added advantage to employability of a graduate, they did not think industry would seriously consider character values of graduates (Blasu and Kuwornu-Adjaottor, 2013). Perhaps, ignorance of the re-emerging contemporary importance of disciplined character

in the personality formation and employability of graduates could explain the tendency of students and alumni in this study to down play on the proposal for character promotion programmes in tertiary institutions.

Employers, on the other hand, explained that character promotion, as educational core, should be mounted in higher institutions in Ghana because:

- Industry looks for some basic character traits relating to the job-type in the prospective employee. [Accountant]
- At the stock exchange, the reputation of a bank is important for attracting shares. This starts with the quality of its human resource in both competence and good character values for customer relations [Banker]
- It provides good personality which is added advantage to win competitive opportunities. [Banker]
- Just like academic preparation, basic character development must already be gotten from education - formal or informal - before seeking job. A student with disciplined character is likely to put up his/her best in any challenging life situation. [University don]
- The graduate must not be knowledgeable and yet a misfit in society [Church administrator]

For employers, then, promoting character as educational core in universities and colleges is a necessity, agreeing with Berkowitz and Bier (2005) who considered it not optional, but inevitable, therefore meriting pragmatism, and priority status in the school. The employers' reasons corroborated that of American National Defence University, (n. d) that character education in university would ensure that the graduate's ethical development occurred before entering an organization. This would give advantaged competitive disposition for employment since industry prefers to deal with individuals whose value base had been already established (National Defence University, n. d.). Moreover, it would enable students be at their best facing challenges, because good character education promotes not only learning (Berkowitz and Bier, 2005), but also determines how best a person does what he/she knows best to do (Egyir, 2011). Thus, generally, the employers in this study agreed with Australian industrialists that character and personal attributes are integral features of an employable person (ACCI, 2002), and with Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) that it would also make the graduate beneficial rather than a menace to society.

6. CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was to ascertain the assumption that despite the apparent relegation and protestations against it, disciplined character could be promoted as a core in tertiary institutions in 21st century Ghana. The findings indicated that all respondents generally agreed that character development could be promoted as a core educational objective in tertiary institutions in Ghana today, and should be given planned attention. However, because employers were more emphatic than both students and alumni in agreeing to the proposal, the programme might have to be introduced with caution and appropriate methodology to appeal to students if it must be effective. Berkowitz and Bier (2005) observed that as interest in character education continues to rise, educators face tough questions, including '*what works'*. This should be the next focus in the series of this study.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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