








# From mission to academia: The Presbyterian Church of Ghana's influence on Higher Education Policy and Practice

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## ABSTRACT

This study used an exploratory qualitative design to examine the rationale behind the establishment of tertiary institutions by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) and its contributions to higher education in Ghana. Using purposive sampling, data were gathered from 20 participants, including church leaders, education administrators, and policymakers. The findings revealed that while the PCG was not the first to introduce tertiary education in Ghana, it was among the earliest faith-based organisations to establish such institutions. The Church significantly expanded access through the creation of five Colleges of Education, the Akrofi-Christaller University College of Theology, Mission and Culture at Akropong-Akwapim, and the Presbyterian University, inaugurated in 2004. The study highlights the PCG's transformative role in promoting equitable access, moral development, and intellectual growth. Its implications extend locally and internationally, offering valuable insights into how faith-based institutions can complement state efforts to advance inclusive tertiary education in sub-Saharan Africa.

**Keywords:** Access, Infrastructure, Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Tertiary Education

## INTRODUCTION

Tertiary education in Ghana dates back to the early 1940s, when Mr Justice Asquith was appointed by the British government to investigate the principles that would guide the establishment of universities in the Colonies in 1943.<sup>1</sup> Historically, the British model of education bequeathed to Ghana, like many Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, was designed to educate an elite corps who would gradually take up roles in the civil service played by expatriates. The first Higher education institution established in Ghana was the University College of the Gold Coast in 1948 and was later renamed the University of Ghana (UG) after independence in 1957.<sup>2</sup> By the late 1980s, there were three public universities in Ghana: the University of Ghana (UG), the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

<sup>1</sup> G F Daniel, "The Universities in Ghana," *The Commonwealth Universities Year Book* 1 (1997): 649–56.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Education, *Education Sector Performance Report* (Accra: Ministry of Education, 2008), 12.

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(KNUST), and the University of Cape Coast (UCC). In addition, other professional institutions were offering post-secondary programmes in the country.<sup>3</sup>

Starting with a few 100 students during its inaugural ceremony in 1948, student enrollment at the UG rose to 9,000 in 1976 and remained at this level until the government issued a white paper in 1991 on the reforms to the Tertiary Education System, a precursor of the report of the University Rationalisation Committee (URC). The URC undertook a comprehensive review of post-secondary education in the country and recommended detailed proposals designed to overhaul the education system.<sup>4</sup> The recommendations of the URC provided the basis for innovation in higher education. The committee recommended, among other things, strategies to expand access, particularly for the poor and female students; the creation of a new University in the northern part of Ghana; and the upgrading of the existing polytechnics into a tertiary education status under the Polytechnic Law (PNDC; Provisional National Defense Council Law 321 in 1992).

Another important recommendation of the URC report was the unification of all post-secondary educational institutions into a single, unified, and coordinated system with greater public accountability. Although the URC acknowledged that the Government cannot exclusively finance higher education, the report recommended that universities embark on innovative financial diversification approaches such as the introduction of cost-sharing and cost-recovery mechanisms, while tuition remained constitutionally free. These major developments led to a massive expansion of access and participation between the 1990s and 2000s. Before 1993, enrollment at the three public universities was 14,500, and by 2002, it had increased to 86,570, and then to 121,390 in 2005.<sup>5</sup>

During the past two decades, the number of tertiary institutions in Ghana has increased significantly, especially private ones. By 2012, more than 126 public and private universities were accredited by the National Accreditation Board (NAB). Of these, there are 6 public (traditional) universities, 49 private universities, three of which are chartered and authorised by the presidency to award degrees, 46 Colleges of Education (CoE) that have been upgraded to university status, 18 Nursing Training Colleges, and 10 Technical Universities. Additionally, several private universities operate various post-secondary programmes without accreditation. In public universities, enrolment growth has not kept pace with the expansion of academic facilities to promote equity and inclusion across all social groups. For example, between 1990 and 2004, the average annual growth rate was 18% for all tertiary institutions combined, and 16% for universities alone.

During the 2006-2007 academic year, the total enrollment in the tertiary sector was just more than 135,000. At the polytechnic (now Technical University) level, enrollment increased from about 1,900 in 1990-1991 to about 45,000 in 2008-2009.<sup>6</sup> These developments are due to various policies adopted by the Government to improve higher education in Ghana. Another example is the policy of differentiation being implemented to allow accreditation of some polytechnics (Technical Universities) to run selected bachelor's degree programmes, thereby reducing pressure on universities to expand access and participation. In spite of this growth, universities and polytechnics (Technical Universities) are not fully equipped with the required infrastructure to admit the number of qualified students seeking admission. Every year, many qualified students are denied access to tertiary education due to limited institutional facilities.<sup>7</sup>

In recent years, Ghana's educational sector has faced numerous challenges, including disparities in access to quality education, inadequate infrastructure, gender inequality in terms of admission, and economic constraints faced by students, just to mention a few.<sup>8</sup> The issue has always been the

<sup>3</sup> Francis Atuahene and Anthony Owusu-Ansah, "A Descriptive Assessment of Higher Education Access, Participation, Equity, and Disparity in Ghana," *Sage Open* 3, no. 3 (2013): 2158244013497725.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education, *Education Sector Performance Report*, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Kingsley Adu and François Orivel, "Tertiary Education Funding Strategy in Ghana," *Unpublished Mimeograph*, 2006, 34.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Effah, "A Ghanaian Response to the Study on 'Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing an Equity Scorecard,'" *Research in Comparative and International Education* 6, no. 4 (2011): 379.

<sup>7</sup> Effah, "A Ghanaian Response to the Study on 'Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing an Equity Scorecard," 383."

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Appiah Takyi et al., "An Overview of Ghana's Educational System and Its Implication for Educational Equity," *International Journal of Leadership in Education* 24, no. 2 (2021): 161.

government's inability to provide tertiary education to a large number of Ghanaians who are qualified due to inadequate space and facilities to admit all these potential students, and it has led to faith-based organisations and some private individuals who have entered into the provision of tertiary education in the country. This problem has created gaps for faith-based organisations such as the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, to come in with the desire to provide tertiary education to numerous Ghanaians who would have been denied education.

Ghana's transition from colonial rule to independence in 1957 brought significant changes to its educational landscape. The government began to prioritise expanding access to education by improving its quality nationwide. Despite these shifts, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana maintained its educational mission, often supplementing government efforts, particularly in areas where public educational infrastructure was inadequate. Despite these obstacles, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana continues to be an important educational provider. However, there is a growing need to critically assess the current state of tertiary education in Ghana in relation to the role of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana by evaluating both its impact and its alignment with national goals. The significance of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana's role extends beyond the number of schools or students. The Church has been particularly effective in reaching underserved communities, providing quality education, and instilling values that foster social cohesion and national development. However, to fully appreciate and improve this role, a systematic evaluation of the Church's educational initiative is essential.

Despite significant expansion in Ghana's tertiary education system, persistent inequalities in access, infrastructure deficits, and quality concerns have limited the ability of the system to absorb qualified students. This gap has created space for non-state actors, including faith-based organisations such as the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, to play an increasingly critical role in tertiary education provision. However, limited research has systematically examined the rationale, nature, and impact of such interventions, hence this inquiry.

Based on these objectives, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What was the state of tertiary education in Ghana before the involvement of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana?
2. What factors motivated the Presbyterian Church of Ghana to establish tertiary institutions, and how have these institutions contributed to educational access and quality?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review concentrates on religion and education, which helps to throw more light on the researchers' paper. Through this literature, review, the researchers seek to convey that religion and education are fundamentally intertwined dimensions of any society in which they are present. Education, in particular, is widely acknowledged as a cornerstone of societal advancement and development. Similarly, many development theorists have explained how religion contributes to development. Religious institutions play various roles within human societies, influencing various aspects of national development. Among these, the intersection of religion and education emerges as a particularly significant domain. This section, therefore, examines the educational contributions of Christianity in Ghana, highlighting its impact on the broader developmental landscape.

Education is commonly perceived as a process of training and shaping individuals. Within the context of this study, it encompasses the cultivation of literacy, the pursuit of knowledge, and the broader art of learning. As society strives to enhance the quality of life, through educational advancement, it becomes imperative to examine the role religion plays in shaping educational development. This inquiry seeks to confront the reluctance to recognise religion's influence in fostering sustainable and transformative human and national progress. The central aim of this review is to illuminate the interconnected contributions of religion and education to Ghana's national development. Achieving a more inclusive development framework, both within Ghana and across other developing nations necessitates a deeper appreciation of the responsibilities and impact of religion in the educational sphere. In Ghana, as elsewhere, religious institutions have played a pivotal role in formal education since the nineteenth century, significantly shaping the growth of individuals, communities, and traditional

structures. Research with this focus can encourage stronger relationships between states and religious. Among other things, the literature has been reviewed according to the subheadings outlined below.

### **Religion, State and Development**

From the perspectives of various authors, describing religion is a very challenging task, and effort to do so have led to a wide range of view from the scholars around the world.<sup>9</sup> Religion stands out as one of the most enduring and influential pillars within traditional backgrounds and likely has the biggest impact on how people think and live.<sup>10</sup> It denotes a system of beliefs and rituals informed by an enduring reverence for the sacred and transcendent dimensions of human experience.<sup>11</sup> According to Shorter, religion is a foundational form of cultural conduct and has to be included in the way a culture interprets life. He views religion as a cultural system that engages symbolic resources and inherited traditions, functioning as an entity embedded in the broader domain of shared meanings and social practices.<sup>12</sup> Geertz views religion as an organised framework of symbolic expression that work to shape deep, enduring moods and motivations in people by offering a framework for understanding the general order of existence. In this light, religion is meant to impact human existence. Central to the structure of religion are belief systems, ceremonial practices, ritual observances, and the guiding presence of religious leaders.<sup>13</sup> According to this viewpoint, all religion regardless of their underlying beliefs convey the idea that human beings are neither self-sufficient nor able to exist in isolation, but are inherently connected to and depend upon forces beyond themselves.

### **Education as a Catalyst for Human and National Transformation**

According to Opoku, Manu and Wiafe, the term “Education” originates from the Latin word *educare* (*educere*) and *educatum*. *Educare* signifies training or moulding, as well as the concept of bringing up or leading out, implying an inward or outward development. In contrast, *educatum* refers to the acts of teaching, illuminating the principle and practices involved in the educational process.<sup>14</sup> The authors argue that *educare* highlights the development of the latent faculties within a child, a potentiality that is often unrecognised by the individuals themselves; thus it is the role of the educator or teacher to identify these capabilities and implement strategies to cultivate them. Education is viewed as the manifestation of inherent perfection within individuals.

Rabindranath Tagore’s perspective is cited, emphasising that the highest form of education transcends mere transformation; it aims to foster harmony within all aspect of existence, cultivating self-reliance and selflessness in students.<sup>15</sup> The authors assert that, true education enhances both the physical and spiritual dimensions of pupil, nurturing their potential for beauty and perfection. Consequently, education is framed as the creation of a sound mind in a body, designed to refine human faculties and enable individuals to appreciate and engage with the supreme truth, goodness, and beauty in life.

Education is a complex concept that is difficult to define uniformly due to differing perspectives among educationist, many of whom are philosophers. These variations stems from distinct philosophical views on the aim of life.<sup>16</sup> For idealist, the focus is on spiritual development, which leads them to view education as a spiritual process aimed at self-realisation and connecting the soul with the creator. In contrast, pragmatists see education as a means of fostering social progress. Thus, education can be defined variably, influenced by underlying philosophical beliefs regarding life’s purpose. Ultimately, education is described as both a purposeful and unconscious process that encompasses psychological,

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<sup>9</sup> John Kwaku Opoku, Eric Manu, and Frimpong Wiafe, “Religion, Education and Development in Ghana: A Historical Perspective,” *Global Journal of Art, Humanities and Social Sciences* 3 no. 12 (2015): 13.

<sup>10</sup> John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Clays Ltd., 1969), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Cassell Publishers Ltd., 1999), 41.

<sup>13</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 94.

<sup>14</sup> John Kwaku Opoku, Eric Manu and Frimpong Wiafe, “Religion, Education and Development in Ghana: A Historical Perspective,” *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences* 3, no. 12 (2015): 15.

<sup>15</sup> Ravi Singh and Sohan Sin Rawat, “Rabindranath Tagore’s Contribution in Education,” *VRSD International Journal of Technical and Non-Technical Research* 4, no. 8 (August 2013): 33

<sup>16</sup> John White, “What is Philosophy of Education? Overlaps and Contrast Between Different Conception,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 58, no. 4 (2024): 452

sociological, scientific, and philosophical dimension. It is aimed at maximising the development of individuals in accordance with their needs and societal demands, contributing to overall happiness and prosperity.

### **The Role of Religion in Education**

Ghana's education indicators reveal a clear gender imbalance and notable differences between urban and rural areas, as well as between the country's southern and northern regions. These disparities have led to public initiative aimed at reducing illiteracy and promoting more equitable access to education. In recent years, many religious organisations in Ghana have embraced this challenge as part of their social responsibility. The history of education in Ghana reveals a long-standing connection between Christianity and formal schooling. Although introduced later, Islam has also had a major part in advancing education in the country. Both religious traditions have prioritized education as a vital part of their service to society, viewing it as way to shape citizens. Transmitting knowledge to future generations has remained a key focus for the two major faith communities in Ghana.

### **The Development of Tertiary Education by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana**

Beyond its foundational role in establishing primary and secondary schools across Ghana, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana gradually extended its educational mission into the realm of tertiary education. Although the financial and logistical demands of such an undertaking were initially daunting, the Church, alongside other faith-based organisations, persisted in its commitment to higher learning. This expansion occurred despite the prevailing assumption that the provision of university education was primarily the responsibility of the state. Nevertheless, the determination of religious institutions to contribute to national development through education remained steadfast. Comparable effort were observed in other parts of West Africa, notably in Sierra Leone, where missionary-led initiative laid the groundwork for early forms of higher education.<sup>17</sup> The Presbyterian Church of Ghana's foray into tertiary education reflects a broader trend among Christian missions in Africa, where the pursuit of holistic development, spiritual, intellectual, and vocational, was central to their educational philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study adopted a qualitative approach anchored in interpretive phenomenological design, drawing on the philosophical foundations of Heidegger and van Manen.<sup>19</sup>

### **Study Sample and Population**

Five Presbyterian Church of Ghana-affiliated tertiary institutions were purposively selected: Agogo Presbyterian College of Education, Abetifi Presbyterian College of Education, Presbyterian University, Kibi College of Education, and Akrofi-Christaller University (Akropong-Akwapim). A total of twenty (20) participants were selected through purposive sampling, comprising principals, lecturers, students, ministers, and church members. Inclusion criteria were: affiliation with one of the five institutions; direct engagement with Presbyterian educational programmes or policies; and willingness to participate. Individuals with less than 1 year of involvement at the institution or who were unwilling to be recorded were excluded.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews and document analysis. Each interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes, was conducted in English, and was recorded on audio with the participants' consent. The documents reviewed included institutional reports and prospectuses, church

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<sup>17</sup> Edward H. Berman, *African Reaction to Missionary Education* (New York: Teacher College Press, 1975), 93.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Foster, *Educational and Social Change in Ghana* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 147

<sup>19</sup> Max Van Manen, *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing* (Routledge, 2023), 26.

educational policy documents, historical and archival materials, and government education policy statements on faith-based institutions. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and imported into NVivo 12 for coding. Data were stored on password-protected devices and backed up on encrypted cloud storage, with each participant assigned a unique pseudonym.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Thematic analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase process: familiarisation, coding, theme development, theme review, theme definition and naming, and reporting.<sup>20</sup> Codes were generated inductively from the transcripts and documents, compared across institutions and participant groups, and interpreted in relation to the research questions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee. Participation was voluntary and withdrawal was permitted at any time without penalty. Participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure anonymity, and data were coded to conceal institutional and individual identities. Rigour and trustworthiness were ensured through member checking, peer debriefing, triangulation of data sources, an audit trail, and reflexive journaling.

## **PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

This section presents the outcome of the fieldwork generated through individual interviews with selected students, Principals of Colleges of Education established by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, and some national leadership of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana who participated in this research. From the responses, the study generated two main themes that emerged from the data, namely: The state of tertiary education in Ghana before the Presbyterian Church of Ghana became involved and the contributions of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana to the expansion and development of tertiary education in Ghana.

### **Theme 1: State of tertiary education in Ghana before the involvement of PCG**

Theme one focuses on participants' perspectives on the state of tertiary education in Ghana before the PCG became involved.

#### **The number of tertiary education institutions in Ghana**

In terms of the number of tertiary education institutions in Ghana, the participants asserted that there was no tertiary education institution in Ghana before the involvement of the Presbyterian Church. Others were also of the view that, though the PCG first established institutions of higher education, it was not the first to introduce tertiary education in Ghana.

A National Officer of PCG stated:

*There was no tertiary education in Ghana before the arrival or involvement of the Presbyterian church. Most of the schools provided primary education to children. The first tertiary education in Ghana was established by the Basel Missionaries, which is now the Presbyterian Church. So, I will say the Presbyterian Church set the ball rolling when it comes to the establishment of tertiary education in Ghana.*

Another National Officer of PCG also stated;

*Let me say the PCG has contributed immensely to the development of tertiary education in Ghana. For example, the PCG established the Presbyterian Training College at Akuapem Akropong in 1848. The main focus was initially a tertiary institution in the modern sense. However, the institution was designed to train local catechists and teachers for mission schools. I can say the PCG laid the foundation for tertiary education in Ghana. In other words, the*

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<sup>20</sup> Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 78.

*government of Ghana and other missionaries learned from the model or foundation laid by the PCG to establish other tertiary education institutions.*

When we asked for further details, a Principal disclosed that:

*Before the Presbyterian Church took any steps toward higher learning, there truly was no structure for tertiary education in Ghana. All the missionary and government schools of the early nineteenth century focused strictly on primary instruction, leaving students with nowhere to advance beyond basic literacy. It was only when the Basel Mission, now the Presbyterian Church, established Akropong Training College in 1848 that the concept of post-secondary education even began to exist. In essence, the Presbyterian Church set a precedent that no one else had considered until then.*

Participants consistently noted that the Presbyterian Women's Training College at Aburi (1928) was the first PCG-run institution to award a formal post-secondary diploma.

As one National Officer of PCG explained,

*Although Akropong Training College existed from 1848, its program was primarily focused on catechist and teacher apprenticeship rather than a government-recognised diploma. It was not until Aburi in 1928 that the Presbyterian Church offered a credential equivalent to a tertiary diploma. [P5, National Officer of PCG].*

From the participants' standpoint, Aburi marked the moment when the PCG moved beyond basic teacher formation into a fully-fledged diploma-awarding status. A student further indicated that.

*There were some already established tertiary education institutions before the establishment of the Presbyterian Women's Training College at Aburi. I can mention Achimota Teacher Training, which began in the late 1920s under colonial government auspices, located at Achimota in the Greater Accra Region and offered post-secondary teacher certificates starting around 1935.*

### **State of infrastructure**

Participants recalled that, before the Presbyterian Church's direct involvement in tertiary education, most post-secondary institutions in Ghana operated with very limited infrastructure. In their opinion, even the few government-run teacher training colleges, which stood as the closest thing to tertiary institutions before PCG's Aburi campus, lacked key facilities that are now considered essential for higher learning. For example, participants described the situation at Achimota Teacher Training, which began awarding post-secondary certificates in the early 1930s.

A National Officer of PCG explained:

*Although Achimota had a handful of lecture rooms carved out of its secondary school complex, there was no dedicated library for trainees—books were scattered in the secondary school's general collection. Laboratories existed only insofar as basic science classes required a few benches and glass beakers, but there was no separate building or properly stocked science lab. The halls of residence were makeshift dormitories shared with secondary-school students. In short, Achimota's infrastructure barely stretched to support a growing teacher-training cohort, let alone the needs of a true tertiary environment.*

Likewise, when participants discussed Akropong Training College (1848), they emphasised that despite its pioneering role in training catechists and teachers, the college had almost no formal academic facilities. Class sessions were held under thatch or in wooden mission houses; there was no permanent lecture hall, and trainees often studied under candlelight in simple boarding huts.

A participant explained:

*At Akropong, students gathered in a single large hall for both worship and instruction. There was no separate lecture room. Books were scarce; most 'library' resources consisted of a few religious and pedagogy texts kept by senior missionaries. If you want to practice a science demonstration, you have to improvise with cooking pots. The halls of residence were basic*

*wooden cabins, and there was no laboratory to speak of. Everyone recognised it as a training centre, but hardly a tertiary institution in the sense of infrastructure standards.*

Participants unanimously noted a marked change in infrastructure quality when the Presbyterian Women's Training College at Aburi opened in 1928. Aburi was built with a clear vision of providing a fully functioning post-secondary environment. One interviewee remarked:

*Aburi College was deliberately constructed on a larger scale: there was a two-story library stocked with pedagogical and general-education texts, science laboratories outfitted with microscopes and basic chemistry apparatus, and proper lecture halls that could seat over a hundred students. The dormitories were modern boarding houses with running water and electricity, unheard of at earlier mission sites. Infrastructurally, Aburi set a new benchmark for what a Presbyterian-run tertiary institution could look like.*

Participants contrasted Aburi's facilities with those of contemporaneous government colleges. They observed that even though Achimota and similar government teacher training schools had made incremental improvements, adding small "science rooms" or expanding dormitories, none matched the level of purpose-built infrastructure that the PCG provided at Aburi.

A Principal clarified:

*By the late 1920s, government institutions were still converting existing secondary-school spaces into makeshift lecture rooms and labs. They lacked a centralised library environment; most reference materials were photocopied or passed around students. In contrast, Aburi's administrators had allocated specific budgets to build a stand-alone science block and a dedicated library building. That kind of foresight was rare before the PCG took charge.*

Finally, participants emphasised that the Presbyterian Church's insistence on adequate infrastructure was driven by a holistic vision of education: they believed that to produce competent teachers and catechists, trainees needed more than just instruction; they needed a proper academic environment.

One Principal reflected:

*The PCG recognised early on that a quality tertiary education required suitable facilities. That's why Aburi wasn't just another training college shoehorned into a mission compound it was purpose-built with lecture halls, laboratories, and a library from day one. Prior institutions simply did not have the resources or mandate to build on that scale. From my perspective, Aburi's infrastructure represented the first true tertiary footprint of tertiary education in Ghana.*

The students also presented perspectives on the state of infrastructure before the involvement of the PCG in tertiary education. They revealed that there were poor facilities, leaving an impression of how the condition affected studies and general well-being. Their statements capture the grassroots experience of infrastructural inadequacies that existed before the Presbyterian Church of Ghana's intervention: In general, participants agreed that before PCG's expanded role in tertiary education, institutions in Ghana generally operated with inadequate infrastructure—libraries were small or nonexistent, laboratories were makeshift, and halls of residence were rudimentary. The Presbyterian Church's Aburi campus, opened in 1928, was widely recognized as the first PCG-established institution to meet and exceed the infrastructural standards necessary for a genuinely post-secondary, diploma-awarding college.

### **Access to admission**

Another theme discussed in this study was admission to tertiary education in Ghana before the involvement of the PCG. The study specifically focused on the degree of difficulty in obtaining admission to tertiary institutions, the cost of tertiary education, and the gender disparity in admission and enrolment. Most of the participants asserted that admission into tertiary education was difficult before the involvement of the PCG. Most of the participants agreed that getting admission into any

tertiary education institution in Ghana was a real uphill battle before the Presbyterian Church of Ghana began opening its colleges. They explained that it was difficult to get admission into tertiary education because there were not enough slots due to the few institutions and the few available places that existed set the bar extremely high.

One principal expressed it this way:

*Yes, it was incredibly hard to secure admission. This is because there were a handful of colleges in the entire country, and you had to score near-perfect marks just to get a look. The entrance exams were designed to weed out most applicants before they even reached the interview stage. I know students who spent years preparing for that one chance, only to be turned away because the colleges didn't have room for everyone.*

Another participant stated;

*Absolutely, it felt almost impossible. Nearly all the colleges were located around Accra, so if you lived in a remote or northern area, just travelling to take the entrance exam was a massive challenge. Even if you managed to get there, you were competing against students who could go to extra prep classes. In many cases, talented young people never even bothered to apply because they knew they couldn't make the journey or navigate all the paperwork.*

In summary, participants agreed that admission was difficult because there were too few institutions, the exams and interviews were ruthlessly selective, and the travel barrier meant that many bright students did not even get a fair shot. Again, the study asked the participants about the cost of tertiary education before the involvement of PCG. The participants were asked to describe the level of difficulty in terms of very high cost, high cost, low cost and very low cost, and the responses of the participants are summarised in Figure 4.

## **Theme 2: Reasons the Presbyterian Church of Ghana Established Tertiary Institutions**

The second objective of this study was to explore the reasons the Presbyterian Church of Ghana decided to establish tertiary institutions in Ghana. The themes that emerged from the study included: part of the mandate of the church, education provision as a social responsibility of the church, helping address tertiary education challenges of access and cost, and the church as a partner in development. The details of these themes are presented below.

### **Part of the mandate of the church**

The participants indicated that the establishment of tertiary education institutions is part of the mandate of the church. According to the participants, running schools and teaching people is as essential as preaching the gospel. They explained that offering tertiary education is not a nice side project; it flows directly from what they believe the Church is supposed to do: nurture people's minds and hearts.

One National Officer of PCG summarised it:

*When Jesus instructed his followers to 'teach all nations,' he was not referring to sermons. He was referring to providing people with access to learning, how to read, how to think, and how to interpret God's word for themselves. That's why our churches started schools almost as soon as they planted pulpits. Teaching is part of what Christ asked us to do.*

Another participant, a National Officer of PCG, added:

*I have always believed that faith without learning is half a meal. Think about it: if you cannot read the Bible, how do you grow in faith? The Church saw that back when missionaries came. They built classrooms so children could learn to read Scripture. It was not a second thought; it was obedience. For them, education and evangelism were two sides of the same coin*

A third person, a National Officer of PCG, asserted that the Church linked teaching with caring for people's whole lives from day one. This is what the participant said;

*The very first missionaries said, 'We'll bring God's word, but first, you must learn to read. They started schools because they believed literacy was the gateway to both spiritual growth and better work opportunities. Over time, those mission schools became places where kids learned math, science, and values alongside the Bible. Therefore, education became woven into our DNA, never an afterthought.*

A Principal of a Presbyterian College of Education stated;

*When we first opened the doors, we envisioned combining rigorous academics and Christian values. As a principal, I have witnessed how our academic program and campus life collaborate in creating educators who excel not only in their profession but also continue on the Church's ethic of service, compassion, and integrity into each classroom they occupy.*

A student of Agogo Presbyterian College of Education indicated that;

*It's not the same here. In addition to the tests and lectures, there is a focus on building character through weekly chapel, community service, and mentoring. It reminds me that as a future teacher, my job is no't only to teach facts but to exhibit kindness and faith, so my time here is significant.*

### **Education provision as a social responsibility of the church**

The results show that most of the participants see the provision of education as a social responsibility of the PCG, while 8 do not consider the provision of education as a social responsibility. The analysis of the data showed that most of the participants felt that the Church owed the community the responsibility of providing education, though a few said that it is not the responsibility of the church. One student participant stated:

*You know, if you ask me, I will say the Church has to establish schools. This is because we are called to love our neighbour, and how do you help a neighbour who cannot read? It is like standing and watching them struggle without offering a helping hand. Constructing schools and educating children is one way we express our faith in action. For me, it is a social mandate or responsibility of the church.*

Another participant asserted;

*I would see children walking miles to learn under a tree, in the hope that somebody would come along with some chalk and a bit of board." If the Church had stopped building a real school, those children would not have known how to write their names. For me, if you have the chance to help a child learn, you do it. It's not about rules, it's about compassion*

However, some participants who did not agree that the PCG has the social responsibility of providing schools or education shared their narratives. One of them had this to say;

*I get why people say it's our duty, but I also see another side. The Church's first job is to share the Gospel and guide people's hearts. Yes, education is important—but if we try to take over everything the government should do, we stretch ourselves too thin. I'd say it's more of a calling than a strict obligation. We help where we can, but we should not lose sight of why we gather in the first place.*

Another participant said;

*Honestly, I'm torn. I believe strongly that when we invest in schools, we change lives—no doubt there. But I worry sometimes when the Church becomes a jack-of-all-trades. If we say 'yes' to every single social issue, we might lose focus on worship and discipleship. So, I see education as vital, but I don't think it's mandatory in the sense that we must do it at all costs*

In the end, most people agreed that education was probably the Church's top social responsibility when they first got involved, though they acknowledged that health care and other services were also

crucial. However, education felt like the spark that could light up every other part of life, so that is where they started. This part of the study is important in yielding important information concerning the attitude of members of the Presbyterian Church toward prioritisation of social duties, i.e., health and education, and other services. Prioritisation of education is seen by the participants as the most important social duty of the Church, even in recognition of the priority of hospitals and other services.

### **Help address tertiary education challenges of access and cost**

The interview also revealed that the PCG got involved in providing education to enhance access to tertiary education in Ghana. It was revealed that the PCG saw how many bright young people were locked out of higher learning simply because there were not enough institutions, and the available ones had limited spaces to accommodate numerous applicants.

A participant said,

*The Church leaders saw that there were few opportunities for our young people to go beyond secondary school. They knew that if the Church could establish tertiary educational institutions, more people would have a chance to continue learning. So yes, it was about access. The church decided to contribute to limited institutions and expand access*

Other participants said;

*Look, in those days, even getting into a teacher training college was a miracle. There were very few universities, and everyone was fighting for a spot. But the Church stepped in and said, 'We will make room.' And it was not just for the privileged it was for those who might never have had a chance otherwise*

A principal added:

*They didn't just open the doors of their schools; they tried to make sure the doors were wide enough for everyone to walk through, not just those who could afford it. Scholarships, reduced fees for certain groups, and even boarding facilities to save on transport. It was a real attempt to give hope to those who could not get access to other schools.*

For these participants, it was clear that the PCG saw limited access as a significant problem that could hinder the ability of people to attain higher education and contribute to the development of society. As a result, the PCG wanted to remove the hurdles that kept people out of higher education, whether those hurdles were financial or simply the fact that no one in their community had ever been given the chance to dream of a degree. By stepping in to create new institutions, the PCG was not just offering classes; it was opening doors that had been closed for generations.

Also, Other participants revealed that PCG got involved in tertiary education due to the high cost of education in Ghana at the time. Participants expressed that due to the limited availability of tertiary institutions, the cost of attendance was high and few individuals could afford it. As a result, the church had to step in to provide education at a relatively low cost.

One of the respondents said;

*The cost of attending tertiary education at the time was high, and few individuals could afford it. It was only people from affluent homes who could afford it. Those in the cities and those whose families were wealthy could attend. So, if you were from a poor home, you had no chance of attaining a tertiary education. That's why the church sought to establish tertiary education institutions.*

A principal remarked:

*The cost of attaining tertiary education also affected some of our church members. Some of them were brilliant but needy. So, they could not afford the higher fees charged by the available institutions. There was therefore a need for PCG to mobilise the available resources and establish tertiary institutions so that members of the church could also benefit from them.*

The participants seem to suggest that unacceptable Christian and Muslim practices promote rebellious behaviour because parents and their wards would attempt to resist such an imposition. Community leaders are thus expected to become familiar with the rapidly changing natural environments, fast-paced changes, and rapid cultural changes on a global scale.

## DISCUSSION

This study explored the nature of tertiary education in Ghana before the involvement of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) and examined the Church's contributions to the expansion, accessibility, and moral development of tertiary education. Through a phenomenological inquiry involving principals, students, ministers and church members across five Presbyterian institutions, the study illuminated the transformative role of the PCG in addressing the systemic deficiencies that historically constrained higher education in Ghana.

This study focused on exploring the nature of tertiary education in Ghana before the intervention of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and exploring the contributions they have made to the expansion and development of tertiary education in Ghana. The findings on the state of tertiary education prior to the entry of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) indicate a general national limitation in access, infrastructure, and equity that collectively failed to meet the promise of enhancing higher education. There were few universities before PCG's entry, which reveals a national shortfall in planning and investment in education. The dearth of restricted access favoured affluent households. The poor were unable to gain admission or access the limited vacancies within the few available tertiary institutions. In support of the current finding, Asare-Danso<sup>21</sup>, whose study focused on the Historical Study of the Presbyterian Colleges of Education in Ghana, confirms that tertiary education before the involvement of PCG was characterised by limited access, colonial influence, and uneven development, both in structure and distribution. According to Abban-Quarshie, based on limited access, funding constraints, and theoretical bias, the entry of faith-based institutions such as the Presbyterian Church of Ghana into tertiary education became not only timely but necessary. Their involvement would continue to diversify the landscape, increase access, and promote values-based education that addressed both national development needs and moral transformation.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, it was reported that students from disadvantaged backgrounds in Australia not only had less access to high-quality educational facilities but also faced systemic biases that hindered their academic achievement. Consequently, these students often experience limited educational opportunities, which further exacerbates the socioeconomic disparities within society. Okae-Anti contends that this situation had the propensity to entrench socio-economic inequalities. Similar results are found in other studies.<sup>23</sup> It could be asserted that the poor infrastructure of tertiary educational institutions before the involvement of the PCG only adds to the problem of access. This is because even where access is enabled, the standard of education achieved will likely suffer. Overcrowding and poor supplies endanger an under-resourced project, in which the number may not have been followed by investment in classrooms. It is a reflection of a culture with quality rather than quantity as its priority, with graduates who do not have the desired competence for industry.

Collectively, these findings suggest that the incursion of value-based religious organisations such as the PCG was not only opportune but also necessary to plug the key gaps. Their incursion can be understood as a state efficiency response, as well as how value-driven, people-centred institutions can aid in national development programs through increased access, ethical leadership, and learning conducive environments. Therefore, the value of PCG's contribution goes beyond the increase in the number of institutions to opening up a more inclusive, equitable, and integrated higher education landscape.

It was revealed that the number of Tertiary Institutions was only a handful of public universities that served the whole country, making slots extremely scarce. Most colleges and technical institutes

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<sup>21</sup> S. Asare-Danso, *Historical Analysis of the Effects of Educational Acts on Basel Mission* (2011).

<sup>22</sup> Alex. Abban-Quarshie, "Christian Work Ethics as a Means of Revamping Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Ghana: An Assessment of the Contributions of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana" (University of Cape Coast, 2020).

<sup>23</sup> E. Okae-Anti, "A History of Public Relations in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana" (University of Education, 2011).

were clustered around major cities rural students had very few local options. Private and faith-based schools were almost nonexistent, so growth was painfully slow. With so few campuses, countless qualified young people were shut out; demand far outstripped the meagre supply of institutions, especially outside Accra, Kumasi and Cape Coast. The study also found that admission into a Tertiary Institution was fiercely competitive: even students with excellent grades often missed out. Many families had to pay for long-distance travel or relocation just to attend entrance exams. Word of mouth from older relatives painted a picture of repeated rejections and fading hopes. The admissions quota strengthened social and spatial inequalities, saddling applicants and their families with enormous financial and emotional costs.

The interview with the participants showed that the high tuition fees of colleges and universities were a major reason for the involvement of the church in tertiary education. That is why, time and again, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana felt compelled to intervene. The goal of the PCG was to ease the burden so that families could afford to educate their members at tertiary institutions. This finding reveals an important motivation behind the Presbyterian Church of Ghana's (PCG) engagement in tertiary education. It indicates that the PCG is driven by the desire to democratise access to higher education and address structural imbalances that had previously excluded large segments of the population. The participants affirmed, in particular, that the actions of the PCG were a response to what they perceived as these structural inequalities. According to Asare-Danso, this imbalance manifested itself in ways that prevented capable and intelligent individuals from progressing educationally, not due to disability, but due to institutional barriers, poor infrastructure, and socio-economic constraints.<sup>24</sup>

As access to universities continues to be extremely unequal in Sub-Saharan Africa, with poor geographical location and institutional capacity limiting access for most pursuing tertiary education, state universities in Ghana are overenrolled and consequently feature highly competitive selection processes favouring students from urban areas with better connections. As noted by the study participants, this exclusion is further aggravated even for poor and rural students. Students from rural and poor backgrounds face economic exclusion, and also do not have aspirational role models, especially first-generation students, to consider attending university.

The PCG's reaction to build new colleges and open up more possibilities is an example of what calls for the expansion of capabilities, where institutions strive to remove the barriers that restrict human potential. It is not merely about additional students; it is about redefining the story about who goes to higher education and for what. Therefore, the PCG strove to open doors that had been closed to many by establishing tertiary institutions in previously overlooked neighbourhoods, offering value-centred education, and embracing forms of financial assistance. This kind of mission-driven expansion is also consistent with the literature on faith-based higher education in Africa, where churches have increasingly than not played the role to address educational demand where the state is found to be lacking.<sup>25</sup> These institutions, established by the PCG, are not only for educational purposes but also are institutions of hope, transformation, and identity. The PCG placed education as a service and also as a redemptive ministry that could construct communities and future leaders. The PCG project is a social justice product of faith. It is a solution to the quantitative problem of insufficient university space and the qualitative problem of exclusion and inherited disadvantage within society.

## Discussion Summary

The research used a qualitative study design in which data was collected using interviews with stakeholders, such as administrators, lecturers, students and church leaders, to critically analyse the contribution of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana to the provision of tertiary education. The study achieved its objective by looking at the nature of Ghana's tertiary education before the intervention of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, asking why the Presbyterian Church of Ghana founded tertiary institutions and looking at the role of PCG institutions in improving access to tertiary education.

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<sup>24</sup> Seth Asare-Danso, "Building a Mission-Oriented Church in Ghana in the 21st Century: The Role of Theological Education," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 6, no. 3 (2020): 190–99.

<sup>25</sup> James Patrick Burns, "The Impact of Character-Based Education: Exploring the Effects of Curricular Redesign in Faith-Based Higher Education," *Essay. In Character and Public Policy: Educating for an Ethical Life. Birmingham, AL: University of Birmingham*, 2012.

The findings revealed that, before the PCG intervention, Ghana's tertiary education system faced severe limitations in access, infrastructure, and equity. A handful of public universities served the entire nation and most colleges were concentrated in urban centres such as Accra, Kumasi, and Cape Coast. Students from rural and economically disadvantaged backgrounds were largely excluded due to high tuition, limited slots, and geographic inaccessibility. This exclusion established social inequalities and created a system that favoured the elite. Abban-Quarshie emphasised that faith-based institutions such as the PCG entered at a crucial moment to fill the equity gap, introduce values-based education, and address the moral and developmental needs of the nation.<sup>26</sup>

The research also revealed that the Church institutions provide a unique blend of spiritual guidance and scholarly success that significantly contributes to the national policy to provide holistic development and values-based education. Additionally, the institutions have maintained a high dedication to upholding fair admissions policies and gender equity despite facing challenges of funding limitations, infrastructural shortages, and conflicts between religious identity and intellectual freedom. In conclusion, the research not only highlights the central roles of religious organisations in higher education but also reiterates the need to promote efforts together with the stakeholders and the government to make the efforts effective and sustainable in the long run.

### Study Implications

The findings have several implications for policymakers and educational planners. For policy integration, government education strategies should formally recognise and support faith-based institutions as vital partners in achieving equitable access. Again, for moral formation, PCG's emphasis on ethics and service offers a framework for embedding values-based curricula in national education reforms, and the PCG's model of regional diversification can inform decentralised higher education planning, ensuring that rural and underprivileged students are not excluded.

The findings also contribute to several theoretical discourses. The participation of PCG underscores how non-state actors diversify the educational ecosystem, blending religious and secular values to broaden educational choices. This aligns with theories of educational pluralism, which recognise multiple value systems coexisting within national education frameworks. The study reinforces faith-based agency theory, demonstrating that religious organisations act as moral entrepreneurs, filling state capacity gaps while shaping citizen formation through ethical education. PCG's collaboration with governmental regulatory bodies exemplifies effective PPP models where shared governance promotes educational expansion and quality assurance. This suggests that faith-based institutions can serve as strategic partners in national educational development, particularly in contexts of resource constraints.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. The Government of Ghana, through the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), should maintain the provision for the establishment and balanced spread of the tertiary institutions throughout the nation, especially in areas of low access. This will complement the efforts of PCG to enhance access to tertiary education and encourage more geographically and socially inclusive education.
- ii. Public and private tertiary institutions should adopt and enforce policies that support disability-friendly learning spaces and infrastructure.
- iii. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana should be committed to its higher education initiative in its religious and social calling by expanding programmes and campuses to reach poor communities. Although the Church views education as part of its gospel mandate and social calling, this consistency ensures sustained moral and developmental impact through fair access to higher education.
- iv. The Ministry of Education and development partners should officially recognise and involve religious communities such as the Presbyterian Church of Ghana as a stakeholder in national

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<sup>26</sup> Alex Abban-Quarshie, *Christian Work Ethics as a Means of Revamping Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Ghana: An Assessment of the Contributions of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana* (PhD diss., University of Cape Coast, 2020), 115.

educational planning. Since the Church's provision is complementary in both cost and access margin, such a partnership can pool resources and capacities to overcome composite deficits in providing tertiary education

- v. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana must continue to sustain and improve its tertiary educational institutions, particularly in regions with no access or limited access to tertiary education. This will solve the limited slots available for admission even as the population increases, especially in rural and peri-urban communities. The persistent annual increase in admission to Presbyterian University College is a measure of the growing strength and potential of the Church to admit more underprivileged students.
- vi. Presbyterian tertiary institutions should continue carrying out chaplaincy and religious-based moral education programmes among their student body. However, the church must be mindful to make such programmes inclusive and conducive to all-around student development. This study confirmed that programmes positively affect students' moral growth and social adjustability, instilling in them the unique contribution the Church has to offer tertiary education.
- vii. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana must create diversified and sustainable funds like endowments, alumni contributions public-private partnerships, and fund raising activities in an attempt to break from its dependence on students' fees and achieve financial autonomy for its universities. This is because, based on the study, the existing fee-based system will not be enough to to guarantee the long-term sustainability of operation.

## CONCLUSION

The research has critically assessed the Presbyterian Church of Ghana's involvement in tertiary education and its effect on access, quality, gender sensitivity, and responsiveness to national education policy. The findings demonstrate that the Presbyterian Church of Ghana's involvement was both a response and a reform movement motivated by the need to democratize education, reduce cost barriers, and infuse moral and spiritual values into tertiary learning. Participants consistently described the PCG's entry as a "mission-driven expansion" aimed at dismantling structural imbalances that restricted human potential. Through the establishment of new universities and colleges in underrepresented regions, the PCG increased access and decentralisation of tertiary education. Moreover, its value-based education model emphasised discipline, service, and integrity, aligning with the Church's broader social mission of nation-building through education. The PCG's initiatives exemplify a form of faith-based social justice, where education becomes both a developmental and redemptive ministry, and its holistic approach offers valuable lessons for future tertiary expansion in Ghana and beyond. Its model, anchored in community engagement, affordability, and ethical leadership, can guide future faith-based and secular collaborations. Establishing inter-denominational partnerships could further amplify reach and resource-sharing, advancing sustainable higher education for underserved regions.

## Limitations and directions for future research

Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The sample size (n=20), though appropriate for qualitative inquiry, restricts generalizability. Data were drawn exclusively from Presbyterian institutions, which could limit cross-denominational perspectives. Additionally, the reliance on interviews and document analysis means that findings are interpretive rather than representative. Future research could employ mixed-method approaches to quantify the impact of faith-based institutions on access and outcomes. Comparative studies across other denominations (e.g., Methodist, Catholic, or Islamic universities) could illuminate broader patterns of religious involvement in higher education. Longitudinal studies could also trace how PCG institutions sustain quality and inclusivity over time.

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