

Transition of Colleges of Education in Ghana to Tertiary Institution: Perceptions of Principals about Changes Experienced in the Colleges

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Abstract

A non-experimental survey and basic interpretive study were conducted to examine the perceptions of principals of colleges of education in Ghana about change initiatives in the colleges. Data were collected from all the principals of public colleges of education through a Likert-type survey questionnaire and using a semi-structured interview protocols from a focus group. Data collected from the survey were analysed using Chi-square test of independence, while the data from the interview were put into themes and descriptions provided on the adopted change approach and targeted activities undertaken for change initiatives in the colleges. Based on the study findings, the study concluded that change initiatives in the colleges of education were predominantly in the area of establishing governance and administrative structures with focus on priority activities of developing college strategic plan, constituting functional committees of the academic board, adopting committee system for decision making, and operationalizing college governing councils. A major recommendation for practice was that the leadership of the colleges of education should consider the long-term impact of change initiatives in the colleges and adopt the reconstructive approach in executing change.

Keywords: educational change, change strategies; institutional governance, decision making

DOI: 10.7176/JEP/13-23-08

Publication date: August 31st 2022

1. Introduction

A change in the mandate of an institution is accompanied by corresponding changes in its operations. Amakyi (2017) posits that it is the activities of institutions that result in the attainment of their mandate, hence institutions are expected to embrace change to do things differently in response to a change in their mandate. Davila, Epstein, and Shelton (2006) point out that changes in an institution are occasioned by a change in institutional goals and objectives.

Change in institutions is associated with growth and new ways of doing things and a process of revitalization and growth (Fullan, 2014). According to Weston, Ferris, and Finkelstein (2017), institutional change is a transition from how things are done to how things will be done in future to make the institution different. Bolden, Jones, Davis, and Gentle (2012) argue that when an institution undergoes change, its fundamental operations, that is, roles and responsibilities, resource allocation, and logistics, are affected. In the opinion of Cummings and Worley (2015), the sustainability and growth of an institution depend on how it handles change in response to renewal of mandates. The successful implementation of mandates is through effective planned interventions in the institution's processes.

Changes taking place in institutions can be described from three perspectives of developmental, transitional, or transformational change (Ackerman, 1997; Anderson & Anderson, 2010). In a developmental change, the change initiative is focused on improving an existing situation, that is, the change enhances or corrects existing aspects of an institution. The transitional change seeks to achieve a known desired state that is different from the existing one. It entails the implementation of a known new state. The transformational change takes the form of a radical nature and requires a shift in assumptions made by the institution and its members. Transformational change usually results in a new institution that differs significantly in terms of structure, processes, and culture.

In addition to the three perspectives, changes in an institution may be classified into four major paradigms of planned versus unplanned change, continuous versus episodic change, linear versus nonlinear change, and local versus system-wide change. Amakyi (2017) opines that when change is deliberate and a product of conscious reasoning and actions, the change is referred to as planned change. Unplanned change unfolds in an apparently spontaneous way in response to unanticipated circumstances. Sveningsson and Sörgärde (2019) describe continuous change as ongoing, evolving, cumulative, and are small uninterrupted adjustments made in the institution and characterized by a constant adaptation and shaping of ideas usually acquired from different sources. Episodic change is infrequent and discontinuous and it usually involves a complete overhaul of the system. According to Burke (2017), in a linear change the emphasis is on getting or completing a job that needs to be done at one level before moving on to the next. the change is referred to as linear. A nonlinear institutional

change takes place when several areas are addressed concurrently in bringing about the change. Fullan (2014) posits that a change initiated at local level refers to change effected to address daily needs and realities of the local community. It is considered as change that is tailored to specific groups. Change initiated at the local level is often precipitated by needs at the local level. This can be compared with change initiated at the national level which usually refers to top-down mandates and initiatives. Such institutional changes tend to be broader and come in the form of policies.

Fullan (2015) makes a distinction between top-down and bottom-up changes. The former are changes developed by legislators with the help of scholars, with intention of discovering methods to help institutions in executing certain innovations. The latter are changes initiated by institutional leaders.

Change in educational institutions usually involves alterations or modification of curriculum, pedagogy, and enrolment patterns and intended to alter the goals of education and to improve how learners are instructed and assessed, how educational functions are organized, regulated, governed, and financed (Duke, 2015). According to Kotter (2012), the core activities of education; teaching and learning are the main targets for educational change. Educational change should eventually lead to a well-defined outcome of improved student learning outcomes. Fullan (2014) postulates that effective educational change should focus on the possible use of new or revised instructional resources (i.e., curriculum materials or technologies), teaching approaches (i.e., new teaching strategies or activities) and alteration of beliefs (i.e., pedagogical assumptions and theories) underlying particular new policies or programmes. According to Howard, O'Brien, Kay and O'Rourke (2019), educational change should shift from restructuring single areas to multiple areas and have a focus on curriculum development, institutional improvement, institutional effectiveness, research, and teacher development.

Changes in educational institutions do not occur by themselves, but require active orchestration and coordination in the form of change approaches or implementation strategies Literature is rife with different change approaches. For example, Sims (2002) describes a three-stage change model; “unfreezing—changing—refreezing,” developed by Kurt Lewin to implement changes in an institution. The unfreezing stage refers to a process of conducting gap analysis to identify differences between existing behaviours and the desired behaviours needed to attain the goals of the institution. The changing stage entails implementing new behaviours that will facilitate the accomplishment of the goals of the institution. The final stage, refreezing, focuses on stabilizing the new behaviours in the institution through reward and reinforcement of the new behaviours.

Kowalski (2010) suggests three broad approaches to implement changes in educational institutions: rational, coercive, and reconstructive approach. The rational approach is made up of two tools: the empirical–rational and the normative–reeducative tools. The empirical–rational uses empirical evidence to establish the urgency for change. Communication of relevant information and the giving of incentives to members of the institution are the main tools used in the empirical–rational approach. This change approach is driven by the assumption that people are rational and will act accordingly in the face of empirical evidence.

The normative–reeducative approach is based on redefining and reinterpreting existing norms and values through continuing professional development and developing commitments to the emerging new ones. The normative–reeducative approach presents members of the institution with the need to change existing norms and provide them with the necessary education to facilitate the establishment of new norms. The normative–reeducative approach is driven by the assumption that members of the institution are social beings and adhere to cultural norms and values.

The power-coercive approach is based on the exercise of authority and the imposition of sanctions to implement new norms in the institution. The power-coercive approach uses institutional structures (e.g., chain of command) to get members of the institution to accomplish tasks. The approach is based on the belief that unless members of the institution are forced to adopt changes, they will not do so on their own volition.

The reconstructive approach utilizes the building of a shared vision and the altering of fundamental assumptions that influence behaviour in the institution. Adopting reconstructive approach entails working in collaboration with all stakeholders. The reconstructive approach is driven by the conviction that behaviour is largely controlled by underlying values and beliefs and unless these values and beliefs are altered, most change efforts are doomed to fail.

2. Problem Statement and Research Questions

The passage of the Ghana Colleges of Education Act, 2012 (Act 847) brought about change in the mandate of the colleges of education. The Colleges of Education Act upgraded the colleges from post-secondary institution status to tertiary status, granting them the opportunity to function in multidisciplinary environment to carry out teaching and learning and to conduct research. The change in status came with new demands for running the colleges. Newman (2013) intimates that the colleges had to experience change to adopt a new operating culture that befits their new status. The colleges are expected to embark on changes in the key operational and result areas that include governance and administrative structures, introduction of new fit-for-purpose curricula and pedagogy, requirement for different calibre of human resource (i.e., new students' admission requirements and

new staff qualification requirements), and procuring technologically oriented infrastructure. It is imperative that the changes that take place in the colleges are focused on the key result areas. Kimonen and Nevalainen (2017) suggest that when institutions undergo change, they should embrace fundamental change which entails an alteration or modification in the primary principles, norms, or laws that serve as the basis of a system in the institution. These areas must not be left out and every change in the institution must be a change to realign these elements with the new institutional arrangements. Fullan (2015) argues that in order for the change taking place in an institution to have an impact, that change should resonate with people, particularly those in the institution and they should find meaning in the change. *Are the colleges of education embarking on changes that align with the tenets of their new dispensation?* Amakyi (2017) posits that the choice of change approach utilized is driven by the assumptions change leaders make about how to go about effecting changes in the institution. Fullan (2001) describes these assumptions as “powerful and frequently subconscious sources of actions” (p. 122) which explains why same tools for implementing change may be a great success in one institution and a failure in another institution. *Are the college principals adopting the appropriate change approach as they respond to their new mandate?* This study sought to ascertain the perception of college principals on the changes that have taken place in the colleges and the change approach adopted to effect the changes. The study was driven by three main research questions:

1. How do the college principals perceive changes that have taken place in key result areas during the transition of the colleges to tertiary institutions?
2. What targeted activities constituted change priorities in the colleges?
3. What are the preceptions of college principals about change approach adopted in the colleges of education?

The findings and conclusions reported in this study will provide data on the changes that have taken place in the colleges of education in the aftermath of the passage of the Colleges of Education Act, 2012, (Act 847) that upgraded the colleges to tertiary institutions. The study findings will provide data for policy makers, college governing councils, and principals as they guide the colleges during the transition phase towards becoming accredited universities. The findings will constitute an important addition to the professional knowledge base on education change.

3. Research Methods

The study adopted the mixed-method research design that utilized a non-experimental survey and a basic interpretive study. The non-experimental survey utilized chi-square test which was considered valuable in assessing whether an association exists between the changes embarked on by the colleges and the expected changes to be embarked on. The basic interpretive study was helpful in understanding the phenomenon of adopted change approach from the perspective of the principals and the meaning they attributed to their experiences in embarking on change. The study population consisted of principals of public colleges of education ($N= 46$) in Ghana considered as the strategic decision makers who are not only familiar with the change agenda in the colleges of education, but were also deemed to be the principal architects of the transformation taking place in the colleges. A census method was adopted for the study hence all the principals were selected to constitute the study sample. The quantitative data were collected from the respondents using a survey instrument that consisted of two sections. The first section was Likert-type closed-ended items with three response choices of *Not Sure; No; and Yes*. The response choices were interpreted as:

- “Not Sure” – area of change is yet to be identified and considered for change
- “No” – area of change identified but change efforts have not been focused on the area
- “Yes” – change efforts have been focused on the area.

The instrument consisted of 48 items and the items belonged to the four areas of focus of change, that is, governance and administrative structures, introduction of new fit-for-purpose curricula and pedagogy, requirement for different calibre of human resource (i.e., new students’ admission requirements and new staff qualification requirements), and procuring technologically oriented infrastructure.

The second section required participants to rank sub areas of the college’s operations that have been targets of change in the college.

A semi-structured interview protocol was used to gather the qualitative data. Data were collected from five principals who participated in a focus group session. The questions were generated from the three broad change approaches of rational, power-coercive, and reconstructive approach suggested by Kowalski (2010).

The quantitative data were analysed using the chi-square test in ascertaining if differences existed in the proportions of change efforts and initiatives in the four key result areas of operations. The top 10% of activities were ranked and identified.

The qualitative data were analysed using themes that coalesced around the broad change approaches of rational, power-coercive, and reconstructive approach.

4. Findings and Discussions

Research question one: To address the research question one, the hypothesis was tested that the four key result areas received an equal amount of change initiative effort.

H₀: There is no difference in change initiatives focused on the key result areas in the colleges of education.

H₁: There is a difference in change initiatives focused on the key result areas in the colleges of education.

Table 1 depicts the percentages of the areas of focus of change initiatives.

Table 1 Areas of focus of change initiatives

| Area of Focus of Change | Observed (%) | Expected (%) | Residual (%) |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Establishing governance and administrative structures | 46 | 25 | 21 |
| Introduction of fit-for-purpose curricula and pedagogy | 24 | 25 | -1 |
| Requirement for different calibre of human resource | 20 | 25 | -5 |
| Procuring technologically oriented infrastructure | 10 | 25 | -15 |
| | 100 | | |

The observed percentages in Table 1 shows that change initiatives focused on the key result areas were not equally emphasized. The chi-square test statistics is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2 Chi-square test statistics

| | Area of focus of change |
|------------|-------------------------|
| Chi-square | 11.8 |
| df | 3 |
| p-value | .002 |

The findings revealed that the chi-square test conducted to ascertain if changes that have taken place in key result areas had the same emphasis of change initiative was significant,

$\chi^2(3, N=28) = 11.8, p < .05$. The proportion of change initiatives in the area of establishing governance and administrative structures (.46) was much higher than the expected proportion (.25). Also, the proportion of change initiatives in the area of securing technologically oriented infrastructure (.1) was appreciably lower than the expected proportion (.25).

This study finding that change initiative efforts were skewed in favour of establishing governance and administrative structures is consistent with the works of various authors (Aboramadan, Albashiti, Alharazin, & Zaidoune, 2020; Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2008; Schein, 2010) on creating an institutional culture. The authors posit that the governance and administrative structures form the foundation to create a new organizational culture. For example, Schein (2010) opines that a culture that is embedded in an organization is driven by the tone at the top. Aboramadan *et al.*, (2020) posit that it is the governance and administrative structures that formulate and define the vision, direction, and beliefs which inform how things will be done in the institution.

Research question two: To address research question two, participants indicated activities that were targeted to constitute change priorities. The most frequently occurring sub-areas which constituted the top 10% were selected. The top 10% of activities that constituted priority areas are constituting the functional committees of the academic board, adopting committee system for decision making, functioning governing councils, admitting students with requisite qualifications, and developing college strategic plan.

The top 10% activities selected by the participants are consistent with literature on best operating tertiary institution practices. For example, Rowlands (2013) postulates that the functional committees of the academic board play key roles that define the reason for the existence of academic tertiary institutions. The committees of the academic board oversee the instruction and learning activities as well as research and other outreach activities. According to Whitchurch and Gordon (2011), the idea of participatory decision making is executed through the activity of adopting committee system for decision making. Bates (2014) points to use of committee structures as synonymous with tertiary institution decision strategies, while Bampoh-Addo (2018) argues that the use of committee structures is one of the distinctive elements of decision making in tertiary institutions. With regard to student admission, students with requisite qualifications are needed to ensure the success of any newly introduced curricula.

Academic performance and success of students are areas of concern for educational institutions, especially when the institution has introduced new programmes. Since learning is a cumulative process, a student admitted with higher entry qualification is expected to be well prepared for the course content than one admitted with lower qualification. According to Zwick (2013), students continuing success in a programme is attributable to meeting entry requisite qualifications. Developing a college strategic plan is seen as an activity that enables the college to put together proposals of actions that makes it possible for the college to set goals, develop strategies, and engage staff and other stakeholders to initiate and sustain change (Dussaillant & Guzman, 2014). The governing council provides strategic direction for tertiary institutions. According to Baird (2007), governing councils support management to provide excellence in the fundamental disciplines of instruction and learning and research. Kowalski (2010) that the governing councils' main role revolves around setting directions and

goals, facilitating the attainment of the goals, and holding management accountable for performance.

Research question three: To address research question three, themes were gleaned from engaged in focus group interviews in relation to adopting appropriate change approach. Strategies. The participants indicated that the colleges predominantly adopted the rational approach to implement change.

A participant shared that:

The colleges have used the rational approach most often, especially the empirical-rational approach. I have seen the colleges share with staff, students, and other stakeholders about the implications of the passage of the Colleges of Education Act. It is obvious what has to be done to meet the requirements of becoming a fully-fledged tertiary institution. Letting everyone see where we have to be has been helpful to college leadership in getting people to do what will take the college to where it has to be.

Another participant indicated that:

The changes in the colleges have come about as a result of persons in the college acknowledging where the college is and where it wants to be. The facts are before us; if we don't act and bring about some changes, we may end up being reverted to the post-secondary status of training college. We have to do things in the way tertiary institutions do them. If they use committees for decision making, then we have no choice but to do likewise. If lecturers are expected to publish in a tertiary institution, we have to do the same; we have to publish.

A participant, agreeing with the earlier participants added:

I agree that we have used the rational approach a lot to bring about changes in the colleges and we have adopted the empirical-rational most of the time. However, we have also used the normative-reeducative approach together with the empirical rational. In the colleges, we have engaged in a lot of PD (professional development) sessions to learn new things to implement in the colleges. It was through the PD sessions that we were able to create the college development plan and prepare the college policies. The staff were also engaged in PD sessions on the new college curriculum framework. The same also goes for the college leadership that participated in several leadership workshops.

In response to a question about whether the colleges adopted the power-coercive approach since it brings about changes in timely manner, the participants objected to the adoption of the power-coercive approach.

A participant voiced objection and stated:

It may seem like using the power-coercive approach may bring quick results, but over a period of time, the compliance will wane and people will do their own thing. Staff in the college will have to understand why they have to engage in certain activities or why you are introducing new stuff. When they are forced to accept a change they will find a means to resist. I don't think the colleges adopted this approach, I doubt it very much.

A participant summed up the objection to adopting the power-coercive approach:

It is dangerous when introducing change to be seen as dictating to people. Even if what you are introducing is good, the notion of dictating to people will put them off. There will be no stakeholder buy-in for the change. The calibre of people we are working with at the colleges, you can't be telling them what to do.

The participants indicated that they have not used the reconstructive approach.

A participant opined:

It seems you need time to get through with a change when you adopt this approach. The colleges are also working with time and this approach does not support their agenda. We have not adopted it simply because it is time consuming in terms of what you have to do to get one thing done.

All the other participants were in agreement with the opinion expressed.

This study finding that revealed that the rational change approach is the predominant approach adopted is consistent with literature on institutions that embark on change in the midst of several interest groups. Bacharach and Mundell (as cited in Amakyi, 2017) observe that when it comes to educational change, interest groups or individuals emerge to attempt to influence decision making. Interest groups or individuals will organize and contest other groups as each group attempts to express their values and secure their interests in the

educational change. The resultant outcome is that the leadership adopts the rational approach, which appeals to objectivity and does not yield to emotions. Authors, such as, Hall and Hord (2011) and Kowalski (2010) suggest that when institutional leaders function as implementers of policies, they should adopt rational approach for educational change as the first option believing in the staff to act rationally. Such institutional leaders use staff professional development, in-service training, and empirical evidence to bring about change. Hall and Hord (2011) note that when teachers attend professional development workshops addressing intended educational changes, they are prepared to implement those changes. Kowalski (2010) cautions that even though the rational approach is the predominant approach used by the colleges, it may not yield desired the results if underlying assumptions in the colleges are not integrated into the professional development workshops.

Also, the finding that the power-coercive approach is not favoured to be adopted as an effective change approach is not inconsistent with literature on change. According to Fullan (2007), Kotter (2012), and Kowalski (2012), in an institutional culture that supports an appreciable level of autonomy, research, innovation, and entrepreneurship comparable to cultures prevailing in tertiary institutions, people will resent and resist the imposition of change initiatives given as fiat. Kotter (2012) observed that any form of acceptance of change initiated through the power-coercive approach is short-lived and as Kowalski, Petersen, and Fusarelli (2007) puts it, there is spiteful compliance with the power-coercive approach.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the study concludes that change initiatives in the colleges of education were predominantly in the area of establishing governance and administrative structures with focus on priority activities of developing college strategic plan, constituting functional committees of the academic board, adopting committee system for decision making, and operationalizing college governing councils. One priority activity of admitting students with requisite qualifications was in the area of the requirement for different calibre of human resource. The study also concluded that change initiatives in the colleges were mainly executed through the adoption of the rational approach that utilized both the empirical-rational and normative-reeducative strategies.

Based on the findings and conclusions reported in this study, the following recommendations for practice and future research are offered. The leadership of the colleges of education should consider the long-term impact of change initiatives in the colleges and adopt the reconstructive approach in executing change; recommended in literature as the appropriate change approach that anchors change initiatives in the culture of the institution. College principals constituted the study participants. A study could be conducted with the students, deemed as the primary beneficiaries of change initiatives in the colleges, as the participants. Also, a regression study could be conducted to examine the impact of the change initiatives on operations of the colleges of education.

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