

## **THE CHALLENGES OF THE ADVENTIST HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN CHOOSING ADVENTIST EDUCATION IN GHANA**

JOHN APPIAH, EBENEZER DANQUAH,  
AND ELISHA KWABENA MARFO

(Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Philippines)

### **ABSTRACT**

Would-be Seventh-day Adventists students in Ghana are confronted with the dilemma of either placing emphasis on faith and attend Seventh-day Adventist schools which usually offer limited course options for students to choose from or emphasizing on highly demanded courses which sell in the job market offered in non-Seventh-day Adventist schools and attends non Seventh-day Adventist schools. The dilemma of which way to go engages their attention and time. Making the right choice is key and has implications for their future lives. This paper discusses the pros and cons of each possible choice. The paper further offers practical suggestions to help addresses the problem. It is the aim of the contributors to open a scholarly debate among Seventh-day Adventist scholars throughout the globe to consider the problem and contribute to the debate as to the best ways to address the challenge.

Keywords: Adventist education, mission, curriculum, Ghana, high school.

### **1. Introduction**

Adventist youth in Ghana are in a high number as a result of the evangelism drive of the Seventh-day Adventist church. Many of these youth are in high school (known in Ghana as senior high school) who after completion will seek to enter tertiary institutions. This high number

has reflected in the number of Adventist high school students seeking to enter Adventist tertiary institutions.

Since education is the livewire for any individual who wants to leave a mark in society, many Adventist youth would like to choose a school where their lives would be impacted by the total education they will receive at such institutions so that they can go back and serve their society well. However, true education not only prepares one for service in this world, but the world to come. Fortin & Moon (2013) says "True education is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come" (p. 793). This is the type of education many Adventist youth will want to receive, so that their faith in God will not wane as they climb higher the academic ladder.

The main fundamental purpose of Adventist education has to do with the restoration of the student through redemption and renewal (White, 1952). Acquiring all the knowledge in the world without being restored to the image of one's maker is tantamount to gaining nothing. Hilde (1980) states clearly that, it is the delightful opportunity of the learner and the educator when we think of the magnitude and the grandeur of the noble work in reproducing the character of God in man. There are other tasks in education but they are all peripheral in nature. If the other efforts of education do not add anything to the restoration of God's image in man, they are not worthwhile.

To Seventh-day Adventists, every human being is privileged to be created in the image of God. Therefore all are endowed with such powers that are akin to that of the creator of the universe. Such attributes like individuality, power to think and to do, when they are developed in an individual, they become responsible leaders who can influence character and lead organizations. Seventh-day Adventist education therefore sees true education as developing such attributes to help train students to be independent and think for themselves. By doing this, they will not always depend or reflect on other men's thought.

The task of Adventist education hits at the core value of churning out students who reflects the character of God in all the virtues as seen in a positive interpretation of His perfect law. Such students go out to the world ready to serve their society and be good models that are ready to help others to be also restored in the image of God.

It must also be noted that the character of God or the image of God can be found in the one who thinks and acts, and who does not just reflect the opinions of others. Such a person will of course listen to the ideas of others, but will always make decisions and also act on principles as a result of his own cognition and his personal commitment. This Adventist

philosophy of education rates very high on the list of factors considered as Adventist students go in search of institutions with such a philosophy in their curriculum.

## **2. Factors Considered in Choosing a School**

There are a number of factors that Adventist high school students and their parents will consider in their choice of a school. These factors vary from one family to another since success may be seen from different perspectives. Below are some of the factors which are carefully considered in the selection of a school.

### **2.1. Curriculum**

The curriculum of a school speaks volumes of what the school is all about. Many schools based their curriculum on what will please them and their customers. A good curriculum plays an important role in forging life-long learning competencies, as well as social attitudes and skills. At the same time, curriculum contributes to the development of thinking skills and the acquisition of relevant knowledge that learners need to apply in the context of their studies, daily life and careers.

In selecting a school, Adventist high school students and parents examine whether the curriculum will offer a better option pertaining to the overall development of the student. They therefore select schools with a curriculum that supports the learner's personal development by contributing to enhancing their self-respect and confidence, motivation and aspirations.

A school may have everything going for it, but without a good curriculum, it may be shunned by students and parents. Emphasizing the importance of curriculum for a school aside its facilities, Hilde (1980) states that "if on the other hand, they do not provide the setting for the best curriculum possible, then they ought to be re-examined. The curriculum is the engine of the school" (p. 89). The curriculum gives life to learning and defines a school, as such when a choice is being made by students and parents; it always receives careful attention and consideration.

#### *2.1.1. Components of Curriculum*

For a curriculum to be effective and attractive to parents and their wards, it normally has these four components; educational purposes or intended educational outcomes, curricular content or subject matter covered by the curriculum, learning experiences the student goes through, and evaluation scheme to assess the extent to which the educational purposes or learning outcomes have been achieved (Reyes, 2000).

### *2.1.2. Educational Purposes*

Educational purposes may take the form of aims, goals, and objectives. Reyes (2000) says "There should be congruence between educational aims, goals, and objectives" (p. 6). Such coherence is necessary since desired curricular outcomes not only influence the very shape of the curriculum, but provide direction and focus for the entire educational program.

### *2.1.3 Curriculum Content*

Curriculum content is the knowledge, understanding, skill, and processes to which the student is exposed in accordance with the curriculum plan. Curriculum content needs to give more emphasis on learning how to learn and on attitudes and skills which will be relevant to the learner and to his community and improve his self-concept and sense of personal integrity.

### *2.1.4. Learning Experience*

Learning experiences refers to the body of knowledge, skills, competencies, values, attitudes, and appreciation to which students are exposed to. According to Reyes (2000) "Learning experiences refer to both overt and covert interactions of the learner with content" (p. 16). Meaningful learning activities represent the heart of the curriculum because they are so influential in shaping the learner's experience and thus his education. Zais (1976) states "Good intentions, fine goals and objectives, excellent content, flawless evaluation procedures, then, are all for naught if the learning activities in which students engage do not provide them with experience whose consequences are educational" (p. 351). Indeed, these are the demands in a curriculum as parents and students consider a school to select.

### *2.1.5. Evaluation Scheme*

The last essential component of a curriculum is the evaluation scheme for assessing the extent to which educational aims, goals, objectives have been achieved. Evaluation is intended to measure and to make judgments regarding the behavior of a learner whether it has changed toward a desired direction as indicated in the educational objective. The results obtained from the evaluation indicate the extent to which the instructional objectives have been achieved.

Reyes (2000) discussing the importance of evaluation says that “it is very useful not only in assessing academic achievement, but also in diagnosing learning difficulties and student readiness for future learning experiences. As such, evaluation feedback guides teacher’s decisions as to whether to proceed to the next lesson or, to provide remedial, review, or enrichment activities” (p. 26). In response to identified students weaknesses from such evaluation, planned guidance in counselling services can help address such issues. This laudable idea of curriculum evaluation is sought after as schools are selected, because it helps students to stay on their right track.

#### *2.1.6. Co-curricular Activities*

There are other factors associated with a curriculum that makes it attractive to students and parents as they choose a school. One of such is the co- curricular activities of the school. These activities help students in their learning as they partake in activities like debates, research work, field trips, and forums. Engaging in such activities expose the students to a variety of knowledge as they learn from each other and gain research experience as they work with their colleagues. Such co-curricular activities boost the confidence of many students because they are able to come out with their own practical ideas in solving issues.

#### *2.1.7. Extra-Curricular Activities*

Extra-curricular activities have become very important in education because it helps to develop other hidden talents in students. Some schools, apart from their classroom work engage in many outdoor programs like cleaning their community, sensitizing people on health issues, doing philanthropic work, visiting the hospital in their community, and engaging in sports programs to keep students fit.

Such programs enrich the lives of students and ensure to make them socially responsible by serving their community. Many students are also able to develop their hidden talents from these extra-curricular activities and have been able to make a career out of it.

### **3. Other Factors**

#### **3.1. Christian Education**

Education has now a broader scope and a higher aim. Getting educated now is more than reading a certain course of study. Education has now assumed a state where getting just the knowledge will not suffice in life. White (1952) states "It has` to do with the whole being and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come" (p. 13).

The power a school has to impress a worldview on a youngster is great. Students and parents therefore look for a school that not only shape a child's mind, but one that also impact the heart of a child. In other words, such schools do not only teach information, but they also seek to educate the emotions. According to Peshkin (1988) "They operate in the active mode, leaving no doubt that the proof of their Christian pudding is in the action of living always as a Christian. Informed that there is but one standard, one outlook, one code of conduct, students are expected to see all of life as one, with no warrant for situational adjustments: right behavior does not vary with time and place" (p. 141).

Students and parents now look for a school that has an ultimate purpose to equip students to understand the truth about life, the world and their place in it. Not only that, but Christian schools also strive to challenge students towards allowing God to mould their hearts in submission to Him, and in doing that, they equip them to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the world. Some schools are without such a curriculum to guide students through these deeper questions of life and do not use the Word of God as its standard of truth. Adventist education on the other hand, offers all the above stated hope for students as their philosophy of education depicts.

### **3. Adventist Tertiary Institution in Ghana**

There are several Adventist tertiary institutions in Ghana. They include Nursing and Midwifery Colleges, Colleges of Education. These higher institutions of learning offer specialist programs of study. However, the only tertiary institution that offers diverse programs is Valley View University. This paper concentrates on VVU as an institution that has the mandate to offer different programs. Valley View University is the hope

of all Adventist students to offer many programs to meet their desired academic needs.

Valley View University which is twenty miles north of Accra, the capital, began in 1979 with a handful of students. A persistent and very effective affiliation with Griggs University in the United States of America helped the school to develop a bachelor's degree in theology and religion. The school later received accreditation from the Ghana National Accreditation Board which is the main accreditation body of Ghana to offer her own degrees. This permitted VVU to offer additional degrees in computer science and Business (Greenleaf, 2005).

The institution which has branches in various parts of Ghana, namely: Techiman, Kumasi, and Accra (Nyaniba estate) offers the following programs on its main campus and in the other branches: The faculty of science offers computer science, information technology, mathematics with economics, mathematics with statistics, and biomedical equipment technology. The faculty of arts and social sciences offers developmental studies, English language, social studies, religious studies, and information technology. The school of theology and missions offers theological studies, while the school of business offers accounting, banking and finance, human resource management, management, and marketing.

#### **4. Challenges Faced by Adventist High School Students**

With the above description of VVU, it could be gleaned that there are some challenges faced by Adventist high school students in Ghana as they pursue their dreams in higher education. In as much as they would like to continue their education in an Adventist institution to reap the benefits of Christian education, the limited programs of study in the academic areas curtails their dreams.

Programs such as the creative arts, law, Engineering, Architecture, medicine, and all the allied health disciplines are not offered in VVU. The advancement of these programs in VVU will go a long way in easing the pressure faced by the youth. Bold and new plans for the future needs to be put in place for these programs to distinguish VVU from the many private Christian tertiary institutions in Ghana.

##### **4.1. Limited Programs of Study and Personal Ambition**

Students have future aspirations which come into play when selecting a school. Their future career hope can only be met when they attend schools that offer such programs. A major study by ACT (2013) states that “selecting a college major that is rewarding-that provides opportunities to do preferred activities and express one’s value- is an example of interest-major fit” (p. 12). Indeed, many students will move toward their majors that fit their interest because, it will more likely help them to persist in college, remain in their major, and complete their degree in a timely manner. Students and parents are careful in choosing a school that meets their future career goals. The study by ACT (2013) confirms with the statement that “the availability of a particular college major or program of study was their most important factor in selecting a college” (p. 21).

The personal ambition of many Adventist students leads them to other universities which run the major program they want to pursue. In this instance, they have no choice but to divert to other universities. This is a big challenge to their faith as they forgo Adventist education because of lack of major educational programs at VVU. Greenleaf (2005) dilating on the number of Adventists students in Adventist institutions, gives statistics to show that after the mid-1960s, Adventist schools were somehow losing out to non-Adventist institutions. He describes how for twenty years after 1945 about one in four Adventists worldwide attended a denominational school. But between 1965 and the year 2000, he says the proportion dropped steadily to less than one in ten.

According to him, educators attribute the drop in number to many factors. But most significantly is the generally accepted opinion that parents and students are more willing than were previous generations of Adventists to look at the larger picture of curricular opportunities where they are offered as clear evidence of better education than the limited offerings in Adventist institutions. Indeed as Hilde (1980) rightly says “The church must look to the educational needs of all its members, young and old. If it does not, it will build too small” (p. 59).

#### 4.2. Challenges in Faith

The repercussions of not attending an Adventist institution because of the unavailability of diverse programs of study are numerous. Adventist high school students may find themselves in another university where their faith will be greatly challenged because of the potential hindrances to their ability to exercise their faith and beliefs. Most often, the major obstacle is the observance of the Sabbath. Lectures and examinations are scheduled on Sabbaths and failure to participate in both adversely affects the student’s grade.

There are also challenges of study groups meeting on Sabbaths, and Adventist students may either opt to follow their faith or forgo the keeping of the Sabbath. Some of these students will stand by their faith no matter what they go through. Others crumble in the face of pressure.

#### 4.3. Cost of Denominational Education

Rising costs are putting an education at the Adventist institution in Ghana out of reach for many Adventist high school students. The school, being a private institution owned by the Seventh-day Adventist church has no support from the government of Ghana. To keep the quality of education high, university leaders recruit a strong faculty and build a state-of-the-art facility for teaching and research. The administrative salaries must also be met. Quality of course counts, but it also costs. These have necessitated the situation where more costs have been passed on to students and their families in the form of increased fees. To make matters worse, incomes have seen little growth for lower and middle class families in recent years.

The fees for fresh students per semester ranges between \$781.60 and \$1,805. For accommodation and feeding, students have to pay between \$236 and \$282 and a medical fee of \$50 per every semester (vvu.edu.gh). The charges are beyond most families in Ghana. Cost is therefore becoming a challenge for Adventist high school children to attend Adventist universities. Even when a student decides to enrol, increased costs in the course of their study can hinder their progress toward a degree. There are unexpected annual increases and this definitely will affect some students because they will be unable to cover their costs. Such students may either transfer to affordable schools or may drop out of school entirely. The above challenges have therefore rendered many Adventist high school students attending Adventist institution a myth.

### **5. Advantages and Disadvantages of Seventh-day Adventist Youth in Choosing Tertiary Education in Ghana**

This section discussed the pros and cons of either choosing faith over personal ambition or choosing personal ambition over faith. The advantages of choosing faith over personal ambition include (1) usefulness to the work of the church, (2) strong in faith, and (3) furtherance of the church's mission. However, it leads to (1) increased the tendency of unemployment, (2) sacrifice personal ambitions, (3) low

morale, and (4) lack of job satisfaction. The advantages of choosing personal ambition over faith include (1) job satisfaction, (2) increase the likelihood of employment, and (3) high morale. However, it leads to (1) limited usefulness to church's work, (2) weak in faith, (3) high tendency of backsliding, and (4) adversely affects the mission of the church.

### 5.1. Advantages of Choosing Faith Over Personal Ambition

Church members who attend the church's school tend to know more about their church. They become useful to the church and occupy positions in various capacities. They also tend to be strong in faith since both the curricular and extra-curricular activities are intended to connect them to Christ. They also tend to promote the church's mission and win others to the church.

### 5.2. Disadvantages of Choosing Faith Over Personal Ambition

As a result of offering few programs students who attend Adventist schools may have limited employment opportunities. This happens when the schools are not able to keep pace with the changing market conditions and offer programs which are on high demand in the job market. Moreover, Adventist students may have to sacrifice their personal ambitions because their desired programs may not be available in Adventist schools. This tends to lower their morale both in school as at work. Those who are not able to overcome this have less job satisfaction which may lead to low productivity.

### 5.3. Advantages of Choosing Personal Ambitions Over Faith

Adventists who attend other schools to offer courses that are in high demand in the job market may easily be employed after school. They offer the courses they desire. This leads to high morale both at schools and at work. They get job satisfaction which can lead to increase in productivity.

### 5.4. Disadvantages of Choosing Personal Ambition Over Faith

Attending non-Adventist school can lead to weak in faith and high tendency of backsliding. This can adversely affect one's usefulness in the church. It can also limit the mission of the church.

## **6. The Way Forward**

This section recommends strategies for implementation to mitigate the side effects of attending non-Adventist universities and the long-term solution to factors preventing students from enrolling in Adventist universities in Ghana. These include (1) offering more courses at Valley View University, (2) establishing endowment fund for would-be students of Valley View University, and (3) offering of complementary programs for students in non-Adventist schools.

### **6.1. Offering More Courses at Valley View University**

Valley View University should offer more courses to ensure that students have wide-range of courses to choose from. New programs in law, medicine, engineering, land planning and architecture, among other programs that have high demand in the job market should be offered at VVU. The school should liaise with sister institutions to enable her students offer courses through distances learning modes. This would ensure that students of VVU can access courses in other Adventist universities throughout the globe.

### **6.2. Establishing Endowment Fund for Would-be Students of Valley View University**

Parents and guardians of would-be students of VVU should be encouraged to contribute to an endowment fund to assist their wards access it when they attend the school. Parents and guardians could contribute in advance toward the future payment of their wards' school fees even before they are born. The fund should be invested and the interest added to the principal contributed. This could ease the financial burden of parents when their wards come of age and attend VVU.

### **6.3. Offering of Complementary Programs for Students in Non-Adventist Schools**

In situations where it becomes imperative for Adventist students to attend non-Adventist universities, Church should offer complementary programs to address what SDA youth in non-SDA schools lack. Student organizations like Ghana National Association of Adventist Students, GNAAS, has mobilized the students for evangelism, and helped them in their spiritual growth. There should also be Sabbath worship, mid-week prayer meetings, Sabbath school lesson studies, week of spiritual emphasis, Adventist Youth programs, Bible studies, among others church activities to help in the spiritual development of the students in non-Adventist schools. Chaplains should be appointed as to oversee the spiritual activities of these students.

### References

- ACT. (2013). *College choice report: Part 1, preferences and prospects*. ED546622. Retrieved from [www.act.org/college-choice](http://www.act.org/college-choice).
- Fortin, D. & Moon, J. (2013). *The Ellen G. White encyclopedia*. Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald.
- Gardner, G. T. (2010). Challenges to Seventh-day Adventist tertiary education in the Caribbean. *Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 19.2, 197-209, DOI: 10.1080/10656219.2010.496725.
- Greenleaf, F. (2005) *In passion for the world: A history of Seventh-day Adventist education*. Nampa, ID: Pacific.
- Hilde, R. (1980). *Showdown: Can SDA education pass the test?* Washington, DC: Review & Herald.
- Peshkin, A. (1988). *God's choice: The total world of a fundamental Christian school*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Reyes, C. F. (2000). *Engineering the curriculum: A guidebook for educators and school managers*. Manila, Philippines: De La Salle University Press.
- White, G. E. (1952). *Education*. Mountain View, CA: Pacific.
- Zais, S. R. (1976). *Curriculum: Principles and foundations*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.