

Preparations For Going to Secondary School - Part 2: *The Boarding System*

Dear Friends,

The August article ended on the note where the Learner/Student is getting ready to go to the **Senior Secondary School (SSS)**, beginning in the 10th grade, which is a Boarding School. (Ghana now uses the word *Learner*, to mean Student.)

This system of continuing one's education, to stay away from home, from family and friends, was encouraged by the first President of Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, after independence from the British government, in 1957.

Education, in Ghana, was started by the missionaries who lived in the castles and forts that were built by the slave traders. As the system expanded, the missionaries-built schools where they kept students away from their homes for periods of time during the year, effectively the first 'boarding schools' in Ghana.

A few points about the boarding school system, that Ghana's first president encouraged and helped to grow.

1. Education started in the castles and forts of the slave traders. The missionaries who came with the slave traders started schools in the castles.
2. The objective was to, de-culturalize Ghanaian children, and to wean them from their pagan system with civilization through education.
3. The system was part of the evangelism strategy of the European Missionaries
4. To make it thorough, the boarding house was introduced so the weaning from paganistic tendencies would be complete.

The Boarding System

The boarding system of education involves the Learners/students moving away from home and staying in school for up to three months at a time, for every term. In the (school) year we have 3 terms, so effectively the Learners are away from home for about 9 months in the year.

Education away from home begins with the 10th Grade, and lasts the duration of 5 years of 'secondary school', followed with the award of the **General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level (G. C. E. 'O LEVEL)**.

This extends to **General Certificate of Education, Advance Level (G.C.E. 'A' LEVEL)**, for two more years, before one may be admitted into the University to

pursue a chosen course, for the award of **Bachelor's Degree** in the Arts, Sciences, and/or Medicine.

The number of years for the chosen course vary. Medicine, for instance, requires six years of 'course of study', to become a doctor. Thus, a Learner/student, from the primary school, up to entering the University, would spend about sixteen/seventeen years before entering the University for their college degree. (Kindergarten - 12th Grade, and a few more years to gain the first two Certificates of Education, listed above).

In recent times, this amount of time has been reduced to twelve years and the Learner *may be admitted* into the University. Throughout this period, more than ninety percent of Learners/students must necessarily go into the boarding school system for their education. The remaining Learners attend **Day Schools**, sometimes with less commute time.

The Boarding System was set up, as explained in the points above, to put Learners/students together in one place for a period of time so they can be educated without any interference from their home communities. I must emphasize that the boarding system of education was optional. There are a few **disadvantages** against the boarding system of education, but they are nowhere comparable to the **advantages** of the system. It is argued that the boarding system provides the environment where Learners/students learn to grow in confidence, develop social skills and new talents, accept challenges and make friends. It can also provide a more rigid academic environment, a sense of community, and possibilities for personal development.

In Ghana, most Secondary Schools are more than 30 miles away from the Learner's hometown, and therefore pose a huge challenge of commuting to and from school on a daily basis. Without a doubt, the best option is to go to a boarding school! This is the reason why the current government decided to support the feeding of the Learners/students while they are in the Secondary (boarding) Schools and also **fee-free tuition** in the Secondary (boarding) Schools, so as many Learners as possible can access secondary education. The Parents or students are still responsible for boarding, and all other costs, excluding the tuition. Besides, in the Boarding Schools, there are fewer distractions, and more studying. The Learners/students get to spend more time with their mentors - the teachers - which is lacking in the Day Schools.

Please watch for Part 3 of this article series in October!

Blessings, Pastor Ben