

At the crossroads: Sustainability of History Education in Ghana

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Abstract: History Education has for a long time been part of the Ghanaian school curriculum. With the emergence of 21st Century, however, the popularity of the subject has decreased. This pattern of decrease in enrolment has been blamed on plethora of factors including the role of government, lack of job prospects, poor teaching methods employed by teachers of the subject. In order to resuscitate and restore the status of the subject in the school curriculum, it was argued that teachers need to be equipped with more knowledge in order to facilitate the growth of students in historical knowledge. Teacher education institutions need an infusion of new ideas, new knowledge, and a different approach to the training of the history teachers. In terms of curriculum development, greater emphasis should be placed on chronology and historical enquiry by using sources and recognition of organizational and communication skills. Students should be taught to assess the significance of main events, people and changes being studied. A fundamental strategy should be adopted by teachers to ensure that the students gets a clear understanding of the importance of what they study in history and how it contributes to national development. Also, history teachers must be more pro-active in selling not just the content of history but the varied and extensive educational outcomes that can arise from the study of people in the past and the significance of what they did.

Keywords: History, Assessment, Sustainability, Curriculum.

Introduction

History has been represented in different ways by different societies based on certain mode of understanding and perspective. According to Thorndike (as quoted in Adjepong, 2015), to some, history is literature; to others, facts; to some, archiving; to others, interpretation of the sources; to some, art ; to others, science; to some, drudgery; to others, romance; to some, an explanation of the current; [and] to others, a revelation and a realization of the past (p. 44). Obviously, history is a branch of learning that deals with past human activities, the motives that prompted these activities and how the activities affected the lives of the people who lived at the time or presently.

The teaching and learning of history have for a long time been part of the curriculum of schools. According to the Association of Assistant Masters in Secondary Schools (as cited in Oppong, 2011), “the systematic teaching of history in secondary schools has its origin in the work of Thomas Arnold, Headmaster of Rugby from 1828 to 1842” (p.1). The prominence of the subject in the school system increased tremendously during the last three decades of the nineteenth century.

In Ghana, Dwarko (2007) intimates that History was a subject well placed in the curriculum of Ghana’s education during the greater part of the twentieth century. History was taught as a core subject and examined for

the Seventh Standard, Senior School, and Middle School Leaving Certificate Examinations conducted by the Gold Coast Education Department, the Ministry of Education and the West African Examinations Council. With the introduction of the Senior Secondary School system in Ghana in 1987, history was incorporated into social studies at the basic school level and offered as an elective for General Arts students at the senior secondary school (now senior high school) level. Prior to the 1987 educational reform, history lessons in Ghana emphasised Eurocentrism as well as West African history whilst local Ghanaian history was not given much prominence in the curriculum.

Historians have provided enough justifications for the studying of history in the curricula, ranging from its contribution to civic culture and the phrasing of social issues to the specific skills it can provide to citizens and learners in particular. In support of the necessity of history, Marwick (1970) argued the following in terms of the wider cultural and social significance of history:

To those who ask, "What is the use of history?" The crispest and most enlightening answer is to recommend trying to imagine what everyday life would be like in a culture where nobody knew history. Imagination boggles, because a society can have understanding of itself only through understanding of history. As a person without memory and self-knowledge is a guy drifting, so a society without memory (or more accurately, without memory) and self-knowledge would be a drifting society (p. 13).

In Carr's (1987) effort to discover the merits of different approaches to history and its connection with other academic disciplines, he noted that the past is only understandable to us in the light of the present; and only in the light of the past can we completely comprehend the present. History's dual role is to allow man to comprehend the previous culture and to boost his mastery over the current culture. Writing on the different uses of history, Tosh (1991) points out that history trains the mind, extends the sympathies and offers a much-needed historical viewpoint on some of the most urgent issues of our moment. More recently, Tosh (2008) has argued that a deficit in historical understanding amongst society generally can have negative consequences:

Time and again, complex policy issues are placed before the public without adequate explanation of how they have come to assume their present shape, and without any hint of the possibilities which are disclosed by the record of the past. But on many of the topics to which historical perspective can profitably be applied the problem is not the tenacity of myth but the lack of any relevant knowledge at all (p. 140).

He has tried to argue for a revitalized 'public history' that could add to the quality of deliberative discussion between people and politicians. Historical scholarship, therefore, has a lot to give to society's democratic culture. Taking a careful and informed perspective on issues of government interest is essential to the citizen's anticipated behaviour-in polling booths, in political parties, and in partnership with other people. To be efficient, it is necessary to deliberate on representative democracy, requiring a certain amount of relevant knowledge and critical acumen. An expanded public history range would be a significant step in achieving these objectives. Hobsbawm (1997) also observed that it is the responsibility of historians to encourage a universalistic history that displaces those smaller histories that can underpin the darker shades of nationalism. Reflecting on problems like the Macedonian issue and Balkan nationalist history, he stated that, sadly, as the condition at the end of our millennium in big areas of the globe shows, poor history is not harmless history. It's a hazardous thing. Death sentences may be the phrases written on apparently innocuous keyboards (Hobsbawm, 1997).

Schama (2010), scholar and advisor to the Government of the United Kingdom, emphasized the significance of history in reaching kids with their accompanying contemporary distractions:

Who is the one most in need of history? Naturally, our kids: the generations that either pass on the memory of our disputed liberty or are not very familiar with the actions of dark ancestors, and go back to Facebook for an hour or four. Unless they can be won to history, their imagination will be held hostage in the cage of eternal Now: the flickering moment that has passed away as soon as it arrives. They will stay constant kids, always innocent from where they came and correspondingly unconcerned or, worse, fatalistic about where they might end up.

The Historical Association released *The Planning of a History Syllabus for Schools* in 1944 with the following rationale in terms of school abilities:

Moreover, in studying history, however simply, the pupil has to use his memory, his imagination, his reasoning power, and his judgment in collecting, examining, and correlating facts, in drawing conclusions... weighing evidence, and in forming general opinions which he must learn to regard as provisional only and as more or less probable rather than as true or untrue. In short, the study of history can and should give boys and girls some of the kind of knowledge indispensable both as a foundation for any real understanding of the world of to-day and as a basis for culture of any kind. It should further offer some training in the quasi-inductive processes of thought most common in adult life, and some power of considering current events in the light of past experience.

In 1999, England's domestic history curriculum for colleges postulated that history would fire the curiosity of students about Britain's past and the wider world. Students consider how the past affects the present, what previous societies were, how these societies organized their politics, and what creeds and cultures affected the

behaviour of people. As they do this, for their understanding of important occurrences and individuals, students create a chronological structure. They see the variety of human experience, and as people and members of society they know more about themselves. What they learn can affect personal choices, attitudes, and values in their decisions. Pupils discover proof in history, weigh it, and come to their findings. To do this, they need to be able to investigate, search through proof, and argue for their point of view – abilities that are valued in adult life. In summary, the goals of teaching history are to prepare students for working life, promote the development of higher-order cognitive skills, and promote the development of attitudes to citizenship and historical awareness (Husbands et al., 2003).

Despite the enormous historical potential in the curriculum, Price (1968) anticipated that looking at how history is becoming progressively unpopular and considered to be meaningless, if care is not taken, it will end up with subjects such as classics in the curriculum broom-cupboard. According to Arthur and Philips (2000), every year since 1998, the percentage of learners sitting for GCSE has continued to decrease by about 1%. This obviously implies that the place of history for that matter has been eroded in the curriculum and in many colleges. This scenario is partially due to the reality that the structures created in many colleges made it difficult for learners who want to pursue history studies to have the chance. Employers further denigrate the position of history in the college curriculum by frequently asking for convincing arguments that teaching history is both helpful and applicable to working life (Arthur & Philips, 2000).

Barton and Levstik (2004) in the United States mention that history's place in the curriculum is under threat because scientists criticize educators for not using primary sources, professors criticize learners for not wanting to learn, and learners criticize textbooks for being deadly boring. In Nigeria, apart from the decrease in the number of learners studying history, the National Commission for Educational Colleges (NCCE) proposes that history should be abolished as a course in Educational Colleges (Katsina, n.d.). Their argument was based on the fact that, teachers with NCE qualification are to teach in Primary and Junior Secondary Schools. There will be no need, therefore, for study of history in the Colleges of Education. Besides, there are consistent calls for history to be abolished in the school system as a result of a seeming negative perception that courses like history are relatively becoming irrelevant to the society, as the world is now moving toward technological advancement, and life today is based on wealth acquisition. To pay more emphasis on studying science and managerial courses should, therefore, be the sole concern of government.

In Ghana, the latter part of the twentieth century saw a decline in the number of students who opt for history in the Senior High School. The abolition of the Middle school system saw the removal of history from the junior high school curriculum and replaced with Social Studies. At the Senior High School, the centrality of history in the national development was reduced when the subject was made an elective instead of a core subject by the Government. There is a seeming impression, therefore, that this single act by the Government led to the decline in the patronage of history as a subject in the Senior High School. For instance, Dwarko's study compared the number of students who registered for the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE) in History, Government, Religious Studies and Economics, conducted by the West Africa Examinations Council (WAEC) from 2000 to 2005. He found that whilst all the four subjects registered increased number of candidates during the period, the increase in History was only 70% compared to 230%, 160% and 140% in Government, Religious Studies and Economics respectively. Similarly, Cobbold and Adabo (2010) gathered data from two Senior High Schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis (Adisadel College and St. Augustine's College) and reported that in one school, the number of students who read Government between 2004 and 2007 exceeded those who read History by 191. In the other school, the number of students who read Government in the same period exceeded those who read History by 250.

Data from the West African Examination Council [WAEC] (2016) shows that from 2005 – 2015, the number of students undertaking history compared to the other General Arts subjects seem to be reducing at an alarming rate. Details of the WAEC report is presented in Figure 1.

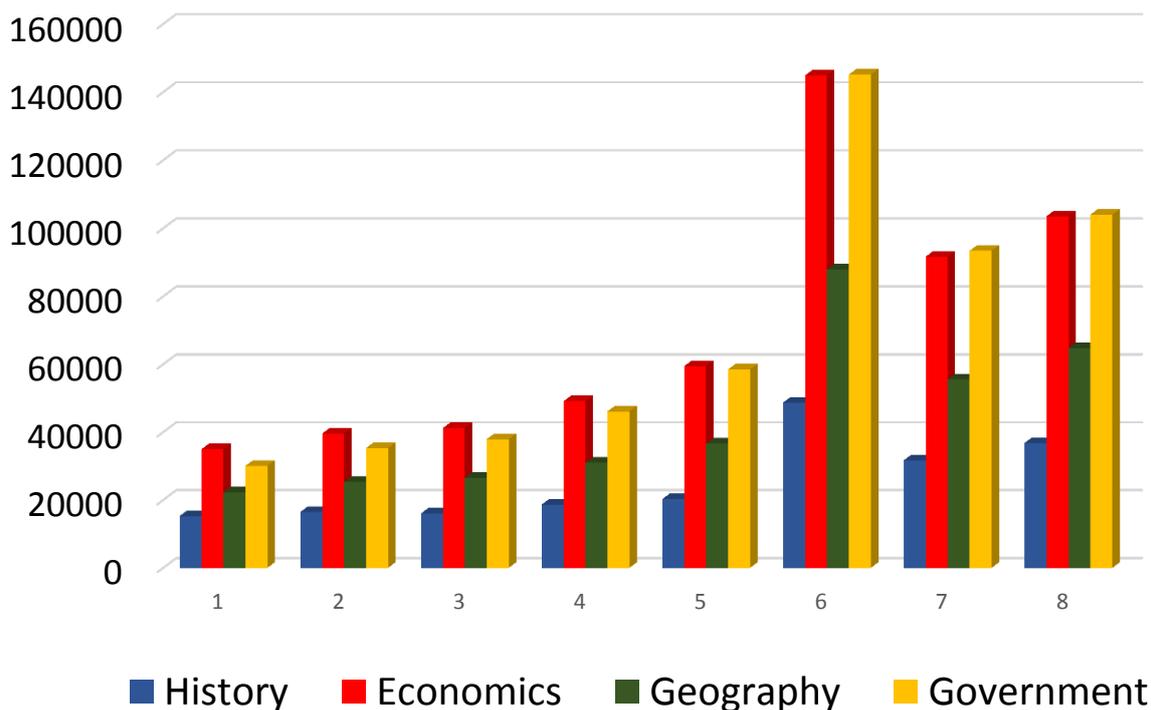


Figure 1.

It is quite obvious that History is losing its place in the Ghanaian educational system as compared to other subjects such as Geography, Economics and Government. Various explanations have been offered for the sharp decline in the study of History not only in Ghana but the world over. In the United Kingdom for instance, the 2004/5 Annual Report of the Chief Inspector of schools indicates that History is playing a marginal role in the wider curriculum as schools prefer to give more attention to literacy, numeracy and vocational subjects. As a result, history is seen as less important and irrelevant to the students' future aspirations.

According to Phillips (2000), most governments have instituted policies to undermine the teaching and learning of history in the school curricula because history relates to the issues of power, values and cultural transmission. This is because of the potential nature of history to shape the minds of people. As indicated by Orwell (1984), 'he who controls the past, controls the future'. Tosh (1984) intimates that school history has always been seen as a political battleground because the 'sanction of the past' is useful for 'upholders and subverters of authority'. The way history is taught and learned impacts on how young people will view their own identity and most importantly, their country's identity.

Adey and Biddulph (2001) argued that most History teachers in the UK reported that parents had differing views on the worth of pursuing History beyond KS3, with some replicating the commonly held pupils' view that it was not useful unless you wanted to be a History teacher or an archaeologist. Harris and Haydn (2006) further argued that despite the protracted debate concerning the purpose and nature of History as a school subject which has taken place in the public domain in the UK, the rationale for school History, and, more importantly, the utility of the subject, has not been transmitted in a meaningful way to the young people obliged to study the subject. Unsurprisingly, Arthur and Philips (2000) maintains that most students see history together with mathematics and physics as being "more difficult than average" and indicate that the subject has one of the highest entry requirements at the university.

In addition, the Ofsted Annual Report (2011) found from their survey in the United Kingdom that majority of the teachers who taught history had minimum training in the pedagogies for teaching history. The report further painted a stark picture on the Continuous Professional Development programme organised for teachers. This means that the number of specialist history teachers affects the implementation of the subject. This would obviously affect students' interest in the subject – hence, academic performance.

In Ghana, Dwarko (2007) attributes the decline in the study of history to that the changing nature of the 21st century which has shifted the interest and attention to the so-called utilitarian, job-oriented, practical subjects such as science, business and Information and Communication Technology. In support, Owusu-Ansah (2011) maintains that certain factors that influence the learning of the subject, the benefits of studying the subject, parental involvement and motivation to students in studying the subject, job prospects for History graduates and the challenges that students face in learning contributes to the decline in popularity of the subject. Although there may be myriad problems facing the teaching of history in Ghana, the two major issues I have

realised in my years of history education first, balls down to the promotion of the substantive knowledge at the expense of procedural knowledge in history education. Both academics and high school history teachers, more importantly, have focused their teaching of history on indoctrinating students on contents at the expense of more intriguing and exciting ways that encourage students to think historically or interpret history from evidence available and not only on textbooks usage.

Secondly, there a lot of teachers in Ghana who focus their instructions on collective memory/persistent instruction or teach by telling. By this approach, teachers in the history classroom act as sage on stage trying to socialise students with the past. Teachers of this nature try as much of possible to focus their lesson on contents that are of interest to them. They do so by showing in their classroom that they are astute fun of that historical actor. Even though, that is not the problem, the problem lies in making students produce answers or give an accurate response to the historical incident as narrated by their teacher. The result has made students disliking history courses and finding them moribund because history is presented as *faitacompli*. Added to this, these students end up becoming cognitively helpless whenever they encounter conflicting historical accounts because they lack the tools and criteria in judging among them.

Moreover, inadequate excursions to historical sites account for the decline in popularity of the subject. The teaching and learning of history cannot be complete without visiting some important historical sites. Students are taught about important personalities like Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, W.E.B. Dubois and others and yet they never get the opportunity to visit their respective mausoleums. Again, Students rarely visit important places like the forts and castles which were associated with the arrival of the Europeans as well as keen archaeological sites even though they are taught. This does not only add to the boredom nature of the subject, but it also makes the grasping of some historical facts difficult for students. Lastly, the history syllabus is overly lengthy. Whiles teachers struggle to complete the syllables, students always run against time to finish learning before their final exams. This does not attract students to pursue the subject for fear they may not excel in it.

The Way Forward

In order to resuscitate the place of history in the Ghanaian curriculum, the following measures have been proposed:

The Role of the Government

The study of science and technology can only complement the study of humanities. To advocate that studies in the science and technology should be pursued to the relative neglect of the humanities and social sciences is to express appetite for the materialism which technology creates rapidly, but without regard for the organic growth and stability of the society. Every one of us including the scientist and technologist has to be a citizen without the socialising influence of training in the humanities, the aggregation that we represent as citizens cannot properly be called a nation. A nation that lacks self-identity which is structurally incoherent cannot be strong whatever its wealth and the amount of gadgetry at its disposal (Fadeye, 1986).

Teachers' Role

Teachers should familiarise themselves with fresh approaches to teaching the subject and assessing pupils' historical knowledge and understanding. Teachers need to develop further- their awareness of historical concepts and ways of working before they can fully implement the history curriculum. Teachers need to generate possibilities to discuss what to do with a degree in history. Law school and teaching are not the only choices, nor are they even the main choices for our learners. They must be able to market the subject to prospective students and their parents in ways they haven't had before. In terms of methodology, history teachers need to understand that in the implementation of the history curriculum, there are two approaches teachers can adopt. These are the investigative approach and the narrative approach. The use of the narrative approach is when teachers make their students acquire that narrative and repeat the details on command. Exercising this effort means pressing on the storyline, imploring students to read and consume the textbook, reinforcing those details in class each day, and assessing possession of them at the end of the unit (Darling-Hammond, 2015). In such instances, the students may feel stimulated listening to the verbal nuances and dramatic flourishes of the teachers (VanSledright, 2002). In this approach, students will regularly vote such teachers as their best teachers and clamour to always get them in their class. However, with such approach students can occasionally be heard complaining about how tests are difficult in history because teachers are so picky about details, especially trued with regard to the 40-item multiple-choice exam questions at the end term. The teachers, on the other hand, would complain that students do not do as well as he would like them to on the test. Teachers may wonder why the memories of their students are so thin, especially, since the stories from the students may look thin and invalid as compared to what they may have listened to from their teachers during lessons (VanSledright, 2002).

The use of the investigate approach, on the other hand, ensures that students can build arguments relying on such evidence-based claims. This method informs students how historical accounts are written, a practice that characterises activity in the discipline of history. Students then get a turn to write their own. Students are also assessed primarily on their capacity to build evidenced-based account and demonstrate budding prowess in citing sources (VanSledright, 2002). This approach, therefore, allows teachers to supply students with several excerpted source documents, often containing conflicting perspectives or otherwise discrepant accounts. Teachers then pose an investigative question. Drawing from the accounts and citing them as evidence, students are to craft an argument that stakes out a position vis-à-vis that question. Questions are often provocative, but they can generate a feeling of false dichotomy, so learners are free to stake out intermediate positions as soon as they are properly defending their position with documentary evidence. Students can sometimes quote sources beyond those given on the test as this is acceptable and encouraged, but it is necessary to identify such sources. Although the research strategy focuses the attention of learners on complicated and investigative problems, learners may do better than the narrative method.

Despite students getting somewhat better grades on average and finding the investigative approach engaging, they will often grumble about how hard history is, how much work and writing they will have to do to succeed. In private moments, though, a number of them will concede that they learn much, find the investigative approach engaging, and believe that they develop a much deeper understanding of history through the teachers' efforts. The use of the investigative approach makes the classroom functions frequently like a history seminar in which participants' debate ideas, cites evidentiary support for their positions, dispute others' claims, and, in the end, agree to disagree. VanSledright, (2002) has shown that students learn best when they are acting as inquirers, pursuing into evidence questions that grow out of their own lives.

Assessment task must also be built around sources, which is a common approach in historical literacy. The scoring rubric must focus more on procedural components which hinges on four categories:

1. Staking out a position and argues it effectively;
2. Defending position by clearly citing evidence from documentary sources;
3. Showing evidence of having assessed the reliability of sources; and
4. Demonstrates understanding of (events, persons, and ideas) by displaying the capacity to reason within the historical context. (see APPENDIX A)

Lastly, History teachers need to demonstrate that their subject is 'relevant' and forms an integral part of the values, aims, and purposes of the school curriculum. A fundamental strategy is to try to ensure that the students are very clear about the importance or significance of what they study in history and how this contributes to their general education, in the same way that a core curriculum subject does. There is a strong case for history teachers to be more pro-active in selling not just the content of history but the varied and extensive educational outcomes that can arise from the study of people in the past and the significance of what they did. Husbands (1996) postulates that students must see the relevance and importance of the subject to their own lives. To him, therefore, if students cannot explain why some historical periods and events have a significance and resonance for them, then knowing about the past is reduced to a sort of quiz game. Emphasizing significance in the teaching of history, therefore, encourages students to develop their understanding of human actions and motives as well as the attitudes and the ideas that gave rise to such actions.

The State and Its Institutions

The state together with its subsidiary agencies have specific roles to be in order to surmount the dwindling nature of history in pre-tertiary institutions. For instance, if students are to achieve higher standards of learning, teachers would need to be equipped with more knowledge to facilitate their growth. Deeper knowledge of subject matter and reconceptualised teaching practices are two key domains that have captured the attention of the systemic reformers in history. Teacher education programmes need an infusion of new ideas, new knowledge, and a different approach to the training of student-teachers.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment should ensure that greater attention is placed on historical concepts such as chronology, significance, similarities and differences and cause and effect through the use of sources to enhance the development of subject specific competencies. Thus, students should be taught to assess the significance of the main events, people and changes being studied through the history curriculum. The understanding and use of key concepts such as change, causation and empathy in history would help to underline how historical changes and continuities have events, social, political, economic developments in history. When a student recall of specific detail diminishes, it is the understanding that comes from conclusions about the significance of events, people and changes that creates the eventual educational value.

Periodic refresher programmes must be held for history teachers by the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service. This should be intended to introduce them to new methods of teaching the subject and how they can make it more interesting and attractive to students. This will help reduce the conservative nature of the teachers. There is also the need to institute a national history quiz and peg it at the level of the national maths and science quiz. This will encourage more students to pursue the subject.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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APPENDIX A

CONTENT STANDARD: B4.2.1.1. Show understanding some of the factors that led to the rise, expansion and decline of one major kingdom

INDICATOR: B4.2.1.1.1 Describe how one major Kingdom was formed and the reasons behind its expansion. (extracted from the new **History of Ghana Curriculum**)

What will you consider as the factors leading to the rise of the Asante Kingdom?

Study the background information and sources carefully, and then answer all the questions

Background Information

The Asante was one of the powerful kingdoms before the Europeans arrived in Ghana. They had a lot of wealth and their kings were very powerful. Before Asante united as a kingdom, they were just separate groups. The separate groups were controlled by Denkyira, another powerful kingdom. Scholars have over the years debated on the main factors that made Asante a powerful kingdom. Considering the following sources, which would you consider the most important factor that led to the rise of the Asante.

SOURCE A

That situation changed when Osei Tutu, the Asantehene (paramount chief) of Ashanti from 1701 to 1717, and his priest Komfo Anokye, unified the independent chiefdoms into the most powerful political and military state in the coastal region. The Asantehene organized the Asante union, an alliance of Akan-speaking people who were now loyal to his central authority. The Asantehene made Kumasi the capital of the new empire. He also created a constitution, reorganized and centralized the military, and created a new cultural festival, Odwira, which symbolized the new union. Most importantly, he created the Golden Stool, which he argued represented the ancestors of all the Ashanti. Upon that Stool Osei Tutu legitimized his rule and that of the royal dynasty that followed him.

Quintana Ph. D., M. (2010, January 11) Ashanti Empire/ Asante Kingdom (18th to late 19th century). Retrieved from <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/ashanti-empire-asante-kingdom-18th-late-19th-century/>

Source B

Since at least 1600, small weights in brass and bronze were used to weight gold dust and nuggets. The royal court had the most elaborate store of weights, while commoners often had about a dozen. Their imagery falls into two broad categories: geometric and representational. The latter often refers to proverbs, which used judiciously, marked a wise person.

SOURCE C



Unknown author

A Painting by an unknown author

Now answer **all** the questions. You may use any of the sources to help you answer the questions, in addition to those sources which you are told to use. In answering the questions, you should use your knowledge of the topic to help you interpret and evaluate the sources.

1. Study Sources A and B.

How different are these two sources? Explain your answer using details of the sources and your knowledge in the history of Ghana.

2. Study Source C

Describe what you see in the painting using details of the source and your knowledge in the history of Ghana.

3. Study **all** the sources

(a) What is the central theme in each source?

(b) What will you consider the most important factor for the rise of the Asante Kingdom?

(c) Which source supports your answer in (b) above

Marking scheme

1. Stakes out a position and argues it effectively [4]

2. Defends position by clearly citing evidence from documentary sources [3]

3. Shows evidence of having assessed the reliability of sources [2]

4. Demonstrates understanding of (events, persons, and ideas) by displaying the capacity to reason within the historical context.

Level 5	Compares big messages	[7]
Level 4	Agreement and disagreement of detail or sub-messages	[5-6]
Level 3	Agreement or disagreement of detail or sub-messages	[3-4]
Level 2	Identifies information that is in one source but not in the other or states that the sources are about the same subject OR Compares the origin of the sources	[2]
Level 1	Writes about sources but fails to address the question	[1]
Level 0	No evidence submitted or response does not address the question	[0]