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Ghanaian Teachers' Perspectives on Implementation of the Free Senior High School Policy

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Abstract:

This study explored Ghanaian teachers' views on the implementation of the free senior high school Policy in the Effutu Municipality and Gomoa East District of Ghana. Using the public policy implementation theory, the study employed sequential explanatory design. Questionnaires and interviews guide were administered to five head teachers and 125 teachers using purposive and simple random sampling procedures. Teachers stated that the implementation of free senior high school (SHS) policy has ensured equal access and participation by all students to different categories of Ghanaian senior high schools. Secondly, the policy had increased students' enrolments, and reduced financial burden on parents. On the contrary, teachers believed that the implementation of the free SHS policy did not adequately seek stakeholder perspectives; insufficient logistics to accommodate increased students' enrolments; teacher workload due to large class sizes with ramification for education quality in the Gomoa East District. The study recommended that the Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service should engage head teachers and teachers to successfully implement the free SHS policy. Indeed, government could consider cost sharing approach where certain bills are paid by parents and wards of students.

Keywords: Free senior high school; basic education in Ghana, public policy implementation theory

1. Introduction

Education is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character, or physical ability of an individual. It is the process by which the society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills, and values from one generation to another (Agyare, (2018). Access to education is recognized as a basic, and an enshrined right in both the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (King & McGrath, 2002). According to Mansaray(2001), the rapid development of African societies is largely dependent on the extent to which appropriate education is made available to as many people as possible. Education is also seen as an investment in a country's future and can equip people with particular competencies and attitudes; it can transfer wisdom, expectations, and ways of thinking and discipline to the next generation (Semali, 2007).

The government of Ghana since independence regards education as a fundamental human right for all her citizens and has enshrined this in the 1961 Education Act. The 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana reaffirms education as a basic human right for all Ghanaian children. Article 38 (2) states: "The government shall within two years after parliament first meets after coming into force of this constitution draw up a program for the implementation within the following ten years for the provision of a free, compulsory, universal basic education" (The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, 1992). The Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) program was introduced in 1996 that aims at increasing educational access to all children.

In Ghana, second-cycle education is recognized as critical to the country's quest to develop at a faster rate because it is the most accessible form of higher education today with greater potential of sustaining higher levels of literacy, increasing political awareness, strengthening democracy and producing a pool of middle-level manpower crucial to national development (Quist, 2003). Successive governments in the country have therefore, made efforts to devise strategies of improving quality delivery of education through policy formulation and implementation and better still constituting committees to review or reform the educational system in the country to give it a face lift (Ankomah et al, 2005). In most contemporary educational systems of the world, secondary school education comprises the formal education that occurs during adolescence. It is characterized by transition from primary education, to tertiary, "postsecondary", or "higher" education (UNESCO, 2001). Dropping out of school is one of the most serious and pervasive problems facing education programs (Cobb and Johnson, 1997; Thurlow and Johnson, 2000). Lockheed (1991) states that educational systems in developing countries are inherently inefficient due to among other reasons a low budgetary allocation which lowers the quality and quantity of inputs, especially physical infrastructure such as classrooms, workshops, laboratories and learning materials. The World Bank (2005) describes secondary education as the crucial link between primary schooling, tertiary education, and the labour market.

Addressing the inherent inefficiencies, educational policy makers had attempted to relabel the Ghana's school system. For instance, the pre-tertiary education in Ghana consists of 6-year primary, 3-year junior secondary school (JSS), and 3-year senior secondary school (SSS) education. Since the 2007 Education Reform, 3-year Senior Secondary Education (SSS) has been extended to four years, and the names; JSS and SSS were also changed to become Junior High School (JHS) and Senior High School (SHS). But the 4-years SHS was reverted to the 3-year SHS in 2008 upon a change in government. But the change was not solely due to political reasons, but because of a lack of facilities in the Senior High Schools to run for four years.

In 2004, the Ghana Government introduced the Capitation Grant and the School Feeding Program in Ghanaian basic schools as a means of meeting Goals 1 and 2 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These policies abolished payment of levies to run the schools and provide free feeding for vulnerable children in primary schools. The policies aim at reinforcing the existing FCUBE policy of attracting and retaining children in Ghanaian schools with donor support (UNICEF, World Bank, 2009). Indeed, the government has added another dimension of changing the school uniforms of the Junior Secondary School students in order for them to receive the psychological boost that really they are in the Secondary School. However, the Ghanaian Government has been widely criticized for the implementation of the free SHS policy that there were no consultations with relevant stakeholders. Others were also of the view that the current economic challenges in Ghana might not support funding of such a policy. Some teacher unions have also complained that the free SHS policy will further reduce quality of education. UNESCO (2005) has recommended that quality education should not only be made universally available but also more relevant to the socioeconomic needs of nations. Rose (2007) argues that since 'the state has been unable to fulfil its role in extending access of appropriate quality to all children in the context of the Education for All (EFA)', the role of non-state providers which deliver services to the 'under-served' is being considered.

2. Statement of the Problem

In fact, issues of cost sharing in schools have been considered in various fora yet results appear to be inconclusive. Many people admit that government alone cannot shoulder the responsibility of education in the country. Stakeholders of education for example civil society organizations, churches, traditional leaders, non-governmental organizations members of parliament, board of directors and PTAs in basic and second cycle institutions or schools play important functions to give quality education to Ghanaian children as a constitutional right (World Bank 2005).

The implementation of the Free SHS educational policy in Ghana is one of the policies with long term benefits geared towards an improvement in the human capital base of the country. Within all Sub-Sahara African countries that have implemented free education, the challenging issues of enrolment and quality have become a major issue (Arthur Dickson, 2011). In Ghana, the introduction of the Free SHS policy in September, 2017 resulted in an increase in enrolment by 33.2% (GoG Budget, 2018). Civil Society Organizations especially the Institute for Education Studies (and other bodies in the education sector have prompted government on the impending challenges as enrolment continues to increase in our secondary schools. The Ministry of Education had projected an additional enrolment of 181,993 pupils into SHS in 2018 into (MoE, 2018). Under the Free Senior High School policy, there is free tuition, no admission fees, no library fees, no science centre fees, no computer lab fees, no examination fees, no utility fees, free textbooks, free boarding and free meals, and day students get a meal at school for free. The free SHS education policy aims at creating a more literate society and to make education easily accessible to all. Recent studies indicate that the challenges related to introduction of free secondary education (FSE) include management of staff personnel, pupils, school finances, physical and material resources, the curriculum, and school-community relations (Boatman and Long, 2016; Dynarski & Scott-Garlick, 2013 & Melguizo, 2011). Some reviewers had asserted that the implementation of free Senior High School policy appears to be impeded by many challenges such as inadequate classroom block and accommodation, inadequate teachers and teaching and learning materials (Obeng, 2012). The goal of this study was to explore the perceptions of head teachers and teachers about the implementation of free SHS policy and its educational implication to school administration and management. Indeed, such challenges if not dealt with, coupled with the alarming proportion of students, who are likely to enter this system, is more likely to compound the Government's problem. Hence, conducting such a study would lay bare such challenges and propose ways of addressing them. Consequently, the current study sought to answer two overarching questions:

- What are the perceptions of head teachers and teachers about the implementation of the free Senior High School system in Ghana?
- What are the school administrative and managerial challenges head teachers and teachers encounter in the implementation of the free Senior High School system in Ghana?

3. Related Literature

3.1. Policy Implementation Theory

Some decades ago, Lasswell, (1958) explored the association between government decision-making and policy formulation. Anderson (2014) took a much narrower approach to the definition of policy, stating that policy is "a purposive course of action or inaction undertaken by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern" (p. 5). According to Anderson, policy is a deliberate decision to take action or not to take action determined by the government in response to a perceived problem. More recently, Ball (2012) described policy as a series of statements related to future actions that have emerged from perceptions of the way things are. To clarify, Ball framed his conceptualisation of policy on the notion that it operates as a document that gives legitimacy to visions and privileges

particular courses of action. In addition, Peters (2013) referred to policy as “the sum of government activities, whether acting directly or through agents, as it has an influence on the life of citizens. The implementers of the Ghanaian free junior high school policy had reviewed the financial burden on parents (MoE, 2018). Consequently, the current study adopted the policy implementation theory to examine stakeholders’ perspectives on the free SHS policy implementation. Policy implementation theory is concerned with the way in which governments enact policies (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003; O’Toole et al., 2000). Thus, policy implementation is recognised in the literature as the way in which governments use policy tools or instruments to achieve the intended policy goals (Videc et al., 1998). Hood (1986) categorised the theory into four areas: government authority; information held by the government; government finances; and the formal organisations available to governments. Formal organisations are most commonly used to implement government policies (Leman, 2002). A government directly delivers goods or services to various sectors like the education sector through government employees with funding from treasury (Devas et al., 2001). In turn, the outcome of the implementation process is evaluated in terms of its effectiveness and efficiency in regard to the effect on the problem to which the policy decision was addressed (Birkland, 2005).

According to the authors, policy implementation must be conceptualised as a highly variable process, which takes different shapes and forms in different cultures and institutional settings. As such, Paudel (2009) defined implementation as the process of “carrying out, accomplishing, fulfilling, producing or completing a given task” (p. 36). Paudel (2009) drew on the policy implementation theory as an interactive process between goal setting and action taking by relevant stakeholders. Paudel argued that policy implementation is primarily about the transformation of decisions into operational processes to achieve the changes defined in the decisions.

From a more practical perspective, Paudel (2009) also outlined the elements required for successful policy implementation: clearly defined objectives; the development of a management plan that includes explicit tasks and performance standards; a method for making accurate and objective measurements of performance; and compliance with relevant statutes and legislation. As such, implementation is fundamentally about a process and outcome. That involves decisions and actions undertaken to put into effect an authoritative decision in a timely and satisfactorily.

Education policy implementation is a multifaceted, evolving process that implicates many stakeholders and sometimes results in catastrophe if not well focused. Unarguably, a whole array of factors can inhibit policy implementation process and make it ineffective. For instance, unclear definition of policies; a lack of stakeholder engagements, and resource constraints. In the views of Burns, Köster, and Fuster, (2016) challenges at implementing education policy include co-ordination issues, inadequacy of organisational resources, and actors’ capacity or reactions against reforms. The education sector has become more complex, the challenges of putting change into practice have also evolved. Education stakeholders are becoming more conscious, diverse, and more vocal and ambitious about what education systems should look like. McLaughlin (1987) proposed that if policy makers and stakeholders want effective policies for quality education, they need common understanding and be able to work together on the process. Studying education policy implementation is therefore closely linked with understanding what determines education systems’ ability and actors’ willingness to engage and change. Moreover, these change processes take place in education systems that are progressively more complex, and require more elaborate strategies than the traditional top-down policy making (OECD, 2016). Fascinatingly, Barnes (1985) reported that after the initial years of teaching, teachers had a tendency to reject policy changes in education. Within the context of McLaughlin’s advice, the current study explored stakeholders’ views on the implementation of the Ghana’s free SHS policy.

The free senior high school education policy is implemented by Ghana Education Service school administrators, head teachers and teachers thus making them central to the implementation process these various stakeholders contribute to shaping the process and the outcomes of policy implementation.

4. Methodology

This research explored the implementation of the free senior high school policy in Ghana; specifically, in the Effutu Municipality and Gomoa East District of Ghana. This section outlines the research design, sample, instrumentation, and data analysis techniques.

4.1. Research Design, Sample, and Instrumentation

The study employed the sequential explanatory mixed method (SEMM) design. According to Creswell (2012), SEMM is a two-phase approach to data collection where quantitative data is first collected and follow up with interview. The researcher used the survey as a baseline data whereas face-to-face interview triangulated the quantitative data. The population of this research consist of all head teachers and teachers within the Effutu Municipality and Gomoa East District of Ghana. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 130 participants comprised five (5) head teachers and 125 teachers for the study.

4.2. Data Collection Procedure and Analysis

The instruments were given to colleague lecturers and experts in the area of educational administration for them to grant face and content validity respectively. The test and re-test method was used to determine the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire at an interval of one month between the first and second administration. This produced reliability coefficient (r) of 0.82; indicating that the questionnaire items had attained a good internal consistencies; hence, highly reliable. Frequencies and percentages were employed to answer the research questions whilst thematic analysis approach was adopted for the interview data.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

- Research Question 1: Perceptions of head Teachers and Teachers about the Implementation of the Free Senior High School System in Ghana

This question sought to measure teachers' perceptions on the implementation of the free senior high school policy in Ghana. Using multiple response items, Figure 1 shows that senior high schoolteachers' score on six factors on the implementation of the free senior high school policy in Ghana. Unanimously, teachers agreed that the free senior high school policy was good (n = 110); improved students' access to SHS education (n = 108); equal access to different categories of SHS (n = 111); reduced financial burden on parents and guardians (n = 110); and increased in students enrolment (n = 116). Even though respondents overwhelmingly endorsed the introduction of the free senior high policy, 102 of them expressed reservation that wider stakeholders' consultations preceded the introduction of the policy (Figure 1).

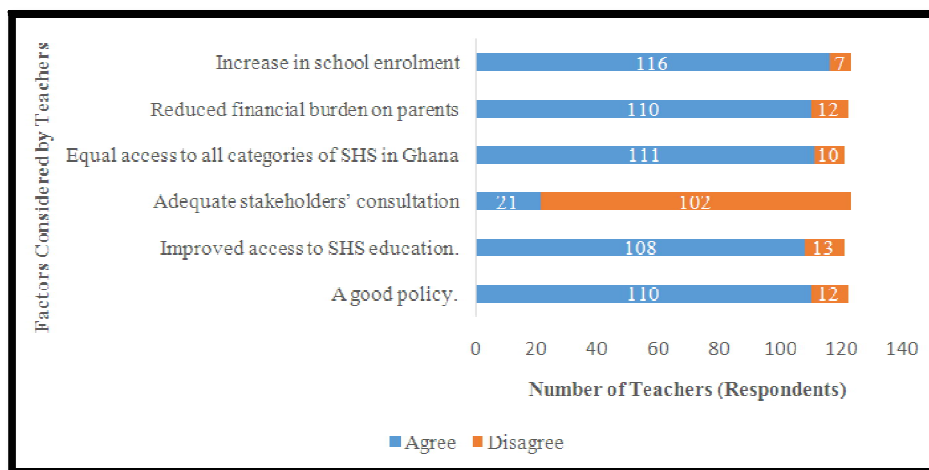


Figure 1 : Teachers' Views on the Implementation of the Free Senior High School

Thematic analysis of head teachers' views on the free senior high school policy had revealed similar trends as observed in Figure 1. For instance, a Head Teacher 3 stated, "This policy is beneficial as it allows every Ghanaian student who has completed his or her Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) to further his or her senior high school with ease." Head Teacher 2 commenting said:

"I commend the free Senior High School policy. It will increase Ghana's literacy rate."

Another view had it that the policy was likely to curtail the perceived bribery associated with senior high school admission. Head Teacher 1 reported, "It has also thwart their efforts to receive bribes, some headmasters and headmistresses take before offering admission to some students." Some head teachers had to deal with increasing students' numbers to their schools as one narrated.

"I have to inform my various assistants to come as a team to divide the dining session of students into two sessions because the first- year student's enrolment has increased by almost 55%". (Headteacher 5). Indeed, other commentators enumerated the financial benefits likely to accrue to parents due to the introduction of the SHS policy. A head teacher believed that

"Parents will not need to think much when my younger brothers complete Junior High School". (Teacher 10). Even head teachers acclaimed that the policy might inure to their benefits in /education of the children and wards as stated "My two children at junior high school are now motivated because they know that they shall have access to senior high school of their choice for free". (Head Teacher 4). Similarly, Head Teacher 1 shared, "I was able to allow my daughter to attend the university this year because her twin siblings who just completed Junior High School are enjoying the free Senior High School policy." (Head Teacher1). Similar findings from Kenya showed that free senior secondary education witnessed increased students' enrolment with resource constraints (Onyango, 2001).

Studies from other jurisdictions have shown that poor parents were able to educate their children because due to the introduction to a free senior high school policy (Boatman & Long, 2016; Dynarski & Scott- Garlick, 2013 & Melguizo, 2011).

- Research Question 2: Implementation Challenges of the free senior high school system in Ghana

This question sought to identify from the respondents what administrative and managerial challenges that confronted the free senior high school implementation in the study area. In Figure 2, the results showed that 96% (n = 118) of respondents (teachers) were concerned about poor grades of first year students. Indeed, 92% (n = 112) of teachers agreed that the free senior high school programme was faced with high student/teacher ratio. Respondents (n = 98) were also unanimous in their views that the free senior high school policy lack adequate infrastructure to accommodate students; increasing pressure on existing school facilities; whilst the schools lack adequate funding to procure consumables for students. Figure 2

| Free SHS Implementation Challenges | Agree | % Agree | Disagree | % Disagree | total |
|---|-------|---------|----------|------------|-------|
| Inadequate Infrastructure | 98 | 81 | 23 | 19 | 121 |
| Pressure on school facilities | 108 | 91 | 11 | 9 | 119 |
| Adequate funding by government | 20 | 17 | 99 | 83 | 119 |
| Poor grades have been admitted | 118 | 96 | 5 | 4 | 123 |
| High student/teacher ratio | 112 | 92 | 10 | 8 | 122 |
| Adequate provision of teaching and learning materials | 25 | 21 | 95 | 79 | 120 |

Table 1

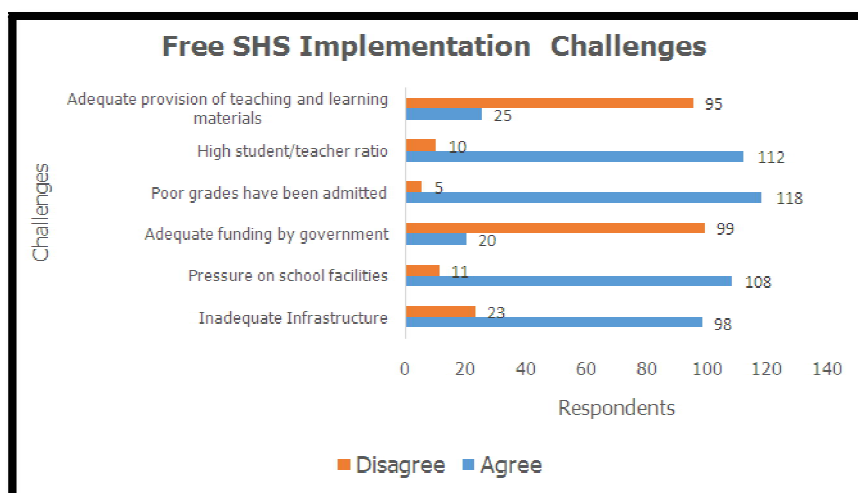


Figure 2: Challenges Facing the Implementation of the Free SHS

Anecdotal evidence from head teachers in the study aligned with the count data in Figure 2. As illustration, Teacher 4 shared his views on inadequate school facilities for students' practical works that "Science teachers have to divide students [first year students] into groups during practical lessons". Teacher 3 collaborated the story on inadequate school facilities; specifically, availability of classrooms in a claim, "At my school, the classrooms are fully occupied especially General Art classes". (Teacher 3 continued, "We have to negotiate with parents of children who hail from the town and its nearby outskirts [communities] for their wards to be day students due to inadequate infrastructure [boarding facilities].") Computer lessons were also affected by inadequate space for pupils during practical as demonstrated here; "The librarian and Information Communication and Technology (ICT) teachers complained to me that, the numbers are too many with pressure each day at the library and the computer laboratory." (Headteacher 4)

Pressure on utilities such as water and electricity were some of the concerns shared by head teachers. Recounting, Teacher 5, a headmaster of a boarding school had this to say, "When there is shortage of water as a result of electricity go, the only bore-hole we have at the school can be occupied by students from dawn to dusk."

Headteacher 2 expressed similar concern "indeed, dealing with such astronomical numbers trooping to school continuously pose a scare for meeting their demands.....with only one administrative staff by my door you should know that having administrative challenge is an understatement"

These finding appears to be in consonance with Bell and Rhodes (1996) who noted that school facilities such as administrative office, staff rooms and offices, classrooms, laboratories, equipment, stores libraries, hostels, staff houses are put on pressure when school enrolment increases. The study recommended the need for employment of more teachers to boost student/teacher ratio, and to provide more funds to head teachers of the free SHS programme.

Other studies also found funding to be useful in improving the academic performance of students. These studies are Denny et al. (2014) Moussa et al. 2015 Natasha et al. (2011) and Tatiana et al. (2016). Most of these studies showed a positive relationship between funding and quality education.

An interesting scenario occurred as most of the teachers felt that parents needed to contribute to the cost in order to support the government's effort at introducing this Free SHS policy. The researcher sees this as interesting because this was not the main focus of the study yet most teachers commented on the issue of cost sharing. For example, a teacher commented: "I don't understand why should, the government alone shoulder the burden of providing for every SHS students, when this used to be the burden of parents. Indeed, parents should contribute their widows might to support such a good idea from the government" Teacher, 7.

Another teacher had this to say in respect to cost sharing: i am tempted to say we Ghanaians are not supportive enough to this bold attempt by our president. We the parents including myself should support the policy by paying for our children feeding because if the students come home we feed them morning till evening so why are we pushing all the cost the government" Teacher 6. This makes the researcher believes that sharing the cost of educating students at the secondary school level is more likely to receive a favourable response from parents and other stake holders.

6. Conclusions

The study has implications for secondary school heads, teachers, and the Ghana Education Service. Based on the findings that the level of head teacher and teacher consultation regarding educational policy development was low, the Ministry of education (MOE) and Ghana Education Service (GES) must create a platform to involve teachers in setting out educational policies since they are the key implementers. Ghana has implemented Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) as well as free Senior High School policies. This has resulted in an increase in school enrolment at both the basic and secondary level. Consequently, the government of Ghana must deal with issues of funding, provision of teaching and learning materials, equity, access and participation to ensure quality education. This study also concludes that, the Government of Ghana has taken some financial burden off parents through the implementation of the free Senior High School policies.

7. Recommendations

In view of the above findings and conclusions, the study makes the following recommendations:

The study strongly recommends that, policy makers should strategically involve head teachers and teachers in the development of educational policies. It is recommended that, educational policy makers (MOE and GES) should develop policies to enhance effective flow of information from top (MOE and GES) as well as from the various Metropolitans, Municipals and District Educational Directorates to the various schools. Government should also ensure adequate provision of resources and logistics for successful implementation of its policies.

In addition, parents should also be made to contribute some amount towards the education of their wards. Finally, it is imperative that future studies of this nature should consider investigating the issue of cost sharing among stakeholders of Education on the Free SHS policy.

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