

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FREE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL POLICY IN GHANA: FIVE YEARS ON; MAJOR BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES.

ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the study was to explore the inherent benefits and challenges regarding the implementation of the free Senior High School policy in Ghana and how it is affecting teaching and learning in Senior High Schools in the Effutu Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. The target population for the study were leadership of school heads within the Effutu Municipality. A qualitative research approach and a case study design was employed. Purposive sampling technique was used to select five head teachers. Semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data for the study. Thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the data. It was discovered through the respondents' comments that the policy is a very good initiative, has led to increase school population, reduced financial burden on parents and payment of intervention allowance to teachers. Findings also indicate that inadequate infrastructure, inadequate funding from government, unstable school calendar and increase in teachers' workload were means by which implementation of the policy has affected teaching and learning. Therefore, the Ghana Education Service should consider this paper as means of reviewing and revising the free Senior High School policy five years after its implementation taking into consideration key findings and recommendations of the study. Government should consider cost sharing with parents to ease pressure on its revenue since the policy is taking a substantial part of government's budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Education. In addition, the government should increase the intervention allowance for teachers and pay it regularly in order to motivate teachers likewise seeking financial support from international donor agencies and other local financial institutions to provide adequate infrastructure in all schools.

Keywords: implementation, free senior high school policy, benefits and challenges

INTRODUCTION

Globally, education is an investment as well as an instrument that can be used to achieve more rapid economic, social, political, technological, scientific, and cultural development in the

country. Education promotes the development of the right citizenship as a basis for effective participation and contribution to the life of the society. It also assists in developing the individual's ability to adapt to changing environments and inculcating character and moral training and the development of sound mind (Day & Sammons, 2016). Education, according to many authors, has been and will continue to be the potential cause of change in any society. Education is also meant to develop manpower for different levels of the economy which is an ultimate guarantee of national self-reliance. Hence from the formulation and clarification of purposeful education must emerge the realities of life, taking into account the entire scope of human life and at the same time, considering specific needs of the individual (Abdul-Rahaman, Rahaman, Ming, Ahmed, & Abdul-Rahaman, 2018).

Ghana's quest for development, satisfying its internal and external demands and positioning its citizenry to adequately participate/contribute enormously in global issues within a liberal world economic, among others has been one of the foremost driving forces behind its education which has constantly witnessed many reforms and policies since its inception. At the heart of most of these policies and reforms was the need to improve the standard/quality of education, increase enrolment, making access to education a fundamental right to all citizens etc.

For these prioritized national agenda to bind the then Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) government and for subsequent governments to give it the utmost accordance, it became a legislative instrument that is embodied by the letter and spirit of Chapter Six of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. Titled "The Directive Principles of State Policy," required the provision of quality education for all citizens within the school going age. It further emphasised under Article 38, Clause 2 that "Government shall, within two years after Parliament and the coming in force of the constitution to draw up a ten-year programme for the provision of free compulsory

and universal basic education (Manu, 2020). By this all Ghanaian school-going child should be ready for the then secondary or high school education.

The constitutional provision for Senior High level of education as enshrined at Article 38 Clause 3 is that “the State shall, subject to the availability of resources, provide (a) equal and balanced access to secondary and other appropriate pre-university education, equal access to university or equivalent education, with emphasis on science and technology” (p.34). Article 25 Clause 1 (B) of the same 1992 Constitution profess that “Secondary Education in its different forms, including technical and vocational education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular, by the progressive introduction of free education”.

Indeed, there has been tremendous efforts by subsequent/past governments towards the fulfilment of this constitutional mandate to increase access and equity in secondary education through various programmes and interventions like: Cocoa Board Scholarship, Merit Scholarships for Secondary Schools, Hardship Scholarships, Senior High School Subsidy, free secondary education for students from the north and its extraction and Progressively Free Education among others (Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019).

Absorption of about 320,488 day-students’ expenses in public Senior High Schools (SHS), and later extension to include 120,000 boarding students by 2015/16 academic year characterised the initial implementation of the progressive Free Senior High Education (FSHS). In 2017, Ghana became the pace setter within the West Africa sub-region to implement FSHS education as a fulfilment of a 2016 campaign promise made by the Nana Addo Danquah Akuffo Addo led New Patriotic Party (NPP) government. This saw the government paying all the required fees for the first year Senior High School students of the 2017/18 academic year numbering about 361,771 while providing subsidy for the continuing students (Essuman, 2019).

This led to a significant improvement in enrolment in subsequent academic years. An estimated 36% increase in enrolment was recorded at the commencement of the 2018/2019 academic year. The government was compelled to introduce the Double-Track system in about 400 schools (Essuman, 2019) to intervene on the deficits in accommodation, spaces for classrooms and teacher to student ratio. This led to the introduction of Green and Gold Track as a temporary measure to re-strategize and come out with a permanent solution. This temporary measure required students of the same academic level to come to school within specific periods for academic work while their counterparts were on break/vacation after which there were swaps. This development has generated a lot of discourses, debate and mixed reactions on its efficacies and quality of education it holds when compared to the pervious/regular system.

The discourse on quality and high standard of education especially under the Free Senior High School (FSHS) policy has led to a comparative study of Ghana's educational advancement which has countless times come under critical scrutiny. Not in any attempt to downplay similar ones that have occupied in the past which has led to various reforms. The significant success chalked by this policy by way of enrolment is however being dented with its implicated high rate of truancy, declining standards and quality, decadence in morals and discipline among others. Despite these concerns there is a fraction of Ghanaians who believe it's by far the best educational policy the pre-tertiary educational system has witnessed citing accessibility and enrolment as key indicators.

Statement of the Problem

The current inquiry comes on the backdrop of countless discourses which have suggested a clarion need for a holistic review of the Free SHS programme with much emphasis on standards/quality and other implicated issues. These calls have concurrently come from various

educational stakeholders, educational think tanks, concerned and well-meaning Ghanaians which include the Eduwatch West Africa, various teachers' unions in the country, Conference of Heads of Assisted Secondary Schools (CHASS), University Teachers Association Ghana (UTAG), the Clergy, traditional authority and other opinion leaders. Aside citing various classical cases nationwide in support of their claims ascendency of general indiscipline and physical attacks directed at authorities, there has been instances and yearly reports of poor and declining performances at the end of the West African Secondary Schools Examinations (WASSCE) conducted by West African Examinations Council.

There is a general scarcity of scholarly framework and literature for interested researchers. Rather unfortunately, most editorials and few available texts which suggested such enthusiasm tend to be either prejudiced with political propaganda or just a general information to the reader. Often than not, they are either popular opinions and over-reliant on official accounts, or take a literal reportage than a critical inquiry methodology. Currently most literature available on FSHS lacks that in-depth scholarship and less palpable details aside the over referencing of the chief examiners reports published by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) after its annual standardised West African Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WASSCE).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the inherent benefits and challenges regarding the implementation of the FSHS policy in Ghana and how it is affecting teaching and learning in SHS in Effutu Municipality.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. explore the benefit of the implementation of FSHS policy in Ghana as perceived by head teachers.
2. explore how the implementation of the FSHS is affecting teaching and learning in schools.

Research Questions

The following questions are formulated to guide the study:

1. How beneficial in the implementation of FSHS policy in Ghana?
2. How does the implementation of the FSHS affect teaching and learning in schools?

Significance of the Study

First, this study is significant because it will offer empirical evidence on the inherent benefits and challenges regarding the implementation of the FSHS policy in Ghana and how it is affecting teaching and learning in SHS in Effutu Municipality. Second, this study will be significant because it will go beyond anecdotal evidence or subjective observations and provide governments, parents, head teachers, teachers, school administrators and other stakeholders with qualitative evidence on some of the key issues affecting the implementation of the FSHS policy. Third with the Ghana Education Service's five years policy of reviewing and revising its literary contents by way of syllabi and other pedagogies, the new autonomous body, NaCCA formerly CRDD can consult this document as an important resource for future review due to its critical and comparative approaches. Finally, findings of the study can be used as a baseline by future researchers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Senior High Education in Ghana

At the zenith of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is the achievement of universal primary and secondary education. This championing rides on the back of the educational assertion that, graduating from the secondary level of education provides individuals with the requisite skills, knowledge and competencies to establish businesses, seek employment, and save to secure their future. Seemingly higher levels of education plausibly translate into improved intergenerational mobility and sustained poverty eradication. It's noteworthy that skills and knowledge acquisition as taught in institutions to students/youthful population (from age 15 onwards) is pivotal in economic development (World Bank, 2009). Hence the pursuit for universally accessible secondary and post-secondary education by most citizenry should be the ultimate priority of every government.

Ghana is still faced with an array of challenges in this sector, prominent among them include limited space for the ever-increasing admission/enrolment, insufficient infrastructure for SHS. The study of Mensa (2020), revealed that the FSHS policy is a good policy because it has ensured equal access and participation by all students to all categories of SHS in Ghana. The author also discovered that the policy resulted in increased enrolments in SHS and substantially reduced the financial burden on parents.

Challenges in the Implementation of Free SHS in Ghana

The process of Ghana's FSHS policy implementation was to consider a number of key issues. There include, the need for clearly specified tasks and objectives that accurately reflect the intent of the policy. The next is management plan that assigns tasks and performance standards to sub-

units. The third is the need for objective means of measuring sub-unit performances. Lastly, there need to be a system of management controls and social sanctions sufficient to hold subordinates accountable for their performance (Bonsu, 2019).

However, the processes of implementing the FSHS policy was rather characterised by high political influences and other implicated issues. This according to Bonsu (2019), this stem from situation where those with interest in the FSHS policy engage in negotiations over the goals of the policy and the conflict over the allocation of resources. This position agrees with Bell and Stevenson (2015). Bonsu (2019) purports that, the socio-political environment of the nation shapes the context within which policy is framed and enacted because they define the issues that can arise and the policy solutions offered. They shape and constrain actors' strategies as well as the implementation plan.

The inputs required for policy implementations ranges from politics, funding, technology and skills or expertise available to industry players, clearly define path for the policy, strategic guide, enabling environment for stakeholder consultation among others. It is however debatable that a section of these could be missing within the Ghanaian context of the implementation of the Free SHS policy. Thus, the implementation of the FSHS policy has encountered several challenges including critical ones that require keen attention of policymakers and governments.

Political expediency

At the heart of the challenges is the politicisation of the implementation of this policy. It was discovered in this study that the FSHS policy from the onset has been the political advantage of the NPP governments claim to power. This has affected the conventional process involve in rolling out such public and social policy (Bonsu, 2019). Though policy implementation

encompasses the functional and sector divisions of many institutions, the current government focused less in broader consultation and prior analysis of the policy. In instances of institutional placement of policies, ministries and departments share and compete for responsibilities and authority on the implementation. This results in duplication of effort, bureaucratic infighting, insufficient technical expertise in any single agency. Clear advices from the policymakers and “active participation of senior management (political leadership) as well as stakeholders through planning, are key to successful implementation of the FSHS policy (Bonsu, 2019). Policy implementation arrangement that suffers from political interference pose both the challenge of content and goal (Weaver, 2010).

The quest for political advantage from populist and social interventional policy is also shown by the government disregard for the fundamental needs of society such as the inability to address the challenges facing the basic education in Ghana to pursuing the policy. Although Ghanaians were enthused about the FSHS since it has eased the burden of the shoulders of parents, they also think there is the need to focus on the basic level where a lot of unresolved challenges exist. For instance, there are still countless schools under trees, while those with classroom blocks lack desks, textbooks among others. Hence the argument to rather channel energy into basic education to help produce students that will be enrolled on the policy on merits. However, driven by quest to sort political points, convenience and politicisation of issues, there has been a neglect on the calls for improvement and review of this novel policy.

Sustainable Funding and Infrastructural Challenges

It was evidential in other studies that financial constraints and infrastructural challenges ‘cripple’ effort of the implementing the FSHS policy. The inadequacy in infrastructural deficit and supply of logistics has been a major challenge. While supplies lament over delayed payment, heads of

schools also complain of no or delayed grants and monies to offset their debts. Most heads emphasize the non-negotiable need for equipping the schools with adequate amenities such as classrooms blocks, dormitories, laboratories, working studios, furniture, computers and other accessories among others, not forgetting means of transport. The amount, quality and distribution of these resources allotted to implementation to a very large extent determines how and whether a policy is implemented (OECD, 2010) cited in Bonsu (2019). The resource needed for the implementation of the Free SHS policy is funding, infrastructure and technology available to key players, not underrating their ability to use them. These resource constraints have stalled and thwarted the effort and success of the FSHS policy which has translated to an arguable decline in the quality of teaching, learning and the productivity of teachers.

Other constraints which include both human resources and materials; ranging from inadequate number of staff who are well equipped to carry out the implementation, relevant and adequate information on the implementation process and the authority to ensure that policies are carried out as they are intended (Bonsu, 2019). The introduction of the policy in 2017 has resulted in an increase in enrolment by 33.2% (Ministry of Finance, 2018). This has a great implication on the infrastructural and human resource capacity to absorb the overflow. According to Bonsu (2019), that students travelling long distances to school, overcrowding in classroom and dormitory has resulted in outbreak of diseases, and the overrated teacher/student ratios has led to poor supervision of students due to infrastructural deficit in most schools.

Limited stakeholder involvement

For any policy to be effective, there should be a connect between policy adoption and implementation. According to Bonsu (2019), the institutional framework determines the nature of policy implementation and the connection between the key players and structures involved. A

key objective of the institutionalization of the FSHS policy is instilling the belief, norm, social role, particular value or mode of behaviour within an organization, social system, or society as a whole. Education is a multifaceted sector which require the role of various stakeholders for maximum efficacy. Bonsu (2019) indicated that there were instances of stakeholder involvement through seminars and workshops. He further explained that there were instances where stakeholders were not involved in the formulation of policies. Policy “implementation encompasses the functional and sector divisions of various Ministries, Departments and Agencies which further complicates institutional placement of policy if not well managed.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The study used qualitative research approach. The reason is that this study seeks to gather data on experiences of respondents without generalising the findings of the study. This supports what Cropley (2019) posited that the aim of qualitative research is to illuminate an experience or understanding for others, but, unlike quantitative research, not to generalise from it. Neuendorf (2019) added that qualitative researcher does not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study, rather through emergent data collection, they are constructing a picture that takes a particular shape and qualitative researchers are concerned with what are called participant perspectives. How different people make sense of their lives is their major interest (p. 127).

Research Design

A case study design was employed. The premise of the case study design is that any unit of investigation that involves people can only be understood through the perspectives of those involved in the investigation. This view ensures that the very nature of the phenomenon that is being researched into is quite unique and not open to generalisation beyond the study participants (Yin, 2011). Case study helps in getting “deep data” or “thick description” information based on particular contexts that can give research results a more human face. Case study design, then, is an approach to researching and understanding more deeply our everyday lived experiences, hence making it an appropriate design for the study.

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

Pandey and Pandey (2015) define population as a group of individuals or people with the same characteristics and in whom the researcher is interested. The target population for the study were leadership of senior high schools within the Effutu Municipality. Creswell and Creswell (2018) assert that five to twenty-five (5-25) participants can be used in qualitative studies. Based on this assertion, purposive sampling technique was used to select five head teachers. The researcher believes these respondents have the needed knowledge which can help gather data in order to answer the research questions.

Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured interview guide was used for the study. This is because according to Ruggunan (2013), it allows for interaction between the researcher and respondents. Also, while this interview is reasonably objective, it permit a more thorough understanding of respondents’ opinions and reasons behind their responses as recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2003).

Trustworthiness of the Interviews

Qualitative research is trustworthy when it accurately represents the experiences of the study participants. Four criteria were used to measure the trustworthiness of data collected as suggested Speziale and Carpenter (2011). They are: Member checks, dependability, transferability and conformability.

Member checks

Peer debriefing exposes a researcher to the searching questions of others who are experienced in the methods of enquiry, the phenomenon or both (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). In this study, the researcher played back the audio recording of the interviews to respondents for their confirmation as soon as the interview session ends. This helped respondents to either confirm or disconfirm the experiences they shared. Also, field notes were read to the respondents to confirm it before the commencement of the data analysis.

Dependability

Silverman (2011) claimed that dependability relates to the consistency of findings. For this purpose, the report from this study was presented in detailed. Thus, the researcher gave respondents the opportunity to share their opinions with regards to the topic under investigation. Also, the researcher's colleague lecturers were given the opportunity to examine the data, findings, interpretations and recommendations so as to add their expert knowledge in order to make the report support the data obtained from the field.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the probability that the study findings have meaning to others in similar situations (Speziale & Carpenter, 2011). As a result of a well-established dependability, future researchers are likely to repeat part of the findings from this study in their study. The

report/findings from this study were done in detailed, this served as a good ground for other researchers conducting similar studies to repeat part of the findings in their studies.

Confirmability

Confirmability is a neutral criterion for measuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research. If a study demonstrates credibility and fittingness, the study is also said to possess confirmability (Speziale & Carpenter, 2011). This study presented the findings as given by the respondents. This infers that the researcher did not allow his familiarity with the topic under investigation. The researcher did his possible best to present findings from the study as they really existed.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analysed in themes. The researcher listened to the audio recordings many times in order to develop familiarity with the data. “Initial noting” of potential themes were noted in the margins; hence, each theme was coded as suggested by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE: How beneficial is the implementation of free senior high school policy in Ghana?

The first question sought to find out from the study participants, the benefit of the introduction of free senior high school policy in Ghana. The theme discussed below assisted to find answers to this question. It was discovered through the respondents’ comments that the policy is a good policy initiative, FSHS policy has resulted into High School population, reduced financial burden on parents and payment of intervention allowance to teachers.

THEME ONE: FREE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL IS A GOOD POLICY INITIATIVE

The following explanations were given by some respondents to back this proclamation. For example, one respondent said:

HEAD 1. *“Free SHS is a good policy because if a nation invests in education it means it is building its human resources for the future. Initially I thought the government was using it as a propaganda, I thought it was one of the strategies to win power. But when the government implemented, I saw it to be a good policy”*

HEAD 2 said: *“Gone are the days when parents will be wondering how to cater for their wards after basic education. I believe with the introduction of the free S.H.S, such burden has been removed.”*

Besides, one respondent said:

HEAD 3. *“You see, in the olden days when you complete basic education and your sibling is in school you will have to wait for, he or she to complete before you can also embark. With the introduction of the free S.H.S such problems have been reduced, I can boldly say so. I know some teachers and even heads are try to sabotage the policy for personal and political reasons”*

Emphatically, respondent 4 said:

HEAD 4. *“At first before you will go to S.H.S sometime certain properties and livestock animals must be sold before you can go to school especially the needy people. So, I can say the policy is good” need more educated citizen in the country and the free S.H.S policy will help us to achieve the aim. So undoubtedly the policy is in the interest of the country.”*

Again, respondent 5 said:

HEAD 5. *“I am of the view that if not for free S.H.S a lot of J.H.S graduate will be remaining the house, but because of the free SHS policy most of them are continuing their education. I know a family that none of the children has attended S.H.S a lot of J.H.S graduate will remain the house, but because of the free S.H.S policy most of them are continuing their education. So, the policy is a good one. Even though some stakeholders were not consulted before the implementation”*

It is evident from the comments given by these respondents that the implementation of free S.H.S will increase literacy rate in the country. They think the implementation of free S.H.S is in the right direction and the policy is a good one. Some are also of the view that how the

policy is managed is problematic because stakeholders consultation was minimal before its implementation hence the policy is not running smoothly. One of the heads revealed that there are teachers and head teachers who wish this policy should not succeed so that they will use it against the government.

THEME TWO: HIGH SCHOOL POPULATION

Comments from respondents also suggest that there high school population is one of the benefits of the implementation of free senior high school policy in Ghana. The following declarations were made by some respondents to support this claim.

For example, one respondent said:

HEAD 1. *“This academic year alone we admitted over 1,200 one thousand two hundred students. When free S.H.S was not implemented, the school was admitting just about 650 six hundred and fifty students.”*

Moreover, respondent 2 said:

HEAD 2. *“Around 2016 the school’s total population was about one thousand six hundred (1600) but now as we speak our population has shoot up to over three thousand students (3000).”*

Also, respondent 3 said:

HEAD 3. *“We were ranked among the least populated schools in the municipality, but with the introduction of free S.H.S we are no longer classified among the least populated schools”.*

Again, respondent 4 said:

HEAD 4 *“My school’s population has increased by 55% just within a space of two years thanks to the free SHS policy”*

HEAD 5 *“Just this semester I checked with my assistant and I was surprised the number of students we admitted. The free SHS has increase our enrolment”*

The comments suggest that the FSHS policy has resulted in increase in school enrolment. The findings run parallel with Onyango (2001) who observed that with the introduction of FSE, schools have registered over-enrolment, which means that the resources available in schools are constrained. The study participants seem to agree that the FSHS policy has increase enrollment in schools suggesting that student population has greatly increased due to the admission of more students.

THEME THREE: REDUCED FINANCIAL BURDEN ON PARENTS

Views of respondents also revealed that reduced financial burden on parents is one of the benefits of the introduction of FSHS policy in Ghana. The subsequent statements were made by some respondents. For example, one respondent said:

***HEAD 2.** “I know parents who use to sell their cloths just to pay for their wards fee. I think the situation now has changed because parents do not have to worry about fees any more”*

Again, one respondent said:

***HEAD 5.** “Gone are the days when a child calls the parents, the parents might think is school fees when the school fees has not been paid. With the introduction of free S.H.S that fear has been dealt with”*

Moreover, respondent 3 also said:

***HEAD 3.** “Some parents have to go into cheap labor before they can pay their words school fees, but with the introduction of the free S.H.S I can say that burden has reduced.”*

Lastly, one respondent said:

***HEAD 1.** “Do you know that some senior siblings pay school fee for their younger siblings? All of these monetary demands have reduced drastically.”*

In fact, these comments from respondents attest to the fact that the financial burden on parents have reduced. The current policy on Senior High School education is to provide free education that is free tuition, no library fee, no boarding fee, no science laboratory fee, no examination fee, no utility fee, free meals for both boarders and day-students, no Parents Teachers Association (PTA) fee, and free textbooks for all at the Senior High level. Both policies aimed to increase enrollment, improve quality through academic performance and most importantly to reduce the burden on parents from paying their children fees. For instance, the free education introduced in South Africa in some areas enabled poor parents to enroll their children in school (Boatman & Long, 2016; Dynarski & Scott-Garlick, 2013).

THEME FOUR: PAYMENT OF INTERVENTION ALLOWANCE TO TEACHERS

Regarding payment of intervention allowance to teachers. These are excerpts from the interview;

HEAD 1. *“For the first time the government introduced intervention allowance for teachers to compensate for the extra period that teachers engage our students.”*

HEAD 2. *“With the implementation of free SHS government now pays intervention allowance to teachers to make up for their workload as a results of the increase in the number of students.”*

HEAD 3. *“Our school is now running double track system and for that matter majority of teachers work load has been increased. So the government pays intervention allowance to motivate teachers.”*

HEAD 5. *“Now the teachers are teaching more classes than they used to. Some are teaching about ten classes Form 1 to 3. That is why they receive intervention allowance tough some complain the money is not enough.”*

It is evident from the comments that, there is increase in teacher's workload due to high student intake. In view of this the government pay intervention allowance to motivate teachers. Teacher motivation is one of the topical issues in Ghana. Various teacher unions in the country have raised serious concerns about the manner in which teachers are motivated. Some are of the view that the intervention allowance should be paid monthly instead of the semester basis.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO: How does the implementation of the free senior high school affect teaching and learning?

According to the interview data, most of the respondents emphasized that inadequate infrastructure, inadequate funding from government, unstable school calendar and increase in teachers workload were means by which the implementation of the FSHS has affected teaching and learning.

THEME 1: Inadequate infrastructure

A respondent shared her experience by saying that;

HEAD 1: *“Inadequate infrastructure is one of the major challenges we are facing. There is increase in population but no infrastructure has been increasing. Due to high population some building has been converted into dormitory.”*

HEAD 2: *“Hmm, we don't have even have enough classroom to accommodate the children. So, we have to even use the assembly hall as classroom for the form ones.”*

HEAD 3: *“The government introduced double track system because the school facilities was constrained. We need more classrooms chairs, tables, textbooks etc.”*

HEAD 4: *“There is increase in population but there is no expansion of toilet and water system. Even the dormitories are congested. I think if expansion is been made it can be of help.”*

HEAD 5. *“As we speak there are shortage of teaching personnel's not even teaching personnel alone but the entire department. Government needs to recruit more teacher”*

These comments are in consonance with Bell and Rhodes (2016) 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. A study conducted by Onyango (2001) on free Secondary education in public secondary schools in Kangundo District in Kenya established that more students were able to attend schools as a result of free Secondary education though this stressed the available resources in schools. The study recommended the need for employment of more teachers to cater for the increasing students' population, and also to provide more funds. This is since the quality of education is usually pegged on teacher effectiveness and adequacy of funds.

THEME 2: INADEQUATE FUNDING FROM GOVERNMENT

Pertaining to inadequate funding from government.

HEAD 1: said “Last month our school and some schools in the country did not have adequate food supplies to feed the students. According to the supplier’s government was owing them.”

HEAD 2: commented “Our classrooms are becoming over crowded. Government needs to find money and build new classrooms for the school.”

HEAD 3. Opine that “Government was giving teachers some extra money and intervention to motivate them. But for the past one and half years the money has not come.

HEAD 4. expressed “Is like we are doing sacrificial work, at times we have to use our own money and sometimes stakeholders as well to run the school.”

HEAD 5 observed: *Sometimes the government delays payments for a whole academic year before it will come. We are not magicians to chant for monies.*

Conferring to the interview data, inadequate funding from government was a major challenge. There are several studies conducted on the impact of funding on enrollment and students' academic performance. The study of Denny et al. (2014), Moussa et al. 2015, Natasha et al.

(2011), and Tatiana et al. (2016) reported positive relationship between funding and quality education in their separate studies.

THEME 3. UNSTABLE SCHOOL CALENDER

HEAD 1: *“The introduction of the free SHS has brought about disruption in our school calendar. There is different calendar for form one, form two and form three.”*

HEAD 2: *“Some of the students will be in school while others are on holidays and some students are taking advantage of that to achieve their parents. One parent called to ask whether we are still on holidays because his child had stayed home for almost two and half months.”*

HEAD 3: *“The school calendar is getting confusing to some students and even some teachers. A teacher asked me why some students will stay in school for 4 weeks and others will come spend only 11 weeks.”*

HEAD 4: *“Do you know that because of this unstable school calendar the stubborn children among the girls used this opportunity to go and hide in their boyfriends’ place”*

HEAD 5: *“One head teacher said the students themselves sometimes become confused due to this unstable school calendar.”*

THEME 4: POOR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

HEAD 1: *“The grades that some students get at WASSCE is very poor because they think is free, they don’t make much effort to learn.”*

HEAD 2: *“Previously the least grade to gain admission to SHS was 36 but now with free SHS even students with grade 50 are given admission. How can such student perform well?”*

HEAD 3: *“Do you know that even students with aggregate 40 or 45 are offered science? The end result is what we see when they write WASSCE very poor performance.”*

HEAD 4: *“Some of the students think they are been forced to go to SHS and for that matter they become reluctant in learning said by one head teacher.”*

HEAD 5: *“Now that it is free. Some parents do not even monitor the performance of their children. If they the ones paying the school fees it would have been different.”*

A study by Gatheru (2008) on challenges related to the implementation of FPE in Narok District established that due to the rising number of pupils enrolling in schools, teachers were sometimes overwhelmed and not able to give individualized attention to pupils. Teachers could not mark

students' assignments and this contributed to a decline in academic performance. The World Declaration on Education for All in 1990 noted that, poor quality of education is a hindrance to the socioeconomic development of nations especially the underdeveloped ones. Quality education, beginning with primary education, is fundamental to endow individuals with the capacity to successfully pursue their private goals. While at the same time equipping them with the knowledge and skills, as well as the values and attitudes, necessary to contribute to the economic, social and political development of their societies (Pettinger, 2012).

THEME 4: INCREASE IN TEACHERS WORKLOAD

Concerning the issue of increase in teachers' workload. This is what the heads had to say:

HEAD 1. *“Some of my teachers are complaining of their workload. They say marking exercise is now time consuming because of increase in the number of students.”*

HEAD 2. *“Our school is now running double track system and for that matter majority of teachers work load has been increased.”*

HEAD 3. *“As we speak now do you know that student to teacher ratio has increase almost thrice. When such things happen, it increases teacher's workload.”*

HEAD 4. *“Is very appropriate to always listen and pay attention to students when you have a sizeable class. But if you have increase in workload you can't.”*

HEAD 5. *“Two teachers told me that now that they have a lot of work to do that is why they leave campus late than expected and even that they cannot attend to all students needs”*

The interview data presented suggested that some of the teachers are confronted with lots of workloads. Some heads complained bitterly about the large numbers in their schools which make the work of teachers challenging and affect their performance. Because of high numbers of students, teachers are not able to provide students with intensive guidance that would enable them to master the skills they are being taught, which is seen as a challenge to teaching and learning.

In line with these responses, Acheampong and William (2015) observed that some schools are characteristically large class size and teachers are required to carry out teaching loads which demands greater preparation time for the teacher and reasonably places greater strain on them.

CONCLUSIONS

Indeed, the implementation of FSHS policy is a good policy initiative since it leads an increment in students' population, reduces financial burden on parents, and also boost teachers financially through the payment of intervention allowances by the government as established by the participants. However, insufficient infrastructure, shortage of funding from government, increase in teachers' workload and its inconsistencies it has brought in the calendar of schools are major drawbacks that hinder the effectiveness of teaching and learning within schools. It is therefore noteworthy to conclude that the policy as a result of every citizen's equitable access, being the core aim of the policy (attaining universal access and equity in education) have been realized to some extent. However, without the government's provision of more infrastructural, physical and material resources, it would have a negative effect on the quality of education within the country. Notwithstanding, if care is not taken, the policy could lead to unconducive classrooms within schools across the country due to over-crowdedness as a result of increased enrolment. This means that from 2023 onwards, the government has to make provisions for millions of Ghana cedis per annum for successful implementation of the policy. This cost, arguably, represents a considerable financial burden on the state and requires vigorous source of funding to ensure its sustainability. A core element in policy formulation and execution is policy goals and the decision-making process in arriving at the goals. Certainly, the goals of FSHS policy are too multifaceted and the fact that the government anticipates to absorb all fees at a go when financial resources and manpower in the country's educational sector are limited. These fundamental

investigations should have been delved into detail within the years ahead of us. Other than that, effective teaching and learning shall be impeded within these subsequent years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Ghana Education Service should consider this paper as means of reviewing and revising the FSHS policy five years after its implementation taking into consideration keys findings and recommendations of the study.
2. Government should consider cost sharing with parents to ease pressure on its revenue since the FSHS policy is taking a substantial part of government's budgetary allocation to the Ministry of Education.
3. The government should increase the intervention allowance for teachers and pay it regularly in order to motivate teachers. Parents can also contribute to support government's effort.
4. The government of Ghana should seek financial support from international donor agencies and other local financial institutions to provide adequate infrastructure in all schools.
5. The Ghana Education Service should ensure that they prepare school calendar in consultation with head teachers and teachers.

REFERENCES

- Bonsu, A. (2019). *Examining the Politics of Social Policy Implementation: A case of Free Senior High School Policy in Ghana*. [Unpublished MPhil Public Administration Thesis, University of Ghana].
- Cohen L., Monion, L., & Morrison, K. (2013). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.) Routledge Falmer, London.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches* (5th ed.). London: Sage.
- Cropley, A. J. (2019). *Qualitative research methods: A practice-oriented introduction for students of psychology and education*. Riga, Latvia: Zinātne.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2013). *The landscape of qualitative research* (4th ed.). USA, Sage Handbook.
- Essuman A. (2019). Fee-Free Secondary Education in Ghana: Reflections on the Past, Realities and Feasible Choices. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, 4(3), 24-54.
- Manu, J. (2020). *Education in Ghana: Status and challenges' Commonwealth Education Partnerships*. <https://www.cedol.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Manu-article.pdf> (accessed 29th October 2021).
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2019). Content analysis and thematic analysis. In P. Brough (Ed.), *Research methods for applied psychologists: Design, analysis and reporting* (pp. 211-223). New York: Routledge.
- Pandey, P., & Pandey, M. M. (2015). *Research methodology: Tools and techniques*. Retrieved from <http://euacademic.org/BookUpload/9.pdf> on March 22, 2019.
- Rubin, H., & Rubin, I. (2003). *Semi-structured interviews and focus groups*. In *Key methods in geography*. Retrieved December 13, 2021 from <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>
- Ruggunan, S. (2013). *Introduction to qualitative analysis and writing up your analysis: Discipline of human resources management*. Retrieved December 13, 2021 from http://smitg.ukzn.ac.za/Libraries/General_Docs/Introduction-to.Qualitative_Analysis.sflb.ashx.
- Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting qualitative data: A Guide to the principles of qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.

Speziale, H. J. S., & Carpenter, D. R. (2011). *Qualitative research in nursing: Advancing the humanistic imperative*. Retrieved December 13, 2021 from <https://trove.nla.gov.au/work9010777>.

Tamanja, E. M. J., & Pajibo, E. D. (2019). *Proceedings of EDULEARN Conference*. 1st-3rd July 2019, Palma, Mallorca, Spain.

Yin, R. K. (2011). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. New York & London: The Guildford Press.

UNDER PEER REVIEW