

Critical Analysis of Free Senior High School (FSHS) Education Policy in Ghana.

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Abstract:

This paper sought to analyze and evaluate critically the Free Senior High School (FSHS) education policy in Ghana and the impact it has had on the people since its inception in September 2017. The scrutinization of the policy reveals that the policy and political elements are overemphasized at the expense of the process dimension. The FSHS education policy was a major campaign issue, and it was aggressively promoted to Ghanaian voters in order to persuade them to vote for one of the parties. Without a doubt, poverty exists in Ghana and Africa as a whole, and the majority of the poor and vulnerable cannot afford to pay for their children's education at all levels including the second cycle level. McConnell's (2010) policy assessment dimensions were used to analyze and evaluate the FSHS policy. Dunn's (2012) six-program evaluation dimension was also used to fully capture all components of the policy dimensions. Effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and appropriateness were the six dimensions used to digest the FSHS policy to unravel the impact and the issues associated with its establishment. These dimensions were also used to identify some implementation inefficiencies in the policy. Using these thematic elements allowed for in-depth discussions and analysis of the policy as a whole. After thorough evaluation and analysis of the policy some crucial recommendations were made to help mitigate if not eliminate completely some of the issues bedeviling the policy, upon its implementation.

Keywords: Policy, Political parties, Education, Free Senior High School, Ghana.

Introduction

Senior High School (SHS) education has been a hot topic in Ghana for quite some time. This is the effect of political parties attempting to win voters' hearts during election seasons, such as in 2008, 2012, 2016, and 2020. These were periods or eras in Ghana when the Ghanaian people went to the polls to elect the country's president, and this policy has not been abandoned as far as Ghanaian political parties are concerned (Mohammed & Kuyini, 2020). The FSHS education policy was a major campaign issue, and it was aggressively promoted to voters in order to persuade them to vote for one of the parties. Without a doubt, poverty exists in Ghana, and the majority of the poor and vulnerable cannot afford to pay for their children's education at the second cycle level. Some students are unable to attend SHS after completing Junior High School (JHS) owing to budgetary constraints. Fundamentally, there was an issue that needed to be addressed. In 2008 and 2012, Ghana's dominant political party, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), made free SHS education a prominent campaign topic, but the party was unable to gain political power. In 2016, the NPP gained political power and made SHS education totally free, allowing both those who could afford and those who could not afford to avoid paying for school at the second cycle level. The general populace was outraged because the government had made SHS education completely free. The opportunity cost of free education was significant, and some individuals, opinion leaders, and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) believed that those who could afford to pay the tuition for their children should be forced to do so through policy reform. Thus, there were two schools of thought, those who believe that education at this level should be completely free, and those who believe that the government should allow those who can afford to pay to do so without hesitation (Oduro, 2019).

Eventually, the controversy surrounding the program died down, and the government adopted a firm stance on the policy, implementing FSHS education across board. This policy was adopted in accordance with the World Bank's perspective of citizens' potential to effectively and efficiently utilize those countries' resources (World Bank, 2015). In 1996, the government implemented Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) to close the enrolment gap between the rich and the poor (Essuman, 2018). This effort by the government resulted in abrupt increase in enrolment

at the JHS level nationwide, hence 57% in 1999 and 65% in 2004 (UNESCO, 2006). Payment of school fees was a major contributory factor to enrolment barrier at the basic school, based on this evidence. The FCUBE is based on the Ghanaian constitution, which states that primary and junior high school education is free and compulsory (Nsiah, 2018). Despite the fact that free education is enshrined in the constitution, its implementation requires political determination. Thus, policy creation and implementation would be extremely difficult without the political willpower to determine what should be done, who benefits, for what purpose, and who pays (Mohammed & Kuyini, 2020).

The policy's success during the last few years will be analyzed and evaluated, as well as its influence on the population. The policy's shortcomings will not be overlooked in this careful examination. Despite the fact that the policy had only been in place for a short time, it had a significant influence on the lives of ordinary Ghanaians. The policy must be thoroughly studied and analyzed in order to fully understand the impact or purpose for which it was enacted (Mohammed & Kuyini, 2020). This will allow policymakers to make changes as needed. It is important to emphasize that every policy seeks to achieve a specific purpose, for instance, the free SHS policy in Ghana sought to increase enrollment at the second cycle institutions. If it is discovered that enrollment at the stated level has not changed or risen, the policy has failed to fulfill the goal for which it was designed or established, and policymakers should reconsider the policy. Inequality in policy access can be seen between the rich and poor households, as well as between the northern and southern portions of Ghana, with enrolment inequalities between these groups expanding over several decades (Ministry of Education, 2018). Despite the fact that there is presently no policy document covering the Free SHS education policy, the policy was created to provide the poor and vulnerable in the country with the opportunity to complete senior high school education. Many parents and guardians were unable to afford the tuition for their children to attend second cycle institutions in Ghana prior to the implementation of the program. The primary goal of the FSHS policy is to increase enrolment in second-cycle universities by removing cost barriers.

The Policy Seeks to Achieve the Following Objectives:

1. To remove cost barriers through the absorption of fees approved by Ghana Education Service council.

2. To expand physical infrastructure and facilities to accommodate the expected increase in enrolment.
3. To improve quality through provision of core textbooks and supplementary readers, teacher rationalization and deployment.
4. To improve quality through the implementation of 30% of places in elite schools for students from public Junior High Schools (JHS).
5. To prioritize and reform TVET institutions at the SHS level to facilitate skills acquisition (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Every Ghanaian child who was placed in a public second cycle institution by the Computerized School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS) during the placement process was eligible to participate in the FSHS policy (Ministry of Education, 2018). As a result of this initiative, the number of students enrolled in public senior high schools has increased dramatically. According to a report published by Modern Ghana News (2017), 358,205 pupils were enrolled, accounting for 83.9 percent of the total number of students that took the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE). This was an improvement over previous years, when student admission was about 75 percent, as opposed to 83.9 percent the year before. With the start of the 2018/2019 academic year, the student population is set to skyrocket to 1.2 million (Ghana web, 2019). The policy is producing results, as seen by the enormous impact it is having. The above-mentioned student population is the highest it has ever been. Because of the steady increase in the student population, it was possible to establish that cost was a barrier or hindrance to accessing education at the second cycle level. From all appearances, the FSHS education policy is sound.

Theoretical framework

Three important theoretical principles in public policy making guide this work. They are as follows: McConnell's (2010a) three reconcilable streams model (Kingdon, 1984), which has led study of the planning and implementation process for Free SHS since 2016; dimensions for assessing policy success, which guide analysis of the Free SHS's program, process, and political aspects (McConnell, 2010b); dimensions for assessing policy success, which guide analysis of the extent to which it has been successful (McConnell, 2010a); and the political settlement framework evaluates how the two largest political parties in Ghana, the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) and

the opposition National Democratic Congress (NDC), compete for political power by determining which approach to providing a fee-free SHS education is preferable.

The Multiple Streams Model

Kingdon introduced the Multiple Streams Model (1984). According to the theory, policymaking involves three distinct and independent streams: the problem stream, politics stream, and policy stream (The 3Ps Stream). The problem stream includes concerns that both policymakers and citizens want addressed (Zahariadis, 2007). The national political environment, which might include public opinion and partisan control of policy-making institutions, is covered by the politics stream. Finally, the policy stream consists of ideas and solutions that have been devised and prepared for implementation by experts and policy professionals. When a 'window of opportunity' appears, a policy entrepreneur takes advantage of it by combining the three streams by applying a policy proposal to a problem in the problem stream at a moment when the problem/solution coupling is acceptable within the political stream (Nowlin, 2011). The Multiple Streams Model is predicated on the idea that each stream operates independently of the others. Because the Multiple Streams Model implies different streams, participation in one stream excludes participation in another (Sabaatier, 2007). However, Boscarino (2009) and Robinson and Eller (2010) found that many individuals and organizations engaged in both problem identification (the problem stream) and policy proposals in their studies (the policy stream). The Multiple Streams Model (Ness, 2010; Ness & Mistretta, 2009) has been updated to include institutional variables (called policy milieus), which include establishments such as state government arrangements and state higher education governance configurations. The revised model expands the policy stream into a 'policy field,' which includes the politics and problem streams, based on the premise that "policy trends and information are present throughout the policy process" (Ness & Mistretta, 2009, p. 492 cited in Nowlin, 2011). When a window of opportunity emerges, policy entrepreneurs, like those in the original Multiple Streams Model, try to bring the streams together (in this example, the politics and problem streams) (Nowlin, 2011).

Ness and Mistretta (2009) show that the modified Multiple Streams Model accommodates for policy design differences in two situations using a comparative case study approach. According to Ness & Mistretta (2009), the modified Multiple Streams Model provided useful information for policy design decisions using need-based rather than merit-based approaches (Ness, 2010).

Existing research supports the benefits and practical applications of the multiple streams model (Boscarino, 2009; Ness, 2010) and the revised model moves beyond agenda setting by offering empirical insights into policy design choices (Ness, 2010; Ness & Mistretta, 2009). However, it appears that it has only been evaluated in the higher education domain, therefore further work is needed to empirically test this model across a variety of policy areas. It will provide knowledge and make improvements in the realm of policymaking by utilizing this approach to critically assess the Free SHS Policy.

McConnell's theory

Traditionally, policy success or failure has been measured by whether or not the policy's programmatic goals have been met. Assessing a policy's success or failure solely on the basis of its programmatic objectives is incorrect or deceptive. This is because, according to McConnell (2010b), there are other characteristics of policy success or failure that must be addressed if failures are to be avoided. McConnell (2010a) recognized process failure as a second general factor of policy failure. This means that policies can fail not only in substantive, technical terms (objectively or as perceived failure to deliver expected material outcomes), as is typical of program failures, but also in process terms - as simply being unable to move from idea to reality through the successful completion of the many stages of the policy process (Bovens, Hart, & Peters, 2001; Brandstrom & Kuipers, 2003). In this sense, a policy is typically regarded a success if it successfully navigates a complex, veto-point-filled, and multi-actor approval process to establishment and execution, independent of its substantive program efficacy or efficiency (Lindblom, 1959). These types of process flaws have been organized by Howlett (2009) according to where they occur in the policy process. These include situations where overreaching governments take on too many simultaneous initiatives at the agenda-setting stage, and situations where governments attempt to address "un-addressable" or "wicked" problems where neither the cause of a problem nor the solution to it is well known enough to generate feasible policy alternatives at the formulation stage (Churchman, 1967). Another issue occurs at the adoption stage, when institutional settings constructed for serial or seriatim processes may stymie plans (Jones, 1994), or when governments engage in log-rolling and other forms of bargaining that compromise the integrity of policy ideas (Jones, 1994). (Anderson & Heywood, 2009). Others are

at the implementation stage, where governments take on too many policies beyond their organizational capacity to deliver results (Meier & Bohte, 2003), or at the evaluation stage, where they fail to evaluate their policies properly and thus fail to incorporate this knowledge into subsequent policy reforms (Meier & Bohte, 2003). (May, 1992). Only the program dimension is usually reviewed in Ghana and elsewhere (Ayee, 2000; Mohammed, 2014). Assessing policies along the three dimensions provides important insights into the nature of policy success or failure, assisting in the unification and clarification of existing literatures on policy learning and failure while also pointing to means and mechanisms by which common sources of failure can be avoided or overcome (Fawcett & Marsh, 2012). The performance of the Free SHS Policy is also evaluated in three dimensions: program, process, and politics. The political dimension of evaluation, which refers to how policies and policymakers are represented and evaluated in the political arena, is a final factor of policy failure identified by Boven et al. (2001) and agreed to by McConnell (2010a) (Bovens et al., 2001). Even if the three dimensions (programme, process, and political) are used to evaluate policy performance, there will be conflict with the problem to the extent that objective assessment is achievable (Marsh & McConnell, 2010).

Political settlement framework

A political settlement can be characterized in a variety of ways. It refers to "informal and formal processes, agreements, and practices that assist strengthen politics rather than violence as a means of dealing with differences concerning interests, ideas, and the distribution and use of power," according to Laws (2012). Because Laws' (2012) term better depicts the contestation of ideas between Ghana's two major political parties, the then-ruling NDC and the then-opposition NPP, this study adopts it. The debate was over whose party's plan to implementing free SHS into the country's education system was the best. While the then-ruling NDC won power in 2012 on the promise of adopting a progressively free SHS, the then-opposition NPP, which was determined to overthrow the NDC government in the 2016 election, suggested a competing option of making SHS education completely free instantly (Oduro, 2019).

The NDC's argument was that a free SHS education would be met with a depleted public budget, insufficient infrastructure, and declining teaching and learning outcomes (Oduro, 2019). The NPP mocked the NDC's allegations, claiming that Ghana's economic capability (particularly from oil

money) allows it to deal with such problems (Oduro, 2019). The political agreement on the contestation of the methods was that the strategy would be taken by the party that would win the 2016 election and have the people's mandate to rule the country. After winning the election, the NPP implemented its Free SHS Policy in 2017. The difficulties that the Free SHS Policy is encountering have spurred a new round of public debate about whether the Free SHS is a viable alternative to the opposition NDC's Progressively Free SHS Policy. Political settlements analysis has been used to solve problems in a variety of circumstances. It's been used to figure out why certain states survive while others break down (World Bank, 2011). Also, it's been used to figure out why some peace initiatives result in more participatory political and development plans than others (Rocha Menocal, 2015). To put it in another way, it has been used to explain why some countries have been able to implement successful industrial strategies and generate and sustain economic growth (Pritchett, Sen, & Werker, 2018). It has also been successfully used to execute gender legislation (Nazneen & Masud, 2017); in other cases, it explains why certain countries implement more effective and inclusive health and education policies than others (Hossain et al., 2017; Levy & Walton, 2013). The political backdrop or underlying power dynamics impact institutional and policy performance, according to most of these studies. More precisely, it implies that in Ghana, power dynamics or instability exist in regard to how approaches to a fee-free senior high school education have influenced and continue to affect electoral fortunes, as well as the power balance between the two major political parties, the NPP and the NDC. The political context that sparked the debate over which approach to take to make senior high school education free is that there have been three power transitions between the NDC and the NPP since the fourth republic, and thus the democratic dispensation in Ghana, began in 1993, in 2001, 2009, and 2017. The rivalry between the two political parties has thus intensified to the point that every election has enormous stakes, and contesting policy ideas has become one of the most effective ways for them to undo each other. This is because people are won over by perceptions of which party has superior policy proposals. As a result, political settlements analysis is a vital contrast to the good governance agenda, the "golden thread" narrative, or technical guidance on "best practices" (Cameron, 2012; Fritz, Levy & Ort, 2014).

The Analysis of The Free Senior High School (FSHS) Education Policy:

McConnell's (2010) policy assessment dimensions are used to analyze and evaluate the FSHS policy. Dunn's (2012) six-program evaluation dimension is also used to fully capture all components of the policy dimensions. Effectiveness, efficiency, adequacy, equity, responsiveness, and appropriateness are the six dimensions. Using these thematic elements would allow for in-depth discussions and analysis of the policy as a whole. According to Dunn (2012), the FSHS policy's programming goals are assessed using these six criteria.

Effectiveness of the Free Senior High School Policy

The degree to which a policy or program achieves its stated goals is known as effectiveness. The goals of the Free SHS Policy are to remove the financial barrier to education, enable universal access to secondary school, improve quality and equity in infrastructural expansion, and provide the necessary/essential skills for socioeconomic development (Essuman, 2018). Based on secondary data, this section determines if these goals have been met. In terms of the financial barrier, the government has absorbed the one-time item cost for first-year students (as per policy). All recurrent fees for day and boarding students, as well as feeding fees for both boarders and day students, are also absorbed. The government has also agreed to spend GHS 20.00 per student each year to replace the portion of the PTA dues allotted to teacher motivation (Prempeh, 2018). This means that the Free SHS Policy is, and will continue to be substantially more expensive than the previous government's Progressively Free SHS Policy. If the government has been able to absorb and pay all of the cost components in the FSHS policy as this dimension of Dunn (2012) tries to achieve, then the FSHS policy's effectiveness can be concluded.

Efficiency of the Free Senior High School Policy

The amount of work necessary to achieve a certain degree of effectiveness is referred to as efficiency. The cost of that effort is reflected in monetary terms (Dunn, 2012). For a multitude of reasons, the Free SHS Policy is ineffective. First, the policy makes no distinction between those who can afford to pay for their children's SHS education and those who cannot. As per Mohammed

and Kuyini's (2020) research, "lack of distinction has led to a situation where a sizeable number of students whose parents can pay for their SHS education are included in the "uniform fee-free policy," where primary data was collected via an interview and the interviewee in the Ghana Education Service (GES) affirmed the position." Also, "lack of distinction has led to a situation where a sizeable number of students whose parents can pay for their SHS education are included in the "uniform fee-free policy," where primary data was collected via an interview and the interviewee in the Ghana Education Service (GES) affirmed the position." (Mohammed and Kuyini's, 2020).

Second, due to a lack of space, a double-track system consisting of green and yellow batches of students has been implemented. The students on the 'green track' attend school for half of the year and then leave to make place for the children on the 'yellow track' to attend for the remaining half. There are additional costs that parents bear as a result of ensuring that their children attend class on a regular basis. One of such cost is transportation fare. Students, particularly day students, must commute to and from school, which has proven difficult for such parents and is a discouragement for the majority of parents and guardians.

Furthermore, the Free SHS Policy is ineffective because some students who were offered SHS placement were unable to enroll (Zindzi, 2018; The Finder News Paper, 2018). According to the Ministry of Education, over 25% of students who are placed in SHS through the Computerized School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS) do not enroll (Ministry of Education, 2018). This is a problem since resources have been committed in creating learning spaces, but enrolment obstacles indicate that class numbers are below the optimal level for optimizing teaching and learning results. Furthermore, capitation grants for Free SHS placements are not disbursed on time (Ministry of Education, 2018), which disrupts school managements' plans for timely delivery of education services. For example, most headmasters of SHSs complain that because of the delay in the disbursement of the capitation grant it affects the timetable of the schools, hence delay in the commencement of classes for an average of two weeks. Meanwhile, teachers who had no part in the properly delayed start of the semester are paid. This is uncalled for, and it could be construed and concluded that there is poor resource management because missed instructional contact hours are rarely recouped (Nurudeen & Abdul, 2018). Finally, the lack of collaboration between government and private SHS education providers is another issue impeding the effective

implementation of the Free SHS Policy. A partnership like this would allow the state to take advantage of the resources available in private institutions to address infrastructural issues in public schools. There are currently about 300 private schools scattered over Ghana's 16 regions, with a total capacity of 181,000 students (Cudjoe, 2018; Nurudeen & Abdul, 2018). Despite the fact that the owners of these private SHSs have stated a willingness to take half of what the government spends on public school kids (Cudjoe, 2018), the government has yet to accept this offer. A partnership between the state and the private SHS education providers will enhance efficiency.

Adequacy of the Free Senior High School Policy

Adequacy refers to how well a certain degree of efficiency meets the requirements, values, or possibilities that led to an issue (Dunn, 2012). The findings suggests that the Free SHS Policy is inadequate, as SHS education remains inaccessible to many. In an interview conducted by Mohammed and Kuyini (2020), the majority of respondents (87 percent) stated that poor students, who are the primary target of the Free SHS Policy, made up the majority of students who were unable to secure spots following the policy's implementation. Access was denied due to a lack of space, according to the explanation. The double track system was developed as a result of this dilemma, which necessitated a solution, resulting in students enrolling at school in batches.

The accompanying expense of education, which limits participation, is another facet of adequacy. According to a World Bank report (2017), individuals in Ghana's rural and poor communities are around 5-6 times less likely to receive free SHS education due to factors other than economic difficulties. For students from the poorest families, pursuing a Free SHS education is an opportunity cost. Other cost considerations, such as the perceived economic return on such schooling, may have a role. In this case, doing a cost-benefit analysis of having a free SHS education is critical for such families. If the expense of the coverage considerably outweighs the value, the chances of the child not being covered are high.

Some parents believe that education is a luxury good, and that providing their children with such a luxury at their own expense cannot be overemphasized. As a result, parents cannot afford to keep their children from participating in profitable activities. The inference is that there are additional

cost variables or family financial restrictions that limit full adoption of the Free SHS opportunity and, as a result, limit adequate attainment. In order to completely accomplish the adequacy goal of a Free SHS Policy, more social support (whether in cash or in kind) must be provided to impoverished families.

Equity of Free Senior High School Policy

The distribution of effects and efforts among different groups in society is referred to as equity. It is intimately tied to legal and social reason (Dunn, 2012). Because some schools are boarding and others are day, students are not on an equal footing and the notion of equity is entirely compromised. This is due to the fact that students in boarding facilities are relieved of the stress of commuting between school and home, learn together and share ideas, and have teachers around to assist them if they are having problems understanding what is being taught. Day students, on the other hand, do not have these options, despite the fact that they will be taking the same exam (Nurudeen & Abdul, 2018). Equity cannot be said to be operating if this bias is the order of the day. Furthermore, it is common knowledge that highly competent instructors are concentrated in urban schools, whereas teachers with average skills and competencies are found in rural schools. As a result, it's no surprise that students in most urban schools consistently outperform their peers in rural regions in the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE). For example, there were large differences in the 2016 WASSCE results for grades A1 to C6 achievement between and within regions. Comparing regions, such as the Greater Accra and Brong Ahafo, the three Northern regions scored significantly lower in all four core disciplines (Ministry of Education, 2018). Females qualify for tertiary education at a lower rate (20%) than boys (26%), according to the Ministry of Education (2018). Furthermore, according to the World Bank (2017), the WASSCE results show that a small number of SHSs produce over 90% of those who are admitted to higher education, while the remaining SHSs produce between 60% and 90% of exam failures. Furthermore, textbook-student ratios differ significantly between locations in terms of equity in the allocation of resources.

Responsiveness of the Free Senior High School Policy

The degree to which a policy satisfies the needs, preferences, or values of specific groups is referred to as responsiveness (Dunn, 2012). There is evidence that the Free SHS Policy is ineffective since kids who most need a fee-free senior high school education are not the people that benefit. Between urban and rural settings, there are differences in the development of school infrastructure and amenities, as well as the supply of teachers and auxiliary staff. However, in a separate forum, the education minister said that in 2016, prior to the implementation of the Free SHS Policy, 111,336 JHS students were placed in SHSs but did not enroll owing to a shortage of funding. However, he said that after the introduction of the Free SHS Policy, this figure was drastically reduced to 62,453. The minister concluded that the Free SHS Policy is responsive enough (Prempeh, 2018).

Appropriateness of the Free Senior High School Policy

The value or usefulness of a program's objectives, as well as the tenability of the assumptions that underpin these objectives, are referred to as appropriateness (Dunn, 2012). The Free Senior High School Policy aims to make senior high school education accessible and universal, as well as to create human capital, nurture youths into responsible adults, and adjust education to Ghana's development needs. These goals are suitable since an illiterate population of young people has a negative impact on children, their parents, and society as a whole. An illiterate and barely effective labor, lower adult salaries, poor health, and a passive and ignorant society are all effects of a large population of uneducated citizens (Satz, 2003). As a result, an intervention to enroll all eligible students in SHS education is a good policy. However, the source of money for the policy's long-term viability is critical. The policy's existing reliance on oil income funding is unsustainable. If the oil runs out, the policy would be unable to continue unless new sources of finance are found, which are exceedingly restricted (Mohammed & Kuyini,2020).

Conclusion

The program, process, and political components of Ghana's Free SHS Policy were examined in this research. Following a thorough examination of the program, it appears that Ghana's approach to the Free SHS policy was similar to the Multiple Streams Model. However, unlike the model's

original hypothesis, the streams were interdependent rather than independent. The new dimensions of reality for adjusting the Multiple Streams Model, which this study has discovered, are that Multiple Streams are applicable to other stages of the policy process; an unsuccessful attempt at merging the three streams represents a learning curve and a launch pad for a fresh attempt with a propensity for success; and the lull in the duration between an initial attempt at merging the streams and subsequent attempts is a function of the type of window of opportunity that opens up. The examination of the policy reveals that the policy and political elements are overemphasized at the expense of the process dimension. Even in relation to the programme dimension, the accent is put on removing the cost barrier to enhance access to SHS education, while little attention is paid to other programme elements like other cost variables (opportunity cost, expected return on SHS education), space and other infrastructure expansion, quality (curriculum reform, improved teacher-student ratio, learning outcomes), equity (urban-rural disparity, disparities in the number of teachers and facilities), and knowledge and skills acquisition relevant to personal and national development. The Free SHS Policy has met the appropriateness requirement in terms of program execution and policy dimensions since its goals of ensuring universal access to SHS education, growing human capital, and nurturing children into responsible adults are rights that should be pursued. The evidence for reaching the efficiency component is more ambiguous, since some parts have been met while others require further political and pragmatic refinement. Inefficient use of school resources due to some students' inability to enroll; lack of means-testing for parents who can pay for their children's education; lack of timeliness in the disbursement of funds; and inadequate infrastructure coexisting with idle facilities in private schools are all examples of implementation inefficiencies. The inclusion of students whose parents/guardians can pay for their education, in particular, is a huge allocative inefficiency in secondary education financing, and constitutes a case that warrants a conclusion, or at the very least, an assertion that a premium is not placed on the judicious use of the country's limited resources. In policy analysis terms, a change in policy is an allocative improvement as long as those who benefit from the change (winners) gain more than the losers. This is not the case with Ghana's Free SHS Program, because the wealthy who typically receive school placement also get to keep their money, whilst the poor, who make up the bulk of the population and are expected to gain immensely from the policy, do not. Following a critical evaluation of the policy, it was discovered that it is skewed in the distribution of educational resources, including qualified teachers, which disadvantages rural students and has

resulted in noticeable rural-urban academic performance disparities in favor of urban students, who are also disproportionately admitted to higher education (World Bank, 2017). In terms of adequacy, there is still some ambiguity about what will be free and what will not be free after the cost barrier to access is removed. From the standpoint of the FSHS Policy's political dimension, the emphasis was on fast adopting a universal fee-free SHS education, with little respect for need or other viable options, and with little regard for financial sustainability. The political goal was to maintain voter support by following through on campaign pledges, which it mainly did. In terms of the process dimension, the problem was poorly defined, and other feasible solutions were ruled out during the formulation and adoption stages. Furthermore, several stages of the policy process were overlooked, and work on the attentive stages was badly conducted, thus jeopardizing long-term viability. The policy does not have Parliamentary approval and as such lacks strong legal foundations and successive governments can abolish it.

Recommendations

The recommendations for dealing with the implementation challenges of the Free SHS Policy are numerous. First, given the overemphasis on access and the apparent lack of attention paid to other factors (e.g., teacher training and outcomes), it is recommended that an equitable focus be placed on all of these variables, with a much higher likelihood of graduating students who are well prepared to pursue tertiary education or enter the labor market. Another recommendation is to reform the curriculum and its mode of delivery to achieve more meaningful outcomes. Second, in view of the cost challenges facing the implementation of the policy, a targeted rather than a universal approach to free education would have been most appropriate. It would have also ensured better management of resources and improve quality. It is recommended that 'The Vulnerability Map,' which is currently being used for cash transfers to the vulnerable under the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme (LEAP), be adopted, expanded, and updated to target/support poor households who may also be stressed by other cost variables in order to make determining who qualifies for fee exemption easier. Undoubtedly, targeting is unavoidable if Ghana is desirous of subsidizing the poor without increasing the burden of taxation to the 70% of labor income observable in Scandinavian countries. Third, collaborating with the private sector to create and implement a fee-free SHS education would have reduced the government's financial burden. Alternative public-private partnerships (PPPs) in Uganda and Mauritius are practical

examples for Ghana to follow. Uganda's PPP system allows qualified students to attend private secondary schools, which has boosted test performance at low-cost private schools by 0.2 to 0.3 standard deviations (Mohammed & Kuyini, 2020). In Mauritius, the government funds education adequately and subsidizes a significant amount of expenditure in privately owned institutions. Finally, due to a lack of classrooms and other facilities to serve the large number of students, the Double Track System (DTS) has resulted in shortened contact hours and placed additional expenditures on students in the form of private tuition. The DTS should be scrapped, and the government should take use of idle infrastructure and private school teachers in the short term. Longer-term, public-school infrastructure should be expanded, and teachers should be taught to reduce student-classroom and teacher-student ratios in fees and transportation charges. If these recommendations are implemented successfully, it is highly likely that the political settlement framework that begot the Free SHS Policy would be sustained. In view of the foregoing, it would be useful for implementers of the Free SHS (Ministry of Education, through the Free SHS Secretariat and Ghana Education Service) to consider building consensus on a reliable and sustainable funding source dedicated solely to the policy for its sustainability.

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