

A Shift in Ghana's Educational Policy: a Boon or a Bane for the Country

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of new policies in Ghana on mission schools, emphasizing the perceptions of educators, administrators, parents, students, and community members. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research included a purposive sample of 56 students from five mission schools. Thematic analysis was performed to identify key themes related to educational policy changes and their impact on quality education. Stakeholders highlighted several factors associated with these policies that have negatively influenced educational standards, particularly the introduction of the Free Senior High School (FSHS) initiative. The effective implementation of the FSHS policy has been challenged by issues such as inadequate infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, limited curricula, and insufficient funding. As a result, this study recom-

RESUMEN

Un cambio en la política educativa de Ghana: ¿una bendición o una maldición para el país?

Este estudio investiga los efectos de las nuevas políticas en Ghana sobre las escuelas de misión, enfatizando las percepciones de educadores, administradores, padres y miembros de la comunidad. Utilizando un diseño de estudio de caso cualitativo, la investigación incluyó una muestra intencionada de 56 estudiantes de cinco escuelas de misión. Se realizó un análisis temático para identificar los temas clave relacionados con los cambios en la política educativa y su impacto en la calidad de la educación. Los interesados resaltaron varios factores asociados con estas políticas que han influido negativamente en los estándares educativos, particularmente la introducción de la iniciativa de Escuela Secundaria Gratuita (FSHS). La implementación efectiva de la política FSHS ha enfrenta-

mends greater stakeholder engagement in the policy development process to more effectively meet the needs of mission schools.

Key words: Educational Policy Shifts, Stakeholder Perspectives, Curriculum, Free Compulsory Universal Basic School, Free Senior High School Policy.

do desafíos como la infraestructura inadecuada, las aulas abarrotadas, los planes de estudio limitados y la financiación insuficiente. Como resultado, este estudio recomienda una mayor participación de los interesados en el proceso de desarrollo de políticas para atender de manera más efectiva las necesidades de las escuelas de misión.

Palabras clave: Cambios en la política educativa, perspectivas de las partes interesadas, currículo, escuela básica universal obligatoria gratuita, política de escuela secundaria superior gratuita.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ghanaian government education policies play a crucial role in program design, implementation, and evaluation. According to Baker (2022), these policies shape the development of curricula, assessment practices, teacher training, administrative processes, and resource allocation. They establish clear objectives and standards for delivering quality education to all students. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2021) emphasizes that for educational policies to respond effectively to globalisation trends, rapid technological changes, and evolving societal demands, they must be innovative, adaptive, and growth-oriented (Lubienski & Lubienski, 2022). Since gaining independence in 1957, Ghana has continually revised its educational policies in response to various political, social, cultural, and economic forces (Akyeampong et al., 2021). Notably, the government's implementation of Free and Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) in the early 1980s focused on increasing enrolment while alleviating the financial burdens associated with basic education. In the late 1980s, Ghana initiated a community-participatory Education Reform Program (ERP) aimed at decentralization and improving educational standards. The introduction of the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) in 1996 further facilitated reforms by investing in teacher training and infrastructure. Most recently, in 2017, the Ministry of Education implemented the Free Senior High School (FSHS) policy to promote secondary school attendance by eliminating tuition fees (Darkwa & Acquah, 2022). However, these innovations have raised questions regarding their practicality and sustainability concerning access and quality (Ananga, 2021). Although initiatives such as FCUBE have significantly reduced tuition fees

and helped to universalize education, challenges persist in rural and impoverished areas due to financial constraints (Ananga, 2021).

The ERP aimed to enhance governance and community involvement through decentralization and local policymaking. However, by the mid-1990s, inadequate training and capacity-building among local stakeholders had created a gap between policy formulation and actual delivery. Future interventions should prioritize training local stakeholders to align the education system with community needs for improved learning outcomes (Sarre et al., 2018; interObservers, 2023). While the 1996 ESP improved teacher qualifications and infrastructure, issues such as absenteeism and a lack of monitoring continue to hinder educational effectiveness. The implementation of free education for FSHS students has increased inclusivity and led to substantial enrolment growth, but this has also resulted in overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of teachers, compromising the viability of the educational system (Ananga, 2021). Additionally, recent policy shifts have significantly impacted mission schools within Ghana's educational framework. The government's trend towards secular education has created challenges for mission schools as they strive to balance educational and Christian values (Boakye & Boakye, 2022). While government funding has reduced private donations, mission schools attempt to offset this through fundraising activities. However, their reliance on non-donation-based revenues has made them vulnerable to instability (Grosskopf et al., 2020). Despite these challenges, many mission schools continue to excel in providing quality education and are recognized for their moral standards (Akyeampong et al., 2021). Educational reforms have also significantly impacted teachers. The FSHS initiative has improved student attendance and performance, but issues related to overcrowding and insufficient resources particularly hinder students in poorer communities (Akyeampong et al., 2021). Recent policy developments have enhanced teacher training and development, but resource constraints and workload issues have affected teacher morale. Ananga (2021) notes that while the FSHS policy has reduced family expenditures on tuition, increased enrolment rates, and improved access to secondary education, concerns about quality in public institutions have led to ongoing calls for greater accountability and transparency in educational governance (Akyeampong et al., 2021). Policymakers must collaborate to address educational disparities and enhance quality (Ananga, 2021). Recent research underscores the importance of traditional leadership in shaping education policy (Akropong, 2022), as well as the positive correlation between women's empowerment and FSHS enrolment (Sackey et al., 2023). Strong leadership has emerged as a critical factor in improving educational policy and practice (Adzroe, 2023). Overall, continuous engagement with stakeholders—including teachers, parents, and community leaders—is essential in addressing the challenges faced by Ghana's educational system.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The educational environment is always evolving, demanding innovative policy approaches to help students learn and succeed. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Education Policy Outlook (2021) emphasises the critical need to place student learning at the heart of educational programs. Baker (2022) reflects this focus on student-centred policies and emphasises the need to adapt policies to meet the changing needs of learners. The UNESCO (2021) Education Policy Review of Ghana sheds light on the nation's efforts to enhance its educational system. In a similar vein, Akyeampong, Pryor, and Westbrook (2021) study the challenges and prospects for increasing access to education in Sub-Saharan Africa, finding important patterns and potential solutions. Lubieniski and Lubieniski (2022) examined the differences and similarities between public and private schools, and they concluded that public educational institutions are more successful than private alternatives. Akyi et al. (2019) contribute to the ongoing discussion by providing an overview of Ghana's educational system and the effects of achieving educational equality. Ananga (2021) conducted a thorough analysis of Ghana's education reforms and offered a comprehensive examination of past, current, and potential future policy changes.

The 2017 Ghana Education Sector Performance Report from the Ministry of Education in Ghana highlights the country's educational sector's triumphs and challenges. Demir (2021) investigates how governments often have difficulties meeting expectations throughout the process of developing educational programs. According to Sager and Gofen (2022), successful implementation strategies may serve as a roadmap for achieving policy goals. These techniques give insights into successful implementation strategies. Furthermore, Mugambwa et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of research in policy implementation by assessing its current state and prospects. Coleman et al. (2020) propose the ambiguity-conflict model of policy implementation, which synthesises existing research to help readers understand the obstacles to effectively implementing policies. Recent studies, such as those conducted by Kyereko et al. (2022) and Sackey et al. (2023), have focused on specific aspects of Ghana's educational system, such as grade repetition and the impact of programs like free senior high school and women's empowerment on secondary school attendance. These studies shed light on the challenges and successes of Ghana's educational system. There is a growing body of research on educational policies and how they are put into action. New studies by Akrong (2022), Adzroe (2023), and Apau (2021) help us understand how policies, education systems, and student outcomes interact in complex ways.

3. THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Using systems thinking and functional theories to look at the data, the study shows important insights that could help us decide if Ghana's new educational policy is good or not. Systemic thinking emphasises the interconnectedness and interdependence of system components, suggesting that a change in one area of the educational system may trigger significant effects throughout the entire framework. This underscores the need for policymakers to recognise the relationships among various elements, such as curriculum, teaching methods, assessments, and governance structures, to better anticipate the potential outcomes of their decisions (Zhang & Ahmed, 2020). On the other hand, functional theories focus on how different elements within a system perform specific roles. In the context of educational policy changes in Ghana, functional theories can assist policymakers in assessing whether proposed adjustments align with the overarching goals of the educational system (Cassar, 2023). By evaluating the intended objectives of the policy, such as enhancing student performance, promoting diversity, or fostering teachers' professional growth, policymakers can better ascertain the potential effectiveness of the changes being considered.

The decision to adopt both systems thinking and functionalist theories when analysing the transition in Ghana's educational policy is strategically advantageous for several reasons. Using both system thinking and functionalist theories to analyse the transition in Ghana's educational policy offers several strategic advantages. System thinking provides a holistic framework that underlines the interconnectedness of the various components of education, thus enabling policymakers to appreciate what happens in parts of the system when changes are made. Functionalism guarantees the implementation of reforms to achieve the system's overall objectives, including enhancing student performance and promoting inclusivity. Merged, these theories facilitate informed decision-making by enabling thorough analysis of interdependence and focusing on specific goals. In addition, they engage stakeholders through collaboration and community involvement, crucial in reform implementation. This will contribute to adaptive and responsive policy development and hence create a better educational system in Ghana that would, therefore, be effective, fair, and resilient. It is important, then, to weigh the potential advantages and disadvantages inherent in determining the theoretical underpinning of systems thinking and functional theories in Ghana's education policy reform. The interconnectedness of the structure of the educational system and the desired goals of the policy would perhaps enable policymakers to make informed decisions on whether the shift would be helpful or damaging (Nelson & Campbell, 2017).

4. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative case study examines the changes to Ghana's educational policy and their impacts on the stakeholders. The approach, catalyzed by the mobilization of frameworks by Ampah-Mensah et al. (2024), looks at the complex effects of policy implementation. From this paper, a discourse on the implication and efficacy of policy change within the Ghanaian educational system is presented, with accompanying recommendations on how policy can better be harmonized collaboratively. It takes the community perspective into consideration through its input from parents, teachers, and school administrations.

4.1. Population and Sample

The sample and population of the study were drawn from Ghana's 575 Mission Senior High Schools (SHS) (GhanaWeb, 2017; Afram et al., 2024). These schools, by their Christian affiliation, form part of Ghana's educational framework and cater for students from many socio-economic backgrounds and areas. This is a qualitative investigation involving 56 mission stakeholders from five purposively selected schools in the Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions. A wide variety of techniques will be employed in selecting the samples in such a way that respondents have diverse socio-economic and geographic backgrounds, enabling in-depth investigations of issues of concern in this study, while ascertaining that data collection and processing are monitored.

4.2. Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews applied in focus group discussions and key informant interviews in Wolff et al., (2024), have indeed elicited the detailed opinions of stakeholders on the impacts brought about by changes in policy. The people were recruited through official procedures with informed consent, and in-person interviews allowed them to have in-depth conversations.

4.3. Data Analysis

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interviews (KII) qualitative data were thematically analysed to identify themes and patterns. We grouped and analysed the data using theme coding. Member verification and inter-coder reliability checks improved the findings' validity and reliability. NVivo is software that was employed to facilitate the analysis and the management of data (Swygart-Hobaugh, 2024).

4.4. Validity and Reliability

We ensured the research's validity and reliability through strict methods. We methodically and iteratively established interview methods using qualitative research techniques, which included brainstorming, writing, expert review, pilot testing, and modification. Inter-coder reliability evaluations assessed coding consistency and data processing reliability. Member checking enhanced the study's credibility by enabling participants to independently verify the results of their data (Arslan, 2022).

4.5. Research Ethics Committee

This study received ethical clearance from the UNICAF University Research Ethics Committee on July 19, 2022, and the Ministry of Education in Ghana on August 12, 2024. The parties obtained informed consent. Participants are involved in the process of obtaining approved ethical practices. In the throughout the research, we ensured the participants' privacy and anonymity while observing moral considerations to uphold the validity and reliability of this study.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Results

Three themes emerged from this study's data analysis, which showed stakeholders' perspectives on the policy shift in the Ghanaian educational system. The themes are: (a) policy changes in education; (b) policy changes' effectiveness and consequences; and (c) policy changes' impact on education quality.

5.1.1. Changes in education policy

These changes indicate that educational norms, laws, and standards are evolving over time, and these policies can have both positive and negative effects (Levinson et al., 2022). Such changes influence curriculum design, teaching methods, funding allocation, and the overall governance structure. For instance, in Ghana, recent policy changes such as the Free Senior High School (FSHS) initiative have sparked significant debate among stakeholders. As noted by Stephen (2021), critics have attributed the decline in the quality of education to these policy shifts, highlighting the need for an inclusive approach that ensures the voices of educators, parents, and policymakers are heard. Constructive dialogue can promote the development

of a supportive educational environment. Engaging all stakeholders will help safeguard the rights and dignity of both learners and educators, ultimately leading to improved educational standards in mission schools in Ghana (Abonyi & Salifu, 2023). According to one interviewee, government policy changes are a key factor in the decline of educational quality in Ghanaian mission schools, emphasizing that...

the government is continually changing legislation, such as reducing senior high school (FSHS) from four to three years, which impedes learning and educational growth. She was afraid that the frequent changes would affect both educators and students. Teachers may struggle to maintain their teaching strategies when requirements change, while students may struggle to adapt and stay up with the many educational approaches.

Participant DA003 noted that revisions to educational rules may not always align with the specific needs and resources of schools, potentially leading to complications and a decline in overall educational quality. According to Aldridge and McLure (2023), while the introduction of an education policy can significantly impact quality, these changes may not always consider the realities faced by schools, which can further exacerbate issues within the educational system.

During focus group discussion 5, a participant pointed out that the implementation of the free FSHS policy resulted in a notable increase in secondary school enrolment, leading to overcrowded classrooms and other challenges. Although the expansion of access to education is commendable, it has introduced certain drawbacks. The influx of students has caused overcrowded classrooms and created a mix of students with varying levels of commitment to their studies. Consequently, some students may not approach their academic responsibilities with the seriousness required, which contributes to a decline in overall educational standards.

Following the policy changes, participants noted several significant adjustments that have negatively impacted the quality of education. These include the implementation of the free senior high school policy, the introduction of the double-track system, and the heightened government control or ownership of educational institutions.

5.1.2. Free Senior High School

The high school, popularly called SHS, is the stage of schooling in Ghana that follows Junior High School, usually taking three continuous years and targeting students between the ages of 15 and 18 years. Being the second cycle of education, SHS should prepare students for

tertiary education or vocational training. Indeed, the system encompasses several programs and types of schools, including traditional academic schools and vocational or technical schools. Students in SHS take a general course consisting of core subjects: English, Mathematics, and Integrated Science, with elective subjects chosen from Humanities, Sciences, Business, and technical fields. The students conclude their course with the West African Senior School Certificate Examination conducted by the West African Examinations Council. This is an important assessment that determines their qualification for possible further studies at universities, polytechnics, and other institutions of higher learning. In September 2017, Ghana launched the Free Senior High School program, designed to ensure that all students can access SHS education without incurring any school fees. This government policy seeks to eliminate financial barriers that might prevent students from continuing beyond Junior High School (JHS). Rooted in principles of justice and equality, the initiative aims to boost enrollment and guarantee equitable access to education (Mohammed, 2024). Despite some successes, there have been many setbacks to FSHS policy that have impacted on the way it has been carried out and the quality of education provided. Research by Frimpong et al. (2022) indicates that while some focus group members and interviewees feel the FSHS initiative will better the quality of education provided, others believe the opposite has occurred. For instance, a participant in FGD 4 said that “The implementation of the FSHS Policy has reduced the quality of education,” while participants in FGD 5 noted that students are no longer motivated to meet the standards set by mission schools. Due to this policy, mission schools are now supposed to admit students with various academic backgrounds regardless of whether they qualified under old entrance requirements. It has led to several problems as it is very tough on most schools to uplift the academics of those students who earlier were considered unfit for admission (Tawiah & Addai-Mensah, 2023). Another negative effect of the introduction of the FSHS program is how it has disrupted academic activities with the frequent scheduling being changed by the GES. For instance, one respondent reported that “In addition, the number in each class has increased. This has created a student-to-teacher ratio of 35 to 1 in the classroom.

5.1.3. Double-track system

The introduction of the FSHS program in Ghana increased the number of students who enrolled in senior high schools (SHS). This increase in enrolment, however, brought to light a shortage of classroom facilities. To that end, the schools adopted a double-track system to accommodate the larger student body. In this system, students are divided into two groups,

called the “Green” and “Gold” tracks. The two groups share the same classrooms and teachers but attend school at different times (The Chronicle, 2024). In this way, schools can manage a greater number of students while using the facilities efficiently to their full capacity. The double-track system was thus a government solution to the challenge brought forth by the need to accommodate more students within existing infrastructure so that as many young people as possible get an education despite limitations in physical resources. Such a policy has affected educational performance negatively. In certain instances, the intervention led to “shortened curricula and a disruption of regular academic cycles [that] undermined program effectiveness,” even though it ultimately improved the quality of education (Dwomoh et al., 2022). In focus group discussions with three respondents in four groups, participants indeed expressed that the double-track system meant a decline in the quality of education. According to one participant in Focus Group Discussion 3, this intervention has caused problems for school officials in keeping track of school attendance.

“I have to say something about the government’s policies, particularly the double-track system, which makes it impossible for school administrators to supervise the attendance of children and ensure their prompt return following vacations. She has seen that some kids come back with their assigned group, while others come back later. This results in a lack of consistency, which has a detrimental influence on the academic achievement of the pupils.”

The policy caused a lack of clarity and consistency. Another participant in Focus Group Discussion 5 expressed the belief that there is a lack of clarity and consistency regarding the departure time for students from school and the expected time for teachers to complete their lesson plans. According to the participant,

“In particular, this has been the case with unplanned calendars. There seems to be a lack of clarity and consistency regarding when students should leave for the day and when teachers should complete their lesson plans. This unpredictability has the potential to have a substantial influence on the teaching and learning process.

The double-track approach resulted in compressing courses that should have been studied in a longer period to a shorter one; parent 4 noted that “the practice of condensing subjects meant to be covered over 5 years into just 2.5 years creates strain and lowers academic requirements.” Extend the typical educational curriculum for second-cycle colleges from three to four years. Among other initiatives taken to boost educational standards, the extension of the regular program for second-cycle institutions from three to four was outstanding

(Education Revolution Association, 2024). In addition, there were changes in the organisation of the educational system. However, its limitations included a lack of clarity on the duration of school completion and a gap in the curriculum. Administrator 1 says, "One example of this shift was the expansion of the standard educational program for second-cycle colleges from three to four years." This modification was carried out. Despite this, the structure of the educational system has undergone further changes. Once again, there has been a revision to the duration of operation for the second cycle's institutions, with some proposing a five-year system and others advocating for three years. The situation created ambiguity because of a lack of clarity around the duration of completion of the educational program. While this system offered three different terms, totaling nine months, divided into a typical academic year, the current system, on the other hand, has condensed it into two semesters, giving students longer breaks from school. In addition, the number of pupils in each class has increased, resulting in a student-to-teacher ratio of 35:1. Despite these changes, there remains an issue with the curriculum and syllabus. The shift from a four-year to a three-year educational system has left a gap in the curriculum, requiring teachers to cover a substantial amount of content within a constrained timeframe.

5.1.4. Government control or assumption of ownership

Mission schools' policy of government control, or assumption of ownership, aims to improve educational standards (OECD, 2023). Ten interviewees and one discussant from a focus group discussed the impact of government control on the decline in educational standards. A participant in FGD 2 expressed that the government's takeover resulted in modifications to the school's rules and regulations. "I will make it known that once the government assumed control of the mission public school, they made modifications to the rules and regulations that were different from the principles the church followed." Participant DA002 stated that the government's ownership decision impacted the mission schools. "The government's decision to absorb ownership of mission schools into the mainstream affected the schools' quality, monitoring, and performance." The study's findings delved into the effects of Ghana's educational policy shift on mission schools. This study aims to investigate whether stakeholders within the educational ecosystem have perceived these policy changes as beneficial or detrimental. Through thematic analysis, three major themes emerged: (1) perceptions of policy impact; (2) effectiveness and consequences of policy changes; and (3) stakeholder perspectives on educational quality. Each theme highlights the complex dynamics of the policy shift and its implications for Ghanaian mission schools.

5.1.5. Positive impact

In some respects, the shift in educational policies and curriculum positively affected the mission schools in Ghana. The changes in government policies and curricula have had the desired positive impact on mission schools (Acquah, Attila, et al., 2024). According to the participants, these changes have helped mission schools achieve a broader scope of service, increase student enrolment, and reduce segregation between high- and low-achieving students.

5.1.6. Negative impact

In four of the focus group discussions, fifteen of the interviewees and discussants maintained that the shift in educational policies and curriculum negatively impacted the Mission School. Hence, for most participants, the shift in educational policies and curriculum hurt the mission schools in Ghana. The shift in policies and curriculum has resulted in learning disruption, a decline in moral value, an infrastructural deficit, inadequate supervision, and among other things. According to Abbas (2023), the negative impacts outweigh the positive aspects.

5.1.7. Educational quality is declining

The change in educational policy and curriculum also resulted in a decline in education quality. Changes in years for schools, a lack of teacher training based on curriculum changes, and family financial donations to their child's education created insufficient funding for mission schools, thereby impacting the quality of education provided to the students (Koh et al., 2023). Eight interviewees and discussants from two focus group discussions believed that the policy changes negatively affected the mission schools by causing a decline in education quality. For example, Administrator 1 revealed that "the previous four-year policy was more beneficial to the educational experience than the recent one.

The results of a comparison between those who went through the previous system of four years and those who are currently in the present system of three years (two and a half years) have shown that the previous group profited more from experience. It emphasizes the importance of carefully considering and evaluating the education system to ensure that all students receive an education of sufficient quality.

In the same vein, DA002 stated that teachers' training, which was not affected by the changes made to the curriculum, affects the quality of education.

Also, curriculum changes, which did not correspond to training teachers on how to use the new curriculum, have affected educational standards. Some teachers continue to teach using

the old curriculum, which is more teacher-centred and does not address the needs of the 21st-century learner.

One of the focus group discussions in Focus Group Discussion 4 stated that the lack of donations from families affected the budget to purchase resources for teachers to provide quality lessons. Beauty explains. This policy limits family donations to their child's education. "The restriction on donations has resulted in lower educational quality, as insufficient budgets make it difficult for teachers to provide quality lessons. As a result, the overall quality of instruction in missionary schools has declined, reducing its effectiveness."

5.1.8. Financial constraints

Mission schools suffered funding constraints due to the policy and curriculum changes. The FSHS policy puts limits on family contributions and, subsequently, mission school funding. The changes in policy further reduced mission funding, thereby reducing the resources and facilities at the schools (Acquah et al., 2024). One member of FGD 4 said that the FSHS policy made it difficult for instructors to get material financing. Beauty believes the FSHS program has harmed education. She refers to how this policy limits the school's contributions from parents. Underpaid teachers cannot effectively run engaging classes because of donation limitations that diminish education. Mission schools serve less of a purpose because of the depleting quality of education. Ghana has high school attrition rates because there is no strategy for national education. The curriculum and policy often change because this vague system creates chaos. Mission schools have high staff turnover due to a lack of national efforts. Without a national education plan, Ghana's educational system suffers in terms of continuity and uniformity, with high staff turnover that lowers student learning.

5.1.9. Inadequate supervision

The introduction of the double-track system and free FSHS made it impossible for the teachers to supervise properly the students (Shamo, 2023). Also, the mission managers' lack of involvement in these changes has hurt their reputation. Six of the interviewees and discussants from two focus group discussions expressed the opinion that policy and curriculum changes had a negative impact on supervision in mission schools. For example, DA007 argued that a full class prevents the student from receiving appropriate supervision. "When there are too many students enrolled in a given class, it is impossible to provide enough supervision for all of them, which is one factor that contributes to a declining school attendance rate." One of the focus group participants in Focus Group Discussion 2 believed that a lack of supervision of

students would affect their schooling and situation. The idea is that children who lack proper supervision may struggle in school and life.

5.1.10. Infrastructural deficit

The change in educational policy and curriculum led to an infrastructural deficit. The free education policy resulted in over-enrolment in mission schools, burdening their constrained infrastructure. This led to overcrowding of classrooms and strained the school facilities (Ayembilla & Ayanwale, 2024). The emphasis on hands-on learning in the absence of infrastructure created a challenge for mission schools. Three interviewees and two focus group participants believed that the policy created infrastructural deficits in mission schools. For example, one of the participants, DA005, stated that an increase in enrolment contributed to the infrastructural constraints. “It is essential to recognize that the increase in student enrolment might put a burden on the institution’s already-constrained resources. Because of this pressure, classrooms may become overcrowded.” One of the participants in Focus Group Discussion 4 stated that the new curriculum emphasis on hands-on learning created difficulties for mission schools where there is a lack of resources in rooms and laboratories. “The emphasis on hands-on learning in the new curriculum poses a challenge for mission schools due to a lack of critical facilities such as scientific labs and suitable ICT resources.” This shortage negatively affects both students and instructors, leading to a decline in academic success.

5.1.11. Increase student enrolment

Increased student enrolment is an increment in the number of learners admitted to an academic session. One participant remarked that increased student enrolment is one of the positive impacts of changes in educational policies in Ghana. According to DA005, the changes in education policies have led to an increased number of students enrolled in mission schools. I believe that the implementation of broader educational policies aimed at improving access and fairness in education could potentially impact mission schools, both positively and negatively. These policies may also benefit mission schools because they may increase the number of students enrolled.” The rise in the number of students enrolled has resulted in overcrowding in classrooms, where the number of students surpasses the effective learning capacity. This could impede individual attention from teachers, affect the quality of instruction, and make the learning environment uncomfortable, which in turn could affect the performance and well-being of the students. Such situations may be resolved by expanding facilities, adding more teachers, or reducing class sizes.

5.2. Discussion

5.2.1. Discussion of Results

Stakeholders' View of the Policy Shifts in the Ghanaian Educational System. These results from the study indicate how complex the landscape of policy shifts in education has been in Ghana, and their impacts, as perceived by the stakeholders, tend to be both positive and negative. The three emergent themes, namely changes in education policy, effectiveness, and consequences of these, and impact on quality, thus provide a wide framework within which the implications for such shifts can be gauged, especially in mission schools. 5.2.3. Changes in Education Policy

The rapid pace of change regarding educational policies in Ghana presents both opportunities and challenges. Stakeholders consistently express that changes such as the Free Senior High School (FSHS) initiative have led to vigorous debates about their effectiveness (Akyina & Prem, 2024; Publishing Desk, 2024). Critics, including various stakeholders, contend that these changes have adversely affected the quality of education. A notable concern raised by a key informant is the reduction in the duration of senior high school from four to three years, which has been detrimental to learning outcomes. Participants also highlight that many of these policies do not align with the needs and resource capacities of schools, underscoring the necessity for stakeholder involvement in policy formulation. Engaging in inclusive dialogue could foster solutions that uphold the rights of both teachers and students while enhancing the overall quality of education.

5.2.2. Policy Efficacy and Outcome

While the introduction of FSHS policy increased access to secondary education, added pressure has indeed been strained by existing resources. This resulted in overpopulated classrooms, which consequently disrupted the learning environment, bringing about inequity in various ways among students who demonstrate different levels of commitment to schooling (Ibrahim, 2024). Participants' observations that the policy has lowered educational quality due to a lack of support mechanisms highlight a broader trend of educational policies not being thoroughly evaluated before implementation. This raises concerns about whether the government adequately considered infrastructure and teaching support when introducing such policies. The introduction of a double-track system in many schools as a response to increased enrolment has received different reviews. While it aimed at managing student

distribution, it shortened curricula and disrupted the academic track, raising quite valid concerns about the sustainability of educational quality (The Chronicle, 2024). This has given administrators a hard time in ascertaining the actual students attending classes and their yearly progress, hence the clarity of policy design and regulatory uniformity across the education landscape.

5.2.3. Effects on the Quality of Education

Perhaps the most resounding area that arises in many discussions of the results relates to the general depreciation in education quality as brought forth through policy changes. Insufficient supervision, and infrastructural deficit were among other aspects noted by many respondents due to rapid implementations without looking back. In this connection, inadequately linked new approaches to teacher training contribute negatively to the problems caused in the learning processes at (Boakye & Boakye, 2022). This shift to practical learning without the necessary infrastructure at these mission schools raises many concerns about the delivery of quality education. Notwithstanding these negative trends, stakeholders noted positive outcomes such as wider access to education and less segregation between the lower and higher achievers. This glimmer of hope means that even while policies are flawed, they sometimes offer an avenue for improvement in equity within education. It is here that policymakers need to be aware of these nuances so that positive aspects can be expanded while the inherent weaknesses that have dogged educational quality are tackled.

In summary, on the discussion, the shift in the educational policy in Ghana marks a pivotal point in the history of the country's educational system, especially mission schools. These findings reveal the dire need to strike a proper balance between policy development through comprehensive assessments of the potential impacts that may be caused, feedback from concerned stakeholders, and sustainable planning regarding infrastructure and resources. The way forward for improving the quality of education in Ghana will involve creating a responsive educational environment that addresses the needs of all stakeholders while protecting academic standards. Further research might be conducted on how stakeholder contributions could be meaningfully integrated into policy-making processes and how mission schools could meet the challenges with which they are confronted in this changing environment.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

6.1. Limitations

Issues of limitations in research that one should consider: **(1) The limitations of the scope of policy analysis:** The study could focus on specific education policies and in that sense loses the broader context in which such changes interact with other socio-political factors in Ghana. **(2) Constraints by Temporal Bounds:** This may or may not then be dependent upon events within narrow time confines that themselves limit long-term understanding of any given policy change. **(3) Data Availability:** The study is liable to be inhibited from complete analysis due to general data unavailability into specific areas of Ghana Education, including regional disparity and some specific demographic segment data. **(4) Biases and Subjectivity:** The interpretation of the impacts resulting from changes in policy could easily be biased by the researchers' point of view, mainly when the qualitative data relied greatly on stakeholders with vested interests. **(5) Diversity of Stakeholders:** If instructors, parents, students, and other policy actors had not been well represented to provide their views, the lack of full understanding of implications from this policy would have arisen. Apart from these, external influences from foreign aid, global tendencies in the field of education, and even economic shifts, about which the research has made no consideration, could equally affect Ghanaian education. **(6) Short and long-term impacts:** There may be failure to delineate the difference between short-run effects and the long-run impact of the changes in education policy, thereby serving to bias results (Chukwuemeka, 2022).

6.2. Future Research

Future Key Research would be: **(1) Longitudinal studies:** A study in this respect would, therefore, enable the implication and effectiveness of changes in educational policy over time to be traced and could hence provide relevant insights with respect to long-term effects. **(2) Comparative Studies:** Drawing from similar changes in education policy and their impact in other countries will help to illustrate best practices for Ghana, which could then be adapted and domesticated. **(3) Variations across Regions:** How changes in policy bear on different parts of Ghana may yield an account of disparities and inspire specific interventions. **(4) Stakeholders' Impact Assessment:** One can explain the multi-dimensional character of the reform in education by analysing how educational policy changes would affect various groups of stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and communities.

(5) Policy Implementation Studies: By analysing the actual implementation of these policies in schools, one can highlight any disparity between the intended policy output and the real results of such policies. **(6) Emphasis on Equity:** Additional research could investigate the effects of educational policy changes on marginalised communities, including the issues of access to quality education and equity. **(7) The Role of Technology:** By evaluating the impact of technology and digital learning initiatives as part of policy shifts, it is possible to gain insight into their efficacy in enhancing educational outcomes. **(8) Outcome Measurement:** An insight of deeper effects beyond the scores that the standardised test would obtain if one constructed and tried ways of measuring the performance in a policy change environment. Therefore, to get a wider understanding of whether the educational policy change in Ghana has been a blessing or a curse, these limitations must be resolved and further research done for the positive impact of the reforms (Hafner, 2022). This will ultimately inform future reforms to achieve positive results.

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research underlines how complex education policy reform has been in Ghana, particularly with respect to mission schools. Such rapid reforms pose lots of challenges, and naturally, good resource allocation plus stakeholder involvement form critical ingredients towards effectively navigating the path through these reforms. The results show just how important proper planning of infrastructure and training for teachers is in curtailing some of those negative impacts that hit the level of quality concerning schooling. With the assistance of a stakeholder, one can provide a collaborative environment for educators, legislators, and the community members to be more responsible with better improvement in student achievement. Accompanying this could be the reasons through which the education system of Ghana will be more effective, equitable, and responsive to the existing challenges. This is where ongoing research into the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders will be crucial in ensuring that policy changes yield significant improvements in education.

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