

# **POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION: THE COMPETITIVENESS OF GENERAL AND ADVANCED BUSINESS CERTIFICATE (G/ABC) HOLDERS IN ACCESSING BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN GHANAIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS (TIS)**

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## **Abstract**

*A key policy strand that emanated from Ghana's Educational reforms of 1987 and the recommendations of the Anamuah-Mensah Committee was the localization of foreign administered pre-tertiary examinations. Subsequently, the G/ABC was introduced to replace the Royal Society of Arts Examination. Since the implementation of the policy, there has been an intensive national debate over the acceptance of G/ABCs into tertiary institutions. The paper adopts a qualitative research model based on a longitudinal traction of three years to examine the policy's impact on tertiary Business education. The admission requirements of accredited TIs were examined to assess the competitiveness of G/ABC holders in accessing tertiary Business education. Tables have been used to enhance the discussion of findings. The study indicated that gaps in the policy implementation process had led to the alienation of most G/ABC holders from accessing mainstream tertiary Business education. Harmonization strategies for inter-agency collaboration have been suggested to mitigate the problem.*

## **Introduction**

A cardinal feature of Ghana's educational reforms of 1987 was the localization of pre-tertiary business education programmes previously administered by external examination bodies like the City and Guilds of London and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA). Invariably, a strand of policy direction in education recommended by the Anamuah-Mensah Committee on educational reforms (2002) was the enhancement of skills acquisition and the development of competencies of business students for the world of work.

The main requirements for accessing tertiary business programmes before the localization process, were credits or passes respectively the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary 'O' and Advanced 'A' levels and the Royal Society of Arts stages I, II and III. The Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE) replaced the GCE 'O' and 'A' levels in 1997. The West African Senior Secondary School Certificate (WASSCE) on the other hand replaced the SSSCE in 2006 (WAEC, 2006). The General and Advanced Business Certificate Examinations (G/ABC) targeted persons who under normal circumstances could not enroll on programmes on full time basis, replaced the RSA. In essence, the G/ABC runs parallel to the WASSCE which is currently conducted for Senior Secondary Schools in Ghana. The General Business Certificate (GBC) and Advanced Business Certificate (ABC) were equated to the SSSCE/WASSCE and GCE 'A' level/RSA stage III respectively (WAEC, 2006). These therefore, constitute the main access qualifications for Business programmes in Ghanaian tertiary institutions (TIs).

The introduction of the G/ABC impacted positively, the direction of Business education because it facilitated a paradigm shift in the traditional business-oriented programmes offered under the GCE and RSA examinations. The profile dimension of the business subjects on offer was expanded to reflect contemporary needs of the business environment and the world of work. Under the GBCE, candidates have a bouquet of 14 core business subjects to choose from. Those who offer ABCE have 18 compared to six for those

who offer the WASSCE. Therefore, candidates who offer the G/ABC are exposed to wider latitude of subjects that enhance their capacity to access diverse business programmes in Ghanaian TIs.

The directive issued by the National Accreditation Board (NAB) in 2011 requesting all TIs in Ghana not to admit candidates with grades 'D7', 'D8' and 'E' from the SSSCE and WASSCE respectively, stoked the embers of a national debate on admission requirements to higher educational institutions. The debate has so far not reflected on G/ABC holders who are equally qualified to access mainstream tertiary business education programmes in Ghana. From 2006 and 2010, a total of 134,925 males and 91,766 females wrote the WASSCE examination in Business Studies. On the other hand, a total of 18,004 males and 21,038 females wrote the G/ABC from 2005 to 2010 (WAEC, 2010). The substantial number of candidates that patronize the G/ABC examination underscores the need for their integration into the mainstream tertiary education system.

### **Statement of the Problem**

TIs in Ghana request for SSSCE/WASSCE, 'O'/'A' levels, RSA and numerous other certificates for admission to Business programmes on offer. Even though the G/ABCE has been running parallel to the WASSCE since 2005 as a government policy, there seems to be no recognition for the category of candidates who patronize the examination. This has created confusion among user agencies on one hand and the GES/WAEC and pre-tertiary institutions that prepare candidates for the ABCE on the other. The enormity of the problem has been emphasized by Dotsey (2010), the Association of G/ABCE institutions (2011), WAEC through its circular No. TDD/VED/G.Com/V.1/21 of 2005 and the Ghana Business Examinations Committee Report (2010). The problem has been exacerbated by the proliferation of pre-tertiary business certificates that are being issued by pre-university institutions. Due to weak regulatory compliance TIs have no problem accepting these certificates as alternatives to the G/ABC for admission. This paper therefore, interrogates the implementation of the government's policy to localize pre-tertiary Business examinations in Ghana. Thus, the paper expands the frontiers of the national debate on admission requirements to TIs to cover G/ABC holders.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The paper seeks to:

- i. find out the level of recognition given to candidates who patronize G/ABCE
- ii. ascertain the competitiveness of G/ABC holders in accessing Business programmes in Ghanaian TIs.
- iii. Assess the level of inter-agency collaboration between the WAEC, GES, NAB and other stakeholders in enforcing compliance to educational policies
- iv. Educate stakeholders on the nature and essence of the GBC/ABC examination.

### **The Scope of the Study**

The study is limited to the competitiveness of G/ABC holders in accessing tertiary business programmes. It does not cover those who seek admission to professional programmes run by self-regulatory professional bodies.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. Are there policies and collaborative mechanisms for actors in higher education that enables G/ABC holders to gain access to tertiary business education programmes?
2. Do TIs in Ghana subscribe to a common system of admission requirements for placement of applicants on business programmes?

3. How does the proliferation of pre-university Business certificates impact the chances of G/ABC holders in accessing tertiary Business programmes?

### **Significance of the Study**

The study provides information that will impact policy direction in the placement of G/ABC holders in tertiary educational institutions. The findings will also enable the stakeholders to project the G/ABC as alternative business examination to the WASSCE. The study will provide additional base-line information for arms-length regulatory agencies like the NAB to enable them enhance their toolkit for assessing TIs. Invariably, the study will provide ideas that will enable inter-agency collaboration.

### **Review of Literature**

The policy making process involves formulation, implementation and evaluation (Inwood, 1999). Policy implementation is invariably influenced by public servants and policy instruments used for the process. Mazinaman and Sabatier (1999) have therefore, indicated that for effective implementation of policies, the agencies responsible for the implementation must have committed persons (as cited in Inwood, 1999). Thus, a successful policy implementation in the Ghanaian public service is dependent upon enthusiastic implementers. Verschiere (2009) contends that as implementation vehicles, arms-length agencies have been disaggregated from core government and therefore have extensive decision-making and managerial authority to focus on policy implementation. In this vein, Cairney (2009) has intimated that policy failure arises because:

- i. Policies may be frustrated by intra-department and inter-agency conflict.
- ii. It is difficult to implement decisions that involve actors who are employed by other independent organizations because of their exhibition of dual allegiance.

The core actors in Ghana's pre-tertiary and tertiary educational system include arms-length agencies like the GES, WAEC and the NAB. Other actors include TIs, Senior High Schools and user agencies. The aggregation of these agencies for a common implementation process raises challenges which if not managed well could leave yawning gaps in the implementation of educational policies (Cairney, 2009). Lock (1999) posits that Business Education exhibit considerable ambivalence about accreditation as they wobble between accepting or challenging accreditation requirements based on how they impact their activities. It follows therefore, that if implementing agencies in Ghana are not tough on their compliance requirements, TIs may refuse to conform to regulatory prescriptions. To remain competitive in the global technological and market oriented environment, Business Schools should strive to set appropriate standards (Van der Colff, 2004; Nguyen & Le Blance, 1997; Bosch & Low, 1998). Regulatory regimes, be they external regulation, institutional self-regulation or collaborative regulation (mixed) justify their existence through enforcement of direction, i.e. compliance (Jackson, 1997). Regulatory bodies are tasked to make rules, provide guidance or restrictions and ensure compliance. They also measure performance in relation to established standards and make adjustments in relation to changing environmental circumstances (Jackson, 1997). It is therefore, imperative for Ghana's regulatory agencies to exact compliance from higher educational institutions. This position is also shared by Kuperan and Sutinen (1999). According to them, regulatory economic agents should be controlled through monitoring, surveillance and enforcements to ensure conformity because when failures occur, the enforcement agencies are cited for censure.

Admission requirements to Business programmes in TIs, according to Boyles, should be properly managed. He accentuated the fact that the application of 'one-size-fits-all' standard of admission of undergraduate students with no distinction made between applicants with different backgrounds militates against performance (as cited in Pharr & Lawrence,

2007). The statement has implication for Ghana's higher educational system where the WASSCE/SSCE has become the sole standard for admission to some TIs. (Norman, 2004). It is believed that diversification of educational products coupled with freedom of choice enables quality in higher education. this epitomizes the fact that the introduction of the G/ABCE programmes in Ghana's pre-tertiary educational system invariably affects quality assurance in higher Business education. according to Jackson (1997), concerns have been raised in the United Kingdom higher educational system over academic standards as a result of the way institutions provide education in relation to the rapid rise in enrolment and the subsequent diversification of a higher educational products. In the Ghanaian context, the setting of verified standards in relation to admission requirements is equally necessary in view of the diversified nature of business products being produced by both public and private TIs. The goal and specification model of higher education assumes that there are clear, enduring, normative and well-accepted systems in place as indicators and standards for educational institutions. The quality of education defined by this model has implications for Ghana's higher educational system.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

The study hinges a qualitative model that adopts a longitudinal traction of three years. Library based resources in addition to data collected from advertisements placed by TIs in the Daily Graphic from 2008 to June, 2011 were examined. This choice of methodology was necessary because entry requirements placed by TIs in newspapers ultimately determined the category of applicants needed for admission. The 'Daily Graphic' was selected because it carried most advertisements placed by TIs inviting applications to their programmes. The selected TIs were first cleared for operational legitimacy by checking their accreditation status with the National Accreditation Board's list of accredited TIs for 2011 (Daily Graphic, Monday, March 21, 2011). Unaccredited institutions were not considered because they were operating illegally. The selected TIs were further categorized into 'public', 'private', 'polytechnic', 'tutorial colleges' etc for ease of data interpretation and discussion. Some operatives of pre-tertiary institutions, public and private TIs were interviewed to find out their level of understanding of the G/ABCE. Similarly, operatives of the GES and WAEC had been interviewed.

### **Results and Discussion**

Research Question 1: Are there policies and collaborative mechanisms for actors in higher education that enable G/ABCE holders to gain access to tertiary business education programmes?

It was established that the policy to phase out the General Certificate of Education and RSA examinations and replace them with the SSSCE/WASSCE and the (G/ABC) respectively was facilitated by the government through its key policy instruments on education (Ministry of Education (MOE) and the WAEC) as part of Ghana's educational reforms. The key governmental policy instruments engaged in managing the G/ABCE include:

- The MOE and its regulatory agencies
- The West African Examination Council (WAEC) and
- A 26-stakeholders committee – The Ghana Business Examinations Committee (GBEC).

Other actors in the implementation process include the NAB, public and private Senior High Schools, public and private TIs, professional bodies that administer Business oriented examinations and user agencies.

## **Implementation Gaps**

The implementation strategies adopted to localize the RSA examination was fraught with constraints. The study indicated a yawning gap in communication between the arms-length agencies viz. GES and the WAEC and other actors in the implementation process because most respondents from both the public and private TIs and pre-TIs could not explain the essence of the G/ABCE. Others did not know that the RSA and GCE examinations had been replaced by the G/ABCE and SSCE/WASSCE respectively. The study established the lack of inter-agency collaborative mechanisms in educating and sensitizing TIs and other stakeholders on the essence of the G/ABC. There was therefore, weak horizontal and vertical communication among the stakeholders. It was also established that user tertiary institutions have no guiding manuals that explain the relativity of grades of the G/ABC to the 'O' and 'A' levels, SSSCE/WASSCE and other certificates. The tertiary institutions are therefore, not under pressure to factor the G/ABCE into their admission policies. The NAB which is the key regulatory agency has equally not been able to exact regulatory compliance hence TIs advertise diverse entry requirements without sanctions being imposed on them. Cairney's (ibid) argument that when policies are executed by arms-length agencies, challenges of implementation arise because their parochial interests have relevance here. There were therefore, gaps between decision points and action points.

## **Recognition of G/ABC Holders**

For the 2008/2009 academic year Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and University of Education, Winneba (UEW) were the TIs in the public sector that accepted G/ABC holders for placement. For the public degree awarding/professional institutions, only IPS placed them. Two out of the seven selected private universities made no provision for them. In the 2009/2010 academic year with the exception of KNUST and UEW, no provision was made for G/ABC holders in the other public universities. The situation for the public degree awarding/professional institutions category remained unchanged. Thirteen (13) out of the 21 private universities accepted G/ABCs for placement. For the nine Polytechnics observed, only four made provision for G/ABC holders. KNUST and UEW continued to be the only public universities to have made provision for G/ABC holders for the 2010/2011 academic year. Of the 21 private universities studied, seven (7) had no provision for them. Three (3) out of the nine polytechnics studied also had no provision for them either.

## **Recognition of 'A' Level, RSA III, SSSCE and WASSCE Holders**

It was realized that TIs that offer business programmes have an appeal for SSSC and WASSC holders as against G/ABC holders. This was emphasized by Dotsey (Daily Graphic, March 26, 2011) when he argued that public universities should accept G/ABCE holders. All the 38 TIs studied accepted SSSC and WASSC for admission even though the SSSCE is no longer conducted in Ghana. 'A' level and RSA certificates were accepted as against the G/ABC. All the 21 private universities studied listed 'A' level holders thereby buttressing the fact that most TIs have not been educated on the replacement of the RSA and 'A' level examinations with the G/ABC and WASSCE respectively. The nine polytechnics studied listed 'A' level holders for admission. Five out of the nine accepted RSA III certificates for admission. The premium placed on RSA and 'A' level holders for admission to Business programmes despite their discontinuance exacts enormous pressure on G/ABC holders.

**Research Question 2: Do Ghanaian TIs subscribe to a common system of admission requirements for the placement of applicants on Business programmes?**

The study showed that admission requirements varied from one TI to another due to lack of intrusive regulatory scrutiny. The absence of regulatory manuals on admission

requirements relating to the G/ABC had enabled TIs to calibrate their admission requirements independently. It is therefore, difficult to enforce compliance. Regulatory compliance must be enforced rigorously in education to sustain standards as intimated by Kuperan & Sutinene (1999). Some TIs required a ceiling aggregate of 24 for both WASSC and SSSC holders. Others required aggregate 24 and 36 for SSSCE and WASSCE respectively. This means that TIs that required aggregate 36 factored grades C4, C5 and C6 as entities and attached points to them. They therefore, used a scale of 1-6 in the aggregation process. Conversely, those that required a ceiling of aggregate 24 for both SSSCE/WASSCE lumped grades C4, C5 and C6 together and attached four points. Hence, an applicant who applied with grade 'C6' in six subjects was aggregated 24 whilst in the former the aggregate would be 36. The implication of these separate aggregation processes is that TIs that set a ceiling of aggregate 24 for both WASSCE and SSSCE holders placed the later in disadvantageous position. The study showed that eight (8) out of the 22 TIs selected constituting 36% fell in that category. It further showed that whereas UDS, UCC, UG, UEW and the Central University College for example, accepted WASSCE applicants with aggregate 36, some Polytechnics (Kumasi Polytechnic and Ho Polytechnic) required a ceiling aggregate of 24 for both WASSCE and SSSCE holders – an indication that some Polytechnics were demanding grades higher than what universities required for admission. This aggregation process impacts G/ABC holders negatively because TIs do not have standard scaling mechanisms for determining grading differentials for the placement of 'General' and 'Advanced' Business certificates holders. It was realized that even though the NAB derives its authority for the maintenance of higher educational standards from the National Accreditation Board Act 2007 (Act 477), it has not been able to enforce the standardization of minimum admission requirements to TIs.

As a result of lack of understanding, some TIs require a mix of 'A' level, RSA, G/ABC and other certificates for admission. Similarly, the SSSCE and WASSCE were equated to the ABC even though the ABC is higher. As a result of this confusion, ABC holders are placed in level 100 and 200 by some TIs. Discrepancies were also observed in the calculation and aggregation of GBCE grades. Some TIs required four, five or six passes at GBCE for admission. At the ABC level, some required two, three, four or five passes. The prescription of six (6) GBC subjects including Mathematics, English and Science were ignored by most TIs. Others however, ignored G/ABC holders entirely. In the aggregation of G/ABC grades numerous discrepancies were identified in the admission requirement of TIs.

Another dimension to the absence of standardization of admission requirements related to the determination of who a 'mature applicant' was. For example, the study indicated that the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), University of Ghana (UG) and Accra Polytechnic pegged the ages of matured applicants at 25, 27 and 30 years respectively. This further accentuates the fact that G/ABC holders, some of whom access tertiary education through the 'mature' candidates' platform encounter further hurdles depending upon which TI they intend attending.

Research Question 3: Does the proliferation of pre-tertiary Business education certificates impact the competitiveness of G/ABC holders in accessing tertiary Business programmes?

The liberalization and deregulation of tertiary education has led to a rise in the number of TIs that accept Business certificates of diverse academic orientation for admission. As at 25th December, 2011 apart from College of Nursing, Education and Agriculture, the following categories of TIs were offering degrees and diplomas:

Public universities	6
Private tertiary institutions	42
Tutorial colleges	7

Polytechnics	10
Distance learning institutions	5
Chartered private TIs	3
Regionally owned tertiary institutions	1
Public universities/professional institutions	9
Source: National Accreditation Board, December, 2011	

The numerous certificates required by TIs for admission to Business programmes raises concern over academic standards (Lock, 1999). The proliferation of Business certificates from local and foreign sources without verification and standardization poses serious challenges to benchmarking standards of pre-tertiary and tertiary Business education. Since there are no verifiable means of aggregating these certificates, TIs on their own volition assign 'academic weight' to them for placement in levels 100, 200 or 300. It was realized from the study that the following Business certificates were being accepted as alternatives to the SSSCE/WASSCE and the G/ABCs for placement

- High National Diploma or Advanced Diploma Certificate from divers subject areas
- Professional qualifications like ICA, ACCA and ACMA, CIM, CIB, etc.
- International Baccalaureate (IB)
- GCE 'A' Level
- RSA III
- Diploma in Business Studies (DBS) certificate awarded by the MOE through its technical examination agency
- National Vocational Training Institute Certificates
- National Coordinating Committee for Vocational Education and Training (NACVET) certificates
- Teachers' Certificate 'A'
- Other foreign administered pre-university certificates

Boyles (as cited in Pharr & Lawrence, 2004) advocated that the 'one-size-fits-all' policy of admission requirement is not the best option but it must be equally emphasized that the proliferation and acceptance of Business certificates of doubtful accreditation may compromise academic standards in a prismatic educational environment like that of Ghana. The study indicated that TIs were divided over the determination of equivalences and aggregation of grades for the numerous certificates being used to source business education. It was evident that most of the public universities did not recognize G/ABC holders because they have a large reservoir of SSSCE/WASSCE Business candidates to choose from. In 2011, only 40% of public universities that offer Business programmes had openings for G/ABC holders. Even though the 'A' level and RSA examinations had been discontinued and replaced with the G/ABC, 86.8% of the TIs studies had opening for them. Forty seven percent (47)% of them admitted RSA certificate holders. Incidentally, 50% of the 38 TIs studied did not have openings for G/ABC holders. It was also realized that some operatives in the Universities and Polytechnics were not familiar with grade equivalences and interpretation in relation to the SSSCE, WASSCE, GCE 'O' and 'A' levels on one side and the G/ABC on the other.

The challenges of G/ABC holders are further exacerbated by the fact that TIs found it difficult to list the different types of Business certificates on their admission forms for processing. Unfortunately, the G/ABC is perceived as one of those certificates to be excluded for direct placement on admission forms. G/ABC holders are therefore considered for admission through the 'mature' applicants' platform where they compete unfavorably with other applicants holding varied foreign and local certificates.

The study also showed that TIs – in the absence of regulatory prescriptions – unilaterally placed applicants with ‘A’ level, RSA, DBS or ABC holders at levels 100 or 200 ostensibly to attract more applicants. The magnitude of the discrepancies shown by the TIs in their admission requirements indicates that there is no effective educational traction on the essence of the G/ABC amongst stakeholders in the educational system.

## Conclusion

The results of the study accentuate the fact that the policy to introduce the G/ABC is inundated with challenges as a result of gaps in the implementation process. It shows that policy objectives may not be realized if implementation challenges are not monitored and mitigated in time. The implementation of policies must therefore, be hinged to constant review processes to remove challenges in the process (Inwood, 1999). The policy cycle – policy formulation, implementation and evaluation – must be considered in policy review processes. The key policy implementation gaps resulted from:

- i. Inadequate education on the policy to phase out RSA and GCE ‘O’ and ‘A’ levels and replace them with G/ABC.
- ii. Lack of inter-agency collaboration and coordination.
- iii. Weak regulatory intrusiveness to make TIs confirm to establishment policies.
- iv. Inadequate information on the grading systems of the G/ABC examinations and other certificates accepted for admission to tertiary Business programmes.
- v. The absence of prescribed criteria for the admission and placement of applicants with analogous Business certificates on Business programmes in TIs.

TIs constitute the end-users of majority of candidates who write the G/ABC examinations but most of them (public and private) do not recognize applicants who patronize these examinations.

## The Way Forward

The following recommendations are made to streamline admission requirements to business programmes and to enhance the localization process:

- i. The MOE and WAEC should, through enhanced horizontal and vertical communication, intensify their education and sensitization on the G/ABC examination to enable TIs realize their essence.
- ii. The NAB should replace ‘A’ level and RSA certificates on their evaluation check lists with G/ABCs since the former certificates are no longer tenable in Ghana.
- iii. To bridge the gap in placement differentials the MOE and its regulatory agencies should come out with a standardized manual on entry requirements. This will enable TIs to adopt a unified system of placement to levels 100, 200 or 300.
- iv. The MOE and WAEC should target their monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at the implementation of the G/ABC to address challenges militating against the process.
- v. The SSSCE, WASSCE, G/ABCE and other certificates accepted for admission should be properly disaggregated to enable G/ABC holders to be placed in level 100 and 200 respectively. It is further suggested that TIs should admit G/ABC and SSSC/WASSC holders on equal terms.
- vi. Punitive sanctions should be imposed on TIs that violate regulatory prescriptions.

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