

STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTION OF THE COMPUTERISED SCHOOLS SELECTION AND PLACEMENT SYSTEM (CSSPS)

Kate Frimpong
University of Cape Coast Junior High School, Cape Coast

Abstract

This study investigated stakeholder's perception of the computerised schools selection and placement system (CSSPS) in the Central region of Ghana. The essence was to provide an informed basis for discussion on the future of the secondary school selection system in Ghana. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling methods were used in the selection of the sample size of 365 comprising 282 students, 68 parents and 15 heads of institutions. Three sets of questionnaires were used for the data collection. The methods used in analyzing the data were frequencies, percentages, means, and t-test. The major findings were that, dishonesty in Senior High School (SHS) placement in Ghana has now shifted from the doorsteps of school heads to CSSPS secretariat. Both students and parents perceived the CSSPS as being unfair. Another important finding is that, the use of core subjects for selection into senior high schools makes students work harder on the core subjects. It was recommended among other things that there should be appropriate checks and balances at the CSSPS secretariat to curtail avenues of corruption in Senior High School admission. Perhaps more openness in the CSSPS admission process including local community participation will ensure a greater success and allay all fears from stakeholders and that school Heads should be given concession in the admission process.

Introduction

Education as a social system is not "self-regulatory" but composed of human beings who have a right to decide on their lives. In other words, those directly concerned by education should get the opportunity of questioning the education policy objectives instead of treating them as given. Therefore, more and more authors on education sector diagnoses, while adopting a predominantly system's management approach, recognize the importance of bringing in the views of the recipients and major actors of the education system (e.g. students, teachers, parents, employers) and of trying to make them participate in the design, conduct and follow-up of the sector diagnosis (IIEP, 2009). A stakeholder is a person (or group) that has an interest in the activities of an institution. Campbell and Rozsnyai (2002) define stakeholder as students, society, and government participating in or benefiting from the provision of education.

Selection of candidates into the Secondary education system in Ghana has undergone tremendous changes from the post colonial era of the early 1950s till today. Each new system of selection and placement is supposed to improve upon an existing one, by providing a cohort group with more access to secondary education and reduce wastage in the system. However access to secondary education by and large continues to favour students with high intellectual ability due to the competitive nature of selection and placement examination and limited places in the secondary schools in Ghana. Until the year 2005, candidates who passed the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) were manually selected for placement to SHS by a selection board which included the heads of Senior Secondary School/Technical and Vocational Institutes (SSS/TVET). The well endowed schools would select students with excellent grades. Most of the students with good, average and low grades were not selected due to limited vacancies in the well endowed schools. They therefore, had to find their way into the community secondary schools which usually had less attractive facilities. There was

a great distribution disparity between the endowed senior secondary schools and the less endowed ones at the selection centres. While the former seemed to admit students over and above the required number, the latter had no option than to select the cards of few weak students whose cards had been rejected by the top class schools.

The manual system of selecting qualified candidates to second cycle institutions came with its own internal problems. The system was, for many years, a source of stress and frustration to parents, heads of schools and candidates alike. Issues of missing cards, wrong choices of schools and programmes, the rejection of second and third-choice candidates by some heads, inability of candidates to select schools from more than one region, and a host of other problems became the main characteristics of the manual system (Ministry of Education, Science & Sports, 2008). To help minimize the occurrence of most of the problems above, the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports in collaboration with the Ghana Education Service adopted a policy to computerise the selection and placement of candidates into Senior Secondary and Technical/Vocational Institutes, hence the introduction of CSSPS, the acronym for Computerised Schools Selection and Placement System, to replace the manual system (Micah, 2007, p.32).

This system uses processed raw scores of six (6) subjects instead of grades obtained in various subjects, for the selection of candidates. The six (6) subjects used for processing include 4 Core subjects plus any 2 best Elective subjects of the candidate. Hence, the total marks obtained by a candidate in the six subjects will be used to rank them in order of merit for the school selected. Placement of candidates is therefore, strictly on merit, based on the number of vacancies available for every school. For students entering Senior High Schools, the four core subjects are English, Mathematics, Integrated Science and Social Studies. For those entering Technical/Vocational Schools, the four core subjects are English, Mathematics, Integrated Science and Pre-Technical Skills.

The introduction of the educational policy of computerised school selection and placement system (CSSPS) was intended to improve the system of selection and placement of qualified Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) graduates into public and private Senior Secondary Schools /Technical and Vocational Institute (SSS/TVET), by replacing the manual system with a computerised one. Since the introduction of the computerised system of selection and placement, a number of concerns have been raised by the public and in the media about some implementation problems that have confronted the new policy. Since new policies seek to address weakness and improve existing situations, it is the expectation of stakeholders that the CSSPS will offer all students equitable access to senior High school education. The students of today are considered as the future of this country and therefore, anything that disturbs their total well-being can negatively affect their lives and the development of the country as a whole.

It is taught that geographical distance to school significantly decreases probability of attending university, controlling for family background (Frenette, 2006). This evidence is in line with the theoretical prediction that students who live closer to university have lower costs of schooling (by staying at home while attending the local school) and therefore are more likely to continue their education. Cameron and Taber (2004) measured direct cost of schooling by the presence of a college in the country of residence. They found a large effect of the ease to college access, implying that individuals with a college in their country complete half a year more of schooling on average. On the other hand, Filmer (2004) uses data from 21 low-income countries (including some of the poorest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa) to show that there is a negative relationship between school participation of 6 to 14 year olds in rural areas and the distance to primary and secondary schools. However, the magnitude of the association is small. He found that simulating big reductions in distance

yields only small increases in school enrollment on average, and suggested focusing on policies aimed at increasing the demand for schooling or the quality of schooling.

The contextual framework of a country's educational policy on schools selection is tied to the legislature of that country. In developed countries like the U.S.A, stakeholders of education use legal procedure to ensure that the provisions in the constitution are adhered to. However, developing countries like Malawi and Ghana are faced with the problem of meeting constitutional mandate on equity in school admission because the number of students leaving primary school outnumber the available places in secondary schools.

Statement of the Problem

The computerised schools selection and placement system came with very good intentions; however, it has also got its teething problems. People openly say that the system is not transparent and therefore it is corrupt. With the introduction of the CSSPS, it is assumed that parents no longer need to travel to look for places in Senior High Schools for their wards. Through the use of internet and mobile phones, parents are to sit in the comfort of their homes and offices to access the results of their wards and schools where they have been placed. Despite this and other merits of the computerised selection, it has not been able to fully solve the existing problem of qualified candidates not having access to SHSs.

A lot of concern has been raised by the populace about students with very good aggregates not being placed at all. Some students who have aggregate six and grade one in many of the subjects are missing out of the computer selection. More so, students who were put on second placement list get their schools very late, sometimes few weeks to the end of first term. Parents continue to move from one school to another, looking for admission for their wards at the beginning of the academic year. School heads, on the other hand, continue to suffer the pain of having to explain to frustrated parents why their children could not be admitted. In view of this, there is the need therefore, to examine the perception of stakeholders on this new system of selection and placement.

One major question that needs to be answered is:

1. What are the perceptions of students, parents and heads of Junior/Senior High Schools about the CSSPS?

Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis was tested:

1. There is no significant difference between the perception of students and heads of Junior/Senior High Schools on the usefulness of the computerised schools selection and placement system.

Methodology

The population for the study consisted of final year (SHS 3 & JHS 3) students in the Public and Private Junior /Senior High Schools in the Central Region of Ghana. In addition to the students, parents whose children were in final year class as well as heads of Junior and Senior High Schools also formed part of the population. There were 1,221 Junior High Schools and 86 Senior High Schools making a total of 1,306 schools in the Central Region. There were 36,343 JHS 3 students and 20,001 SHS 3 students totaling 56,344 of the students' population (GES, Central Regional Directorate School Census, 2009).

There were all together 365 respondents, comprising 282 final year JHS and SHS students, 68 parents whose children were in a final year class and 15 heads of the schools were sampled for the study. Out of the number of students involved in the study, 55(19.5%) were from JHSs while 227(80.5%) were SHS students. Similarly, parents with children in JHS selected for inclusion in the respondents were 13 (19.1%) and those with children in SHS were 55 (80.9%).

The multi-stage stratified random sampling procedure was used to select the students, parents and school heads. In the first place, junior and senior high schools in the region were clustered into three geographical zones, namely, Coastal zone, Middle zone and Northern zone. Through a simple random sampling method (using the Lottery Approach), 15 schools were selected from the three zones based on the proportion of schools in each district. A cluster of schools from the zones were classified on the basis of Rural/Urban and Public/Private characteristics for both junior high and senior high schools. The second stage of the sampling process, after selecting the schools, was to stratify the schools in each zone into rural, urban, public and private categories. For each zone, at least one private and two rural schools were selected through the simple random method.

The third stage was to decide on the number of students to select for the study. The table for determining the sample size from a given population developed by Krejcie and Morgan and cited by Sarantakos (1994) was used in the selection process. Using the table, a sample size of 365 was selected out of the population of 5,625 students, parents and heads from the selected schools. Class lists and index numbers of the final year students which also indicated their sex were collected from the heads of schools. The proportional stratified sampling procedure was then used to select the students for the study. Parents of the selected students were also made to be part of the subjects for the study. All heads of the 15 selected schools also participated in the study.

The main instruments used for the data collection were three different sets of questionnaire for students, parents and school heads. The instrument was generated by the primary research questions and hypothesis. The major focus of the study's instrument was to find out the perception of respondents on the CSSPS. The design for the study was a cross-sectional descriptive analytic survey and was conducted with ex-post facto research approach.

Perception of students, parents and heads on the CSSPS were examined in five perspectives. The perspectives are: The like or dislike for the system of selection, fairness of the system, other ways of getting placement apart from the CSSPS, support for the re-sit policy and views on the effect of CSSPS in relation to protocol admission. These perception issues have been represented in Tables 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Perception of Parents, Students and Heads Concerning the Likes or Dislikes, Fairness and Other Ways of Getting Placement into SHS

Respondents' views were sought on the perception of the CSSPS. Findings are provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondent's Perception on their likes, Fairness and other ways of Getting Placement into SHS

Perception of respondents	Parents (N= 68)		Students (N= 282)		Heads (N=15)	
	Yes Freq. (%)	No Freq. (%)	Yes Freq. (%)	No Freq. (%)	Yes Freq. (%)	No Freq. (%)
Likes the CSSPS	53(77.9)	15(22.1)	214(78.9)	68 (24.1)	14 (93.3)	1 (6.7)
Fairness of CSSPS	29 (42.6)	39 (57.4)	124 (44.0)	158(56.0)	9 (60.0)	6 (40.0)
Other ways of getting placements	36 (52.9)	32 (47.1)	126 (44.7)	156(55.3)	5 (33.3)	10 (66.7)

As could be observed from Table 1, Majority of the parents 53 (77.9%) said they liked the system. In the same vein, 14 (93.3%) of the school heads agreed that the CSSPS is acceptable. The pattern of response from the students was also not different from that of the parents and school heads. Majority of the students, 214(78.9%) said they liked the system of selection. This shows that, the students who were the direct recipients of the CSSPS also

shared the same opinion with their parents and heads of schools that they liked the new system of selection.

On the other hand, a little more than half of the parents, 39 (57.4%), made an observation that the CSSPS is not fair (see Table 1). About half the number of students, 158 (56.0%), also shared the same views with the parents that the system was not fair to all students. The heads of schools, on the other hand, had a contrary view to that of the students and parents. The views of most of the heads 9(60.0%) were in line with the widespread agreement made by the Conservative Party in England and Wales concerning the Tripartite system of selection in U.K. They stated that, whatever the failings of the Tripartite system was, it is considered to be fair (Wikipedia, 2008).

Majority of the students and their parents on the other hand did not recognize the fairness of the system of selection just as the Labour Party in England and Wales opposed the Tripartite system of selection to secondary education (Wikipedia, 2008). These tiers in the British school system are similar to the situation between the well endowed schools (schools A and B) and the less endowed and Technical schools (schools D and T) in Ghana which has resulted in some amount of discrimination and disparities among schools.

The study also ascertains whether aside from the CSSPS there could be other ways of getting placement into SHSs in Ghana today. It can be seen from Table 1 that a little above half of the parents 36 (52.9%) perceived that there are other ways of getting placement. The students 156 (55.3%) on the other hand, felt that, there are no other ways of getting placement aside from the computer system. Many of the heads 10 (66.7%) also said there were no other ways of getting placement into public senior high schools in Ghana apart from the CSSPS. The findings showed that quite a larger number of the heads as well as the students are of the view that, there were no other ways of getting placement into SHSs while the parents thought otherwise. The implication of the parents' perception is that, the least problem they may encounter with the CSSPS placement could be blown out of proportion by them and thus create the impression that all had gone wrong.

Respondents' Reasons for CSSPS being Unfair

All the respondents who perceived that the system of selection was not fair to all students were asked to state reasons for saying so. Various reasons given by respondents to indicate the unfairness of the CSSPS are found in Table 2. The reasons offered by parents, for claiming that the system of selection was not fair were somewhat varied. They included the fact that, it did not favour students who did not perform well 16 (41.0%), many students not getting school of their choice 12 (30.8%), some clever students left out of the computer selection 5 (12.8%), the issue of distance from the schools where students are placed to their homes 5 (12.8%) and lastly the system not being objective and equitable 1(2.6%). From the trend of the responses, it could be noted that majority of the parents attributed their claim on the unfairness of the system of selection to most children being given their third choice of school which is not of their interest.

The students' claim of the unfairness of the system was based on the following reasons: Students not getting their school of choice, 67 (42.4%), the system not being objective and equitable, 45 (28.5%), many students given the third choice of school in which they did not have much interest, 29 (18.4%), Some students not interested in travelling far from their home town 12 (7.6%), and lastly the fear that the Computer as a machine could make mistakes, 5 (3.2%). Incidentally, all the heads who claimed that the system was not fair 6 (100.0%), gave a common reason. Their reason was that, many students with good grades were not placed at all by the computerised selection and placement system.

Table 2: Respondents' Reasons for CSSPS being Unfair

Reasons	No.	%
Parents (N= 39)		
It does not favour students who do not perform well	16	41.0
Students do not get school of their choice	12	30.8
Clever students are left out of the computer selection	5	12.8
Distance of the schools from homes	5	12.8
Not objective and not equitable	1	2.6
Students (N= 158)		
Students do not get their school of choice	67	42.4
Not objective and equitable	45	28.5
Given third choice of school which is not of their interest	29	18.4
Some students do not like to travel far from their home	12	7.6
Computer as a machine can make mistakes	5	3.2
Heads (N=6)		
Students with good grades are not placed	6	100.0

Those who said there were other ways of seeking admission aside the CSSPS had diverse reasons for their perception. The parents said it was possible for one to contact the head master or mistress. Again they felt that through bribery and corruption in the admission process, people could maneuver to be considered for admission from the backdoor at the level of the CSSPS secretariat and finally, through protocol admission. The students also gave similar reasons for their claim. They made mention of people contacting the headmasters/headmistresses and the possibility of bribery and corruption in the admission process. The heads of schools also mentioned parents trying to bribe their way through. The heads suggested that there should be local community participation in the admission process. They again suggested that the Heads should be given concession in the admission process.

Perception on Re-Sit Policy and Abolition of "Protocol Admission"

The study sought to find out the perception of respondents on the re-sit policy for BECE candidates and the issue of "protocol admission" which was supposed to have been abolished with the introduction of CSSPS. The findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Views on Re-Sit Policy and Abolition of Protocol Admission

Items	Parents (N=68)		Students (N=282)		Heads (N=15)	
	Agree Freq. (%)	Disagree Freq. (%)	Agree Freq. (%)	Disagree Freq. (%)	Agree Freq. (%)	Disagree Freq. (%)
Re-sit policy	52 (76.5)	16 (23.5)	179 (63.5)	103 (36.5)	10 (66.7)	5 (33.3)
Abolishing protocol admission	42 (61.8)	26 (38.2)	168 (59.6)	114 (40.4)	4 (26.7)	11 (73.3)

As shown in Table 3, majority of parents, i.e., 52 (76.5%) agreed to the re-sit policy which allowed candidates who did not qualify for placement to be made to re-sit in their previous JHSs. Similarly, a majority of the students, that is, 179 (63.5%) were in favour of the re-sit policy. The pattern of response for the heads was no different from that of the parents and students. It can be seen from the table that, 10 (66.7%) of the heads supported the re-sit policy. This means that majority of the respondents agreed that BECE candidates who

did not qualify for placement should be made to re-sit in their former Junior High Schools where their continuous assessment could be obtained.

Table 3 again shows that, more parents, that is, 42 (61.8%) agreed that protocol admission should be abolished. The views of the school heads on the other hand, contradicted those of the parents and students. Many of the heads of schools that is, 11(73.3%) disagreed that it should be abolished. The opinion expressed by the heads of schools concerning protocol admission is in line with the observation made by Bimpong (2006). He outlined some of the major contributions made by the “old boys”/alumni and the missionary bodies towards the development of education in the country. He mentioned projects ranging from building of classrooms, dormitories, staff bungalows and institution of special awards to students in their respective institutions. The headmasters/headmistresses shared the same opinion and deemed it fit for personalities who contributed to the development of the school to be given consideration when it came to school admission.

The following null hypothesis was tested to find out the difference in the perception of heads and students on the usefulness of the new system.

HO: 1. There is no significant difference between the perception of students and heads of junior and senior high schools on the usefulness of the computerised schools selection and placement system.

Table 4 shows the result of the analysis of an independent samples t-test on the perception of students and heads of schools concerning the usefulness on the CSSPS.

Table 4: T-Test for Difference between Perceptions of Students and Heads of Senior/Junior High Schools on the Usefulness of the CSSPS

Respondent Type	N	Mean (μ)	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t-Value	DF	P
Students	282	5.3723	1.75745	0.10465	-1.206	295	0.973
Heads	15	5.9333	1.70992	0.44150			

P<0.05

Table 4 provides a summary statistics for the two categories of respondents (students and heads). The students' category had a mean score of 5.37 with standard deviation of 1.76 and a standard error of 0.10, while the heads of schools had a mean score of 5.93, standard deviation of 1.71 and standard error of 0.44. The calculated t-value -1.2, and the probability value (p) is 0.97. The probability value (p) of 0.97 is greater than the significant level of 0.05. This shows that there is no significant difference between the perception of students and heads on the usefulness of the CSSPS.

Discussion

Despite the fact that majority of the students, parents and heads of schools all liked the computerised system of selection into senior high schools, most of the students and their parents perceived the system as not being fair to all students. The heads of schools on the contrary perceived that the system of selection is fair to all students. According to the respondents, reasons for claiming that the CSSPS is not fair included the following: It only favoured students who performed well in the BECE; some students with good grades were not placed and students were placed in schools which were far from their homes. The views expressed by the parents and the students contradict the information given by Somuah (2006) that the CSSPS will promote fairness in admission process in the sense that students who perform well will gain admission to their choice of school.

On the perception of students and school heads concerning the usefulness of the computerised system of selection, students as well as school heads had the same perception that the CSSPS was very useful. Among the reasons given on the usefulness of the new system of placement included the fact that, registration of BECE candidates had been easier than the manual system of selection. They also perceived that it had reduced parents' burden of searching for schools for their wards and that the use of core subjects for selection into senior high schools made students work harder on the core subjects. The study did not however, show whether students concentrated on the core subjects to the detriment of the other subjects. The stakeholders' perception on the usefulness of the CSSPS unveiled in the study is in line with the GPRS II policy initiatives. In the GPRS II policy document, Ghana Education Reform Policy is aimed at addressing the weaknesses of the current educational system with a view to making it more responsive to current challenges. Specifically the policy addresses issues pertaining to the development and delivery of education, access to different levels of the education ladder etc, (Adamu-Issah, Elden, Forson, & Schrofer.2007). The CSSPS as a government policy is expected to address the weaknesses associated with the manual system of selecting students into SHSs in Ghana.

The hypothesis tested on the perception of students and school heads also strongly supported the claim that "there is no significant difference between the perception of students and heads of senior/ junior high schools on the usefulness of the computerised schools selection and placement system". Since the year 2009, registration of BECE candidates had been done using the computer's on-line registration which was likely to reduce the rate at which headmasters and parents committed errors in the process of completing selection and placement forms into senior high schools. Again it was observed that the CSSPS had reduced parents' burden of searching for schools for their wards.

As to whether the CSSPS had eliminated corruption in admission process, opinion was divided among the parents and the students on one side and the heads on the other side. While majority of parents and students perceived that the CSSPS had eliminated corruption in the admission process, the headmasters/headmistresses on the other hand, argued that the new system had not been able to eliminate corruption.

Conclusions

There seems to be a general perception among the parents and students that the CSSPS method of placing qualified JHS candidates into SHSs is unfair. The perception is attributed to a number of issues including the belief that the system favours only those who perform highly in the BECE, the non-placement of some students with good grades and the placement of students in schools which are far from their homes. The implication of their view is that, there should be a way by which BECE candidates with lower grades can have access to SHSs. For the system to be fair, every qualified candidate needs to be given a school of his/her choice. The perception on students being placed in schools which are far from their home is in line with Frenette (2006) that geographical distance to school significantly decreases probability of attending university, controlling for family background. This evidence is also true with the theoretical prediction that students who live closer to university have lower costs of schooling (by staying at home while attending the local school) and therefore are more likely to continue their education. The views of the parents and the students are just like the Labour Party in England and Wales which opposes the fairness of the Tripartite system of selection to secondary education in England and Wales (Wikipedia, 2008).

The call for the abolition of "protocol admission" by parents and students indicates a general dissatisfaction of the system although the heads of schools do not want it to be abolished. The opinion expressed by the heads of schools concerning protocol admission is

similar to the observation made by Bimpong (2006). The headmasters/headmistresses share the same opinion and deem it fit for personalities who contribute to the development of the school to be given consideration when it comes to school admission.

The perception by some of the respondents that there are other means of getting admission into SHS aside from the CSSPS and that it was possible for one to contact the school heads, and also that through bribery and corruption in the admission process one could be considered for admission should stir up a great concern among stakeholders. It is possible that the corruption level in SHS admission has shifted from the doorsteps of school heads to the CSSPS Secretariat. Perhaps more openness in the CSSPS admission process including local community participation will ensure a greater success and allay all fears from stakeholders. The main reason why the government introduced the computerised selection was to address the numerous problems associated with the manual system of selection which include corruption in admission process. When the opinion of the parents and students is taken into consideration, it can be said that, in a way, the aim of the government has been achieved but the views of the heads of schools suggest that much more needs to be done if the aim of the government for implementing this programme is to be fully realized. There is therefore the need for greater transparency in the CSSPS process by the secretariat.

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