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Fee-Free Secondary Education in Ghana: Reflections on the Past, Realities and Feasible Choices

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Abstract

In 2017, the Government of Ghana introduced a Fee-Free Secondary Education policy that attracted intensive debate nationally. This paper is a reflective analysis rooted in both historical and contemporary expressions of education financing in Ghana. It considers the feasibility of the policy, its sustenance and draws on past policies and practices in Ghana and other country experiences. It reflects on past social interventions in Ghana and their outcomes. Findings suggest that a universal fee-free policy will be burdensome on government's limited resources and affect the quality of education delivery. The paper concludes that a gradualist approach or phased implementation of the programme through means-testing and pro-poor targeting could lead to better management and practice of the policy.

Keywords: Secondary education, fee-free policy, pro-poor targeting, secondary education financing, universalization.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2001, the Government of Ghana introduced subsidies at the Senior High School level meant to reduce the burden on parents and guardians of wards. Since 2012, there has been an intensive debate in the political arena on fee-free senior high school education in Ghana. While some see this as preposterous and unimaginable, others consider it as a poverty alleviation option and a panacea to providing the required cadre of youths with skills needed for the economic development of Ghana.

The discussions that follow tease-out specific areas of opportunity, and offer choices that could impact on the sustainability of implementing such a policy. The paper raises the issues and examines the trajectory of the funding of secondary education in Ghana over the years, trends, sources and patterns of education financing in Ghana. Additionally, an assessment of various interventions and major programmes are examined to appreciate the nuances that underpinned their introduction, the drivers of such policies and the effects they have had on the direction of education financing in Ghana as well as lessons for future programmes. Evidence derived from other regions that have implemented such policies against the realities of education financing, the feasibilities, practicalities and challenges of fee-free secondary education have also been examined. The paper discusses feasible choices to be considered and the need to adopt painstaking approaches to identify those who are needy with a fundamental objective for such policies to benefit the poor. Although, the paper focuses on Ghana, there are obviously some implications and messages for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa since many of them share similar aspirations as Ghana.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is a reflective analysis rooted in both historical and contemporary expressions of the evolution of education financing in Ghana by means of documentary analysis. In a number of cases, discussions were held with stakeholders in education, including the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Ghana Education Service (GES), Development Partners in education (DPs) and education think tanks, to gain further insights into issues from their various perspectives. It also involved the review of journal articles on education financing in general and in particular, financing secondary education in selected developing countries. Studies commissioned by the Government of Ghana and development partners were also examined. As a past 'insider' of education policy formulation and management, relevant documents have been reviewed extensively. With this deep knowledge and contextual factors that affect educational outcomes, attempts

have been made to bring a fresh and objective look at an educational system that is at the crossroads.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education Financing: Issues and Perspectives

The expansion of education at a rapid rate imposes increasing financial burdens on countries and leads to expanding costs for the payment of teachers, construction of new buildings, production and supply of textbooks and teaching aids. Many countries in Africa and the developing world have allocated a large proportion of their national budgets to the financing of educational expansion. As much as 19 to 30 percent of national budgets are devoted to education (Lewin, 2008).

Global studies by the World Bank have shown that the unit cost of higher education is about sixty times higher than that of primary education (World Bank, 1988). Similarly in 2010, the cost of educating a student at the tertiary level in Ghana as against educating a student at the primary level was nine times higher - GHS1,932: GHS213 (MOE, 2012). Higher education has thus become a target for cuts in economies, aiming at implementing greater austerity measures. Therefore, there has always been an urge from donors and the international community to countries in the developing world, particularly, in Sub-Saharan Africa to reduce government spending at the higher level and focus more resources on primary education, which in their view has higher returns. The World Bank viewed this then as a more justified way of efficiently and equitably allocating resources (World Bank, 2010).

On the back of such evidence, the World Bank has argued that many countries had misallocated resources to sub-sectors of education by increasing spending on secondary and tertiary education (Azcona et al., 2008). However, as Lewin (2008) points out, many African countries have unduly neglected secondary education in proportion to primary education. Lewin highlights the disparities in terms of sector financing in education in

Sub-Saharan Africa, pointing out that many countries in the region often put more resources in funding primary and tertiary education than education at the secondary level. Lewin advises that correcting this imbalance would have a more positive impact on the needed growth that will aid access to education by all.

The levels of commitment shown by African governments in financing education reflect the level of expenditure as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which has generally been on the increase. Akyeampong (2014) acknowledges the massive injection of financial capital into education by governments in Africa, but points out that despite these injections, there still exists a large number of disadvantaged people who are still excluded from accessing education. Akyeampong calls for a more direct channelling of funds to institutions and individuals who need them most, as an effective way of overcoming the cost barrier in education and argues that funding should not only be about how much is given out, but how such monies are utilised. Yamda (2005), citing the examples of Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia, reports however, that teachers' salaries took up the largest chunk of recurrent education expenditure.

It is instructive to note that economic development is highly dependent on skills of the sort which are taught in institutions to students of 15 years of age and upwards (World Bank, 2009). It is of the highest priority, therefore, to ensure that an adequate proportion of the population receives secondary, post-secondary and university education. This should be put before the goal of universal primary education if for financial reasons these two are not yet compatible. Plans for economic and social development depend upon an adequate supply of teachers, technicians, middle level support staff and other secondary level skills (ibid). Whereas the numbers required at the university level are so small that deficiencies may be managed at relatively small cost, the numbers required at the secondary level are so large that deficiencies could seriously handicap development.

Clearly, from a developing country perspective, and considering allocations to other ministerial budgets, the desire for expansion in quantity and improvement in quality may be far-fetched. The fact that international financial assistance has declined over the years needs some reflection; first, due to their own in-country funding challenges that have led to them cutting back aid to developing countries. Second, the attainment of Ghana as a middle-income country has implications on the degree of foreign aid that could be made available to the country.

Advocacy for more investment in secondary education

Expanding access to secondary education has now become an increasingly urgent issue, often as a result of the universalisation of primary education. However, in many African countries including Ghana, governments are faced with limited capacity in secondary schools to accommodate all primary school leavers. The reason for this has been that much of public investments in the last three decades have been devoted to primary education, leaving the efforts of expanding secondary education to the private sector or local communities. Again, the funding capacity of most African governments has led to the increasing growth of non-governmental or private schools in Africa (Lewin & Sayed, 2005) thus, making the case for external funding – private and donor support.

Lewin (2008) points out the neglect of secondary education in policy-making and postulates that many a time, policy on secondary education has come from the residues of other policies. Lewin enumerates some reasons why the financing of secondary education should be paramount in the policy planning of many countries especially those in Sub-Saharan Africa. The author states that free universalisation of primary education has increased in several folds the number of children completing primary education. Thus, there is a need to invest and look at financing options for secondary school in order to increase access. Furthermore, secondary education was key to the achievement of some targets of the millennium development goals and that promoting gender equality and

removing disparities in the school system could not be achieved without expanding access to education at the secondary level.

Bergman and Stallmeister (2002) and Lewin and Calloids (2001) have identified some key reasons for the increase in investment and widening of secondary school access in Sub-Saharan Africa. They point out that in the 21st century where there is increased need for knowledge to meet the transformations in the technologically advanced world, opening access to secondary education for the masses of the uneducated cannot be taken for granted.

Also, in an era where the youth are at risk of picking social vices that could be detrimental to the progress of African nations, investing and opening access to secondary education would be key in fostering positive social and civic values among them. Additionally, the limitations of primary education to help students develop job oriented skills, and thus an increased private rate of return place a lot more responsibility on investing in secondary education. However, Bray (2002) stresses that a larger proportion of government expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP does not necessarily mean greater financial commitment of government to education. He postulates that the reason for the relatively higher proportion of public expenditure on education in Africa in recent years is often due to the fact that there is a relatively higher ratio of teachers' salaries to national expenditure on education than in Asian countries.

Strong economic growth and private sector partnerships as driving force of increased Access to secondary education.

Bergman and Stallmeister (2002) assert that African countries are faced with the problem of expanding access to secondary education in the light of weak economies and limited financial resources. They argue further that African countries are handicapped in the light of the scarce resources at their disposal in their attempt to expand access to secondary

education, increase quality and equity at the same time without diverting resources at the primary school level. They advocate the increase in public funding for secondary education and also increasing efficiency internally in order to make secondary school financing more cost effective (Lewin & Calloids, 2001). In East Asia however, secondary school expansion has been successful. The success is hinged on strong economic growth. Morris and Sweeting (1995) argue that significant change in the economy preceded secondary education expansion and that economic development induced such progress. Consequently, the increased government revenues enabled those countries to financially allocate more budgets to the secondary education sector. Compared to most African countries scoring less than 3.0% or negative growth, Asian countries between 1965 and 1986 had a Gross Domestic Product of more than 4% e.g. Singapore - 7.6%, South Korea - 6.7%, Hong Kong - 6.2% and Malaysia - 4.3% (World Bank, 1988). The African Development Bank (ADB) has argued that the successful economic stories of the East Asian Tigers in the 1970's and 80's could partly be attributed to the massive investments in secondary education (Bruno, 2014).

Bergman and Stallmeister (2002) point out the role the private sector could play in secondary school financing, citing Botswana and Lesotho as examples of countries where they have targeted financing mechanisms in the form of grants and subsidies to some private schools. They further suggested other modes of increasing cost effectiveness by altering the structure of the education system, modes of delivery, improving internal efficiency among many others. Patrinos, Felipe and Guáqueta (2009), outlines six possible public-private partnerships in education:

- i. Private sector philanthropy initiative.
- ii. School management initiative: where certain schools were managed by private hands whilst those schools still remained publicly owned and funded.
- iii. Purchase of educational services from private schools: where governments finance the

education of students in private schools. This is normally done in areas where governments want to increase access to education.

- iv. School voucher system: where a voucher system that allows parents to choose either the private or public school they prefer. Payments are either made directly to schools or to parents. The aim of voucher programmes could be to either improve quality or increase access.
- v. Provision of Infrastructure: where the private sector builds and operates infrastructure and the government goes into contract to use the facilities for the running of schools.
- vi. Capacity building: where there is a wide range of possible initiatives ranging from curriculum and pedagogical support; management and administrative training; textbook provision; teacher training; and the development of support networks, professional partnerships and linkages.

The World Bank (2005) has described boarding schools as effigies of colonial times that are inappropriate for the kind of mass school in contemporary times, considering the costs associated with them. Akyeampong (2008) points out that boarding fees alone constituted about 60% of total student cost of the Ghanaian secondary school student in 2002. For the 2010/2011 academic year, whereas boarding students paid 329 Cedis, day students paid 160 Cedis. It does appear that the phenomenon is not peculiar to Ghana alone, but to other African countries. For example, the cost of boarding secondary schools in Zambia was more than four times higher than that of day schools (Bennell et al., 2005).

Targeting the vulnerable

Local dynamics of poverty and how they affect demand for education are important in informing judgments about who is really needy and who is not. Thus, in view of budgetary constraints, targeting has been adopted in some countries to ensure that safety-net programmes provide the most benefits to the intended beneficiaries (Domelen, 2007). Two targeting approaches normally adopted are geographical targeting, where

programmes are offered in some schools or districts and not in others (ibid). Sometimes, in addition to the geographic location, school characteristics that correlate with poverty are used (Bundy et al. 2009). The rationale for geographical targeting is to identify areas with the greatest educational needs. On the contrary, Coady and Parker (2009) observe that many existing safety-net programmes in developing countries are very badly targeted, with a large proportion of programme benefits leaking to higher income households and a substantial proportion of poor households being excluded.

A review of the targeting performance of such programmes by Coady, Grosh and Hoddinott (2004), reports a wide variation in targeting performance. The general contention is that sectoral spending patterns among essential public services like education, health care and water supply disproportionately benefit the better-off households and that even within targeted programmes, actual performance may not match programme goals (Domelen, 2007). Domelen points out that the best targeting mechanism should reflect local contexts, including institutional framework, information availability, degree of inequality, governance factors, and the demographic profile. The author argues that the issue of who benefits from public spending is a deeply political one that reflects the nature of power relations within a society and stresses that an important aspect of these political economy issues is the so-called 'paradox of targeting' whereby better targeting may serve to undercut broader political support for a programme (Domelen, 2007, p9).

Lewin (2008) contends that systems that adopt selective fee waivers are able to achieve the target of increasing enrolment compared to systems that adopt a completely fee-free secondary system, stressing that there is more equity in systems that adopt selective fee waivers in comparison to fee-free systems. In Nepal for example, children from the Dalit community, the Janajati ethnic groups and households living in abject poverty are exempted from paying fees at the secondary school level. Also, in Bangladesh financial barriers to secondary education have been removed for girls with the introduction of stipends. This has helped improve their numbers in schools at the secondary level and has

resulted in more girls enrolling in secondary schools than boys (UNESCO, 2012). Malawi in its quest to reduce dropout rates among teenage girls sought to also use the cash transfer system (ibid).

Lee (2002) further posits that instead of subsidising schools, direct transfers were more appropriate as they made sure support went to those who actually needed it. Raynor and Wesson (2006) give examples of how in the Bangladeshi's government quest in 1982 to increase female enrolment and retention in secondary school led to the introduction of monthly stipends and other additional payments in terms of examinations and book fees as they progressed. With the programme being hugely successful, it was extended in 1994. The Poor Students Trust Fund was also instituted in Malaysia to cater for the educational needs of students from families below the poverty line (ibid).

Govinda (2003) affirms that there is a tendency for most secondary schools to be cited in urban areas. This the author acknowledges has an effect of marginalising the already marginalised from education. Govinda argues that in expanding access to secondary education there was a need to balance the quantity, quality and equity. Govinda gave examples of how some East Asian tigers expanded secondary education. Thailand in 1991 targeted expansion. Lower level education was made free for students in selected villages. In India, expansion focused primarily on four main groups. These included street children, ethnic minorities, rural settlers and child labourers. Each group had specific programmes that targeted their special needs (Lee, 2002). For rural settlers, the government started by building pace-setter schools. The government encouraged the setting up of residential schools for ethnic minorities and also introduced residential bridge courses for street children and child labourers. Opening new educational facilities closer to households in need was one key way of reducing indirect costs (ibid).

The following sections, focus on the experiences of India, Uganda and Kenya in their approach to the delivery of universalisation of secondary education and their implications

COUNTRY EXPERIENCES

India

The Indian government in 2001 launched a programme to universalise access to elementary education. In 2007, the goal shifted to universalising secondary education. Unlike elementary education, the Indian constitution does not guarantee commitment to making secondary and post-secondary education free. Prior to the implementation of the universalisation programme in 2007, the highest advisory body on education in India set up a sub-committee in 2004 to prepare a blue print for the programme. At the end of the sub-committee's work, three major recommendations were made:

- i. The Universal Secondary School programme should be guided by certain principles.

These included universal access, structural and curricular considerations, social justice and equity.

- ii. The programme should be decentralised with each state developing its own plan.
- iii. The government needed to increase the education budget of secondary and elementary schools which stood at 5.1% of GDP to 6% in order to achieve the target of universalisation of secondary education (CABE, 2005).

These recommendations were thus captured in the policy document that was to guide the implementation of the programme. The Prime Minister at the launch of the universalisation of secondary education succinctly posited:

We are setting out the goal of universalizing secondary education. This is clearly the next step after universalizing elementary education. While the goal is laudable much work needs to be done before we are in a position to launch the Scheme for Universalization of

Access for Secondary Education. Its details need to be quickly spelt out and discussed with States so that we are fully ready to launch it from 2008-2009. *We must not underestimate the complexity of this task as the principles for universalizing elementary education cannot be easily transferred to secondary education* (emphasis mine). The physical, financial, pedagogical and human resource needs are quite different. (Lewin, 2011, p 30).

Clearly, the recognition by the Prime Minister not to underestimate the complexity of the programme is a caution worth considering.

The World Bank (2009) affirms that at the heart of justification of increased public spending on secondary education is the importance of secondary education to economic growth and poverty alleviation. In the particular case of India, the World Bank suggests four ways by which India could increase funding to secondary education. Firstly, there was the need to increase overall government spending on education and secondary education in particular. Secondly, unit costs of secondary education must be reduced. Thirdly, contributions from private sources should increase. Fourthly, external support should be sought (ibid).

In further advancing the Agenda 2020, the Indian government launched a programme to enhance the goals of secondary education in April 2009. The programme was tagged Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan. The major target of the scheme was (i) Universal access of secondary level education to all students in the age group 15-16 years by 2015, by providing a secondary school within 5 kilometers of any habitation, a higher secondary school within 7 kilometers of any habitation and (ii) Universal retention by 2010. Enrolment rate was to increase within 5 years of the launch of the programme from 56% to 75%. The government was to pump close to \$12 million into the programme. With more than a half of secondary school students being enrolled in private schools, the programme identified the need for closer public-private partnership to achieve the goal of universalising secondary education access by 2020. Under this scheme 6,000 model

schools were to be built with over 2,500 of these schools being built through private public partnerships (PPP). Many more states are now adopting the private sector provision of infrastructure approach (Sankar, 2011).

Issues with implementation

Some concerns have been raised on the Indian programme (UNESCO, 2016). For the purpose of this paper focus will be on only four (4) of these concerns:

1) It was indicated that most states would find it difficult to achieve secondary level gross enrolment ratios (GERs) greater than 100% by 2020. The reasons being:

- i. insufficient number of students reaching grade 8,
- ii. inadequate levels of achievement of grade 9 entrants,
- iii. poor attendance of students and absenteeism by teachers,
- iv. wide variations between schools in staffing, class size and availability of learning materials and
- v. failure to ensure adequate financing to universalise access.

2) Increased participation was likely to come from areas located at a distance from existing schools. Whilst this could increase average travel distances to schools and result in additional costs to poor households, safety and security issues in some states, especially for adolescent girls, were problematic.

3) The distribution of teachers was very uneven with pupil-teacher ratios (PTRs) within the same district varying from below 10 to above 100. The problem is further exacerbated by staff recruitment as in some states, less than 14% of schools have teachers qualified in

all four main subject areas and less than 10% of schools have all the basic facilities.

4) Financing universal secondary education with current cost structures would require more than 2% of national gross domestic product but this level is financially unsustainable without a disproportionate allocation to the education sector.

Uganda

Uganda started a universal free secondary school education in 2007, the first of its kind in the Sub-Saharan Africa Region. Although tagged as free, government paid only the tuition while students paid boarding and other scholastic fees. The universal secondary education (USE) was essentially aimed at increasing access into secondary schools and also to increase the quality of education. The free secondary education was also geared at sustaining the gains of the universal primary education at a time when enrolment from the free universal primary education had resulted in a 136% increase from 1997 to 2006. There was a huge deficit in terms of transition rate to secondary schools as only 20% of primary children made it to secondary education by 1997 (Werner, 2011). It was also part of Yoweri Museveni's re-election promises during the 2006 elections. However, beyond it being an electoral issue, international conventions like the (Education for All) EFA and the Millennium Development Goals influenced the implementation of the policy. The programme was run on a pilot basis for a year before its full-scale implementation in 2007. It was launched at a time when only one fifth of Uganda's 25 million population had ever had access to secondary education. The majority of those who had access were also of the richer class in society. Thus, the pilot programme targeted more of the low-income rural dwellers (Werner, 2011; MOE, 2010). The Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sport in anticipation of challenges put in place strategies that were aimed at reducing the unit cost of secondary education and created more space for students. Among the strategies adopted were:

- a. Curriculum reduction and consolidation of subjects. This was changed to a four-year general secondary curriculum in 2015 that emphasised competencies for the work force and further education.
- b. By 2015, a two-track vocational/academic curriculum had been adopted.
- c. Increased teacher-pupil ratios and minimum class sizes.
- d. Rationalisation of teacher workloads and the number of subjects each teacher taught.
- e. Introduction of double shifts and multi-grade classrooms.
- f. Decentralisation of school management and curriculum planning to schools and
- g. Redeployment of teachers to better meet demands (Jacob & Lehner, 2011).

Issues with implementation

Even though enrolment increased from 412,367 in 2007 to 1,194,000 in 2010 ((Jacob & Lehner, 2011), Huylebroeck and Kristof (2015) indicated that the impact of the USE was mixed, as the increase in educational attainment remained slow and educational performance declined after implementation. They emphasised that the USE had been used to play a primary political role, thus, making the actual improvement of education service delivery secondary. The authors highlight congested classrooms, lack of teaching and learning materials, inadequate educational infrastructure and reduced teacher compensation as key-elements negatively affecting motivation of the key-actors involved, and ultimately influencing educational performance. They argued further that although the USE programme was designed with co-responsibility of parents, schools and government in mind, it was implemented without sufficient attention to local school realities.

Kenya

Ohba (2009) asserted that there had been several attempts to introduce free secondary education in Kenya since its independence but the politics of aspiration coupled with the increased numbers from basic school leavers limited the quality of delivery. Several factors needed to be reviewed for the successful implementation of the free senior secondary school education. These included a change of syllabus to include the needs and aspirations of several other groups who were hitherto sidelined due to the issue of cost in accessing secondary education. The issue of increasing the number of teachers to cater for the increased numbers needed to be addressed. There was also the need to increase efficiency in the running of secondary education in order to reduce the unit cost of financing secondary education and to allow for the excess funds to cater for the increased numbers. Unlike the free primary education that was necessitated by international conventions like the Jomtien Education for All (EFA) Declaration in 1990 and the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000, the free secondary school programme was a partial response to political promises made during the 2007 general elections.

The main objective of providing free secondary education is to ensure that children from poor households acquire a quality education that enables them to access opportunities for self-advancement and become productive members of society (Ohba, 2011).

Secondary education accounts for over 23% of the total education budget in Kenya and it is financed by two main sources – capitation from government and support from the private sector. The private sector support consists of boarding fee charges while faith-based and community-based organisations and NGO's mainly complement the work of government in the building of infrastructure (Ohba, 2011). The Kenya Institute of Education (2011) indicated that the introduction of free senior high schools (SHS) in Kenya saw substantial reduction in fees but did not completely abolish fees. Transition rate from primary to secondary school increased from 59.9% to 66% just a year after the introduction of the free secondary school policy. However, one out of three households were still marginalised from secondary education. Fees were levied as a remedy to the delay in government subventions and subsidies, although the Kenyan government did not

officially sanction these. The introduction of the free secondary school resulted in student transition from primary to secondary school hitting an all-time high of 72% in 2010 from 56% in 2005. Secondary enrolment rate improved from 28.8 per cent in 2005, to 47.8 per cent in 2010. Enrolment increased from 1.03 million students in 2006 to over 1.7 million students by 2010 (Kenya Institute of Education, 2011). However, Ohba (2009) asserts that 40 percent of children from privileged backgrounds constituted close to 74% of children in secondary schools.

Issues with Implementation

The introduction of free secondary school education in Kenya came with its own challenges. These included large class sizes, high pupil-teacher ratios in densely populated areas and low pupil-to-teacher ratios in less populated regions, increased number of untrained teachers as a result of the need to recruit more teachers to cater for the increasing numbers and a growing government funding deficit. Due to the need to contain the wage bill to manageable levels, the government did not employ new teachers, but only replaced. There were also huge deficits in terms of the number of schools. Hitherto, governments in Kenya never provided finances for the acquisition of learning materials at the secondary level, but with the introduction of the new policy, these expenditures were now to be financed by government (Otieno & Colclough, 2009). Government funding did not cover everything. However, the feeling that the government should provide free education led to unwillingness by many parents to make any payments towards their children's education (Kenya Institute of Education, 2011).

REFLECTIONS ON PAST POLICIES

The FCUBE and matters arising

Ghana's Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), was introduced in 1996 after the World Education Conference in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 recommended the increased focus on primary education. The FCUBE was aimed to achieve universal

primary education by 2005. The programme was also in partial fulfillment of Ghana's 1992 Fourth Republican Constitutional mandate which stated in Chapter 6, section 38, subsection 2 that: *The Government shall, within two years after Parliament first meets after the coming into force of this Constitution, draw up a programme for implementation within the following ten years, for the provision of Free, Compulsory and Universal Basic Education for all Ghanaian children of school-going age* (Republic of Ghana, 1992; p35).

The FCUBE had four main objectives. These were to:

- i. improve the quality of teaching and learning;
- ii. improve management efficiency and sustainability;
- iii. increase access and participation; and
- iv. decentralise the management of the education sector (MOE, 2002).

It was funded by the Government of Ghana and through a multi-donor support programme. This intervention led to a rise in enrolment of children of primary school going age. The expected coordinated donor support for the FCUBE programme did not come to fruition as major donors like the US, UK among others, channeled their support to the sector through individual country programmes. The lack of coordination among the financiers of the FCUBE led to a restructuring of the design and funding structure of the programme during a mid-term review. Additionally, District Education Offices could not manage and sustain the programmes as they lacked the needed capacity (Ayamdo, Casely-Hayford, Palma & Thompson, 2008). Although the FCUBE programme managed to reduce fees substantially at the primary level, some fees were still being collected. Akyeampong (2009) argued that until there was a focus on the poor households, monies would be continuously wasted on rich homes that did not need such help. The programme also faced acute shortages of teachers especially in the rural areas. This further worsened the teacher-pupil ratio, academic performance as well as regional disparities. Poor supervision also affected negatively the impact of the FCUBE programme (MOESS, 2008).

The Capitation Grant and matters arising

The Capitation Grant Scheme was introduced in 2004-2005 on a pilot scheme to enhance the FCUBE programme. The scheme was expected to make education at the basic level free by eliminating all fees and levies. It was scaled up nationally in the 2005/2006 academic year. The pilot scheme led to 14.5% increase in enrolment in the 53 pilot districts. The net enrolment was further increased from 59.1% in 2004/5 to 81.1% in 2006/7 (MOE, 2008). Despite the success chalked there were challenges of managing large class sizes, delays in funds transfer to schools, inadequate textbooks and teaching and learning materials, cumbersome bureaucratic procedures and inadequate capacity for accounting by heads of schools (Ampratwum & Armah-Attoh, 2010). The delays in fund release resulted in schools levying pupils through the Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), an action which went contrary to the capitation grant policy (MOE, 2006).

School feeding programme and matters arising

In a study in the southern part of Ghana (Essuman & Bosumtwi-Sam 2013), identified lack of funding from government and payment delays as one of the key problems confronting the School Feeding Programme (SFP) in the study area. They noted that Ghana's SFP had enjoyed the support of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and some Development Partners (DPs) through budgetary support in the past. They noted however that interventions such as SFP, aimed at advancing schooling goals had in no doubt, come with challenges of funding, which raised sustainability concerns and that given the global economic challenges, such inflows from DPs might not be assumed (ibid). Again, in a study of the challenges and prospects of the school feeding programme in Northern Ghana, Sulemana et al., (2013) among others made these major findings:

All the schools visited identified the irregular release of funds as one major problem that hampered the smooth implementation of the programme. In all the schools, the matron complained of payments for food supplied being in arrears for two terms and the payment of salaries of cooks and other workers

in arrears for almost six months. At one primary school, the matron had not been paid for two school terms (p.427)

Other policies such as free exercise books and textbooks and school uniforms, no doubt, enhanced access to education in Ghana, but had similar challenges with lack of funds or delays in the release of such funds like in earlier interventions.

The next section examines the trajectory of the funding of education in Ghana and secondary education in particular over the years, trends, sources and patterns of education financing. Issues are raised whether such a universal policy could be sustained over time.

SOURCES/TRENDS OF EDUCATION FINANCING IN GHANA

Table 1: Expenditure on Education (2011 - 2018)

| Expenditure on Education (2011- 2018) | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | Budget 2018 |
|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------------------------|
| Education Exp. as % of GDP | 6.5 | 7.6 | 6.1 | 6.2 | 6.3 | 5.1 | 4.5 | 4.2 |
| Educ. Exp. as % of GOG Expenditure | 25.8 | 27.2 | 20.7 | 21.8 | 22.2 | 16.7 | 17.8 | 16.7 |

Source: Ministry of Education, 2018

UNESCO (2012) recommended that 6% of GDP should be allocated to the education sector. Evidence from the table shows that from 2011 to 2015 Ghana met the target, until 2016 when it started declining. It is instructive to note that the provision made for 2018 was the lowest so far, a period when more allocation was rather needed to support the policy. Similarly, education expenditure as a percentage of Government of Ghana expenditure started declining from the same period - 2016 (16.7%). In prior years (2006-2009), it hovered around 30%.

Table 2: Trends in Expenditure by level of Education**Summary of Resource Allocation (Basic, Secondary and Tertiary): 2012 – 2016**

| Level | 2012 | | 2013 | | 2014 | | 2015 | | 2016 | |
|----------------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|
| | Amount | % Share | Exp. (GHS) | % |
| Pre-school | 435,502,334 | 7.6 | 363,499,436 | 6.4 | 501,912,110 | 7.6 | 440,567,890 | 5.6 | 503,657,295 | 6.6 |
| Primary | 1,302,972,161 | 22.8 | 1,388,792,576 | 24.4 | 1,445,683,240 | 22 | 1,270,418,880 | 16 | 1,439,804,230 | 19 |
| JHS ¹ | 969,147,257 | 17 | 965,117,148 | 16.9 | 1,054,711,276 | 16.1 | 1,691,653,730 | 21.3 | 1,108,435,386 | 14.6 |
| Basic Educ. (Total) | | 47.4 | | 47.7 | | 45.7 | | 42.9 | | 40.2 |
| Secondary Education | 1,057,413,465 | 18.5 | 1,152,064,995 | 20.2 | 1,467,511,148 | 22.4 | 1,713,539,729 | 21.6 | 1,676,521,301 | 22.1 |
| Tertiary Education | 1,081,971,635 | 19 | 1,106,283,329 | 19.4 | 1,063,958,851 | 16.2 | 1,848,576,964 | 23.3 | 1,959,500,000 | 25.8 |

Source: Ministry of Education, 2018

Between 2012 and 2016 basic education received an average yearly allocation of 44.78% of education expenditure, compared to secondary and tertiary education that had an average of 20.96% and 20.74% respectively. Basic education, because of its widened base (pre-school, primary and junior high school), continues to enjoy a major allocation of the education resource allocation (45%). This trend is likely to continue for two reasons. First, Government has to meet its constitutional mandate of providing free compulsory universal basic education to all children of school going age in the midst of uncontrolled population growth. Second, expenditure on new safety nets and other social interventions like the school feeding programme, free school uniforms, the need for increased educational infrastructure and adequate teacher supply for the number of people enrolled at the basic level.

DISCUSSION

According to the MOE (2012), education expenditure covered employees' compensation, which constituted 86.0% of the expenditure at that level. This revelation resonates with

1

JHS

:

Junior

High

School

Yamda (2005) and Bray's (2002) assertions that even though many African States appear to be spending more on education, a sizable portion of this is used to pay salaries and may not necessarily mean greater financial commitment of government to education. The examples of Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia, are cited as countries in which teachers' salaries took up the largest chunk of recurrent education expenditure (Akyeampong, 2009; Yamda, 2005).

The challenge of finding adequate resources has led to undue delays and inconsistencies in the timing of release of funds to schools and lack of infrastructure, teaching and learning materials as well as teacher supply. These have had significant impact on the extent to which schools are able to plan, spend their allocated funds and feel accountable as indicated by Armah-Attoh (2010). This view has also been largely expressed by UNESCO (2016); Werner (2011); Huylebroeck and Kristof (2015) and Ohba (2009) in their studies on India, Uganda and Kenya respectively.

As stated earlier by Akyeampong (2008), boarding fees alone constituted about 60% of total student cost of the Ghanaian secondary school student. With the high cost involved in boarding schools, and the fact that more than 65% of students in secondary schools are in the boarding houses (MOE, 2012) the situation could be exacerbated with more preference by students for boarding schools. The issue then will be the criteria to be used to determine who will be a day student and who becomes a boarder? Clearly, majority would like to be boarders because of the opportunity; thus, feeding and other fees that were hitherto taken care of by parents will therefore be transferred to the government. Although this transfer of responsibility might be helpful to a lot of poor families, it may not have significant impact on some rich parents (Akyeampong, 2009). Pragmatically, encouraging more day schools and less boarding schools may be a better option to consider.

Fundamentally, the current system of universalisation of secondary education largely ignores those who do not need to be supported. This could be as a result of the absence of a reliable targeting mechanism to identify poor students who cannot finance their secondary education. In a developing world context, it is difficult to target funding according to students' needs when there is limited information on pupil's socio-economic status of pupils and no systems through which such data can be collected. Clearly, a reliable data at the school level on parents' socio-economic background would be a prerequisite for effective need-based assessment.

An equity mechanism for the management of allocated resources may be a better option to consider. In this respect, instead of government focusing solely on increasing resources for secondary education, it must be accompanied by a more equitable and targeted distribution of funding. Specifically, to enhance per-pupil and per-school equity in the allocation of resources, funds should be allocated to students and schools, based on their relative educational needs. Students may be categorised on the basis of ability to pay, with the most disadvantaged group receiving the most resources. In effect, there may be the need to perform a socio-economic profile analysis to identify students who cannot bear the cost of their education, using economic and social welfare indicators that could include the following:

- i. Income of parents (either unemployed or employed in petty occupations)
- ii. Living conditions of family of students measured by indicators used by the Ghana Living Standard Surveys (GLSS) including household consumption expenditure, covering food and non-food items (including housing).
- iii. Health condition of parents (incapacitated)
- iv. Type of school attended (basic school)

The issues associated with universalization of secondary education are clear. What is unclear, though, is the extent to which policy makers allow these to inform the policy formulation and its implementation. As was pointed out in the literature (Lewin, 2011;

Werner, 2011; Ohba, 2009 and Domelen, 2007), in many circumstances, who benefits from interventions such as free SHS is a deeply political question that signals the nature of power relations within a society or country. In a developing country context in particular, the issue to be considered is whether governments have the political will and sometimes, the capacity to follow through with pro-poor resource allocation even when clear poverty indicators exist, as sometimes priorities and perceptions of vulnerability may be quite different from what government or outsiders perceive. What has been less considered in rolling out such a policy is the collaboration between the government and the private sector in education. Such a partnership may assuage the many challenges confronting the implementation of the free-SHS policy.

The introduction of various interventions in Ghana's educational system, from the FCUBE, the capitation grant scheme, school feeding etc., has always led to a significant increase in enrolment. These increases have however come with their own challenges, a phenomenon not peculiar to the Ghanaian situation, as the examples cited in India, Kenya and Uganda revealed. With the majority of investment in education going into the emolument of workers, the need to recruit more teachers would further push up the personnel emolument (PE) budgets to the detriment of real investment in education. The general expectation has been that with the production of oil, the country will see significant changes in the education budget. However, the impact has not been significant.

There also seems to be a clash of two key policies. The policy on community participation in education appears to be threatened by the policy implications of the free SHS. A key aspiration of decentralised education service delivery is that this would allow local communities to support education and improve the quality of provision. The government's policy on the free SHS however, excludes parents and communities from making financial contribution in relation to their ward's schooling. There are strict rules and regulations on this and heads of schools that flout the directives are sanctioned. If

schools and their local communities are to share in this responsibility, then the decentralisation policy should place as much emphasis on what schools, teachers and parents should and can do for communities to strengthen the partnership (Essuman & Akyeampong, 2011). The need for policy synchronisation can therefore not be overemphasised in this context. The policy on the free SHS could benefit from a deeper reflection on the local factors that can shape outcomes, as policies should envisage opportunities where schools and their local communities work together to improve educational outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Admittedly, an introduction of a fee-free senior secondary school education in Ghana is laudable. However, in the light of evidence gathered from other regions that have initiated similar programmes, coupled with reflections on the challenges of past policy implementations and outcomes, the idea requires careful consideration

Reflecting on the past, country experiences, realities and feasible choices and from the foregoing discussion, implementing free secondary education in Ghana may have been more desirable if a gradualist approach or a phased implementation of the programme had been adopted. Learning from other country experiences could lead to better management and practice of the policy. With the problem of inadequate resources and delays in fund release to schools for the programme as had been with other safety-net interventions in the past, a strategy for means-testing to target the poor and the vulnerable could have been adopted as an initial phase. Such a strategy, no doubt will be an arduous task in a country where a lot of income is earned in the informal sector thereby making it difficult to assess real family income levels.

Debates about making secondary education free often focus on issues about access, and not enough about the content and the outcomes expected. Matters about skill development, teacher re-orientation and training and development as well as new

pedagogical approaches are less stressed. Clearly, a fair attention to all these is likely to produce students ready to transition either to the tertiary level or the world of work. The policy of making secondary education free and available to all is a lofty one, but such a goal would be useless and needlessly expensive if all it does is to create opportunities to give young people access without the skills that will make them great assets for the nation's development. Reforming what would be taught, and how they are taught are more important, otherwise the problems are likely to be compounded.

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