

The Impact of Government Policies on Education: The Ghanaians' Perspective

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Abstract: Educating the Ghanaian child is not devoid of political, economic, social and technological disruptions. Education system in Ghana over the last three decades, have become more and more vulnerable to economic, political and social developments. Owing to mostly the change in government, the trend of education keeps changing and the student is always at the receiving end of new policies. The inconsistency in the structure of Ghanaian educational system is as a result of “over politicization”. Political parties after gaining power seek to provide reforms that they deem fit especially regarding their quest to provide quality education for Ghanaians (Adu-Gyamfi & co, 2016). Government imposed changes are accompanied by several pitfalls, which impede their implementation and, consequently, their success. First, governments adjust education policies by attempting to realign educational priorities to meet what they perceive to be the imperatives of national needs and/or globalisation, imposing never-ending reforms on education systems, and engendering turbulent changes.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Trends in Education in Ghana:

According to the world data on education, 6th edition, 2006/7, a major objective of the school system as designed by the education reform programme of 1987 is to make education more relevant to social economic realities of the country so that the Ghanaian children will be able to live a productive and meaningful life.

After the overthrow of Dr. Nkrumah led government in 1966, there were swift expansions in education starting from 1967 with every new government trying to abolish the policies made by the previous government and this was seen as compromising the quality of education for political gains and popularities. This article looked at the trends in Ghana’s education from 1987 to 2020 at the Basic school level to senior high level.

The 1987 Educational Reform:

In an effort to find solutions to poor access, quality, and educational infrastructure, the populist Rawlings’ government which had come into power through a military coup, turned to the World Bank for assistance to reform Basic Education as part of economic reform (World Bank 2004; Donge et al., 2003). The blueprint for the reforms stemmed from the work of the Dzobo Committee in 1973. The committee had recommended a different trend in education which proposed 6 years primary, 3 years junior secondary and 3 years senior secondary. Vocational and technical skills was also accentuated in this reform. Children enter school at the age of six and are “automatically” promoted until the end of the JSS, at which time they take their first external examinations. Basic education was supposed to be compulsory for all pupils living within 5 km. of a school. There was also emphasis on progressive introduction of free education. The curriculum was to provide children with literacy skills in their own language, a second Ghanaian language and English, modern farming skills, familiarity in using tools, manual dexterity, practical mathematics. Create positive attitudes to hard work and national development. The expectation was that, the majority of graduates from basic education would become productive modern farmers (with support from agricultural extension services); a substantial number to become productive skilled workers (with short term training or informal apprenticeships); 30% to proceed to secondary education.

The curriculum:

Lower Prim.	Upper Prim.	Junior secondary.
English	English	English
Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics
Ghanaian language	Ghanaian language	Ghanaian language
Religious and moral education	Religious and moral education	Religious and moral education
Music and dance	Music and dance	Music and dance
Physical education	Physical education	Physical education

Environmental studies	Environmental studies	General Science
	Integrated since	Pre-technical skills
		Pre- vocational skills
		Life skills
		Agricultural science
		Social studies
		French (optional)

The senior secondary school (S.S.S) offered different subjects with Mathematics, English, Science and Social Studies being the core subjects for every student and other subjects being elective subjects. At the initial stage of the implementation of this reform, it looked like it would last long especially as many students showed much interest in the vocational skills as well as other subjects. One could see technical tools and other vocational tools in the basic schools in those days but it failed along the way as it turned to be theoretic than practicum. As implementation moved forward, a number of challenges were faced, some technical and some political. Technically, many people felt that the change was being hard-pressed with insufficient attention being paid to details. An evaluation by a British volunteer teacher-educator working in the north during the earliest years of the reform confirmed the burdens on teachers. Because the JSS curriculum had been extended to thirteen subjects, teachers were obliged to teach four subjects where previously they had taught two and felt under increased pressure to cover the official syllabi. A compulsory two-week training course conducted country-wide in 1987 was judged by teachers to be inadequate, especially in relation to the teaching of the specifics of particular subjects. The sense of isolation was acute among teachers in the rural and sparsely populated north (Angela W Little, 2010). In order to gain political supports and popularity, some politicians participated in the implementation of this policy and even daily running of schools. According to a retired Headmaster, there were instances where assembly members stepped in the schools to do things at will without considering the adverse effects. More schools were opened for communities that were not even up to 5km away from existing schools.

National Education Reform (2007)

The Education Act 778 put Ghana’s education system into three progressive levels, namely; basic education, which consists of two years of kindergarten education, six years of primary education and three years of junior high school education. The act made the second-cycle level of education four years which later reverted to three years after three years of implementation. The objective of the Education Act 778, which is still in operation, is to provide for the establishment of an educational system intended to produce well-balanced individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills, values, aptitudes and attitudes to become functional and productive citizens for the total development and democratic advancement of the nation, GES, School Management Committee Resource Handbook (2010). The Act, through FCUBE (Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education), allows for free and compulsory access to basic education with district assemblies (Das) providing the needed infrastructure and other facilities in educating the child. And to ensure that every child enjoys quality basic education, the Act creates the room for parents who deny their children education to appear before the social welfare committees of DAs for appropriate action(s) to be taken. On paper, parents who truly could not afford the education of their children were to be assisted by the DAs. A school feeding program was introduced later in the implementation to enable pupils to have “balanced-diet” once a school day. Unfortunately, the school feeding program was only available for some selected schools.

Curriculum:

Primary	Junior high school
English	English Language
Mathematics	Mathematics
Integrated Science	Integrated Science
Citizenship Education	Social Studies
Religious and Moral Education (RME)	Religious and Moral Education (RME)
Information Communication Technology (ICT)	Information Communication Technology (ICT)
Creative Arts	Basic Design Technology (BDT)
	French (optional)
Ghanaian Language	Ghanaian Language

Free Secondary Education:

Ghana's 4th republican president Akufo Addo during his pre-election campaign pledged to make the senior high school (SHS) totally free; "there would be no admission fees, no library fees, no science center fees, no computer laboratory fees, no examination fees, no utility fees. There would be free textbooks, free boarding and free meals, and day students will get a meal at school for free." The country was divided on this policy at the start of its implementation because many people doubted the credibility and sustainability of the policy. Oppositions were of the view that the senior high schools in the country were limited with limited resources as well and they accept a limited number of students. Some propositions were that, in order to ensure that all children benefit equally from free SHS education, the government should invest in high schools across the country. Like any other transition process, the initial stage of the implementation was in a big mess with students who were already in the second cycle before the implementation not knowing whether they were part of the policy or not. Intake increased but facilities remained the same. In fact, in the first term of the 2017/2018 academic year, enrolment into first year of Senior High School was 424,092 students, representing an increase of approximately 63% in first-year enrolment over that of 2014/2015 academic year's 260,210 students, Ministry of Education (2015). Many students had to sleep on corridors and classrooms were converted into dormitories in some schools. Insufficient number of teachers was one alarming problem. Again, private schools lamented that no provision was made for them in the policy therefore resulting in low admission rate in the private senior high schools.

In government's attempt to finding solutions to these problems, more teachers were recruited in the second cycle. This also led to the birth of the Semester and the Double Track System in the SHS. The implementation of the double track system was to allow government to cater for the excess enrolment in order to ensure that, the Free SHS is accessible to all eligible students. The double system has the capacity of absorbing more students into the same school. This stipulates that, a school with the capacity of absorbing 600 students could take 900 or more students. But the double track was not devoid of criticisms. In a study conducted by Dominic Kwaku on teachers' perspective of the double track system, it was realized that challenges confronting the implementation of the double track senior high school system in the study area (Effutu Municipality and Gomoa East Districts of Ghana) were inadequate stakeholder consultation, inadequate provision of logistics and funds by the government, quality of education being compromised, possible incompleteness of syllabus owing to increased number of holidays and maintenance of school facilities becoming a problem. To worsen the situation, teenage pregnancy increased at the SHS level which parents alluded to the Track-System as a cause as students spend months at home awaiting others to vacate before they go to school.

The New curriculum for Basic Schools in 2020:

Following governments determination to reform education especially at the pre- tertiary level, a new curriculum was introduced at the basic level with the aim of making education more responsive to the human resource and development needs of Ghana. According to Simon Ayab, the modern curriculum was designed with recognition of the difficulty of modern times and the importance of quality education. What does this mean to Ghanaians that are looking to give their children the best knowledge? If the implementation goes according to plan, the country's expected to see a gradual rise in literacy and retention of learned skills. <https://yen.com.gh/161867-ges-curriculum-basic-schools.html>.

FRENCH-B1-B6

COMPUTING-B4-B6

HISTORY-B1-B6

MATHS-LOWER-PRIMARY-B1-B3

MATHS-UPPER-PRIMARY-B4-B6

OUR-WORLD-AND-OUR-PEOPLE-B1-B3-1

OUR-WORLD-AND-OUR-PEOPLE-B4-B6-1

PHYSICAL-EDUCATION-B1-B6

RELIGIOUS-AND-MORAL-EDUCATION-B1-B6

SCIENCE-LOWER-PRIMARY-B1-B3

SCIENCE-UPPER-PRIMARY-B4-B6

CREATIVE-ARTS-B4-B6-

ENGLISH-B4-B6

ENGLISH-LOWER-PRIMARY-B1-B3

GHANAIAN-LANGUAGE-B1-B3

GHANAIAN-LANGUAGE-B4-B6

How Do the Changes in Educational Policies Affect the Ghanaian Child?

All educational reforms aim to improve teaching and learning but evidence about leadership effects on student learning can be confusing to interpret, much of the existing research actually underestimates its effects.

- *Struggling to understand the new trend;* one major problem of the policy makers in Ghana is that, they give little or no sensitization to the learner and teacher prior to the implementation of the policy. For instance,

when the track system was introduced, students who were already in Senior High Two before the introduction were confused as to if they would also be part of the track system. Some headmasters were also in dilemma as to when the next set of students would be in school.

- *Difficulty in adjusting to new policy*; it is always difficult for the learner to adjust to new policy as the learning takes a different dimension sometimes with the names of subjects being changed but contents being the same or nearly the same.
- *Misinterpretation of the policy by parents*; very often, students complain that their parents misinterpret the educational policies which leads to conflicts among parents and wards. For instance, when the FCUBE was introduced, many parents failed to pay printing fees for their wards to write examinations. Teachers and headmasters had to send pupils home during the periods of examination to collect fees. Actually, some pupils end up not writing the examination but were expected to be promoted to the higher class in the subsequent school year. In schools where there is feeding program, parents do not give feeding fee to their wards to eat in school. This is disturbing because, the government feeding is provided once a day and mostly, the food served is just but a little.
- *Fear of the unknown*; owing to the instability in the educational policy over the years, parents and pupils normally have the fear that the policies would change again if another government comes into power and this hinders decision making.

Some Remedies to Policy Effects:

- *Consultation with stakeholders*; before making policies, government should consult the various stakeholders in education including learners to ensure that what they want to introduce is actually what the people need and to explain to beneficiaries why the need to introduce the new policy. This can be done in form of a survey. Educationist should be consulted to undertake this kind of survey.
- *Sensitization of the masses*; the masses should be educated on the policy and what it entails. This would reduce the tension the results from the introduction of policies.
- *Monitoring progress*; policy implementors should regularly monitor and assess the progress of the policy and new government should take some time to monitor the progress of an already existing policy before deciding to introduce it.

2. CONCLUSION:

The Ghanaian teacher and the Ghanaian child face lots of problems anytime there is change in government. Successive governments politicized the education system to the detriment of the child just to send their political messages across and to fulfill their campaign messages. If the education body is made independent, it would stabilize the system. This means that, Directors of education should not be chosen based on their political affiliation but based on their experience and capabilities. Before the introduction of new educational policies, a grassroots survey should be carried out to solicit the views of the people on the policy and a pilot implementation should be done to evaluate the prospect of the policy.

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