

Full Length Research

Politics and Ghana's Pre-tertiary Curriculum Reform Programmes: Have These Helped the Nation?

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The study investigated policy factors (since independence) that occasion education reforms in Ghana. Specifically, it focused on pre-tertiary education reforms in Ghana with critical historical reference to literature and the political ramification in an effort to improve education. The paper critically examined whether the politically-motivated reforms have helped address the developmental challenges of Ghana thereby ensuring enhanced quality of life of the people. The paper made use of historical analyses and sought views of some key players in education through interviews as strategies to critically explore the issue. Five (5) education policy implementers in the pre-tertiary system of Ghana were drawn from the Ghana Education Service to shed light on the subject to provide rich comprehensive data on their perspectives relative to the education reforms during the period. In addition, two curriculum experts from the University of Cape Coast were interviewed to ascertain the candid opinions of connoisseurs on the issue. The study recommended that government should organise annual curricula colloquiums to solicit broad stakeholder views on ways of making the curriculum better. The paper's view is that when this happens, Ghana's quest for development through education would be a fait accompli.

Keywords: curriculum reforms, politics, influence, pre-tertiary education, GES, GSFP, NDC, FCUBE, NPP

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INTRODUCTION

We examine in this paper the shape that education reforms in Ghana have taken since independence with a view to analysing the political manipulations and critically looking at whether these underhand dealings from governmental forces have inured to the benefit of Ghana. In doing this, the paper, in the end sought to proffer solutions or make recommendations to governments to forestall some of the pitfalls associated with curriculum

reforms in nation-building and socio-economic development. The article started with an effort to provide readers with the profile of Ghana, the conceptual framework on education policy and politics, Ghana's current pre-tertiary education structure with detailed discussions on the curriculum reform policies and choices since independence. Then, a conscious attempt was made to outline the reform programmes since

independence and the relevant social interventionist programmes over the years. It also consciously drew attention to the political influences imbedded in the reforms with discursive focus on important issues that occasioned revival and adjustment in reforms. An effort was made to shed light on the content of these reforms and their potential in contributing to Ghana's aspiration of becoming a middle-income country by 2020. This study was geographically delimited to Ghana although some implied deductions from it could be beneficial to countries which have similar characteristics and aspirations in the sub-region. In content, the study focused on digging into whether political influences in our pre-tertiary curriculum reform programmes in Ghana (from independence till date) are bearing the desired fruits and dividends in helping to guarantee the attainment of national goals and aspirations.

Ghana's education sector has been plagued with myriad of challenges over the years. Some of the challenges are the result of inconsistent policies and faulty implementation agenda on the part of stakeholders. Public debates on who should receive the blame have often cited the ineptitude of policy-makers and a general lack of insight and vision for the education sector. As if this is not enough, the democratic path chosen by Ghana to elect her governments after every four years has exacerbated the problem. It has resulted in fragmented-sliced-educational policies which a lot of experts have described as whimsical and capricious to partisan political parties. In Ghana today, governments, once they are 'booted out' of governmental office, do not have their educational programmes continued by succeeding governments. A government goes out of power today and the educational policies of that government is almost forgotten entirely. This state of affairs is worrying since it does not ensure a concrete, and a well-thought-through educational policy for the nation at the pre-tertiary level. The one who bears the brunt eventually are the students whose future aspirations are toyed with. The consequence of this situation is the production of human resource with no capacity to contribute meaningfully to society. On the labour front, there has been a lacuna between curriculum content being offered in schools and current labour market demands. The curriculum objectives for most of the subjects are not being achieved in terms of the skills they should instill in young graduates. This has left the Ghanaian populace in quark mire with an attendant loss of confidence in the educational system. A lot of people have wandered whether governments have really done the nation any good by the kind of policies they put in place and whether the nation has benefitted from these policies in terms of the quality of man power that is churned out from our educational system. This study, curious as it was also sought answers to questions such as, *'In what ways has political authority influenced implementation of*

educational reforms in Ghana since independence?'; 'By what measure has political interference in curriculum reform affected (positively or negatively) the education system of Ghana?'; 'How have politics in Ghana's curriculum reforms contributed to the overall development of the country?'; and 'What should be the ideal role of political leaders and other stakeholders in ensuring successful implementation of a national education reform plan necessary to catapult Ghana to a higher developmental height?' The study would devote attention to seeking answers to the following questions from a historical analytic perspective and also by talking the relevant stakeholders in education.

The study therefore is conceptualised in a framework which seeks to suggest that Ghana's current pre-tertiary educational system has evolved since independence due to what governments over the years, have thought should be the direction of education in the country. In other words, the direction of our education system has been largely influenced by governments who act as spending officers in countries. They have, also to some extent, determined knowledge that is most worth which must be taught in schools. White Papers of governments which outline the blueprint, nature, form, and format for tackling and executing educational policies have either inured to the benefit of the Ghanaian people or not. The policies (whether pro-poor social interventionist ones) have either helped the country to attain its aspirations or not. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptualised simplified curriculum evolution model in Ghana since independence.

Public Education Policy and Politics: A Conceptual Framework

Public policy is about the rules and procedures governing public sector activity - what they are and how they are made. It can be thought of as either a subset of the study of government or an element in the study of various policy fields - health, education, justice, social welfare, transportation, and so on. Policy studies tend to focus on the processes through which policies are created and the effects of such policies once in place. Policies govern just about every aspect of education - what schooling is provided, how, to whom, in what form, by whom, with what resources, and so on. The application of these terms to curriculum is evident. Curriculum concerns what is taught - a fundamental aspect of schooling and thus of public policy. Policy studies sometimes give short shrift to questions of politics, treating policy creation and evaluation as an intellectual activity based primarily if not solely on the actual content of the policies. In reality, though, policy is inextricably connected to politics and the attempt to separate them is unhelpful to understanding or action.

The role of politics in policy is troubling and

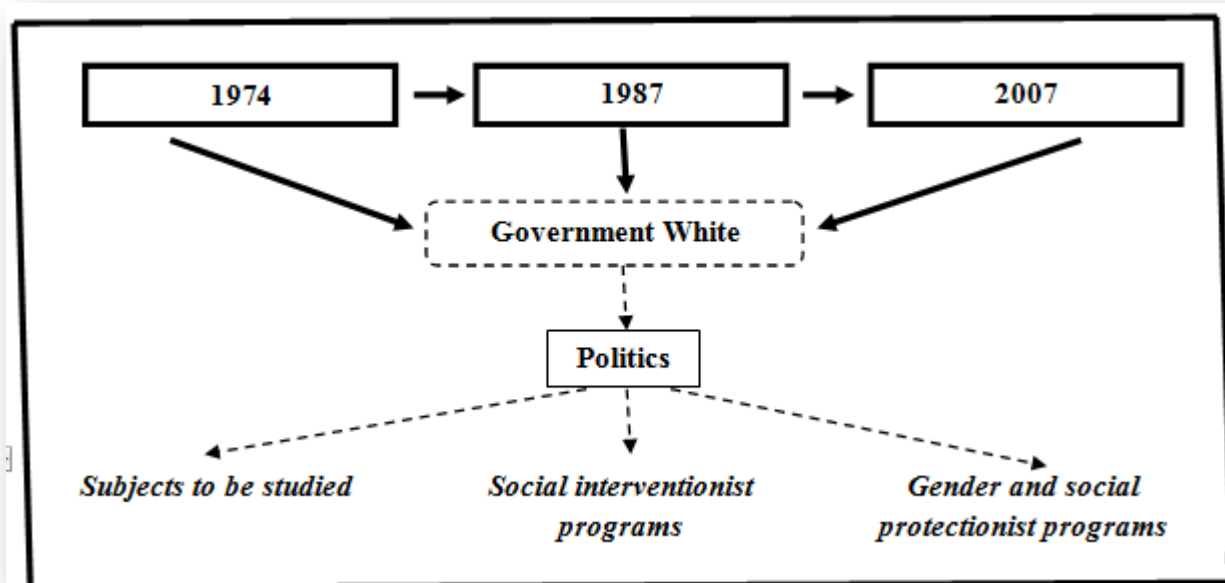


Figure 1. Simplified curriculum reform model depicting curriculum evolution in Ghana since independence. (Source: Authors' Construct, 2016)

misunderstood by many educators, who feel that education is a matter of expertise and should be beyond politics. The apolitical or even anti-political view of many educators is not helpful because it takes attention away from the reality that, "politics is the primary process through which public policy decisions are made" (Levin, 2008, p. 8). Even the choice to use a supposedly nonpolitical mechanism such as markets is a political choice (Plank & Boyd, 1994). Some definitions of politics put the spotlight on prescribed processes of government including electioneering issues, those of party politics, and division of powers. Other definitions, closer to our understanding, are broader, viewing politics as going beyond strict procedures to embrace an array of unofficial, "influences and larger social processes" (Levi, 2008, p. 8). Political processes operate even in the most authoritarian societies, though their forms differ depending on political culture and institutions.

One of the most enduring definitions of politics is Lasswell's (1958), "Who gets what?" This definition can be applied to every setting, from a country to a school or classroom. The art of politics is about wielding control and influence over a people. Since not all can have what they want, the question is who does get what they want and who does not. Tinder (1991) describes a political system as "a set of arrangements by which some people dominate others. In every setting, from classroom to country, political influence is usually highly unequal, and those who have the least status tend also to have the least influence on political decision making. Every

education policy decision can be seen as being, in some sense, a political decision. However, this does not mean that every educational issue will be the subject of intense public discussion and political lobbying. Indeed, most policy decisions in education, including curriculum decisions, are made with little or no public attention. Sometimes these decisions are controversial and highly political within the organization itself. A subfield of education politics, micro-politics, developed to examine some of these small scale political interactions (Ball, 1987; Hoyle, 1982). But whether controversial or not, education policy decisions, because they involve questions of public choice and concern, are essentially political in nature (Manzer, 1994). A substantial body of research and scholarship in education addresses issues of policy formation and implementation from a variety of conceptual positions such as the ones provided by Hargreaves, Lieberman, Fullan, and Hopkins (1998) and Day (2005). The education policy literature could be strengthened if it were better linked to the larger literature on public policy and politics, although the latter has more sophisticated frameworks and modes of analysis (Dror, 1986; Howlett & Ramesh, 2003). Most frameworks for understanding politics and policy formation address similar topics. Central features of any analysis include the institutional setting and structure around decisions (Cibulka, 1996), how issues come to be on the political agenda (John, 1995), and the processes through which decisions are made in the face of different points of view (Ball, 1990). Attention may also be given to the process

of implementation - what happens to policies after their official adoption. Implementation became a more intensive focus of attention starting in the late 1960s as analysts began to realise that policies did not always produce the intended results (McLaughlin, 1987). In one comparative study of education reform politics, Levin (2001) used a typology of origins (where policy comes from), adoption (from an idea to a decision), implementation, and outcomes (results, intended or not, of decisions). However any such categorical system is only a device, since in practice political processes are highly interactive.

METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

A qualitative design was the method used for collection and analysis of data. Historical analysis of curriculum reforms in Ghana and structured interviews constituted sources of data for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select seven (7) participants comprising five (5) staff from the Ghana Education Service (GES) in the Cape Coast Metropolis (the Metro director, the deputy director in charge of curriculum and instruction, the public relations officer of the metro office and two circuit officers) and two curriculum experts from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences education, University of Cape Coast. The secondary data in the literature was triangulated with the primary data from the interviews in order to ensure the content validity and completeness of the data. Table 1 depicts the schedule that was followed to collect data from the participants and the research questions that they were intended to help find answers to. Barely one week was used to collect the data from the participants.

An interview schedule was prepared based on conversion of the research objectives into the interview questions. This was done in such a way that the questions adequately reflected what was being studied in terms of the study focus. I therefore wrote down the variables of interest of the study taking also into cognisance the question and response formats as Tuckman, (1972) and Creswell (2009) suggested. We used 'open-ended items' because it allowed me to obtain their perspectives of the predetermined domains of interest to the study. It also allowed for flexibility so that I could delve into the interviewees' responses and have a depth of knowledge in the responses about politics and curriculum reforms. The questions were categorized basically into descriptive, and knowledge, questions (Patton, 1980; Cohen, Raudenbush & Ball, 2003).

I used inductive and iterative strategies to make sense of the data which were obtained from the field through the interviews. This strategy was used to help me examine the whole matter in a natural setting, to get the ideas and

feelings of the stakeholders in education on the selected issue. When the data were gathered, I needed to put it into a format that was useful for analysis. A way was therefore found to transcribe the interviews. I made a folder and labeled it. In this file, I placed several files depending on how much data I had collected. These files represented individual interviews (Creswell, 2009; Hammersley, 2010). It was helpful to label each file in a systematic manner to document with identity, responses on more than one interview session. In addition, I created a researcher journal. In this folder, I kept information that was collected from the literature review (Cohen *et al.*, 2003; Hammersley, 2010).

The interview data was analyzed after they were coded. In qualitative data analysis, is almost inevitable to use interpretive approach and so a flexible interpretive approach was used for the actual data interpretation. Then themes that emerged from the literature and the interviews were contextualised in order to put these (subjects) within an overall context of education. The style of writing up a composite summary of all the interviews to accurately capture the essence of the phenomenon being investigated was used (Hycner, 1985). This enabled us to describe curriculum reforms in Ghana in general, as experienced by the participants. The systematic 'network analysis' was used to represent the content and structure of individualized interviewees knowledge of the domains presented them (Bliss, Monk & Ogborn, 1983; Hammersley, 2010).

Context of Educational Reforms in Ghana since Independence

The Ghanaian educational system before 1974 followed the structure that was left by the British Colonial Administration (McWilliam, & Kwamena-Poh, 1975). The structure that was in operation before independence was still being followed strictly even on the attainment of independence. What changed maybe was the running of the schools and some new curriculum content which had been included. The structure of the educational system was made up of a six-year Basic Primary Course followed by a four-year Middle School Course. Leavers then proceeded to pursue either a five-year Secondary/Secondary Technical School course or a two-year Teacher Training for Certificate 'B' and another two-year Certificate 'A'. Middle school leavers also had the option of attending Technical Institutes after which they could enter the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. Secondary School leavers had the choice of pursuing a two-year Sixth Form Course to enter the university or a two-year Certificate 'A' teacher training course. Students from the Secondary Technical schools could either choose to enter the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology or pursue two-year

Table 1: Interview Schedule for Interviewees from the Education Sector

Interview/Person Interviewed	Semi-structured Interview (Date and Duration)	Research Questions (RQs)
Metro Director, GES	23 rd June, 2015: 15 minutes	RQ 2, RQ 4
Curriculum Officer, GES	23 rd June, 2015: 10 minutes	RQ 2
PRO, GES	24 th June, 2015: 10 minutes	RQ 2
Circuit Supervisor 1	24 th June, 2015: 10 minutes	RQ 2
Circuit Supervisor 2	25 th June, 2015: 10 minutes	RQ 2
Curriculum Expert 1, UCC	29 th June, 2015: 20 minutes	RQ 1, RQ 3, RQ 4
Curriculum Expert 2, UCC	29 th June, 2015: 20 minutes	RQ 1, RQ 3, RQ 4

Sixth Form Course to enter the University of Ghana. Holders of Teachers Certificate 'A' could also pursue University education at the University of Ghana and later the University of Cape Coast. The structure of education in the country as described paved the way for people to have entrée into formal education using several other possible means available till the university (McWilliam, & Kwamena-Poh, 1975). This made the educational structure lengthier in terms of duration than subsequent reforms which were later introduced. The post-colonial period prior to September 1975 adhered to this structure of education. There was therefore a major departure from this structure as the recommendations of the 1974 Educational Review Committee were implemented (McWilliam, & Kwamena-Poh, 1975).

Dzobo Education Reforms of 1974

In the early 1970s, the National Redemption Council (NRC) government of Col. Ignatius Kutu Acheampong established an Educational Review Committee to recommend reforms in the educational system of the country. The committee was chaired by Prof. Dzobo of the Faculty of Education, University of Cape Coast. The reasons fundamental to the reforms were as follows: Firstly, it was argued that as a result of the colonial experience Ghana had been handed an educational system, which equipped people only to run an administration and an economy totally dependent on demands of other countries instead of that of Ghana. In view of this, there was a strong need for a new system of education that could teach the Ghanaian youth to be self-reliant for express development. Secondly, the schooling provided by the colonial system was a wrong type that failed to equip people with skills that enabled them to secure available employment. Thirdly, basic education needed to focus on how Ghanaians could deal with the problems of the environment, disease, deforestation and low agricultural productivity. The argument was that the

then education system did little to address the socio-economic and the developmental needs of Ghana ((MoE, 1974; Anum-Odoom, 2009). Also, though it had been recognized long ago by previous governments that basic education should be free and obligatory; many children of school-going age were still not in school. There was the need, therefore, to develop a system that ensured that a lot of children gained access to school. Lastly, there was the need to place stress on science and technological education which was not the case in the preceding educational system (Anum-Odoom, 2009).

The relevance of the 1974 Reforms to national development agenda is innumerable. In the first instance, the reforms completely eliminated the four-year middle school system, which had become a major dissipater of government resources. The political leadership of the country therefore thought it wise to introduce three (3) years of basic and comprehensive Junior Secondary education for all children of school-going age obviously to reduce the drain on government finances. It therefore shortened pre-university education from seventeen (17) to thirteen (13) years. This reduced the time spent by students in school and thus reduced the net expenditure of government on the students. Again, the introduction of technical and vocational courses was aimed at providing the nation with its manpower needs since the new courses were to provide practical skills for school leavers to help reduce the increasing unemployment situation at the time. This was because pupils were expected to be equipped with skills to be self-employed and also to seek employment in existing businesses. The government at the time thought it wise to implement this reform so that it could take some credit for helping to reduce unemployment problem and to pacify electorates of the country. Was this reform actually the best at the time? How did it inure to the benefit of the generality of the people? These are questions that need urgent answers.

This reform had some political advantages in that it placed the weight on practical courses instead of the unnecessary emphasis on the colonial system of the

grammar type. Government used this reform to raise the number of needed skilled persons to function in the productive sectors of the economy. Emphasis on the technical, vocational and commercial courses ensured that students who were not academically good in the arts found solace in the technical, vocational and commercial schools thereby creating a balanced education system. Nonetheless, these reforms had inbuilt flaws associated with their implementation. There was no apt political will in the first place to implement the programme nationwide given that it ran only in 113 Junior Secondary Schools throughout the country. Also, it was run in tandem with the old system it was supposed to replace and reform the existing educational system. This also gave way for the reforms of 1987.

Evans-Anfom Committee Reforms of 1987

In 1987, the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) government of Flt Lt Jerry John Rawlings implemented Evans Anfom educational reforms. The reforms were based the report of the Education Commission headed by Dr. Evans-Anfom who was then a lecturer from the University of Education, Winneba. The same factors which occasioned the education reform report of 1974 also informed content of the 1987 reforms. The reforms of this era changed the structure of system from seventeen (17) years to twelve (12) years at the pre-university level and reduced the Dzobo structure of 1974 by one extra year (MoE, 1986). Consequently, the reforms led to a total replacement of the old pre-university educational system including the replacement of the Common Entrance Examination (CEE) by the Education Certificate Education (BECE).

The new curriculum contents were aimed at acquainting students with science and technology, and various vocations were to be pursued. In this regard, agricultural science, pre-technical and pre-vocational courses were introduced. Ghanaian Languages, French, cultural studies, social and environmental studies, and health protection courses were also included in the curriculum. Emphasis was placed on skills acquisition, creativity and the arts of enquiry and problem solving. Politically, the reforms were pertinent to national development in that was meant to provide broad-ranging manpower supply for the various sectors of the country's economy. This included the training of people to engage in agriculture to provide the needed raw materials to feed the industries and provide adequate food to feed the nation. It was also intended to train people in science and technology for the development of science and technology to help raise health standards. This was the era when the country's over-reliance on other countries for food and other services had climbed to its apex. It became necessary therefore for government to utilise the

reform to redeem its tumbling image through the appliance of curriculum to boost its agricultural development base (MoE, 1986). As a measure to increase literacy levels throughout Ghana, government established a lot of Junior Secondary Schools. In the process of implementation, quality was sacrificed because government unintentionally failed to provide textbooks for all basic schools in the country. Also, there was inadequate infrastructure and teaching-learning materials, inadequate trained teachers for the Junior Secondary Schools and these affected the quality of basic education in the country. A major component of this reform was the Free Compulsory Universal Education (FCUBE). This reform also gave birth to the Anamuah-Mensah reform of 2007.

Anamuah-Mensah Committee Reforms of 2007

The committee, chaired by Prof. Jophus Anamuah-Mensah, was tasked to appraise the whole educational system of the country with a view to making the curriculum responsive to current challenges. The committee obtained its report in October 2002. Some primary factors drove the need for a new Junior High and Senior High School reform to address the flaws in the previous reforms. The reform was also introduced for the following reasons: formation of human capital for industrial growth and for ensuring competitiveness in the global economy; ability to make use of recent developments in Science and Technology, especially Information and Communication Technology (ICT); radical transformation in the field of work and employment; and the preservation of cultural identity and traditional indigenous knowledge and creativity. It was intended to ensure 100% access to basic education, placing premium on technical/vocational education and training and improving the quality of instruction and making it flexible enough to contain the varied student capacities.

The Anamuah-Mensah Report recommended similar structural alterations in education just like the Evans-Anfom Report of 1986. The difference was the inclusion of two (2) years of Kindergarten education as part of Basic Education and Apprenticeship training for leavers of the Junior Secondary School who unable to or do not want to continue in the formal sector (MoE, 2002). The Apprenticeship training was to formalize the training of school leavers in the various trades. The committee maintained the three (3) years Senior Secondary School but the government decided to increase it to four (4) years and rename the educational system Junior High School and Senior High School to replace the existing Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary Schools. The change from the three (3) years Senior Secondary School to the four (4) years Senior High School was to ensure that students had adequate time to prepare for

the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) (MoE, 2008; MoE, 2002). This was as a result of the large percentage of students who failed at the final examination. The new curriculum content that was introduced by the reform included French and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as core courses at the Junior High School and Senior High School levels. Implementation of the reforms came with some challenges some of which included setback in the provision of syllabuses and textbooks for the take-off of the programme. Again, teachers were not sufficiently equipped in terms of training to put the reform recommendations into practice. These troubles were later resolved as the reform implementation progressed. The next key quandary which was anticipated was the insufficient classrooms and other learning amenities which posed serious challenge to those students who went through the four year Senior High School programme in September 2010 (Anum-Odoom, 2009).

Following the report, government issued a White paper this time round too to outline a road map for the areas to be implemented based on the report of the committee. In that document, basic education was to be expanded to include 2 years of Kindergarten as well as the existing 6 years of primary and 3 years of Junior High Schools. The overarching target was 100% completion rates for male and female students at all basic levels by 2015. There were plans for a radical reform of second cycle education, which, with effect from 2007, will last for 4 years, serve as a universal terminal point of entry into work or tertiary education by 2020. The major initiatives and sector policies that were to be followed through included a Senior High School system, which consist of technical, vocational, agricultural or grammar streams and a structured apprenticeship system. This was further reviewed under a stakeholder consultative process after the NDC took over the reins of government and the Senior High School programme was reverted back to three years since 2010.

Governmental Interventionist Educational Programmes

Capitation Grant Schemes

Despite the introduction of the FCUBE Ghanaian school children continued to pay towards their education until 2005, when the Ministry of Education abolished school fees for basic schools for all children of school-going age all over the country. Following which the capitation grant scheme was introduced for all basic schools after its successful pilot in 2004. The object of the policy was to effectively address poverty – one of the main barriers to access - and also to address gender inequality in the education sector (Agyare-Kwabi, 2008). The grant is

described to have showed that eliminating school fees leads to narrowing sex gaps and has an immediate and substantial impact on education. This was particularly the case for kindergarten. Enrolment went up from about 500,000 students in 2004-2005 to more than 800,000 in 2005-2006, an increase of 67 per cent. During the same period, the primary net enrolment rate increased from 59.1 per cent to 68.8 per cent, while net enrolment at the junior secondary level increased from 31.6 per cent to 41.6 per cent in the same year. The increase in enrolment was reportedly higher for girls than for boys, thus further narrowing gender gaps. As to whether these grants are released timely to the schools is a matter that needs further investigation. A lot of people have hailed the policy had advised that measures are put in place to sustain it.

Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP)

The pilot phase of the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) was launched in 2005 under the NEPAD “Home Grown” SFP concept, which aims to contribute to not only improvement of the education service delivery but also agricultural development. Locally produced food would be purchased to feed school children, school gardens would be established, and agriculture would be incorporated into school curricula. It is obvious that success of GSFP will depend on how partnership at the local level among different actors, such as DA, GES, SMC, PTA, private sector, farmers and communities, can be built and strengthened for the programme. A key challenge which has been coming up now is the sustainability of school feeding. The programme has strong government support but requires unquestionable political will on the longer term to continue and expand the school feeding. In the Northern Ghana it is reported that there has been some major achievements on the GSFP due to NGO and donor support, while mainstreaming its national policies.

Free School Uniforms and Free Shoes/Sandals for School Children

Not quite long ago, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) government embarked on an educational project dubbed: free uniforms and free sandals for school children. The President, without mincing words, at the launch of the programme explained that government was before then supplying school uniforms to school children in deprived districts and so he had instructed the shoe factory to liaise with the MoE to make school sandals and footwear to accompany the school uniforms already being piloted in underprivileged areas (Osam, 2014). Since then, government has come under verbal attack

from the public for 'encouraging irresponsibility' on the part of parents in the education of their wards. Others also see these programmes as misplaced in the face of the increasing government wage bills and the overwhelming public debt situation. The programme has been tagged by many as having a motive of scoring despicable political points since it makes the populace believe government is sensitive to their plights. I would rather advocate that in so far as it brings relief to parents, it should be continued but government should flirt with all the impossible to attract foreign donor support so that the programme could be sustained.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

As research ethics demands, we acquainted ourselves with our interviewees before the actual interview session. We shared pleasantries and assured them of anonymity and confidentiality before the session began. Since I was the same person who did the recording of their responses, it was right for me to crave their indulgence to allow me write points throughout the session.

Research Question 1: *In what ways has political authority influenced implementation of educational reforms in Ghana since independence?*

The questions were used to obtain information to answer this question. The themes that emerged from the curriculum experts pointed to the fact that policy implementations are largely political. They indicated that nature of subjects to be studied in the curriculum, number of years to be spent in school, issues relating to training of teachers, release of teaching and learning resources (TLRs), and many others emanate from political leaders. They indicated that a critical look into the composition of educational reform committees shows that members selected often owe allegiance to the party in power and this largely influences the decisions for curriculum change. One of them intimated, "*once the government in power hires you to work for it, you have to do all you can to meet their aspirations. If you fail to do so, they hold the exclusive right to 'fire' you and so dare not*". Asked what practical ways government has influenced implementation, one commonality in their responses pointed to the release of funds for the procurement of educational materials such as textbooks, chalk, computers, syllabuses, and many others. They pointed out that one way is in the kind of programmes and policies they churn out to the Ghanaian people. One of them said, "*A lot of policies and programmes have been unsuccessful in the past due to deficiencies in governmental role to ensure successful implementation. A typical example that I can cite is the implementation of*

the ICT programme in basic schools. These programmes, I would say, have not worked". These perspectives concur with the literature because government's role in implementing programmes is shaped in part by political commitments, party manifestoes, and the views of key political leaders. And so often, how well it plays the role is also influenced, often to a much greater extent, by outside political pressures, changing economic circumstances, unforeseen events, and crises (Levin & Young, 2000). This is perhaps why a lot of Ghana's educational programmes have failed to work.

Research Questions 2: *By what measure has political interference in curriculum reform affected (positively or negatively) the education system of Ghana?*

On this issue, one of the participants specified that few governments in the past have tried to interfere positively in curriculum reforms. He cited the example of four-year and three year programme for the Senior High Schools that was proposed but was short-lived due to change in government. A circuit supervisor said, "*I think the Capitation Grant policy for example, is good but it is fraught with sustainability issues. The timely release of funds to meet its intended obligations is not forthcoming and therefore this has crippled day-to-day running of our schools*". This kind of interference is not good; I am sure you agree with me". The PRO also indicated that all the social interventionist programmes such as the capitation grant, school feeding programme and the current provision of school uniforms and shoes for school children being piloted in remote areas of the country are governmental interference policies that have positive effect on the education system and which also gives respite to parents. The director cautioned that as a representative of the Director General, she is not to make comments that appear to incriminate the very service she works for or government and so she restrained herself from answering some of the questions. In all a majority of the interviewees however suggested that interference has negatively affected the education system though they admitted that by a great measure, social interventionist education reform programmes have positive impact on the education system. However, the literature appears to suggest that governmental interference, by a greater measure has had a positive measure on the education system given the dividends the interventionist programmes have brought. For instance the social interventionist programmes initiated by governments such as the FCUBE, the school feeding programme, the capitation grant, the free school uniform programme and the free shoe projects have come as relief to parents. The question though is whether government can sustain such programmes by assuming the role parents are to play in educating their children. Though these

programmes increased enrolment, they have brought untold hardships to school managers, teachers and students.

Research Question 3: *How have politics in Ghana's curriculum reforms contributed to the overall development of the country?*

When they were asked this question, the two experts alluded to the fact that politics, for nothing at all have shaped the current curriculum being used in our schools. As one of them put it, *"I think we have come far as a nation due to the diverse ideas of the various governments that have been brought on board our curriculum. Today, I think we are not doing worse comparing ourselves to other neighbouring countries in the West African sub-region. Our curriculum is not bad per say but implementation has been our problem; we have always had it right in terms of policies but over-politicisation is our bane. And so if for nothing at all, the various governments we have had in the past and their ideas in terms of what should be learnt, how it should be learnt,... have contributed to the overall development of the country"*. In terms of aligning curriculum content to meet modern demands, they shared dissenting views. Whereas one felt the curriculum has helped to deal with practical problems of the country, the other said, the curriculum needs an overhaul to tailor its activities towards meeting the needs and aspirations of Ghana. For instance the one who felt the current curriculum is living up to expectation said in so far as the country can boast of its human resource competence; there was sufficient evidence to show that the curriculum is meeting its objectives. Supporting his assertion he said, *"We have very smart lawyers, engineers, architects, pilots, doctors and other professionals who we can all boast of as being competent and this is a manifestation of a robust and pragmatic curriculum"*.

On the contrary, the other expert suggested that there appears to be a lacuna between curriculum and the social quagmire and conundrum facing the nation. Specifically, he mentioned the issue of filth and the haphazard disposal of waste which is killing Ghanaian almost every year. For him, the curriculum should be a capable tool in the hands of political leaders to correct all 'ills' of society and so he indicated that it was high time a curriculum was crafted to deal with this nuisance. He indicated that people needed to be educated on better ways of living and to dispose their trash properly to save them from falling sick and visiting the hospitals needlessly and for him, the education should start from our basic schools. The finding from the latter interviewee expert is concurrent with the literature information which admits that politics in Ghana's education reform has not helped much in the overall development of the country. In

fact, Anum-Odoom (2009) noted that the 1974 reforms was informed by a basic need to make basic education focus on how Ghanaians could deal with the socio-economic, developmental, environmental, health and agricultural challenges of the country. But the fact that these problems are still rife suggests malfunction on the part of the curriculum to deal with them. The argument was that the then education system did little to address the socio-economic and the developmental needs of Ghana. Nonetheless, the literature reveals that the 1974 Reforms contributed immensely to national development agenda in that by eliminating the four-year middle school system which was a dissipater of government resources, the state accrued some money to prosecute her developmental agenda. In this light, we see politics contributing to the nation's development.

Research Question 4: *What should be the ideal role of political leaders and other stakeholders in ensuring successful implementation of a national education reform plan necessary to catapult Ghana to a higher developmental height?*

The two experts were again requested to provide their views on this issue since the personnel from GES could not, per their job, comment on what they thought could be the way forward for government in terms of her role. On this issue, the views of the experts were similar even though there were few areas they differed in submission.

They both held the view that the education enterprise should be left in the hands of the masses with minimal interference. Again, they intimated that educational policies should not be driven by political impulses but should be driven by research. In this regard, government should allocate research funds to institutions of higher learning (especially the ones mandated to produce educationists) to undertake research to understand the myriad perplexing issues faced by the education system. They said that government's role should not be to impose their policies on implementers but they should allow much of these decisions to be underpinned by research. One of them said, *"Nothing in education can succeed without scientific research. Government needn't impose educational ideas to satisfy their political interest"*. In addition, they both opine that teachers should never be left out of any curriculum reform programmes. It was good to appoint reform committees but these committees must contain members who are teachers in the basic schools. They said that government should enhance salaries of teachers so that implementation of the reforms at the point of transaction does not suffer. One of them said, *"If teachers still complain of low salaries, you can be sure nothing will work because they are supposed to implement the programme and if they are dissatisfied, then there is already danger ahead"*. They also

suggested that the education ministry needs always to consult with the ministry of finance before agreeing to implement policies. They said a situation where we are told there is no money to implement policies only smacks of incompetence and lack of planning. They decried the situation where a lot of important educational policies have stalled due to the issue of 'lack of money' saying, "If there is no money, then nobody has a business coming out in the first place with any policies that necessitate use of money. I think we have to be more serious in this country". One of them felt that reform programmes should cover the higher levels of learning even though one thought the tertiary institutions are autonomous institutions. One of them advised that government should consider involving businesses or industrial players in curriculum reform programmes to allow infusion of their ideas. This he said would help forestall future gaps between the curriculum and the labour market even at the basic school level. Though Howlett and Ramesh, (2003) noted that governments often think all the time about how to improve its prospects in elections, (which means trying to do what voters want), it should be careful to come out with educational policies that would move the country out its economic doldrums.

CONCLUSION

Schools are widely seen as playing a central role in the socialization of children and young people. The curriculum, for many countries serves as the fuel that drives the vehicle of national development. Through robust curricula, countries move from developing to developed ones. Through curriculum reforms, countries are able to bring technology and globalization to their national jurisdictions. Through curriculum reforms, countries succeed in aligning their visions and refocus attention to where the nation aspires to be. Political leaders, who are the janitors of political power, owe it a responsibility to come out with practical policies that benefits the generality of their people instead of tailoring their policies to satisfy their whims and caprices. A lot of countries with polarised political posture on vital educational policies and programmes fail in their bid to resurrect their national dreams. Excessive politicization of national issues has been found to be injurious to economic and social health of nations. In other words, the over-politicisation of educational issues does more harm than good to countries. In Ghana, this has accounted for the disparities between educational objectives and national aspiration. If this situation pertains, the curriculum is allowed to woefully fail in addressing pertinent and peculiar national issues. Under the circumstance, a national educational policy with the necessary legal frameworks which encapsulate the aspiration of the nation is required to be put in place deal

with the national conundrum from government to government. The onus would only lie on all governments to see to it that these programmes are implemented according the road map accepted by the whole nation. Extensive stakeholder consultations are necessary for national curriculum reforms on critical educational issues. Through intense public debates, inputs from the public when solicited could enhance the quality of educational policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a recommendation, the Ministry of Education and government for that matter, politicians, and all stakeholders in education should, as a matter of urgency, consider advice of curriculum experts in curriculum reform programmes. There must be a national educational policy reform document developed with the necessary legal framework delineating what go into reforms. The document must enjoin parties in power to put party interests aside and strive for the collective good of the nation. Again, it is recommended that governments ensure that formulated curricula policies requiring implementation are quantified in monetary terms to avert the usual situation of lack of funds that bedevil implementation efforts. Lastly, government should set aside a fund to organise annual curricula colloquiums with the aim of bringing stakeholders together to discuss curriculum issues to keep the curriculum abreast of the changing trends.

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