Exploring the policy implementation paradox: using the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE) policy in Ghana as an exemplar

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This paper uses the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE) policy implementation in Ghana as an exemplar to explore the apparent disjuncture between policy intentions in theory and outcomes of implementation tasks in practice. Through the critical discourse analysis of a range of policy documents complemented by the analysis of interviews with Ghanaian education officials, the paper investigates the extent to which the 'free', 'compulsory', 'universal' and 'basic education' components claimed in the fCUBE policy title are reflected in the implementation process. Owing to its commitment to enhancing the educational opportunities and outcomes of the educationally disadvantaged, the fCUBE policy is viewed as a 'rights-based policy' deeply rooted in social democratic values. However, the advent of neo-liberal ideological rhetoric of 'skills for the world of work' has triggered the neutralisation of these progressive ideals. This, the paper argues, has led to a significant discursive shift in policy direction and language of implementing the policy.

Keywords: policy and practice; policy implementation; policy as 'text' and 'discourse'; critical discourse analysis; social democracy; neo-liberalism

Introduction

A review of current education policy and practice endorses the view of a paradox in education policy implementation.[1] Although tremendous investments (in terms of time, energy and resources) are made in enacting policies, the outcomes of these endeavours differ significantly from intended goals. This paper reports on a case study which explored the causes of the apparent disjuncture between policy purposes and intentions in theory and the outcomes of implementation processes in practice. The approach involved using the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE)[2] policy in Ghana as a case, and Ball's (1994) post-modernist conception of policy as both 'text' and 'discourse' as an analytical framework to gain insights into and/or demystify this policy phenomenon. The paper aims to explore primarily the extent to which the 'free', 'compulsory', 'universal' and 'basic education' intents of the fCUBE policy title are reflected visibly in the process of implementation.

The paper is organised as follows. The next section discusses briefly what is known in methodological and sociological terms as 'the statement of purpose',

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where the fCUBE policy context and/or background and the aim of the paper are outlined. This is followed by a review of relevant literature to shed light on the perspectives explicated in the policy literature to explain the existence and/or occurrence of what in the context of this paper is described as the policy implementation paradox and through that highlight the conceptual or analytical framework for the paper. Next comes the methodology, that is, an exploration of how the study on which this paper reports was conducted and the methodological approaches, strategies, techniques and decisions taken to ensure that the findings were well grounded in the evidence obtained. Thereafter, the issues emanating from the analyses of the data gathered are presented before the conclusion.

The fCUBE policy and the research context

The fCUBE policy is a comprehensive sector-wide programme set up in fulfilment of section 38, sub-section 2 of Chapter 6 of the 1992 Republican Constitution which states 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 to all Ghanaian children of school-going age. (Government of Ghana [GOG] 1992)

This Constitution came into effect officially on 7 January 1993 and in line with this constitutional requirement, the then Government of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), in consultation with the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ghana Education Service (GES), came out to implement the fCUBE policy in April 1996. Among the aims of the programme, those that are of paramount importance and worth stressing, as far as this paper is concerned, are given as follows:

- to make schooling from basic stage 1–9 (5–13 years), free, compulsory and universal for all school-age children by the year 2005;
- to improve the quality of teaching and learning: recognizing the fact that 22% of children of school-going age (that is, P1–P6) are not in school, 29% of students in Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) are not in school, and that there are less vacancies for students who qualify to enter Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) (MOE 1996, 1998; Ghana Education Service [GES] 2004).

An 'fCUBE' implementation plan which adopts a range of strategies, often referred to as the objectives of the fCUBE programme, was also developed to guide the implementation of the programme. These strategies revolve around three main components and are geared towards the following:

- Improving quality of teaching and learning.
- Improving management efficiency.
- Improving access and participation (MOE 1996).

In 1997 (that is, a year into its implementation), a fourth objective – decentralisation and sustainability of management structures – was added to the three main objectives. This objective sought to decentralise the management of the sector's

budget for pre-tertiary education. This involved capacity building and financial management at the district level (MOE 1998; GES 2004).

Granted that the implementation of the fCUBE policy is still in progress (that is, in spite of the fact that the 10-year grace period mandated by the 1992 Constitution for the implementation of the policy elapsed some years ago), it is imperative to question the extent to which the policy intentions and/or purposes are taking hold. Ironically, 15 years into its implementation, evaluative reports on the fCUBE policy are rather cursory and inconsistent. A case in point worth illuminating is the findings of the national mid-term stocktaking exercise undertaken on the fCUBE policy by GES in the year 2000. The aim of this nationwide exercise was to evaluate the programme for the first half of the implementation period (i.e. from 1996 to 2000) to identify achievements and constraints with the view to mapping up strategies for improvement (MOE 2000). The findings showed that through the capacity-building programmes carried out at the various level of implementation, the quality of teaching and learning had improved tremendously and so also had children's enrolment and retention and the management of schools. Regarding constraints, the report of the stocktaking exercise catalogued a number of issues affecting the implementation process, which among other things included the following: inadequate supply of logistics; lack of community cooperation and participation in education; inability of parents/guardians to supply school needs of children owing to poverty; high-level apathy of parents/guardians towards the programme; inadequate supply of teachers; inadequate financial support from District Assemblies; and low retention rate, especially for girls, due to the parents/guardians' inability to pay school fees (MOE 2000; World Bank 2004). The constraints to implementing the fCUBE policy were for instance reverberated by Tomasevski (2006) in her global report of the state of the right to education. In this report, she asserts that after the 10 years of implementing the fCUBE, Ghana's educational performance had not improved greatly and that whereas Eastern Europe and Latin America were alleged to be on track towards meeting the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) targets, Ghana and for that matter Sub-Saharan Africa seemed to be lagging behind desperately and irreparably (Tomasevski 2006, 22).

Whilst the achievements of fCUBE enlisted above are commendable in terms of the strides made over the years of implementation, the issues identified as militating against the process of implementation rather contradict the fCUBE policy intents. These issues, especially the issues of low retention of pupils and the inability of parents to pay fees, do suggest that perhaps verbal commitments to the laudable social goal of free compulsory and universal basic education have not been translated into the needed changes in policy and practice (UNESCO 2004; Akyeampong 2009).

Interestingly, after the stocktaking exercise in the year 2000, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) Government that replaced the NDC introduced key policy initiatives to (in their own words) strengthen and revitalise the fCUBE policy implementation process. Notable among these policy initiatives were the 'capitation grant', the 'school feeding programme' and the 'eleven-year basic education' policies[3] (GES 2004; Ministry of Education Science and Sports [MOESS] 2006). As aptly noted by Agbenyaga (2007) and Maikish and Gershberg (2008), the capitation grant concept, for example, was designed to reinforce the existing 'fCUBE' policy of attracting and retaining children in school. The concept was developed and is currently being administered by Ghana's Ministry of Education and Sports and its

implementation wing, the Ghana Education Service, to support financially and administratively the fCUBE policy of free, universal primary education. The scheme was launched as a pilot programme in 2004–2005 and launched country-wide in 2005–2006, and is aimed basically at removing the financial barrier to enrolling in schools whilst, at the same time, compensating schools for any loss of revenue incurred by eliminating student levies. It allocates a per pupil allotment of funding (i.e. four Ghana Cedis per pupil per year) to all basic public schools (kindergarten through JSS) to encourage effective implementation of decentralisation by empowering schools to plan and carry out school quality improvement activities using accountability guidelines and forms. In fact, a total amount of 95 billion Cedis, equivalent to US$ 10.4 million, is reported to have been allocated for the capitation grant in the 2006 fiscal year (Government of Ghana [GOG] 2006). A few years down the line, this author thought it would be interesting to conduct an exploratory enquiry into the implementation process with the view to finding out the extent to which the fCUBE policy purposes and intentions claimed in official documentations are being realised.

The aim of the paper therefore is to investigate the extent to which the 'free', 'compulsory', 'universal' and 'basic education' intents claimed in the fCUBE policy title and documents are reflected visibly in the process of implementation. The approach involves finding out essentially what a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the provisions enshrined in the fCUBE policy documentations says about the policy intentions, how these provisions are conceived and articulated by the education officials[4] who mediate policy at the meso-level of the Ghanaian educational system, and what an analytical framework which conceptualises policy as both 'text' and 'discourse' could suggest about the fCUBE implementation process and indeed what in the context of this paper is described as the 'policy implementation paradox'.

Thus, whilst the researcher tends to focus more specifically on the implementation of the fCUBE policy in Ghana, the study generally concerns the apparent dissonances between policy intentions in theory and outcomes in practice, thus making the findings of the study relevant to a wide range of national and international contexts. Essentially, whilst the study uses the fCUBE policy as a means to better understand and explicate the policy implementation milieu, an attempt is made particularly to explore the convergences and dissonances in what the fCUBE policy documentation says both implicitly and explicitly about the policy purposes and intentions, and how these provisions are enunciated by the Ghanaian educational elites. Based on this assessment, a further attempt is made to offer explanations as to why this policy milieu exists in education and how the issue could be understood using Ball's (1994) conceptual approach of policy as 'text' and 'discourse'.

The theoretical context

Two perspectives – change management and post-modernist perspectives[5] – are among a number of reasons explicated in the policy literature to explain what in the context of this paper is described as the policy implementation paradox. Those who subscribe to the change management perspective hold the view that the policy implementation paradox exists because policy-makers, implementers and change agents are unable to, or fail to, put in place operational plans to ensure efficient and effective implementation of policies enacted. For this school of thought, policy

implementation is not just a question of defining an end and letting others get on with it. It is a process of interaction, dialogue, feedback, modifying objectives, recycling plans, coping with mixed feelings and values, pragmatism, micropolitics, frustration and muddle.

Fullan (1988, 2001) and Rist (2000), for example, cite the lack of conceptualisation of the process of implementation as the reason for the disjuncture between policy intentions in theory and outcomes in practice. Fullan on his part problematises the implementation process. For him, understanding the meaning of implementation and its associated problems is not as straightforward and rational as it seems at first glance. He identifies implementation as a 'variable', in other words, 'changing practice', and goes further to explain that it is the process of altering existing practice in order to achieve more effectively certain desired learning outcomes. Rist (2000), on the other hand, quotes Pressman and Wildavsky's (1984) words to illustrate the multidimensional structure of implementation processes that many change agents and policy implementers fail to adhere to and are therefore not able to implement and manage educational policies successfully:

> Policies imply theories. Whether stated explicitly or not, policies point to a chain of causation between initial conditions and future consequences … Implementation, then, is the ability to forge subsequent links in the causal chain so as to obtain the desired results. (cited by Rist 2000, 1007)

Everard, Morris, and Wilson (2004) echo the apparent dissonances between the perceptions of policy-makers and those on whom policies impinge. They argue that more often policy-makers (and in this context, policy implementers) make assumptions about the causes of things which differ from what pertains in the world of those on whom such policies impinge. Hence, the need for them to address themselves not just to the world they see, but also to the world other people see, however misguided, perverse and distorted they may think the outlooks of others are. They write:

> The … reason why those who initiate change often fail to secure successful conclusion to their dreams is that they tend to be too rational. They develop in their minds a clear, coherent vision of where they want to be at, and they assume that all they have to do is to spell out the logic to the world in words of one syllable, and everyone will be immediately motivated to follow the lead. The more vivid their mental picture of the goal … the more likely they are to stir opposition and the less successful they are likely to be in managing a process of change. (239–40)

Huczynski and Buchanan (2001) pitch the existence and/or occurrence of the paradox in policy implementation, among other things, on resistance to change. They cite four reasons, namely: parochial self-interest of individuals or groups in the organisation; misunderstanding and lack of trust of the change process; contradictory assessment of change; and low tolerance for change, to exemplify why changes in organisations and institutions are strongly resisted. They go on to project that as long as these conditions are not remedied, policy purposes and intentions will continue to differ significantly from outcomes of implementation (559–60).

Viewed through the change management lens, this perspective generally exemplifies the kind of practical, operational and strategic plans or works that need doing in order to bring about the desired policy changes. The weakness of this perspective, however, relates to its intrinsic over-determinism. It appears limited in the

sense that it misses out completely on the socio-cultural and political dynamism of policy processes. The perspective assumes and/or presupposes that once change management routines and operational plans are well conceptualised, put in place and judiciously pursued, policy implementation is bound to succeed.

The post-modernist perspective on its part calls for a fundamental re-conceptualisation and redefinition of policy and its role in the decision-making. It registers the claim that it is not the case that policy provisions enacted are not implemented successfully but rather that the problem lies in the fact that in the current dispensation, policy performs significant democratic roles which the traditional/rationalist conception of policy overlooks. Proponents of this perspective suggest that the globalisation of capitalism in recent years has exerted significant influence on countries and their educational systems worldwide, leading to a paradigm shift in leadership. This phenomenon, the proponents of this perspective claim, has resulted in decision-making becoming a participative activity shared among various local school constituents as opposed to a traditional/rationalist problem-solving one which concentrates power solely at the centre.

From this standpoint, researchers in this tradition inhabit and propose two very different conceptualisations of policy – policy as 'text' and 'discourse' – for understanding the complexities in policy-making and implementation. They base their proposition on what they see as a post-modernist understanding of social issues where 'two theories are probably better than one' (Ball 1994, 14), and on that premise, they argue for what Olssen, Codd, and O'Neill (2004) call a 'materialist theory of language' – a theory which sees policy as being made of language and therefore a social practice – as a basis for understanding the disjuncture between policy intention in theory and outcomes in practice.

The conception of policy as 'text' embraces all artefacts of human communication. However, for the purposes of this paper, 'policy as text' is taken to refer exclusively to written text and signifies the contested, changing and negotiated character of policy processes. 'Policy as text' draws upon the insights of literary theory and recognises the complex ways in which textual representations are encoded as a result of compromises and struggles. It rejects the technical-empirical approach to understanding policy implementation where there is a quest for authorial intentions presumed to lie behind the text (Walford 2000, 124). It reiterates the point that texts are made up of language and as such contain divergent meanings, contradictions and structured omissions and that a plurality of readings that are liable to be produced are in themselves indicative of the existence of a plurality of readers (Codd 1988).

Policy as 'discourse' in the context of this paper is taken to mean the ways by which the articulation and interpretations of ideas and propositions contained in policy documents constrain the 'intended meanings' of such texts. The conception draws on and emphasises the post-modernist view of the ways in which the discourses available to us as people limit and shape our views and perspectives about the social world. 'Such an idea links to those of Foucault (1977) and many others, and emphasizes the limitations on what can be said and thought, and also who can speak, when, where and with what authority' (Walford 2000, 125). Related particularly to the paradox in policy implementation, the conception of policy as 'discourse' draws on the ways by which the constraining effects of discursive contexts set up by policy-makers come to the fore in implementation and institutionalisation processes.

The post-modernist perspective on the policy implementation paradox is particularly insightful as it views policy implementation as a complex undertaking involving contestations, negotiations and struggles (Ozga 2000). In particular, the perspective appears to suggest invariably that policy intentions are hardly met owing to the contested manner in which policies are encoded and decoded according to the history, traditions, orientations and/or motivations of the actors involved in the process.

Thus, although the accounts of this model remain tentative (Walford 2000), it is however highly illuminating in the sense that it identifies the challenge of relating: 'together analytically the ad hocery of the macro and the ad hocery of the micro without losing sight of the systematic bases and effects of the ad hoc social actions: to look for the iterations embedded within chaos' (Ball 1994, 15). In other words, owing to its potential to draw on language as a resource for reading into the issues of knowledge, power and social relations through the analysis of written and spoken communication, the post-modernist conception of policy as both 'text' and 'discourse', in this context, is chosen as offering a deeper insight into the causes for the disjuncture between policy intentions in theory and outcomes in practice. This however does not mean that the change management perspective illustrated earlier is either inferior or relegated to the background. In fact, as the data below will illustrate, elements of the change management perspective could be implicitly seen, particularly in the interviewees' accounts.

Methodology

The findings reported in this study draw on a research piece that explored the fCUBE policy implementation process in Ghana. In the light of the research questions posed and the fact that the study purported to use the fCUBE policy as an exemplar to shed insights into the apparent disjuncture between policy intention in theory and outcomes in practice, the interpretivist approach and its (supposedly) underlying qualitative strategy were adopted. In the process, the fCUBE policy implementation was taken as a 'case' and studied in its real-life context, using more than one source of evidence. The approach involved the use of the conception of policy as 'text' and 'discourse' as an analytical framework, whereby a range of publicly available texts/extracts from documents on the fCUBE policy were subjected to CDA. These were complemented by the analysis of semi-structured, open-ended interviews with Ghanaian educational elites.

The CDA as an interdisciplinary analytical tool for social policy research adopts a 'discourse-based view' of language which focuses particularly on the ways by which knowledge, power and social relations are construed through the analysis of written and spoken communication. As such, it was seen as appropriate in unearthing the implicit and explicit intentions and assumptions made in the fCUBE policy documentations. The approach to CDA adopted for the purposes of this paper involves the analysis of selected extracts from four key documents on the fCUBE policy. The documents from which extracts are taken for analysis are in the public domain and include the following: the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana (GOG 1992); the Programme for Implementing the fCUBE Policy (MOE 1996); The Education Strategic Plan (ESP) (MOESS 2003); and the White Paper on the Report of the Education Reform Review Committee (MOESS 2005). The selection of documents from which extracts are taken for analysis is done diligently and with

the view to providing a 'time-line' (i.e. from 1992 to the present) expressing an overview and chronology of the major 'landmarks of events' regarding the fCUBE policy formulation and implementation. The first of these documents (the 1992 Constitution) is the document from which the wording of the fCUBE policy title is derived. It was thus selected to explicate the constitutional and democratic requirements the policy was initiated to fulfil. The second document (the Programme for Implementing the fCUBE Policy) forms part of the strategic guidelines introduced to inform and assist the implementation of the fCUBE policy. It was selected therefore to highlight the broad ideological stance of the government in power at the time of the initiation of the fCUBE policy regarding the purposes and goals of the policy. In addition to highlighting the ideological position of the then government of Ghana, the third and fourth documents (i.e. the Education Strategic Plan and the White Paper on the Report of the Education Reform Review Committee) were selected with the view to predicting and/or forecasting the future direction of 'basic education' provision in Ghana, particularly after the initial 10-year period allocated constitutionally for the implementation of the policy had elapsed.

The extracts taken from these four documents for analysis were carefully selected bearing in mind Macdonald's (2001) text eligibility criteria as well as van Dijk's (2001) 'text-context theory'. The former's eligibility criteria comprise four main factors, namely authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning of the texts. The latter's 'text-context theory' refers to the process by which the topics under investigation inform the type of sources likely to be relevant in the selection procedure. It also requires due consideration to be given to the context within which the text was produced and the audience for which it is acknowledged. So whilst the focus on extracts from four documents on the fCUBE policy (and also the focus on certain linguistic features, as the analysis of texts/extracts will later show) could be considered potentially limited, the choice is informed by and grounded particularly in van Dijk's (2001, 99) advice on carrying out CDA. He suggests that rather than subjecting an entire piece of text to analysis, it makes sense to concentrate on analysing those factors which enable the speaker or writer to exercise power: stress and intonation, word order, lexical style, coherence, local semantic moves (such as disclaimers), topic choice, speech acts, schematic organisation and rhetorical figures.

The analysis of the selected texts was conducted at two levels: linguistic and intertextual or discursive tiers (Taylor 2004). The former centred on bringing to the fore the linguistic and semiotic choices made in the writing and layout of the fCUBE policy texts. These were understood in an extended sense to cover not only the traditional levels of analysis within linguistics (that is, phonology, grammar up to the level of the sentence, and vocabulary and semantics) but also the analysis of, 'textual organization above sentences, including inter-sentential cohesion and various aspects of the structure of texts' (Fairclough 1995, 188). The intertextual/discursive level of analysis focused mainly on identifying, highlighting and documenting multiple, competing and marginalised (ideological) discourses in the fCUBE policy texts, as well as tracing any possible discursive shifts in the policy implementation process.

The second phase in the methodological approach involved semi-structured, open-ended interviews with Ghanaian educational elites. In all, 16 (11 individualised and 5 group) semi-structured, open-ended interviews were conducted with Ghanaian education officials who mediate policy at the 'meso-level', over a two-month period in Ghana. The focus on the meso-level implementers was not

intended to achieve any parochial interests. As mediators of policy between the pol-
icy-makers and the actual implementers (i.e. headteachers and teachers at school
level), the Ghanaian education officials often create public conversation that sets
legitimate boundaries of discourse, owing to the venerable positions they occupy
and the 'power' they wield. Hence, the decision to interrogate and make sense of
how they conceived and articulated the fCUBE policy purposes and what these
indeed suggest about the extent to which the policy intentions could be said to be
reflected visibly in the implementation process. The interviewees, who comprised
senior officials at the GES Headquarters, Regional Directors of Education and their
assistants, District/Municipal/Metropolitan Directors of Education and an Executive
member of the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), are spread across
the 10 regions of the country and were selected using the 'purposeful sampling
technique'. The rationale for using the purposeful sampling technique for the selec-
tion of interviewees was grounded in the three critical conditions outlined by Neu-
man (2004, 138–40), which are particularly relevant to this study, and are namely:

(1) when the researcher wants to select unique cases that are informative for in-
     depth investigation – in this case, finding out the extent to which the fCUBE
     policy implementation is leading to the realisation of the policy intentions;
(2) when the researcher wants to select members of a difficult-to-reach, specia-
     lised population – in this case, Ghanaian education officials who by virtue of
     the nature of their work and position are very difficult to reach for research
     purposes;
(3) when the purpose of sampling is less to generalise to a larger population than
     it is to gain deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied – in this
     case, gaining insight into the reasons and/or causes of the disjuncture
     between policy intentions in theory and outcomes of implementation endeav-
     ours in practice.

The number of interviewees was based primarily on achieving a fuller under-
standing of the implementation process and involved the kind of variation sampling
that cuts across urban, semi-urban and rural spectrums. The five group interviews
(which consisted of 2, 3, 3, 3 and 5 members, respectively) resulted from requests
from some Regional and District Directors of Education who, being relatively new
to their respective posts, felt they were more comfortable if their substantive assis-
tants who were very knowledgeable about the fCUBE policy implementation joined
them for the interviews.

The interview schedule had 10 items that were grouped into three main sections
which probed the interviewees on a range of issues, hinging particularly on their
interpretation and experiences of the fCUBE implementation process. Responses
were transcribed manually and analysed thematically. The thematic analysis
involved coding the transcripts. Coding in this context is used to mean re-arranging
the transcripts into thematic categories. In all, 14 codes/thematic categories emerg-
ing from the interview responses were identified. Out of the 14 emerged three major
themes, under which all the categories were re-organised and merged. These three
major themes comprised responses to key questions which probed: the
interviewees' conception, articulation and/or interpretation of the fCUBE policy
intentions and purposes encapsulated in the policy documents; their experiences of
the implementation process and their perceptions of its strengths/successes and

weaknesses or constraints; and the interviewees' suggestions and recommendations to improve practice.

A key component of the thematic analysis was the use of the 'common-sense hypothetico-inductivist model' (Wengraf 2001), whereby insights are gained from data through the process of induction. However, granted that this article aims to gain a deeper insight into the fCUBE policy implementation process rather than theorising, in the actual reportage of the interview findings in this article, a combination of narrative and interpretive approaches are used. The rationale for this stems from the need to narrate the interviewees' experiences as a story whilst pausing intermittently to reflect upon what is being said, its interpretations and the implications therein. The narrative approach treated the interview data as a story, a situated account (Jephcote and Davies 2004), and as an outcome of the application of the study's conceptual framework to the Ghanaian educational elites' stories and experience of events. The interpretive approach, on the other hand, allows social actions and human activities to be seen and treated as texts or as a collection of symbols expressing layers of meaning (Berg 2004, 226). The researcher's own personal biases about the fCUBE policy implementation process were thus mitigated/minimised considerably by adhering to Cookson's (1994, 129) suggestion to remain very close to the words of the respondents and with minimum interpretation so as to understand their views properly before jumping to conclusions.

In the reports that follow, the findings from the CDA of selected extracts from key fCUBE policy documentations and interviews with Ghanaian educational elites are illustrated consecutively. The examples presented are intended to illustrate how the assumptions made in the fCUBE policy documentations about the policy intentions are conceived and articulated by the actors who have the responsibility for mediating policy, but not to argue necessarily that the interviewees were homogeneous in their responses. In view of the current political terrain in Ghana, and the fear that interviewees might be vilified and/or victimised for their comments, pseudonyms (typical Ghanaian household names) are assigned to protect their anonymity and to safeguard the validity of the interview data.

Emerging issues

In the original research on which this paper reports, the research findings reportage extended to include experiences and perceptions of interviewees regarding successes/achievements and setbacks as well as suggestions to improve the fCUBE policy implementation process. However, for the purposes of this paper, the analytical framework of policy as both 'text' and 'discourse' is utilised to report the emerging issues from the study.

Analysing the fCUBE policy texts (policy as text)

A CDA of the fCUBE policy purposes and intentions encapsulated in the policy documentations indicated that the fCUBE policy could be viewed as a 'rights-based'[6] policy deeply enshrined in social democratic values. This is indicative of its commitments to enhancing the educational opportunities and outcomes of the socially and economically disadvantaged children in the Ghanaian society. Trowler (1998, 62) refers to these social democratic impulses in educational ideological terms as 'progressivism' and reports that it rejects elitism and is intended to give what he

describes as a 'step up' to disadvantaged individuals and groups in the largest numbers possible. These social democratic and progressive imports are implicit in the wording of the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana, whose formulation and passage into law paved the way for the introduction of the fCUBE policy in 1996. Chapter 6, Article 38, sub-sections 1 and 2 of this Constitution state that:

> The State shall provide educational facilities at all the levels and in all the regions of Ghana and shall to the greatest extent feasibly make those facilities available to all citizens.

> 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 to all Ghanaian children of school-going age. (GOG 1992)

Thus, a CDA of the above quote at the linguistic level shows that the two sub-sections have different syntactic compositions. In the case of 'sub-section 1', the second clause is seen as simply qualifying the first as follows:

[The state shall provide educational facilities …]

To whom shall it make these facilities available?

[… to all its citizens].

The second sub-section of the extract uses a single complex proposition with a constellation of prepositional phrases (PP). These PPs are inserted between 'shall', the phrasal verb (Ph. V) 'draw-up' and the noun phrase (NP) in objective place. This representation is illustrated below:

NP1	aux/f.t.	PP1	PP2
[The Government]	[shall]	[within two years]	[after Parliament first meets]
	PP3	Ph.V	NP2
	[after the coming into force of this constitution,]	[draw up]	[a programme]
PP4	PP5		PP6
[for implementation]	[within the following ten years]		[for the provision of Free,
	Compulsory and Universal Basic Education]	PP7	PP8
		[to all Ghanaian children]	[of school-going age.]

From the analysis above, PPs 1, 2 and 3 are inserted in between 'shall' (an auxiliary and a future tense marker) and the phrasal verb 'draw up', which together constitute the main verb of the proposition. PPs 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 on the other hand, are suffixed to the noun phrase 'a programme' and therefore by function and categorisation are part of the whole nominal phrase in objective place. Whilst this style of writing is seen as a way of keeping what otherwise would have been more than one sentence brief, precise and as one proposition, it is argued that its use in the extract has another possible function. Although the two sets of PPs, in part, denote the specific time-frame and the chronological sequence within which a 'major' action is to be carried out, the first set of PPs (i.e. PPs 1, 2 and 3) appear to exemplify specifically the kind of democratic processes that are to be undertaken in

achieving the ultimate goal of fCUBE. The second set of PPs (i.e. PPs 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8), unlike the former, perform a different function. They give the rationale for the action described by the predicate.

Thus, in spite of the syntactic differences in the above quote, the analysis at the intertextual/discursive tier argues that references in the two sub-sections to discourses such as 'all the levels', 'all the regions', 'all citizens', 'free, compulsory and universal basic education' set off and/or suggest for example that the Government of Ghana and its institutions and structures of governance viewed education, particularly primary education, as a 'right' and are committed to ensuring that every Ghanaian child, irrespective of his/her geographical location, gender consideration, political affiliation, (dis)abilities, religious and/or ethnic background or colouration, receives good-quality primary education to the best of his/her abilities. Having said that, the text thus appears to be underpinned by what Gewirtz (2002, 140) and Lynch and Lodge (2002, 7) describe as 'distributive justice'. That is, the distribution of life chances to all citizens on an equal basis.

Whilst these social democratic ideals alluded to above are quite visible in key policy documents on the fCUBE, a discursive shift in both language of implementation and policy direction, owing to the advent of a global neo-liberal ideological discourse[7] on education, is also noticed. The neo-liberal ideology on education emphasises transferable 'core skills' (e.g. literacy, communication, IT skills) and views the purpose of education as concerned primarily with developing people to be good efficient workers. The emergence of this ideological discourse, the analysis suggests, emanated from the globalisation of capitalism (a worldwide phenomenon which occurred particularly in Ghana in the late 1990s) and its resultant effect of a paradigm shift in decision-making. The discursive shift in policy direction vis-à-vis language of implementation is particularly apparent in policy documents developed and put in the public domain after the official inception of the policy in April 1996 (e.g. the Programme for fCUBE policy, 1996; the ESP, MOESS 2003; Government's White Paper on the Report of the Education Reform Review Committee, MOESS 2005) to enhance the process of implementation. The following two excerpts illustrate the shift in language and direction of implementing the fCUBE policy alluded to above implicitly:

> The mission of the Ministry of Education is to provide relevant education to all Ghanaians at all levels to enable them to acquire [skills] that will assist them to [develop their potential], to be [productive], to [facilitate poverty reduction] and to promote [socio-economic growth and national development] … (MOESS 2003, 7)

> By requiring that all Ghanaians receive 9 years of free, quality schooling, the Government wishes to ensure that all graduates of the basic education system are prepared for further education and [skills training]. The expansion and reforms planned under fCUBE are designed to equip future generations of Ghanaians with the fundamental [knowledge and skills] … to develop further their talents through additional [education or training and … play a functional role in society as … economic producers and to pursue self-determined paths to improve the quality of their lives]. (The programme for fCUBE, MOE 1996, 18)

In the excerpts above, the social democratic and progressive impulses attributed to the fCUBE policy earlier appear to be expressed alongside classical neo-liberal ideological discourses of 'skills for knowledge-based economy', and as such appear

to be competed with and dominated by the latter. References to expressions such as 'skills … to develop the potential, to be productive … to promote socio-economic growth …' as well as 'fundamental knowledge and skills … to play functional role … as economic producers …', set off, supposedly, the argument about education provision and delivery in Ghana as fundamentally about producing a well-trained, skilful and ideologically compliant workforce to fill capitalist enterprises. In consequence, the policy appears to have been conceived in what Hill (2001) and Chitty (2003) view as 'utilitarian terms', and described as a means to personal fulfilment. The policy intentions and purposes encapsulated in these latter documentations arguably therefore conceived and described the fCUBE policy (i.e. alongside its original purposes and intentions as a means of creating a level playing field in terms of educational privileges for Ghanaian children) as an avenue for the creation of enterprising and competitive individual entrepreneurs as agents of change.

The potential contextual explanation for this occurrence, as far as this paper is concerned, stems from the fact that whilst the fCUBE policy was initiated by the NDC Government (which is a social democratic party), the NPP Government that came after it had a more liberal and capitalist orientation which influenced later policies on education reforms in Ghana after the fCUBE. So, whilst the analyses of the fCUBE policy texts indicated that the fCUBE policy is deeply entrenched in social democratic values, the emergence of what in the context of this paper is described as neo-liberal ideological discourses in the later documentations after the official initiation of fCUBE (owing particularly to the changes in the political and ideological landscape of education reform in Ghana) appears to have triggered a discursive shift in both policy direction and language of implementation.

Articulating the fCUBE policy intentions (policy as discourse)

The Ghanaian educational elites' articulation of the fCUBE policy purposes and intentions seemed to corroborate the findings of the CDA enlisted above. Essentially, their accounts suggested that they view the fCUBE policy as committed to the tenets of social justice and its related concepts of inclusion and equality of opportunities, among others. The following excerpts illustrate how the fCUBE policy intentions and purposes were generally conceived and articulated, for example, by Dzifa (an Assistant Director of Education of a Metropolis), Kweku (a senior official of the GES National Headquarters) and Elorm (a District Director of Education):

> **Dzifa:** As the name implies, it's free … we're talking about free tuition, free provision of accommodation for teaching and learning, free provision of textbooks, free provision of furniture. It's compulsory because it compels parents and guardians to send every child of school-going age to school. It's also universal in the sense that you cannot differentiate between the type of education that is going on in Accra and that which is going on in the hinterland. And then we're saying that it is the basic type of education that every Ghanaian child should access to …

> **Kweku:** The fCUBE as a policy or constitutional requirement stipulates that in Ghana every child must have access to schooling and then it is obligatory on the state and parents to make sure that the children go to school … Then the universality here means that it covers all children irrespective of gender, ethnicity, geographical location, or maybe in terms of physical disability or whatever … And it is at the basic level, 6 years primary and then 3 years Junior Secondary School.

> **Elorm:** The free nature of the programme is that children should not pay for education. Compulsory, meaning that any parent who has a child of school-going [age] must ensure that the child is in school. The 'Universality' of fCUBE means that irrespective of the location of a child, s/he must be able to access education. Yes, so it is universal irrespective of colour, creed, tribe, whatever … nothing should hinder the child in accessing education at least at the basic level …

With these progressive ideological readings of the fCUBE policy in mind, the researcher proceeded to investigate from the interviewees' accounts the extent to which the 'free', 'compulsory', 'universal' and 'basic education' components of the policy title could be said to be reflected visibly in the implementation process. The interviewees were asked to articulate their conceptions of the components of the policy title and to make an assessment about whether or not the policy intentions were being met. The result of this exercise was fascinating. In one interview encounter, Enyonam (a District Director of Education), like other interviewees, emphasised that the 'freeness' of primary education in Ghana was in the fact that parents/guardians did not pay tuition fees for their children/wards' education and neither were they made to pay for the cost of teaching and learning materials, furniture and infrastructural facilities. However, when quizzed as to whether what parents/guardians pay as 'developmental levies' could not constitute fees, she became defensive:

> **Enyonam:** … we have brought our own children into the world and we have a responsibility to them. Knowing our economic situation, we can't just put everything on the Government … So I think we can't just usher ourselves into a project that will be too much for us …

When asked if her response did not imply that the fCUBE policy intentions, particularly the 'free' intent, were not being realised, she made what could best be described as neo-liberal, individualistic and anti-collective comments in support of her position:

> **Enyonam:** When children graduate from school and become productive in society, is it to the credit of themselves or the State? We are saying the children (and their parents) are educational clients or consumers and we're encouraging them to take advantage of the educational opportunities to develop their skills to the very best of their abilities. The Government only acts as (if you like) a referee in increasing human capital …

Although Enyonam's emphasis appears to be on parents and guardians taking up what could best be described as 'private costs' whilst Government bears the 'public costs' of primary education, her reference particularly to pupils and parents as 'clients and/or consumers', and Government as a 'referee in increasing human capital' could be interpreted to mean a possible indication of support for a neo-liberal ideological perspective on education, which makes a case against the creation of a welfare society. The view could be seen and/or interpreted as making a case for the rolling back of the state, away from fulfilling its civil responsibilities towards its citizens, and a call for the establishment of a kind of neo-liberal and knowledge-based society where ideals such as individualism, consumerism, competition and privatisation are entrenched.

These neo-liberal ideological imports alluded to by Enyonam were reverberated much more succinctly by Akpene, a Director of Education in one of the 10 regions of Ghana:

> **Akpene:** You asked if the 'skills for the world of work' discourse we're emphasizing isn't a neo-liberal one, and whether this in fact is the purpose of education? We believe that the primary purpose of education is to equip the citizenry with knowledge and skills to be useful and productive members of society and that's exactly what we want to achieve.

Whilst these insights are interesting, it is not being suggested that all the interviewees were homogeneous in their accounts. In some of the interview encounters, the interviewees expressed views which suggested that perhaps the fCUBE policy intentions were not taking hold. Some of the interviewees who alluded to what apparently appears to be the rolling back of the state from the provision of education, argued nevertheless that Government has taken note of the issue of 'private cost' of education and has hence initiated the 'capitation grant' concept (the payment of 30,000 cedis – less than £2 – per child per year) to offset the burden on needy parents. However, when quizzed about both the viability and/or sustainability of this project, they conceded that although the amount is viewed by many as woefully inadequate, it could not realistically be sustained in the long term. They added that although the practice is a genuine effort to offer a helping hand to the needy parents/guardians, when viewed critically, it could end up benefiting those children in the urban areas, whilst neglecting those that the programme is intended to help. Their line of argument was that the programme could practically end up making the 'wealthy' schools (in terms of funds derived from the number of pupils) wealthier and the 'sinking ones' (typically in rural and remote areas), in these same terms, more resource-stricken:

> **Elorm:** Yea, we have identified this little flaw in the capitation arrangement. If a school is well enrolled, it means it has enough money to run the school. In the same way if a school does not have enough children, it is handicapped. So we're proposing to our heads in Accra that there should be some minimum level of money to each school. Then from that point on, the enrolment figures are used …

In addition to the insights above, the participants also expressed divergent views about their understanding of the 'universal' component of the fCUBE policy title. Whilst Mawunyo (Deputy Director of Education for a Metropolis) thought and interpreted the universality of 'fCUBE' to mean that all Ghanaian children are to '*enjoy some basic educational provisions and facilities*', Atta (an Assistant Director and a Public Relations Officer) was of the view that the component basically encourages *freedom of choice* and both Elinam (the Director of Education for the same Metropolis) and Dziedzorm (an Assistant Director in charge of Human Resource Development) interpreted the universality of 'fCUBE' as meaning *equity in terms of inputs into education*. Whilst this appears to buttress the earlier claim that perhaps the primary purposes of the fCUBE policy intentions were not taking hold, the account particularly reiterates the point that perhaps the educational elites themselves do not have a grounded conceptual understanding of the policy intentions and purposes.

Again, one would have thought that the 'basic education' component of fCUBE would have extended to cover issues of the quality of education children were to receive and/or sophistication of the curriculum. However, the sense made from the interviewees' exploration indicated that they limited the component to schooling for the first 11 years in a child's life. Whilst this was taken to mean that perhaps as mediators of policy, the interviewees might not have had a grounded conceptualisation of the fCUBE policy intentions, the interesting thing of course was that they responded in the negative, when asked if adequate provisions had been put in place to enable children to have access to a 'broad-based' and national inclusive curriculum:

> **Kweku:** Yea, the first 9 years of education is the basic education. Our structure is in such a way that it is terminal and continuing. So it means that after the first 9 years the child who is not able to continue can terminate at the JSS 3 level and enter into the world to take up a vocation … But with this, I think I'll admit that we seem to have some problems. Most of the children, who after JSS are unfortunate to continue don't find themselves well fitted into society. Most of them end up in the streets selling various items, 'dogs chains', here and there …

The suggestion that the fCUBE policy is perhaps not yielding the intended results is explicated ostensibly in Kwabla's (a Deputy Regional Director of Education) and Mawunyo's respective accounts. In the following excerpts, the two interviewees unearthed the reasons why the fCUBE policy intentions cannot be said to be reflected in the process of implementation:

> **Kwabla:** When we take the fCUBE as a case in point, the 'free' and 'compulsory' aspects are inter-related. As it's clearly seen, education is not totally free and because it is not totally free, it is not possible to make it compulsory. That is why it hasn't been possible to put legal frameworks in place to ensure that the compulsory aspect is observed …

> **Mawunyo:** I beg to differ. Words mean a lot. If you tell me something is free and I realise I have to pay for what you are saying is free, then you are misleading me. If you are telling me something is compulsory and there is no legality behind it then still I am being misled. If we want our educational policies to be successful, we must be extremely careful about our choice of words. If we feel we cannot implement these policies to the letter of the words we have chosen, then let us explain this to the people.

Kofi (an executive member of the GNAT) put these conceptual issues together and labelled them the 'opportunity cost of/to funding education'. In his rather long speech, he summed up the discussion in this section of the paper. He explained why it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to make primary education free and at the same time compulsory and universal:

> **Kofi:** … If we talk about free education, we need to operationalize the concept 'free'. Education has an opportunity. You decide to go for education and you do that at a cost, otherwise you may be doing some other thing which perhaps could be income earning. So, anybody who decides to participate in education at whatever level is incurring these costs among others. Education has private cost, in the form of feeding, uniforms and transportation fares that the person who is being educated or those who offer to help him, in the form of parents, have to provide …

> Then the public also has to incur certain costs. For instance, the Education Act, Act 87 talks about the local authorities building, maintaining schools and things like that, so it means infrastructure has to come from the local authorities as far as basic schools are concerned … So the question of free? Yes, it is good that we fashion a beautiful policy like that but the objectives more and more are becoming elusive because you cannot divest that access to free education from the workings of the general economy … So that is the problem we have with running the fCUBE …

Thus, the insights in this section of the paper are important as they bring to light the real conceptual, economic and operational challenges that beset the fCUBE implementation process. In general, the insights resonate a significant blurring in meaning of the components of the fCUBE policy title owing to what can be described as the private and public costs of funding education. This thus echoes Tomasevski's (2005, 2) contention that: 'to make education free compulsory and perhaps universal, all direct, indirect and opportunity costs would have to be identified so as to be gradually eliminated through their substitution by public allocation'.

Conclusion

This paper has explored what is described as the apparent disjuncture between policy intentions and purposes in theory and outcomes in practice, using the fCUBE policy as an exemplar. Overall, the evidence of both the documentary and interview data analyses appears to accord. Significantly, the findings show that whereas the fCUBE policy is viewed as deeply entrenched social democratic values, the advent of neo-liberal individualistic and anti-collective ideological discourse on education wrapped in the rhetoric of 'skills for the world of work' has triggered a significant shift in language and policy direction, causing the neutralisation of the original social democratic and progressive imports of the fCUBE policy. This, the paper contends, has resulted from the fact that the fCUBE policy which was initiated by the NDC Government is entrenched in socialist and social democratic values, and that the NPP Government which came after the NDC had a more capitalist orientation which influenced later policies on education reform in Ghana. The discursive shift in policy direction and language of implementation as indicated by the analysis in this article thus reflects the changes in the political and ideological landscape of education reform in Ghana.

It is contended therefore that as long as there are both private and public costs of/to education, the absence of a law to enforce the compulsory aspect of fCUBE and a blurring in meaning as to what both the 'universal' and 'basic education' components of fCUBE entail, the 'free', 'compulsory', 'universal' and 'basic education' components and/or purposes of fCUBE cannot be said to be reflected adequately in the process of implementation. The study portends that the principal implication of this is that what in the context of this paper is referred to as the policy implementation paradox could be seen as a natural policy phenomenon occurring as a result of the discursive contexts and/or shifts that emerge as policy gets enacted, and that this needs to be acknowledged and concerted efforts made to manage its effects on policy processes.

So whilst the findings of this paper concern the paradox in implementing education policy, the issues explored to a large extent resonate with the post-modernist composite theory conceptualisation of policy (and the policy-making process) as 'text' and 'discourse'. As 'text', the fCUBE intentions are viewed typically as the

cannibalised products of multiple but circumspect influences and agendas that are liable to shift and change in the face of modification in their contexts over time (Ball 1994, 16). As 'discourse' on the other hand, the issues explored in this paper buttress the moving discursive frames within which the struggles involved in policy-making are set and how these struggles articulate and constrain the interpretation and enactment of the process of implementation. In general, the exploration of issues indicates that policy purposes and intentions are textual representations that are encoded and decoded via complex ways.

It is important to acknowledge however that although the study employed the fCUBE policy in Ghana to exemplify the policy paradox, the intention was not to over-emphasise the issue at hand by suggesting, for instance, that the issue is more visible in low-income countries because of the poor socio-economic and political conditions present there. Rather, the decision to ply this methodological route was grounded in the need to trace, bring to the limelight and exemplify the existence and magnitude of the policy paradox in Ghana, which more or less is in a secluded academic enclave as far as research and educational debates are concerned.

Notes

1. What in the context of this paper is described as 'the policy implementation paradox' arguably has two facets. In a sense, the phenomenon implies policy is not implemented as policy-makers expect. In a different and much broader sense, the label explicates the view that policy information is not used by different policy actors to achieve policy intentions. Whilst both of these views have been major themes for fundamental discussions within policy studies over a considerable period of time, for the purposes of this paper, the focus is on exploring the apparent disjuncture between policy intentions and purpose in theory and outcomes in practice.
2. Small 'f' in fCUBE is intended to show that there are contestations regarding the notion of 'free education'. In this context, the 'f' demonstrates the Government of Ghana's commitment to meeting what is referred to as the 'public cost' of education whilst parents/guardians take up the 'private cost'.
3. These were the three key policy initiatives implemented by the former New Patriotic Party Government of Ghana to revitalise the fCUBE policy. The 'capitation grant concept' involves allocating a per child grant of three Ghana cedis (now increased to four Ghana cedis) (i.e. the equivalent of less than £2 a year) to individual schools to offset the costs of such things as material, sports levies and cultural fees on poor and needy parents. As the names suggest, the 'school feeding programme' policy provides at least a decent meal a day for vulnerable children in deprived settings, whilst the 'eleven-year basic education' policy extends primary education from 9 to 11 years, comprising two years Kindergarten, six years of Primary Schooling, and three years of JSS (which is also now known as Junior High School).
4. By virtue of their position as mediators of policy, the Ghanaian education officials fall within the group of policy actors Cookson (1994, 116) refers to as actors who set legitimate boundaries of discourse. As such, the researcher thought it could be useful to find out how the elites conceptualised and articulated the fCUBE policy intentions and provisions and how this impacts on the process of implementation.
5. These are illustrated in detail in a paper entitled 'Re-conceptualising the paradox in policy implementation: a post-modernist conceptual approach', which has been published in *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 30, no. 4: 501–13.
6. This is taken in the context of this paper to mean a policy that takes education provision and delivery seriously as a human rights issue. See Tomasevski (2004, 2005) for a thorough discussion of this issue.
7. This is a political ideology. Its educational ideological terminology is 'enterprise education'. It is an individualistic or anti-collective ideology that sees the individual pursuing

his/her own interest as the key to happiness. See Trowler (1998), Hill (2001) and Olssen, Codd, and O'Neill (2004) for detailed discussion of this political ideology.

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