An Analytical Review of Education Policy-Making and Implementation Processes Within the Context of "Decentralized System of Administration" in Ghana

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Abstract

A critical assessment of education policy and practice in Ghana suggests that despite the initiation of the concept of decentralization, education policy making and implementation is still perceived as adopting a hierarchical structure with its inherent practice of concentration of power at the center. This article conducts an analytical review of the processes of education policy making and implementation within the context of decentralized system of administration in Ghana. This is done with the view to illuminating the theoretical and practical challenges and limitations that this "top-down" and rationalist approach to policy processes imposes on the functioning of the education system. In pursuit of this agenda, useful proposals for democratizing and decentralizing the processes of policy formulation and implementation are presented. The article contends that this critical review is necessary to provide analytic information for facilitating and informing national education policy dialogue and policy formulation to improve the Ghanaian education system.

Keywords

policy making, decentralization, policy implementation, rationalist approach to policy making, Ghanaian education system

Introduction

The period 1987 to 2000 was one of very active education policy reforms in Ghana. This was the period when the three Ministry of Education (MOE) "Strategic Objectives," namely, improving access to and participation in basic education, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and improving the management efficiency of the education sector, were formulated to inform and facilitate the implementation of the various education sector policies in the country. This period, essentially, was characterized by Ghana's participation in and endorsement of international and multilateral agreements and conventions such as the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) Conference, the Beijing Declaration on Women's Rights, the Lome Convention, and World Education Forum (or what is commonly referred to as the Dakar Framework for Action or the Millennium Development Goals Conference).

Ghana's endorsement of the agreements and declarations of these international meetings, coupled with commitments to her own internal constitutional reforms, for example, led to major constitutional and educational reforms of which the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE) policy was a formidable part (Nudzor, 2012). The Fourth Republican Constitution of 1992 and the policy acts that followed it set the stage for the national provision of basic education (Maikish & Gershberg, 2008). The 1992 constitution formulated the policy titled "Basic Education—A Right: Programme for the provision of Free Compulsory and Universal Basic Education by the year 2005," which was launched officially by MOE in 1996 (Government of Ghana [GOG], 1992; MOE/Ghana Education Service [GES], 2001).

A year after (that is, in 1997), a fourth objective, decentralization and sustainability of management structures, was added to the three strategic objectives formulated to guide the execution of the fCUBE policy implementation and generally education policy formulation and implementation in the country. The objective of the decentralization component of fCUBE includes decentralizing the management of the education sector's budget for pre-tertiary education to District Assemblies (DAs). This involves capacity building and financial management at the district level (GES, 2004). Thus, historically speaking, although attempts to decentralize the general administration of Ghana dated back to the era

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of the introduction of indirect rule by the British colonial regime (Ayee, 2000), the strategy of education decentralization as the fourth strategic objective of fCUBE was aimed specifically at shifting responsibility of education decision making into the hands of local education authorities. To do this, the strategy sought to devolve central administrative authority and divest implementation responsibility to the district level. As Maikish and Gershberg, citing the National Decentralisation Action Plan (NDAP) (GOG, 2003), rightly note, the policy of decentralization in Ghana (which receives the necessary legal impetus from Chapter 20, Article 240 of the 1992 Constitution [GOG, 1992]; Act 462 of the 1993 Local Government Act [GOG, 2003]; as well as from several other subsequent policy acts) aimed to establish a decentralized administration through the transfer of power from the central government to sub-national institutions such as DAs "to enhance the capacity of the public sector to plan, manage and monitor social, spatial and economic development" (p. 2).

The policy acts (e.g., Chapter 20, Article 240 of the 1992 Constitution; Local Government Law 207; Act 462 of the 1993 Local Government Act; and several other subsequent legal frameworks) that brought to being the strategic objective of decentralization are still in force, and some reasonable amount of efforts are perceived to have been made and are still being made to decentralize education policy making to the local and/or district levels. Unfortunately however, a critical assessment of education policy and practice in Ghana generally suggests in rather stark terms that despite the initiation and adoption of the strategic objective of decentralization, education policy making and implementation is still perceived as adopting a hierarchical structure with its inherent practice of concentration of power at the center. Policy is still largely formulated at the national level by political figureheads and technocrats and "pushed down" for implementation at the local level through regional and district representatives of the Ghanaian education authority. While this "top-down" rationalist approach to the policy process arguably has its own merits, the practice does raise a number of interesting questions worth examining. For example, the question does arise as to how the concept of educational decentralization can take hold when policy making remains the preserve of political figureheads and technocrats at the top echelons of the policy process? Conversely, the question also comes to mind as to how or the extent to which this rationalist approach ensures the avoidance of adoption of the straitjacket of external accountability which favors imposition of change from the "center."

This article seeks to respond, although indirectly, to these and other concerns and challenges that confront the Ghanaian education system as a result of the adoption of the rationalist approach to policy making. In particular, the article analyzes critically the practice of education policy making and implementation within the context of "decentralized system of administration" in Ghana. This is done with the view to

illuminating the potential theoretical and practical challenges and limitations that this "top-down" approach to the policy imposes on the functioning of the education system. In pursuit of this goal, the article presents proposals for democratizing and decentralizing the processes of policy making and implementation. Essentially, the article argues that Ghana's interest and focus on strengthening central government control at the local levels rather than the focus on devolution has encouraged education policy making and implementation to assume the managerial "top-down" posture, causing educational decentralization structures and institutions and their local governance counterparts to operate as dual hierarchical and parallel structures. Consequently, and as the article contends, education policy has come to be conceptualized and reduced to simplistic routines of decision making rather than a complex undertaking involving contestations, struggles, and negotiations between and among the various actors of policy.

The article is organized as follows. The next section sets the article in context by describing crisply some underlying drivers and concepts of decentralization vis-à-vis a brief history of the initiation of the policy of decentralization in Ghana. This is followed by detailed description of education policy-making and implementation processes in the Ghanaian context. Thereafter, the theoretical and practical challenges and limitations imposed on the Ghanaian education system by the top-down and rationalist approach to policy making are presented. Then, proposals for democratizing education policy processes are highlighted before the summary and conclusion.

Decentralization: Underlying Drivers and Concepts

The preponderance of available evidence from empirical studies and literature on public administration suggests that decentralization entails and/or could be defined generally as any act in which a central government formally cedes its power and authority to sub-national and diversified levels of the governance arrangement (Ayee, 2000; Crawford, 2004; Devas, 2005; Egbenya, 2010; Gariba, 2009; etc.). In other words, decentralization as a concept concerns the transfer of authority in public planning, management, and decision making from national and/or central levels to sub-national levels (Rondinelli cited by Egbenya, 2010) with the view to achieving positive outcomes in both democratic and developmental terms (Crawford, 2004).

A remarkable empirical evidence from the various studies on decentralization (e.g., Coulson, 1995; Crook, 2003; Devas, 2005; Olowu & Wunsch, 2004; Shah & Thompson, 2004; Wunsch, 2001) exemplify the very many and valid economic, political, administrative, and conflict resolution arguments for decentralization. For example, while in some countries (particularly central and eastern Europe and Latin America) the drive for decentralization came from demands

from local levels as a reaction against the failures of the centralized state, in some other parts of the world, decentralization of the state has been a response to actual or potential regional conflict (e.g., Indonesia) and/or as a way of reconstructing states afflicted by conflict arising from ethnic diversity (e.g., Uganda, South Africa, Iraq). However, in reality, the process in most countries (especially countries in sub-Saharan Africa) has generally been driven by local and national political elites, by certain political realities at the center, and by "external pressures," rather than by local-level democratic demand (Devas, 2005, p. 3). Thus raising further the critical issue about whether or not governance institutions at the local levels have the capacity to offer the prospect of increased accountability to citizens through the greater accessibility of decision making.

Three main types of decentralization, namely, administrative decentralization or deconcentration, fiscal decentralization, and political/democratic decentralization or devolution, are also discernible from a critical review of the literature (Ayee, 2000; Crawford, 2004; Manor, 1995; Nkrumah, 2000; Ribot, 2001). Administrative decentralization or deconcentration, as illustrated in the literature, involves the relocation of branches of the central state to local areas, entailing a transfer of power to locally based officials who remain part of, and upwardly accountable to, central government ministries and agencies. Fiscal decentralization, however, entails the transfer of fiscal resources and revenue-generating powers, inclusive of authority over budgets and financial decisions, to either deconcentrated officials and/or central government appointees or to elected politicians. The third type of decentralization (i.e., political/democratic decentralization or devolution), according to the public administration literature, is concerned essentially with the transfer of powers and resources to sub-national authorities who are largely or wholly independent of the central government and are democratically elected (Manor, 1995, cited by Crawford, 2004).

While these remain the commonly identifiable types of decentralization in the literature, it is worth noting for the purposes of this article that two competing concepts of decentralization appear to be operating in the Ghanaian context currently (Gariba, 2009). The first is the devolution of major political and administrative responsibilities from central Government to DAs, comprising the establishment of partially elected bodies with the mandate for local government and local community development. The second, running parallel to the concept of devolution, entails the process of administrative and technical deconcentration practiced by Ministries, Departments, and Agencies that plan and deliver specific services (such as water and sanitation, health, education, agriculture, roads, works) and other allied municipal services. Devolution, as set out under the former illustration, has far reaching implications for political, administrative, and technical setup, proposing to restructure institutions and mandates for service delivery. Deconcentration as illustrated

in the latter case has involved the simpler re-arrangement of the locations of key personnel and where their functions are delivered, while retaining the loyalties, promotion incentives, and the "chain of command" of the centralized agencies (Gariba, 2009, p. 6). This second entrenched concept and/or process of deconcentration depicts, to a large extent, Ghana's interest and attempt at decentralization all along and is aimed at strengthening central government control at the local level (Ayee, 2000).

Decentralization in Ghana: A Brief Historical Account

The history of decentralization in Ghana dates back from the introduction of indirect rule by the British colonial authorities in 1878 (Ayee, 2000) and has run through the pre and post-independence eras to the current democratic and "Fourth Republican" dispensation. During the period of colonialism, the British administration ruled indigenes indirectly through the native political chieftaincy system. They (i.e., the British colonial authorities) set up a native political institution whereby chiefs and elders in given districts were constituted as local authorities with powers "to establish treasuries, appoint staff and perform local government functions" (Nkrumah, 2000, cited in Crawford, 2004, p. 6). Under this system of administration, according to Crawford (2004), the democratic ideals underlying chieftaincy in Ghana, which made chiefs accountable to their subjects was replaced by upward accountability to the colonial "master." This was because, and as Nkrumah (2000) for example, notes, "the recognition by the central government was more crucial to the chief than support of his people" (p. 5).

In the periods after this (i.e., the period immediately before, during, and after Ghana's independence in 1957), local government generally was weak and subject to the centralization of power that was typical of most post-colonial states in Africa. Several attempts at decentralizing the administration of the country, for example, the decentralization reforms introduced in 1974 under the military regime of Lt. Col. Acheampong, were generally characterized by deconcentration and aimed at strengthening central government control at the local level. A historical aspect during these eras, nonetheless, was the decentralization reforms introduced in the early period of Rawlings's military regime (i.e., 1981-1992). In 1983, Rawlings's Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) government announced a policy of administrative decentralization of central government ministries, alongside the creation of People's Defence Committees (PDCs) in each town and village. The PDCs, made up of local PNDC activists as self-identified defenders of the "revolution," effectively took over local government responsibilities, though often limited to mobilizing the implementation of local self-help projects (Nkrumah, cited in Crawford, 2004, p. 7), while the deconcentrated ministries played a more significant role. While this policy reform was

remarkable in terms of its "politico-historical antecedents," Ayee (2000, p. 49) notes that the PNDC government's interest in decentralization reflected that of previous regimes. He argues that its interest was not the devolution of political authority to the local level but rather in the administrative decentralization of central government.

The most significant push toward decentralization in post-independence Ghana however occurred in 1988 when the PNDC government introduced a major piece of legislative reform, "the Local Government Law 207" (also known as PNDC Law 207). The introduction of this Law saw the creation of 110 designated administrative districts (ADs) within Ghana's 10 regions, with non-partisan DA elections held initially in 1988/89 and subsequently every 4 years. In addition to the two thirds of DA members elected on an individual, non-partisan basis, one third was appointed by central government, along with a chief executive for each district. The stated aim of the 1988 Local Government Law (according to Map Consult Ltd, 2002), was "to promote popular participation and ownership of the machinery of government . . . by devolving power, competence and resource/means to the district level" (p. 35). According to Crawford (2004, p. 8), the language of "participation" and "ownership," interestingly anticipated the "donor speak" of the 1990s (particularly World Bank), although it had some resonance also with the revolutionary rhetoric of "popular participation" of the earlier PNDC period.

The 1988 decentralization reform was endorsed by Ghana's Fourth Republican Constitution of 1992 which marked the transition to multiparty democracy at the national level. The 1992 Constitution consolidated the aim of decentralization within the overall context of a liberal democratic constitution. The objective of decentralization as laid out unambiguously in Chapter 20, Article 240, Sub-sections 1 and 2 of the 1992 Constitution states emphatically that

> Local government and administration . . . shall . . . be decentralised. . . . The functions, powers, responsibilities and resources should be transferred from Central Government to local government units. . . . Measures should be taken [by Parliament] to enhance the capacity of local government authorities to plan, initiate, co-ordinate, manage and execute policies in respect of matters affecting local people. (GOG, 1992)

The principles of local government participation and downward accountability to the populace are inferred in the provision in Article 240[2][e]) of 1992 Constitution that

> To ensure the accountability of local government authorities, people in particular local government areas shall, as far as practicable, be afforded the opportunity to participate effectively in their governance. (GOG, 1992)

Currently, these constitutional provisions regarding decentralization are further deepened under President John Mahama's National Democratic Congress (NDC)

Government through the adherence to the three-tier sub-national structure created by the 1992 Constitution. This three-tier sub-national structure comprises Regional Co-ordinating Councils (RCCs), ADs (or what is known in general terms as DAs), and Sub-District Structures. Each of the 10 regions has a RCC, chaired by a regional minister, appointed by the president. The RCC is composed of the regional minister and his or her deputy, the presiding member and District Chief Executive (DCE) from each district, two chiefs from the Regional House of Chiefs, and regional heads of decentralized ministries in the region who sit as nonvoting members. The RCC's main functions are to co-ordinate and regulate the DAs in their respective regions. The DAs, as per the 1992 Constitution, the Local Government Act, and other previous policy acts/laws, are responsible for the overall development of districts and are, among other things, permitted to exercise deliberative, legislative, and executive functions. Currently, the number of DAs/ADs has been increased from 110 to 216 comprising 6 Metropolitan Assemblies, 55 Municipal Assemblies, and 155 DAs. The third-tier (i.e., sub-district structures) of the sub-national structure, consist of Urban, Zonal and Town/Area Councils, and Unit Committees, who are essentially implementing agencies of DAs and are what Ayee (2000) describes as "rallying point of local enthusiasm in support of the development objectives of DAs" (p. 17).

In all, the objective of decentralization, along with the key powers and responsibilities enshrined in sub-national government structures, as can be seen above, is clearly established in and/or by the Fourth Republican Constitution of 1992. Yet, certain essential democratic elements of decentralization appear to remain compromised. As this article, using the education system as case in point, will later show, sub-national educational institutions and structures in Ghana lack the necessary wherewithal to enact their own policies owing mainly to the hierarchical structure of the education system. This state of affairs does not enable the educational system to engage effectively with local governance institutions. Ayee (2000), for example, endorses this argument forcefully. He contends that a key feature of local governance in Ghana is the adoption of a dual hierarchical structure in which central government institutions and local counterparts (including education) "operate in parallel" (p. 49), but with encroachment many at times by better-resourced central government on the roles and responsibilities of under-resourced local government.

Education Policy Making in Ghana: The Narrative

Education policy making in the Ghanaian context adopts the traditional rationalist model whereby policy formulation progresses through phases, namely, conception, consultation, development, implementation, and evaluation stages (Working Group on Education Sector Analysis, 2000).[1] The process begins with perceived or felt need for changes in the

education provision and delivery systems. Such changes are necessitated by and/or for various reasons such as the findings of research on ineffectiveness and/or failure of a particular education policy or the recognition that a particular educational reform program is no longer appropriate or has outlived its usefulness. Similarly, policy-making initiatives are also prompted by the concern to fulfill earlier promises made, especially by politicians, seeking the votes of the electorates, or in some cases, the need to supplement, strengthen, or address weaknesses in existing policies to improve conditions.

In the Ghanaian context, the practice at the conception stage of the policy-making process is to respond to demands for change by first setting up a national committee or commission, with membership from a wide range of stakeholder organizations, to review the situation warranting change (Working Group on Education Sector Analysis, 2000). The review at this stage is expected to draw heavily on the analysis of the experiences gained in the implementation of existing policies that are the focus or targets of the proposed change. The main concern of the review at this stage is not only to find out why targets of existing policies are not being achieved and whether implementation has gone on as planned. The task here, equally importantly, involves examining what unintended outcomes or unforeseen obstacles have emerged during the process of implementing existing policies which are the target of change, and what alternative measures can be adopted to address existing challenges. A good example to illustrate policy formulation at the conception stage (and typically how demands for educational change are responded to in Ghana) is the setting up of the Education Reform Review Committee of 1993/1994 with the mandate to review Ghana's policies on basic education. The activities of this Committee culminated in the initiation and implementation of fCUBE policy and/or program in 1996.

The consultation stage of education policy-making process in Ghana solicits views for the purpose of review by government. An essential part of the task here involves considering which options are available or are still open to the sector while taking into account the past experiences and the extent to which the sector has drifted off course. Generally, at this stage, all-round stakeholder conferences or meetings are convened to which individuals of the various constituent bodies as well as representatives of the development partners are invited to discuss the options proposed by the review committee for consideration. The review committee then reconvenes to put together the various proposals discussed and adopted at the round-table conferences. Thereafter, the outcomes of this exercise are submitted to the MOE in the form of policy recommendations for considerations. Humes (1999) contends that a relatively open process of consultation canvasses views widely and sets few limits to the issues that are set up for debate while a relatively closed consultation restricts both those who qualify as legitimate respondents and what they are invited to comment on. While this

holds true for the activities at the consultation stage of the policy-making process in the Ghanaian context, it is important to stress that whether an open or closed process is adopted, it is the prerogative of government, and in most cases, the minister in-charge of the education portfolio, to either revise or not to revise the policy recommendations in the light of the responses and/or feedbacks received. Similarly, it is instructive to add that for reasons of political expediency, the extent of revision of the policy recommendation by government at the consultation stage depends on the degree of political will behind the policy initiative.

At the development stage, the policy-making process is moved beyond the broad enunciation of principles to the clarification of aims, detailed planning, pre-testing of materials, or alternative plans among others. Most often, new policies are pilot-tested before wholesale national implementation. A case in point is the piloting of the Junior Secondary School (JSS) initiative (which was an offshoot of the 1987 education reform program) in 1981 before a nationwide implementation in the 1990s. The important management implications involved at the development stage of the policy-making process include the remit given to individuals and groups, and particularly the role of key institutions such as the GES Council, the Curriculum Research Development Division (CRDD), the National Inspectorate Board (NIB), the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), the National Teaching Council (NTC), and many others. In the Ghanaian context, the development stage of the policy formulation process also has as its integral part, the submission of policy recommendations in the forms of bills to parliament for approval after which the policy is then ready for implementation.

Once the policy decision has been taken and the policy recommendations are approved and/or passed by parliament, the policy then moves to the implementation stage. The long-standing practice in Ghana, backed by acts which established the GES and the GES Council in 1974 and 1996, respectively, is for pre-tertiary education policy to be implemented by the GES for and/or on behalf of the MOE. However, a recent complimentary practice is to set up a unit to monitor the implementation process and carry out periodic impact monitoring assessments. Granted that this is where the policy is rolled out, activities at this stage call for decisions on phasing, timing, the production of explanatory documents and strategies to aid the process of implementation, as well as the provision of in-service training programs and courses for the "actual" implementers of the policy.

The final stage of evaluation is where the success or failure of the "new" policy is assessed, and this is normally separated in time from the other four stages. Normally, sector analysis is conducted virtually at all the stages of policy formulation but is emphasized particularly at the policy analysis, pilot testing, and impact monitoring phases. Generally, the practice in Ghana has been to choose persons who have been involved with the policy formulation processes as

evaluators. However, this, over the years, has been fraught with issues relating to "insider biases" and "blinded objectivity." That is, the evaluators, more often, tend to be favorably disposed toward finding success rather than failure of policy formulation processes. For this reason, the practice nowadays is to call on independent and "objective minded" individuals and agencies to serve as evaluators of the processes of policy formulation.

Education Policy Implementation in Ghana: A Descriptive Account

Although represented as the fourth stage of the policy-making process, the act of implementing education policy constitutes a discrete process conceptualized as a hierarchical structure involving four main levels, namely, governmental, regional, district, and school levels.

Policy implementation at the governmental level in the Ghanaian context is controlled by the MOE. The MOE has overall responsibility for education sector policy formulation, planning, monitoring, evaluation, budgeting, and co-ordination. The MOE is headed by a minister who is responsible for all educational issues and reports directly to the president of the Republic. The tertiary sector management of education falls into the hands of the Governing Council of the tertiary institutions and is co-ordinated by the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE). The pre-tertiary-level management of education is managed by the GES, which is the legally mandated body for implementing all educational policies at the pre-tertiary level. The GES is headed by a director-general who carries out his or her functions of implementation and advice through the regional directors of education, the general managers of mission/faith-based schools, the regional managers of mission/faith-based schools, the district directors of education, headteachers and teachers of both public and private schools in the country.

Two other bodies, namely, CRDD and NIB (formerly Inspectorate Division), play an invaluable role in the implementation process. These are supposed to be independent bodies created and its members appointed by government, for the purposes of quality improvement and control in pre-tertiary education (Quasi Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisations [QUANGOS]), and are intended to be accountable solely to government. Interestingly, however, the CRDD today is still under the GES and is headed by a divisional director accountable to the director-general of GES. The CRDD is responsible for curriculum development, evaluation, innovation, and implementation whereas the NIB is responsible generally for supervision and inspection of schools to ensure educational standards at the pre-tertiary level. The functions of the NIB thus augment the endeavors of the CRDD. Apart from the CRDD and NIB, there are other national agencies whose activities and functions also augment the endeavors of the GES. These agencies include the NTC, GNAT, the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), the National Vocational Training Institute (NVTI), and the National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NACVET). The job of the NTC includes the accreditation of teacher training institutions and the accreditation of individuals who pass out of teacher training colleges. GNAT is the official and exclusive bargaining agent representing teachers in pre-tertiary educational institutions in matters relating to employment working conditions. WAEC is a regional examining body of Anglophone West African States, which conducts all types of academic examinations for students in the sub-region. The NVTI and NACVET are involved in the development, assessment, training, and certification of pre-tertiary technical and vocational subjects.

The implementation of educational policy in each of the 10 regions in Ghana is carried out at the regional directorates of education. Each directorate is headed by a regional director who is accountable to the director-general of GES. The regional director is responsible for all educational matters in the region, and therefore liaises with the district directors and regional managers of the various religious educational units in the region for the implementation of all educational policies introduced and/or emanating from central government. The regional director of education is also responsible, among other things, for providing the necessary support and making available funds, educational resources, and materials from central government to all the districts under his or her jurisdiction.

At the district level, the implementation of education policy is done by the district directorate of education which is commonly known as the District Education Office (DEO). The DEO is headed by the district director of education (DDE) who takes charge of all educational matters and is thus responsible for the implementation of education policies and programs of GES within and throughout the district. The DDE is accountable ultimately to director-general of GES through the regional director of education for his or her region. The DDE's responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following: supervision and monitoring of schools within the district; dissemination of education-related information to headteachers, teachers, and educational institutions (both public and private) under his or her jurisdiction; organizing training programs for teachers and headteachers; provision of educational resources (including furniture, books, and infrastructural facilities); management of the capitation grant scheme; resolution of conflicts between schools and communities; organizing school/community participation programs; and setting up in schools school/community organizations and district-level support systems such as the parent teacher associations (PTAs), school management committees (SMCs), district education oversight committees (DEOCs), and district teacher support teams (DTSTs).

The activities of the DEOs are, in principle, supported and complemented actively by the DAs. The DAs are statutory

bodies created by law for the primary purpose of decentralizing government business at the local or district level. They are charged with the development of school infrastructure and the mobilization of local communities to support and be actively involved in the provision and delivery of pre-tertiary education at the local levels. The DAs, thus, have statutory duty for providing communities under their jurisdiction with education in accordance with national policy guidelines laid down by central government.

The "actual" implementation of educational policies formulated at the national level and recommended for action is carried out at the school level (GOG, 2001). Two very important groups of actors, headteachers and teachers, undertake this task. The headteachers, for example, are the chief executives or administrators of schools, and are the key implementers of change that central government has at its disposal. They are responsible for running of schools, and as such, the success and/or failure of change initiatives in schools, to some considerable extent, rest on their shoulders. The responsibilities of headteachers within the resources available include, but are not restricted to, conducting affairs of schools (through the pursuance of achievable and measurable objectives) to the benefit of all pupils, their parents, and the communities they serve; implementing policies set by the education authority under the overall direction and guidance of DDE; the general day-to-day administration and management of schools; and determining the job descriptions of other members of teaching staff (GOG, 2001).

The teachers or class teachers as they are commonly called in Ghana, however, have responsibility for the management of teaching and learning of their classes. They are responsible for meeting the educational as well as other related needs of the pupils they teach, which they must conduct in tandem with national or central government policy. The class teachers, therefore, are seen or regarded in the Ghanaian context as the "actual" implementers of policy, particularly those intended to impact pupils learning outcomes positively. Apart from their teaching roles, they are also required to liaise with parents, guardians, and communities to reflect the local circumstances, needs, and aspirations of the children they teach.

In summary, the above exposition describes how educational policy formulated at the national level in Ghana is implemented and the various bodies involved in the process. Granted, however (and as noted earlier), that education policy in the Ghanaian context is expected to be formulated and implemented within a decentralized system of administration, raises some pertinent questions which beg asking. One of these critical questions worth asking is whether or not this top-down and rationalist approach to education policy process imposes any restrictions, challenges, or limitations on education policy-making processes and indeed the functioning of the educational system in general. This and other related issues are addressed in the following section.

Picking Strawberries From the Jam

In this section, a few of the theoretical and practical challenges and limitations imposed by the top-down and rationalist approach on the processes of education policy making in the Ghanaian context are highlighted and elaborated on. The rationale essentially is that this could provide some useful information to facilitate and inform national education policy dialogue to improve the Ghanaian education system.

One of the theoretical shortfalls of the rationalist approach to education policy making and implementation adopted in Ghana relates to its reduction of the policy process to simplistic routines of decision making. The examples in this article show that a group of authorized decision makers assemble at particular times and places, review a problem, consider a number of alternative courses of action with more or less explicit calculation of the advantages and disadvantages of each opinion, weigh the alternatives against their goals or preferences, and then select an alternative that seems well suited for achieving their purposes. As proponents of the "policy cycle" tradition to the study of policy (Ball, 1994; Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992; Olssen, Codd, & O'Neil, 2004; Ozga, 2000; Rist, 2000; Shulock, 1999; Trowler, 1998) would have us believe, the processes of policy making go beyond this simplistic traditional approach to decision making. For them, policy is a complex process involving contestations, struggles, negotiations, and dialogues between the different actors of policy within and outside the policy-making machinery. According to the adherents of the process conception of policy, the contested and negotiated nature of the policy process, for example, is evident at both the policy "encoding" and "decoding" phases, which are also referred to in policy terms as policy as both *text* and *discourse*. The encoding phase of policy formulation denotes the initial stage of formal policy making where the ideas, values, and aspirations of both the key actors involved in the policy process and the people and/or interests they represent are elicited and enlisted via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations, and reinterpretations. The decoding phase, however, is marked by the disputed and complex ways by which the policy messages and outcomes are interpreted by actors and implementers in the contexts of their own culture, ideology, history, resources, and expertise. For this reason therefore, conceptualizing education policy processes in quite straightforward terms into phases, as the Ghanaian case shows, tends to ignore the wider structural, socio-cultural, and political dimensions of policy by oversimplifying or reducing the processes to operational plans and routines which need following to achieve desired outcomes of change (Ranson, 1995; Trowler, 1998; Trowler & Knight, 2002).

Following on from the above, the top-down, and rationalist approach to policy adopted within the perceived decentralized system in Ghana could also be criticized theoretically for reinforcing implicitly the prevailing traditional view of

policy as a problem-solving tool. As per the expositions in this article (particularly the conception and consultation stages of the policy-making process), the rationalist approach to policy adopted in Ghana appears to reiterate the assumption that experts trained in proper analytical techniques can apply their expertise to the political marketplace, discover and measure the impact of policy on citizen interests, project policy consequences with some accuracy, and affect the decisions of identifiable clients, who will use policy and its analyses to solve problems. Trowler and Knight (2002) capture this erroneous impression forcefully when they write that

> [T]he technical-rational approach to policymaking invigorated in/by the change management perspective assumes that if sufficient energy can be elicited from those involved by enthusiastic leaders with clear vision of change then large scale transformations can be accomplished relatively quickly and economically. (p. 144)

Theoretically, and in policy terms, not only is this assumption overly deterministic but represents a change management perspective driven by the "stages" view in which the final stage of policy making is a timely recommendation to a client or a timely intervention to solve pressing problems. This, consequently places huge limitations on our understanding of policy processes. This is particularly because the "client orientation" invigorated implicitly in this rationalist approach endorses the prevailing view of policy making as relatively orderly in which analysis and implementation are seen as advice to clients, and their usefulness is assessed as its contribution to eventual decisions or actions by policy makers and/or reformers, rather than as contributions to broader cultural, socio-economic, and political discourses (Shulock, 1999).

In practical terms, the hierarchical approach to policy making adopted in the Ghanaian education system has, in many instances, led to the allied agencies responsible for playing key roles in education sector policy decisions operating in parallel to national and sub-national institutions and structures of decentralization. A case in point worth citing to illustrate this issue concerns the activities of GES. As per the rules that established it as the sole agency for implementing pre-tertiary education policy in 1974, the GES was/is mandated to, among other things, liaise and/or engage with other national and sub-national institutions of decentralization in providing and delivering education at/to the local levels. Dishearteningly however, the hierarchical nature of the education system and its inherent concentration of power at the center appear not to have enabled the GES to be able to perform this onerous role effectively. Consequently, to be able to perform its mandated role, the GES has had, in many instances, to arrogate to itself decision-making powers contrary to its subordinate position within the MOE. The effect of this is that, sometimes, some top management staff and field officials of GES made pronouncements bordering on

policy without the prior knowledge of the MOE and the minister of education. This particular issue led to the abolishing of the GES Council in 1983 under PNDC Law 42, and its functions and powers were vested in the PNDC Secretary for Education (Working Group on Education Sector Analysis, 2000). However, since the re-establishment of the GES Council in 1996, the situation has improved considerably and there is now a greater institutional participation of GES in education policy-making processes.

Conversely, the top-down and rationalist approach to policy formulation and implementation discussed in this article has more often resulted in what is perceived as the duplication of function among the various agencies responsible for policy implementation at the grassroots level in Ghana. A good illustration here relates to the tensions and unnecessary conflicts between some District Education Directorates and DAs. As per the policy implementation structure presented earlier in this article, policy implementation at the district or local levels falls directly under the ambit of DEOs. The DEOs are headed by the DDOs who are responsible, among other things, for the supervision and monitoring of schools within the district, training of personnel of the education service, provision of educational resources (including furniture, books, and infrastructural facilities), management of the capitation grant scheme, and setting up in schools school/community organizations and district-level support systems. Ironically, however, (and owing largely to the adoption of the decentralization initiative), DAs have also been mandated by law as both direct representatives of government and agencies of development to engage in some aspects of education provision and delivery mainly through the development of school infrastructure. Clearly, what some people see as a duplication and/or contradiction in the functions of both the DEO and DAs have been noted, and measures such as making DDEs automatic members of District Education Select Committees have been put in place to cure any mischief that may arise. However, the sad news in Ghana is that owing to reasons of political expediency and/or perhaps lack of education, frequent tensions and conflicts rear their ugly heads between DEOs and DAs regarding their core mandates, thus throwing the entire education provision and delivery agenda vis-à-vis the concept of decentralization off gear.

Democratizing Policy Processes: Proposals for Change

Having unearthed the effects of the hierarchical approach to policy making and implementation on the education system in Ghana in the previous section, this part of the article moves now into a brief discussion of proposals for change in terms of how education policy processes could be democratized and decentralized to benefit the Ghanaian education system.

The first proposal, as far as this article is concerned, relates to the urgent need and action to be taken to "de-politicalized" education policy initiation, or to discourage what for the purposes of this article is referred to as the imposition of policy from the "center." In this context, "de-politicalization of policy" is not a suggestion that the processes of policy making and implementation should necessarily be devoid of politics. Rather, what this is intended to de-emphasize is the petty partisan politics currently being practiced in Ghana to the extent that political parties (ruling governments most especially) are able to hijack educational policies and practices for purposes of political expediency. A good example in support of this suggestion concerns the provision of pre-tertiary education in Ghana and matters arising from its structure and duration. Until the third quarter of the 1980s, Ghana operated a 17-year (6 years primary, 4 years middle, 5 years secondary, and 2 years sixth form) pre-tertiary education system. However, in 1987, President Jerry John Rawlings's military regime introduced a new system of education mooted earlier in 1974. This new system reduced the length of pre-tertiary education from 17 to 12 years (i.e., 6 years primary, 3 years junior secondary, and 3 years senior secondary education) owing to the perceived weakness that the 17 years had a telling effect on national budget because it was too long (MOE, 1987). Upon assumption of government in 2000, President John Agyekum Kufour's National Patriotic Party (NPP), under the pretext that too many subjects were taught and were poorly handled in Ghanaian basic schools, also changed the name, structure, and duration of pre-tertiary education to 15 years. This new system comprised 2 years pre-school, 6 years primary, 3 years junior high school (JHS), and 4 years senior high school (SHS; MOE, 2005). As if these changes were not enough, the late President John Atta Mills–led NDC government, which took over the mantle of governance from the NPP in 2008, subtracted 1 year from the SHS component of the existing structure under the pretext of lack of infrastructural facilities, equipment, and logistics. Thus, the duration of the existing pre-tertiary education structure in Ghana was reduced from 15 to 14 years. While it needs to be acknowledged that change in policy direction is one of the ways by which successive governments get to operationalize their ideological beliefs, programs, and policies, the point being made here forcefully is to ensure that educational processes and policies are not opened up to the whims and caprices of unscrupulous and self-seeking political parties and leaders who, for purposes of gaining political currency, may cause long-term and lasting injuries to the educational system. One strategy to achieve what I call "a de-politicalized education policy making" is to ensure that there is in place a national development policy, plan, or framework from which educational policies of the country would emanate and whose goals educational policies are geared toward achieving. Quite apart from providing a national policy framework against which all successive government would lean, this will also ensure consistency and alacrity in the provision of good quality education to all Ghanaian citizens.

Following up closely on the first proposal is the advice for government and its allied agencies of education to embark upon devolution of power to formulate and implement education policy to local or district levels. Undoubtedly, some arrangement to this effect could be said to be in place already in Ghana under the policy of decentralization. However, the point of emphasis here is that this does not appear to be taking hold in practice because of the problems associated with the policy-making regime in place currently. Therefore, what this article is calling for is not necessarily re-inventing the wheel of decentralization, but a more concerted and sustained efforts aimed at rejuvenating the processes and structures of decentralization. One of the practical ways of achieving this objective is by adopting the local education authority (LEA) system or strategy practiced in countries such as the United Kingdom. The LEA strategy of decentralization ensures that local actors of policy are empowered and positioned to take strategic decisions regarding the planning, administration, management, and leadership of schools in their local jurisdictions.

An equally important way of democratizing and decentralizing education policy processes in Ghana is through the encouragement and support of bottom-up approaches to policy making. As has been indicated already in this article, some structures or agencies of decentralization (such as DAs, DEOs, DEOCs, DTSTs, PTAs, SMCs) are already operational in the Ghanaian educational setup. For example, under the current policy of decentralizing educational administration, the Education Management Information System (EMIS) is being positioned as a resource to construct operational plans and develop budgets at the district levels to ensure that education provision becomes more efficient and responsive to local needs. Essentially, under this process, the MOE is still required to retain overall responsibility for teacher training, curriculum development, and monitoring policy at the national level. However, the districts, unlike before, are to take responsibility for their own policies, operational plans, and budgets based on accurate and up-to-date information obtained from EMIS as opposed to their needs being determined by the MOE and GES. As a step toward democratizing and decentralizing education policy formulation and implementation, this article advocates for the actualization of arrangements such as this one. This, in the view of the article, will empower and enable local-level actors of policy to generate policy at their levels which will then feed into the national development agenda and hence bring about the needed changes and improvements in the education system and in the lives of the Ghanaian citizenry.

Summary and Conclusion

This article is built on the premise that traditional hierarchical approaches to policy processes do not support and/or

encourage devolution of power from the center to local-level actors of policy. Using the Ghanaian education context as an exemplar, the article analyzes critically the practice of education policy making and implementation within the context of decentralized system of administration. This is done to unearth the challenges and limitations that the adoption of the rationalist approach to policy places on policy processes and indeed, the functioning of the educational system.

Essentially, the article finds that some reasonable amount of decentralization efforts was and is still being made, and some education decentralization structures (e.g., DAs, DEOs, DEOCs, DSTSs, PTAs, and SMCs) are also in place to devolve power to local levels to ensure that decision making in education becomes more efficient and responsive to local needs. However, the article argues, although implicitly, that Ghana's interest and focus on strengthening central government control at the local levels (rather than on devolution) have had a "knock-on" effect on policy processes to the extent that education policy making and implementation is seen to have assumed the traditional and managerial "top-down" posture. This consequently, and as the article contends, has caused the educational decentralization structures and institutions and their local governance counterparts to operate as dual hierarchical and parallel structures.

Within the context of unearthing the theoretical and practical effects this rationalist approach to policy has on the Ghanaian educational system, the article makes three key proposals for change in terms of how education system could be democratized and decentralized to benefit the Ghanaian citizenry. The proposals puts forth include de-politicalizing education policy making, devolving and deconcentrating power to formulate and implement education policy from central government to local or district levels, and support for bottom-up approaches to policy making.

So, while this article concerns itself mainly with education policy processes in the Ghanaian context, the discussions reverberate strongly the criticism against centralized systems of education administration and policy making in the sense that these systems do not support decentralization. Rather, they tend to adhere to the straitjacket of external accountability models which favors imposition of change from the "center."

Note

1. The author of this paper wishes to acknowledge the Working Group on Education Sector Analysis (2000) for their work titled "Review of Education Sector Analysis in Ghana (1987-1998)," from which much of the valuable information regarding education policy formulation is derived for this article.

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