



## Ghana's Free Senior High School Policy within the Spectrum of the Focal Points of Curriculum Development

Atar Alphaa Mohammed

Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya College of Education, Ghana

E-mail: [ataralphaa.mohammed@stu.ucc.edu.gh](mailto:ataralphaa.mohammed@stu.ucc.edu.gh)

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### **Abstract**

This study performs a meticulous examination of Ghana's Free Senior High School (FSHS) policy, considering the focal points of curriculum development. Ghana has significantly augmented its financial commitment to the educational sector, recognising the pivotal importance of education in sustainable development. Despite this monetary dedication, the government has implemented the FSHS policy to guarantee the extensive availability of high-quality education. The study seeks to thoroughly analyse the policies of curriculum development, assessing its influence on access, fairness, curriculum content, educational excellence, stakeholder engagement, and long-term viability. The research aims to provide detailed insights into the effectiveness of the FSHS policy by thoroughly examining various aspects. It goes beyond just looking at enrollment numbers and evaluates how the policy contributes to a well-rounded educational experience that aligns with both national and global educational goals. The expected results are positioned to offer useful insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders, enabling continuous improvements to the Free Senior High School project and the overall educational environment in Ghana.

**Keywords:** *Free Senior High School; Curriculum Development; Educational Policy; Focal Point*

### **Introduction**

Education is a fundamental human right and a requirement for sustainable development (GPE Secretariat, 2015). The success and progress of any nation is anchored on the education of its citizens. Education exposes citizens to the requisite knowledge, skills and experiences for employment. It also imbibes in them values such as respect, discipline and patriotism. In cognizance of these countries all over the world allocate a substantial amount of their annual revenue to their educational sector. In recent times, Ghana's budget allocation to the sector has increased at an average annual rate of 20% (Government of Ghana, Education Budget Brief 2021 - UNICEF, 2021). Notwithstanding the substantial allocation of

funds to the educational sector, the governments of the past and present also formulate policies that have a great impact on formal education. Examples of these include free compulsory universal basic education, school feeding programme, capitation grant, progressive free senior high school and free senior high school (FSHS) (Asumadu, 2019). All these policies are geared toward the improvement of access to free quality education for all.

It is worth noting that the free senior high school policy is an advanced model of the progressively free senior high school policy stipulated in Article 25 (1) (b) of the 1992 constitution of the Republic of Ghana that “secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular, by the progressive introduction of free education” (Government of Ghana, 1992). The constitutional provision for progressively free senior high school education is in consonant with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 which states “by 2030, ‘ensure that all boys and girls complete free and equitable primary and secondary education (United Nations).

### ***Conceptual Frame Work***

The study utilises a conceptual framework that combines important elements of curriculum development with the particular circumstances of Ghana's Free Senior High School (FSHS) policy, providing insights into crucial aspects of education. The "Access and Equity" perspective examines the influence of the FSHS policy on expanding the availability of senior high school education, particularly for marginalised demographics (Government of Ghana, Free SHS Policy, n.d.). This entails a comprehensive analysis of whether the strategy has effectively eradicated obstacles and contributed to an all-encompassing educational environment. In addition, the framework evaluates the efficacy of the policy in advancing fairness by examining its capacity to mitigate educational inequities that exist among various areas and socioeconomic groups (Abdul-Rahman, Abdul Rahman, Ming, Ahmed, & Salma, 2018). Examining "Curriculum Content and Relevance," the research investigates how well the FSHS curriculum matches the changing demands of the modern workforce in the 21st century. This entails an investigation into whether the curriculum effectively meets the requirements of a constantly changing job market and if it contains the technical and vocational education emphasised in the constitutional clause. This emphasis area reveals insights into the policy's flexibility in response to the evolving skills needed for sustainable development (Asumadu, 2019).

The "Quality of Education" lens focuses on the results of the FSHS policy. The evaluation considers various criteria, including the nature of the learner, the nature of the society and the nature of the subject matter. This provides a thorough picture of how the policy affects the entire quality of education and the focal points to be specific (Tikly, 2011). The framework concurrently identifies potential obstacles and possibilities for enhancement, providing a nuanced viewpoint on upholding and improving educational standards. "Stakeholder Involvement" is a vital component of the conceptual framework, assessing the level of engagement of different stakeholders in the FSHS policy (Abdul-Rahman, Abdul Rahman, Ming, Ahmed, & Salma, 2018). This entails evaluating the participation of teachers, parents, and communities in both the execution and assessment of the policy. Moreover, the analysis examines the degree to which input from various stakeholders has been integrated into policy modifications, offering valuable observations on the inclusive process of policy formation and improvement.

The framework takes into account the "Sustainability and Long-Term Impact" of the FSHS policy. This entails an inquiry into the long-term feasibility of the policy, considering its financial ramifications, infrastructure advancement, and ongoing enhancements. In addition, the study forecasts the possible enduring influence of the FSHS policy on Ghana's educational environment and its contribution to the attainment of sustainable development goals. This study seeks to conduct a thorough analysis to

uncover the strengths, flaws, and overall effectiveness of the FSHS policy in Ghana in promoting high-quality education. The conceptual framework functions as a systematic method for thoroughly evaluating the policy, offering a basis for well-informed observations and suggestions to enhance and polish educational policies in the nation.

### ***Conceptual Review***

#### **Curriculum Development**

Curriculum development is a complex and ever-changing subject in the field of education, with experts presenting various viewpoints and definitions. This exhaustive analysis seeks to offer a deep understanding of academic interpretations of curricular development, emphasising the multiple facets and factors that contribute to its intricate nature. Tyler (1949), a prominent figure in the mid-20th century, contributed a fundamental viewpoint that focused on the creation of educational goals. As per Tyler's explanation, curriculum development encompasses the process of establishing explicit goals, choosing suitable educational activities, arranging and ordering these activities, and assessing their efficacy. His concept serves as the foundation for other curriculum creation techniques, highlighting a methodical and goal-oriented procedure (Wraga, 2017).

Similarly, Taba is reported to have implemented a more interactive and collaborative approach in the 1960s, emphasising the active engagement of educators and students in the process of designing the curriculum. The methodology she employs promotes cooperation, introspection, and continuous modifications in response to the learners' requirements and experiences (Parry, 2010). Taba's model emphasises the significance of the surrounding circumstances and the ever-changing character of education. In contrast, Wheeler introduced a cyclical framework for curricular development during the latter part of the 20th century. This method perceives curriculum development as a continuous process that encompasses the stages of planning, execution, assessment, and modification (Gosper & Ifenthaler, 2014). Wheeler's concept acknowledges the necessity of ongoing adjustment to societal shifts, educational research, and the changing requirements of learners.

Moreover, Stenhouse proposed a process model of curriculum development that highlights the active participation of teachers in designing curricular content (Eliot & Norris, 2011). Stenhouse advocated for an inclusive and cooperative approach, wherein educators actively participate in the process of designing and refining the curriculum as a means of professional growth. This method highly esteems the knowledge and proficiency of educators and recognises their pivotal role in developing the content of the curriculum (Eliot & Norris, 2011). Also, Tanner and Tanner created an integrated paradigm that amalgamates diverse perspectives of curricular development. This method acknowledges the intricacy of curriculum development and promotes the integration of diverse viewpoints. The significance of taking into account context, learner requirements, and societal expectations in curriculum design is highlighted (Jickling, 1988).

Furthermore, Grundy introduced the notion of a product model, which emphasises the concrete results of the curriculum creation process. From this viewpoint, the curriculum is regarded as a tangible outcome that can be assessed according to pre-established goals. Grundy's model emphasises the significance of having clear goals and outcomes in the process of curriculum building (Gallardo-Pérez, 2014). Scholars have used postmodern and critical viewpoints in curriculum creation in recent years. These viewpoints question conventional ideas of a single, unbiased reality and highlight the significance of varied perspectives, cultural backgrounds, and analytical reasoning in influencing educational content. The objective of this method is to enhance the inclusivity, responsiveness, and social justice of education (Pinar & Bowers, 1992).

The renditions of curriculum development as espoused above encompass a wide range of theories and perspectives. The area of education has continued to evolve, with several approaches being developed by different scholars. These include Tyler's systematic and objective-centered approaches, Taba and Stenhouse's participatory and context-specific models, and the integrated models suggested by Tanner and Tanner. The use of postmodern and critical viewpoints in curriculum creation demonstrates an increasing recognition of the importance of diversity and responsiveness. The evolving educational environment prompts continual scholarly discussions that enhance our comprehension of how curriculum creation can most effectively address the requirements of learners and society.

### **Educational Policy**

Educational policies are essential instruments that shape the course of a country's education system, directing its organisation, goals, and allocation of resources. This relevance transcends national boundaries, with a global setting that emphasises the interdependence of education systems globally (Verger, 2014). Organisations such as UNESCO have a significant role in influencing global educational priorities, promoting cooperation, and spreading effective methods (Power, 2007). In light of the challenges posed by globalisation and technological breakthroughs in the 21st century, it has become crucial for countries to adapt and reformulate their educational systems on a worldwide level (VanBalkom, 2010). These policies are crucial in addressing social demands and promoting inclusivity. They play a significant role in shaping education and society, with policymakers holding the key to resource allocation and support (Beblavý, Thum, & Veselkova, 2011). However, the effectiveness of these policies varies across countries, with some intentionally reproducing social stratification. In higher education, equity promotion policies are essential for achieving social justice and economic efficiency (Salmi & D'Addio, 2020).

Ghana's educational policies are closely tied to its development strategy, with a focus on addressing specific challenges and leveraging opportunities. The Free Senior High School Policy is a key example of this, removing economic barriers to secondary education and promoting inclusivity (Akyeampong, 2009). The country's commitment to education is further demonstrated by its efforts to improve literacy and global competitiveness (Quest, 2005). Despite economic challenges, Ghana has pursued Universalist approaches in education and health care, with targeted interventions to address inequalities (Abubakar, Kuyini, & Mohammed, 2015). These policies are crucial in the country's pursuit of national development. Ultimately, the development and execution of educational policies are not only crucial at a national level but also play a vital role in a worldwide endeavour to ensure that education systems can adjust to the changing demands of societies in a constantly growing globe. The Ghanaian example demonstrates the significance of customising policies to fit the unique circumstances of a country, while still ensuring they are in line with global standards and goals.

### **The Structure of Ghana's Pre-Tertiary Education**

Senior high schools are conceived as part of the basic education system in Ghana's recent educational reform for pre-tertiary institutions. As a result, the pre-tertiary curriculum was evaluated and revised to be more standard-based. The standard-based approach aims to produce well-balanced citizens with the necessary knowledge, skills, values, and aptitudes for self-actualization as well as the country's socioeconomic and political transformation (Ministry of Education, 2018). In light of this backdrop, the senior high school curriculum is designed to prepare learners for the early world of work or to fortify them with the requisite knowledge and skills for tertiary education. Below is the conceptual framework of Ghana's pre-tertiary education.

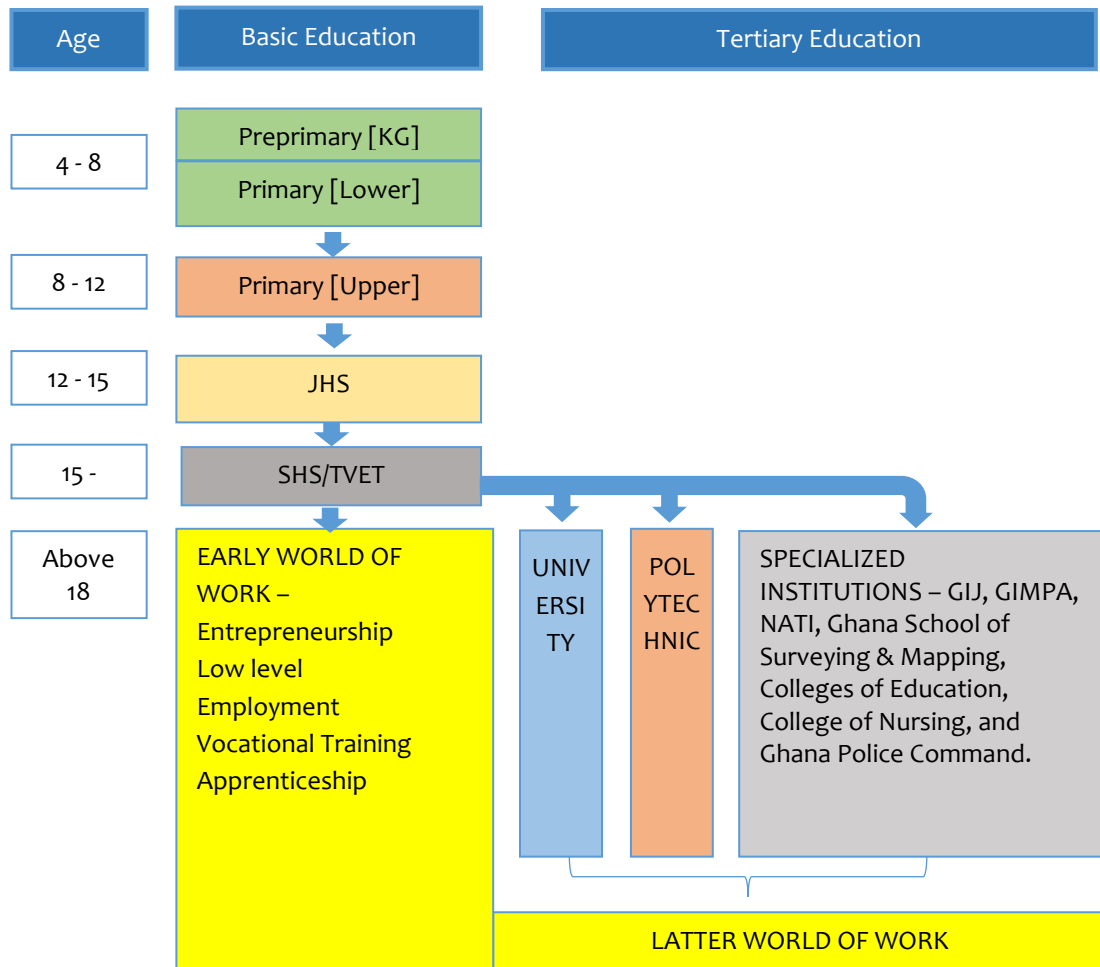


Figure 1: The Diagrammatical Illustration of the Age Range of the Respective Phases  
Source: (Mohammed, 2023)

With respect to the figure above, Senior High School is considered the fifth key phase of basic education designed for learners between the ages of 15 to 18 years. It provides the avenue for students to specialize in any of the following programs: Science, General Arts, Business, Visual Art, Technical and Vocational coupled with a relevant apprenticeship training programme for a year. Similarly, it is also portrayed as a platform that provides a broad spectrum of academic knowledge and skills necessary for admittance into further education and training in Ghana and international tertiary institutions (Ministry of Education, 2018). Thus, SHS graduates stand the chance of being admitted into Universities, Polytechnics and specialized institutions such as Nursing Training College, Colleges of Education and the Military Academy after excelling in the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) administered by the West African Examination Council (WAEC).

### Ghana’s Free Senior High School Policy in Perspective

Before the free SHS policy, some head teachers of exceptionally good and well-resourced schools would arbitrarily and independently set high personal cut-off grade scores and admission standards to attract only the most exceptional and talented students at the expense of the less brilliant and rural students. Some parents have to travel long distances simply to enroll their wards in schools. Similarly, some wards are placed in secondary schools but are unable to attend due to financial constraints (Babah,

Frimpong, Mensah, & Aquah, 2020). This, in turn, restricts the average Ghanaian child's ability to attend secondary school and contributes negatively to the development of the nation's human capital. In cognizance of this, the Government of Ghana implemented the free SHS policy with a focus on making quality education accessible to all.

To ameliorate the challenges parents face in a quest to enroll their wards in secondary education and fending for their needs the government of Ghana implemented the Free Senior High School policy in the year 2017 (Abdul-Rahman, Abdul Rahman, Ming, Ahmed, & Salma, 2018). The policy is anchored on the elimination of cost barriers, expansion of infrastructure, improvement in quality and equity and the development of employable skills. More importantly, the policy is open and accessible to only Ghanaian students who have obtained qualified grades and are placed in public senior high schools. The policy covers each beneficiary for 3 years (Government of Ghana, Free SHS Policy, n.d.). Due to inadequate infrastructure at the senior high school level and the conscious effort of the Ghanaian government to make secondary education accessible to all qualified graduates from Junior High Schools, the government adopted a double-track system of education to address the challenges. The double-track system sought to increase the contact hours between teachers and students, efficiently utilize the limited infrastructure, reduce congestion in schools and increase the holiday periods for students and teachers.

## **The Impact of the Free Senior High School Policy in Respect of the Focal Points of Curriculum Development**

The focal points of curriculum development are the common places that require maximum attention in the process of designing a curriculum. The individual learner, society, and subject matter are the three core focuses of curriculum design. This essay will elaborate on the effects of Free Senior High School on the three key areas outlined above.

### **Nature of the Learner**

The free senior high school policy is designed with a focus on churning out well-balanced graduates to participate as productive members of the country. However, learners within this scope are identified with varied characteristics that stand the chance of advancing their progress in education or otherwise. Learners at the senior high levels are in their teen ages and are characterized as risk-takers, adventurous, energetic, socioemotionally sensitive and sexually active (Pearson, 2017). That notwithstanding they also mimic and imitate peers/adults and their environment and are highly gullible.

Notably among the benefits of free senior high school is the absorption of the financial burden of parents/guardians (Asumadu, 2019). This component also reduces/eliminates fear and anxiety on the part of students. Thus students are saved from humiliation by the administrations of SHS concerning fault in paying fees. In a study, Kwegyiriba (2021) reported the Free Senior High School Policy to have increased student enrolment as compared to the progressively free senior high school policy. Similarly, other studies indicated the absorption of cost to have a positive impact on students' performance (Tatiana, Fabio, & Tatiana, 2016; Denny, Doyle, McMullin, & Sullivan, 2014). Albeit the fact that the policy has received applause from well-meaning Ghanaians in respect of the opportunities granted to JHS graduates at the SHS levels, concerned citizens, however, are worried about the caliber of graduates the system will churn out. Moreover, others raised concerns with respect of the preparedness of the tertiary system to receive graduates from the FSHSP. In a study, Mensah (2019) opined that the double-track system of FSHSP is applauded for heightening students' enrolment but fails to acknowledge adequate stakeholder consultation.

### The Trend of Enrolment

Year	Total registered (BECE)	Number Placed	No. Enrolled	No. Placed but not enrolled	% Placed but not enrolled
2015	440,469	415,012	299,649	115,363	27.80%
2016	461,009	420,135	308,799	111,336	26.50%
2017	468,060	424,224	361,771	62,453	14.70%
2018	521,811	486,641	433,819	52,822	10.90%
2019	512,083	459,912	404,856	55,056	11.90%

Source: Government of Ghana, Free SHS Policy (n.d.)

The Table above makes manifest the positive impact of the free secondary education policy on students' enrollment. Over 1.2 million pupils have been able to attend senior high school for free as of September 2017 thanks to the strategy. Data research reveals that around 400 000 fewer pupils would not have been able to enroll in secondary education in Ghana without the policy. Before the introduction of the free SHS programme, a total of 440,469 students registered to sit for the Basic Education Certificate Examination (B.E.C.E.). Out of these, 415,012 students, equivalent to 94.2 percent, met the requirements to be admitted into SHS. Among this total, a mere 299,649 graduates opted to enroll, while 115,363, or 27.8 percent, made the decision not to attend SHS that year, as indicated in the Table. After the policy was introduced, a total of 461,009 students participated in the B.E.C.E. examination. Out of these, 420,135 students, accounting for 91.13 percent, met the qualifications for admission to Ghana's S.H.S. According to the data shown in the Table, only 308,799 kids were enrolled, while 111,336 or 26.50 percent of them were not.

Moreover, a total of 424,224 graduates, representing 90.63 percent, were qualified for enrollment in Ghanaian senior high schools in 2017, the first year the free senior high school program was implemented. Only 361,771 of those students registered, according to the Table, while the remaining 62,453 pupils, or 14.7 percent, did not. Furthermore, a grand number of 521,811 Junior High School (JHS) students enrolled and participated in the 2018 B.E.C.E. A total of 486,641 students, which accounts for 93.26% of the total, met the requirements to be eligible for enrollment in one of Ghana's SHS. Out of the total number of eligible individuals, 433,819 graduates chose to enlist, while the remaining 52,822 individuals, which accounts for 10.90 percent, did not enroll as indicated in the Table. Following that, a total of 512,083 candidates participated in the Basic Education Certificate Examination. A total of 459,912 individuals, accounting for 89.81% of the given number, met the requirements for secondary education in Ghana's S.H.S. Out of the qualified graduates, 404,856 registered, while 55,056, which is 11.9% of the total, did not, as shown in the Table.

According to the Table, 226,699 qualified graduates were unable to enroll in senior high schools in Ghana for the two years (2015 and 2016) to the implementation of the free SHS programme. However, the number fell to 170,331 in the three years (2017, 2018, and 2019) following the government's implementation of the free SHS programme. The analysis of the results presented in the table brings to light the impact of the Free Senior High School policy on Ghana's secondary education.

### Nature of the Society

Society is a broader spectrum within which all actors of the educational system interact to bring fruition to educational policies/programmes. Besides, educational policies and programmes are designed to mirror the society in which they are to be implemented or to solve its problems. The free senior high school policy is an example of such a policy. Ghanaian society is noted for a high rate of school dropouts and illiteracy due to financial constraints and other related factors. This attribute is reported to have contributed to broadening the gap between the poor and the wealthy in society. This difference is

manifested in the performance of learners from higher socioeconomic backgrounds and those from needy homes.

A study carried out by West (2007) found that learners from wealthy homes have outperformed their colleagues from needy homes in areas such as literacy and numeracy. She maintains that resources play significant roles in learners' performance. As a result, Akyeampong (2009) reasoned that funding for senior high school education should be prioritized to lessen the burden on needy families. It is worth noting that the majority of Ghanaian citizens are engaged in agricultural-related businesses (farmers and traders) to make ends meet. The majority in this category are subsistent farmers who fall within the needy brackets and reside in rural communities.

Pettinger (2012) advanced an argument that the education of an individual is of great importance to society than the individual for it furnishes the educand with social and moral values that enhance national unity. As a social intervention policy, the FSHSP was designed to provide quality and accessible senior high school education to all qualified Ghanaian students (Abdul-Rahman, Abdul Rahman, Ming, Ahmed, & Salma, 2018).

Moreover, it also depends largely on the produce from Ghanaian farming communities to feed the senior high school students. As a result, farmers enjoy a ready market and a boost in the earnings from their labour. Similarly, the policy also necessitated the government to recruit teachers to help augment the efforts of the staff of teachers at the senior high school level. This also opens room for qualified graduates to gain employment as teachers at Senior High Schools.

### **Nature of subject matter**

The significance of the subject content is of utmost importance under Ghana's Free Senior High School Policy. Regarded as a ubiquitous component, it requires meticulous deliberation in the development of curricula and educational policy. This comprehensive rendition encompasses a range of elements, including knowledge, skills, competencies, and experience learning (Kwao, 2017). It represents a shift away from traditional, content-focused methods of teaching, adopting a comprehensive viewpoint that acknowledges the diverse requirements of learners.

The Free Senior High School Policy (FSHSP) is in line with the current educational reforms and adapts to the dynamic changes in educational paradigms. The curriculum is designed to be flexible and responsive to emerging trends and the changing demands of education in modern society. The main goal of the FSHSP is to effectively equip learners for a smooth transition into the workforce or further study in tertiary or professional institutions (Ministry of Education, 2018). This strategic alignment demonstrates a practical approach, recognising the various options that students may choose after graduating.

The subject content covered in the FSHSP plays a crucial role in promoting Ghana's goals for economic growth and development. The educational curriculum intentionally prioritises Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, as well as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes (Arthur-Mensah & Alagaraja, 2018). The curriculum is designed to cultivate the necessary abilities for national progress, acknowledging these sectors as crucial catalysts for innovation and economic growth. In addition to conventional academic material, the subject matter includes a collection of essential skills considered necessary for Senior High School (SHS) graduates (Ministry of Education, 2018). These competencies include critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, innovation, communication, cooperation, digital literacy, and personal growth. By doing this, the curriculum surpasses traditional limitations, recognising the wider range of skills needed in today's professional environment.

Furthermore, the subject matter demonstrates its adaptability by effectively responding to the evolving dynamics of the workplace. Highlighting skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and digital



literacy demonstrates a proactive approach, guaranteeing that SHS graduates possess not only a strong understanding of fundamental knowledge but also the ability to successfully navigate and participate in a quickly changing work environment (Government of Ghana, n.d.). The subject matter of Ghana's Free Senior High School Policy is characterised by a broad and dynamic structure. It is in line with current educational reforms, supports national economic development objectives, and prioritises the preparation of students with a wide range of knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for success in both the job market and further education (Ministry of Education, 2018).

### **Challenges Facing Ghana's Free Senior High School Policy Implementation**

According to Tamanja and Pajibo (2019), poor policy implementation is considered the fiber optic nerve for most of the educational sector's challenges at the national and institutional levels. Similarly, there also identified resource constraints and the mode of placing students in the double-track system as contributing factors to the challenges in the implementation of the policy. They concluded that the policy lacks funding and its sustainability is not guaranteed. Expatriating on the negative impact of FSHSP and the double-track system on Ghanaian society, the ranking member of the education committee in Ghana's parliament, Hon. Peter Norsy-Kotoe is reported to have said that "*within a spate of one year (2018-2019), over 1,433 girls at Senior High Schools across the country were impregnated and dropped out of school*" (Ayamga, 2019).

Similarly, Dr. Daniel Yielpiere, a senior research fellow at the University of Education, Winneba, is reported to have expressed worry about the long vacations for the S.H.S students and argued further that it contributes to the increase in social vices (Matey, 2020). Correspondingly, graduates of the free senior high school policy are reported to have demonstrated a significant decline in performance in all core subjects compared with their predecessors. This poor performance is reported to have resulted from financial constrains, infrastructure deficit, shortage of food items, inadequate teaching and learning resources coupled with limited contact hours (Dwomoh, et al., 2022).

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Ghana's Free Senior High School (FSHS) policy has had a significant and positive effect on the lives of Ghanaians, making it one of the most praiseworthy social intervention programmes in the fourth republic. The strategy is especially beneficial for residents in both rural and urban areas as it helps to reduce the financial challenges they have when obtaining senior high education. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the FSHS policy is impacted by obstacles stemming from insufficient facilities and resources in senior high schools, resulting in the adoption of the double-track system. The FSHS policy, although highly valued, has faced obstacles in achieving its intended goals due to its rushed and disorganised implementation.

Given these problems, conducting a thorough assessment and considering making necessary changes to the FSHS policy is crucial. The government is encouraged to participate in a thorough engagement with education stakeholders and think tanks, to address the need for a thoughtful decision-making process. This comprehensive strategy seeks to tackle the current obstacles, maximise the policy's efficacy, and guarantee its unity with the overarching objectives of improving educational accessibility and quality. Through promoting a cooperative conversation, the government can enable a more knowledgeable and deliberate assessment of the FSHS policy, ultimately enhancing its durability and beneficial effects on the educational system in Ghana.

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