



**GHANA NATIONAL EDUCATION CAMPAIGN  
COALITION – GNECC/ IEPA**

**RESEARCH ON THE FREE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL (FSHS) POLICY  
IMPLEMENTATION -A baseline study of Central Region(PHASE I)**

SEPTEMBER, 2022

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TABLE OF CONTENTS	ii
LIST OF TABLES	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	v
RESEARCH ON THE FREE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL (FSHS) POLICY IMPLEMENTATION	1
Introduction	1
Statement of the research problem	5
Purpose of the study	9
Research questions	9
Significance/Benefits of the study	9
Delimitation of the study	11
Limitations of the study	12
Research methods	12
Study area	13
Study population	17
Research design	17
Study sample and sampling procedures	21
Procedures for data collection	26
Data management and analysis procedures	28
Ethical considerations	29
FINDINGS	30
Introduction.	30
Research question 1	31
1.1 Features of the Free Senior High School (FSHS) Policy	31
Research question 2	32
2.1 Increased Enrolment	32
2.2 Equitable Access to Education.	33
2.3 Reduction of Financial Burden on Parents.	33
2.4 Recruitment of Teachers	34
Research question 3	34
3.1 Inadequate Infrastructure	34
GNECC/IEPA FSHS POLICY STUDY,2022	ii

3.2 Inadequate Supply of Teaching and Learning Materials	35
3.4 Inadequate Human Resources	35
3.5 Delay in the Payment of Grants by Government.	36
Research question 4	36
Research question 5	38
What exactly do the review calls mean?	39
What is the cost-sharing research?	40
CONCLUSION	40
RECOMMENDATIONS	41
REFERENCES	42

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Sampled Participants for research phase one (Baseline study phase)	22

## LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1: Ghana Map	13
Figure 2: Population of Ghana	14
Figure 3: Education Structure of Ghana	16
Figure 4: Research design for the research	20

# **RESEARCH ON THE FREE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL (FSHS) POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

## **Introduction**

All over the world today, education is considered as a human right issue and a panacea for attaining sustainable development and peace. The global ambitions for education towards attaining sustainable development, resilient societies and world peace are captured essentially and visibly in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 4 of the SDGs states that all nation states shall ensure that “by 2030, all girls and boys complete free equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes” (UN, 2015). In relation to this, its (i.e. the UNs) Agenda 2030 aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UNESCO/UNDP, 2016).

Certainly, the achievement of this global Education Agenda requires sustained funding. In consequence, many governments worldwide have gradually come to increase their budgetary allocation to education in order to reduce the financial burdens on households and to increase access and quality to education (Abdul-Rahaman, Rahaman, Ming, Ahmed & Salma, 2018; Weller, 2020). In addition to this, and in recognition of education’s outsized role in promoting national development through bridging inequalities and levelling out life outcomes, some ‘forward-looking’ countries have taken the bold step of initiating policy reforms and/or programmes to provide ‘free education’ to their citizens at different levels of their education systems. Typical examples worth isolating for commendation are countries like Germany and Switzerland who offer free education to their citizens up to the tertiary level (Belentsov, Fahrutdinova, Grevtseva & Batrachenko, 2019). Within the context of sub-Saharan Africa, the Free Education Policy introduced in South Africa is worth commending as it has enabled poor parents to enrol their children in schools in some areas, especially in pro-black settlements (Boatman & Long, 2016; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013). Thus, clearly free education provision is no doubt one of the most important aspects of a country’s economic prospects as it offers a platform where all citizens can easily enjoy education as part of their human rights (Lee, 2020).

In the case of Ghana, the country’s recent history has been characterised by increasing focus on equal access and quality education for Ghanaian children, reflected in the various policy interventions crafted to support outcomes for students and families, especially for those who

are historically disadvantaged and/or underserved (Armah & Opoku-Amankwa, 2020). To ensure that these provisions are adhered to at all times, the commitment to free education provision is enshrined in Ghana's Fourth Republican Constitution of 1992. In respect of free secondary education (which is the focus of this research) Article 25, 1b of the 1992 Constitution states 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" (GOG, 1992). Thus, clearly, Governments of Ghana through the Ministry of Education (MOE) over the years of the constitutional experiment have seen it as a priority to ensure that education is made free from basic to secondary to afford more children in Ghana the opportunity to access quality education. As Akyeampong (2009), for example, has argued, funding for senior high school education is necessary to make it easier for people from needy families to participate in education and in reducing the financial burden on parents.

On the back of this, and drawing inspiration essentially from the 1992 Constitutional demands, coupled with its own vision and mantra of transforming Ghana positively through education, the Government of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) began to implement what Armah and Opoku-Amankwa (2020) calls 'an extended basic education system' (i.e. the Free Senior High School (FSHS) Policy) which makes senior high school (SHS) education free and inclusive. For the policy formulators, a number of contexts underscored the design and implementation of this free and inclusive education regime. These include: a perennial weak transition problem (especially for pupils from basic education secondary), imbalances in education access, the need to fight poverty and crime and stimulate improved civic life, health and living conditions as well as economic growth for the people Ghana (Armah & Opoku-Amankwa, 2020). In respect of weak transition, for instance, from 2010/11 to 2016/17 academic years, out of a total of 4,000,000 pupils who started primary school, only 500,000 students were enrolled in senior high education (Education Management Information System (EMIS) Data, 2010-2017, cited in Armah & Opoku-Amankwa, 2020) indicating that a significant majority of students (i.e. 3,500,000 students) could not gain access to SHS. The Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) 'stanine' non-referenced grading system, built on a highly 'selective' modality, had played a long-standing part in compounding the problem of limited access to secondary education, year on year. Further, in Armah and Opoku-Amankwa's (2020, p. 1) words, it is apparent from the 2012/13 and 2016/17 Ghana Living Standard Survey (GLSS) data that substantial inequities in access to education exist

across the various wealth quintiles, with students coming from the poorest 20% of households at an acute disadvantage when it comes to accessing secondary education. So clearly, these and other concerns are the reasons for the introduction of the FSHS policy in Ghana in 2017.

Among other things, the introduction of the FSHS policy aims to remove cost barriers to enable more Ghanaian children to make the progression from basic school to secondary school without hindrance; address inequities in access to secondary education; enhance the human capital base of the country by making secondary education the minimum academic qualification; and enable students who otherwise would have terminated at the JHS level to acquire functional and employable skills (Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition – GNECC, 2018). From these broad aims, the FSHS policy has the following as its specific objectives:

- to remove cost barriers through the absorption of fees approved by the Ghana Education Service (GES) Council
- to expand physical school infrastructure and facilities to accommodate the expected increase in enrolment
- to improve quality through provision of core textbooks and supplementary readers, teacher rationalisation and deployment, etc.
- to improve equity through implementation of 30% of places in elite schools for students from JHS
- prioritise programme support and reform TVET institutions at the SHS level to facilitate skills acquisition (MOE, 2021).

Thus, overall, the FSHS policy seeks to ensure that every Ghanaian child who is placed into a public Second Cycle Institution by the Computerised School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS) during the school placement process is eligible for a free SHS education (MOE, 2021).

Following the launch of this ambitious policy, several legitimate concerns were raised by stakeholders and civil society organisations (CSO) regarding its form and mode of implementation. These concerns focused largely on financing of the policy and its potential impacts on quality and equity based on lessons learned from similar effects of the school feeding and capitation grant policy initiatives at the basic level of Ghana’s education system



(GNECC, 2018). Notwithstanding these concerns, the FSHS policy implementation commenced in September, 2017, and students who qualify for and are placed in a public Senior High School for their secondary education now in Ghana have their fees absorbed by the government through FSHS policy. The policy also provides free tuition for students, and ensures also that prospective SHS students pay no library fee, no boarding fee, no textbooks fee, no utility fee, no science laboratory fee, no Parents Teachers Association (PTA) fee, and no examinations fee. On top of these, the policy makes room for the provision of free meals for boarders and one hot meal a day (from Monday to Friday) for day-students in Ghanaian public senior high schools (Abdul-Rahaman, Rahaman, Ming, Ahmed & Salma, 2018). As aptly summed up in the MOE's document on FSHS policy implementation, the policy aims essentially to increase enrolment, improve quality through academic performance, and reduce the burden on parents from paying their children's school fees (MOE, 2021). According to data released by Government, in its first year of implementation, about 52,000 additional students enrolled in public senior high schools (SHSs) across the country as a direct result of the policy. This increased enrolment in SHSs in 2017 alone from about 308,799 to about 361,771 (MOE, cited in GNECC, 2018, p. 4).

So, while this brief exposition serves to summarise the background antecedents to the FSHS policy initiation in Ghana, it is instructive to emphasise that its implementation across the country is one activity that has generated intense debate and rancour among citizens. Underlyingly, two schools of divergent thoughts have emerged over the period of implementing the policy. One school of thought, representing pro-NPP activists and institutions, hail the policy for it not only being popular but timely and advantageous in terms of its human capital development indices coupled with its inherent propensity to address inequities in access to secondary education. Those who subscribe to this view argue that the FSHS policy as a strategy for poverty reduction, and a means of supplying the requisite skills and talented workforce for Ghana's socio-economic transformation (Essuman, 2018). The other school of thought, represented by opposition elements, some independent CSOs and well-meaning citizens hold the view that although laudable, the policy is very ambitious and highly unsustainable. The argument of the second school of thought is underpinned largely by concerns regarding issues of cost, sustainability, human resource development and political expediency (Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021). Some from within this school of thought have argued that the policy was rushed for political reasons without full consideration of the cost implications making it unsustainable in the long term (Oduro, 2019). Others too have argued

that the rush to implement the policy implies that Free SHS is unlikely to meet the recommended processes and procedures of policy-making (McConnell, 2010), which indeed is a clear recipe for policy implementation failure (Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021).

Four years into the implementation of the FSHS policy, this debate has not receded but is continuing unabated. In recent times, the debate over free education provision has been exacerbated by the effects of the introduction of the ‘Tract System’ as a stop-gap measure to the perennial issue of lack of space for the teeming number of students who qualify and are placed in in SHSs across the country. Undeniably, the introduction of the tract system in the secondary sector has caused disruptions to the academic calendar of the entire Ghanaian education system, and has in many ways, appeared to have compounded the very issues of quality, inclusion, equity and the acquisition of transferable core skills which the FSHS policy was enacted and intended to address in the first place.

It is generally within this context of unending debate regarding free secondary provision, and particularly the lacuna in knowledge about the extent to which the FSHS policy aims and objectives are being achieved, that the research is worth undertaking. Significantly, the research seeks to assess the FSHS policy implementation process with the view to exploring and documenting the strides that have and are being chalked up in all facets of the policy over the duration of implementation.

### **Statement of the research problem**

It is undeniable that the introduction of the FSHS policy in Ghana is a sensitive issue that has generated intense debate and rancour among citizens. Whereas a group of citizens see the initiation of the policy as a timely opportunity to revisit and address concerns of quality, equity and human resource development issues confronting Ghana’s education system, another group views the FSHS policy as an ambitious project that cannot be sustained in the long term. This controversial debate appears to have reached its crescendo by the introduction of the ‘track system’ as a stop-gap measure to the perennial issue of lack of space for the teeming number of students who qualify and are placed in in SHSs across the country. As was indicated earlier, the effects of the introduction of the tract system in the secondary education sector has, in recent times, caused disruptions to the academic calendar of the entire Ghanaian education system, and thereby compounding the very issues of quality, inclusion, equity and the acquisition of transferable core skills which the FSHS policy was

enacted and intended to address. This has left many critical minds to ask questions regarding the feasibility, viability, desirability, affordability and sustainability of the policy. For example, questions are being asked about how far or the extent to which the aims and objectives of the policy as outlined by the Government are being achieved. Conversely, specific questions have also surfaced in the media space in respect of the strides that the implementation process is making relative to issues such as quality education and improvements in students' learning outcomes.

A perfunctory study conducted on the FSHS policy by GNECC in 2018 in this direction, for example, produced findings that illuminate some of these concerns directly. The study, entitled "A qualitative assessment of the free senior high school policy implementation", sought to examine the quality issues arising out of the implementation of the FSHS policy. The study was conducted in sixty (60) districts across ten (10) regions, and involved 120 teachers and 600 SHS students across the country. The teacher participants were selected purposively to share their experiences in teaching and supervising students, whilst the students were selected for interviews at random (GNECC, 2018). The descriptive design was employed to examine the quality deficits in the FSHS policy and to recommend policy measures to improve the quality deficits identified.

The findings of the GNECC study revealed generally that there were indeed quality deficits in the FSHS policy implementation relative to some key areas of the education process, including class sizes and how they promote quality teaching and learning; the availability of teaching and learning materials, the nature and conditions of students' accommodation; and the management and delivery of feeding in schools under the FSHS policy. Taking the theme of class sizes as an example, the study found that classrooms generally were congested with the minimum class size being 45 students to a class, and a maximum of 160 students to a class. The study concluded that the implications of having an average of 60 students to a class included limited assignments and class tests, limited engagements with students during instructional hours, difficulty in identifying and providing special attention and/or support to low academic students, bearing in mind the need to complete a set of prescribed syllabi. With respect to the availability of teaching learning materials as another key theme for investigation, the study found this to be one laudable effort under the implementation of the FSHS policy in the sense that the MOE ensured textbooks (at least for the first year of implementation) were available in the schools before admissions of students were undertaken.

However, when it came to the issue of exercise books for students, the findings showed that contractors engaged to supply them delayed and were also not able or failed to deliver the right quantity to schools. Only 20% of schools sampled received the full complement of 9 exercise books and 4 notebooks envisaged per student. Again, regarding the theme concerning the nature and condition of students' accommodation, the findings showed that the level of overcrowding in students' dormitories was unacceptable. School authorities were compelled to receive all posted students into their schools as they feared being sanctioned by the authorities should they complain about lack of sleeping spaces. The issue of lack of space in the dormitories was compounded by lack of beds resulting in some students sleeping on the bare floor with their mattresses. Also, the sheer student numbers admitted to the schools meant that toilet facilities were/or under pressure resulting in students having to form queues (GNECC, 2018).

Frankly speaking, and from an implementation analysis point of view, the findings enlisted in this research paints a gloomy picture of the FSHS policy implementation process. To put it rather bluntly and succinctly, the findings of the GNECC commissioned study put together are indicting revelations that go to undermine the FSHS policy implementation process. The findings in their entirety reveal, or imply covertly, that the FSHS implementation process is one that does not appears to be yielding intended results because of bottlenecks that stem from the failure (or to put it mildly, the inability) of policy makers to think carefully through the processes of change before jumping into implementation. (See GNECC, 2018 for full project report on the FSHS policy implementation including study findings and recommendations.)

Ironically, and aside the GNECC study findings and other challenges that the implementation of Ghana's FSHS policy is reported to be faced with, an analysis of the 2020 West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) results released by the West African Examination Council paints a rather promising picture that suggests that perhaps the policy implementation is making some modest gains (Asante & Agbee, 2021). An analysis of the results by Armah and Opoku-Amankwa (2020) shows that the 2020 performance is a remarkable one as compared to that of 2016 (the year immediately preceding the commencement of the FSHS policy implementation). For example, comparing the 2020 performance to 2016 performance, the results show that on average, the 2020 performance shows a 12.7 percentage increase over that of 2016. Comparing the percentage of candidates

obtaining the tertiary education qualifying grades (TEQG) (i.e. grades A1-C6) in the core subjects in the 2020 WASSCE to that of 2016, Armah and Opoku-Amankwa (2020) observed that the greatest improvement was in Mathematics (the most dreaded subject in the SHS curriculum). The percentage of candidate obtaining the TEQG in Mathematics increased from 32% in 2016 to more than double this number (i.e. approximately 66%) in 2020's exam results. Also, Mathematics recorded the highest percentage increase (9.43%) of candidates obtaining a Grade A1, while English Language recorded a marginal percentage increase (0.6) of candidates obtaining a Grade A1. Furthermore, the proportion of candidates making the TEQG in all four core subjects (i.e. English Language, Mathematics, Integrated Science and Social Studies) is observed to have exceeded 50% in 2019 and 2020, meaning a little over half of the candidates taking WASSCE in the last two years obtained the tertiary education qualification grades (i.e. A1 – C6) (Armah & Opoku-Amankwa, 2020, pp. 2–3). These, in the words of Armah and Opoku-Amankwa (2020), show clearly that the 2020 WASSCE performance, 'like any other performance in the past three years, continues to dispel the concern of a compromised education as far as students' performance is concerned' (p. 4).

Interestingly, these major improvements appear to have happened at a time the FSHS policy implementation is said to be faced with teething challenges. In this sense therefore, and apart from it being an indication that all may not be lost with the implementation process completely, both the GNECC (2018) and Armah & Opoku-Amankwa, (2020) study findings enlisted in this section of the research present us with a knowledge gap and a dilemma, where on the one hand, the FSHS policy implementation is considered as beset with enormous challenges it finds difficult to surmount, and yet, on the other hand, it is able to produce results that generally could be described and accepted as appreciable and/or modest improvements. Quite clearly, this paradox relating to policy/practice conundrum calls for a robust implementation research and analysis (such as the one this research describes) to be undertaken to assess, document and present a groundswell of evidence to serve two key purposes relative to the realisation of the FSHS policy aims and objectives. First, the findings of the research that the problem emanating from the FSHS policy implementation calls for would re-ignite dispassionate and non-partisan discussions surrounding the discourse of free education being propagated by political leaders of countries sub-Saharan Africa in recent times. Second, the findings of the research described in this research would also produce a rigorous, comprehensive and invaluable report on the FSHS policy implementation to guard the implementation of the FSHS policy going forward.

### **Purpose of the study**

The FSHS policy implementation in Ghana is one sensitive process that has assumed a lot of twists and turns generating serious debate in the public space. In view of this, and in order for our research findings to be taken seriously and applied by education authorities and leaders irrespective of their political clouts, the research team (comprising officials from both collaborating institutions, that is, the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (IEPA) and GNECC went to the research field to examine the FSHS policy implementation processes with one single but yet overarching research purpose. That is, to undertake, document and present a comprehensive assessment of the FSHS policy implementation process with the view to underscore the strides that are being chalked up, the challenges that beset the processes of implementation, and some practical policy recommendations to improve practice.

### **Research questions**

The following are research questions this research seeks to unveil

1. How is the FSHS policy being implemented in schools across the country? (What delivery approach(es)/methods are employed/are being employed to implement the policy?)
2. What aspects of the FSHS policy aims and objectives are being achieved and why?
3. What aspects of the FSHS policy implementation are not going on well or as expected, and why?
4. How are schools responding to and/or dealing with the challenges (if any) that confront them as they make efforts to implement the policy? (Any innovations, best/good practice and/or learning points to share?)
5. What practical policy recommendations do the Government, schools, CSOs, development partner agencies and stakeholders have to offer to help improve the practice of implementing the FSHS policy?

### **Significance/Benefits of the study**

As the Education 2030 Agenda that Ghana (as well as countries across the globe) has subscribed to progresses to its mid-term review stages, there is an urgent need to generate credible evidence with respect to Ghana's progress to inform national and international discourses and advocacy in the education space. In view of this essentially, there is the need to know where the country is in the international commitment towards giving an impeccable

report on the huge resources committed to achieving the SDG4 Education 2030 agenda. Remarkably, the research write-up is in this direction as it deals with an aspect of this important subject. The research that this research describes purports to examine the FSHS policy implementation process with the view to underscoring the strides that have been made (or are being has chalked up) in all facets of the policy over the duration of implementation, the challenges that beset the processes of implementation, and some practical policy recommendations to improve practice. In this sense possibly, and owing to the robust, open-minded and enquiry focused research questions posed, the innovative sequential mixed methods process tracing research design to be employed and the rigorous research processes and methods to be undertaken in pursuit of the research endeavours would ensure and assure that a comprehensive and invaluable report on the FSHS policy implementation is produced and made available to guard the implementation of the FSHS policy going forward. Thus, apart from it being an evaluation of the FSHS policy, the research report would come in handy to help put education on the right pedestal in the country for a robust monitoring, evaluation and reporting of progress towards the attainment of Education 2030 Agenda that Ghana has subscribed to and to which she is committed to providing to her citizens.

Following on from this first point, the impartial, open-minded and enquiry focused research approach that the research team used would lead inadvertently to the production of a research output which would serve to re-ignite dispassionate and non-partisan discussions surrounding the discourse of free education, not only in Ghana, but sub-Saharan Africa and the continent of Africa as a whole. Further, the impartial stance adopted by the team of researchers engaged with/in this research is most likely lead to the output of our research endeavours to be accepted and applied expeditiously in dealing with issues regarding subsequent policy initiatives by education authorities and political leaders irrespective of their political clouts and/or leanings.

On the part of collaborative institution, the outcomes of the research endeavours described would inure immensely to their profile and image. Quite recently (i.e. in November 2019), at the 40<sup>th</sup> Session of the UNESCO General Conference in Paris, France, the IEPA was upgraded to a UNESCO Category II Centre of Excellence to implement UNESCO's mandate in key areas including capacity building in educational planning, management, leadership, research and innovation in the West African sub-region. The IEPA Category II Centre of Excellence builds on four (4) strategic thrusts and is intended to address challenges in key

areas of educational planning and administration. (See the IEPA's website at: [www.iepa@ucc.edu.gh](http://www.iepa@ucc.edu.gh) for details regarding the 4 strategic thrusts.) The research activities described in this research relate to these four strategic thrusts of IEPA (either directly or indirectly), and as such shall project IEPA as fulfilling its renewed mission and mandates as UNESCO Category II Centre of Excellence in education for Ghana and West Africa. For GNECC, collaborating with IEPA to undertake the programme of activities outlined in this research is timely and refreshing on two counts. One, this collaborative effort puts the GNECC in the limelight as one of the few CSOs in the country that is fulfilling its advocacy roles of ensuring that issues of education are seen and dealt with as human right issues. Two, by undertaking this research endeavour together with IEPA, the GNECC stands to benefit in the area of capacity building in the sense that its staff would be trained and equipped with requisite research skills and competencies to be versatile in undertaking policy/programme evaluations, including conducting development research.

Put together, undertaking the research activities that this research describes would yield benefits for policy actors across the different spectrums and levels of the education system in Ghana and the sub-Saharan Africa. Our view essentially is that undertaking this research endeavour could help improve bureaucratic functioning and policy delivery of our education systems by combining a set of managerial functions in novel ways to shift the needless attention and fixation from educational inputs to equally important areas of 'processes' and 'outputs'.

### **Delimitation of the study**

The issue of free education provision across all the levels of education in Ghana's education system is one that is entrenched in the 1992 Republican Constitution. A lot of work, in this regard, has been done in the basic and secondary sectors to actualise this constitutional requirement, by ensuring that free education is provided to all Ghanaian school-age children/students (i.e. irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, geographical locations, political colouration, socio-economic status etc.). In line with the research activities described in this research, the study is delimited to free secondary education provision as it is reflected visibly in the FSHS policy currently being implemented in public SHSs in Ghana.

Similarly, the discourse of 'free education' is known to trigger debates surrounding what the education development literature refers to as 'opportunity and/or ancillary costs' of funding



education. In this study, debates regarding whether or not the FSHS policy is totally free are considered needless, as they fall outside the remit of our research plan. The research is delimited to assessment of the FSHS policy implementation process. Our focus essentially is on examining whether or not (or the extent to which) the stated aims and objectives of the policy are being achieved, the strides that are being chalked up, the challenges that beset the processes of implementation, and to proffer some practical policy recommendations to improve the practice of implementation.

### **Limitations of the study**

Throughout the country, the FSHS policy is being implemented in different category of schools. Currently, the policy is being implemented in schools labelled, for example, as top performing, non-performing, mixed/dual-sexes, single-sex, inclusive, day, double-track and single-track schools, among others. Clearly, these labels affect and/or impact on how the FSHS policy is being implemented country-wide. As such, the information obtained from the research process may be varied (and in some cases, inaccurate or unreliable), making it difficult to make a determination concerning the extent to which the implementation process generally is taking hold in schools across the country. It is, therefore, obviously discernible that this could have or is likely to have a knock-on effect on the generalisability of the research findings of this study.

### **Research methods**

In this section of our research , the methodological approaches for the research study are outlined and described as discrete sections to help bring to light clearly the justifications for our choice of research methods and the robustness of our research processes and methodology. The sections include: study area, research design, population, sample and sampling procedures, research instruments, data collection procedures and data management and analysis procedures

### ***Study area***

This section of the research introduces the research area, which is Ghana. Ghana is a West African country that stretches from the Gulf of Guinea to the Atlantic Ocean to the south, with the Ivory Coast to the west, Burkina Faso to the north, and Togo to the northeast (Berry, 1995). In terms of size, Ghana covers an area of 238,535 km<sup>2</sup> (92,099 sq mi), spanning diverse geography and ecology that ranges from coastal savannahs to tropical rain forests. Ghana's Atlantic coastline stretches 560 kilometres (350 miles) on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean to its south (Berry, 1995). Luckily, Ghana lies between latitudes 4°45'N and 11°N, and longitudes 1°15'E and 3°15'W. This makes Ghana closer to the “centre” of the Earth geographical coordinates than any other country even though the notional centre (0°, 0°) is located in the Atlantic Ocean, approximately 614 km (382 mi) off the south-east coast on the Gulf of Guinea (Berry, 1995).



Figure 1: Ghana Map  
Source: Adopted from The Permanent Mission of Ghana to the UN (2021)

From a population of 6.7 million persons in 1960, Ghana has witnessed a population increase to about 30.8 million persons in 2021 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Ghana's population has increased by 6.1 million from the 24.7 million recorded in 2010, constituting an annual intercensal growth rate of 2.1% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). At this rate, the country's population will double within 33 years. And by 2050, the population of Ghana would be. According to current projections, Ghana's population will continue to grow for the rest of the century, reaching over 50 million people by 2050 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Ghana has a sex ratio of 97 males for 100 females (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021).

In terms of the regional differences, the Greater Accra Region is the most populous region in Ghana. Ashanti Region closely follows as the second most populous region as illustrated in

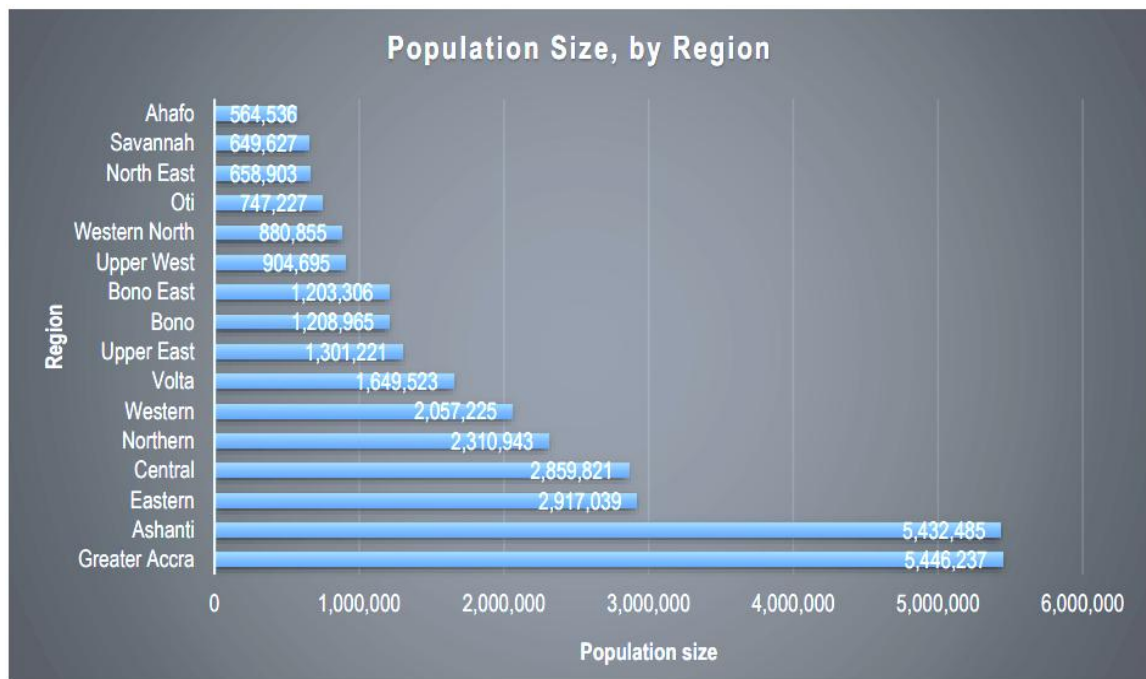


Figure 2.

Figure 2: Population of Ghana

Source: Adopted from 2021 PHC Provisional Results by Ghana Statistical Service (2021, p.4)

Greater Accra and Ashanti regions are both almost twice (1.9) times the size of the third most populous region, Eastern Region. The Central Region is the fourth most populous region following the splitting of the former Western, Brong Ahafo and Northern Regions who were all more populous than Central Region in 2010 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). The four most populous regions make up over half (54%) of the total population. The Ahafo Region is the least populous region taking the place of the Upper West which had been the least populous in all the previous post-independence censuses. The Savannah and North East Regions are the second and third least populous regions respectively.

Historically, in sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana is the first place where Europeans arrived to trade - first in gold, later in slaves (Meyerowitz, 1975). It is also the first black African nation in the region to achieve independence from a colonial power, in this instance, Britain. Regarding governance and politics, Ghana practices a unitary presidential constitutional democracy with a multi-party parliamentary system. Ghana had alternated

between civilian and military governments until January 1993, when the military government gave way to the Fourth Republic after presidential and parliamentary elections in late 1992. It is instructive to note that the Government of Ghana is elected by universal suffrage after every four years. Administratively, Ghana is divided into 16 regions (see with a decentralised system of local government for the people to ensure good governance and balanced rural based development. In terms of economic gains, Ghana is the world's second-largest cocoa producer behind Ivory Coast and Africa's biggest gold miner after South Africa. It is one of the fastest-growing economies and has made significant progress in attaining and consolidating growth (Kofi-Teye & Torvikey, 2018).

Interestingly, Ghana has been a pioneer in modern mass education in West Africa. Modern European-style education was first introduced in Christian missionary schools and colonial government institutions, most notably in coastal areas during the time of the British administration after 1867. At the time of independence, Ghana had a carefully articulated plan of how her education was going to support the efforts to become a prosperous economy. On March 5, 1957, Ghana's first president, Dr Kwame Nkrumah addressed the Legislative Assembly and outlined his government's vision which had education at the centre. Essentially, education was developed to fulfil three goals: first, it was to be used as a tool to produce a scientifically literate population; second, to address the underlying environmental causes of low productivity; and third, to generate knowledge to maximise Ghana's economic potential.

Ghana's school system, which is modeled after the British system, has experienced many adjustments during the last 60 years. Prior to 1974, for example, the system was divided into six years of primary school and four years of secondary education (Graham, 2013). Prior to enrolling in three-year undergraduate programs, students had to complete a two-year advanced level (A-level) university-preparatory curriculum based in the United Kingdom. Currently, the system is divided into six years of primary education and three years of junior high education, followed by three years of senior high education (also known as basic education) and four years of standard university programs as presented in Figure 3.

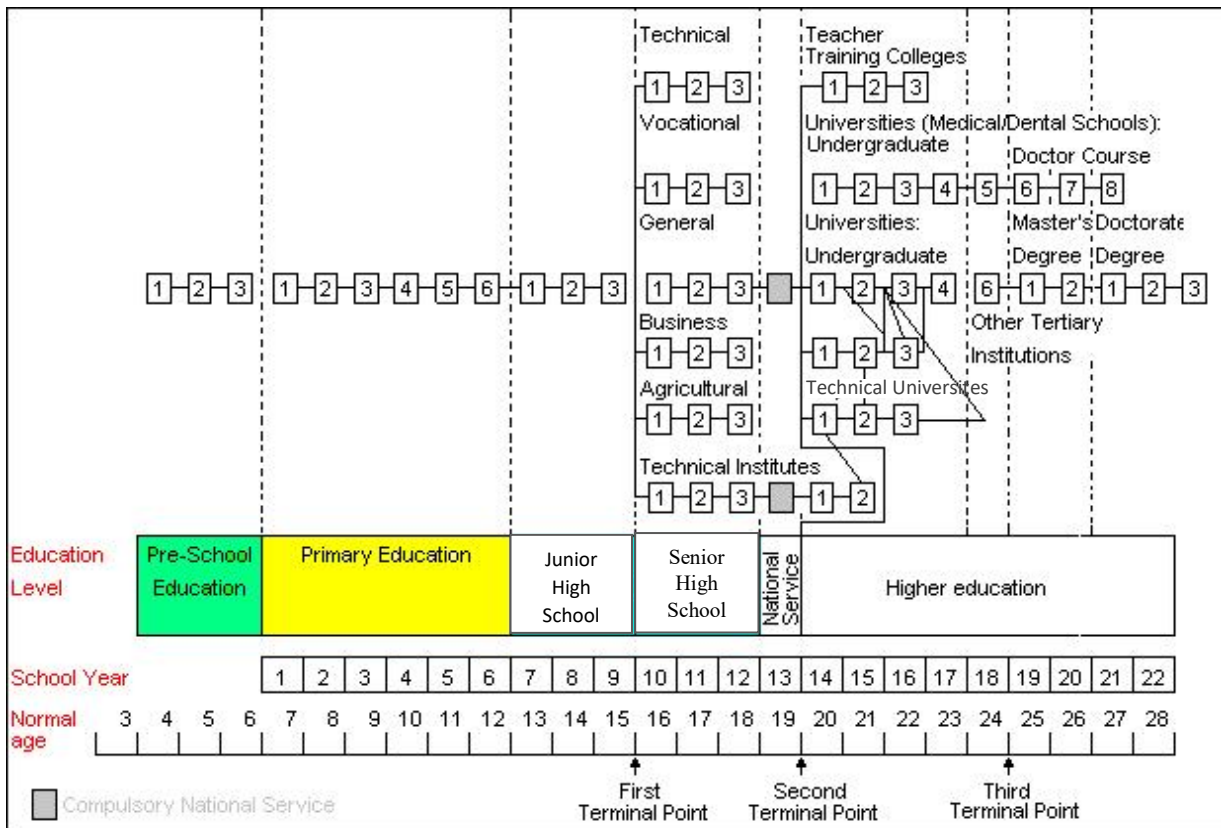


Figure 3: Education Structure of Ghana

Source: Adapted from Ministry of Education (MoE) (2014)

Primary education in Ghana begins at the age of six and is nominally free of charge at public schools. The primary school curriculum focuses on developing basic reading and writing abilities, arithmetic and problem-solving skills. Junior High education is open to all students who complete primary education – there are no entrance examinations. It lasts three years and concludes with the Basic Education Certificate Exam (BECE) conducted by the WAEC in June each year. The vast majority of graduates who complete Junior High School who wish to continue their education get assigned to Senior High Schools based on a computerised school selection placement system. The Senior High School curriculum includes mandatory core subjects as well as electives from the specialisation streams of General (with separate arts and science options), agriculture and environmental studies, business, vocational, and technical. The WAEC administers the senior high school graduation exams. Since 2007, Ghana has been using the pan-regional West African Senior School Certificate (WASSCE) Test instead of the national senior secondary school certificate examination. The appropriate

school authorities register eligible applicants to sit for the exams in May/June, although private candidates may also register for a separate examination in October/November.

Ghana's public education expenditures are substantial – over the past 15 years, the country spent more on education as a percentage of GDP than both the global average and the average in sub-Saharan Africa, the latter of which ranged from 3.8 per cent to 4.6 per cent in the current decade (as per World Bank data) (Kamran, Liang & Trines, 2019; Oseni, Akinbode, Babalola & Adegboyega, 2020). By comparison, Ghana's expenditures have been well above 5 per cent since 2001, peaking at 7.4 per cent and 8.1 per cent in 2005 and 2011, respectively, before finally dropping to 4.5 per cent in 2017 (Kamran, Liang & Trines, 2019). Moreover, since the inception of Ghana's flagship Free SHS Policy in 2017, which is the main subject for this study, the government has spent GH¢7.7 billion in implementing the policy, which has benefitted more than 1.2 million students at the secondary education level (GNA, 2021, June 7). For instance, an amount of GH¢480 million was spent on the policy in 2017, GH¢1.3 billion in 2018, GH¢1.6 billion in 2019, GH¢2.4 billion in 2020, while GH¢1.9 billion has been allocated to be spent in 2021 (GNA, 2021, June 7).

### ***Study population***

The study concerns the issue of free education provision in Ghana's secondary education sector. The population of the study therefore includes key stakeholders of education, including, but not limited to: the MOE (representing the Government of Ghana), GES and its staff of the decentralised education administration (i.e. staff of the regional and district directorates of education), development partner agencies (particularly those into education), CSOs, headteachers of SHSs and their teaching and non-teaching staff across the country, students and parents.

### ***Research design***

Owing to the sensitive nature of the issue of free secondary education provision vis-à-vis the resolve of our research team to undertake a credible, non-partisan and robust research study to unearth the issues surrounding the FSHS policy implementation for rumination, a sequential mixed-methods process tracing design for this study. A mixed-methods research generally is an approach to research which involve the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The choice of a mixed-method research approach is grounded, most often on, the basic assumption that quantitative or

qualitative approach, each on its own, is insufficient to better understand complex research problems (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

In the case of this study, the variant of the mixed-methods design we envisage to employ (i.e. sequential mixed-methods process tracing exploratory design) would involve the procedure of first conducting multi-site case studies to explore the FSHS policy implementation processes in the Central Region of Ghana (See the next two paragraphs in this section for justification for the choice of the Central Region for the multi-site case studies.) Thereafter, and as the second phase of data collection, instrument(s) would be designed (mainly from the multi-site case studies and document analysis/literature reviews conducted in phase one) to collect both quantitative and qualitative data on the FSHS policy implementation from schools across districts and regions in the country. Phase three subsequently would involve qualitative data collection (through multi-site case studies), this time to gauge the views of the educational authorities, development partner agencies, CSOs and relevant agencies involved in education policy making at the national level of Ghana's education system regarding the study's findings from the two previous phases.

As already intimated, the research activities for the study shall be undertaken in three key phases. We refer to phase one as the 'baseline study phase', where preliminary data would be collected to serve as precursor to the next two phases of our data collection and research activities. As indicated from the onset of this research, the introduction of the FSHS policy in Ghana is a sensitive issue that has generated intense debate among citizens. As such, there are fears that studies conducted into the implementation of the FSHS policy could be tagged as biased and/or prejudiced if proper care is not taken to plan the research processes of such studies in transparent and impartial ways. In order for our collaborative research team to demonstrate its transparency and impartiality in conducting this research, we have decided to enter the research field with an impartial, open-minded and enquiry focused research approach to first undertake a baseline study into the FSHS policy implementation process. This baseline study involves multi-site case studies conducted with a cross-section of participants in SHSs in the Central Region of Ghana. The plan is to use the findings of this preliminary baseline study conducted in this phase (i.e. phase one) together with insights from the documentary analysis and review of literature for the study to design instruments for data collection during phases two and three of the research.

The Central Region is chosen for this preliminary baseline study basically because the region is known to be the ‘hub’ of education in Ghana. Its capital, Cape Coast, is touted as the doyen of Ghana’s education as this was the colonial administrative capital of the then Gold Coast (now Ghana), and the place where formal education began. As if by design, or as faith will have it, the Cape Coast Metropolis, and by extension the Central Region, today is also flaunted arguably as the region with the constellation of the ‘best’ SHSs in Ghana. This is evidenced not only in the name of SHSs in the Metropolis (such as: Wesley Girls, Mfantsipim School, Adisadel College, Holy Child School, Ghana National College, Aggrey Memorial College, Mfantsiman Girls, University of Cape Coast Practice School etc.), but also by the aggregated performance of students in these schools in the annual West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (WASSCE). While this puts Cape Coast, and indeed the Central Region in a high pedestal in terms of students’ performance in national and international examinations, it is also instructive to note that there are schools in the region that are tagged as ‘non-performing schools’ as far as the same students’ performance indices are concerned. This thus makes the Central Region an interesting research site and a lens through which educational issues can be explored for research purposes. It is as a result of this that the Central Region is chosen for the first phase of this study.

So clearly, the decision to undertake the baseline study as phase one of the research into the FSHS policy implementation is borne out of the collaborative research team’s adherence to the admonishing to set aside its own (and those of the individual researchers constituting the research team’s) biases, prejudices and ‘blind-spots’ to safeguard the transparency and impartiality of the research processes and findings.

Phase two of the research shall involve the use of instruments designed from phase one (i.e. from the findings of baseline study together with documentary analysis and literature reviews conducted to support phase one of the study) to collect both qualitative and quantitative data on the implementation of the FSHS policy from research participants in SHSs across selected regions in the country. Regarding the qualitative data to be collected, open-ended semi-structured in-depth interview guides and documentary analysis would be employed whereas self-administered questionnaires and observation checklists would be used in the case of quantitative data to be collected from participants. To ensure that the research questions posed are addressed to achieve the overarching research purpose, both randomised and non-randomised sampling techniques shall be employed to select respondents from the various



participant groupings (e.g. Regional Directors of Education and their frontline officials<sup>1</sup>, School Management Board (SMB) members, headmasters/headmistresses, housemasters/housemistresses, teachers, students, School Management Committee members (SMC) members etc.).

Phase three of the research activities shall entail qualitative research activities. These would take the form of multi-site interviews undertaken with national level actors of policy (i.e. educational authorities, development partner agencies, CSOs and relevant agencies involved in education policy making at the national level of Ghana’s education system) to gauge their understanding and views on issues emanating from the two previous phases of the study. Owing to the qualitative research focus of this phase, data collection shall take the form of qualitative elite interviews with national level actors of policy. Overall, the third phase of the research activities shall focus principally on exploring the convergencies and divergencies between the research findings and outcomes at the two previous phases.

The design for the research is captured pictorially in Figure 2.

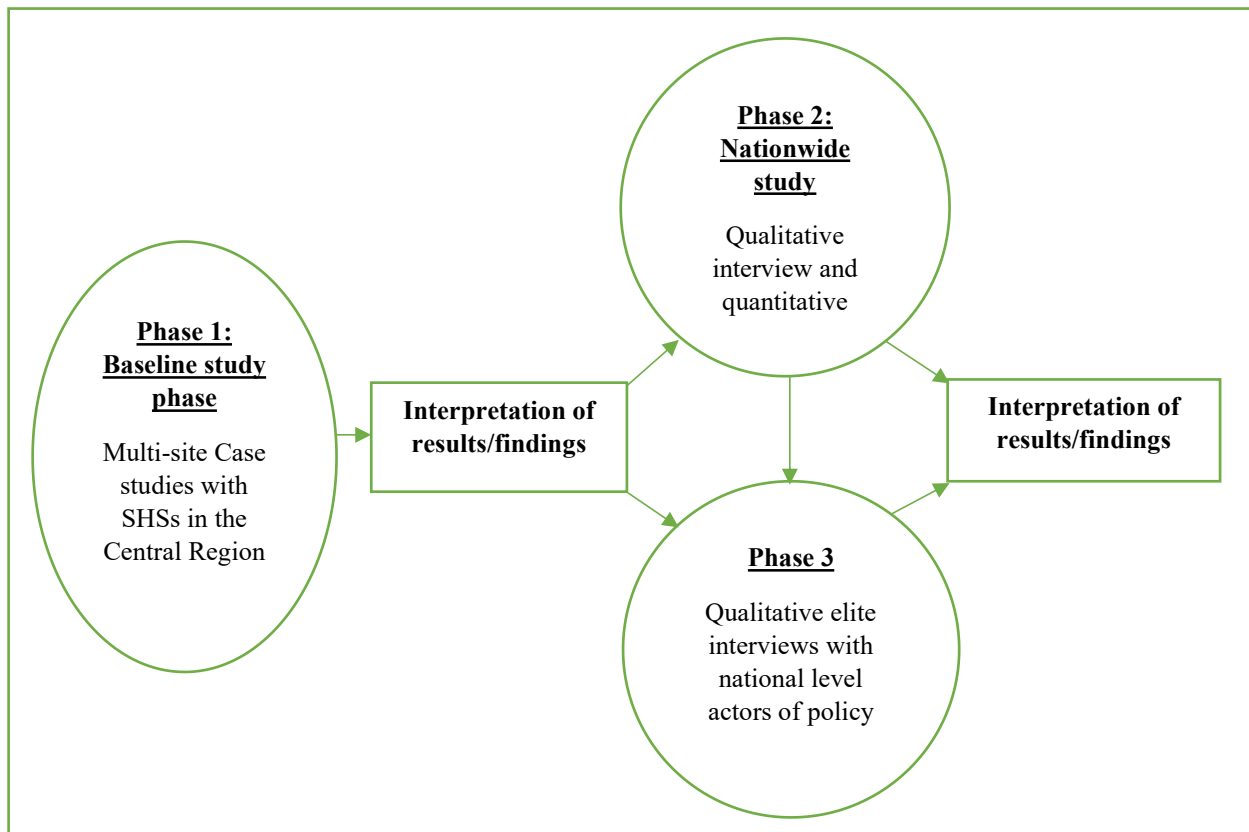


Figure 4: Research design for the research

### ***Study sample and sampling procedures***

The issue of sample and sampling in research is crucial as it determines how participants over whom the findings of a research applies are selected. Whereas sample refers to a group of people, objects, or items that are taken from a larger population for purposes of investigation or measurement, sampling denotes the process of selecting the actual group from which data will be collected from in a research study. Thus, taken together, sample and sampling both refers basically to the process of learning about the population of a study on the basis of a part drawn from it (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Sarantakos, 2012 etc.).

Owing to the three-tiered research approach the research team intends to adopt, coupled with the varying methods and/or approaches to data collection outlined by this research, a multi-stage sampling method, under-laced with/by both randomised and non-randomised sampling techniques are appropriate for use for the purposes of the research. For the first ‘baseline study’ phase of the research, for example, the 2020 WASSCE Performance List released by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) would be used to purposively sample top seven (7) performing SHSs and bottom seven (7) non-performing SHSs from within the Central Region for the baseline study. The two groups of 6 SHSs selected shall belong to the various category of SHSs in which the FSHS policy is being implemented (namely: mixed/dual-sexes, single-sex (boys), single-sex (girls), inclusive, day, single-track and double-track schools). In the likely event that any school within the bracket of the set of 6 schools exhibits more than one of the characteristics outlined, the next school down the ‘ladder’ with the same or similar characteristic features shall be picked and added in order to obtain the required number of schools for the baseline study.

From within each of the 14 SHSs purposively selected using the 2020 WASSCE Performance List for the baseline study, participants would be sampled using both randomised and non-randomised sampling techniques. For example, from each of the selected SHSs, the Headmaster/Headmistress, Assistant Headmaster/Headmistress (Domestic), School Bursar and Senior Housemaster/Housemistress shall be purposively selected whereas the other participants, namely: Housemaster, Teachers and Students shall be selected using simple random sampling technique. What this means is that, from each of the 14 SHSs to be selected for phase one of the study, a total of 94 participants (comprising 1 Headmaster/Headmistress; 1 Assistant Headmaster/Headmistress (Domestic), 1 Bursar, 1 Senior Housemaster/Housemistress; 10 Teachers and 80 Students) shall be sampled to engage

in the baseline study. This brings to total the number of participants/respondents to be involved in phase one (i.e. the baseline study phase) of the study to 1,316 participants. Information regarding the total sample of participants/respondents for phase one of the study and the sampling methods to be employed in their selection is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Sampled Participants for research phase one (Baseline study phase)

Types of participant	Number sampled		Sub-Total	Sampling method
	From seven (7) top performing school	From seven (7) low performing school		
<b>Head of SHS</b>	1 * 7 Schs = 7	1 * 7 Schs = 7	<b>14</b>	Purposive
<b>Assistant head (Domestic)</b>	1 * 7 Schs = 7	1 * 7 Schs = 7	<b>14</b>	Purposive
<b>Bursar</b>	1 * 7 Schs = 7	1 * 7 Schs = 7	<b>14</b>	Purposive
<b>Senior housemaster</b>	1 * 7 Schs = 7	1 * 7 Schs = 7	<b>14</b>	Purposive
<b>Teacher</b>	10* 7 Schs = 70	10* 7 Schs = 70	<b>140</b>	Simple random
<b>Student</b>	80 * 7 Schs = 560	80 * 7 Schs = 560	<b>1,120</b>	Simple random
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>658</b>	<b>658</b>	<b>1,316</b>	

As was mentioned earlier, we (i.e. the collaborative research team) propose to use the findings of our baseline study (together with insights from our documentary analysis and review of literature for phase one) to inform the design of the study approach, instrumentation as well as research sample and sampling procedures for phases two and three of the research study. Owing to this cascading innovative rationale underpinning our design, any attempt to specify the sample sizes for these phases (i.e. phases two and three of the research) would be counterproductive. To avoid this, information regarding the samples for phases two and three would not be divulged now except to say that for phase two, the entire country would be divided into three zones (i.e. northern, middle belt and southern zones), and out of these zones, 9 regions (out of the 16 regions in Ghana) shall be selected purposively for the research. From among the 9 regions, SHSs would be selected randomly for the purposes of the research. The purposive sampling of regions and the random selection of

schools shall be done in such a way that the sampled SHSs for the study are distributed across Ghana. Also, from the regions and SHSs sampled, research participants from the various stakeholder groupings (e.g. Regional Directors of Education, Headteachers/Headmistresses, SMC Chairs, Assistant Heads, Senior Housemasters/Housemistresses, School Bursars/Matrons, Teachers, Students etc.) would be selected and from whom data for the research would be generated and/or gathered for analysis to answer the research questions posed.

In respect of phase three of our research process, and for the same cascading design purposes, qualitative data shall be collected from ‘national level actors of policy’ in the Ghanaian education system. These actors (comprising officials of government and educational system and individual from CSOs, development partner agencies, institutions of higher learning, NGOs, INGOs among others) shall be selected purposively for elite interviews. Two interrelated purposes underlie these interviews. One, to present the findings of the previous two phases for some form of validation and/or triangulation. Two, to gauge the understanding of the national level actors so as to be able to use their insights (as well as the findings from the two previous phases) to proffer policy recommendations on the implementation of the FSHS policy going forward.

### ***Instruments for data collection***

In view of the research design chosen for the study and the nature of the research questions posed, data generally was collected using multiple research instruments, namely: semi-structured open-ended interview guides, self-administered questionnaires, observation checklists and document review guides. Granted especially that the baseline study phase of the study seeks to undertake multi-site case studies with a cross-section of SHSs in the Central Region of Ghana to set the base for the entire research study, these four research instruments shall be employed during the first phase of the three phases of the study. For phase two, these four research instruments again shall be employed for data collection owing to the nation-wide data collection focus and the quantitative and qualitative data driven purpose and/or rationale of activities at this phase. In research phase three, however, semi-structured open-ended interview guide is the only research instrument to be used owing to the focus on engagements with national level actors of policy by means of qualitative elite interviews.

While this helps in identifying the research instruments to be deployed in the entire research study, it is important to add that the detailed information concerning the instruments provided in this section of the research are relevant particularly to the baseline study phase (i.e. phase one). This is due to the cascading intent that the research team envisage and the fact that data collection activities relating to research phases two and three would come off later, typically after collection and analysis of phase one data and re-design of instruments (if need be).

So in the case of the semi-structured open-ended interviews to be conducted during phase one, carefully and expertly developed interview guides shall be designed and used to engage and elicit relevant information from the different participant groups (including: Regional Directors of Education, Headmasters/Headmistresses, Assistant Headmasters/Headmistresses and School Bursers) relative to the overarching purpose of the study and the research questions posed. In terms of structure, the sets of interview guides to be employed in the research described in this research shall have thematic areas relative to the research questions posed as well as issues emanating from the review of literature. This is to allow for in-depth probing of the issues concerned with FSHS policy implementation across schools in Ghana. So, for example, in formulating/constructing the interview items, consideration would be given to specific issues such as how the FSHS policy is being implemented in schools across the country, the delivery approach(es)/methods that are being employed in the implementation, aspects of the policy aims and objectives that are being achieved, aspects of the implementation process that resonate well with both implementers and the beneficiary communities, and the components of the implementation process that are not going on as expected. The other issues that the interview guides would take account of include: how schools are responding to and/or dealing with the challenges that confront them as they make efforts to implement the policy, how the Government (through the MOE and GES) is responding to and/or addressing the challenges/problems that the implementation process is beset with, as well as the practical policy recommendations that the Government, schools, CSOs, development partner agencies and stakeholders have to offer to help improve the practice of implementing the FSHS policy in schools across the country.

In the case of the self-administered questionnaires to be used in the baseline study phase, different sets, each corresponding with its appropriate participant grouping would be utilised to elicit responses from Housemaster/Housemistresses, Teachers and Students with respect to the overarching research purpose and research questions posed. The questionnaire items

would focus largely on the specific issues covered by the semi-structured open-ended interviews relative to the research questions posed. This is to ensure that responses elicited from the two data points complement each other for ease of analysis and for triangulation purposes. In a similar manner to the semi-structured open-ended interviews, the questionnaire items would be organised in sections reflecting the thematic areas of the research questions posed. Additionally, there shall be a section on demographic information, where personal and/or background information relating to respondents shall be collected to help set the findings of the questionnaire data in proper context. Essentially, the questionnaire items shall consist of closed items (involving a five-point rating scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = indifferent, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree, together with some ranking scales) and a few open-ended items.

The third research instrument to be used during the baseline study phase of the study is an observation checklist. As the name implies, an observation checklist is a list of questions an observer will need to answer when they are observing and assessing an individual, object or process within the process of research. In this sense, the observation checklist by implication could be a list of items (indicating objects, processes and practices) whose availability or otherwise are verified by researchers during the research processes. In this line of reasoning, and for the purposes of the research to be undertaken in the baseline phase of the study described in this research, an observation checklist would be carefully designed to take account of the key observations to be made during the data collection process about the availability (or otherwise) of objects, processes and practices of ‘evidential value’ which could help indicate how the FSHS policy is being implemented in school across the region and the successes (or otherwise) being chalked up by the implementation process. The items to be included on the observation checklist, and whose availability (or otherwise) would be verified shall comprise the following, among others: qualified trained teachers, classroom furniture, teaching and learning materials, sitting spaces, sleeping spaces in dormitories, sleeping beds, luggage/baggage spaces, good and/or quality food and manageable class sizes.

Based on the research, an extant literature reviews on the FSHS policy implementation was undertaken to help garner the views of authors/experts on the subject of free education provision generally. To help achieve this as well as the broader aims of the research, a document review guide (consisting mainly of a checklist) was designed to identify and select relevant documents needed for initial scoping and review of literature for this purpose. The

documents to be identified for selection for review include policy documents on the FSHS policy implementation, rules and regulations second cycle institutions, institutional (school) reports and journal articles (including opinion and feature articles) on the FSHS policy implementation. The data/information from these documents would provide insights generally on the state of the FSHS policy implementation in schools across the country that would be used to triangulate the data collected from the other sources during the baseline study period. Essentially, the document review guide shall offer a systematic procedure for identifying, analysing and deriving useful information from existing documents. So, although the process of identifying, obtaining and analysing necessary documents is time-consuming (Bowen, 2009), one major advantage of the document review guide is that its use would enable information contained in extant documents to be independently verified. Beside this, the document review process will be done independently without needing to solicit extensive input from other sources.

Before their utilisation for data collection purposes, these research instruments (especially the semi-structured interview guides and self-administered questionnaires) shall be tested to ensure and assure their validity and reliability. In the case of the former, a pilot study would be undertaken in the Greater Accra region, where respondents/participants from selected schools would be made to respond to questions on the prepared interview guides. The data from these interview sessions shall be transcribed and analysed thematically to observe the data quality and also to see if excerpts from the interviews serve to answer the research questions posed directly. In cases where the research expectations do not appear to have been met, revisions and/or corrections shall be undertaken to get the interview guides ready for use during the baseline study phase of data collection. In the same way, the questionnaires shall be tested in the same schools that the interviews are conducted in for the same quality assurance purposes as the interviews. The content validity of the questionnaires shall be determined through the expert opinion of an experienced researchers among the research team. The reliability of the questionnaire items shall be determined using a reliability coefficient with an average of alpha coefficient of reliability of 0.8.

### ***Procedures for data collection***

Owing to the cascading intent of the research processes mentioned earlier and the fact that data collection activities relating to research phases two and three are not described in this current research, the data collection procedures that this section outlines would focus only on

the baseline study phase of this research. The procedures for data collection for phases two and three would be described and justified fully as the research study progresses and initial study findings begin to unfold.

Access to the participating schools in the Central Region for data collection purposes for the baseline study phase (as well as the subsequent phases) would be facilitated by GES. This facilitation (for data collection purposes) would take the form of a letter of information to be sent by GES to all selected schools in the Central Region before the research team embarks upon data collection. In this letter of information, the purpose of the study would be stated clearly, and both IEPA and GNECC would be introduced to the selected schools as the collaborating institutions that are undertaking the study. Based on this initial introduction, the IEPA/GNECC research team would send follow-up letters to the selected schools to arrange convenient dates for the data collection exercise. In addition, personal introductory letters would be given to the field officers to be delivered to the institutions to enable them to grant them access for the purposes of data collection.

In all, 7 researchers and 35 research assistants were recruited and trained to assist in data collection and analysis for the baseline study phase of the research that this research describes. The field staff and their team leaders for their respective schools of data collection shall operate based on standards of good practice agreed on during the fieldwork training workshop.

Data collection would be carried out in two major phases. The first phase, which has already culminated in an aspect of this research, involves desk review of relevant policy documents, empirical literature, and technical and institutional reports to provide the context and theoretical support for the research. This phase of data collection has helped to firm up the study in two major ways. First, it has contributed to the development of this research research which outlines the research ideas, ingredients and/or components parts of this research study. Second, the collection and review of documents for the purposes of the research study has also facilitated the development of data collection instruments for the baseline study. This is seen in the fact that the instrument items developed were informed by insights from the documents/literature reviews. The second phase of the data collection process, on the other hand, would involve multi-site case study data collection (involving both qualitative and quantitative data collection) from selected schools in the Central Region using semi-



structured interview guides, self-administered questionnaires and observation checklists. (See the section on Sample and Sampling Procedures for information on the specific schools to be selected for the purposes of data collection for the baseline study phase of this study.)

### ***Data management and analysis procedures***

In the baseline study phase of this research, different analysis techniques would be employed to analyse data gathered. As is indicated earlier, textual data to be collected in the form of documents would be/were analysed through reviews and synthesis of literature to provide the context and theoretical support for the research. This process of document analysis generally involves skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination) and interpretation (Bowen, 2009). This process is also iterative as it combines elements of content analysis and thematic analysis. In the context of this study, the content analysis of documents to be gathered would be helpful as it would serve to organise information into categories related to the central questions of the research. The thematic analysis also involves a first-pass document review in which meaningful and relevant passages of text or other data would be identified and organised according to relevant themes.

Following up on this, the quantitative data to be generated as part of the multi-site case study in this baseline study phase would be organised, managed and analysed using SPSS version 20, a quantitative data analysis software. Essentially, the quantitative data analysis would employ descriptive statistics (i.e. frequency tables and charts) to present the findings of the data analysis. In the case of the qualitative data generated from the multi-site case studies through interviews, the interview transcripts generated would be managed and analysed using NVivo 8 to store, code, categorise and analyse the data. The use of NVivo software would facilitate a more nuanced comparison within and across cases using coded data as well as data storage (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This would serve to identify patterns and themes to ensure rigour and trustworthiness.

As part of data storage plan, data management and preservation strategies and standards would be followed to ensure that the data gathered is handled professionally. Thus, the qualitative and quantitative data to be generated and written to be generated would be retained for at least ten years after this project ends. Access to these datasets generated would be available for educational, research and not-for-profit purposes.

### **Ethical considerations**

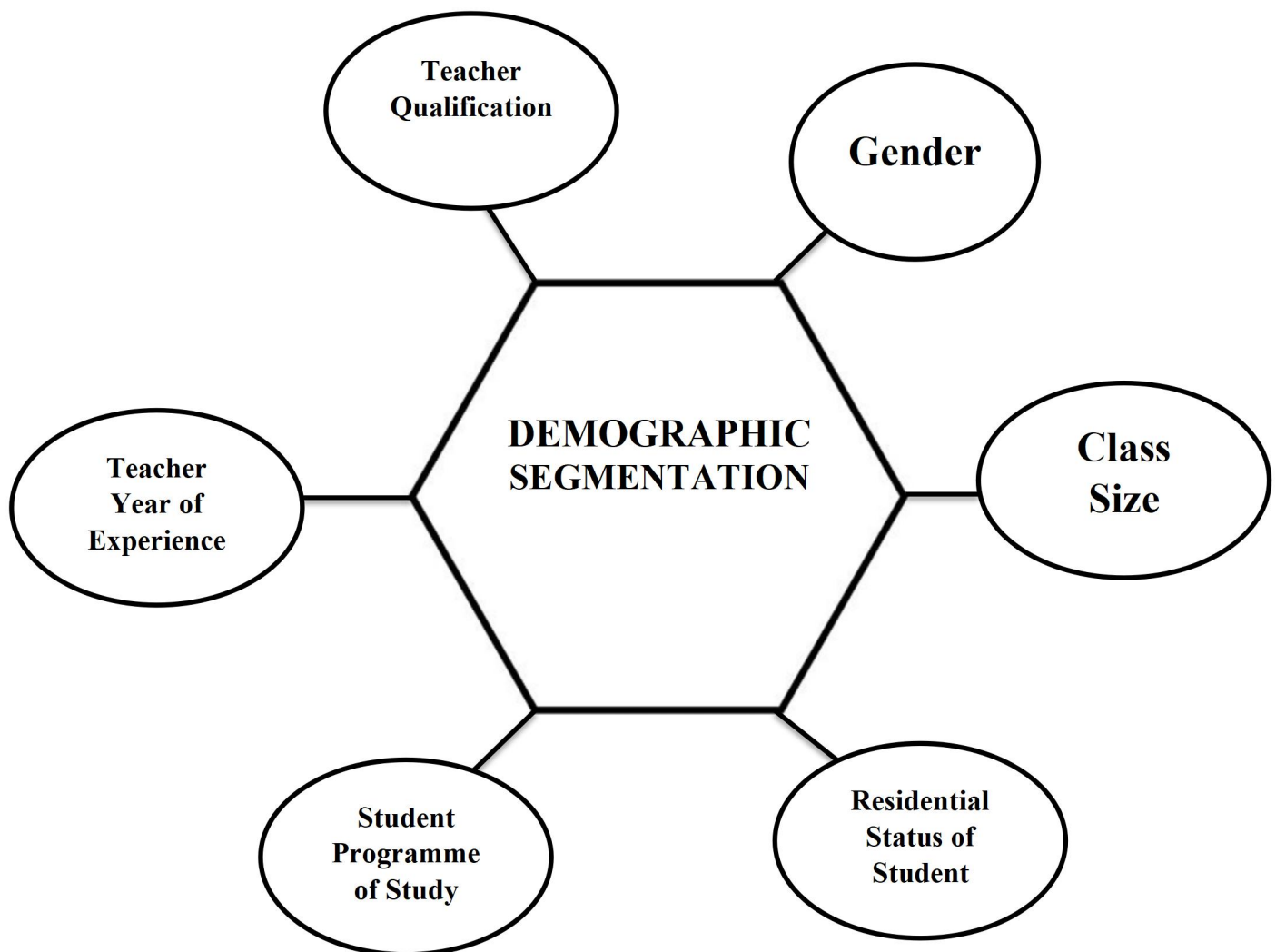
The process of carrying out this research requires that potential risks and ethical issues that are likely to affect the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings are given the needed consideration and addressed fully. In this regard, ethical protocols such as obtaining informed consent, respecting the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents, avoiding emotional or psychological harm to respondents and ensuring that respondents participate voluntarily in the research would be established and adhered to strictly to ensure quality and integrity of the research process. (See Appendix A for the consent form designed to aid access to participants and to encourage them to participate in the study.) To ensure that the research is planned and executed in line with the tenets of research ethics, the project research and research activities would be submitted to the University of Cape Coast Institutional Review Board for approval after which the research project activities shall commence.

## FINDINGS

### **Introduction.**

The free senior high school policy is one of best social and economic intervention policies that openly affect both parents and their wards in senior high school. This realisation is reached on the backdrop of the policy's role in redeeming parents from their economic and financial burden. This study therefore looks at the effect of introducing the free senior high school policy on the economic and social lives of parents and students respectively. These are findings of the first phase of the research.

### **Demographic Segmentation of Respondents.**



The figure above represents the demographic segmentation of respondent with a sample of one thousand three hundred and sixteen (1316) respondents. These included teachers (SHS Head, Assistants Heads & Subject Teachers), school bursar and students

## **Research question 1**

### **6. How is the FSHS policy being implemented in schools across the country? (What delivery approach(es)/methods are employed/are being employed to implement the policy?)**

In Ghana, Article 25(1)(b) of the 1992 Constitution states 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'. Efforts by past governments to increase access and equity in secondary education include: free secondary education for students from the north and those of northern extraction, Cocoa Board scholarship, and merit scholarships for secondary schools, hardship scholarships, senior high school subsidy, and progressively free secondary education [1]. The Government started implementing the progressively Free Senior High School (SHS) policy in direct response to fulfilling the requirement of Article 25(1) (b) of the 1992 National Constitution. This began by absorbing the expenses of day-students in public SHSs. The sponsorship included the absorption of examination, entertainment, library, Students Representative Council (SRC), sports, culture, science and mathematics quiz, Information Communication Technology (ICT) and co-curricular fees for 320,488 day-students in public SHSs. This was expanded to include 120,000 boarding students by 2015/16 academic year. These interventions have led to increases in enrolments from 393,995 in 2007/08 to 787,861 in 2015/16 [1]. Despite the increase in enrolment, high proportion of candidates who qualified and were placed could not enroll into secondary schools

#### **1.1 Features of the Free Senior High School (FSHS) Policy**

The following are the main features of the FSHS in Ghana.

- 1 Eligible to all Ghanaian youth and young adults who are placed into public second cycle institutions by the Computerised School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS) starting from the 2017/18 academic year.
- 2 The duration of the FSHS scholarship is for three (3) years.
- 3 The government absorbs all tuition fees of students in senior high schools.
- 4 The government absorbs feeding costs for all those admitted as boarding students but lunch for those who are not in boarding house.

- 5 To ensure equity, 30% of places in elite schools are reserved for applicants from public Junior High Schools (JHSs).
- 6 The government provides infrastructure; buildings, furniture, teaching and learning materials, etc.

With this approach, the policy began and covered the expenses of all candidates who were placed in SHSs for the 2017/2018 academic year. Currently, all students in SHS are covered by the FSHS.

With the Free Senior High School Policy, vocational and technical schools are accessible and available to all students including none payment of tuition fees, library books, admission, utility, science centre, examination, meals, free textbooks, and free boarding facilities. The programme has brought relief to parents who would otherwise have borne the cost of secondary education of their wards. In other word, the programme serves as a barrier broker for those who could not afford senior high school education due to poverty.

## **Research question 2**

### **What aspects of the FSHS policy aims and objectives are being achieved and why?**

- Removal of cost barriers. Remove Cost Barriers through the absorption of fees approved by GES council.
- Expansion of infrastructure. ...
- Improvement in Quality and Equity. ...
- Development of Employable Skills.

### **2.1 Increased Enrolment**

All of the interviewees agreed that the free SHS programme had increased the number of junior high school students enrolling in senior high school in the area. This is stated to a Regional Director of Study: "Since tuition and boarding costs are covered entirely by the government, the initiative has made it possible for more JHS graduates to pursue SHS education. Prior to the policy's adoption, it was anticipated that student enrolment in senior high schools would rise.

This fieldwork outcome is consistent with Ngeno and Simatwa's (2015) research on the "impact of Kenya's free secondary education program on dropout rates." The number of

students moving from the junior secondary level to the senior secondary level has increased, according to Ngeno and Simatwa (2015). Accordingly, if there is an increase in enrolment in education as a consequence of equal access, the government may improve quality of education and development. Parents are now more motivated to make sure their children continue their education after successfully completing the basic education due to the non-payment of tuition fees and boarding expenses by parents.

## **2.2 Equitable Access to Education.**

The provision of fair access to secondary school is another potential benefit of the free SHS program. One major advantage of the free SHS policy that was cited by 100 respondents was equity.

"Access to senior high school education, which was non-existent before the adoption of the policy. Rich or poor parents are not subject to discrimination under the free SHS scheme. All children, whether from wealthy or low-income households, are entitled to senior high school education. Governments in "Sub-Saharan Africa" have viewed eliminating the tuition and boarding costs paid by students as a measure (Field Data) in order to fulfil the Sustainable Development Goals' objectives for education. This is due to the fact that prior to the implementation of the policy, senior secondary level fees were a significant barrier to some children's admission to senior secondary level education (Ohba, 2009).

## **2.3 Reduction of Financial Burden on Parents.**

The free SHS programme, according to the survey, has also alleviated parents' financial burdens. Many parents angrily lamented having to pay their children's escalating tuition and boarding expenses prior to the implementation of the regulation, especially those who were enrolling them in senior high schools for the first time.

As a result of this financial constraints, particularly for those living in rural areas, some children were not able to attend senior high education. With the government covering both the tuition and the boarding costs, it has reduced the financial pressure on parents so their children can attend senior high school without charge, after completing their basic education. Without the free SHS program, "a large proportion of students who would have stayed at home due to lack of money are at school," a statement made by an assistant headmaster who was interviewed. Therefore, it is clear that removing this financial burden from parents has improved access to education for all. The money that parents would have spent on tuition and boarding can now be put to better use in other ways.

## **2.4 Recruitment of Teachers**

The respondents who participated in the survey also identified teacher recruitment as a critical aspect of the free SHS programme. If the quality of education is to be improved, it is necessary to hire additional instructors in order to accommodate the anticipated growth in SHS enrolment. The adoption of the policy, according to respondents, “it is a fantastic chance for these instructors to be posted to schools where their skills would be needed because, in addition, there are many trained teachers who are yet to be posted”. According to the capital theory of school effectiveness, with more students enrolled but no additional enrolment (of teachers), teachers may become overburdened and unable to impart knowledge to every student at the expected level. This would not only have an impact on students' academic performance but also the intellectual capital that the free SHS aims to achieve.

### **Research question 3**

#### **What aspects of the FSHS policy implementation are not going on well or as expected, and why?**

Given the numerous issues the continent is facing, several implementation obstacles for the FSHS programme in Africa have been deemed impractical. Assessing some of the difficulties in carrying out the free SHS program in the Central Region was one of the study's main goals. Interviewed respondents outlined a number of the program's difficulties. These difficulties include "a lack of suitable infrastructure, a lack of proper distribution of teaching and learning materials, a lack of adequate teachers, and a delay in the government's delivery of funding."

### **3.1 Inadequate Infrastructure**

All respondents acknowledged that the region's senior high schools' subpar infrastructure was one of the key obstacles to the efficient implementation of the free SHS programme. The free SHS program was implemented at a time when senior high schools were having infrastructural issues, according to respondents. As a result, the free SHS policy did not coincide with a proportional increase in infrastructure to accommodate the growing student enrolment. This has put stress on the region's senior high schools' sparsely populated facilities.

Participants in the survey, including teachers and assistant headmasters, emphasized how the lack of adequate infrastructure has led to congestion in classrooms, dorms, dining halls, libraries, and labs.

A teacher, for instance, recounted that "certain students don't get seats to sit in class since enrolment has grown." A second instructor said that "the rise in enrolment has resulted in congestion in certain classrooms totalling more than 60 which affects effective monitoring." According to an assistant headmaster, there is now "a dearth of room for boarders at boarding schools, and some institutions even run shift during mealtime," as a result of the rising enrolment and constrained facilities.

The aforementioned conclusion adds to a prior research by Apeanti and Asiedu-Addo (2008) that looked at teachers' perceptions of educational reforms and addressed the problem of insufficient infrastructure as a barrier to reforms' effectiveness. From the theoretical point of view, having a good infrastructure is essential to provide students with a high-quality education. Therefore, the goals of the free SHS programme would be challenging to attain without a comparable expansion in senior school infrastructure.

### **3.2 Inadequate Supply of Teaching and Learning Materials**

The lack of suitable teaching and learning resources was further noted in the survey as one of the major challenges facing the senior high schools in the region. Respondents alluded to the dearth of instructional and learning resources that is seriously impairing teaching and learning activities in the district's senior schools.

A teacher said that "there has not been any provision of instructional aids" since the programme's commencement. The capital theory of school performance makes obvious the need of having enough teaching and learning resources to provide high-quality education.

This is so, that the delivery of the curriculum and, consequently, the performance of the students, might be negatively impacted by a shortage of teaching and learning resources, such as laboratory equipment.

### **3.4 Inadequate Human Resources**

Another issue resulting from the free SHS programme has been pushed as being the inadequate supply of instructors in senior high schools. Due to the policy's increasing enrolment of students, the student to teacher ratio has not improved.

"The teachers lamented how difficult it was to manage the children because of the enormous class numbers".

Studies conducted in Kenya and Uganda by Kalunda and Otanga (2015) and Oyaro (2008), which identified teacher shortages and heavy teaching loads as the primary issues secondary



schools faced after the implementation of "free secondary education," are consistent with the insufficient availability of teachers as a result of increased enrolment. According to the capital theory of educational efficacy, having a sufficient supply of instructors considerably improves the standard of instruction. This suggests that the senior high schools in the region will suffer considerably from a lack of effort to attract new instructors or teachers in senior high schools in the region.

### **3.5 Delay in the Payment of Grants by Government.**

The majority of the instructors who were questioned bemoaned the government's slowness in disbursing subsidies. The government is required by the policy to offer financing and grants to all senior high schools in order for them to properly carry out their activities. As a result, for the schools to be able to operate efficiently, the prompt availability of cash is quite important.

However, "the government mostly lags in the grant delivery to the various institutions," was noted. According to the head teachers, this placed a tremendous responsibility on them to get the school to run efficiently. Respondents called attention to the fact that most government handouts were insufficient (School Heads). As a result, some of the programs may not be completed by the schools.

A lack of sufficient funding combined with a holdup in the transfer of these funds may prevent effective and high-quality education. In order to share the same resources across a relatively large number of students, Verspoor (2008) claims that sub-Saharan nations that offer free secondary education are bound by low public income.

### **Research question 4**

**How are schools responding to and/or dealing with the challenges (if any) that confront them as they make efforts to implement the policy? (Any innovations, best/good practice and/or learning points to share?)**

Some policy analysts have noticed financing challenges associated to the Free SHS Policy. They argue that, this is a paramount angle to which this project should have first been based on, thus, in terms of the financial demands, how to overcome them and source to generate revenue to cover up for the government free spending. According to these experts, this was completely omitted making the project be synonymous with a car with no fuel but with the driver and other occupants on board ready to take off. The Policy seems to have taken off well, but question of sustainability and funding will gradually but certainly stop the project

before it even leaves the initial stages. The policy has significantly drained the country; parents are afraid about being passed on the financial responsibility through taxation or through other indirect ways the government may come up with. School going children are frightened that the project may not be long term and that before long their joy may be short-lived.

The major consequences of this important policy to Ghana's economy is an infrastructural challenge. The nature of the free SHS budget towards goods and services as against capital expenditure reveals an existing infrastructural inadequacy. Students in some schools have been compelled to sleep in classrooms and exposed to unhygienic conditions. This because some schools were not ready for the large influx of new students which led to congestion and a drop in the quality of education. Many would have thought, immediately, the government would have put up a number of structures like classrooms, dormitories, dining halls, expand existing ones and in some cases build schools from the scratch to overcome the infrastructural challenge. This has been some improvements over the years but a lot more to be done.

According to respondents feeding has become a challenge since feeding grants and under supply of foodstuff is making it difficult for heads to feed students. This is having a toll on parents and students which eventually will affect academic work. Head in the event of finding a way out are owing some suppliers.

The question asked respondents to list the actions they thought would improve "successful implementation of the free SHS program." The respondents noted a number of problems that may improve the region's ability to execute the policy effectively. These elements include the availability of infrastructure, the hiring of educators, and the provision of instructional materials. Others stressed the requirement for additional stakeholder involvement in order to improve the policy's efficacy in execution (Deputy Minister for Education, Dr. Yaw Adu Twum). Respondents stated that in order to reduce government spending, "the government should permit parents who are able and willing to bear some share of the funds such as food and clothes to do so". They call for a policy review to sustain the policy.

The aforementioned problems amply demonstrate that the free SHS program has substantial challenges that, if not solved, can impede effective, high-quality education in the Central Region and the country at large. The capital theory of school effectiveness has underlined that increasing enrolment, appropriate physical and material resources, adequate skilled instructors, adequate and prompt funding from the government, community and stakeholder

support are all crucial for improving the quality of education. According to the study's findings, while the free SHS programme has significantly increased senior high school enrolment, decreased financial burden on parents, and promoted equitable access to education, there has not been a corresponding improvement in terms of infrastructure, sufficient teachers, teaching and learning materials, which are absolutely necessary for quality education to be enhanced (Director: Ministry of Education).

### **Research question 5**

**What practical policy recommendations do the Government, schools, CSOs, development partner agencies and stakeholders have to offer to help improve the practice of implementing the FSHS policy?**

The Free Senior High School (SHS) policy, for both boarding and day students in Ghana, as introduced in September 2017 by President, Nana Akufo-Addo's government, received several applause and commendations from experts and sector stakeholders, hence calls for its review by the same authorities cannot be politically motivated, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) has expressed.

According to the CSOs, the significant role of the policy in attaining Sustainable Development Goal four (SDG-4), and its importance in human resource development as a key social intervention were touted by stakeholders both local and international, developmental agencies, donor organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and experts in academia, as well as the clergy who in some years past own these schools, therefore a call by some people to review the funding structure definitely would be for better functionality.

The Presbyterian church commended the policy and government for introducing such a great social intervention initiative when it was introduced. For instance, the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG), Rt Rev. Prof. Joseph Obiri Yeboah Mante, at the opening ceremony of the 19th General Assembly of the PCG at Abetifi in the Eastern Region, in August 2019, commended the government for the introduction of the free Senior High School (SHS).

The Chief Executive Officer of Africa Education Watch (Eduwatch), Kofi Asare, stated that monitoring the free SHS trends over the past few months, he has gathered news reports of

key institutions, statesmen, religious bodies and clergy, traditional rulers, and academia call for review of the policy.

He cited headlines made by Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Asantehene, Most. Rev. Charles Palmer-Buckle, Prof. Otchere Addai-Mensah, Dean and Senior Lecturer Haematology/Immunology KNUST, and Prof Stephen Adei, former Chairman of the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC).

Others are Catholic Bishops, Presbyterian church, Methodist church, Conference of Heads and Assisted Senior High Schools (CHASS), National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT), Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), National Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), CSOs, among many others.

Interestingly, Minister of Finance, Ken Ofori Atta, a cabinet member, and Director-General of the Ghana Education Service (GES), Prof. Kwasi Opoku Amankwah, have all expressed in one form or the other need to review the policy.

In recent times, food shortage has hard hit the SHSs with some headteachers warning of closing down the schools. This has further heightened the call for review but the government is of the opposite opinion that everything is under control.

Kofi Asare said: “I have engaged over 22 Parents Associations (PAs) this week alone. So far, the lowest parents are paying for SHS feeding is GHC300. We just paid GHC300 for my nephew at St Peters SHS.

According to Joy News, schools like Wesley Girls are paying GHC500; that’s about the entire feeding cost for the semester.

### **What exactly do the review calls mean?**

According to Richard Kovey Kwashie, Convener, Commercialization of Education (CAPCOE), The constitution made provision for secondary and tertiary education to be free at a point. The problem with what is being implemented now is the wholesale nature and the fact that feeding is extended to even day students.

“Mind you, we still have some primary schools in certain parts of the country not being fed. Junior High Schools (JHS) students are excluded from feeding and when they move to SHS we assume they can’t feed themselves so the state should bear the cost,” he said.

The financial burden this is imposing on the state is making it difficult to channel resources into infrastructure at the pre-tertiary level.

Therefore, the review calls are seeking a cost-sharing middle ground that will relieve the government of some of the cost items and give parents that are capable and willing to pay the opportunity to pay full or part payment depending on the agreed outcomes of the review

### **What is the cost-sharing research?**

Some stakeholders want education to be free and accessible to every child but others are of the view that it could have been based on the income level of parents and guardians where some could pay full, others half, and the rest free.

In this situation, what the middle and upper-class pay could be used to take care of the poor. Breaking it down further, all category 'C' and 'D' schools could be a free system while 'B' pay half the feeding cost and 'A' pay full cost for schooling.

All are geared towards easing the cost burden for the government to improve and upgrade C and D schools to reduce the craving for every child opting for A schools.

According to the Archbishop for Cape Coast, Most Rev. Palmer-Buckle the free SHS policy has come to offer relief to parents, but the government needs to reconsider reviewing it to remove all bottlenecks.

### **CONCLUSION**

There is increasing recognition by policy makers and analysts of the significance of the policy environment in executing public policies such as the Free SHS Policy in Ghana. One such environment is the task environment which connotes the socio-economic conditions prevailing in the policy area, values and interests of the official senior policy advisors. Relative to the socio-economic conditions, first and foremost, Ghana's Free Education Policy and its attendant double track system are implemented in both boarding and day-schools by which boarders have three meals a day and day students have one meal a day. This imposes huge cost on the government. This juxtaposed with the country's level of economic development, poses difficulties. The saliency of this argument rests on the fact that Ghana, like many Third World countries, suffers from a number of challenges and uncertainties which ultimately foster the maintenance of a very low level of economic development. Litany of some of these uncertainties are natural disasters, undue dependence on economic

relationships with very powerful capitalist countries, fluctuating commodity prices, inflation and monetary instability

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the light of the foregoing, it would be useful for implementers of the Free SHS (Ministry of Education, through the Free SHS Secretariat) to consider building consensus on a reliable and sustainable funding source dedicated solely to the policy. With reliable source of funding, infrastructure could be improved timely disbursement of feeding grants and food supply to schools. This will help minimise the challenges associated with the Free SHS.

It is important that governments find sustainable sources of funding the educational system and expand academic user facilities and increasing the numerical strength of both teaching and non-teaching staff in various senior high schools

Develop and implement a framework to encourage the financial contribution of parents toward funding of the free SHS policy.

Implement infrastructure gap finding in the FSHS document.

## **Notes**

1. Although SHSs in Ghana are located within districts, for the purposes of the research study District Education Offices (and their respective Director of Education) are not involved in this study. The reason for this is that, under the decentralised system of educational administration in Ghana, SHSs operate directly under Regional Education Directorates and not the District Education Directorates.

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