



Political Leadership and Policy Making. A Case of the Educational Sector of Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Article 35 (7) of the Ghana state policy act advise that as practicable is it would be, a current government can continue with the projects and policies undertaken by the previous government so far as it goes to enhance the well-being of the nation. However, it appears that from time pasts, as far back as the colonial era, governments that have come into power have ended up establishing policies that go to support their political vision for the country which is more often than not tainted by their political ambitions. This study sought to understand how political leadership in Ghana has influenced the educational system through policy making. Interviews were conducted with twenty three respondents who comprised of some officials from the Ghana education service, Educational experts, headmasters as well as teachers, who were selected using the criterion selection technique. The over politicization of government policies have remained a very common factor affecting the quality of education in the country. The inconsistencies in the policies formulated by various governments when they come into power is largely due to the fact that they seek to impress a populace that expects a new government to bring something new, this has resulted in governments in power formulating new policies which appear to lack synthesis with previous policies. Analysis of the views from respondents also points to the fact that apart from infrastructure, learning materials and availability of skilled teachers, the behaviour of educational heads when it comes to the usage of government funds remains a very important factor affecting the quality of education in the country. The paper also concludes by supporting the idea that some public policies with regards to education should be entrenched to disallow for misguided changes in educational plans which has brought adverse effect on the sector as a whole.

Keywords: Political Leadership, Public Policy, Educational Policy, Governments of Ghana.

INTRODUCTION

The attainment of a robust economy of every nation depends on the various policies formulated by its leadership which lies in the hands of its government, a function of a political system. Despite the several facets of an economy, one of the most vital aspects of an economic system is that of its educational sector. An observation of the Ghanaian political system in the light of policy decision making over the past twenty years reveals that every regime which came into power brought on board new policies, more often than not scrapping away older ones, to champion their course with the aim of pressing on for another term of office, usually four years. That is, the state of governance and leadership in the Ghanaian public circles has not geared towards the objectives of traditional leadership principles such as embarking on policies for the benefit of the people. The leadership experienced in the political governance in Ghana have geared towards having to set out policies with the expectation of achieving them to set the mark for the next term of elections (Braithwaite & Seidu, 2015).

Unfortunately, this has brought heavy rains on the educational system in Ghana. Sadly speaking, the educational system in Ghana has had to go through several phases from the time of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah through to the current president John Dramani Mahama. Although these past leaders have introduced diverse reforms so far as education in the country is concerned, these reforms have been more of antagonistic rather than synergistic due to politicization. The consistent variation in the educational policies of political leaders in Ghana, especially the over-politicization and lack of long term planning in the educational sector, has motivated this study.

EDUCATIONAL POLICY FORMULATION IN GHANA

The Convention People's Party (CPP), under the late President Osagyefuo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, introduced several reforms including the free compulsory basic education and the northern scholarship schemes to make education reachable to as many Ghanaians as possible in order to achieve the Africanization dream. Through this initiative, the prospects of Ghanaians studying abroad became very high. Furthermore, this led to the introduction of vocational courses into the Junior High schools to equip the students to acquire some skills for entrepreneurship. However, this action plan suffered from the fact that most of the schools were highly impoverished with educational facilities and hence could not meet the high aims the then government had set with this action plan. Nevertheless, the system ran up till the year 2007 when the newly elected President at the time in the person of John Agyekum

Kuffour openly declared to Ghanaians in his inaugural speech the intent by he and his administration to alter various policies especially in the education sector through professional development programs as well as an entire look at the educational structure of the country and how the schooling system was going to be financed. This his administration did by implementing a four year SHS education as opposed to the former three year SHS period set up by previous administrations. The seeming positivity about the four year SHS education was the fact that it allowed teachers to have ample time to cover as many topics in the syllabi as possible so that the students are well equipped for future endeavors. This however, was not well received by the opposition parties. The politics of leadership in the governance sector saw the opposition party, the NDC, to hugely criticize this idea and made it as a part of their campaign to return to the three year system. As a result of this, the four year system did not see much years as a lost in 2008 by the NPP to the NDC saw a return to the three year system. A committee set up by the NDC government at the time reported that the basis for cancellation of the four year SHS system was due infrastructural concerns, the nation was not prepared although few ones were done during the NPP regime to cater for the four years system to some extent.

Besides, currently, another policy implemented in the field of education is the cancellation of the teacher training allowance which was formulated by previous governments to motivate individuals into the teaching field as a results of the lack of teachers at a point in time which has existed for long. This met the huge disapproval of the trainees as they expressed their frustration. This issue has also been politicized as the current major opposition party, the NPP, promise to restore this and have bombarded the current government of the effects it is likely to have on the country's educational sector as a whole. What this implies is that, just as occurred with that of the three year-four year switches, there is the likelihood that the teacher training allowance will also suffer the same fate.

Currently, the government ruling government, NDC, have introduced an educational policy that will seek to convert polytechnics in the country into technical universities. Generally, educational experts have upheld that the idea is very good as it would help reduce the level of unemployment in the country by producing more skilled graduates. However, the main issue with the policy has got to do with when and how the conversion should be implemented. The Deputy Minister in charge of Tertiary Education, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa, have openly addressed government's stands by reporting that the government intends to convert six universities in the first face by September 2023, while it puts in efforts to aid the other four polytechnics rise to meet the requirements for their conversion as well. This however have met several criticisms as renews scholars in the field of education such as Prof. Ayee, a visiting Professor of Commonwealth Studies (University of London), have argued that the idea to rush in the conversion of these polytechnics is purely political due to impending elections and could be catastrophic citing cases of South Africa and Germany as instances where these failed due to inadequate curricula for the institutions. A study by Amedorme, Agbezudor and Sakyiama (2014) affirmed the thoughts of Prof Ayee by recommending that the government take very much time with the policy and that conversion should be given a period of ten years to allow polytechnics develop their full curricula as well as the required equipment especially infrastructural wise and skilled lecturers to meet the task. The politicization of converting polytechnics into technical universities could prove costly and a flop if the right policies are not followed. Policy making takes time and should not be rushed, especially in cases where it would have direct impact on the citizenry. The incremental model of policy making posits that, policy formulation and implementation should follow s stepwise format, that is, one things should be taken at a time in order to allow for a more in-depth analysis of issues to prevent adverse loss along the way (Jones, 2005). A policy of this calibre should mean government taking enough time to also learn from Ethiopia when the normed planning model was applied to boost their three decade educational system which covered from primary to tertiary education (Cohen, 2023).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The inconsistencies in the public policies of governments worldwide have had an adverse effect on various sectors of an economy (Udogu, 2008; Adei, 2003; Mensah, 2009; Grint, 2000). This is partly because leadership in politics is viewed more as a competition rather than as a continual succession of nation building. That is, one party comes into office with the view of bringing into power their own ideas with the aim of impressing the public to be voted into power again in the next term after four years. What this implies is that, most policies that were started by the previous government are either restructured or scrapped away. Political leadership in these parts of the world has been known for showmanship where one leader enacts their own policies only to be followed by an overhaul of policies in the next set of four years. When this happens various sectors of the economy suffer from setback.

In Ghana, education and employment sector have been recognized to have suffered the most under such occurrences (Amankrah, 2000; Allah-Mensah, 2009). Some researchers have made enquiries into the diverse nature of governance and policies within the country (Antwi, 2015), other have also concentrated on the various regimes of Ghanaian governance system before 2012 and how these have affected some parts of the economy such as the unemployment situation in the country (Seidu & Braimah, 2015). This paper tends to explore the nature of policy making in the government sector and its effect in the educational system of Ghana.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Researchers have made enquiries into how policies in Ghana affects key indicators of a vibrant economy such as the GDP and employment. However, not much studies have been conducted in Ghana to ascertain how diverse educational policies can affect the educational system in Ghana. Therefore in order to examine the effects of varied political leadership policies on the educational sector of Ghana, the study intends to:

1. Establish the reasons accounting for the inconsistencies in public policies
2. Examine the influence of political leadership on policy formulation

3. Ascertain the effects of varying education policies on the quality of education in Ghana from 2004 to 2015.
4. Explore other factors aside varying education policies that influence the quality of education in Ghana.
5. Examine whether it would be necessary to implement entrenched education policies to maintain the quality of education in the country.

METHODOLOGY

The study espoused the descriptive research design. This research design is employed to describe the perceptions or views of respondents with respect to a particular subject (Creswell, 2008). The study was approached qualitatively since the researcher sought to understand the nature of policy making within the governmental system of Ghana as well as assess the perception of various stakeholders about the nature of the Ghana's educational system.

POPULATION, SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE

The study comprised of twenty-three (23) respondents. These comprised of some officials of the Ghana education service, Educational experts (counsellors), Teachers and Headmasters who were sampled using the criterion selection technique since the researcher was particular about those who had adequate information peculiar to the research objectives.

INSTRUMENTATION

Considering the nature of the study, two categories of data was utilized. Firstly, interviews which took place from May 10 to May 23 were conducted using semi-structured interview format to solicit for opinions from the respondents concerning the research questions. The study utilized a semi-structured interview to make way for follow-up questions where necessary. The second set of data were records, peer review of journal articles as well as books that contained facts about the history of the development of the Ghanaian educational system.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Category of Respondents	Number of People Interviewed
GES Officials	4
Headmasters	4
Teachers	10
Education Counsellors	5
Total	23

Source: Field Report (2023)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Policy Making, Political Leadership and Education

More often than not, public policies are enacted by the government sometimes through committees they establish to investigate and find out the anomalies within a particular sector or issue. Respondents were asked various questions relating to their knowledge about key education policies as well as their impact on the quality of education within the country under the period under review. From the responses received during the interview, it appeared that all the GES officials sampled were very conversant about governments' policies with respect to education. However, the same couldn't be said about the teachers nor headmasters. That is, 40% of the teachers displayed adequate knowledge about government educational policies while the remaining claimed they did not know much about them and had little concerns about these policies because they have no say in them and were there to do their job as teachers, as such, they gave vague responses such as "...every government brings its own policies and plans for education, this government also brought theirs". On the other hand, the headmasters were able to tell some specific educational policies under the years reviewed such as the three year-four year SHS shifts, however these were not as specific as that of the GES officials. In total, 73% of the respondents declared that education has become a huge political issue now and has been one of the reasons why policies keep on changing concerning it. More specifically, three of the education experts vehemently stated that the general public is also to blame because every government is expected to bring something new, and education is a sector that attracts votes, hence new ideas in that sector whether it meets previous plans or not is welcomed so far as it appears "good". In the nut shell, it can be concluded that the over-politicization of government policies on education as well as the public expectation of government account for the main reason why there have been inconsistencies in them. What this also means is that, political leadership has a great influence on policy formulation. That is, to gain applause of the majority, some decisions are taken without much analysis as criticized about the current conversion of polytechnics into technical universities. This is in congruence with a similar study conducted in Nigeria by Oyelola (2015). On the other hand, all of the education experts expressly said that the level of education in country, as forecasted by the First Prime Minister Dr. Kwame Nkrumah since the nineteenth century, has not been achieved. One of them said that "look at our secondary school leavers, pupils complete without even knowing how to construct meaningful sentences, and yet they have completed secondary education, what is said is that considering their age and how many times they have sat for the exam they must go

through, is that a solution". This, 85% of the total respondents stated it was as a result of the lack of future oriented plans and a good succession to previous plans stated by predecessors. When asked about the factors aside education policies that has affected the level of education, most of the teachers as well as headmasters highlighted factors such as infrastructure, payment and service conditions which were very poor and hence made some workers less motivated as well as faulty learning materials in the system. However, one remarkable response from one of the education experts was that "the problem will always be the people element, how serious do people take their work, will the teacher work well, and will the headmaster use funds for their intended purposes or for personal gains, what of the examiners who leak question". This summarizes all the other responses in the sense that, when government releases funds for construction of libraries in some schools, it is the people element that will ensure whether this is carried out to the fullest or not.

To be more specific, if there were a more robust trajectory strategic plan guiding the educational system especially for the basic and secondary such that these laws outlined how the system would be run and furthermore ensured that every government that comes into power is mandated to contribute a certain percentage towards the accomplishment of such a plan without having to alter or bring about their own policies except for situations where need be, then a committee set up independent of the government would sit and review them from time to time. Some questions were posed to the GES officials as well as counsellors in education concerning some of these school of thoughts. The GES officials mentioned that there were laws governing the educational policies however these laws were not to the core governing the changes one can make as a political concern for our education. For instance, the adjustment of allowances as well as other alterations are not clearly enshrined as untouchable in the laws. Four (4) of the education counsellors as well as three (3) of the GES officials supported the idea that education should be treated with very much caution and laws that prevent certain changes or constrain the extent to which some of the changes can be made should be brought to motion.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Political scientists within the country have observed that the continual incoherence in the policy set up by political leaders overtime have affected several sectors of the economy. This has been the case from the time of the late President Kwame Nkrumah till date. It is prudent to argue that due to the complex nature of society, policies have to be reviewed to keep a system running, however these reviews should synthesize with each other to arrive at a better goal. However, this has not been the case of the education policy reforms in the Ghanaian political system of governance. So far as education is concerned, there has been numerous divergence in reforms from one particular governance to another. The over politicization of government policies have had an adverse impact on the nature of policies enacted in the country. Furthermore, it would be important that leaders of the country take the interest of the nation as a priority rather than activities that gain the support of a group of people without realizing its impact especially when it comes to education. Leadership, according to Yukl (2006) refers to an act of influence of an individual on a group of people to inspire them to their aspiration, that in the end, a common goal is attained. However, political leadership as a leadership style has seen much debate in this regard (Political African Leadership and its Legacy, 2007). However, there is a transformative nature of political leadership where leaders utilize their position as leaders to embark on huge projects that affect societies positively. It is recommended in this study that the constitution of Ghana must expressly address issue relating to reforms in the educational system and more importantly, reforms must be made to stem from strategic necessities rather than from individual political ambitions. Laws must govern the extent of reforms to be made in the educational sector of the country.

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