

## POLICY BRIEF

### Observations on State of Education in Ghana

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The relevance of education to socio-economic development for a developing country lies in the nature and content of the policies that provide the framework for the education system to thrive. This framework ensures that the competencies and ethics desired and valued by society are delivered in a manner conducive to individual and societal transformation. This policy brief highlights three observations about the state of Ghana's education, drawing on administrative data from the Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service. These observations relate to under-funding of key social protection programmes at the basic education level, the imbalance between access and quality of education delivery, and the need to look at the financing of the free senior high school policy to lessen the financial burden on the economy.

#### INTRODUCTION

Education empowers and transforms people for positive societal development. The extent of empowerment and transformation is reflected in people's level of productivity, income potential, ability to use technology, socio-cultural and civic responsibility among others. In the 21st century, education's relevance is particularly more imperative considering the intensity of technological advancement in all spheres of human endeavor and the emergence and spread of complex socio-cultural ideas affecting humanity. Questions of equity, quality, and inclusivity in education are now more paramount than just access.

The education chapter of the 2022 edition of the Ghana Social Development Outlook (GDSO 2022) provides a brief review of the context of education policy reforms alongside an update on key indicators of education such



chapter also discusses education financing at the pre-tertiary level and makes an observation of the government's apparent desire to increase spending in years in which there are general elections. The chapter further finds the seeming over-concentration on senior high school education to have the likelihood of reversing gains made in the basic education

invitation for a broader conversation toward finding a financing strategy for the Free SHS policy to ensure a balance and more sustainable financing arrangement.

## KEY ISSUES

### Education policies in review

The nature, content, and processes of policy reforms in education in Ghana reflect the socio-political context of three distinct phases. The first is the immediate post-independence era (1957-1966), marked by a desire to quicken the pace of socio-cultural transformation. This was the era of free education and accelerated development planning. The second phase (1966-1992), marked by political and economic instability, with a significant toll on the state's ability to continue to provide free education, was associated with policy reforms that took into account cost rationalisation and cost-sharing. The third phase is the return to stability (1992 - date), a period underpinned by rights-based policies and processes. For instance, the Constitution of 1992 in Article 25 (1) guaranteed the right to education for all Ghanaians. In line with this provision, the government introduced the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy in 1995 to enhance access to basic education for all children (MoE, 2003). This was followed by policy instruments such as the school capitation grant scheme and school feeding programme.

The school capitation grant scheme is a fee abolition scheme, involving a per capita allocation of grants to schools. The per capita grant involves allocating a flat amount per each child enrolled in a public school in a year. The grant which started with a rate of GH¢3.0 per child in 2005 was increased in 2009 to GH¢4.50p per child enrolled. The per capita allocation principle was deemed inequitable, as schools with larger populations on roll received bigger allocations compared to schools with smaller populations, regardless of the state and needs of the school (Adamba & Osei-Akoto, 2015). A base grant was introduced in 2019, based on a concept that requires that all public schools receive a fixed grant regardless of the size of the school. The idea of the base grant was to minimize the effect of the inequitable formula in the per capita principle. However, the erratic manner the capitation grant funds are released to schools makes it difficult for

school heads to determine what portion is the base grant and what the population-based grant is. To heads of schools, nothing has changed. If any, delays have been rather prolonged as schools sometimes have to 'starve' for nearly a year before they receive the allocation for the previous year.

The Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) which was also introduced in 2005 as a social protection instrument had the educational objective of improving school enrolment, attendance, and retention among pupils in deprived communities and as a leverage to promote domestic food production and consumption. It also sought to increase the incomes of poor rural households, and improve the health and nutritional status of the pupils. The most recent data on the GSFP (2015) suggest that the programme was providing a meal for about 1,693,698 pupils in 4,881 schools each school day, and providing direct employment to about 20,000 caterers and cooks nationwide. The GSFP is, however, faced with two major challenges: 1) delay in reimbursing caterers who are required to pre-finance the provision of the school meal, and 2) the amount of Gh¢0.90 being given per child to provide a 'nutritious' meal is woefully meagre.

At the secondary education level, the introduction of the Free Senior High School Policy (FSHSP) is the boldest and foundational policy introduced at the pre-tertiary education sector today. The FSHSP gave life to Article 25(1)(b) of the 1992 Constitution which 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".

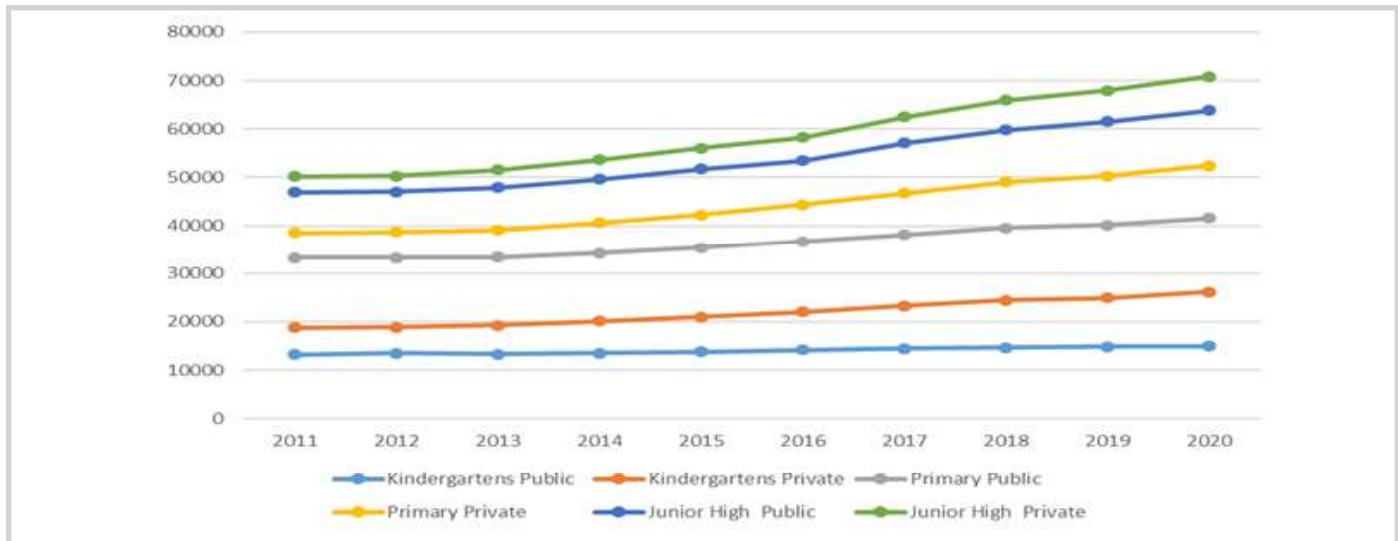
The policy is also a show of Ghana's commitment to Goal 4 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>1</sup>. Having said that, the nature and manner of the introduction of the policy makes it appear more of a legacy policy. Its introduction did not align with principles and processes of policy formulation, including stakeholder consultation, and designing of implementation and monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The attendant implementation challenges encountered are a reflection of these policy formulation defects as there was insufficient consultation and lack of an implementation framework to accompany the policy<sup>1</sup>.

## Access to Education

Using 2010/2011 (or just 2011) as the starting academic year, data available shows that there has generally been an increase in the number of schools across all levels of pre-tertiary education in Ghana (Figure 1). The biggest increase is recorded at the junior high school (JHS) level (44 percent), followed by the kindergarten level (30 percent) and primary school level with 25 percent. The rise in the

started to decline from an average of 91 percent down to an average of 80 percent. NER at the JHS level is typically lower than NER at the primary school level, and since 2017, NER has been falling from about 50% to an average of 44% in 2020. This implies a low transition from the primary level to the JHS level. This is an indication of the effect of the government's concentration on the SHS level with low attention to the basic education sector. It

**Figure 1: Number of schools at each level of basic school, 2010-2020**



number of schools at all levels is driven by the private sector. The number of senior high schools (SHS) also increased in both the public and private sectors. There was a 24 percent increase in the number of public SHS while the number of private schools increased by 37 percent.

## Equity in access and completion

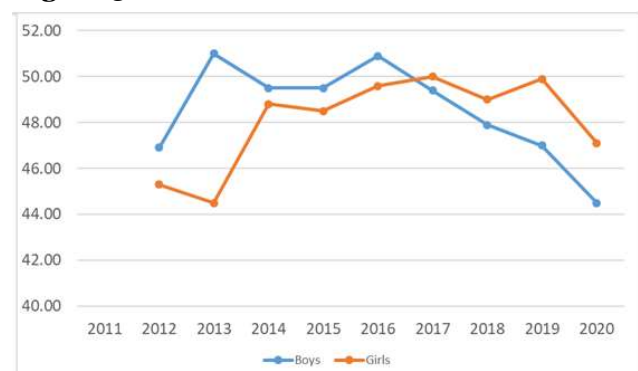
Equity demands that all children must have a fair and inclusive chance of pursuing education. In other words, all children must be provided with the opportunity to have quality education irrespective of ethnicity, income level, sex, location, religion, or any other individual characteristic. The indicators reviewed here are the gross enrolment rate (GER), net enrolment rate (NER), completion rate (CR), and the gender parity index (GPI). There has been a substantial increase in GER for both boys and girls at the primary school level, although, for boys, the increase has been steady, whereas it fluctuated for girls over the period. In terms of NER in primary schools, there was a steady increase for both girls and boys from 2011/2012, peaking around 2015/2016 with no discerning disparity (Figure 2). From 2016/2017, NER

means that children are leaving primary school (including dropping out) without proceeding to JHS.

**Figure 2: NER in primary school education**

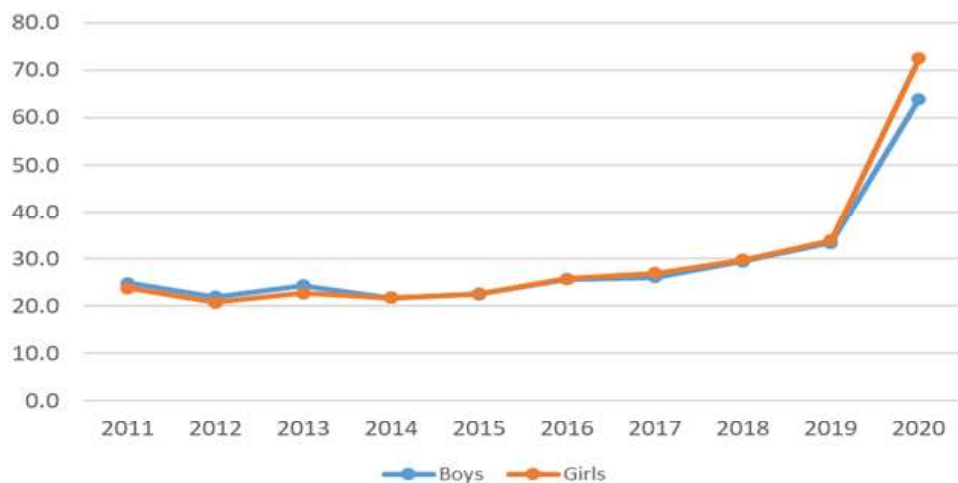


**Figure 3: NER in JHS school education**



The enrolment gap between JHS and SHS levels has contracted significantly following the introduction of the FSHSP. While the transition to SHS was at an average of 64 percent between 2010/2011 and 2014/2015, the transition rate has increased to about 85 percent and 98 percent in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 respectively. NER at the SHS increased significantly from an average of between 20% and 30% to as high as 70% between 2019 and 2020 (Figure 4). The completion rate (CR) at the SHS level also improved significantly, from as low as 32.9 percent in 2010/2011 and 46.4 percent in 2015/2016 to 68.6 percent in 2019/2020 following the introduction of the FSHSP.

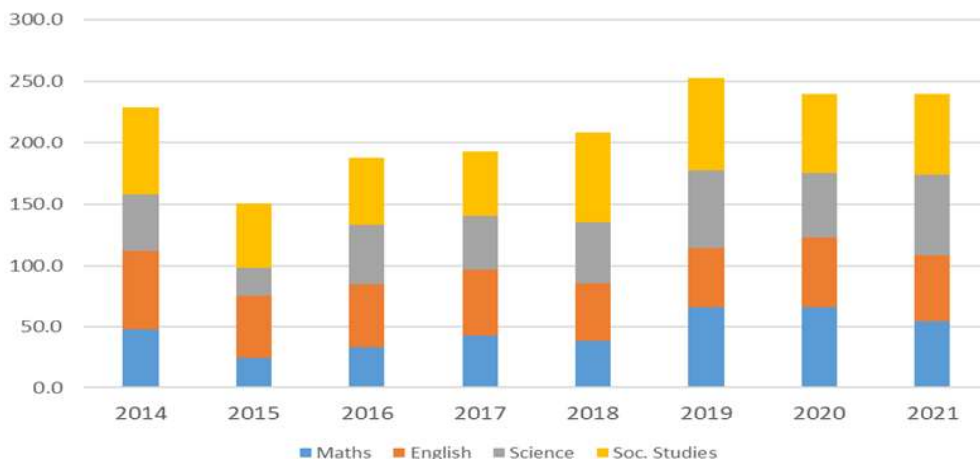
**Figure 4: NER in SHS**



### Trends in quality of pre-tertiary education

The quality of pre-tertiary education, using pass rates in external examinations such as the Basic School Certificate Examination (BECE) and the West Africa Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), shows general improvement in academic achievements (Figure 5)

**Figure 5: WASSCE pass rate (Grades A1–C6), 2014–2021**



### Education financing

Government spending on education has seen a steady increase in nominal terms. In real terms, however, government education spending as a percentage of GDP and total government spending is on a downward trend (Figure 6). In terms of total

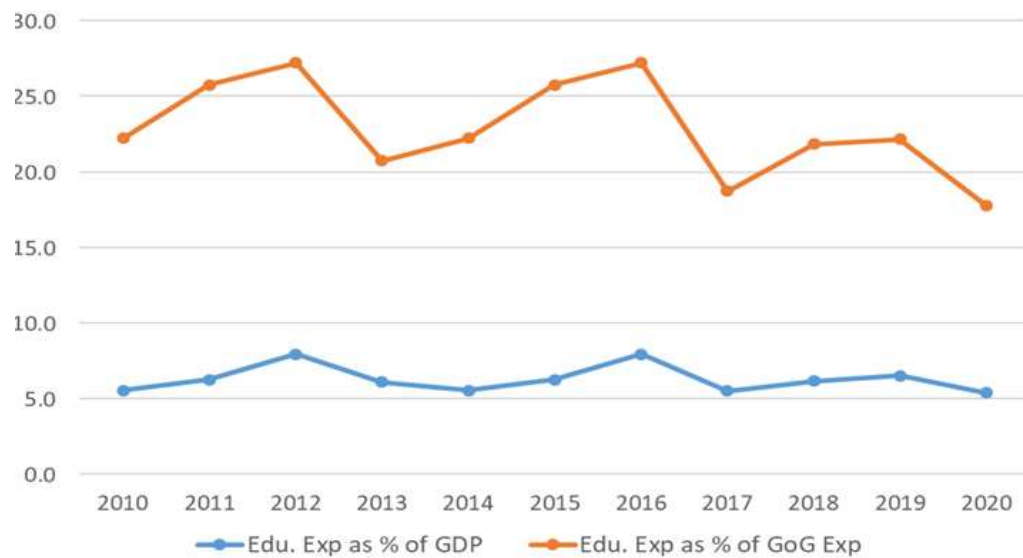
education expenditure as a percentage of GDP, the trend has generally remained stable, with a few years in between when the percentage has fallen below 6 percent (UNESCO recommended level). While generally, there has been steady growth in government spending on education, two things are apparent. The first is that noticeable expenditure increases occur in years in which there are general elections (2012 and 2016 election years) or in the last year before elections (2011, 2015, and 2019). It is also clear that total expenditure takes a downward trend in the years immediately after the elections. This is seen in 2013 and 2014 after the 2012 elections and in 2017 after the 2016 elections. These increases are election-induced expenditures and therefore opportunistic and associated with wastefulness (Adamba, 2023).

The other thing that is apparent is the government's erratic approach to spending on education. For instance, between 2016 and 2017, allocation to the SHS sub-sector increased by about 33 percent. However, in 2018 spending in the sub-sector increased by about 3 percent. In 2019 and 2020, expenditure in the sub-sector increased by about 15 percent and 10 percent respectively.

The erratic manner of allocation does not provide certainty of resource flow or guarantee sustainability. This is perhaps because there is no stable source of funding for the FSHSP and therefore brings to the fore the need for a discussion on the financing strategy for the policy.



**Figure 6: Exp. in education as a percentage of GDP and total Gov. exp**



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, three observations ought to be highlighted. The first is that, while so much attention is being given to the senior high school sector, the data suggest that equally important social protection policies such as the school feeding programme and the school capitation grant scheme are being underfunded. This has serious implications for sustaining the universal basic education agenda. This may also jeopardise the gains made in getting out-of-school children into school. The second observation that ought to be made is the imbalance between access and quality. While providing opportunities for access

to education, not the same momentum is attached to issues of quality. To achieve quality education there must be quality in education delivery. Free education must be accompanied by the provision of pedagogical resources and a safe school environment for learning. The third observation is the need for a national discussion on the financing of the FSHSP to lessen the financial burden on the economy. It may not be politically prudent to go back on the policy, but the thrust of the call is legitimate to find an innovative financing arrangement for the policy that is sustainable.

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