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State-Funded Secondary Education Policy: Implications for Private School Management in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the implications of state-funded secondary education policy for private school management in Ghana. The research used the qualitative approach relying on the phenomenological design. Based on expert and modal purposive sampling techniques, a representative of Ghana's Ministry of Education, and 10 managers of 10 accredited private senior high schools in one of the country's regions took part in individual interviews. I analyzed the data using interpretative phenomenological approaches. Falling enrollment, inability to recruit enough qualified teachers and low revenue emerged as challenges facing private secondary school management. To overcome the issues, the managers resorted to contingency measures.

Introduction

In this era of rapid global population growth especially in the developing world, it is increasingly becoming evident that the provision of basic needs including education cannot be sustained by governments alone without involving individuals or groups who have financial capabilities and are willing to collaborate. For this reason, governments of Ghana have over the years gone into direct or indirect partnerships with interested nationals and expatriates in many key areas of the economy such as agriculture, health, finance, road transport, manufacturing, and education (Härmä & Adefisayo, 2013; Tilak, 2010). These national and expatriate investors are referred to as the private sector in this research. While some private sector investors are for profit-making, others are for charity works to complement the government's efforts in the key areas. Government and private sector partnerships have commonly been called Public-Private Partnership (PPP) (Benson, 2016; Parvu & Voicu-Olteanu, 2009). The focus of this research was on PPP in education. Tilak (2010) has explained PPP in education as:

> . . . a contractual relationship between government and private sector for a specific project, with simultaneous involvement of governments and private sectors in education, with an understanding to share the costs and benefits and risks and rewards. . . . Both parties agree to work together in implementing a program, and that each party has a clear role and a say in how that implementation happens. (p. 2)

In the context of this research, however, I conceptualized PPP in education as the complementary initiatives by a government and its private sector to provide educational services with the aim of meeting national development aspirations. Thus, PPP in education does not only have to be a contractual relationship between a government and its private sector but also the supportive roles both parties play toward education development. The very essence of PPP in education, therefore, is to allow a government to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with its private sector so as to

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complement each other's "strengths in providing educational services and helping to meet the SDGs for education and to improve learning outcomes" (Patrinos, Barrera-Osorio &Guáqueta,p. 1).

How isPPP in education related to private school management? In several developing countries, PPP in education occurs to allow private sector investors, referred to in this research as private school managers/private educational managers, to independently establish and manage for profit or charity educational institutions at various levels of the education ladder including first cycle/basic level (i.e., kindergarten, primary, and junior high schools), second cycle/secondary level (i.e., senior high, technical, and vocational schools), and third cycle/tertiary level (i.e., universities and other analogous institutions). These institutions are known as private schools or private institutions (Robertson et al., 2012).

Duflo et al. (2017), Malenya (2008), and Kim and Han (2015) have identified four main types of private schools in Africa, namely; government-subsidized schools as in the Gambia and Ghana, partially subsidized mission/religious (faith-based) schools as in Lesotho, least partially subsidized community-organized schools as in Kenya, and non-subsidized private schools as in Ghana. Setting the parameter of the investigation, this research focused only on management of non-subsidized private senior high schools (SHSs) in Ghana. The schools are managed as commercial entities with the aim of making profit. The research concentrated only on this category of school managers because of a current trend in Ghana which has seen the government resolve to fully fund public secondary education known as free Senior High School (SHS) policy. The motto for the implementation of the policy is encapsulated in three themes as access, equity and quality. The implementation of the policy is backed by Chapter 5, Clause 25 (1b) of Ghana's (1992) Republican 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.

Going by the policy means that every Ghanaian child who is successful in the terminal Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) written in the country at the end of the first cycle level must have access to free education at the second cycle level. The motivation to conduct this research stemmed from my reading previous literature (e.g., Khansa, 2015; Patrinos et al., 2009; Tooley & Longfield, 2015) which suggested that globally, the private sector's involvement in education provision at the basic (first cycle) level was growing faster than its involvement at the secondary (second cycle) level especially in developing countries. The literature, however, failed to give reasons for the disparity. Could the reason be that private school management at the second cyclelevelwas more challenging?

Another inspiration to conduct this research was the assumption that the notion of access, equity, and quality secondary education being championed by the Government of Ghana was likely to make many parents prefer public (government-owned) SHSs to the private ones. The assumption seemed to have been bolstered by the government's announcement in the 2018 budget statement that the free SHS policy had increased enrollment in public SHSs by 33.2% (Partey, 2017). As important as this issue is for national development, there was no evidence to show in the extant literature that information was available on the challenges confronting the management of the private SHSs in Ghana as a result of the implementation of the policy. There was also no information on the measures put in place by the managers to address those challenges, and what the government, for its part, was doing to ensure that the resolve to fund public SHSs did not collapse private sector participation in secondary education provision in the country.

The research assumed that this absence of information probably would not help the Government of Ghana to understand and appreciate the ramification of the implementation of the free SHS policy for investment in private school management at the second cycle level. The research further supposed that understanding and bringing out the challenges confronting private SHS management as a result of the implementation of the free SHS policy may enable the government to put in place measures that would ensure the viability of private SHSs as crucial stakeholders in national development. What this research set out to do was to explore the implications of State-funded secondary education policy

for private SHS management in Ghana. Specifically, the research was to unravel the nature of the challenges confronting private SHS management in Ghana as a result of the implementation of the free SHS policy. It was also to unearth how managers of private SHSs in the country managed their schools in the face of the implementation of the free SHS policy. The research was to further find out what the government did to ensure that the resolve to fund public senior high schools did not derail the PPP aim of the country.

The research is significant because of its contribution to the global literature on educational management and leadership which has been dominated, over the years, by Anglo-American theories (Hammad & Shah, 2018). Hammad and Shah have argued that although the past few decades have witnessed expeditious growth of private schools, research investigating leadership in the sector is very scarce. This research is therefore a response to the clarion call for further research into management challenges of private schools globally but with a particular focus on an under-researched Ghanaian context. Furthermore, the research is timely because of the growing interest to expand the literature on PPP in education with the aim of providing more information as to how developing countries can better position themselves to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG 4) which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030 (Tilak, 2010). Finally, as the Government of Ghana implements its flagship-free SHS policy in the public sector, it is utterly important to conduct a research on the implications of the policy for the private sector involved in the provision of secondary education in the country since the latter has a greater stake in the PPP.

Conceptual framework: public-private partnership (PPP)

This research is framed around the concept of PPP as depicted in the framework in Figure 1. From the framework, PPP is conceptualized as a middle path between governments and their private sectors. Available literature (e.g., Asian Development Bank, 2017; Patrinos et al., 2009; Robertson et al., 2012) has suggested that PPP in education has gained relevance in developing countries because there is overwhelming evidence that governments in those countries are unable to provide universal access to basic and secondary education without the private sector. Globally, there are different forms of PPP in education including governments providing funding while the private sector provides education services to students. The services include contracts to provide specified services such as the construction, management, or maintenance of infrastructure at a given quantity and quality at an agreed price over a particular time frame (Munic, 1983; Patrinos et al., 2009). Yet, another form of PPP in education exists to allow the private sector provide financial assistance to public schools. The funding includes teacher salaries and textbooks and/or per pupil grants (Rose, 2010).

A growing body of the literature (e.g., Bano, 2008; Duflo et al., 2017; Parvu & Voicu-Olteanu, 2009; Tilak, 2010; Verger, 2012) has posited that PPP in education brings about a healthy competition between private school managers and public schools. The competition compels both sectors to raise the quality of their instructional deliveries in order to attract many admission seekers. Raising the quality of education is important for socio-economic growth of every country.

PPP in education is also important because it brings about flexibility in teacher contracting. This is so because private school managers are autonomous and the autonomy gives them an opportunity to

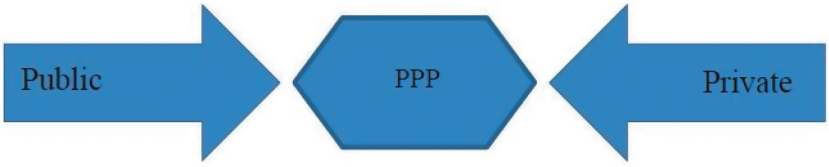

Figure 1. PPP as a middle path (Source: Tilak, 2010).

also hire qualified teachers. It also gives teacher-applicants options for teaching jobs (Bano, 2008; Duflo et al., 2017). Furthermore, PPP in education gives governments an ample opportunity to choose contracts with the lowest costs and yet with the best learning outcomes for students. Governments define a specific standard of quality delivery which private school managers would have to meet (Patrinos et al., 2009).

Again, PPP in education allows risks that come with education delivery to be shared between governments and managers of private schools. It has been argued that the risk-sharing is likely to increase efficiency in education delivery (Verger & Moschetti, 2017). It has been asserted that since research has documented that governments of most developing countries cannot alone guarantee universal access of quality education for all citizens, PPP in education gives an opportunity to philanthropists to give varied forms of support to governments (Verger & Moschetti, 2017).

Despite the numerous positives about PPP in education, it has also some criticisms. For instance, it is believed that PPP could lead to a privatization of education, and governments may lose control over education as a public asset (Parvu & Voicu-Olteanu, 2009; Patrinos et al., 2009; Tilak, 2010). Also, an increase in educational choice for guardians and their wards may create a socially segregated society where the rich who can afford to pay more may have their wards found in "first-class" schools and the poor who cannot do so have their wards in "sub-standard" schools. When this happens, students from financially disadvantaged homes may be lagging in the acquisition of quality education (Patrinos et al., 2009).

Review of related literature

Challenges confronting private school management

Globally, a number of operational difficulties have been ascribed to the management of private/independent schools. These include: competition from state schools, implementation of free education policies, rising costs of management, inadequate/the lack of financial reserves, limited avenues of alternative revenue mobilizations, and changing status of schools.

Competition from state schools happens because in some countries state schools are able to provide quality instruction to students comparable to that which is provided in private schools. In such a situation, parents are likely to send their wards to the state schools because of the additional privilege of paying lesser or no fees (Arum, 1996; Benveniste et al., 2013). In countries where free and sometimes compulsory education policy is being implemented, citizens do not pay fees to attend public schools, and such schools become the choice of many parents leaving private schools to grapple with dwindling enrollments (Härmä & Adefisayo, 2013; Ohara, 2012).

Rising cost of management is one of the major issues hampering private schools in recent times (Noddings, 2015). Soaring management cost often goes with inflation. In countries where inflation rates increase rapidly, the costs of goods and services become unstable. If the margin of increase for the prices of goods and services become too wide and unbearable, private school managers may be compelled to pass on the financial burden to parents. If parents are unable to afford fee hikes, they may also be compelled to withdraw their wards thereby leading to reductions in school enrollments (Härmä & Adefisayo, 2013; Konadu, 2010). Another issue related to running cost is the ability to pay competitive salaries to attract and retain qualified teachers and supporting staff who otherwise may prefer government schools where pay structures are comparably more favorable and opportunities exist for professional development (Härmä & Adefisayo, 2013; Srivastava, 2013).

Inadequate/the lack of financial reserves happens because of rising costs of running the schools and also delay in or the lack of payments of fees by parents (Härmä, 2011a, 2011b; Härmä & Adefisayo, 2013; Noddings, 2015). Without much reserve, it becomes very difficult to undertake developmental projects aimed at expanding physical facilities (Härmä, 2011a, 2011b; Härmä & Adefisayo, 2013; Noddings, 2015). According to Härmä and Adefisayo, many banks who otherwise would have granted loan facilities to private schools to support their existence are often unwilling to do so because of the fear of default in repayment.

In a similar situation, most private schools have limited avenues for alternative revenue mobilization because they rely primarily on school fees to offset running cost. A few, however, get some income from people who rent their infrastructure for social activities but the income is often not enough to be considered financial salvage (Yongdong, 2004). Some private schools operate as commercial entities and are able to get funding from school fees and other income generating activities. In a situation where the status of a private school management changes and it is being run as a charity, it becomes difficult to sustain existence without donations from external sources (Arum, 1996; Noddings, 2015; Yongdong, 2004).

Global financing of secondary education

In this era of global concern for rapid development, universal access to and participation in formal education have widely been acknowledged as pivotal. As Tagoe and Salifu (2019, p. 200) have observed, " … formal education is the bedrock of every country's socio-economic development; it improves quality of life and increases life expectancy". Thus, many countries, especially in the developing world, have a deliberate policy to finance basic and secondary education as they serve as the foundation for further education and for future career pursuits (Chabari, 2010). Global education financing comes in two forms as free or sponsored. Because the concentration of this research was on the context of secondary education, this section will discuss the two forms within only that context.

Although free secondary education and sponsored secondary education have the same intent to finance education, the extent of coverage of the finance differentiates them (M. Oketch & Rolleston, 2007a). Whereas free secondary education exempts students from paying any cost in respect of their studies (such as tuition fees and/or academic and residential facilities user fees including dues/levies), sponsored secondary education exists in the form of bursaries, grants, and scholarships covering partial or total tuition fee waiver (sometimes including stipend) by the institution providing the tuition or a third party doing so (M. Oketch & Rolleston, 2007a; Wilkinson et al., 2007). Another difference is that whereas free secondary education is offered en masse, sponsored secondary education targets individual students who normally meet eligibility criteria (Bano, 2008; Duflo et al., 2017).

In lieu of free secondary education, many countries rather offer sponsored secondary education to citizens and sometimes other nationals depending on their foreign policies (Darling-Hammond et al., 2014; Lubienski & &Lubienski, 2013). Examples include Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay (in South America); and Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Malta, Norway, Scotland, Sweden, and United Kingdom (in Europe). Currently, only a few countries in Sub-Saharan Africa like Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and recently, Ghana offer free secondary education. Even with that, differences exist in the extent of the "free" (Brudevold-Newman, 2016; Chabari, 2010). For instance, while in South Africa secondary education is entirely free, in Kenya, the "free" does not cover boarding facility user fees making only day senior high schools enjoy entirely free education. In Namibia and Uganda also, the version of the free secondary education is such that uniform, stationery, and sports are not covered (M. O. Oketch & Rolleston, 2007b; M. Oketch & Rolleston, 2007a).

The version of free secondary education in Ghana

Like a few countries in the world, Ghana introduced free secondary education as a policy in September, 2017, with the name tag "free Senior High School (SHS) policy." As a flagship policy, it was meant to fulfil a major campaign promise of the government to fund public secondary education (Partey, 2017). As I noted in the introduction, the free SHS policy like the free basic education policy is a provision of the 1992 Republican Constitution of Ghana. The "free" package in the implementation of the policy has come with a number of interesting reliefs: apart from cost-less tuition, boarding fees are also absorbed by the government. In addition, textbooks and school uniforms are absolutely the burden of the government (Duflo et al., 2017; Partey, 2017). Not all, the government has also taken the responsibility of providing three-square meals for boarding students and lunch for day students. Other

levies like entertainment dues, library fees, science center fees, computer lab fees, examination fees and utility fees that were hitherto charged by senior high schools have been abolished because the government pays for them. Again, the money collected at the beginning of each school term to supplement teachers' salaries commonly called teacher motivation has now been taken over by the government (Partey, 2017).

As I indicated earlier, the free SHS policy in Ghana is being implemented based on three themes of access, equity, and quality. What does each stand for? By accessibility, every Ghanaian who has passed the terminal Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) written at the end of the ninth year of basic school is being placed by a computerized selection system into a public SHS. Acknowledging that accommodation is of utmost importance in ensuring access, successive governments have increased the number of public SHSs from 720, in the 2010/2011 academic year, to 872, in the 2016/2017 academic year (Partey, 2017). Currently, efforts are being made by the government to build more of such schools to provide enough space to accommodate the growing number of qualified applicants (Partey, 2017). However, research reports by Ohba (2009) and Patrinos et al. (2009) assessing the role and impact of state-funded secondary education on growing economies have revealed that despite efforts being made by many developing countries to expand school access and to increase enrollments, enrollment rates are still lower than expected. The worst affected, according to the reports, are girls, indigenous people, and other poor and marginalized groups, thus making achievement of universal education difficult. In Ghana, although 472,730 students who completed the basic school in the 2017/2019 academic had admission vacancies in public SHSs, it is estimated that close to 5.3% still could not get access to the schools (Partey, 2017).

Equity in the sense of the policy implementation is to guarantee fairness of enrollment opportunity to all citizens irrespective of gender, religion, ethnicity, disability status, or geographical location. It is seen as a process of ensuring that every qualified Ghanaian enjoys the same level of educational support. However, Partey (2017) disagrees with this notion of equity arguing that equity in the implementation of the policy should rather emphasize education support on grounds of needs so that students from financially disadvantaged homes will be given more support. In his view, the implementation ensures equality rather than equity.

Quality is the last of the three words of the theme for the implementation of the free SHS policy. Quality is a very contentious term that is difficult to measure without a set standard. In global education practices, quality is measured against variables such as learner–teacher ratio, learner–textbook ratio, learner–classroom ratio, and learner–desk ratio (Partey, 2017). In Ghana, the learner–teacher ratio for the second cycle level is supposed to be 25:1. However, Partey has reported that most classrooms in second cycle schools have a ratio of 35/40:1. This has implication for quality which is being intended for the policy. In an attempt to address the issue of overcrowded classrooms in particular, the government has instituted an interim measure of dividing the 2018 newly admitted SHS students into two streams called double-track system. The first stream is labeled "Green Track" and refers to the group of students to be in school for a term of 41 days, and the second stream labeled "Gold Track" refers to the group of students to also be in school for a term of 41 days after the "Green Track" students have vacated on the academic calendar (Partey, 2017). Students of both tracks go to school together for another term of 41 days bringing the total number of school days to 82.

Methods

Approach and design

I conducted this research as a qualitative inquiry aligned with the interpretative paradigm which believes in reality as a multiple and relative concept, and in knowledge as a subjective social construction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The research specifically relied on the realistic phenomenological design to gauge the experiences of managers of private senior high schools in Ghana in relation to the phenomenon of the implementation of the free senior high school policy (Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

According to Johnson and Christensen (2008), phenomenological research describes "one or more individual's consciousness and experience of a phenomenon, such as the death of a loved one, viewing oneself as a teacher, the act of teaching, the experience of being a minority group member, or the experience of winning a soccer game" (p. 364). The specific interest of this research was to explore, understand, and describe the experiences of managers of private senior high schools in Ghana whom, for the purpose of this research, I regarded as "minority" in education provision.

Participants

The target participants for this research were the Ministry of Education of Ghana and all managers of accredited private senior high schools in the country. I used two kinds of purposive sampling (expert purposive and modal purposive) techniques in the selection process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). First, I used the expert purposive technique to select a representative of the Ministry as a key informant on the implementation of the free SHS policy and measures put in place to keep faith with the PPP in the education sector. Second, I used the modal purposive technique to select the Greater Accra region of the country. The selection of the region was necessary because of its status as the most densely populated area with the highest concentration of private SHS in the country (Ghana Statistical Service, 2017). The region is also presumed to have more of the famous private senior high schools in the country which attracts a higher number of admission seekers (Konadu, 2010).

I again used the expert purposive technique to select 10managers of 10 accredited private SHSs in the region who were sole proprietors, and also performed both top-level and middle-level management functions such as planning, organizing, and controlling human and material resources. Additionally, they made and implemented decisions affecting their schools. It was necessary to also select them because of their position askey information on management challenges confronting private SHS in Ghana and on contingency measures to address policy ramification. Their selection brought to 11 the total number of participants in the research. I accessed all the participants after personally visiting their offices and briefing them on the nature of the research and what it sought to achieve.

Research tool

The research used an interview schedule as a tool for data collection. The tool had two sections. The first section had eight semi-structured questions seeking the experiences of managers of private senior high schools in Ghana after the implementation of the free senior high school policy. The second section, however, had six semi-structured questions eliciting information from the spokesperson/representative of the Ministry of Education regarding available supports for the private schools in order to keep faith with the PPP in the education sector.

Data collection and analysis procedure

I collected data in person using an audiotape recording device to record face-to-face individual interviews of the 11 participants. I did the collection in person in order to ensure the credibility and dependability of the data as emphasized by Houghton et al. (2013). I made notes as a backup to forestall any disappointment emanating from sound clarity. I, however, did not use the backup notes because the recordings were clear for my listening and transcription. Each interview took about 45 minutes to complete.

I transcribed the data verbatim and analyzed them inductively using interpretive phenomenological content and thematic analysis (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008) in order to explore the idiosyncratic and invariant managerial experiences of keeping a private senior high school in the face of state-funded secondary education. The analytical techniques enabled me to code and categorize the data as patterns emerged, and to condense the large data into core themes that reflected the objectives of the research (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Ethics

As this research was to use human participants, certain ethical standards had to be met. First, I applied and obtained ethical clearance from the University of Ghana Ethics Board prior to the start of the research. Second, I gave each participant an informed consent form to read and sign on the basis that participation in the research was voluntary and the withdrawal was possible at any stage. I also concealed the identities of the participants through anonymous coding. Rigor and trustworthiness are important elements of qualitative studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). To meet these requirements, I conducted audit trail, peer debriefing, and a narrative accuracy check by sending to all the participant transcripts of the field data for validation–they all affirmed the data as a true reflection of their views. Besides, I critically reflected on the position to assume in the research and adopted the outsider position. As an outsider, my primary role in the research process had been to elicit information from the participants, and analyze the data from their perspective rather than mine. The position enabled me to bracket my biases thereby enhancing credibility and dependability in the research.

Results

This section presents the outcome of the face-to-face individual interviews I conducted with 11 participants to explore the implications of state-funded secondary education for private school management in Ghana. The results highlight challenges confronting private SHS management as a result of the implementation of the free SHS policy in Ghanaian public schools, and also draw a special attention to strategies adopted by the managers to avoid collapse of their schools. The results further underscore measures taken by the government to support the managers in order to keep faith with the PPP in education. A perusal of the results evinces three important themes as: management challenges of private SHS in Ghana, survival strategies of private SHS managers in Ghana, and Government's reliefs for private SHS managers in Ghana.

Management challenges of private SHS in Ghana

All the manager-participants in this research indicated that the free SHS policy had a positive impact on Ghana's socio-economic development and were in support of the policy. They, however, pointed out a number of issues confronting management of their schools as a result of the implementation of the policy. One of such issues is falling enrollment in private SHS which one of them explained saying:

> The introduction of the free SHS policy has greatly affected the enrolment of the school. In fact, since the introduction of the new policy the school is able to get and enrol only a quarter of its usual number of students. The classrooms now have many unoccupied furniture making them virtually empty! . . .

Giving a statistical breakdown on the issue, another manager claimed that "Prior to the introduction of the free SHS policy, my school was able to attract and enroll over 400 student-applicants into the first year. Currently, my school hardly gets 200 admission seekers".

The managers further claimed that the implementation of the free SHS policy put strains on their ability to recruit enough qualified teachers as they did before. One manager noted that:

> . . . because the government is able to pay more attractive salaries to public SHS teachers and grant them study leave with pay, my school has currently lost many hardworking teachers to public schools due to the latter's recruitment drive to cater for their increased enrolment. Considering this term alone, over six teachers resigned and joined public SHSs. This has depleted the school's pool of quality teachers. I'm therefore compelled to recruit inexperienced teachers who see the opportunity as a last resort.

According to the managers, the policy has also affected their capacity to mobilize enough income to meet running costs. One of them blamed the situation on " . . . reduction of student population which has deprived the school of the needed revenue required to maintain the school infrastructure, run adverts and pay the salaries of the existing staff adequately."

Interestingly, the policy even affected the attainment of management visions of the participants. For instance, the vision of a participant was to make the school "one of the fastest growing private senior high school provider in West Africa." However, implementation of the policy had "caused a sharp decline in our student enrollment" making the vision rather seem an illusion. Another participant said the vision was "to make my school become a world-class leading secondary institution recognized internationally for the delivery of result-oriented educational services to the satisfaction of clients." Yet, with the advent of the policy, "it is difficult getting students let alone pursue and accomplish this noble vision."

Survival strategies of private SHS managers in Ghana

As there were teething challenges associated with the implementation of the free SHS policy, the data revealed that the managers developed some coping means of mitigating the effects of the policy on their schools. Excerpts of the transcript reveal one of the strategies as raising the quality of academic work in order to remain competitive with public schools:

> We are making sure that the few students we have get quality tuition and strong foundation in their academic work comparable to the tuition provided in public schools. This will help them come out successfully at the end of the three years SHS education and other students may be attracted to choose our school.

According to the managers, they also "advertise more than we did before" to persuade prospective students about the exceptional learning opportunities they offered including "... remedial classes for students at all levels (i.e., SHS1, 2 and 3)." The managers again said they reduced school fees in order to remain viable in the competitive business. In a visible expression of frustration, a manager said:

> ... we are forced to lower our fees in order to remain attractive to potential clients (students). ... our fee used to be Ghc 1500.00 (equivalent of US$278) per term for boarding students, and Ghc 800.00 (equivalent of US$148) per term for non-boarding students. Currently, we're compelled to rather take Ghc 1200.00 (equivalent of US$223) and Ghc 520.00 (equivalent of US$96) respectively.

As part of the survival strategies, the managers also engaged in other income-generating activities such as "rent our classrooms to churches and people who want to organize wedding or funeral ceremonies ..., and to organizers of foreign courses such as GRE and TOEFL."

Government's reliefs for private SHS managers in Ghana

As the Government of Ghana was making frantic efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG 4) which emphasized inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030, it was important to work in close collaboration with private school managers as indispensable stakeholders. This section explored what the government was doing to ensure that the resolve to fund public senior high schools did not derail the public-private partnership aim of the country. The data were generated from an interview conducted with a spokesperson/representative of the Ministry of Education. It is important to state that the Ministry of Education is in charge of education and speaks on behalf of the government on all matters pertaining to education in the country.

The preliminary questions I posed in the interview were to enable me assess the level of engagement of the government with key stakeholders (including managers of private SHS) before the implementation of the free SHS policy. I, therefore, began by asking whether private senior high schools were taken into consideration during the conception of the idea to implement the policy. The interviewee responded in the affirmative and added that the government considered private schools because of "... the recognition of the important role that the private sector has played and continues to play in education service delivery in this country". Having received this response, I sought to know the key stakeholders the government consulted prior to the implementation of the policy. The interviewee gave a tall list as follows:

> The Cabinet, Regional Ministers, Eminent Educationists in the country, Teachers Unions (at least on 3 occasions), the Ministry of Information, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA), Ghana Education Service Council, Ghana Education Service (GES) Management (Headquarters), Ghana Education Service Regional Directors, Heads of Faith Based Organisations (FBOs), all District Directors of Education, all District PRO's of the GES, all head teachers of public SHSs, all managers of private SHSs, the Parliament Select Committee on Education, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and Faith Based Organisations (AME Zion Church, the Methodist Church, Islamic Educational Unit, the Anglican Church, the Catholic Church, the Salvation Army Church, E. P. Church, Ghana, Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference, Ahmadiyya Educational Unit, the SDA Church the Anglican Church, the Ghana Baptist Convention, CCC, and CAC International).

Having been told the managers of private SHS in the country were among stakeholders consulted, I was curious to know the concerns they raised during the consultations. Responding, the interviewee said the managers were concerned that the free SHS policy would lead to an increase in the number of students seeking entry into public SHS letting those who would otherwise enroll in private SHSs decline to do so. The interviewee added that the managers suggested that the government should " … post some students to private SHSs that had space and it would be the government's responsibility to pay them (the private SHS managers) the equivalence of what was being spent on students in public SHSs."

A follow up question I posed to the interviewee was whether the consultation with the managers was adequate, the response indicated that, "the government willingly met the private senior high school managers as often as it was necessary, and we believe that these consultations were adequate."

As the interaction progressed, I sought to know how the government addressed the concerns raised during the consultation with the managers. The spokesperson's response was that the government could not accede to the requests of the managers because of constitutional requirement:

> Article 25(2) of the constitution stipulates that players within the private education space are entitled to pursue their ventures at their own cost. Government could not therefore expend public funds on private educational enterprises by paying them for education service delivery.

The interviewee further explained that the government could not send students to private SHSs because parents and their wards rather had the choice to decide between sending their latter to a public or private SHS:

> The element of choice of the venue for learning in Ghana is the prerogative of parents and their wards across all levels of the education system … , and therefore it was not within the ambit of the government to arbitrarily post children to schools they have not chosen in the first place.

Having got this first-hand information about prior consultations and matters arising, I wanted to know whether the government had put in place any relief measures, under the circumstance (i.e., after the implementation), to ameliorate the plight of the managers. As can be noted in the following excerpt, the response appears to suggest that the position of the government on the managers' requests had not changed:

> … as I said earlier, the government can't support the managers for avoidance of constitutional violations, … the government's free SHS policy is hinged on a constitutional imperative to provide free education up to the senior high school level …

Discussion

This section discusses the results of the research in the light of contemporary literature and PPP conceptual lens. The emergent themes that will guide the discussion are: ordeals and frustrations of private SHS managers, private SHS managers' use of contingency measures to overcome policy ramifications, and governmental "salvage" for private investors in education. An insight into these themes is important as it encourages a deeper conversation on educational management issues relevant to Ghana's achievement of the Sustainable Development Goal Four (SDG 4).

Ordeals and frustrations of private SHS managers

The theme "ordeals and frustrations of private SHS managers" emerged from the data in my analysis to address the first objective of this research to explore the nature of the challenges confronting private senior high school management in Ghana as a result of the implementation of the free senior high school policy. Put succinctly, the results indicated that participants' ordeals and frustrations emanated from issues of falling enrollment, inability to recruit enough qualified teachers, and low revenue affecting running cost. According to the participants, these ordeals and frustrations affected the achievement of management visions for their schools.

Available literature (e.g., Benveniste et al., 2013; Härmä & Adefisayo, 2013; Ohara, 2012) has documented that globally, managers of private or independent schools face challenges some of which are as a result of state-funded policy implementations. The fact that this current research found Ghana's free SHS policy to have an effect on enrollment in private SHS appears to buttresses Härmä and Adefisayo's claim that in many countries where free and/or compulsory education policy is being implemented, they may be the choice of many parents, and private schools may grapple with dwindling enrollments.

As the manager-participants of this research observed, falling enrollment reduces the revenue mobilization capacity of private schools and that has a rippling effect on the ability of the schools to raise funds for school management including recruitment of enough qualified teachers and undertaking developmental projects aimed at expanding physical facilities (Härmä, 2011a; Konadu, 2010). Lamenting the plight of private school managers, Härmä and Adefisayo have averred that, in order to keep their schools running, some private school managers with low enrollments charge higher fees which eventually worsen their plights because parents withdraw their children as a result of fee hikes. Perhaps, this explains the reason why the manager-participants of this research rather reduced their fees despite falling enrollments. The reduction yielded positive results for all the managers except one who complained that it rather aggravated the existing precarious situation of incurring huge running cost deficits.

Private SHS managers' use of contingency measures to overcome policy ramifications

Another theme that came up from my analysis of the data is "Private SHS managers' use of contingency measures to overcome policy ramifications." A discussion on the theme is important as it helps to meet the second objective of this research to find out how managers of private SHS managers in Ghana coped with and overcame the implementation of the free SHS policy within the public space which they claimed was unfavorable. Contingency measures in this context refer to the course of actions taken by the manager-participants because it was necessary at the time in order to deal with the consequences of the policy implementation. Evidence from the data revealed that, the contingency measures the managers used included: raising the quality of academic work in order to remain competitive with public schools, increased advertisements to showcase credentials and services, charging reduced fees, and engaging in supplementary income-generating activities such as renting of classrooms to religious organizations and revelers. One of the key qualities of a good school manager is the ability to analyze current situations that are likely to affect school success and to find appropriate ways of curbing unforeseen consequences that may arise out of the situations (Verger & Moschetti, 2017). This quality appears to be demonstrated by the manager-participants of this research who, through ingenuity, used innovative measures (such as those enumerated above) to offset the ramifications of state-funded secondary education in Ghana. Research (Ohara, 2012; Tooley & Longfield, 2015; Yongdong, 2004) has shown that, in other parts of the world, private school managers who want to achieve good results have used similar strategies such as renting their infrastructure for social activities and/or resorting to bank loans.

Governmental "salvage" for private investors in education

In my critical engagement with the data to ascertain measures the Ghana Government had put in place to ensure that the policy of funding secondary education did not derail the public-private partnership aim of the country, "Governmental 'salvage' for private investors in education" emerged as an obvious theme to help achieve the third objective of this research. Governmental salvage' in this context refers to the kind of relief package the government gave to private SHS managers to cope with the aftermath of the implementation of the free SHS policy.

From the results, the government consulted with all stakeholders in education including private SHS managers and thought the level of engagement was enough. The parties, however, did not reach a consensus on a support package for private SHS managers. The stalemate occurred mainly as a result of a constitutional provision which restricted the government from using state financial resources to fund private schools (see "Government's reliefs for private SHS managers in Ghana").

The result is interesting given that PPP ideals require a mutually beneficial relationship between the government and the private sector where the two parties would complement each other's efforts aimed at accelerating socio-economic development (Tilak, 2010). Earlier studies have found that PPP in education is important to teacher-applicants, governments, and private school managers. For teacher-applicants, it is beneficial because it gives them the option of choosing between applying to public or private schools (Bano, 2008; Duflo et al., 2017). It is also beneficial to governments because it gives an opportunity to choose contracts with the lowest costs and yet with the best learning outcomes for students (Patrinos et al., 2009). As for managers of private schools, PPP enables them to gain flexibility in teacher contracting to hire and fire them if they fail to perform up to expectation (Duflo et al., 2017). Despite the benefits of PPP, a major criticism against it, however, is that it may lead to a privatization of education, and governments could lose control over education as a public asset (Parvu & Voicu-Olteanu, 2009).

Conclusion

This research explored the implications of state-funded secondary education policy for private school management in Ghana. The research particularly brought to the fore the fact that the implementation of the free SHS policy in the country affected the management of private SHSs by causing falling enrollment, inability to recruit enough qualified teachers, and low revenue generation. To overcome the issues, the managers resorted to contingency measures such as raising the quality of academic work in order to remain competitive with public schools, increased advertisements of credentials and services, charging low fees, and engaging in supplementary income generating activities. The government, for its part, was constrained to provide support to the managers because of constitutional restrictions.

The findings highlight the fragile nature of the collaboration between the Ghana Government and managers of private SHSs in the country, and also provide an insight into constitutional issues that need redress by policymakers in order to pave way for an effective PPP in education. This is important given that both parties will have to work together for the country to achieve the SGD 4 for developing countries.

On the international front, the nature of challenges delineated by the manager-participants perhaps partly explains the reason why a section of the literature (see 5th paragraph of Introduction section) has noted that the private sector investment interest in secondary education provision has not been comparable to basic education especially in the developing world. That notwithstanding, I make a strong case for further research into management challenges of private SHSs in other developing countries where state-funded secondary education policies are being implemented. I believe doing so will enable us be in a position to compare and contrast the challenges as they occur in different contexts. The findings also open up a global debate into how to find feasible ways of supporting the private sector

to participate successfully in education provision so as to achieve the SDG 4 for developing countries. A major recommendation of the research is that the Government of Ghana should review the section of the constitution that restricts state funding to only public schools. Extending financial support to private investors in education may allow for effective PPP in the education sector of the country.

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