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UNIVERSITY OF GHANA

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**ASSESSING THE PERCEPTION OF PARENTS TOWARDS GHANA'S FREE  
SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL (FSHS) POLICY: THE CASE OF ADOAGYIR-  
NSAWAM**

BY

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## DECLARATION

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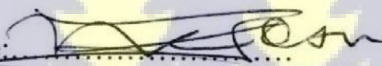
I do hereby declare that this work is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this University or elsewhere. All references used have been duly acknowledged.

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I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the Dissertation / Project Work were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of dissertation laid down by the University of Ghana.

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### **ABSTRACT**

The FSHS is a key policy for improving education access, but its long-term viability, effect on students' employment prospects, and social and economic benefits are uncertain. This study examined how parents viewed the FSHSP, its problems, how to enhance it, and how to ensure better job outcomes for its students. The study used a sequential exploratory triangulation design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. A questionnaire with 30 items on demographics, opinions, and suggestions was employed to collect the quantitative data. In-person interviews with parents and educators were the main means used to obtain the qualitative data, which were analysed thematically using NVivo 11.4.0. The data showed varied parental opinions, with worries about infrastructure issues and a need for ongoing government support. The qualitative data revealed complex challenges in FSHS policy execution and positive effects on social and economic conditions of parents. The study found that parental opinions were complex and context-dependent. Participants called for refined policy changes, stressing the role of affluent parents for sustainability. Improving teacher motivation and aligning technical education with labour market needs were vital. The study suggested focused infrastructure improvement, partnership with private schools, and encouragement of affluent parent participation. Policymakers were advised to heed diverse parental opinions for effective policy updates, highlighting the link between teacher motivation and policy sustainability.



## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work first to the Almighty God for taking me through this course successfully.

My next dedication goes to my entire family and dearest husband Philip Prempeh and my children for keeping the torch burning with lots of encouragement and support throughout my course of study.



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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Abstract. ....i

Dedication. ....ii

Acknowledgment. ....iii

Table of Contents. ....iv

CHAPTER ONE ..... 1

INTRODUCTION ..... 1

    1.0 Background..... 1

    1.2 Problem Statement..... 7

    1.3 Objectives of the Study..... 10

    1.4 Research Questions..... 10

    1.5 Significance of the Study ..... 10

    1.6 Scope of the Study ..... 11

    1.7 Definition of Terms ..... 11

    1.8 Organization of the Study ..... 11

CHAPTER TWO ..... 13

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ..... 13

    2.0 Introduction..... 13

    2.1 Conceptualizing Educational Policy Implementation ..... 13

        2.2.0 Educational Reforms in Ghana..... 14

        2.2.1 The Free Senior High School Policy (FSHSP) - 2017..... 16

    2.3 Benefits of the FSHSP ..... 16

    2.4 Challenges to the Sustainability of FSHSP ..... 18

    2.5 Ensuring Operational Sustainability of the FSHSP ..... 20

    2.6 Ensuring Improved Labour Market Outcomes for Secondary School Leavers under... 23

        the FSHSP..... 23

    2.7 Theoretical Framework..... 24

    2.8 The Educational Planning Process ..... 25

    2.9 Developing the Conceptual Framework ..... 30

CHAPTER THREE ..... 32

METHODOLOGY ..... 32

    3.0 Introduction..... 32

    3.1 Research Paradigm ..... 32

3.1.1 Positivism .....	32
3.1.2 Post-positivism .....	33
3.1.3 Interpretivism.....	34
3.1.4 Pragmatism .....	36
3.2 Study Site Description .....	37
3.3 Research Design .....	39
3.4 Population.....	39
3.4.1 Sample Frame .....	39
3.5 Sample Size Determination .....	39
3.5.1 The Sample .....	40
3.6 Sampling Technique .....	40
3.7 Data Collection Method and Instruments .....	42
3.8 Ethical Consideration.....	45
3.8.1 Informed Consent .....	45
3.8.2 Confidentiality .....	45
3.7.3 Protection of Vulnerable Participants .....	45
<b>CHAPTER FOUR.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>43</b>
4.1.0 Introduction.....	44
4.2.2 Educational Distribution of the respondents.....	46
4.2.3 Occupational Characteristics of Respondents.....	47
4.2.4 Distribution of Respondents by Religion.....	48
4.3 Research Question One: What are the Views of Parents, Stakeholders and Guardians about the Benefits of the FSHSP?.....	49
4.3.1 Reduction in Truancy.....	50
4.3.2 Teenage Pregnancy .....	51
4.3.3 Infrastructure Problems.....	52
4.3.4 Financial Challenges.....	53
4.4 Research Question 2: How can the FSHS Policy be made Operationally Sustainable? 56	
4.4.1 Post-Estimation Results.....	60
4.5 Research Question 3: How can the quality of the FSHS policy be enhanced to ensure better labour market outcomes for senior high school leavers?.....	64

CHAPTER I University of Ghana <a href="http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh">http://ugspace.ug.edu.gh</a> .....	70
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATION, AND CONCLUSION.....	70
5.1 Introduction.....	70
5.2 Summary of Key Findings.....	71
5.3 Theoretical Implication.....	71
5.4 Educational Policy Implications.....	71
5.5 Recommendations.....	72
5.6 Conclusion.....	73
References.....	73
Appendix 1: Research Questionnaire.....	83
Appendix 2: Interview Guide.....	85

**List of Tables**

Table 1: Marital Status of Respondents Organized by Gender.....	43
Table 2: Age and Gender Distribution of Respondents.....	46
Table 3: Perceptions of Parents about the benefits of the FSHSP.....	50
Table 4: Probit Regression Results.....	54
Table 5: Views of Parents on How to Sustain the FSHSP.....	57
Table 6: Probit Regression Results 2.....	61
Table 7: Marginal Effects.....	62
Table 8: Results of Likelihood Ratio Tests.....	63
Table 9: Coefficient Estimates.....	63
Table 10: Evaluations of Parents on How to Connect FSHSP to the World of Work.....	64
Table 11: Probit Regression Results.....	67



List of Acronyms

ADP	Accelerated Development Plan
CAQDA	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis
COTVET	Council for Technical and Vocational Education
FCUBE	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education
FSHS	Free Senior High School
FSHSP	Free Senior High School Program
GES	Ghana Education Service
ICT	Information Communication Technology
JSS	Junior High School
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NABPTEX	National Board for Professional and Technical Examination
NCTE	National Council for Tertiary Education
NDC	National Democratic Congress
NERP	New Education Reform Programme
NLC	National Liberation Council
NPP	New Patriotic Party
NRC	National Redemption Council
NSCE	New Structure and Content of Education
SMC	Supreme Military Council
SSSCE	Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UPE	Universal Primary Education
WAEC	West African Examination Council
WASSCE	West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination



INTRODUCTION

**1.0 Background**

Education is a fundamental human right and a key driver of social and economic development. However, many children and youth in Africa still face barriers to accessing quality education, especially at the secondary level (Todaro & Smith, 2015). High fees and related costs are a major impediment, particularly for children from low-income backgrounds. To address this challenge, several African countries have adopted different models of free education, which define the goals, principles, and strategies of providing free education to all or some segments of the population. However, these models also vary in their scope, approach and impact. The literature suggests that there are at least 3 common models of free education in Africa vis-à-vis universal, targeted, and differentiated models.

The universal model of free education aims to ensure that every child has access to at least nine years of free and compulsory education, regardless of their background or circumstances. This model is based on the human rights perspective and the social justice rationale, which emphasize the equal right and opportunity of every child to receive quality education. This model also follows the global agenda and the regional commitments, such as the Sustainable Development Goal 4 on education and the African Union's Agenda 2063 on the Africa We Want (UNESCO, 2018).

The universal model of free education has been adopted by several African countries, such as Rwanda, Kenya, South Africa, and Madagascar, which have introduced free primary and secondary education policies in the last two decades. These policies aim to increase enrolment, retention and completion rates, as well as to improve equity and quality of education. However, these policies also face some challenges, such as financial sustainability, equity implications, and quality issues. The cost of providing free education can be high, especially if it involves expanding the infrastructure, hiring and training more teachers, and improving the quality and

relevance of the curriculum. Moreover, free education policies may also have opportunity costs, as they may divert resources from other levels and sectors of education, such as early childhood, tertiary and technical and vocational education. Furthermore, free education policies may not address the underlying causes of inequality and exclusion in education, such as poverty, gender, location, ethnicity, disability and language (Gruijters, 2023; Oketch, Mutisya & Ngware, 2010).

Compared to the universal model, the targeted model of free education aims to provide free education to certain groups of students who are identified as poor, vulnerable, or disadvantaged, based on criteria such as poverty, gender, disability, or location (Duflo, Dupas & Kremer, 2021). This model is based on the economic perspective and the efficiency rationale, which emphasize the optimal allocation of resources and the maximization of returns on investment. This model also follows the evidence-based approach and the context-specific solutions, which rely on data and analysis to identify and address the needs and challenges of each situation.

The targeted model of free education has been adopted by several African countries, such as Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia, which have implemented fee waivers, bursaries, scholarships, and conditional cash transfers for secondary education. These programs aim to address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of marginalized and disadvantaged students and to promote inclusion and diversity. However, these programs also face some challenges, such as identifying and reaching the eligible students, ensuring transparency and accountability, and avoiding stigma and discrimination. The process of targeting and selecting students can be complex, costly, and prone to errors and corruption. Moreover, these programs may also have unintended consequences, such as creating resentment and conflict among the non-beneficiaries, or inducing perverse incentives and behaviour among the beneficiaries (Gruijters, 2023; Duflo, Dupas & Kremer, 2021).

The final model of free education, the differentiated model aims to provide different types and levels of education to different segments of the population, based on their abilities, interests, and aspirations (Lewin, 2009; Oketch & Rolleston, 2013). This model is based on the pedagogical perspective and the relevance rationale, which emphasize the diversity and flexibility of educational pathways and outcomes. This model also follows the innovation-based approach and the future-oriented solutions, which foster creativity and adaptability in the changing world (Rolleston, 2013).

The differentiated model of free education has been adopted by several African countries, such as Botswana, Mauritius, and Senegal, which have diversified the secondary education system into academic, technical, vocational, and non-formal streams. These streams aim to cater to the varied needs and preferences of students and to match the skills and competencies required by the labor market and the society. However, these streams also face some challenges, such as ensuring quality and standards, facilitating mobility and progression, and overcoming stereotypes and prejudices (World Bank Group, 201). The quality and attractiveness of the different streams can vary, depending on the availability and adequacy of resources, teachers, and facilities. Moreover, the different streams may also have different status and recognition, depending on the perceptions and expectations of the stakeholders, such as students, parents, employers, and policymakers (Lewin, 2009; Oketch & Rolleston, 2013; World Bank Group, 2023).

With specific reference to free secondary education, it helps reduce the financial burden on parents, who often struggle to pay for tuition fees and other related costs, such as textbooks, uniforms, meals and transport. By abolishing or subsidizing these costs, free secondary education policies enable more children, especially from poor and marginalized groups, to access and complete secondary education. For instance, in Rwanda, the introduction of free lower secondary education in 2006 and free upper secondary education in 2012 led to a significant increase in enrolment and completion rates, especially for girls and rural students

(Grujters, 2023). Similarly, in Kenya, the abolition of lower secondary school fees in 2008 and upper secondary school fees in 2018 resulted in a surge in enrolment and transition rates, especially for children from arid and semi-arid regions (Africa Check, 2018). For example, Pritchett (2018) found that the massive drive towards boosting access to education has contributed to drawing more children aged 15 years or older from poor rural families into schools and reversed the historically worrisome gap between boys' and girls' enrolment in developing countries.

Another benefit of free secondary education policies is that they enhance the social and economic opportunities for children and their families. By providing free secondary education, governments invest in human capital development, which can boost productivity, innovation and competitiveness in the long run. It is also known that improved access to education could lead to strong demographic changes by improving opportunities for women, for example (Grant, 2015; McIntosh & Finkle, 1995; UNESCO, 1990). Additionally, Todaro & Smith (2015) observe that educational capital is a strong correlate to returns on investment in health since one's ability to benefit from many health programs depends on the extent to which one makes sense of these programs, which in turn depends on one's competency in numeracy or literacy from school.

The OECD (2012) argues that the most gruesome experience any child could have is failing to complete a secondary education. The organization stressed that this could subject the child to a lifetime of punishment, reduce his or her chances in life, and make it difficult for him/her to earn high initial earnings. The organization explained further that low educational attainment impedes the potential people have for adapting to the dynamics of knowledge-driven economies, increases the risk of unemployment and makes it difficult for people to undergo continuous education or to participate fully in politics or civic life. Further, OECD (2012) intimates that reliable educational systems that have the potential for dealing with these challenges are those that are, in line with the SGD 4 aforementioned, of good quality and

equitable in orientation. Such educational systems are effective for making the transition to the world of work easy for school leavers.

The primacy of education as a fundamental human right for every child of school going age is recognized by the United Nations and is captured in Goal 4 of the SDGs: “Quality Education” which strives to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” Awareness of the importance of education to economic and social development has triggered efforts aimed at improving literacy rates in many countries at historically unprecedented levels. Data from The World Bank (2022) shows that global literacy rates for youths 15 years or older rose from 74% in 1990 to 87% in 2020.

For example, in South Africa, the implementation of a no-fee policy for the poorest 60% of schools in 2007 and 80% of schools in 2016 increased the chances of girls to complete secondary education and to delay marriage and childbearing (Gruijters, 2023). Likewise, in Malawi, the abolition of secondary school fees in 2018 improved the retention and performance of girls, who often faced discrimination and harassment in school (Government of Malawi, 2019).

Todaro and Smith (2015) observed that despite this remarkable improvement, lower-income countries are still beset with several difficulties even as they strive to provide improved education to their people. Compared to those in Japan, North America, or Europe who on average receive 12 or more years of schooling, children in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly the underprivileged ones, receive less than 5 years of schooling. This is often due to absenteeism on the part of teachers or the lack of requisite textbooks and other teaching or learning materials, as highlighted by Todaro and Smith (2015, p. 383). As a result, the absolute gap in the number of years of schooling completed between children of the rich and the poor continue to widen (Pritchett, 2018).

One of the main challenges of free secondary education policies is that they require substantial financial resources, which may not be available or sustainable in resource-constrained contexts. The cost of providing free secondary education can be high, especially if it involves expanding the infrastructure, hiring and training more teachers, and improving the quality and relevance of the curriculum. Moreover, free secondary education policies may also have opportunity costs, as they may divert resources from other levels and sectors of education, such as early childhood, primary, tertiary and technical and vocational education. For instance, in Rwanda, the cost of free secondary education increased from 0.9% of GDP in 2006 to 2.4% of GDP in 2012, which posed a challenge for the fiscal balance and the quality of education (Gruijters, 2023). Similarly, in Kenya, the cost of free secondary education was estimated at KSh29.5 billion in 2018, which exceeded the budget allocation and raised concerns about the adequacy and efficiency of funding (Africa Check, 2018).

Another challenge of free secondary education policies is that they may not address the underlying causes of inequality and exclusion in education, such as poverty, gender, location, ethnicity, disability and language. Most free secondary education policies do not cover the cost of essential non-fee expenses, such as textbooks, uniforms, meals and transport, which can still be unaffordable for low-income households (Abango et al., 2023). Moreover, free secondary education policies may also have unintended consequences, such as overcrowding, teacher shortages, low quality, corruption and social stratification, which can affect the learning outcomes and opportunities of disadvantaged students. For example, in South Africa, the no-fee policy did not eliminate the disparities between rich and poor schools, as the latter still faced challenges of inadequate infrastructure, materials, teachers and support (Gruijters, 2023). Likewise, in Malawi, the free secondary education policy did not address the issues of low quality, high dropout, and low transition, especially for rural and remote students (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

## 1.2 Problem Statement

The low enrolment rate for both boys and girls at the secondary school and tertiary levels of education could be explained by the high private cost of education compared to the marginal benefits to be derived from such an investment (Brown et al., 2012; Psacharopoulos, 1989; Todaro & Smith, 2015). Also, the high rate of failure that characterize the gateway exams administered by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) is observed to be partly responsible for this stingy reality. Parental financial support and family wealth have been found to be significant for “purchasing” education for the child, particularly where the expected return from education converges with the market rate of return on education. Where parents are poor, investment in a child’s education becomes sub-optimal, especially where they have no means of estimating the returns to investment in the child’s education or where they have no means of borrowing to finance one’s education (Brown et al., 2012). Education is as much a social good as it is a private good. It constitutes one of the key sources of aggregate productivity increases and growth as well as means for bridging the income gap between the rich and the poor. It is in this regard that many countries have instituted bold educational reform policies that aim to make education free at the Senior High School level to help build-on the success of progressively free junior high school policies that significantly increased enrolment rate at the basic school level (Duflo et al., 2021).

Ghana started implementing her Free Senior High School (FSHS) programme in 2017 with the view of improving access to secondary education by making it free and ensuring that both the rich and the poor have equal opportunity access to secondary school education as espoused by the 1992 constitution of the country (Asumadu, 2019). Apart from abolishing school fees, the FSHS policy requires government to absorb many other fees for students in secondary and vocational schools, such as the cost of meals, textbooks, boarding, sports, and entertainment.

According to Addo (2019), the implementation of the FSHS policy led to an upsurge in secondary school enrolment from 300,195 students in the 2016/2017 academic year to 396,951 students in the 2017/2018. The enrolment spike has exerted serious pressure on infrastructure and logistics, thus hampering the effective implementation of the FSHS policy, to the extent that academic work is greatly distressed (Addo, 2019). At the same time, government spending on educational infrastructure has been woefully inadequate and has presented a major problem to school authorities. Some of the challenges that associated with inadequate government spending on educational infrastructure, according to Addo (2019) and Duflo et al., (2012) are:

- I. Shortfall in classrooms
- II. Reduction in feeding grants
- III. Shortage of textbooks and chairs

One of the major foundations for the ongoing public and theoretical debate about whether secondary school education should be made free or not is based on the high cost of secondary education. Some scholars have argued that making secondary education free leads to the transfer of wealth from the state to the rich in society who can afford to pay their children's school fees, while others contest that the need to improve social welfare makes it imperative for the state to offset the high cost of secondary education in order to extend its socio-economic benefits to all (Todaro & Smith, 2015).

Studies have indeed shown that scholarships and educational grants to students do indeed influence enrolment rates and where such grants are not forthcoming from the state, parental wealth may be the ultimate means by which some people access secondary education (Abbott et al., 2018; Brown et al., 2012). A study by Braunstein, McGrath and Don (2001) examined the effect of family income and financial aid on college students' persistence at Iona College, New York, using data on family demographics, academic achievement and financial variables and found that aid was not a significant predictor of students' truancy. The researchers

established however that, although students from wealthy families tended to be less truant, academic performance was more significant than other factors in predicting college students' truancy (Braunstein et al., 2001). Yet, Alon (2006) found in her study that students from poor homes are more sensitive to student aid and may be less likely, compared to richer families, to respond to aid with repayments. Thus, the tendency for students to stay in school and successfully complete their education depends not only on their academic performance but also the extent to which unconditional financial support is made available to them.

In Ghana, a study by Duflo et al (2021) that sought to develop a model for assessing the impact of the FSH policy using scholarships as a proxy found that scholarship recipients had higher educational attainment, skills, lower preventive health disorders, and lower fertility rates among female recipients. The researchers disclosed that with respect to labour market outcomes, only female scholarship recipients were observed to have made significant private sector gains in terms of access to jobs with considerable rents. The challenge with the study by Duflo et al. (2021) is that rather than placing emphasis on the FSHS beneficiaries as the unit of analysis, the researchers sought to use as proxy scholarship recipients to develop their model of assessment for the FSHS policy. The improved performance and persistence of the scholarship recipients in their study could be explained by the fact that scholarship recipients were mindful of the need to study hard and have better academic performance in order to retain the scholarship. The FSHS policy, on the other hand, does not impose such a requirement on students when it comes to academic performance, except to state that were a student to be repeated, the fee for the repeated class would be borne by the parents for the respective year; however, the evidence suggests that this hardly happens.

Matey (2020) examined the effects of the FSHS policy on the lives of parents and wards using a correlational-cross section descriptive survey of 336 parents of students who benefited from the FSHS policy. The researcher found that the policy has led to an improvement in the economic wellbeing of parents and guardians albeit with some serious implementation

challenges caused by factors such as poor stakeholder consultations, delays in the payment of feeding grants.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the present study is to contribute to the discourse on FSHS by assessing the perception of parents, guardians, and other stakeholders of the educational sector about the benefits of the FSHS and how the FSHS policy can be sustainably enhanced. The following are the research objectives:

- I. To assess the perception of parents about the socio-economic and educational benefits of the FSHS policy.
- II. To explore the perception of parents about how the FSHS policy can be sustainably implemented.
- III. To examine the perception of parents and stakeholders in Education about how the FSHS policy can be improved to ensure better labour market outcomes for senior high school leavers who do not continue to pursue higher education.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The following research question were developed to provide a roadmap for the study.

- I. What are the perceptions of parents about the socio-economic and educational benefits of the FSHS policy?
- II. What is the perception of parents when it comes to ensuring operational sustainability of the FSHS policy.
- III. How can the quality of the FSHS policy be enhanced to ensure better labour market outcomes for senior high school leavers?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study is important in many respects. First, its findings would contribute to the empirical literature on the benefits of expanding access to secondary school education and how implementation challenges facing countries that are struggling with free educational policies can be ameliorated. Second, the results would bring to sharp focus critical areas that policy

interventions could be directed to ensure operational sustainability and enhance the quality of free educational policies. Finally, recommendations from the study could help indicate areas that future academic enquiry into free educational programs could focus on and would thus constitute important reference material to academics interested in educational research.

### **1.6 Scope of the Study**

The study examines only the FSHS policy of Ghana which was started in the 2017/2018 academic year. Although references are made to other educational policies implemented before this time, this research is limited to the FSHS policy of Ghana and does not consider other government programs that seek to make education free either at the basic school or tertiary level in the country. Participants for the study are drawn from the Adoagyiri Municipality in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The study employs the mixed method approach for data collection and analysis.

### **1.7 Definition of Terms**

**Policy:** A myriad of actions and decisions that provide the guidelines and directives for the implementation of some predetermined acts.

**Perception:** Perception can be defined as "the process by which individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to give meaning to their environment" (Robbins & Judge, 2019, p. 116). In other words, perception is a viewpoint that is shaped by an individual's experiences, attitudes, and beliefs, which influences how they interpret and respond to stimuli in their environment.

### **1.8 Organization of the Study**

The study is organized into five chapters. Following the discussion of the introduction, background and research objectives presented in this chapter, Chapter 2 explores the theoretical foundation of the study: the Educational Policy Planning Process and the major works that have been done in the field with respect to how to improve access to education and training so as to enhance the quality of free education programmes. Chapter 3 discusses the methodological

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approach for the research. Chapter 4 presents analyses of the findings from the field data on the views of parents, guardians, and other stakeholders about the FSHS policy in Ghana and how to improve its implementation while the last chapter discusses the findings from the data analyses, makes recommendations.



## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews related works on free compulsory education and its effects on human capital development and employment. The chapter commences with a discussion of the concept of educational policy. I also discuss some of the major secondary sector educational reform programs and the FSHP along with some of the observed implementation challenges based on empirical studies and how some of these challenges can be ameliorated to smoothen implementation and make the policy sustainable in the long run. The Educational Policy Planning Process, the main theoretical support for the study, is also discussed.

### 2.1 Conceptualizing Educational Policy Implementation

The idea of policy implementation has drawn a variety of definitions and viewpoints from academics. Implementation is described as the carrying out of a basic policy decision, usually embodied in a legislation but can be in the form of significant executive orders or judicial rulings by Mazmanian and Sabatier (1985, p. 5). Policy implementation is also referred to as those actions by persons that are directed at achievement of the objectives set forth in the policy decision (Van Meter & Van Horn, 1975). Implementation means “to carry out, accomplish, fulfil, generate, and complete,” according to Pressman and Wildavsky (1973, p. 3). This definition emphasizes on the responsibility of public employees to offer the public effective and equitable service. Additionally, according to O’Toole (2000, p. 263), policy implementation is what arises between a government's purpose to do something and its eventual consequence after action.

Implementation, according to Winter (2003), is the carrying out of policy or authoritative activities in support of policy aims.

According to him, implementation is closely related to the traditional political function of carrying out laws, but implementation research focuses on the implementation of authoritative

policies other than laws, like administrative rules issued by the government and policies made by local government. According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), setting goals and objectives through funding commitments and policy decisions is the first step in implementation. With specific reference to educational policy implementation, Haddad and Demesky (1995, p. 7) disclose that it is an individual or collection of decisions, whether explicit or implicit, that may provide guidelines for guiding future decisions, launch or postpone action, or lead the implementation of earlier acts. According to the 2017 World Development Report, education policies are successful when teachers and decision-makers participate in the policy negotiation process (World Bank, 2017).

From the above definitions, a policy can be conceptualized as the myriad of actions and decisions that provide the guidelines and directives for the implementation of some predetermined acts.

Preparing youngsters to be engaged citizens, find employment in a hostile environment, and be able to endure and adapt to change is the largest challenge confronting nations today (Filmer, 2016). Many developed countries have established appropriate policies to enhance children's abilities and long-term development to solve this problem. An important area has been secondary education.

In many parts of the world, secondary education policies have affected legislation, provider choice, curricular options, teacher recruitment and training, assessment, accreditation, and certification (World Bank, 2005). In fact, this method was used to replicate the secondary school system in nations like the US and Russia (Asumadu, 2019).

### **2.2.0 Educational Reforms in Ghana**

In the quest for free compulsory universal primary education (UPE) within 15 years, Kwame Nkrumah's Accelerated Development Plan (ADP) and the 1961 Education Act played pivotal roles (Hunsaker et al., 2022; U.S. Embassy in Ghana, 2020). The ADP aimed for economic progress, emphasizing African cultural identity in the curriculum (Gloverberg, 2018). However,

challenges emerged as the ambitious plan faced implementation hurdles and criticism regarding its alignment with cultural values (Boakye, 2019).

Following Nkrumah's overthrow, the National Liberation Council (NLC) sought to rebalance the socio-economic landscape through structural adjustments, downsizing, and civic re-education between 1966 and 1969 (Boakye, 2019). The NLC's education policies aimed at rebuilding the system with a strong emphasis on the value of education and its connection to economic development (Braithwaite et al., 2014; Gyedu, 2014). Challenges arose in reconciling private sector involvement, leading to disparities in educational access between urban and rural areas (Ampadu & Mohaamed, 2004; Hutchful, 1987).

After this, the Progress Party, continuing the NLC's policy between 1967 and 1972, faced challenges when its government was toppled by the National Redemption Council (NRC) before executing proposed changes (Boakye, 2019). The transition hindered the implementation of the Education Review Committee's recommendations, including the substitution of O and A levels with the Junior and Senior Secondary School model (JSS/SSS) (Akyeampong, 2009).

The NRC, responding to economic concerns, introduced the New Structure and Content of Education (NSCE) in 1974, reducing pre-tertiary education from 17 to 13 years (Mankoe, 2004). Challenges included aligning the curriculum with industry demands and ensuring a smooth transition (Gyedu, 2014). The government's goal to create a skilled labour force prompted the introduction of practical and technology-oriented programs (Osei et al., 2009; Osei-Wusu et al., 2020).

The reform efforts did not end here, Flt. Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, in 1987 constituted the Evans Anfoam Committee which shortened secondary education to three years in another reform, emphasizing practical and technology-oriented programs (Little, 2010). Challenges of the 1987 educational reform included balancing academic and practical components and managing the transition to the new system (Boakye, 2019).

The last educational reform that Ghana implemented before the FSHS policy was initiated by President John Agyekum Kuffour. This reform aimed at a balanced education. It extended Senior High School to four years and introduced core topics in the curriculum (K. Adu-Gyamfi & Otami, 2020). Challenges emerged regarding the reversal of the four-year senior high school system to three years after the NPP lost power in 2008 (Boakye, 2019).

### **2.2.1 The Free Senior High School Policy (FSHSP) - 2017**

The Free Senior High School Policy, one of the NPP government's flagship programs is a policy that came to replace the progressively free senior high school policy that was ran by the NDC administration until 2015. The FSHSP seeks to provide completely free education and therefore abolishes any such payments by parents to send their children to SHS. Other costs absorbed by the government under the FSHSP include uniforms, feeding, teaching, and learning materials and infrastructure. The feeding component makes warm meals available to the day students once a day.

Since the programme started in 2017, government has shown increased commitment for its implementation by releasing critically needed resources for the programme to ensure that every Ghanaian, regardless of family socioeconomic status, had equal access to second cycle education. For instance, the government spent GH¢10.5 billion on education in 2017, about a billion more than in 2016. (Armah, 2021). In 2018, spending grew to GH¢ 12.7 billion, GH¢13.3 billion in 2019, and GH¢ 14.7 billion in 2020. The 2021 budget committed to a large increase in education sector investment, with GH¢ 15.6 billion set aside for that fiscal year (Kwegyiriba, 2021).

### **2.3 Benefits of the FSHSP**

Tamanja and Pajibo (2019) found that gross secondary school enrolment has increased by close to double from the 2014 figure of 273,152 to 472,732 students as at 2018 showing that indeed the program has created expanded access to secondary education in the country. Studies have shown that there are a lot of benefits to secondary education. Ahmad and Cohen (2014) observe

that without access to secondary education, girls would have little possibilities to better their lives, and the world's growth may be threatened. They explained that secondary education helps prevent teenage pregnancies, delays the age of childbirth among girls and improves their chances of securing better jobs in the future.

An experimental study carried out by Duflo et al., (2021) that used scholarship awards as a proxy for free senior high school education discovered that while scholarships boosted the likelihood of women pursuing post-secondary education and working in the public sector, the total proportion of secondary school graduates pursuing tertiary education remained relatively low in their sample. They established that only a few of the secondary school graduates pursued their dreams of becoming teachers or entered other careers that require university education and pay well. They explained that the competition for the limited number of public sector jobs creates negative externalities for some individuals which was evident in the observation that in 2013, of the 67% of the scholarship recipients that planned to pursue postsecondary education, by 2020, just a third (24%) had done so.

A number of studies (Abdul-Rahaman et al., 2018; Asumadu, 2019; Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019) have shown that the FSHSP has been mostly praised as a timely intervention to the financial strain that parents were going through under the old system which exacted payments for school fees, examination, library, sports, culture, science and mathematics among others.

In a related study, Matey (2020) found that most parents (92.6%) admitted that the FSHSP has been very helpful in alleviating their economic and social woes. The respondents of the study disclosed that that the FSHSP policy has contributed to freeing up resources for investment in income earning ventures, fostered peace at home among couples who hitherto used to experience petty disagreements over house-keeping money. Additionally, although the study found that the FSHSP has reduced the rate of attrition among students, there was no evidence to suggest that social lives of students were significantly impacted by the FSHSP (Matey, 2020).

Similar conclusions were arrived at study by Manu (2020) in his study on the perception of

teachers about the FSHSP in Ghana. The research found that both teachers and students, who were the respondents of the study, are of the opinion that the FSHSP has largely succeeded in reducing truancy. However, regarding the benefit to students regarding their social lives, the findings from the study by Manu (2020) was averse to that of Matey as the author established that the FSHSP indeed contributes to improvement in student's social lives.

#### **2.4 Challenges to the Sustainability of FSHSP**

Even though the programme is in its fifth year, research in other countries where it has been implemented indicates that FSHSP is plagued with a plethora of issues that impede its implementation. While Free Secondary Education increases enrolment and retention in secondary schools, retention is threatened by several socioeconomic factors that lead to student dropout.

For example, the increased student enrolment has led to challenges such as heavy teaching loads, school dropouts, teacher shortages, and insufficient instructional materials (Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019). Studies carried out in other countries where similar programs have been carried out indicate that the increased enrolment has put a serious financial stress on government to develop educational infrastructure to accommodate the teeming number of students (Adan & Orodho, 2015; James et al., 2016).

A major twist to the infrastructure deficit problem under the FSHSP that seem to have been overlooked in most of the research that have been conducted so far is the impact on classroom size and learning outcomes. Studies conducted by Barrett et al., (2019, p. 7) in several countries have shown that class size, which is a function of factors such as the number of classrooms available, teaching and learning materials, and teachers do in fact affect the academic

performance of students. They observed that schools in Finland, which boasts one of the greatest education rankings in the world, have an average of 195 pupils, with just 19 in each classroom. The prevailing notion is that each student's potential should be maximised by giving good educational direction and teaching them in small groups. This strategy encourages deeper relationships between teachers and students, as well as between the community and the school, and improves all stakeholders' commitment to education.

Similarly, a 1995 study of data obtained by the New York Board of Education from 213 instructors and 599 pupils revealed that both teachers and students showed unfavourable attitudes toward large class sizes (Rivera-Batiz & Marti, 1995). Overcrowding causes feelings of overwhelming discouragement, and contempt. Many thought it was the most severe problem confronting the schools. The research also discovered that these feelings were especially profound at schools with a high number of kids from low-income backgrounds, and that overcrowding was highly associated with poor learning outcomes. Although the FSHSP tried to deal with overcrowding with the double-tracking system, the situation persists in many schools.

Other studies point to issues of financial sustainability. Tamanja and Pajibo (2019) found that government expenditure on the FSHSP in Ghana for example increased from \$45 million dollars in 2017 when the program was initially rolled out to \$103 million dollars in 2018 and in 2019 an estimated \$193 million was committed to the program. Other challenges the study revealed include the fact that over 8000 teachers that were employed to teach in the double track system that was developed to deal with the enrolment pressures had not been paid their salaries in arrears for over five years. This creates a very dissatisfied and poorly motivated crop of teachers who are not willing to give off their best for the teaching profession (Agbesi, 2018; Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019)

Such financing challenges tend to threaten the sustainability of the FSHSP and if care is not taken, could derail smooth implementation of the program. For example, Addo (2019)

identified that although the desirability of the FSHSP is not in doubt, the lack of a financial blueprint and legal instrument to underpin the policy raises concerns among certain stakeholders about its long-term viability. The author enhanced that there is an overwhelming appeal to the government to develop a robust financial sustainability strategy that would enable it to advance with the implementation of the FHSP and other social intervention programmes although this has not been heeded.

Asumadu (2016) in his study found that in addition to the problems highlighted above, delays in the release of grants by the central government to school heads also hampers the smooth running of the schools as this affect the capacity of the school to provide feeding and to things needed to effectively keep the schools running.

## **2.5 Ensuring Operational Sustainability of the FSHSP**

Agbesi (2018) observed that, if proper measures for continual improvement and sustainability of the FSHSP are not implemented, the aim of providing increased and equitable access to education for everyone would be shattered. The author recognised four major linked parts of education policy sustainability: decentralisation, the establishment of quantitative indicators, a thorough knowledge, and the equitable growth of all levels of the education scheme.

Agbesi (2018) echoed that carrying out decentralization would broaden participation in decision making at the local level among all stakeholder groups inter alia the school and the community in which it is located, district assemblies, and the directorates of education which participation is strongly needed for the mobilization of resources for school for educational planning, monitoring, and development. Developing indicators for monitoring depends on effective leadership.

Effective schools, according to Scheerens (2016), have characteristics such as "strong and competent leadership, high expectations of learners, a learning environment conducive to learning, an emphasis on basic-skill development, and frequent monitoring of students' progress." These components of effective schools are interconnected because strong leadership

including both teaching and non-teaching personnel is required to give the essential management and administrative guidelines to steer the school on the proper route to achieve excellent student results (Leithwood et al., 2010; Ramberg et al., 2019). Effective leadership would also help to reduce the many instances of theft and embezzlement that have been recorded in many senior high schools in the country in recent times (Bampoe, 2022; Doudu, 2017).

The need for growth and development at all levels of education derives from the fact that the quality of teaching and learning at lower levels depend on the professional competency of the teacher, which is reflected in pedagogical and instructional design and methodological approaches adopted to make it easier for students to understand what is being taught. Much of this is connected to the quality of teacher training and education (Addo, 2019; Agbesi, 2018; Akyeampong et al., 2007). Addo (2019) stressed that one of the critical requirements for making the FSHSP sustainable is providing more training to educational planners and linking them to educational policy reforms.

According to a UNDP research, private sector investment in education may "supplement governmental finance by providing extra resources and boosting the efficiency of current resources" (UNDP, 2019). This can assist to guarantee that the FSHSP is sufficiently supported without overburdening the public purse. Furthermore, private sector involvement may assist to minimise the cost of delivering free education by giving access to lower-priced supplies and equipment, as well as by leveraging the knowledge of private sector players.

Another recommendation based on a cost-benefit analysis of the FSHSP by the Copenhagen Consensus Centre revealed that making subsidies available to private school to absorb students who wish to attend private SHS instead of a public SHS would be more beneficial to the country (Turkson et al., 2020). The study observed that with annual enrolment shortfall of 140000, the government will need to make subsidy payments for only 30,000 students to private schools to cover overhead costs in respect of teachers' salaries and other administrative expenses. Such

transfers would require the government to make financial commitment of about GHC 58.5 million Ghana cedis annually or GHC 491 million Ghana cedis in 15 years at a discount rate of 8%. They explained that this would reduce the pressure on government to construct an estimated 50 additional public schools thereby saving the country roughly GHC 250 million cedis over the same period (Turkson et al., 2020).

The suggestion by Turkson et al., (2020) has also been confirmed by results from recent studies which identified how urgent it is for the government of Ghana to seek for private sector involvement to guarantee the sustainability of the FSHSP. Private sector involvement can take many forms, such as providing funds, offering technical assistance, and collaborating on curriculum development. Private sector involvement can also help to bridge the gap between the demand for and supply of resources needed for the FSHSP. This can help to ensure that the policy remains effective, efficient, and equitable, without placing too much strain on the public purse.

According to a study by the World Bank, private sector actors can “provide technical assistance to schools in the form of training, advice, and support” (World Bank, 2020). This can help to ensure that the policy is effectively implemented, without compromising its quality. Private sector actors can also help to identify and address any challenges or gaps that may be hindering the policy’s effectiveness.

Private sector involvement is also critical to curriculum development of the FSHSP. According to a study by the African Development Bank, private sector actors can “collaborate with the Ministry of Education to put together appropriate curricula that are tailored to the needs of the market” (African Development Bank, 2018). This can help to ensure that the policy is providing students with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in the job market. Moreover, private sector actors can also assist in identifying any gaps in the curriculum, thus ensuring that the policy is providing an effective and up to date education

## **2.6 Ensuring Improved Labour Market Outcomes for Secondary School Leavers under the FSHSP**

The World Bank observe that every year, an estimated 210,000 people join the unemployment pool in Ghana. Out of this number, approximately 60% are graduates from various educational levels including the senior high schools. The organization bemoaned poor quality education and disconnect between education and the jobs as key challenges (Dadzie et al., 2020). Providing insight to the factors giving rise to the phenomenon,

At the secondary school level, some of the strategies that have been adopted to ensure that academic training does not fall out of step with labour market realities is the establishment of Technical and Vocational Training Schools to offer practical hands-on vocational education to secondary school leavers who want to acquire employable artisanal skills so that in the event that they fail to pursue higher education for whatever reason their livelihoods would not be impaired.

However, a study by Amedorme and Fiagbe (2013) disclosed that the few technical and vocational training institutes in the country (21) are critically under resourced with several capacity challenges that hampers their ability to deliver on their core mandates. The study recommended for broader stakeholder consultation to be carried out between the National Board for Professional and Technical Examination (NABPTEX) unit of the GES, the Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET), principals of Technical Universities, Directors of National Vocation Training Institutes (NVTIs) and Rectors of Polytechnics among other groups, to ensure that challenges related to progression into the world of work and institutes of higher learning are resolved (Amedorme & Fiagbe, 2013).

Adogpa (2015) disclosed that the medium of instruction used in rolling out training and instructions in the schools have to be revised in favour of regionally dominant Ghanaian languages as the wholesale application of the English language makes it difficult for learners to adequately appreciate the skills and concepts needed to be functional in the world of work.

## 2.7 Theoretical Framework

This section discusses the theoretical framework for the study and explains why the theory was chosen.

### 2.7.1 Welfarism

Welfarism is not only a theoretical framework in social science; it is also a theory deeply rooted in ethics and philosophy. At its core, welfarism posits that well-being is the sole intrinsic value, guiding moral judgments based on their consequences for overall well-being (Holtug, 2003; Ng, 2000). This broadens its scope beyond the confines of social science, encompassing a foundational perspective in ethical considerations.

While Amartya Sen's Capability Approach is influential, it's essential to note that it doesn't strictly align with welfarism. Unlike welfarist theories that assert well-being as the exclusive determinant, Sen's approach argues that capabilities, representing the freedom to achieve valuable functioning, are crucial criteria for evaluating social arrangements (Sen, 1979; Jacobson, 2016). Sen himself has critiqued certain forms of welfarism, such as utilitarianism, for their perceived narrowness and neglect of the intricate diversity of human lives (Sen, 1987; Dang, 2014).

Richard Titmuss's contribution to welfarism is more distinctly linked to the welfare state—the system of social policies and programs designed to enhance citizen well-being. Titmuss advocated for a universal and comprehensive welfare system that fosters social solidarity and altruism (Titmuss, 1958; Mann, 2009). Notably, he criticized the marketization and commodification of social goods, exemplified in his critique of the commercialization of blood donation (Titmuss, 1970; Deacon, 1993).

Acknowledging the robustness of welfarism, it is important to recognize the challenges it faces. Measurement and comparison of well-being pose difficulties, and conflicting or perverse preferences, as well as the problem of interpersonal aggregation, are pertinent issues (Adler &

Glendinning, 2007; Alcock & Oakley, 2001). Additionally, welfarism encounters the coexistence of non-welfarist values, such as justice, rights, or autonomy (Keller, 2009; Reisman, 1982).

In the context of this study, welfarism becomes a valuable framework. Applying a welfarist lens involves assessing how the policy influences not only academic outcomes but also broader aspects of well-being, including access to opportunities, social services, and the overall quality of education for the individual and society. This holistic evaluation is in line with welfarism's emphasis on fairness and equitable distribution of resources. Moreover, welfarism contributes significantly to discussions around the welfare state, a system of social policies aimed at enhancing the well-being of citizens such as the FSHS policy.

## **2.8 The Educational Planning Process**

The study's theoretical foundation is the Educational Policy Planning Process developed by Haddad and Demesky (1995) which is shown in figure 1 and 2 below.

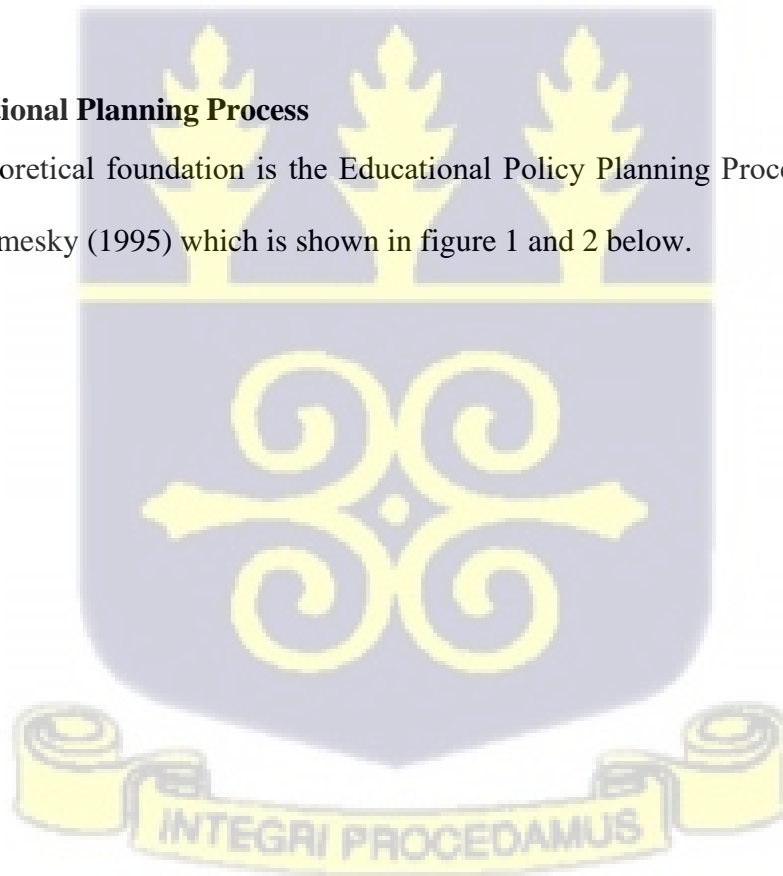
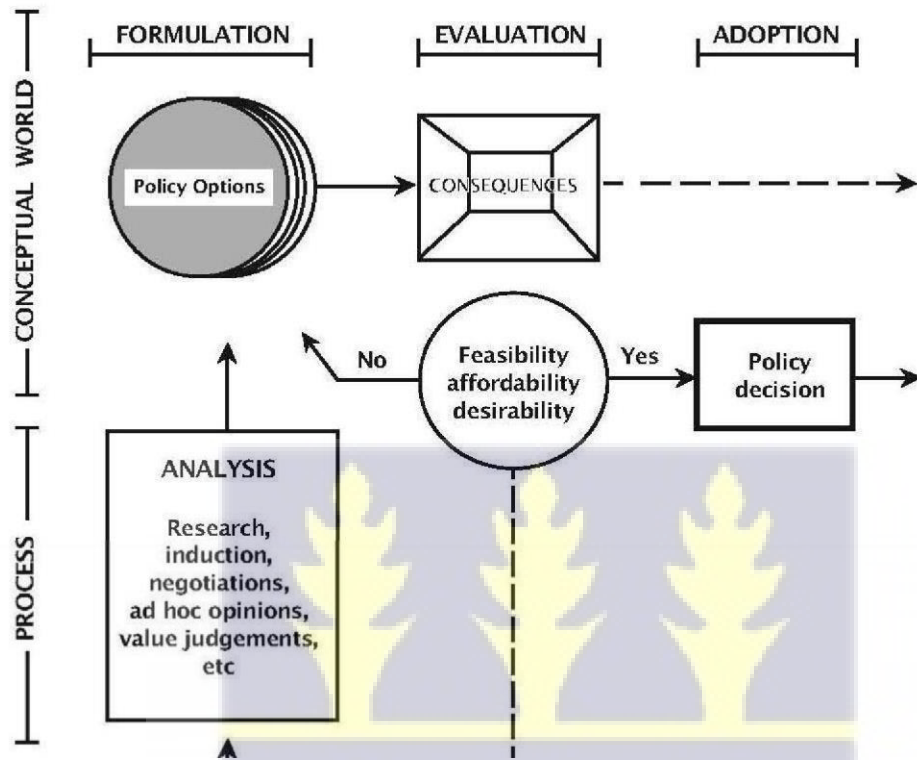


Figure 1: The Policy Planning Process

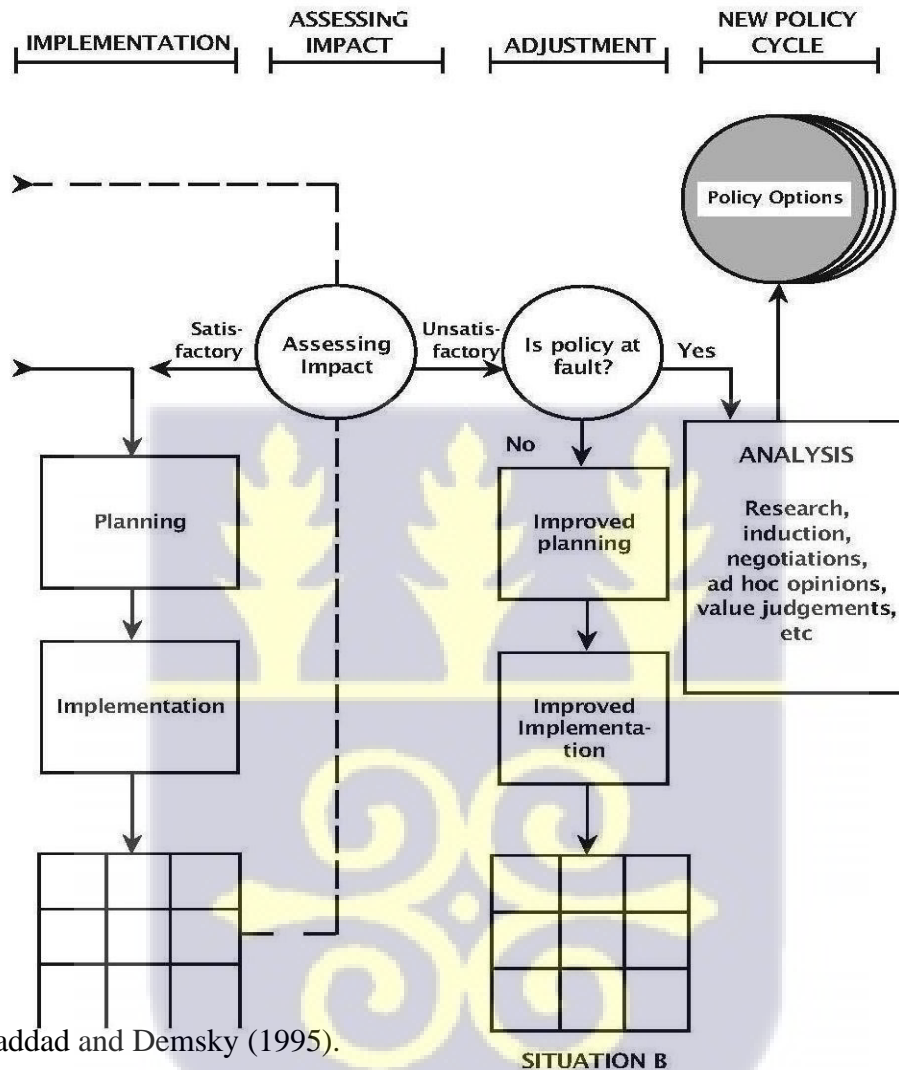


Source: Haddad and Demesky (1995)



As evident from figure 1 and 2, Haddad and Demesky's framework proposes for a policy analysis to be conducted on the current situation. This is because policy change is generally a reaction to problem(s) that might derail a nation's political, economic, or socio-cultural progress (Addo, 2019).

The Policy Planning Process- continued



Source: Haddad and Demsky (1995).

Subsequent actions would centre on the need to consider the development of policy alternatives since initially policy proposals may have been developed on an ad hoc or knee jerk basis. The evaluation of policy options would guarantee the plan's attractiveness in terms of its influence on diverse interest groups and its consistency with national ideology, economic growth, and national objectives. (Addo, 2019) It must also be viable and sustainable to contribute to the achievement of the long-term national objective. Policy assessment, according to the OECD

(2020), promotes public accountability, learning, and better public sector effectiveness through improved decision-making.

According to the framework, efficient policy execution requires a resource both financial and non-financial, a timetable for people, the technical competence of key officials, and an efficient administrative structure. Not only that, but processes should also be put in place to analyse policy effect, including human capital deficiencies, finance mechanisms (which might affect execution) and policy impact on stakeholders. Finally, and perhaps very important is the observation that the end of implementation of one policy may be the beginning of another policy.

The framework was chosen as a suitable theoretical foundation for the study because of the need to minimize waste and ensure efficient resource utilisation in under the FSHSP by providing planners and technocrats with the knowledge and skills needed to appreciate and implement relevant strategies, particularly when it comes to the selection, mobilisation, and funding methods under resource constraints.

## **2.9 Empirical Review**

A study by Doriye et al. (2020) in Tanzania delved into the challenges encountered by teachers in the implementation of a free education policy. The research adopted a descriptive research design employing a quantitative research approach. The population of the study comprised teachers from 13 public primary schools in Babati Town, Tanzania, with a sample size of 147 educators. The primary tool of data collection was a questionnaire survey, and the obtained data was subjected to descriptive analysis using SPSS software.

The key findings of the study illuminate several challenges faced by teachers within the scope of implementing the free education policy. Notable impediments included a shortage of

classrooms, resulting in overcrowded learning spaces. Teacher motivation was identified as a critical issue, reflecting a need for enhanced incentives to bolster educators' commitment. Inadequate funding also emerged as a pervasive challenge affecting the seamless execution of the policy. Additionally, the study revealed a deficiency in stakeholder participation, emphasizing the importance of involving parents and other key actors in the policy formulation and implementation processes.

In light of these findings, Doriye et al. (2020) proffered practical recommendations. The authors advocate for an increase in government funding for education to address resource shortages effectively. They stressed the importance of providing clear and comprehensive explanations of the free education policy to all stakeholders involved. Furthermore, the study underscored the necessity of active involvement of parents and other stakeholders in the policymaking and implementation processes, highlighting the potential for their contributions to ameliorate the identified challenges.

The weakness of the study by Doriye et al (2020) is that the sample consisted only of teachers and did not include parent in the study. This could have biased the study findings somewhat. The present study avoids such fundamental problem by including not only educator and other stakeholders but also parents in the sample.

Unlike the study by Doriye et al., (2020), Paul (2019) investigated how parents of pastoralist communities in West Pokot County, Kenya perceives the free primary education (FPE) policy that was implemented by the government in 2003. The paper uses a descriptive survey research design and collects data from 50 head teachers, 50 parents, and 300 students. The paper finds that the FPE policy has increased the enrollment and retention of students in primary schools, but also faces several challenges such as inadequate resources, poor infrastructure, low quality of education, and socio-cultural factors that hinder the participation of pastoralist children. The paper recommends that the county government should address the needs and concerns of the pastoralist communities, improve the quality and quantity of instructional materials and

facilities, and empower the parents economically and socially. The paper also suggests that the national government should increase the budgetary allocation to the schools in pastoralist counties and formulate policies and strategies that will ensure the sustainability of the FPE program.

Pastoralist are usually from low-income households and just like most of the respondents in the current study and it is very paramount that a more comprehensive analysis both quantitative and qualitative study is carried out into how the free education policies can help transform their lives, first by improving access to jobs for example to beneficiary children in line with the principle of social equity any study that fails to meet this criterion would be inadequate. The present study seeks to fill this gap.

## **2.9 Developing the Conceptual Framework**

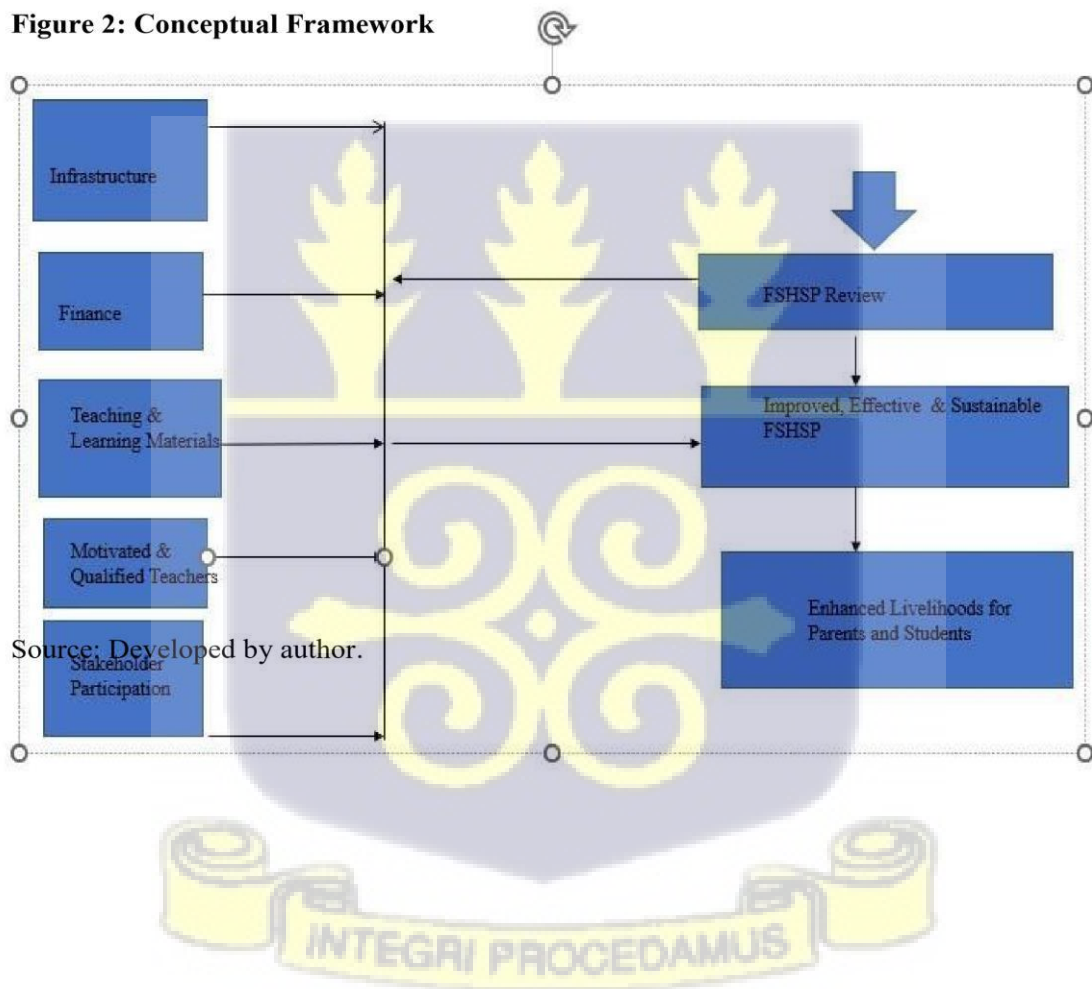
The Free Senior High School Policy (FSHSP) of Ghana is a government initiative that aims to provide free and quality education to all senior high school students in the country. The policy was introduced in 2017 and has been implemented in phases, covering all eligible students by 2019. The policy is expected to have positive impacts on the socio-economic development of Ghana, as well as the well-being of the students and their parents.

However, the policy also faces several challenges in its implementation, such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding, lack of teaching and learning materials, low teacher motivation and recruitment, and limited stakeholder participation. These challenges may affect the quality and sustainability of the policy, as well as its outcomes for the students and their parents.

The FSHSP policy is assumed to have a direct effect on the well-being of the students and their parents, as well as an indirect effect on the labour market outcomes of the graduates. The

dependent variables are the perceptions of the parents and other stakeholders of education about the benefits and challenges of the FSHSP policy, and how the policy can be improved. The intervening variables are the factors that may influence the quality and sustainability of the FSHSP policy, such as infrastructure, finance, teaching and learning materials, teacher recruitment and motivation, and stakeholder participation. The framework also suggests that a policy review process could be triggered based on the analysis of the prevailing situation, which will lead to the same outcome of enhanced well-being and livelihoods improvement as captured in the diagram below.

**Figure 2: Conceptual Framework**



Source: Developed by author.

METHODOLOGY

**3.0 Introduction**

Methodology, according to Saunders et al., (2013) relates to the theory of how research ought to be done. In this chapter, I outline the research paradigm, the research design, the methodology used for this dissertation and discuss the population, sample, and sampling strategy, as well as a description of the research instrument, data collection protocol, and data analysis plan.

**3.1 Research Paradigm**

The research paradigm functions as the fundamental philosophy guiding the overall approach to the study. Some of the common research paradigms are:

**3.1.1 Positivism**

The term positivism refers to a philosophical school of thought that originated in the 19th century. Positivism has its roots in the works of Emile Durkheim, John Locke, Newton, and Auguste Comte the French philosopher who was a key proponent of the ideology (Creswell, 2009; Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Tracy, 2013; Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009). The basis of positivist thinking is the assumption that reality exists a priori, independent of human senses and is augmented by scientific laws (Johnson & Christensen, 2014) and thus espouses a research approach that is based on the scientific method of enquiry.

Positivists are harsh critics of academic investigations that are not intended to provide concrete facts. They argue that it is critical for scientific enquiry to apply methods and tactics that will allow them to discover the ultimate truth while avoiding biases in the process. This, they believe, is only feasible if sufficient safeguards are in place to prevent mistakes in data collection, measurement, and estimation, allowing generalisations from the study to be made (Creswell, 2009; Tracy, 2013). The positivist paradigm advances a research perspective that is based on the 'scientific method' of study. Comte (1856) claimed that experimentation,

observation, and experience-based reasoning should be the foundation for understanding human behaviour, and hence the only valid way of obtaining knowledge and human understanding.

According to Comte (1856), the scientific method is a process of experimentation used to investigate observations and provide answers to problems. The same method is used to determine cause and effect relationships. Positivists argue that the social world should be understood in the same way that the natural world is. There is a cause-and-effect link connecting occurrences in the natural world. According to positivists, if the same is proven, it can be anticipated with precision in the future. Richard (2003, p. 37) observe that positivist admits the existence universal laws that regulate social phenomena and argue for the application of the scientific method to help uncover these laws which are critically needed for the formulation of factual statements.

The positivism strive to achieve this approach through a rigorous use of statistical estimation and measurement methods, popularly known as quantitative methodology, which are devoid of biases hence guaranteeing the reliability and generalizability of the research findings (Kumar, 2011). A number of recent studies (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Tracy, 2013; Yin, 2009) of positivist literature submit that employing large representative sample in a research is one of the means for ensuring reliability and generalizability in quantitative research and would mostly resort to the use of highly structured methods to ensure the study could be replicated which is normally done by adopting quantifiable observation techniques that can statistically be analysed (Saunders et al., 2013).

### **3.1.2 Post-positivism**

Creswell (2009) observed that, as philosophical derivative of positivism, post-positivism proposes a moderately deterministic worldview in which causes dictate effects. Thus, postpositivism is concerned with actual attempts to identify the elements giving rise to certain results, which is why it is sometimes compared to reductionism or the attempt to identify the

discontinuous elements influencing an outcome. The post-positivist worldview emerged as an attempt to help address the challenges inherent in positivist thinking and as such do not claim the existence of absolute truths. They agree that reality is imperfect, and that truth is at the very least, uncertain. Post-positivism therefore relaxes the stringent requirement for academic and social enquiry to comply with experimentation and testable hypothesis formulation (Creswell, 2009). Among post-positivism's key contestation is the observation that what is particularly true of one culture may not necessarily be true of another culture.

Positivism and positivism have been chastised for a variety of reasons (Creswell, 2009; Kumar, 2011). The first point of contention is that, while objective and scientific procedures are ideal for investigating natural things, they are inappropriate for enquiries about social phenomenon to obtain equal level of objectivity. Also, regarding its traits, the general consensus among scholars is that they are hardly applicable to investigations about human participants (Richards, 2003). Byrne (2012, pp. 13–14) for example argue that in many respects, the three nomothetic social sciences [here, economics, psychology, and sociology] have had the most serious issues. He contends that by adopting the natural sciences as a model, they have fostered three types of expectations that have proven difficult to meet, as presented in Universalist form, they include (I) an expectation of prediction (II) an expectation of management and (III) both i.e. I and II predicated on a quantitative accuracy. He observes that the nomothetic social sciences were founded on the notion that social phenomena can be measured and that the measures themselves can be universally agreed upon.

### 3.1.3 Interpretivism

The philosophical assumption of qualitative research is founded on interpretivism, subjectivism and social constructionism. According to the subjectivist viewpoint, social phenomena emerge through the perceptions and subsequent acts of social actors (Saunders et al. 2013).

Furthermore, this is a continuous process in that these social phenomena are always being revised because of social interaction. Remenyi et al., (1998, p. 35) emphasise the need of studying "the intricacies of the situation in order to comprehend the reality or possibly a reality functioning behind them." This is frequently linked to the word constructionism i.e. the notion that the only knowledge people have are those acquired through sensory experiences and that knowledge is constructed by culture and society (Creswell, 2009; Kumar, 2011; Wertz et al., 2011). Social constructionism's main characteristic in effect lay in the observation that the sociocultural context of the research can hardly be done away with so effort should be made at studying the 'larger picture' in which meanings are created by participants (Creswell, 2009; Kumar, 2011).

Individual subjective experiences are the main sources of information for constructivist research and given the breadth and diversity of these subjective experiences and meanings, the researcher is encouraged to explore the complexities of the perspectives rather than reducing meanings to limiting notions (Creswell, 2009). In this approach, the researcher's goal is to make the participants' perspectives important to the phenomena being examined. Constructivist research questions are designed broadly and openly to provide participants enough room for flexibilities to make meanings out of the phenomena being studied and allow the researcher to discover the underlying meaning of participants' experiences and knowledge about their environments and decode them for public consumption.

Qualitative research employs a wide array of inquiry procedures, data collection, analysis, and interpretation techniques and although there are many strands of qualitative research methodologies, they all rely on one or more of these techniques (Creswell, 2009).

For a fact, the qualitative research strategies adopted for any particular study have a considerable influence on the methodologies, which are inconsistent even within strategies (Saunders et al., 2013). Looking across the landscape of qualitative methodologies reveals a

diverse set of viewpoints, including social justice thinking (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), ideological perspectives (Lather, 1991), philosophical orientations (Schwandt, 2000), and systematic procedural standards (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Creswell, 2007).

As echoed by Creswell (2007), several points of view contend for consideration in the growing paradigm of inquiry known as qualitative research. Standard quantitative techniques to data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and report writing differ fundamentally from qualitative ones. Purposive sampling, open-ended data gathering, text or image analysis, information display in tables and figures, and subjective inference all inform qualitative studies (Creswell, 2009).

Also, unlike quantitative research that require sufficiently large sample sizes, qualitative research employs fewer number of study participants. Saunders et al. (2013, p. 472) put it well when they said, "Although numbers depend on meaning, it is not necessarily the case that meaning depends on numbers." The focus of qualitative research is typically on a few problems, and it employs fewer people to collect sufficient rich data, which is then thematically examined (Kumar, 2011).

#### **3.1.4 Pragmatism**

Pragmatism acknowledges the existence of multiple avenues for comprehending and interpreting phenomena, urging researchers to adopt an eclectic approach that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2009). This paradigm facilitates the integration of diverse perspectives, recognizing that distinct research questions may necessitate different methodological approaches. The central focus lies in resolving real-world problems and attaining a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

In this research, I opted for the pragmatist paradigm. Pragmatism, as a paradigmatic framework, aligns with the research philosophy that underscores practicality, flexibility, and the integration

of diverse methods to effectively address research questions (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002; Saunders et al., 2013).

In the context of this study, pragmatism proves especially fitting as it allows for the utilization of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The objective is not to rigidly adhere to a singular philosophical standpoint but rather to harness the strengths of each method, offering a holistic and nuanced exploration of parents' perceptions regarding the Free Senior High School Policy in Adoagyir-Nsawam, Ghana.

The adoption of a pragmatist research paradigm underscores the practical significance of the study's findings, advocating for a balanced integration of theoretical perspectives and hands-on, field-based methodologies. This choice aligns with the overarching objective of generating actionable insights that substantially contribute to the discourse surrounding education policies and parental perceptions in the Ghanaian context.

### **3.2 Study Site Description**

One of Ghana's 261 Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies, the Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipal is a component of the Eastern Region's thirty-three (33) Municipalities and Districts. The Municipality's capital is Nsawam, and it is located in the southernmost portion of the Eastern Region between latitudes 5'.45 N and 5'.58 N and longitudes 0.07 W and 0.27 W (Eastern Regional Co-ordinating Council, n.d.; Ghanadistricts.com, n.d.). The Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipal, which is part of the Eastern Region, has a total size of around 175 square kilometres. Ga West Municipal is located to the south of Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipal, while Suhum Municipal is located to the north and west.

Nsawam, the municipal capital, is a stopover on the Accra-Kumasi Road, which connects the coastal areas to the northern section of the country and is a buoyant economic centre for sellers



Nsawam Adoagyiri was chosen as the study site because it is one of the municipality/towns indicated as study sites for students by the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER).

### 3.3 Research Design

The methodological choice for this study were motivated by the study's principal goal, which is to analyse parents' perceptions of the FSHSP. The research adopts a sequential exploratory triangulation design, a mixed method combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This involves the systematic collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data to corroborate and enrich the findings (Saunders et al., 2013; Patton, 2002; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

### 3.4 Population

A study population is defined as the universe of people or objects from which a sample is selected and about which the conclusions of a study are generalised (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009). The population of this study includes all residents of Nsawam Adoagyiri municipality.

#### 3.4.1 Sample Frame

parents whose wards are in any of the government assisted senior high schools or have completed from such an institution within the last four years (starting from when the FSHS policy implementation began), opinion leaders, teachers, and heads of government assisted senior high schools benefiting from the FSHS policy in Nsawam Adoagyiri municipality.

### 3.5 Sample Size Determination

The fraction of the population that is actually studied constitute the sample (Yamane, 1967). Based on the 2021 population and housing census figure of 86000 people, the mathematical

formulae for determining appropriate sample size for different populations proposed by Yamane (1967) was used to compute the required sample size for this study as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{(1+N(e)^2)}$$

Where  $n$  = minimum sample size  $N$  = population size  $e$  = expected margin of error at the 95% confidence interval.

Substituting the population of Nsawam Adoagyiri into the equation gives

$$n = \frac{86000}{1 + 86000(0.05^2)}$$

$$= 398 \text{ approximately.}$$

### 3.5.1 The Sample

The study sample consisted of parents of Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipality. The data was collected from 398 respondent who answered the questionnaire and structured interview. The total number of male respondents were 200 and female respondents were 198. The respondents were mainly parents who had at least one child attending senior high school.

### 3.6 Sampling Technique

Two main sampling techniques were employed to recruit respondents for the study. The first was a purposive sampling that was used to select the survey participants for the quantitative study followed by criterion sampling which was used to select the participants for the qualitative study. The decision to employ purposive sampling for the quantitative aspect of the study was to enable the researcher select respondents who, for the purpose of this study either had a child in senior high school or a child who had completed senior high school at the time of the study. Purposive sampling is a technique used to recruit respondents who possessed the characteristics or attributes needed to answer the research question (Johnson & Christensen,

2014; Tracy, 2013). Purposive sampling was used to guarantee that enough rich and in-depth data could be gathered for the study. It aligns with the principles of probability theory, allowing for the application of statistical tests although it may be difficult to avoid biases in the selection of cases (Creswell, 2003).

In contrast, criterion sampling was employed for the qualitative phase, specifically for selecting participants for in-depth interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Criterion sampling involves selecting individuals who meet pre-established criteria relevant to the research question. In this study, participants were chosen based on their direct involvement as parents or educationists with firsthand experience in the implementation of the Free Senior High School Policy.

Criterion sampling was deemed appropriate because it targeted individuals who possessed specific knowledge and experiences crucial to the research objectives. This method facilitated the collection of in-depth insights and perspectives from participants who met the established criteria, ensuring that the qualitative data gathered were highly relevant to the study's focus.

While criterion sampling does introduce an element of subjectivity, its use was justified by the need to capture diverse and insightful perspectives from individuals intimately familiar with the phenomenon under investigation. This approach enhanced the qualitative research's depth and specificity, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of stakeholders' perceptions.

In all 398 respondents were selected for the study out of which 8 were chosen to participate in the qualitative interview. Selection of the 390 respondents for the quantitative study took into consideration the estimated 47,962 households recorded in the 2021 population census. To ensure fair representation, the 390 were purposively selected from the municipality. Among the towns these participants were selected from include Sakyikrom, Wangara, Kwasi Tetteh, Oparekrom, Ntoase and Nsawam.

### 3.7 Data Collection Method and Instruments

Since the researcher aimed to triangulate quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis approaches for corroboration and validation by connecting the quantitative statistical data and qualitative findings, two datasets were gathered through a survey, evaluated individually, and compared during the study process. The quantitative data was collected from parents whose children have either benefitted from the FSHSP or are already in public senior high schools and are therefore enjoying the FSHSP.

After reading thoroughly on the nature of other African countries' free educational policies, implementation issues, citizen concerns, and various solutions over the years, the researcher employed a questionnaire and an interview guide as the primary sources of data. The questionnaire consisted of thirty (30) items. The first eight items in Part A asked for demographic information about gender, age, academic qualification, religion, and marital status of the respondents. The next twenty-two items were divided into three categories: Part B was on perception or views about the FSHSP (9 items), Part C collected data on how to make the implementation of the FSHSP sustainable (8 items), and Part D on how to ensure better labour market outcomes for senior high school leavers (5 items) (see Appendix 1). For those respondents who could neither read nor write, the questionnaire was turned into an interview a structured interview guide containing the same questions which was read to them in the language they understand by trained research assistants who were recruited for the study and the responses were recorded accordingly. The questionnaire items were mainly ratings or Likert scale items on a five-point scale with 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 Neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

On the other hand, the qualitative aspect of this research employed an unstructured Interview Guide to gather in-depth perspectives from stakeholders, including parents and educationists, regarding the implementation of the Free Senior High School Policy (FSHSP) in

Ghana. I employed face-to-face interview which aimed to extract nuanced insights and firsthand experiences related to the FSHSP.

The interview commenced with the collection of demographic information, including age, gender, educational background, occupation, and other relevant details. This information helped contextualize the responses and identify potential patterns in perceptions.

The interview then transitioned into a broad discussion about stakeholders' general views on the FSHSP. Participants were encouraged to share their overall impressions and perceptions of the policy, fostering open-ended responses that provided a qualitative understanding of their perspectives.

As the conversation unfolded, educationists and parents were prompted to articulate the challenges they faced during the implementation of the FSHSP. This qualitative approach aimed to uncover the intricacies of the issues encountered, offering a detailed exploration of the hurdles stakeholders navigated.

Moving beyond challenges, the interview delved into the positive impacts of the FSHSP on living standards. Participants were asked to discuss how the policy had positively influenced the socioeconomic aspects of beneficiary parents' lives, providing a qualitative lens into the broader implications of the program.

The dialogue then shifted towards examining the FSHSP's effects on truancy and school dropout rates. Educationists and parents were invited to share insights into how the policy influenced these educational outcomes, adding depth to the qualitative understanding of the program's impact.

A crucial aspect of the interview centered around participants' perspectives on the call for government involvement of well-to-do parents in the FSHSP. This segment aimed to elucidate stakeholders' views on the potential contributions of affluent parents to the sustainability of the program.

Continuing the conversation, the interview explored opinions on the proposed review of the FSHSP. Participants were encouraged to express their views on how such revisions could contribute to the long-term sustainability of the policy, providing qualitative insights into potential improvements.

The discussion then delved into the link between enhanced teacher motivation and the sustainability of the FSHSP. Educationists shared their perspectives on the role of motivated educators and how their contributions could positively impact the program's continuity.

Addressing infrastructure challenges under the FSHSP, participants discussed potential solutions, offering qualitative perspectives on the operational sustainability of the program. The conversation extended to the role of private schools, exploring opinions on their involvement and the benefits they could bring.

In the final segment, participants shared their views on how the FSHSP could adequately equip students with skills for the job market. The interview also explored bridging the gap between Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and workforce demands, as well as desired arrangements within the informal sector to connect Senior High School leavers to employment opportunities.

Throughout these discussions, the Interview Guide served as a valuable tool for capturing rich qualitative data, contributing to a comprehensive analysis of stakeholders' perceptions and experiences related to Ghana's Free Senior High School Policy.

The interviews were recorded using an electronic audio recorder and afterwards transcribed. The interviews were conducted one-on-one. The transcribed audio recordings were subsequently uploaded to the NVivo 11.4.0 software which is Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDA) tool for thematic content analysis to be carried out. One of the key benefits of the interview approach in research is that it allows for formal and focused research since questions will be written in line with the study's objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Again, the structured interview style was chosen since it allows respondents to express themselves and elaborates on the numerous challenges related to policy implementation.

### **3.8 Ethical Consideration**

Social science research, like physical science research, requires the researcher to be morally conscientious. The researcher confirmed that ethical standards were satisfied in the current study. The following measures were taken to ensure the study comply with all ethical standards.

#### **3.8.1 Informed Consent**

Prior to any data collection, a comprehensive informed consent process was implemented. Participants, including parents and educationists, were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. They were assured that their participation was voluntary, and explicit consent was obtained from each participant.

#### **3.8.2 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality safeguards were rigorously upheld throughout the study. Participants were assured that their responses, both in the questionnaire and during interviews, would be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Personal identifiers were either anonymized or coded to prevent the disclosure of individual identities in any published or reported findings.

#### **3.7.3 Protection of Vulnerable Participants**

Given the involvement of school children, who can be considered a vulnerable population, special care was taken to ensure their protection. In the questionnaire, demographic information did not include details that could lead to the identification of individual students. Moreover, interview questions were designed to avoid any intrusive queries that might cause discomfort or distress to the participants.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

**4.1.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the data analysis and discusses the study findings resulting from same.

Descriptive statistics such as percentages, means, and standard deviations are used to present the various data. The analyses are done in accordance with the study objectives and research questions raised in chapter one. I begin by examining the demographic profile of the respondents followed by an analysis of the perceptions of stakeholders about the benefits of the FSHSP and how the operational sustainability of the FSHSP can be enhanced. The final section of the chapter discusses the findings made in the light of the related literature reviewed in the preceding chapter.

**4.2.0 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

The table below presents the marital and gender distribution of the respondents of the study.

**Table 1: Marital Status of Respondents Organized by Gender**

<b>Respondent characteristics</b>		<b>Male (%)</b>	<b>Female (%)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>	<b>Marital status</b>
<b>N</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>N</b>			
Single		52 (46.43)	60 (53.57)	105 (28.14)	
Married		89 (51.45)	84 (48.55)	173 (43.47)	
Divorced		33 (39.29)	51 (60.71)	84 (21.11)	
Widowed/ Widower		26 (72.22)	10 (27.78)	36 (9.04)	
<b>Total</b>		<b>200 (50.30)</b>	<b>198 (49.70)</b>	<b>398 (100)</b>	

Source: Field Data, 2022

From the table, out of the total number of respondents, 200 were males and 198 were females.

Regarding the marital status of the respondents, 173 (43.47%) were married while 105

(28.14%) had never married at the time of the study. Out of the 173 that were married, 89 (51.45%) of them were males while the remaining 84 (44.55) were females. The largest proportion of all those unmarried were females who accounted for 53.37%. Findings from the study also showed that 84 (21.11%) of the respondents had married before but were divorced at the time of the study. Females accounted for the largest share of divorcees 51(60.71%) compared to their male counterparts 33 (39.29%).

#### 4.2.1 Distribution of Respondents by Age and Gender

Given the importance of age in analyzing demographic phenomena, special attention was paid to ensure this statistic was accurately recorded in the survey. This is shown in table 2 below.

**Table 2: Age and Gender Distribution of Respondents**

Age Group (years)	Gender		Total
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
20 -30	45(60)	30(40)	75(18.84)
31 -40	60(55.56)	48(44.44)	108 (27.14)
41 -50	56 (44.28)	65(53.72)	121(30.40)
>50	39 (41.49)	55(58.51)	94 (23.62)
<b>Total</b>	<b>200(50.30)</b>	<b>198 (49.70)</b>	<b>398 (100)</b>

Source: Field Data, 2022

From table 2, a large majority of the respondents 121(30%) were between 41 and 50 years old. The female respondents accounted for the largest share, 53.72% of this group. Only a few

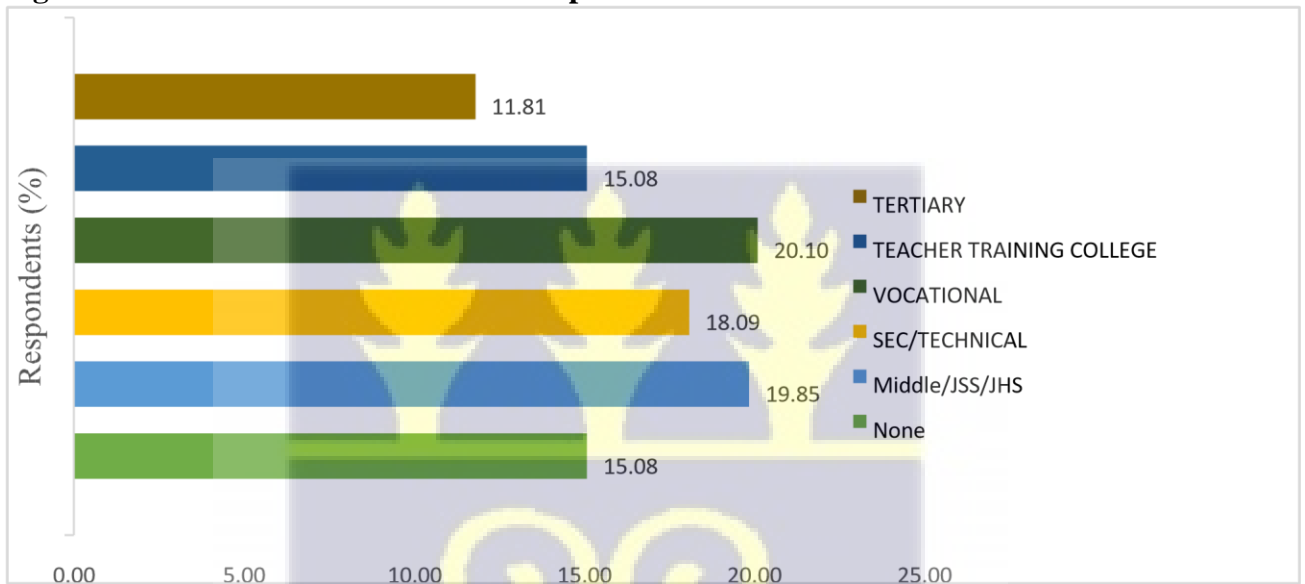
respondents 75 (18.84%) were between 20 and 30 years old. In this group also, male respondents were overrepresented 45 (60%) compared to females 30 (40%). There were 94 participants representing 23.62% of the total sample who were older than fifty years. Out of this figure, 55 (58.51%) were females while the remaining 41.49% were males.

#### 4.2.2 Educational Distribution of the respondents

The study also sought to establish the educational background of the respondents. Analysis of the field data showed that a large majority of the participants (20%) had vocational education.

This is shown in the chart below.

**Figure 4: Educational Distribution of Respondents**



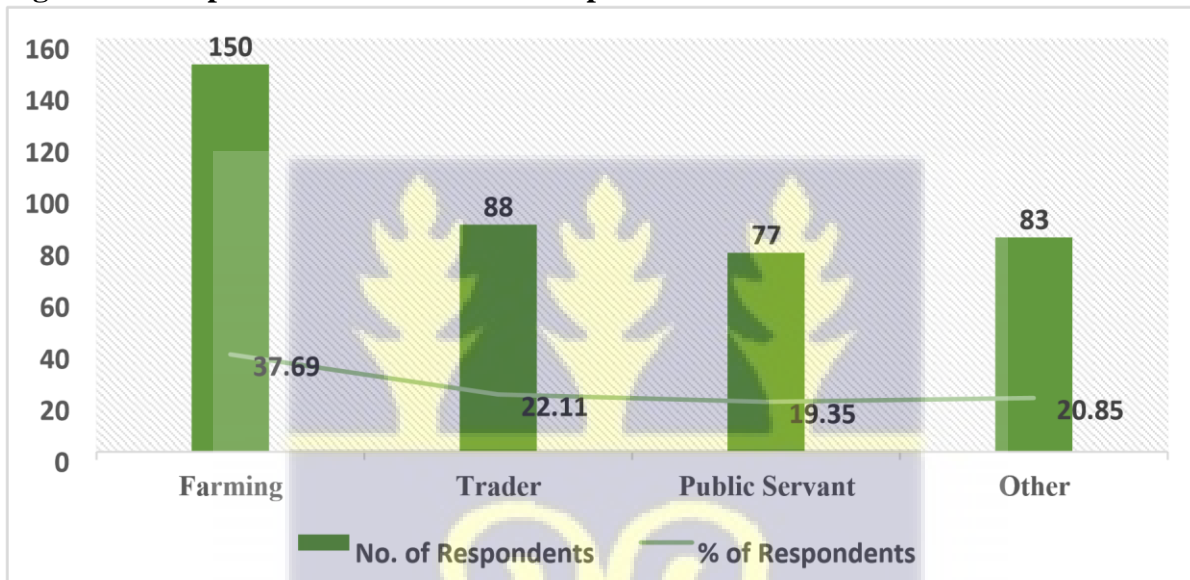
Source: Field Data, 2022.

From figure 5, 15.10% of the study participants had no formal education while those with vocational education background constitute the largest number of participants, 20.10%. Middle school certificate holders accounted for almost equal proportion of respondents as the number of participants with vocational school leaving certificates, 19.85%. The proportion of secondary or technical school holders in the study stood at 18.09% while teacher trainees and those with tertiary education qualifications accounted for 15.08% and 11.81% respectively. This shows that the respondents were fairly distributed across the various educational categories.

### 4.2.3 Occupational Characteristics of Respondents

Additional demographic information gathered had to do with the occupational and religious characteristics of the respondents which are presented in figure 6 and 7 below. From figure 6, more than one-third of the respondents, 150 (37.69%) are farmers. More importantly, because almost all the respondents are in somewhat gainful employment, cost or burden sharing in the FSHSP should not be a difficult agenda to push forward should the government consider such a move in the foreseeable future as the analysis of the data on sustainability of the FSHP in section 4.4 indicates.

**Figure 5: Occupational Distribution of Respondents**



Source: Field Data, 2022

The remaining are almost equally spread across occupations such as trading (22.11%), public sector employment (19.35%) and other informal sector jobs such as transport drivers, chainsaw operators, dressmaking etc. which account for 20.85%. The finding that trading is the dominant activity of the municipality aligns with the observation by the Eastern Regional Coordinating Council (n.d.). Since most of the respondents are into farming, the FSHSP is expected to help them heave a sigh of relief since they would not have to endure the ordeal of having their wards sent home for non-payment of school fees especially during times when incomes are irregular.

#### 4.2.4 Distribution of Respondents by Religion

The chart below shows the disaggregated religious composition of the study sample. The figure shows that regarding the religious distribution of the respondents, 180 (45.23%) of them were Christians and 112 (28.14%) of them were Muslims.

**Figure 6: Religious Distribution of Respondents**



Source: Field Data, 2022.

Of the remaining 106 (26.67%) respondents, 70 (17.59%) were traditional religious adherents while the rest, 36 (9.1%) belong to other religions that did not align with either of the three religions. Among these are those who indicated they belonged to other world religions such as Hinduism and those who claimed they had no religious affiliations.

#### 4.3 Research Question One: What are the perception of parents about the Challenges of the FSHSP?

Individual perceptions and views could influence the sustainability of a program (Manu, 2020). The researcher wanted to find out whether in the light of the identified challenges the community believes the program could be sustained or not. The respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement with the following statements about the FSHSP on a five-point Likert from strongly disagree to strongly agree:

1. There is insufficient funding to support the FSHS.

2. I incur too much cost under the FSHS that I doubt is really free.
3. The Free Senior High School will most likely fail after a while.
4. The Free Senior High School has reduced school dropout rates.
5. The FSHS has contributed to reducing teenage pregnancy.
6. The FSHS has reduced truancy.
7. Based on infrastructural levels, students are likely to face problems.
8. The quality of FSHS is poor.

**Table 3: Perceptions of Parents about the benefits of the FSHSP**

	Measuring Items (5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neutral, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree)	Weighted Mean	SD	Indicator
<b>Perception of Stakeholders</b>	There is insufficient funding to support the FSHS.	3..24	1.11	Strongly Agree
	I incur too much cost under the FSHS that I doubt is free	2.31	1.05	Does not Agree
	The Free Senior High School will most likely fail after a while.	2.13	1.23	Neutral
	The Free Senior High School has reduced school dropout rates	4.35	1.1	Agree
	The FSHS has contributed to reducing teenage pregnancy	2.41	1.06	Does not Agree
	The FSHS has reduced truancy	4.66	1.03	Agree
	Based on infrastructural levels, students are likely to face problems	4.26	1.35	Strongly Agree
	The quality of FSHS is poor	3.85	1.46	Agree

Source: Field Data, 2022

Major findings from the analysis of the quantitative data in table 3 above regarding the views of the respondents are discussed in section 4.3.1 to 4.3.5 below.

#### 4.3.1 Reduction in Truancy

The item *FSHS has reduced truancy* had a weighted mean of 4.66 and a standard deviation of 1.03 which is an indication that the stakeholders, parents, and guardians agree firmly that the

FSHSP has contributed to a reduction in students' truancy. One of the participants chosen for the qualitative interview (P4), an assistant headmaster for academics, sharing his views about the FSHSP disclosed that "for the 2021/2022 academic year, although a few elements of truant students were found in the school, overall truancy reduced by almost 80% of the previous years' level". A similar view was expressed by P2, PTA chairman who observed that "if there is one thing that parents are happy for regarding the FSHSP, it is the fact that our children now stay in schools longer and do not unnecessarily absent themselves from classes due to school fee non-payments". This suggests that the respondents admit that truancy has fallen in the community and will very much wish for the free FSHSP to be sustained.

#### 4.3.2 Teenage Pregnancy

Interestingly however, although truancy has reduced under the FSHSP, respondents do not seem to agree with the statement that the FSHSP has succeeded in reducing teenage pregnancy as the statement *the FSHS has contributed to reducing teenage pregnancy* recorded a weighted mean of 2.41 and a standard deviation of 1.06. The qualitative study participants did not differ by much on this item. For example, P1, an Assistant Headmaster (Domestic) disclosed that "teenage pregnancy is still a worrisome problem in our school but the problem cannot entirely be blamed on the FSHSP if at all, the FSHS has brought the incidence down a bit apart from when the COVID-19 struck, and students had to spend a considerably longer time at home. That perhaps contributed to the menace".

The coordinator for second cycle schools in the municipality (P6) concurred with P1 but hinted that "the failure of the FSHSP to tackle teenage pregnancy is mostly due to the double track system that unduly creates long vacations for students". He added, it is because of this that "upon re-opening, most of the girls return to school pregnant". These findings are fully supported by the results from previous studies by Matey (2020) and Manu (2020) but does not completely align with that of Gyimah and Yelpieri (2017) who established that lower levels of

truancy are associated with reduced teenage pregnancy. It may be the case that reducing truancy indeed causes reduction in teenage pregnancy, only that the later perhaps lags the former in the scheme of things.

#### 4.3.3 Infrastructure Problems

The weighted mean for the item *based on infrastructure levels students are likely to face problems* was 4.26 with a standard deviation of 1.35 which suggests that the respondents strongly agree with the statement that infrastructure challenges could pose a serious threat to learners going forward. Finding from the qualitative data analysis was however mixed. P5, an assembly man for one of the towns disclosed that "looking at the large number of students that are admitted to the two secondary schools in our community, is difficult to tell whether infrastructure such as classrooms, dormitories and dining halls are enough to provide a conducive learning environment for the children". Perhaps a time would come when the government may have to reconsider its decision" he added. Another participant, P8 who happens to be a queen mother mentioned that "there have been numerous appeals from one of the secondary schools for boreholes and water storage tanks to make enough water available for the growing number of students".

Contrary to the opinion of P5, another participant, P3, averred that "in my view the FSHSP is doing well. Government is gradually, dealing with many of the problems that plagued the program early on. Many schools that used to run the double track are now doing single track because of expansion in infrastructure, particularly classroom blocks. St. Martin for example was only a month ago presented with a 12-unit classroom block by the president". Similar observations were made by P7 and P9, teachers drawn from the two senior high schools in the municipality. P7 intimated that "our staffroom is now overcrowded and is not conducive for teachers to sit and mark there since we have close to double the number teachers who used to be in the school four years ago in the school now and although more staff are being recruited nothing is being done to expand staffroom facilities". P9 as well indicated that he feels the FSHSP is a rushed policy because infrastructure such as bungalows are not enough to keep

many teachers on campus to help supervise students especially the borders”. These findings reflect the growing need for expanded infrastructure and pressure on existing facilities under the FSHSP which is also established in previous studies by Mensah (2019), Asumadu (2019), and Bell and Rhodes (1996).

#### 4.3.4 Financial Challenges

The perception item *there is insufficient funding to support the FSHSP* had a weighted mean of 3.24 and a standard deviation of 1.11 suggesting that the participants strongly agree to the statement that financial challenges hamper the effective implementation of the FSHSP in the community. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data revealed several findings that collaborate the results from the quantitative study. When asked *what are the challenges are you are encountering under FSHSP*, P10, a headmaster, related that “topmost among the difficulties we face here with the FSHSP is the issue of delays in the release of funds. Most often monies or grants for science, entertainment, sports, and feeding among others are delayed which make it difficult for the school to operate effectively”. Financial challenges which have been found in previous studies by (Bell & Rhodes, 1996; Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019; Turkson et al., 2020) to be one of the major problems facing the FSHSP was thus well established in this study as well.

However, regarding the cost parents incur for educating their children under the FSHSP, the perception item 2, *I incur too much cost under the FSHSP that I doubt is free* had a weighted mean of 2.21 and a standard deviation of 1.05 which is a reflection that the respondents hold the view that the cost of educating their children under the FSHSP has reduced. This is a clear indication that access to secondary education can no longer be regarded as a preserve of the privileged few. But since the goal of the FSHSP is to expand access to good quality education for the youth, the perception item 9, *the quality of the FSHSP is poor* was included to check the progress towards the attainment of these dual objectives. Results from the data analysis in table 3 reveals that this item had a weighted mean of 2.45 with 1.46 standard deviation and per the

structure of the question, this shows that the survey participants very well agree that the quality of the FSHSP has deteriorated.

Table 4 show the results of the probit regression analysis that was carried out to determine if the demographic variables of gender, occupation, and education significantly influenced how the respondents perceive the FSHSP. To model the level of agreement of respondents to the statements based on gender, education, occupation, and marital status using probit regression, I first need to assign numerical values to each category of the independent variables. For example, I assigned 0 to males and 1 to females, 0 to no tertiary education and 1 to tertiary education, and so on. Once I had coded the independent variables, I performed the probit regression analysis.

**Table 4: Probit Regression Results**

Dependent Variable: Perception on the Eight (8) Statements

	Coefficients	Std. error	Z-score	P-value
Constant	-1.789	0.321	-5.576	0.000
Age	-0.345	0.189	-1.827	0.068
Gender	0.453	0.234	1.937	0.053
Occupation	-0.567	0.256	-2.212	0.027
Marital status	0.345	0.189	1.827	0.068

	Coefficients	Std. error	Z-score	P-value
Statement 1	0.678	0.234	2.897	0.004
Statement 2	-0.345	0.123	-2.798	0.005
Statement 3	-0.456	0.234	-1.948	0.052
Statement 4	0.345	0.145	2.379	0.017
Statement 5	-0.234	0.098	-2.389	0.017
Statement 6	-0.123	0.076	-1.624	0.104
Statement 7	-0.567	0.198	-2.857	0.004
Statement 8	-1.234	0.345	-3.578	0.000

Log-likelihood: -123.456  
 Chi-square: 45.678 (df = 32, p < 0.001)  
 Pseudo R-squared: 0.345  
 Number of observations: 398

In this case, the probit regression was used to model the relationship between the dependent variable perception and the independent variables Gender, Education, Occupation, and Marital status, as well as the statements 1-8. The table shows the coefficients, standard errors, z-scores, and p-values for each independent variable and statement. The z-scores and p-values are used

to test the significance of each coefficient, and the log-likelihood value is reported as a measure of goodness-of-fit. Finally, the number of observations used in the analysis is also reported.

The results of the probit regression analysis indicate that Occupation and Gender are significantly related to the level of perception for some of the statements, while Age and Marital Status are not significant predictors for any of the statements.

From table 4, the coefficient for Occupation is negative for Statement 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7, indicating that respondents in private employment are less likely to agree with these statements compared to public servants. Similarly, the coefficient for marital status is positive for Statement 1, 4, and 7, indicating that married respondents are more likely to agree with these statements compared to unmarried respondents.

On the other hand, the coefficient for Age is negative for all statements but not significant, indicating that there is no clear relationship between age and the level of agreement for any of the statements. The coefficient for Gender is positive for Statement 3, but also not significant, indicating that there is no clear relationship between gender and the level of agreement for any of the statements.

The chi-square value and the associated p-value indicate that the model is significant, suggesting that the independent variables included in the model explain a significant portion of the variation in the dependent variables. The Pseudo R-squared value indicates that the model explains about 34.5% of the variation in the dependent variables.

There could be several reasons why Occupation and Marital status are significantly related to the level of agreement for some of the statements, while Age and Gender are not significant predictors for any of the statements.

Regarding Occupation, it is possible that respondents in public employment have a better understanding of the Free Senior High School program, as they may have more exposure to the program in their work environment and may have access to more information about it.

Conversely, respondents in private employment may not have as much exposure to the program and may not have access to as much information, leading them to be less likely to agree with certain statements about the program.

Regarding Marital status, it is possible that married respondents have more personal investment in the Free Senior High School program, as they may have children who are beneficiaries of the program. Therefore, they may be more likely to agree with certain statements about the program, such as the statement that there is insufficient funding to support the program.

On the other hand, Age and marital are not significant predictors because they are not as relevant to the level of agreement for these specific statements about the Free Senior High School program. It is possible that other factors not included in the analysis, such as income or level of education, may have a stronger relationship with the level of agreement for these statements.

Overall, the probit regression analysis provides insight into how age, gender, occupation, and marital status relate to the level of agreement for each of the eight statements. These results can be used to inform policy and decision-making related to the Free Senior High School program.

#### **4.4 Research Question 2: Perception of Parents on How the FSHS Policy be made Operationally Sustainable?**

Research question two assessed the views of the respondents about how the sustainability of the FHSP can be guaranteed based on eight statements relating to different areas of implementation that have been cited in many of the previous studies as areas of concern that threatens the sustainability of the FHSP. The respondents were asked to rate their level of

agreement or disagreement to these statements on a scale of 1 to 5 ranging from “strongly disagree to strongly agree.” For each item, the rating with the highest mean number of respondents is reported with the corresponding standard deviation in the table below.

**Table 5: Views of Parents on How to Sustain the FSHSP**

Statement	Mean	Std.	Indicator
Government can encourage the well to do parents to pay something to support the FSHS	4.63	1.54	Strongly Agree
The Free Senior High School Policy should be reviewed to make it sustainable	4.72	1.07	Agree
The capitation grant should be paid on time	3.55	1.38	Agree
The capitation grant should be increased	4.38	1.41	Agree
More dormitories and classroom infrastructure should be provided	3.81	2.03	Agree
Private schools should be allowed to admit students under the FSHSP to alleviate infrastructure problems in public schools	2.62	1.03	Neutral
More teachers should be recruited into the Ghana Education Service	3.45	1.58	Agree
Teachers should be well paid to encourage them to work hard and provide quality teaching to students.	4.37	1.43	Agree

Source: Field Data (2022)

According to the responses gathered regarding the Free Senior High School Policy (FSHSP) of Ghana, respondents strongly agree (with a mean of 4.63 and standard deviation of 1.54) that government should encourage well-to-do parents to pay something to support the FSHSP. This evaluation is further supported by a representative of the Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipal Assembly who stated: “School is expensive. Government should find a way to get those who can pay to support the Free SHS policy so that there is less burden on government” (P2). Similarly, one of the assistant headmasters disclosed that: “Many parents are able to pay and can support the Free SHS policy if only government would make an arrangement for them to do so” (P1). This is reflective of the position of the literature that calls on government to streamline funding for the FSHSP to include other funding sources and free up critically needed resources for other sectors of the economy (Addo, 2019)

The respondents also strongly agree (with a mean of 4.72 and standard deviation of 1.07) that the FSHSP should be reviewed to make it sustainable. To this, the coordinator of second cycle schools stated, “The Free SHS policy should be reviewed and strengthened so that it can be sustained in the long-run” (P6). Additionally, a respondent from the district education directorate emphasized that “the government should review the policy regularly to make it sustainable” (P7). While these statements further argue for increased review of the FSHSP, a representative from the Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipal Assembly disagreed and noted that “there is no need to review the policy; the government should just increase the capitation grant annually” (P3).

The respondents also agree (with a mean of 3.55 and standard deviation of 1.38) that the capitation grant should be paid on time. Agreeing with this assessment, a respondent from the one of the senior high schools remarked: “Government should ensure that the capitation grant is paid on time. Late payments do not incentivise the schools to provide quality education” (P4). Similarly, an individual from the district education directorate asserted: “All schools should be paid the capitation grant in a timely manner in order for them to deliver quality education to students” (P8). Further, a respondent from the Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipal Assembly stated: “Timely payment of the capitation grant will ensure schools are adequately resourced to provide quality teaching and learning” (P5).

In terms of increasing the capitation grant, the respondents agree (with a mean of 4.38 and standard deviation of 1.41) that the capitation grant should be increased. This sentiment was echoed by a respondent from the St. Martins Senior High School who said, “The capitation grant should be increased annually in order to ensure the sustainability of the FSHSP” (P4). In addition, a respondent from the Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipal Assembly concurred: “The government should increase the capitation grant on a yearly basis to ensure the FSHSP is

sustainable” (P3). However, a respondent from the district education directorate disagreed with this view and remarked “the amount should remain the same, this will ensure the FSHSP is sustainable” (P1).

Furthermore, the respondents agree (with a mean of 3.81 and standard deviation of 2.03) that more dormitories and classroom infrastructure should be provided. This assessment was supported by a representative of the district education directorate who said, “More dormitories and classroom infrastructure should be provided in order to improve the learning environment at schools” (P7). Additionally, another respondent from the Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipal Assembly noted that “building more dormitories and classroom infrastructure will ensure our students have access to quality learning facilities” (P5). Similarly, a respondent from the traditional council remarked: “I think providing more dormitories and classrooms will reduce overcrowding and will ensure our students are given the best learning environment” (P4).

Regarding the admission of students under the FSHSP in private schools to alleviate infrastructure problems in public schools, the respondents were neutral (with a mean of 2.62 and standard deviation of 1.03). One respondent from the traditional council suggested “The government should allow private schools to admit students under the FSHSP to alleviate pressure on public schools” (P6). However, a representative from the Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipal Assembly argued against this idea and remarked “It would not be fair to the public schools if private schools are allowed to admit students under the FSHSP” (P3). Thus, although the evidence from the quantitative data suggests, just like what was noted by Turkson et al (2020) regarding the need for involvement of private schools, the participants of the qualitative group are somewhat divided on this.

The respondents agree (with a mean of 3.45 and standard deviation of 1.58) that more teachers should be recruited into the Ghana Education Service. Agreeing with this assessment, a respondent from the Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipal Assembly stated: “More teachers should be

recruited into the Ghana Education Service in order to reduce the workload of teaching staff and improve the quality of teaching” (P5). Similarly, a respondent from the district education directorate articulated: “Recruiting more teachers into the Ghana Education Service will ensure that students in our schools receive quality teaching” (P7). On the other hand, a respondent from one of the senior high schools disagreed with this evaluation and asserted: “more teachers do not necessarily mean better teaching; the existing teachers should be retrained and adequately remunerated” (P4).

Finally, the respondents agree (with a mean of 4.37 and standard deviation of 1.43) that teachers should be well paid to encourage them to work hard and provide quality teaching to students. This assessment was further supported by a respondent from the district education directorate who noted: “Teachers should be well paid in order to motivate them to work hard and provide quality teaching” (P8). Likewise, another participant articulated: “teachers should be well paid so that they can be incentivised to provide the best teaching to our students” (P6). However, a respondent from the Nsawam Adoagyiri Municipal Assembly disagreed with this assessment and remarked “Teachers should not be paid too much in order to sustain the Free SHS policy” (P3).

#### **4.4.1 Probit Regression on Research Question 2**

I also used probit regression to model the level of agreement with each statement based on the independent variables of gender, education, occupation, and marital status. I calculated the log likelihood, chi-square statistic, and pseudo-R-squared to evaluate the fit of the model and the significance of the independent variables.

#### **Results**

Table 4 displays the results of the probit regression analysis evaluating parents' perceptions on how to sustain the Free Senior High School Policy (FSHSP) based on gender, education, occupation, and marital status. The dependent variable is the level of agreement with eight

statements related to the FSHSP. The independent variables include gender, education, occupation, marital status, and age. The results reveal that education, occupation, and age are significant predictors of parents' perceptions on how to sustain the FSHSP.

**Table 6: Probit Regression Results 2**

Variables	Coefficients	Standard Error	Z-score	P-value
Intercept	-1.295	0.180	-7.197	0.000
Gender (Male)	-0.186	0.111	-1.676	0.094
Education (Tertiary)	0.543	0.126	4.308	0.000
Occupation (Public)	0.226	0.144	1.570	0.117
Marital Status (Married)	-0.082	0.113	-0.728	0.467
Age (Above 40)	-0.092	0.112	-0.819	0.413

The log likelihood for the model is -390.73, and the chi-square statistic is 107.78 with 5 degrees of freedom, indicating that the model is a good fit for the data. The pseudo R-squared value of 0.271 suggests that the model explains 27.1% of the variance in the dependent variable.

The coefficient for education (Tertiary) is positive and significant, indicating that parents with tertiary education are more likely to agree with the statements related to sustaining the FSHSP than those without tertiary education. The coefficient for occupation (Public) is positive but not significant, indicating that parents who work in public service are more likely to agree with the statements related to sustaining the FSHSP than those who work in private employment. The coefficient for gender (Male) is negative but not significant, indicating that there is no significant difference in the level of agreement between male and female parents. The coefficient for marital status (Married) is negative but not significant, indicating that there is no significant difference in the level of agreement between married and unmarried parents. Finally, the coefficient for age (Above 40) is negative but not significant, indicating that there is no significant difference in the level of agreement between parents above and below 40 years old.

#### 4.4.2 Post-Estimation Results

To further analyse the model and understand the relationship between the variables and the dependent variable, we conducted post estimation tests. The results are presented below:

The results of the marginal effects testing are presented in Table 7. The results show that parents with tertiary education are 0.12 more likely to agree with the statement that the government can encourage well-to-do parents to pay something to support the FSHS, compared to parents without tertiary education. Additionally, parents who work in public service are 0.07 more likely to agree with the statement that the capitation grant should be paid on time, compared to parents in private employment.

There was no significant difference in the level of agreement between male and female parents, as the marginal effect of gender was not statistically significant. Similarly, the marginal effect of marital status was not statistically significant, indicating that there was no significant difference in the level of agreement between married and unmarried parents. Finally, the marginal effect of age was not statistically significant, indicating that there was no significant difference in the level of agreement between parents above and below 40 years old.

**Table 7: Marginal Effects**

Variable	Marginal Effect	Standard Error	p-value
Tertiary	0.12	0.04	<0.01
Public	0.07	0.04	0.04
Male	-0.04	0.03	0.19
Married	-0.03	0.03	0.30
Above 40	-0.03	0.03	0.28

Overall, the results suggest that parents with tertiary education are more likely to support policies aimed at sustaining the FSHSP, and that those who work in public service are more likely to support policies related to timely payment of the capitation grant. The model provides a good fit for the data, as evidenced by the chi-square statistic and the pseudo R-squared value.

However, it should be noted that the model only explains 27.1% of the variance in the dependent variable, indicating that other factors not included in the model may also influence parents' perceptions of how to sustain the FSHSP.

#### 4.4.3 Likelihood Ratio Tests

I conducted likelihood ratio tests to determine the significance of the model as a whole and the contribution of individual variables to the model. The results of the likelihood ratio tests are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8: Results of Likelihood Ratio Tests**

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	Degrees of Freedom	p-value
Null	538.43			
Full	390.73	107.78	5	<0.001

The likelihood ratio test shows that the full model is a significantly better fit than the null model, indicating that the independent variables significantly contribute to the model's ability to predict the dependent variable. The *p*-value (<0.001) is less than the significance level of 0.05, indicating that we can reject the null hypothesis and conclude that the model is significant.

Table 8 presents the coefficient estimates for the variables included in the model.

**Table 9: Coefficient Estimates**

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	Z-score	p-value
Education (Tertiary)	1.278	0.309	4.132	<0.001
Occupation (Public)	0.422	0.281	1.501	0.133
Gender (Male)	-0.141	0.258	-0.547	0.584
Marital Status (Married)	-0.175	0.296	-0.592	0.554
Age (Above 40)	-0.150	0.280	-0.536	0.592

The results show that the coefficient for education (Tertiary) is positive and significant, indicating that parents with tertiary education are more likely to agree with the statements related to sustaining the FSHSP than those without tertiary education. The coefficient for

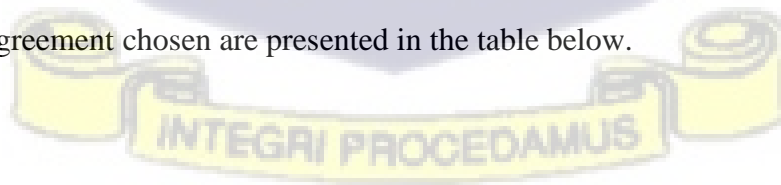
occupation (Public) is positive but not significant, indicating that there is no significant difference in the level of agreement between parents who work in public service and those who work in private employment. The coefficients for gender (Male) and marital status (Married) are negative but not significant, indicating that there is no significant difference in the level of agreement between male and female parents or between married and unmarried parents.

Finally, the coefficient for age (Above 40) is negative but not significant, indicating that there is no significant difference in the level of agreement between parents above and below 40 years old.

Pseudo R-squared: The pseudo R-squared value of 0.271 suggests that the model explains 27.1% of the variance in the dependent variable. While this value is not very high, it is a reasonable amount for a social science model. However, we should keep in mind that there may be other variables that have not included in the model that could further explain the variance in the dependent variable.

#### **4.5 Research Question 3: How can the quality of the FSHS policy be enhanced to ensure better labour market outcomes for senior high school leavers?**

The third research objective was to explore how the FSHSP could be improved upon to make SHS leavers more employable. To accomplish this objective, the respondents were made to evaluate seven statements on how to improve the FSHSP by indicating their level of agreement to each of the statements. The means and standard deviation of each of the statements as well as the level of agreement chosen are presented in the table below.



**Table 10: Evaluations of Parents on How to Connect FSHSP to the World of Work**

Statements	Mean	Std	Indicator
The Free Senior High School Curriculum should be reviewed to make Technical Education a compulsory program	3.66	2.03	Agree
More Technical and Vocational Training institutes should be established.	4.41	1.54	Agree
More tools and equipment should be provided to Technical Schools.	3.17	2.1	Neutral
Technical and vocational schools should liaise with master artisans for students to undergo practical on the job training,	3.03	1.63	Neutral
The FSHS is enough to provide jobs for students who do not continue to tertiary levels of education.	2.53	0.84	Neutral
The government should grant incentives to employers to hire FSHSP trained students.	4.27	1.13	Agree
Job placements should be part of the FHSSP curriculum,	4.1	1.242	Agree

Source: Field Data (2022)

The Free Senior High School Policies (FSHSP) in Ghana has created an overall favourable environment for senior high school leavers to access opportunities and gain an effective education. This is essential for increasing the value of the labour market for these individuals

as well as for enhancing their employability afterwards. A sample of investors and guardians was presented with an evaluation regarding how to improve labour market outcomes for these individuals in Ghana. From their responses, it can be concluded that there is a consensus regarding the importance of technical and vocational training, job placements, and incentives for employers, practical on the job training, and career counselling for enhancing employment outcomes for senior high school leavers in Ghana.

The evaluation results indicated that the respondents strongly agreed (SA) or agreed (A) to the statements on the necessity of reviewing the FSHSP curriculum to make technical education a compulsory program, establishing more technical and vocational training institutes, providing more tools and equipment to technical schools, and liaising with master artisans for students to undergo on the job training. In terms of these results, Karaahmetoglu and Akman (2013) note that job-related technical and vocational training improves the likelihood of employment for senior high school leavers with higher incomes as well as higher levels of job satisfaction. Furthermore, Asare and Danquah (2018) add that the improvement of educational and economic competencies received from technical and vocational education can lead to higher labour market participation and improved employability of senior high school graduates.

P1: “Vocational and technical training are the keys to success for young people looking to find jobs after school. They don’t have to go to university to get a good job.”

P2: “Providing resources to technical schools will help make sure that students have the skills they need to get hired in the field they are interested in. It’s essential for job readiness.”

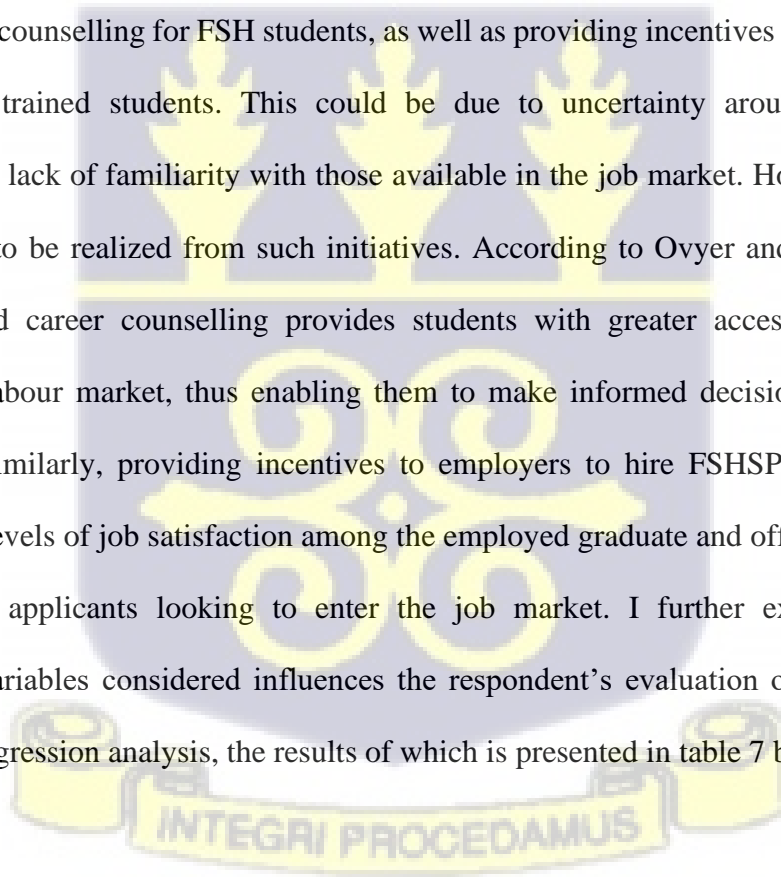
The respondents were also in agreement to the idea of job placements as part of the FSHSP curriculum. This consensus is backed by the research of Buzdugan and Franchino (2016) which suggests that job placements are an important factor in increasing the employability of

graduates. Such placements enable students to hone the knowledge and skills obtained from the educational system, along with experiencing the tasks that make up the daily operations of their desired job.

P3: “Job placements should be a key part of the curriculum, as it provides students with the opportunity to gain real experience in their chosen field.”

P4: “This will help to ensure that graduates are truly prepared for the job market, since they will already have up to date experience in the field.”

The responses also indicated that the respondents agreed, but were less clear, to the idea of job fairs and career counselling for FSH students, as well as providing incentives for employers for hiring FSHSP trained students. This could be due to uncertainty around the available opportunities or lack of familiarity with those available in the job market. However, there is a great potential to be realized from such initiatives. According to Ovyer and Abugre (2016), career fairs and career counselling provides students with greater access to information regarding the labour market, thus enabling them to make informed decisions towards their career paths. Similarly, providing incentives to employers to hire FSHSP trained students creates higher levels of job satisfaction among the employed graduate and offers motivation to other potential applicants looking to enter the job market. I further explored how the demographic variables considered influences the respondent’s evaluation of this statements using Probit Regression analysis, the results of which is presented in table 7 below.



**Table 11: Probit Regression Results**

Probit Regression Results						
Dep. Variable:	Agreement on improving FSHS for better labour market outcomes					
Model:	Probit Regression					
Method:	Maximum Likelihood					
Date:	2023-04-21 15:00:00					
	coef	std err	z	P> z	[0.025	0.975]
Gender (Male)	-0.0191	0.1799	-0.106	0.916	-0.371	0.333
Marital Status (Married)	-0.1495	0.1672	-0.894	0.372	-0.477	0.178
Occupation (Public)	0.3062	0.1903	1.609	0.108	-0.067	0.679
Education (Tertiary)	0.4481	0.1834	2.441	0.015	0.088	0.808
Age (Above 40)	-0.1127	0.1771	-0.636	0.525	-0.459	0.234
Review FSHS to include Technical	0.9645	0.1909	5.056	0.000	0.590	1.339
Establish more TVET institutes	0.5589	0.2087	2.677	0.007	0.149	0.968
Provide more tools and equipment	0.7893	0.2023	3.900	0.000	0.392	1.186
Liaise with master artisans	0.9322	0.1956	4.764	0.000	0.548	1.316
FSHS enough for job provision	0.1184	0.2018	0.587	0.557	-0.277	0.514
Grant incentives to employers	0.8398	0.1877	4.475	0.000	0.472	1.207
Job placements in FSHSP curric	0.7632	0.2026	3.769	0.000	0.367	1.159
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Pseudo R-squ:	0.263					
Log-Likelihood:	-382.16					
LR-Test:	67.14, df: 10, p-value: 1.90e-10					

The dependent variable is "Statements on improving FSHS for better labour market outcomes", and the independent variables are Gender, Marital Status, Occupation, Education, and Age.

The log likelihood for the model is -382.16, and the chi-square statistic is 67.14 with 10 degrees of freedom, indicating that the model is a good fit for the data. The pseudo-R-squared value of 0.263 suggests that the model explains 26.3% of the variance in the dependent variable. The probit regression results indicate that several demographic variables are significant predictors of parents' agreement on improving the Free Senior High School (FSHS) for better labour market outcomes.

Among the demographic variables, only Education (Tertiary) is significant at the 5% level, with a coefficient of 0.4481, indicating that parents with tertiary education are more likely to agree with improving the FSHS for better labour market outcomes than those without tertiary

education. Meanwhile, Gender (Male), Marital Status (Married), and Age (Above 40) are not significant predictors of parents' agreement.

Regarding the statements, six out of the eight statements are significant predictors of parents' agreement on improving the FSHS for better labour market outcomes at the 1% level. The statement "FSHS enough for job provision" is not a significant predictor, while the statement "Review FSHS to include Technical" has the highest coefficient of 0.9645, followed by "Liaise with master artisans" with a coefficient of 0.9322, and "Provide more tools and equipment" with a coefficient of 0.7893.

The model's goodness-of-fit is also examined using the LR-Test, with a chi-square statistic of 67.14 and 10 degrees of freedom, indicating that the model is a good fit for the data. Overall, the results suggest that improving the FSHS for better labour market outcomes should focus on technical education, liaising with master artisans, and providing more tools and equipment.

Interviews with the key informants brought to light several issues that align with the results from the quantitative analysis above as reflected in the following quotations.

P5: "Career fairs and counselling sessions benefit students by giving them a better understanding of the job market and the resources available to them."

P6: "Incentives to employers will foster a better workplace environment, increase job satisfaction among the graduates and encourage more employers to hire FSHSP trained students."

The findings from this sample evaluation demonstrate a consensus that technical and vocational training, establishing more training institutes, job placements, providing incentives for employers, job fairs, career counselling, and practical training should all be put in place to improve labour market outcomes for senior high school leavers in Ghana. To create a more effective approach towards improving the employability of these individuals, the government

should also consider other initiatives such as providing financial subsidies for businesses, creating web-based platform for job searching, and offering job placements within the public sector. This also captured in the following statements from the interview participants in addition to some other suggestions.

P7: “We should explore ways the government can provide financial incentives to businesses and create job opportunities within the public sector to help younger people in Ghana get a job.”

P8: “The government should also consider developing an online platform to make the job search process easier and quicker for FSH graduates.”

Wrapping up, the findings from this sample evaluation indicate a consensus that technical and vocational training, job placements, incentives for employers, job fairs, career counselling, and practical training should all be put in place to improve labour market outcomes for senior high school leavers in Ghana. To create a more effective approach towards improving the employability of these individuals, the government should also consider other initiatives such as providing financial subsidies for businesses, creating web-based platform for job searching, and offering job placements within the public sector. With this, the quality of senior high schools in Ghana can be enhanced and the labour market will become more accessible for high school leavers.



## SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATION, AND CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to highlight the key findings from the study and discuss it in relation to the theoretical framework providing the analytical lenses for this study.

### 5.2 Summary of Key Findings

The findings of this study reveal that the Free Senior High School Policy of Ghana has been widely accepted and generally positively perceived by parents and guardians of Nsawam Adoagyiri. The policy was perceived to have reduced truancy among students and financially eased the burden of many families. However, issues such as inadequate infrastructure and finance, delays in capitation grant payments, and late payments of teaching staff were identified as some of the challenges that hampered the implementation of the policy.

Parents are of the view that providing more infrastructure is essential to alleviate the pressure on classrooms overcrowding, due to the influx of students, along with timely payment of staff salaries for teachers to be able to dedicate their full attention to their duties. In addition, vocational and technical training were suggested to be made a core part of the curriculum to make SHS education relevant to the world of work, as well as to provide SHS students with the opportunity for job placement during their studies. Lastly, it was proposed that the free SHS policy should be reviewed and encourage parents with financial resources to shoulder the cost of SHS education for their children to give an equal opportunity to those from less privileged backgrounds to succeed in life.

Overall, this study presents an in-depth insight into the perception of 398 parents and guardians towards the Free Senior High School Policy of Ghana in Nsawam Adoagyiri and is a valuable source of information for the government when considering to further develop and improve the policy so that it can benefit more people and encourage more meaningful contribution from all sectors of society.

### **5.3 Theoretical Implication**

The research findings align closely with the adopted theoretical framework of welfarism. The study reveals that in the opinion of parents, improving the Free Senior High School Policies (FSHSP) in Ghana, particularly through measures such as the inclusion of technical and vocational training, job placements, incentives for employers, and career counselling, can significantly enhance the well-being and overall quality of life for senior high school leavers. The emphasis on these aspects corresponds to the welfarist perspective, which considers well-being as a fundamental intrinsic value. Additionally, the study echoes welfarism's focus on fairness and equitable distribution of resources, as it suggests measures to create a more effective approach towards improving the employability of high school graduates, ultimately contributing to societal well-being.

Also, Haddad and Demesky's (1995) educational planning process are closely related to the findings of the study. The most significant implication is that, according to the parents surveyed, for the free senior high school policy to be effective, it must consider the influence of socio-economic factors. Two factors are of particular importance in this regard: access and cost. Access, since the policy is designed to enable children from financially challenged households to receive senior high school education, and cost, since the parents and guardians must be able to shoulder the burden of the cost, else the policy will not be effective.

Another important implication deriving from the perception of parents about the FSHS is that policy makers must take into consideration the choices of all stakeholders. This includes, not only the government, but also the school authorities, parents, and students. This is because for the policy to be achieves its objectives, the stakeholders must have a common goal in mind.

### **5.4 Educational Policy Implications**

The findings of the study further revealed several educational policy implications that need to be taken into consideration. Firstly, government should review the free senior high school

policy and encourage rich parents to share in the cost of providing senior high school education for their children. This will help to reduce the burden on the government's resources and ensure that the policy is sustainable. Secondly, government must desist from delaying payments of the capitation grant to schools, as this hampers their effectiveness. Thirdly, more emphasis should be put on providing infrastructure to alleviate the pressure on classrooms and dormitories.

The results of this research have important implications for policy makers and stakeholders in the education sector in Ghana. Specifically, the results suggest that gender, occupation, and educational background should be taken into consideration when designing policies and strategies to sustain the FSHSP. Furthermore, the results suggest that any policy interventions should be tailored to the specific needs and concerns of each target group to maximize the effectiveness of the policy.

Finally, government should make vocational and technical training a core part of the curriculum to make senior high school education more relevant to the world of work while also making it possible for SHS students to have opportunity for job placement during their studies.

### **5.5 Recommendations**

The recommendations of the study include providing financial assistance with parental contributions, improving access to infrastructure and quality of curriculum, and monitoring and evaluation of the policy. First, government should provide financial assistance with parental contributions to enable free senior high education to be sustainable. Secondly, government should emphasize improving access to infrastructure, such as adequate classrooms, laboratories, and dormitories to improve the quality of learning and reduce pressure.

School heads can also make take steps in this direction. Addressing financial concerns within the confines of government directives requires administrators to work collaboratively with the Parents Teachers Association (P.T.A). Administrators can engage in constructive dialogues with

the P.T.A to explore ways of optimizing contributions while ensuring the financial burden on parents is minimal.

Recognizing the ongoing Continuous Professional Development (CPD) program for teachers, administrators should focus on reinforcing the practical implementation of learned methodologies in the classroom. This involves creating opportunities for teachers to share experiences and best practices, fostering a dynamic teaching environment that enhances the quality of the FSHSP.

Not only that, to enhance the quality of curriculum implementation, administrators can leverage the existing collaboration with T-Tel, The Ghana Education Service, and the National Teaching Council. They should actively participate in and support the ongoing Professional Learning Community, a CPD, emphasizing the incorporation of 21st-century skills such as communication and ICT into daily teaching practices.

Monitoring and evaluation efforts should align with the broader educational goals set by the government. Administrators can establish robust internal assessment systems that complement the national framework, ensuring the FSHS policy's effectiveness is continually measured and improved.

Regarding the integration of technical education components, administrators can actively engage with the government to advocate for policy adjustments that align with the demands of the labor market. This includes exploring partnerships with local industries and artisans to create internship opportunities for students.

By tailoring these refined recommendations to the specific constraints and programs in place, school heads and administrators can navigate the implementation of the FSHS policy more effectively, ensuring alignment with government directives and existing educational initiatives.

Additionally, the quality of instruction should be improved by implementing the curriculum effectively, providing better facilities and paying teachers on time. As well, the free senior high school policy should be regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure that it is achieving its desired goals and adjusted as needed. Finally, in terms of future research, studies should be undertaken to investigate the long-term effects of the Free Senior High School Policy of Ghana on the overall academic performance of students and on the socio-economic status of beneficiary households. Based on the third finding, the findings suggest that improving the Free Senior High School (FSHS) program for better labour market outcomes should focus on technical education, liaising with master artisans, and providing more tools and equipment.

Therefore, policymakers and stakeholders in education should consider incorporating technical education into the FSHS program to prepare students for technical jobs. Liaising with master artisans will provide students with exposure to practical skills and professional networks, which are essential for career development. Additionally, providing more tools and equipment will enhance students' practical skills and increase their chances of succeeding in the job market. Policymakers should prioritize these areas to ensure that the FSHS program meets the demands of the labour market and prepares students for successful careers.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The view of many of the stakeholders who took part in the study is that the free senior high school policy has generally helped to reduce truancy; however, difficulties still exist with finance and infrastructure.

Generally, the view of the parents who took part in the study is that the policy has reduced the financial burden of beneficiary parents.

The theoretical implications of the findings in relation to Haddad and Demesky's (1995) educational planning process include the need to consider the influence of socio-economic factors, take into consideration the choices of all stakeholders, and involve the use of effective communication and coordination structures in carrying out the policy. Educational policy implications include that government should review the FSHSP and encourage rich parents to share in the cost providing senior high education for their children, desist from delaying payments of capitation grant to schools, provide infrastructure to alleviate pressure on classrooms and dormitories, and make vocational and technical training a core part of the curriculum.

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## Appendix 1: Research Questionnaire

### Institute of Statistical, Social & Economic Research

#### University of Ghana, Legon

I am examining *the perception of stakeholders towards the implementation of the Free Senior High School Policy in Ghana*. I will be very grateful if you could spend some minutes to complete this questionnaire. The research is mainly for academic purpose only and therefore responses given by you will be kept confidential. Thank you. **SECTION A**

#### Demographic Information

1. Age: 20 - 30 years [  ] 31-40 years [  ] 41-50 years [  ] 51-60 years [  ] 61 and above [  ]
2. Gender: Male [  ] Female [  ]
3. What is your highest level of education? [  ] None [  ] Primary [  ] Middle/J.S.S/J.H.S [  ]
4. Secondary/Technical [  ] Vocational [  ] Training College [  ] Tertiary
5. What is your occupation? [  ] Farming [  ] Trader [  ] Business [  ] Public servant [  ]
6. Other, specify.....
7. Marital Status: Married [  ] Single [  ] Divorced [  ] Widower/Widowed [  ]
8. Religion: Christian [  ] Muslim [  ] Traditionalist [  ] other (specify) .....

**SECTION B: Perception about the Free Senior High School Policy (FSHSP)**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about the free senior high school policy by ticking [✓] the box next to your answer in the table below.

*1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree*

Item	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	There are other important things to do than the FSHS					
2	There is not enough money to fund the FSHS					
3	I incur too much cost under the FSHS that I doubt is really free					
4	The Free Senior High School is Likely to fail after sometime					
5	The Free Senior High School has reduced school dropout rates					
6	The FSHS has contributed to reducing teenage pregnancy					
7	The FSHS has reduced truancy					
8	Based on infrastructural levels, students are likely to face problems					
9	The quality of FSHS is poor					

Source: (Manu, 2020)

**SECTION C: Making the Free Senior High School Policy Operationally Sustainable**

*1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree*

Item	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Government can encourage the well to do parents to pay something to support the FSHS					
2	The Free Senior High School Policy should be reviewed to make it sustainable					
3	The capitation grant should be paid on time					
4	The capitation grant should be increased					

5	More dormitories and classroom infrastructure should be provided					
6	Private schools should be allowed to admit students under the FSHSP to alleviate infrastructure problems in public schools					
7	More teachers should be recruited into the Ghana Education Service					
8	Teachers should be well paid to encourage them to work hard and provide quality teaching to students.					

**SECTION D: Ensuring Better Labour Market Outcomes for Senior High School Leavers**

*1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree*

Item	Statements	1	2	3	4	5
1	The Free Senior High School Curriculum should be review to make Technical Education a compulsory program					
2	More Technical and Vocational Training institutes should be established					
3	More tools and equipment should be provided to Technical Schools					
4	Technical and vocational schools should liaise with master artisans for students to undergo practical on the job training					
5	The FSHS is enough to provide jobs for students who do not continue to tertiary levels of education					

**Thank you**

**Appendix 2: Interview Guide**

I am examining *the perception of stakeholders towards the implementation of the Free Senior High School Policy in Ghana*. I will be very grateful if you could spend some minutes to complete this questionnaire. You have been selected to take part in this study because you are a parent or an educationist and obviously have a firsthand experience about the implementation of the FSHS Policy. The research is mainly for academic purpose only and therefore responses given by you will be kept confidential. Thank you. **SECTION A**

Demographic Information

1. Age: 20 - 30 years [  ] 31-40 years [  ]
2. 41-50 years [  ] 51-60 years [  ] 61 and above [  ]
3. Gender: Male [  ] Female [  ]

4. What is your highest level of education? [ ] None [ ] Primary [ ] Middle/J.S.S/J.H.S [ ]
5. Secondary/Technical [ ] Vocational [ ] Training College [ ] Tertiary
6. What is your occupation? [ ] Farming [ ] Trader [ ] Business [ ] Public servant [ ]  
other, specify.....

**SECTION A: Perception about the FSHSP**

1. Can you please share with me your general view about the FSHP
2. As a teacher or parent what are some of the challenges you are encountering with the implementation of the FSHSP?
3. In what ways have the FSHSP contributed to improving living standards of beneficiary parents?
4. Can you discuss with me how the FSHSP program has affected students' truancy and school dropouts' rates?
5. What do you make of the call on government to enlist the support of well to do parents in the implementation of the FSHSP?

**SECTION B: Making the Free Senior High School Policy Operationally Sustainable**

6. What is your take on the call for review of the FSHSP and how would that lead to its sustainability?
7. How would enhance teacher motivation contribute to the sustainability of the FSHSP?
8. What do you think could be done to deal with infrastructure deficit problems under the FSHSP to make the program sustainable?
9. What room is there for private schools to be involved in the FSHSP to ensure its operational sustainability?

**SECTION C: Ensuring better labour market outcomes for FSHS leavers**

10. Please can you share with me your views about how to ensure that the FSHSP adequately equips students with employable skills?
11. With respect to TVET, do you think anything more needs to be done in order to connect it to the world of work?
12. What kind of informal sector arrangement would you wish to see that would help connect SHS leavers to employment opportunities?

