

Trends in financing of basic education in Ghana – a political economy analysis

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Abstract

Purpose – Using a political economy framework, this paper examines the financing trend, by investigating three systematic spikes occurring between 2004 and 2016. The study aims to provide a useful review of the interaction of politics, financial decisions and educational outcomes. Additionally it provides a useful guide, especially to academics, to identify political and economic conceptualizations that will predict expenditure decision-making of political actors and to be able to provide policy advice on the future effect of such decisions on availability and accessibility of public goods.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper adopts a secondary data analysis approach, drawing upon secondary data sources such as from the Ministry of Education, budget statements from the Ministry of Finance, as well as relevant policy documents. Additional information for the study was also extracted from the manifestos of the two leading political parties in Ghana – the New Patriotic Party and the National Democratic Congress and their viewpoints on financing of education in Ghana.

Findings – Using two epochal years when financing of education peaked (2008 and 2012), which coincided with election years, the trend lends itself to being interpreted as opportunistic spending. It appears to give credence to a conclusion that the increases in spending are more politically directed and nonneutral.

Originality/value – This paper fulfills an identified need to study the trend of basic education financing in Ghana, which will help policy actors make better-informed decisions with the introduction of the novel “adaptive opportunism” framework analysis tool.

Keywords Social justice, Adaptive opportunism, Financing basic education, Free compulsory universal basic education, Free senior high school policy, Political business cycle

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Basic education in Ghana comprises pre-primary, primary and junior high school (JHS) levels. Basic education level is characterized by children between the ages of 4–15 years. Predominantly, government provides public basic education, complemented by the private sector (Ministry of Education (MoE), 2019). Ghana’s 1992 Constitution provides that a free compulsory basic education is a fundamental human right that all governments must ensure. The free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE) policy of 1995 is an example of the many policy instruments to guarantee the right to equal opportunities.

Basic education is fundamental for a literate society and a productive labor force. Ghana continues to show commitment to providing its citizens the best education (MoE, 2015). Basic level fee payment was abolished in 2005 and replaced by capitation grant. This generally increased government expenditure on education (MoE, 2015), with correlative improvements in enrollment, attendance and completion. However, challenges persist. Delayed enrollment of eligible children into formal school, irregular school attendance and low achievement levels are very common, especially among poor households and rural and marginalized communities. In rural communities, many schools still operate under trees with inadequately trained teachers. This hinders enrollment and attendance, with an increase in the number of eligible children who did not attend school in 2018 as compared to 2017 from 90,704 to 153,986 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018).



Ghana introduced free senior high school policy (2017) to provide free secondary education to eligible candidates. The policy rationale is to universalize the 11-year basic cycle and the three-year secondary cycle into one continuous universal basic education system. The pre-tertiary policy agenda is to provide 14 years of universal basic education. Consequently, everything must be done to sustain the gains already made in pre-secondary education. Adequate and consistent financial allocation is essential for sustainability and progress.

Financial resources spent by a government on any sector indicates the sectors' importance to government (Tasleem Araf, 2016). The state has a constitutional mandate to provide free compulsory universal basic education. Optimizing this outcome has burdened the government financially. The outcome so far, in terms of actual financial expenditure, has fallen short of the significance of the policy commitment. The gap between apparent commitment and actual delivery therefore deserves a review.

In this paper, a trend analysis of the financing of basic education in Ghana and the effect on key outcome indicators, growth in the number of schools and the rate of enrollment is conducted. There are three guiding questions for this study:

- (1) What has been the trend of financial flow to basic education in Ghana until 2017 when the new government came to office?
- (2) What has been the trend in enrollment and provision of school infrastructure in the given period?
- (3) What explains the nature of the trend of financial flow observed?

Answering these questions will provide a useful review of the interaction of politics, financial decisions and educational outcomes. The study also provides a useful guide to academics, to identify political and economic conceptualizations that will predict expenditure decision-making of governments and to be able to provide policy advice on the future effect of such decisions on availability and accessibility of resources. The third research question will illuminate the direction of future research to study the underlying reasons for the free senior high school policy, the influence of efforts to universalize pre-secondary and secondary education into a "new basic education" framework and the implications for financing education.

The next section presents the methodology and theoretical framework used in presenting the analysis. This is followed by an analysis of the trend of financial flow to the subsector and discussion of the growth in gross and net enrollment between 2004 and 2017. This timeframe was chosen to connect education trends to three critical political transitions. Using a political economy lens, politics of financing education in Ghana will be illuminated. This paper concludes with recommendations for policy and practice.

Theoretical framework and methodology

This paper uses two political economy frameworks of the political business cycle (PBC) theory to examine the politics of financing public goods: the opportunistic (or electoralist theory) framework and the partisanship framework (Bove *et al.*, 2017; Rogoff, 1990; Hibbs, 1977; Nordhus, 1975). The opportunistic theory attributed to Nordhus (1975) argues that all governments, regardless of ideological orientation, will manipulate economic policies around elections, increasing their chances of reelection. Partisan theories, attributed to Hibbs (1977) alternately argue that left-wing governments typically pursue more income redistribution and more expansionary policies than right-wing governments during their tenure (Bove *et al.*, 2017).

Enu and Okonkwo (2015) in a paper "Political Business Cycle and its effects on the Ghanaian economy" studied the impact of election years on government consumption expenditure, fiscal deficit and real gross domestic product (GDP), using data from 1990 to 2013, a period within which Ghana has had six democratic elections and consistent democratic rule. Although they did

not find glaring evidence of PBC effect on fiscal management, they noted that, there exists a positive relationship between election years and government consumption spending. They suggested that, there is a strong likelihood that, as democracy deepens, the evidence of the PBC, in the nature of opportunistic spending, as regards government expenditure could be empirically glaring in Ghana. Using a concurrent triangulation mixed methods' data collection strategy, [Ahmed \(2019\)](#) studied the interplay between democratic elections and fiscal policy management in Ghana. Ahmed suggested that there is the existence of PBCs in Ghana's electoral process since 1992. Based on respondents' perception, he noted that an overwhelming majority of Ghanaian voters support the proposition that since the inception of democratic rule in 1992, all incumbent governments had tried to manipulate fiscal policy for electoral advantage by increasing public sector wages and salaries and scaling up infrastructure. Ghana holds general elections every four years. Since the advent of the 1992 Constitution, with elections held in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016 and 2020, two main political parties: National Democratic Congress (NDC) and New Patriotic Party (NPP) have dominated the stage (See Chart below showing their tenure of governance). Between 1992 and 2020, they have each won two elections serially but alternately, culminating in forming four governments between them.

1992-1996-2000	NPP	2009-2012-2016	NPP
NDC	2001-2004-2008	NDC	2017-2020 – 2024

The NDC formed the first government under the 1992 constitution from 1993 to 1996 and won the 1996 elections and ruled till 2000. In both the 2000 and 2004 elections, the NPP won and formed the government from 2001 to 2004–2008. Similarly, in both 2008 and 2012 elections the NDC won power and ruled from 2009 to 2012–2016. The NPP has won both the 2016 and 2020 elections and will rule between 2017 and 2020–2024. The analysis, therefore, is to examine the nature of funding allocation to the basic education sector with particular interest in whether there are peculiarities in the election years.

While the intention is not to test the presence of PBC effects, it is argued that the nature of financing of public education in Ghana can be explained by relying on social justice and opportunistic theoretical frameworks. Social justice defines the framework within which particular applications of distributive justice arise ([McLean and McMillan, 2009](#)). Social justice theories are typically associated with governments that are designated as “Social Democrats” ([Braithmah, 2014](#)). Social justice includes an agenda aimed at restructuring society that ensures some degree of equality, rights and privileges to the disadvantaged in society by deliberately spending on such policies and programs that empowers the vulnerable. In education, social justice-oriented spending is characterized by fee waivers, school meals and capitation grants, among others in Ghana. An interplay of opportunism and social justice theories is deemed a political strategic approach, through which political actors pursue public goals with private interest. This is what I call adaptive opportunism.

Adaptive opportunism is an analytical framework which I seek to introduce to help explain the behavior of governments in the global south who largely engage in manifesto-driven governance and selective implementation of policy and programmatic interventions. In Ghana, democracy and politics is ubiquitously laden with promises in dutifully prepared manifesto documents. Once in power, political parties engage in what I refer to as selective and adaptive implementation of policies and programs. They elect to implement or pursue a policy or program agenda when it has a higher potential to win votes in the next election. The timing of the implementation is also adapted to suit the electoral cycle. In Ghana because elections are held every four years, program implementations are typically given attention and resources in the third year immediately preceding the elections and intensified in the election year proper. In this paper, evidence of this is expected to be seen in 2004, 2008, 2012

and 2016 which are all elections years. But this framework becomes even more relevant when it is viewed against expenditures made in years where governance (presidents) is expected to transition from one individual to another (either of the same political party or any other party in opposition). In Ghana an individual representing a political party is expected to govern for four years and eligible for another term of four years only. After the second term of four years, that individual is ineligible to contest again to be a president. During these periods of transition, elections are even more critical with significant effect on excessive and sometimes out of budget spending. In this paper, this is expected to be seen in 2000, 2008 and 2016.

I hope to make a significant contribution to the political economy literature on the nature and justifications for policy and program financing in the global south which is driven largely by politics and a desire to win elections. Generally, a study's contribution to the policy debate depends on the timeliness and salience of recommendations and additionally how well the methodology withstands credibility challenges. In the paper a secondary analysis approach is adopted. Secondary analysis of existing data has become a popular method of enhancing overall efficiency of policy research and policy proposal credibility (Young and Ryu, 2000). Secondary analysis of published data from national statistical systems and detailed tabulations on trends at national level allows research to utilize data that is reported and understood by policy makers. This approach has immense advantages as government officials and their staff can quickly assess whether the data are utilized and interpreted properly. For policy studies, existing data sources are preferred over primary data collected by a single research team because policy makers tend to have more faith in well-constructed studies of well-known data generated by state or nonprofit ordinary business activities and more skeptical of studies of a smaller, unique data set generated specifically for a particular study and by a single researcher or research team (Young and Ryu, 2000).

The paper adopts a secondary data analysis approach, drawing upon secondary data sources such as the MoE, budget statements from the Ministry of Finance, as well as policy documents. Secondary analysis of data is the use of existing data to find answers to a question that is different from the original work (Szabo and Strang, 1997). In this study data are extracted from published reports by the MoE. Where there is incompleteness for some years, data are picked from World Bank data portals. The use of data that is publicly available reduces concerns about secondary use of data which is mostly around potential harm to individual subjects and issue of return for consent (Tripathy, 2013). The guidance is that generally, where data is freely available on the Internet, books or other public fora, permission for further use and analysis is implied (Tripathy, 2013). The reports relied upon for data for this paper are publicly available on the website of the MoE and the World Bank for download. Secondly, the data are highly aggregated (such as macroeconomic data and financial time series) and as a result, unlikely to involve risks of reidentification of individuals or disclosure of sensitive information. The inclusion principle is that the data must have been published in official reports of the MoE. Where similar data existed on website of the World Bank or other portals, they were relied upon to cross-check the data from the ministry. The analysis relied predominantly on data from published reports of the MoE to ensure consistency.

Financing trends for basic education in Ghana

Government expenditure on basic education

Government's spending on education including internally generated funds exceeded UNESCO's recommendation of at least 6% of a GDP. It also exceeded Global Partnership for Education (GPE) recommendation of at least 20% of a government's total budget outlay (MoE, 2015). Total education expenditure as a proportion of GDP has ranged between 6% (2011) and 8% (2018), while total education expenditure as a proportion of government expenditure ranged between 21 and 8% (MoE, 2018).

Within basic education particularly, Ghana’s expenditure levels have been remarkable over the past decade. The analysis presented in the figure below (Figure 1) shows that government from 2004 to 2017 funding for basic education has been progressive. In 2004, with an exchange rate of GHC 1~0.87 US\$, government spending on basic education (all three levels) in normal terms, was GH¢ 298, 472 and 516. This increased to GH¢ 971, 981 and 396 (2008) with an exchange rate of GHC 1~1.05 US\$. Pre-primary received GH¢ 23,176,164 representing 4%; primary level took GH¢ 183, 091 and 696 representing 31.6%; and JHS received GH¢ 92,704,656 representing 16% (MoE, 2012). In percentage terms, whereas pre-primary and junior high levels combined received about 20% of the entire basic education expenditure, the primary level received more than a third of the allocation. Similar trend was observed from 2005 to 2008 (*the exchange rate of 2005: GHC 1~0.91 US\$, 2006: GHC 1~0.92 US\$, 2007: GHC 1~0.93 US\$ and 2008: GHC 1~1.05 US\$*) with the primary level being the major recipient of budgetary allocation. The introduction of the capitation grant possibly accounts for the apparent high attention to the primary level. The school capitation grant scheme is a fee waiver scheme to facilitate the achievement of FCUBE policy.

In 2009, government expenditures on basic education declined slightly by about 1.9% to an amount of GH¢ 953,343,545. The amount comprised GH¢ 60,272,729 for preschool, GH¢ 594,950,694 for primary and GH¢ 297,665,072 for JHS. In 2010 (*the exchange rate of GHC 1~1.43 US\$*), there was an increase in expenditure across all levels of the subsector. This is made up of GH¢ 72,036,051 for preschool, GH¢ 715,160,506 for primary and GH¢370,235,825 for the JHS level, making a total of GH¢ 1,157,432,382 representing 54.5% (MoE, 2015). All the levels of basic education saw an increase in expenditure between 2011 and 2012 (*the exchange rate of 2011: GHC 1~1.52 US\$ and 2012: GHC 1~1.82 US\$*). Pre-primary ones saw a significant increase in expenditure from GH¢ 103,391,337 to GH¢ 435,502,234 representing a 32% increase. The junior high level, on the other hand, had a significant increase in its share of total expenditure, increasing from 11.5% in 2011 to 17.0% in 2012. Nominal expenditure made toward the JHS level increased from GH¢ 411,648,553 in 2011 to GH¢ 969,147,257 in 2012 (MoE, 2015).

From 2012, only marginal increases in expenditure in the sector were observed up to 2014. In 2014 (*the exchange rate of GHC 1~2.9 US\$*), over half a billion (GH¢ 501,912,110) was spent on preschool, GH¢ 1,445,683,240, on primary, and GH¢ 1,054,711,276, on JHS, giving a total of GH¢ 3,002,308,626 representing 11.6% increase compared to 2013 (MoE, 2014). There was

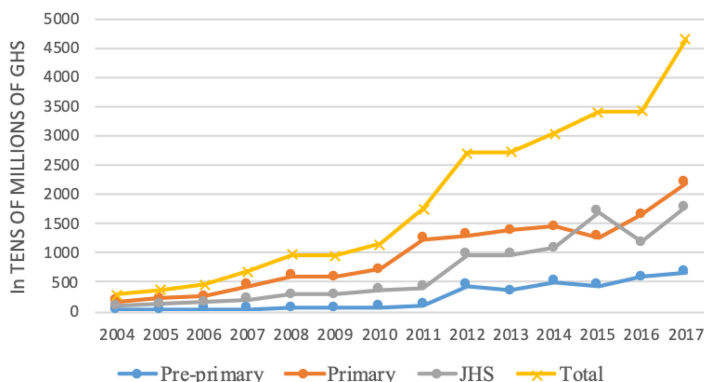


Figure 1. Trend in government nominal expenditure on basic education in Ghana

Note(s): Data from MoE (2010; 2015), MoF (2018), and World Bank (2019)

Source(s): World Bank Official Exchange: 2010: GHC1~1.43USD, 2015: GHC1~3.71USD

however a drop in the expenditure for primary in 2015, (*the exchange rate of GHC 1~3.71 US\$*), while the JHS recorded an increase. An amount of GH¢ 440,567,890 was spent on preschool, GH¢ 1,270,418,880 on primary and GH¢ 1,691,653,730 spent on JHS, giving a total of GH¢ 3,402,640,500 for the year. In 2017 when the cedi to dollar rate was *GHC 1~4.35 US\$*, expenditure on the subsector was GH¢ 4,644,656,034 representing 6.7% increase over 2016, which had a total expenditure of GH¢ 3,412,848,352.

Growth trends in enrollment at all levels of basic education

Participation of the population is reflected in the rate of enrollment or the population of school-going age that is out of school. Basic school enrollment generally refers to the total number of children who have registered in school in a particular academic year, regardless of age. It shows the level of participation in basic school education. Typical measures of enrollment are the gross enrollment rate (GER) and net enrollment rate (NER). The GER is the number of students enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education. The NER is the total number of students in the theoretical age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group. Out-of-school children refer to children in the official primary school age range who are not enrolled in any pre-tertiary school level.

Figure 2 shows the trend in the GER at all three levels of the basic education between 2004 and 2018. There was no significant increase in the GER between 2004 and 2008 for primary and junior high levels. However, the junior high level experienced a slight decline between 2007 and 2008. GER in pre-primary alternatively registered marginal increase between 2004 and 2008, increasing from 60% to about 92.9%. Primary and junior high levels recorded just about one percentage point growth in the GER over the period. There was no noticeable growth at the primary and junior high levels between 2008 and 2010. Significant increases in the GER at all levels were recorded between 2010 and 2014. The GER at primary level increased from 96% in 2010 to over 110% in 2014 and 113% in 2015. In pre-primary, the GER rose from 98% to 128.8% in 2014. The GER at the junior high level increased from 79% in 2010 to 85% in 2014 and 90% in 2016. The GER at all levels, however, tailed off by 2015 and started a decline for pre-primary, and for primary and junior high, the decline started in 2016

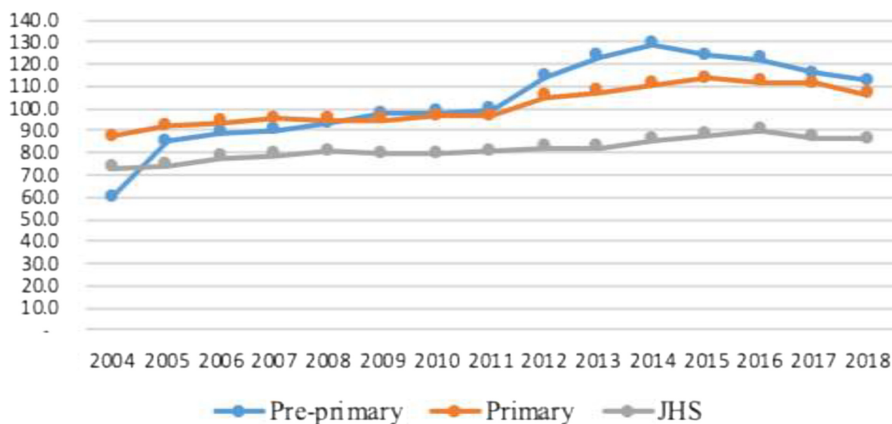


Figure 2.
Trends in the GER at basic education level in Ghana

Note(s): Data from MoE (2010; 2015; 2018; 2019)

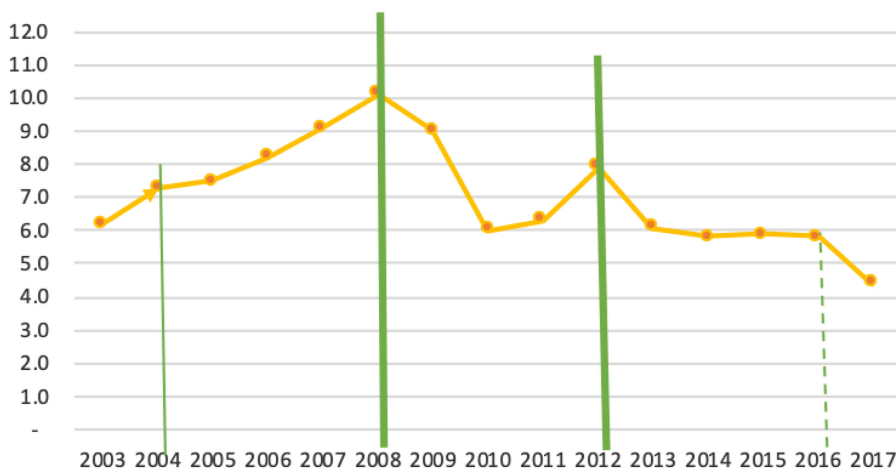
and 2017, respectively. Although the decline is marginal, it could signify eroding of the gains made toward achieving universal access to basic education for all in subsequent years.

It can be observed that at all the three levels, the NER is lower than the GER usually indicating differences between the number of children who are enrolled at the appropriate age (appropriate-age enrollment) and all children enrolled regardless of age (unadjusted total enrollment). The difference between the GER and NER can be expressed in three ways. The first (the GER–NER gap) is the difference in the GER and NER existing at a given level (primary level, JHS level, etc.) suggesting conditions including delayed enrollment (including returned enrollment) and grade repetitions. The second (the GER–GER gap) reflects differences in the GER existing between any two successive levels (primary and JHS levels). This generally will be attributable to a combination of either of the following: delayed enrollment, returned enrollment, grade repetitions and early dropout. The third is the difference in the NER (the NER–NER gap) existing between any two successive levels (primary and JHS levels) which is generally attributable to dropout and grade repetitions.

The GER and NER at any two successive levels (primary and JHS level) indicate trend and pattern of progression. While the GER reflects a general progression from one level to another, the NER reflects progression of appropriately aged children from one level another. While a significant difference in the primary level GER and junior high-level GER reflects a general lack of progression, difference between the primary NER and junior high-level NER reflects lack of age-appropriate progression. In Ghana, enrollment at the junior high level is essentially through progression from the primary level, while there is no requirement at the primary level as evidence of progression from pre-primary to be enrolled at that level.

Politics of financing basic education in Ghana

Providing opportunity for access and participation in education for all children of school-going age in Ghana is a fundamental objective of every government hence providing adequate and consistent financial commitment to the sector vital for expanding access and increasing participation. The data indicate Ghana is among the few countries globally spending above 6% of her GDP on education (World Bank, 2019). Figure 3 below, represents



Note(s): MoE, 2010; 2015; 2018

Source(s): World Bank Official Exchange: 2010: GHC1~1.43USD, 2015: GHC1~3.71USD

Figure 3. Expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP

percentage of GDP allocated to education from 2003 to 2017. In 2003, the portion of GDP allocated to education was 6.2%. This increased gradually and peaked at 10.1% (2008). However, between 2008 and 2017, it steadily declined to 4.4%. Although there was a slight bulge from 6% (2010) to 7.9% (2012), it appears 2012 was a precipice. The problem with basic education financing in Ghana, therefore, is related to allocation inconsistencies which could jeopardize gains made in previous years in terms of growth, access and participation.

Starting off, financial allocation inconsistencies in the basic education sector seem systematic and deterministic, appearing to coincide with years of eminent changeover of government (election cycle hypothesis). Three of these critical years exist in the data with significant elevations in expenditure observed in two years (2008 and 2012) (see [Figure 3](#)). As later argued, 2016 may not have experienced any significant increase in spending due to two plausible reasons: constraints on government by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditionalities and/or perhaps political complacency on the part of the ruling government.

The year 2008 is the year the NPP-led government was facing the reality of losing power to the opposition or to avoid that by creating the environment that will convince Ghanaians to renew the mandate of the party to lead government business. The year 2012 was also critical because having won the 2008 elections, the NDC party-led government suffered the misfortune of the death of the sitting president (President John E. Atta Mills) and had to settle on the sitting vice president to contest the scheduled 2012 elections.

As akin to election year spending, expectedly, there are noticeable increases in expenditure relative to GDP between 2008 and 2012. [Enu and Okonkwo \(2015\)](#) suggested earlier that, as democracy deepens, the evidence of the PBC in Ghana as regards government consumption spending could be empirically glaring. Our observation, hence, corresponds with [Ahmed \(2019\)](#) who found evidence of the existence of the PBC in Ghana relating to public sector spending. This correlates with the opportunistic theoretical argument that all incumbent governments have strong incentive to increase spending on public policies and interventions that will maximize their reelection prospects and promote their partisan agenda ([Bove et al., 2017](#); [Nordhus, 1975](#)).

However, in Ghana, partisanship is vaguely an underlying framework for deciding public goods spending. For example, the NPP-led government, perceived to be right winged, is rather associated with the introduction of majority of the flagship educational social interventions that appear to have led to expenditure increments since 2004. Two noteworthy examples with huge financial outlays are the school capitation grant (2005) and the school feeding program (2008). The trend in the flow of financial resources and the targeted levels (kindergarten (KG) and primary) can be seen from a social justice perspective because expenditures in these areas are not likely to yield immediate political advantage. It is therefore fair to suggest that the inclination was to help secure or regain citizens' political confidence and support for a welfare state. Considering that it suddenly increased to 10% of GDP in 2008 (the election year), the highest since 2004, implies the government pursued a politically opportunistic agenda with social justice interface. I will describe this as "Adaptive Opportunism."

Adaptive opportunism is social expediency for self-serving ends. In adaptive opportunism, public spending on policies and programs is undertaken not only with social justice narrative but also with ulterior motives. This is distinguishable from pure opportunism, which is similar to Max Weber's instrumentally rational behavior. In the typical Weberian orientation, instrumentally rational (pure opportunism) behavior is determined by expectations of the behavior of other people ([Lyons and Mehta, 1997](#)). These expectations enter into the actor's calculation of the best means to attain his or her own rationally calculated ends, devoid of values. Conversely in Ghana, as far as public spending is concerned, what we find is a process of adaptation. Adaptive opportunism starts with an orientation of distributive justice, amassing social capital (trust) and aligning interests of citizens. Over time, political actors begin to use social justice spending for amassing political advantage. Adaptive opportunism fails when a seemingly superior alternative social justice narrative emerges, either in reference to an

existing project or the promise of an alternative. This is what happened in 2008 leading up to the general elections.

The period 2004–2008, witnessed the most growth in the number of pre-primary schools, with a growth rate of about 18.6%. This is attributed to a deliberate policy to emphasize early childhood education in 2004. The 2004–2008 period marked the introduction of major interventions to expand universal primary education. Paramount among them were the introduction of the school capitation grant (2005) and the school feeding program (2008). The period witnessed significant increases in the NER at the primary level, rising by nearly 30% points from 59% to 88.5% between 2004 and 2008, respectively. Additionally, there was the establishment of an early childhood care and development body placed directly under the office of the president. After 2008, this body was relocated to the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, thus lowering the priority and visibility given to early childhood issues. The punctuated equilibrium theory, initially observed by [Baumgartner and Jones \(1991, 1993\)](#) bolsters the understanding of this period (2004–2008) as it reflected periods of stability which have been punctuated by moments of radical change.

The downside to a social justice-inspired public spending with an opportunistic undertone is that it tends to produce overindulgence (government – an ambitious giver and citizen – an enthusiastic receiver) and the emergence of what may be described as “reverse patronage” with vote-pandering political outcome. The principal–agent theory introduced by [Berle and Means \(1932\)](#) and later extended by [Jensen and Meckling \(1976, 2019\)](#) explains “reverse patronage” where ownership and control of resources and opportunities are divided into separate components and where managers (agents) can pursue self-interested actions at the risk of owners (principal). Reflective of this theory, governments (agents) voted into power appear to pursue actions that have a self-serving undertone especially in financing education. Incrementally, these actions pose challenges to the citizens (principals). A social justice spending arrangement with opportunistic undertone reflects high volume of the spending in the election year and in a rather confused and haphazard manner. Well alert citizenry will read into and demand, at best, an enhancement, or a protection of the status quo. [Al-Rodhan and Kuepfer \(2007\)](#) suggested that, it is difficult for a state whose population has become accustomed in receiving subsidized goods from the government to cut these subsidies without risking strong popular opposition. This was observed in 2007/2008 when citizens complained about the size of the capitation grant leading to an increase from an average of GH¢ 3.00 to GH¢ 4.50. Similarly, the Ghana School Feeding Programme (GSFP) which began late 2005 with ten pilot schools saw a steep rise in coverage across the country reaching over 441,189 pupils in 2008 ([GSFP Annual Operating Plan, 2011](#)).

Another downside to adaptive opportunism is that resources are spread thinly in an attempt to reach all. Conclusively, government faces difficulties fulfilling financial commitments hence affecting citizens. In the case of the school capitation grant, schools operated over a year without receiving money for school management. Similarly, caterers also experienced delays in reimbursement of expenses made in providing meals for school feeding. Due to government’s desire to expand the school feeding to a more primary schools program, JHS level was excluded. Many suggest that the wide NER–NER gap between the primary and junior high levels in 2008 may partly be associated with a lack of progression for the majority of children from the primary level, due to a dropout and repetition of grades. If the school feeding was expanded to the junior high level, it potentially would facilitate progression. The program targets children in public KGs and primary schools only ([GSFP Annual Operating Plan, 2011](#)).

Expectedly, the NDC party which eventually won the general elections in 2008 exploited the vote-pandering tendency of the citizenry and promised mobilization of additional external resources to expand and improve the quality of the school feeding program to cover primary schools countrywide. However, after 2009, the trend showed that financial allocation to basic education as a percentage of GDP slowed. It dipped significantly in 2010, correlatively

affecting enrollment. Government spending on education relative to GDP was around 6% in 2010, or 23% of total public spending. Indeed, the 2011 budget of the NDC-led government showed that the school feeding program budget suffered a reduction of 8.1% from GH¢ 50 million (2010) to GH¢ 45.9 million (2011). In 2010, government failed to pay caterers on the school feeding program. It appeared the new government failed to anticipate enough the burden the steep increase in the coverage of the school feeding program will bring.

Financial allocation to the education sector started to rise again toward 2011 and peaked in 2012, notably, the target of nominal expenditure allocation (see [Figure 1](#)). Even though expenditures generally increased across all the three levels, the highest was noticed at the JHS level. The junior high level had a significant increase in its share of total expenditure, increasing from 11.5% in 2011 to 17% in 2012. While indebted to school feeding caterers, government engaged in spending on other areas as long as it included the junior high level. Data gleaned from the budget statements for 2011/2012 showed that, GH¢ 32.1million was released for the payment of capitation grant for 5,467,808 pupils in all public basic schools in 2012. This amount was nearly two times the amount released in 2011. Additionally, government subsidized the conduct of the 2012 Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) for JHS students to the tune of GH¢ 7,518,157, compared with GH¢ 6.34 million (2011). Also, 1.6 million pupils in deprived communities received free school uniforms. Government further distributed over 45.8 million free exercise books to basic schools in 2012. Government distributed 53,555 laptop computers under the basic school computerization project to over 2,000 schools.

The increased spending in 2012 is more opportunistic in nature because, as indicated earlier, the NDC-led government had just had the misfortune of losing the sitting president and presidential candidate for the 2012 elections, barely six months to the general elections. There was little time to prepare, select and market a candidate for the elections. The sitting vice president by mutual consent was represented the party in the elections. Being the sitting vice president and with little time to campaign, the only foreseeable maneuver for the NDC-led government was to engage in opportunistic spending on public services but with a social justice narrative. It can also be observed that, unlike the growth observed in 2008 which increased gradually from 2004 (by an average of less than 1% point), the increase in 2012 was sharp, by nearly 2% points between 2011 and 2012. This threw public finances out of control and the economy wobbled. At the end of 2012, Ghana's budget deficit amounted to a whopping 12.1% of GDP using rebased GDP numbers (or some 20% of GDP in terms of the earlier GDP data). [Younger \(2016\)](#) suggested that governments around the world, including in Ghana commonly increase deficits in an attempt to please the electorate during an election year, as was 2012.

Even though the NDC party retained power in the 2012 elections, expenditure on education relapsed in 2013, the ramifications of opportunism. Expenditure on education relative to GDP decreased to 6% (2013) from the 8% in 2012 and further to 5.8% (2014). Specifically, expenditure at the primary level was slower and flat. However, expenditure related to the junior high level as a share of total spending of the entire basic education subsector received an increase. Government spending between 2010 and 2015 on JHS level increased from around 1% to about 17%, respectively. There was an apparent shift in attention to the JHS level, where government introduced interventions such as distribution of sanitary pads, laptop computers and subsidizing BECE registration. That explains the spike in the GER at the junior high level in 2016 while the GER at the primary level decreased. These expenditures are, however, less sustainable and ephemeral in nature.

[Figure 1](#) shows 2016 as the only election year without unbridled or “runaway” government spending following continuous years of recurring budget deficits, averaging around 7% in 2014. Government accepted an IMF intervention to salvage the economy. Though the IMF intervention protected spending on social protection programs including education, there was a restriction on recruitment which also affected employment in the education sector. What the IMF

containment program did essentially was to recommend fiscal discipline measures in government spending—curtailing opportunistic spending in 2016.

Conclusion

This review has shown that the interplay of social justice and opportunistic theoretical perspectives is fundamental in understanding the trend of financing of basic education in Ghana. Using two epochal years when financing of education peaked (2008 and 2012), which coincided with election years, the trend lends itself to being interpreted as opportunistic spending. It appears to support a conclusion that spending increments are more politically directed and nonneutral. These seemingly election-motivated spending increments relapse after each election year, disrupting progress. Additionally, two things are noteworthy. The year 2008, which recorded the highest expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP, witnessed expenditures on social welfare programs such as capitation grant, school feeding, early childhood education, etc. Secondly, these investments were recorded under a government with center-right liberal democratic tendencies (NPP-led government), which ordinarily is unexpected to have a strong focus on social welfare programs. This can best be described as adaptive opportunism.

Alternatively, the high spending recorded in 2012 is more opportunistic in nature. This is because, since leading government in 2009, expenditure on education started to decline, signaling a reduction in investment in majority of the social welfare programs initiated by the previous government. Payments to caterers for school feeding were in arrears, and capitation grant disbursements delayed. The increased spending in 2012 can only be seen as a strategic maneuver for the NDC-led government then to make a claim for reelection. The same conclusion can be reached when you review the depth from where it increases and the depth it declined to after 2012 elections.

This study has shown that though Ghana's position to achieving an unprecedented feat in delivering universal basic education is remarkable, the current investment trend could derail the progress. The political actors' behavior is central to this. They seem to have unconstrained leverage in deciding what is of interest and how to allocate resources addressing it. The agenda today has shifted from primary to secondary education, where political capital is available and can be amassed. Financing must be prioritized for basic education to be seen as the foundation for human capital development (Almendarez, 2011; Al-Samarrai *et al.*, 2020). Despite the education sector being internally heterogeneous, with a high degree of internal competition for resources, it is still possible to prioritize the subsectors and adopt innovative financing arrangements that will ensure the progress's sustainability. The speed with which the political actors are shifting attention to the senior high school level reflects opportunistic tendencies to policy adoption. Academic research needs to understand the possible effects of the universalization policy on financing of the subsectors of the "new basic education" system and explore potential innovative revenue sources to finance the new policy.

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