



**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK**

**STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVES ON GHANA'S FREE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL  
POLICY: THE CASE OF TWO MUNICIPALITIES IN GREATER ACCRA  
REGION.**

**BY**

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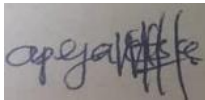
**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON IN  
PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MPhil IN SOCIAL WORK**

**DEGREE**

**DECEMBER, 2022**

**DECLARATION**

I, Margaret Mensah declare that this thesis is my own research which was conducted under the supervision of Dr. Doris Akyere Boateng and Dr. Kingsley Saa-Touh Mort. All sources used in this thesis have been duly cited and no part of this work has been submitted elsewhere for the award of a degree.



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## ABSTRACT

Article 25 of the 1992 constitution calls for the introduction of Progressive free education in Ghana. In response, the government of the New Patriotic Party in 2017 introduced the Free Senior High School Policy. The Free Senior High School Policy has been in existence for nearly five years and has received varied feedback in the media landscape of Ghana among stakeholders on the success and challenges of the policy. In recent times, the Free senior high school policy has come up for media discussion following reports of food shortage in the senior high schools around the country. These reports make a clarion call for the review of the policy. However, what is clear from the foregoing is the lack of empirical data to inform some of the stakeholders' discussion on the policy. Few studies about the policy have mainly explored teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the double track system in Ghana (Mensah, 2019) and on the impact of free senior high education (Duflo et al., 2021). However, studies on stakeholders' perspectives on Ghana's Free Senior High School policy is missing. This study therefore set out to explore the perspectives of stakeholders regarding the FSHS policy in the Ga West and Ga Central Municipalities in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. The objectives were to: find out the benefits associated with the implementation of the FSHS policy, challenges associated with the implementation of the FSHS policy and to explore recommendation by stakeholders in the implementation of FSHS policy. Basic interpretative qualitative research design was employed for the study. A purposive sampling technique was adopted to select 30 participants for the study. This was against the backdrop that the researcher needed to select participants who possessed characteristics critical for the study. Data was collected utilizing face-to-face interviews with the aid of a semi-structured interview guide. Data were analysed using Charmaz's (2006) three-stage thematic standard coding. The results of the study showed, since the introduction of FSHS policy there have been remarkable increase in enrolment, completion rates and over all, the policy has eased the financial burden of parents

and guardians. The findings further indicate that the FSHS policy has brought in its wake challenges including teaching related issues, infrastructural challenges, delay in disbursement of funds, and lack of proper monitoring and collaboration with the school management committee. Additionally, the findings revealed that monitoring of the policy, expansion in infrastructure, and prompt release of funds as recommendations by stakeholders. The study recommends that government should ensure there is an opportunity to consult with stakeholders on the issue of sharing the cost with them. Also, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education employ more teachers and recruit national service personnel as support teachers to reduce the workload on teachers.



## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my children, my husband Daniel Teye and my dearest mother, Regina Afia Asiedua Kumi. Thank you all for your help, prayers and countless support during this period of academic pursuits.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My sincere gratitude goes to my supervisors, Dr. Doris Akyere Boateng and Dr. Kingsley Saa-Touh Mort for their support, corrections, inputs and guidance through my academic pursuit. God richly bless you!

Professor Osei-Hwedie, Professor Mavis Dako-Gyeke, Dr. Abigail Mills and Dr. Eunice Abbey, thank you for the support, and your constant reassurance throughout the entire duration of this work.

To my lovely friends Ruth Karehina Bodua- Mango, Edem Klu, Portia Brempong, Andrews Berchie, Magdaline Awusie and all my colleagues, thank you all for your help in recognizable ways. God bless you all.

My gratitude to Heads of Ordogonno senior high school, Adjen Kotoku senior high school and Amasaman senior high and technical school. And to research participants, who voluntarily opted to partake in this study, thank you all. May the Lord bless you in diverse ways more than you can think or imagine.

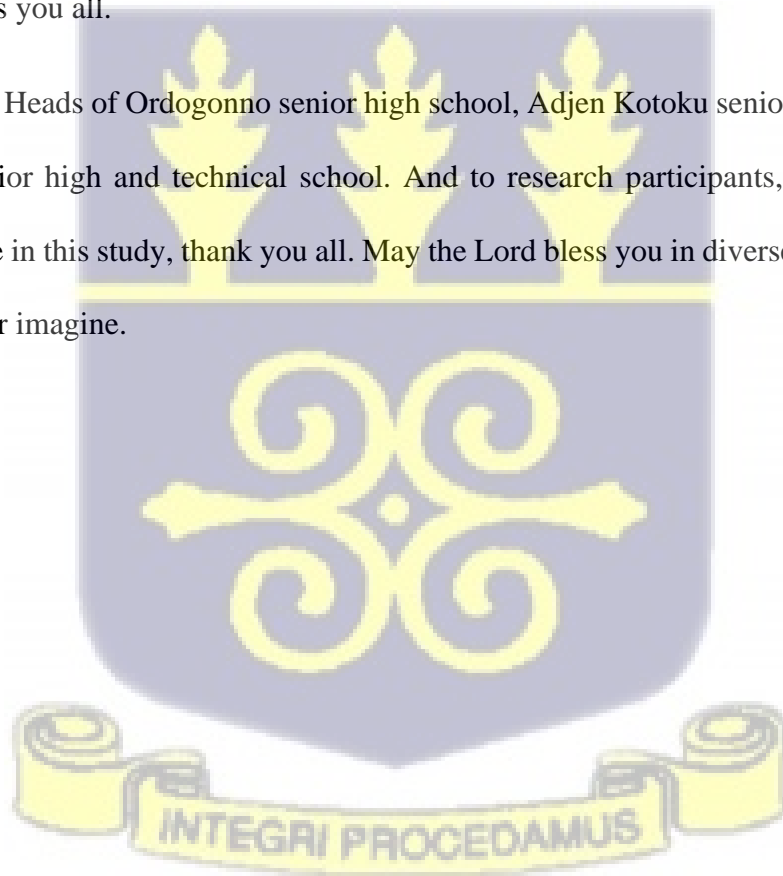


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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FSHS:	Free Senior High School
EFA:	Education for All
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultures
ADEA:	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
UNDHR:	United Nations Declaration on Human Rights
CRC:	Convention on The Rights of The Child
UNICEF:	United Nations Children Fund
NPP:	National Patriotic Party
SHS:	Senior High School
JHS:	Junior High School
ICT:	Information Communication and Technology
NDC:	National Democratic Congress
FCUBE:	Free Compulsory Universal Education
GES:	Ghana Education Service
PTA:	Parents Teachers' Association
SMCS:	School Management Committees
SRC:	Students Representative Council
CSSPS:	Computerized School Selection and Placement System
FSE:	Free Secondary Education
BECE:	Basic Education Certificate Examination
OECD:	Organization for Economic Cooperation Development
MMDAS:	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies
IRB:	Institutional Review Board
WASSCE:	West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination
TVET:	Technical and Vocational Educational Training
KNUST:	Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

As Nelson Mandela once remarked, "Education serves as the powerful catalyst for individual growth. It is through education that a farmer's daughter can aspire to be a doctor, a miner's son can rise to lead the mines, and a child born to a farm worker can aspire to become the president of a great nation."

Education is an integral part of human society such that the lack of it leads to many social issues such as poor health, internal conflict, and low standard of living (Ikegwu et al., 2014). Garcia-Penalosa and Wald (2000) are of the view that, acquiring literacy and numeracy skills are fundamental human requirement for development, and Pettinger (2012) also argued that educating an individual benefit the society more than the individual as it equips a person with social values that enhances national unity. Furthermore, education is a critical factor in determining human capital and, as a result, a significant economic development indicator (Barro, 2001; Barro & Lee, 1994; Cohen & Soto, 2007; Hanushek & Woessmann, 2007; Seetanah, 2009). Additionally, it has been established that there are direct connections between education and the decline in inequality and poverty (Abdullah et al., 2013; Gregorio & Lee, 2002; Tanzi & Chu, 1998). Again, research shows that education has a significant influence on behavioural health and health outcomes (Conti et al., 2010).

The World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 drew delegates from 155 nations and representatives from over 150 organizations. Recognizing the value of education and the necessity to enrol all children in school, they decided to universalize primary education. As stated in EFA Goals 2, 5, and 6, they specified a number of objectives, such as ensuring that all children have access to quality primary education, expanding access

to early childhood care and development programs, and decreasing adult illiteracy (UNESCO-UIS, 2000). However, since the Jomtien Conference, a large number of children have stayed out of school, and of the 113 million children who were not in school in 1998, 42 million were in sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO UIS, 2000, p. 9). Reiterating the principle that education is an intrinsic human entitlement and committing to eliminate all barriers, including those of social, cultural, economic, political, and legal nature, which hinder African children, youth, and adults from accessing quality education and reaching their utmost capabilities, the 2000 World Education Forum convened in Dakar, gathering ministers of education from Africa alongside representatives of various development agencies (UNESCO, 2000).

Given this, the attention of policymakers in developing economies such as Sub-Saharan Africa has been to improve basic education. Moreover, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) reported in 2007 that most Sub-Saharan African countries, including Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, have taken various measures to remove all barriers to education in order to make access to quality education possible for every child such as fee waivers, incentive for teachers in the rural areas and by abolishing the payment of school fees at the primary school level (ADEA, 2007). Also, the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (UNDHR) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognize access to education as a fundamental human right (King & McGrath, 2002; UNICEF, 2019) and makes a strong case for its member states to progressively make education free and accessible to all citizens (UNICEF, 2019).

## **1.2 Brief History of Education in Ghana**

According to Aissat and Djafri (2011) and McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh (1975), formal education in Ghana dates back to the colonial era in the late 1880s. Regardless of the authors views, they assert that succeeding governments have made concerted efforts to raise the country's enrolment rates and pre-tertiary education standards. As a result, attempts by

succeeding administrations to make basic education free for all Ghanaian children have essentially defined pre-tertiary education in Ghana (Essuman, 2018). As the end of the colonial era drew near, so did the demand for education increased, and in 1945 the government developed a ten-year plan for further expanding the availability of education. This strategy aimed to establish universal primary education within 25 years (Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh & Addo, 2016).

Since 1951, Ghana has undergone two substantial transformations (the 1987 and 2007 reforms), which mainly focused on the goals, structure, scope, and duration of the nation's primary education system (Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh & Addo, 2016). The Evans-Anfom reform from 1987 was the first which changed the basic and secondary education curricula, duration, and structure in Ghana. The middle school system was replaced with Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) as part of the reforms. Adu-Gyamfi and colleagues explained that the first cycle of education was reduced to nine (9) years as a result of the 1987 changes (Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh & Addo, 2016). This was a change from the missionaries and the British colonial government's 10-year basic education plan, which included six years of primary school and four years of middle school. They further explained that successful JSS candidates continued on to a 3-year senior secondary program, and as a result, Ghana's pre-tertiary education was reduced from seventeen to twelve years. The changes also divided the secondary school curricula into five distinct parts: agriculture, business, general arts and sciences, technology, and vocational training (Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh & Addo, 2016).

In its pursuit of re-election in the 2004 general elections, the National Patriotic Party (NPP) pledged to institute educational reforms, which were subsequently set in motion in 2007 (Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh & Addo, 2016). The Anamuah-Mensah educational reform committee was set up by the NPP government to implement educational reforms that would address the needs of the country in terms of human capital, safeguard Ghanaian creativity and cultural identity,

and close the science and technological knowledge gap. As part of the reform, the length and content of the basic and secondary education curricula were also evaluated. The formerly 9-year basic education was therefore extended by 2 years to become an 11-year basic education (Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh & Addo, 2016). Senior High School (SHS), formerly Senior Secondary School, expanded from three to four academic years, with the first academic year devoted to the study of five core subjects: English Language, Mathematics, Integrated Science, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Social Studies. In 2010, to fulfil a campaign promise made during the 2008 general election, the ruling government, National Democratic Congress (NDC) changed the standard secondary school program from four to three years (Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh & Addo, 2016).

The Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) initiative was launched in 1996, aimed to make primary education accessible to all by 2005. The goal of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) initiative is to decentralize education sector management, enhancing its efficiency and sustainability while promoting increased access, participation, and improved quality of teaching and learning (Ministry of Education, 2006). In addition, the school feeding Program, Free Exercise and Textbooks Program, Free School Uniforms and Sandals Program, and the Capitation Grant, which was piloted in 2004-2005 and made available state-wide in the 2005-2006, 2009/2010 school years, were significant initiatives in support of the FCUBE (Essuman, 2018). The result of all these measures was a 14.5 percent increase in school enrolment in the 53 pilot districts (Department of Education, 2007). Increasing enrolment led to other problems, such as the difficulty in controlling the number of classes, delays in sending funds to schools, a shortage of textbooks and teaching materials, onerous procedures and the inability of school principals to keep accounts (Ampratwum & Armah-Attoh, 2010). Some of the FCUBE service initiatives were only available to the elementary and middle schools, not the high school. Overall, increasing primary school

enrolment led to greater demand for secondary education, necessitating the creation of the Free Secondary Education Policy. Furthermore, secondary education plays a crucial role in the pursuit of certain objectives outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 4, which aims to ensure widespread accessibility to both primary and secondary education at no cost (Essuman, 2018).

In accordance with Article 25(1)(b) of Ghana's 1992 Constitution, secondary education in all of its forms, including technical and vocational education, shall be made widely accessible and affordable to all by any reasonable means, particularly through the progressive implementation of free education. By providing free secondary education to students from northern Ghana and students from the north, the previous administration worked to increase access to and equity in secondary education (Ministry of Education, 2018, cited in Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019). In direct response to meeting the requirements of Article 25(1)(b) of the 1992 National Constitution, the National Democratic Congress began implementing the Progressive Free Senior High School (SHS) program in 2015-2016. This initially covered the costs of day students attending public senior high schools. For approximately 320,488-day students enrolled in public senior high schools, the sponsorship covered exams, entertainment, the library, student council (SRC), sports, culture, science and math quizzes, information communications technology (ICT), and extracurricular activities. By the school 2015-2016 academic year, this had been expanded to 120,000 boarders. As a result of these efforts, enrolments increased from 393,995 in 2007/08 to 787,861 in 2015/16 (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Article 25 1b of the 1992 Constitution states that secondary education in its various forms, including technical and vocational education, should be made universally available and accessible to all by any appropriate means, in particular through the gradual introduction of free education. All of this necessitated the need for a Free Senior High School Policy (FSHS). Since September 2017, Ghana introduced a free senior high school policy nationwide. The policy was found to relieve parents and guardians of the financial burden of school children at



the second cycle level (Abdul-Rahman et al., 2018). In addition, since the beginning of the policy, students from low-income families have been guaranteed a placement in senior high school. With nearly five (5) years of implementation of the Free High School Policy, there have been mixed views among stakeholders in the media landscape about the achievements and challenges associated with the policy.

The Free Senior High School Policy, instituted by the New Patriotic Party government, differs from previous free education policies in several ways: The FSHS program began with Ghanaian youth and young adults admitted to Second Cycle public institutions by the Computerized School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS) in the 2017 school year. The program lasts for three (3) years and the government covers the tuition of all senior high school students, as well as the subsistence costs of all admitted boarding students (Department of Education, 2018) and a free lunch for those who are admitted as day students. To ensure equal opportunities, applicants from public Junior High Schools (JHSs) are given priority for 30% of places in top schools, and the government provides the infrastructure (buildings, furniture, teaching and learning materials, etc.) (Ministry of Education, 2018). With this strategy, the policy was implemented and began to cover the costs of all applicants for the 2017/2018 academic year who were accepted into SHSs. At the end of the 2017-2018 academic year, first- and second-year students were covered by the FSHS (Ministry of Education, 2018). The number of students enrolled in all high schools increased from 69 percent to 74.69 percent in 2019 and 77.67 percent in 2020 as a result of the introduction of the Free Senior High School Policy in 2017 (UNESCO, 2020). Although there have been studies on the deontological perspective of free secondary education in Ghana (Edwards & Amoah, 2020) and others on important educational actors in the process of formulating basic education policy in Ghana (Wadja, 2019) and also a study by Abubakari and Al-hassan (2016) about Assessing the contribution of stakeholders to the delivery of basic education services in Zongo communities

in the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana. Not much has been done about stakeholders' perspectives on Ghana 's free senior high school policy in two municipalities in the Greater Accra Region.

Therefore, the present study set out to explore Stakeholder's Perspectives on the Ghana's free senior high school policy in Ga West and Ga Central Municipalities in Greater Accra Region.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

The free senior high school, despite its benefits has been found to have many challenges for countries that undertook this policy direction. In Ghana, Amakye-Boateng et al. (2020) found that about 31% of students failed to enrol in schools in 2017, 28% in 2018, and 26% in 2019. Large class sizes, funding delays, shortage of qualified teachers and the two-track system have threatened retention in school and also reduced time spent in school since the introduction of the free SHS policy (Amakye-Boateng et al., 2020). Asante and Agbee (2021) found that Free Senior High School policy exhibits uneven financial releases and poor stakeholder participation. They claim that teachers, parents and students in the educational field were not consulted in the development and implementation of the free high school program, which led to a number of problems

Challenges associated with the policy have been highlighted to include large class sizes, delays in the disbursement of funds, shortages of trained teachers, and the double-track system which threatened retention and also shortened the length of time spent in school (Amakye-Boateng et al., 2020). Additionally, with the upsurge of COVID- 19 in March 2020, the Government of Ghana as a measure to curb the spread of the virus, had all schools closed for a time period of ten (10) months. The pandemic's impacts on children's access and quality of education were most severely felt through the closure of schools without adequate alternative education services accessible by all children, nation-wide which in turn affected the academic calendar of schools (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Some studies about the policy have been conducted on teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the double track system in Ghana (Mensah, 2019), and on the impact of free senior high education (Duflo et al., 2021), however, studies on stakeholders' perspectives on Ghana's Free Senior High School policy has received little attention. Given the limited availability of a comprehensive research particularly from stakeholders' perspective, this study sought to help bridge the gap in literature by exploring Ghana's free senior high school policy, the case of two municipalities in the Greater Accra Region.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of this research is to explore stakeholders' perspectives on Ghana's Free Senior High School (FSHS) policy.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Ascertain the benefits associated with the implementation of the Free Senior High School Policy in the Ga West and Ga Central Municipalities in the Greater Accra Region.
2. Investigate the challenges associated with the implementation of the Free Senior High Policy in the Ga West and Ga Central Municipalities in the Greater Accra Region.
3. Explore recommendations for improving the Free Senior High School Policy in the Ga West and Ga Central Municipalities in the Greater Accra Region.

#### **1.5 Research Question**

1. What are the benefits associated with the implementation of the Free Senior High School Policy in the Ga West and Ga Central Municipalities in the Greater Accra Region?
2. What are the challenges associated with the implementation of the Free Senior High Policy in the Ga West and Ga Central Municipalities in the Greater Accra Region?

3. What are the recommendations for improving the Free Senior High School Policy in the Ga West and Ga Central Municipalities in the Greater Accra Region?

## 1.6 Significance of the Study

### 1.6.1 Policy

The study is expected to provide empirical data to policymakers and other stakeholders of Ghana's education sector to help them appreciate the role played by the free senior high school policy in the Ga West and Ga central municipalities in the Greater Accra Region. In addition, the findings of the study would provide some insight to the government and other education stakeholders on the role played by the free senior high education policy. The study sought to have stakeholders share their perception and their assessment of the free senior high school policy, its implementation, benefits and challenges.

### 1.6.2 Knowledge

The study will contribute to knowledge and add to the pool of research on the implementation of the free SHS policy in Ghana. The findings are intended to help the government to make some improvements in the policy implementations as per the recommendations of the study. The study findings will serve as a guide to the Ministry of Education, its regulatory and monitoring agencies.

### 1.6.3 Research

The findings of this study could stimulate interest in further studies on the subject. This thesis also aims to bring valuable knowledge about the free senior high school policy in Ghana and its influence on the lives of students and parents as a whole to the body of research.

## 1.7 Definition of Terms

**Perception:** Perception is the personal expression of how one view the world which is made up of many socio- cultural elements (McDonald, 2012).

**Free education:** This refers to education which children and young people are entitled to which is free of tuition fees (UNESCO, 2002).

**Secondary Education:** the crucial link between primary schooling, tertiary education and the labour market (World Bank, 2005).

**Free Senior High School Policy:** Free SHS policy is an educational reform policy where parents pay no tuition fee, admission fee, core textbooks, library fees, science centre fees, fees for ICT, examination fee, payment of utility fee, boarding and meals for their wards in secondary education (Ministry of Education, 2018).

**Stakeholder:** This refers to any actor, institution, group or individuals with an interest or role to play and being affected by the societal decision-making process (Hutahaean, 2016).

### 1.8 Organisation of Study

This study is presented in five chapters. The first chapter provides information on the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, and organization of the study. The second chapter entails a review of relevant literature and the theoretical perspectives adopted for the study. The third chapter explains the research methodology, and it encompasses the research design, study area, target population, study population, sampling technique and recruitment, sample size, sources of data collection, data management, data handling and analysis, ethical considerations, credibility and trustworthiness, and limitations of the study and dissemination of research findings. Chapter four presents and discusses the findings of the study while chapter five comprises of the key summary of findings, conclusions, recommendations, implications for social work practice, and future research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of relevant literature on the following themes, the benefits associated with the implementation of the FSHS policy: the challenges related to the implementation of the FSHS policy and recommendations by stakeholders in improving the FSHS policy. The chapter also describes the systems theory as the theory underpinning the study.

#### 2.2 Benefits associated with the implementation of free senior high school policy

The fundamental goal of public policy is to address or solve societal problems or improve policy outcomes through a deliberative process (Peters et al., 2018). This makes an educational policy beneficial to its stakeholders. Several African countries, including Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, have lately instituted free secondary education (FSE), with varying degrees of success. In 2007, Uganda took the lead in offering fee-free secondary education to students in sub-Saharan Africa after a year of trial and error (Essuman, 2008). The program's launch resulted in a 136% increase in enrolment and levels of primary education completion.

The Ugandan FSE policy aimed to maintain the benefits of primary education for everyone while improving access to secondary education and raising the quality of instruction (Essuman, 2008). Through the pilot program, the policy sought to assist low-income rural households in the nation (Werner, 2011). In response to the looming implementation difficulties, the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sport has developed strategies to reduce unit costs of secondary education, increase efficiency and provide more for students. Reducing class size, increasing teacher-student ratios, and streamlining teachers' workloads are some of these strategies (Jacob

& Lehner, 2011). Asankha and Takashi (2013) claim that the strategy helped increase enrolment from 412,367 in 2007 to 1194,000 in 2010 (Jacob & Lehner, 2011).

With an emphasis on children from low-income parents, the free secondary education program (FSE) was implemented in Kenya in 2008 with the goal of enhancing both the quality and accessibility of secondary education for all. Kenya's FSE policy was only partially implemented, similar to that of Uganda, as a result of the government heavily subsidizing secondary school tuition and capitation subsidies. However, parents and guardians were responsible for paying for boarding and other costs like books and stationery. The number of pupils transitioning from primary to secondary education in Kenya grew as a result of the FSE strategy (Radoli, 2011).

In addition, Abdul-Rahaman et al. (2020) study in Ghana results suggest that government funding in the form of progressive free higher education and free higher education interventions had a greater impact on girls' college enrolment than boys. This is consistent with the conclusions of Asankha and Takashi (2011) that by 2007 universal secondary education policies in Uganda had resulted in increased enrolment of students, particularly girls, in public secondary schools.

The benefits of the free senior high school policy are evident as it has given equal opportunity for both the poor and the rich to access secondary education. Highlighted by various studies in this regard, a study conducted in Effutu of the Gomoa East District of Ghana, for example revealed that the policy is beneficial as it allows every Ghanaian student who has passed his or her Basic Education Certificate Examination (B.E.C.E) to further his or her Senior High School education with ease (Mensah, 2019).

Another benefit derived from the FSHS policy as revealed by Matey (2020) is that, it has relieved the financial burden of parents, especially guardians from rural and peri-rural

settlement. In like manner, Okrah (2020) asserted that, parents who are also business men and women are able to invest monies that they would have otherwise used as school fees in acquiring assets to expand their businesses thereby increasing their profit margin.

In a quantitative study to evaluate the appropriateness of the free senior high policy in replacing the pre-existing progressive free policy, Abdul-Rahaman et al. (2008) study in Ghana assert the free senior high school policy has increased enrolment of more junior high school graduates in secondary school by helping reduce the financial burdens on parents. Some parents concurred that receiving government financial support had given them the cushion they needed to comfortably and worry-free send their children to school. The free senior high policy has made it simpler for low-income families to enrol their children in school, alleviating financial pressure on the parents since there are no tuition charges. This is consistent with the findings of research done by (Deininger 2003; de Kemp 2008) which asserts that reducing considerably the costs to parents of sending children to school greatly increases access to primary school.

In a similar vein, Tanzania began its Free Secondary Education Program in 2014 as a part of a combined free and mandatory basic and lower secondary education program for all its citizens. All fees and additional financial requirements for lower secondary education were abolished in 2016 to increase access (Godda, 2011).

The FSE policies in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania are identical to those in Ghana in that they all aim to improve educational quality and access to secondary education, especially for students from low-income families. Ghana's policy differs from that of the aforementioned three countries in that it has a total Free Secondary Education, as opposed to the latter two's partial Free Secondary Education (Addae et al., 2019; Adu-Ababio & Osei, 2018; Asumadu, 2019; Nurudeen et al., 2018; Prempeh, 2018). In terms of outcomes, the approach led to higher enrolment rates across all nations.



Also, in a quantitative study conducted in the Bono East Region by Manu (2020) to seek teachers' perception on the free senior high school policy in Ghana, it was found that teachers, who are the main stakeholders of senior high education, saw the policy to be relevant since it has taken a lot of children from the street.

Dynarski and Scott-Clayton (2013) state that reducing the cost of education, either through grants, aid or other tuition subsidies or scrapping it off completely increases rate of completion of senior high school students. When this happens, it increases the literacy rate in the country of implementation. Similarly, Blimpo et al. (2015) assessed the impact of the Gambian girls' scholarship program on the demographics, academic performance, and accomplishment of secondary school students in Gambia. Their methodology relied on estimating differences-in-differences, comparing locations that benefited from the program early on to those that benefited later. They discovered that the girls' scholarship program increased the number of students taking the high school exit exam. This outcome is consistent with a previous study conducted in the Gambia, which found that the country's scholarship program improved the enrollment of girls between the ages of 13 and 18. (Gajigo, 2016).

Financial assistance may also play a role in encouraging students to enroll in college, according to Boatman and Long (2016). This is corroborated by 2012 research by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which discovered that Chilean students who received scholarships were more likely to continue their education than their classmates who did not.

### **2.3 Challenges associated to the implementation of free senior high school education policy**

All stakeholders involved in the education industry are concerned about resources (both human and financial), as insufficient resources tend to lower the standard of teaching and learning in

institutions. The free senior high school policy in Ghana and in some sub-Saharan African countries has encountered a variety of challenges in its implementation. Notable among these challenges are the issues of funding and inadequate teaching and learning materials. According to studies conducted in Nigeria and Kenya, funding problems and a lack of teaching and learning resources were evident in the secondary schools of both countries as school administrators and teachers struggled with the limited resources and insufficient funding available to them to improvise and manage (Edho, 2009; Cheruto & Benjamin, 2010). Furthermore, according to Mndeme's (2020) research, the per capita fee (funds) allocated each year to meet the educational needs of students is insufficient, forcing students to use the few available educational resources such as textbooks, laboratory supplies, chemicals, and cleaning supplies.

In a quantitative study carried out in Tanzania, Kamente (2014) discovered that due to the low capitation (amount of money) allotted to each student in the free secondary education program, government secondary schools fail to provide enough learning and teaching materials. Mndeme (2020) also found that the majority of research participants reported that another problem was the delay in allocating capitation to the right schools. This finding is in line with study by Mutisya (2011), who demonstrated that children's educational needs were not met as a result of government delays in capitation in Katangi, Yalta District, Machakos County, Kenya.

Additionally, a 2016 study conducted by Koramoah in Ghana aimed to investigate the administration of educational subsidies in public senior high schools and its impact on improving substantial access and participation in secondary education. The results of this research unveiled a significant delay in the government's disbursement of subsidies, resulting in a substantial financial strain on the leadership of secondary schools operating under the free education policy. Similarly, Onderi and Makori (2013) assert that there was lack of funds and parental support in the execution of the free education policy in Kenya. These studies

presuppose that, free education put a heavy financial burden on the government which results in the many challenges encountered in its implementation.

In Tanzania, Mndema (2020) in a case study, evaluated the factors affecting the implementation of the free secondary education in Dar es Salaam. The results showed a deficit in infrastructure. According to the study, respondents indicated that tables and chairs (desks) for students were insufficient as enrolment numbers increased. This finding is consistent with a qualitative study in Tanzania conducted by HakiElimu (2017) that discovered a deficit in infrastructure after the introduction of free secondary education.

Similar issues with free education in Rwanda include a lack of furniture and infrastructure. A shortage of desks and classroom space led to an imbalance between the number of students and facilities, which had an effect on the quality of instruction, according to a study by Nyirandikubwimanu, Njihia, and Mwalwa (2019) on the impact of the free education policy on the quality of instruction in day public secondary schools in Huye District. Their findings are in line with those of Mobela (2015), who found that the free education program resulted in a high student enrolment and inadequate facilities.

In Kenya, the introduction of free education came along with large class sizes, increased number of untrained teachers owing to increased enrolment of students, and inadequate school infrastructure to accommodate the vast number of students (Otieno & Colclough, 2009, as cited in Essuman, 2018). Hitherto, governments in Kenya never provided finances for the acquisition of learning materials at the secondary school level. This suggests that there was not sufficient preparation before the implementation of the education policy.

Addo (2019) analysed the free SHS program in Ghana once more and highlighted certain issues that schools are having with its implementation. Schools were impacted by insufficient infrastructure, a lack of texts for elective courses, and budget constraints. When assessing the

policy, he discovered that severe quality issues were being caused by delays in the delivery of funds to schools. He claimed that the quality of education and learning was impacted by inadequate and unqualified teachers as well as a lack of proper facilities (Addo, 2019). Furthermore, according a study conducted in Ghana by Tamanja and Pajibo (2019), the free senior high school policy resulted in a rise in enrolment of 17% and 31%, respectively, in 2017 and 2018. They acknowledged that the increase has caused infrastructure problems.

Amissah (2019) also discussed the drawbacks of the free senior high school policy, however his claims and conclusions were not supported by thorough empirical study. He talked about how the policy was accompanied by high enrolment, bigger class sizes, and overcrowding, as well as poor infrastructure because there weren't enough resources available to carry it out. He stated that the strategy made it more difficult for instructors to promote learning in classrooms and kept pressure on the current infrastructure and teachers in schools. Additionally, Matey's (2020) conclusion statement in a study titled *The Effect of Free Senior High School Policy on the Lives of Parents and Wards in Ghana* showed that higher enrollment consented to the policy's implementation flaws. He claims that the policy is burdened by delays in the distribution of funds to schools while there were insufficient instructional resources.

In a study conducted by Kindyamtima (2017) regarding free senior high school education in Tanzania, it was observed that the surge in enrolment rates exacerbated issues such as a shortage of teaching resources and delays in the distribution of instructional materials.

According to Munisi, Namusonge, and Warema (2021), large class sizes brought on by high enrolment jeopardized Tanzania's free secondary education. There was a higher chance that students would interact with their teachers one-on-one in small classrooms because teachers cannot go across the class to get to know their students in large courses. It was also found that teachers could control and monitor smaller classrooms (Blatchford et al., 2003).

Difficulties included parental misunderstandings about secondary education:

According to Mndeme, (2020) parents are not encouraged to pay for other school facilities by receiving free secondary education. In the eyes of parents, the government is responsible for providing their children with the necessary school materials, such as uniforms and exercise books. The study claims that parents are not given enough information about the policy and the roles that various stakeholders have to play in its implementation. Munisi, Namugongo, and Warema (2021) concluded that the absence of community awareness of free secondary education and insufficient parental involvement in their children's education are obstacles to the policy's implementation. In addition, parents' misconceptions about the free education policy, often led to parents' resistance to contribute to education, as they believe that the government is responsible for covering all education costs (Fabian et al., 2020).

In addition, the policy's success tends to be hampered by a lack of knowledge among relevant stakeholders about free secondary education. Also, in a quantitative study conducted by Manu (2020) in the Bono East region to identify teachers' opinions on the policy of free high school in Ghana, findings revealed that teachers, who are the main actors of senior high school education at the class level did not have knowledge about the policy before its implementation. This suggests that, there was no consultation of teachers during its formulation and subsequently its implementation.

#### **2.4 Recommendations by stakeholders in improving the FSHS policy**

Since the free education policy has reduced the financial burden on parents, guardians, and students in pursuing a secondary education and increased enrolment, stakeholders continue to look for measures to enhance and preserve it. The free secondary education policy addresses the inequality issue that still plagues secondary education access in many African nations, including Ghana (Ministry of Education, 2007). Stakeholders provided suggestions to improve

the free secondary education policy after running into difficulties with its implementation in various schools.

In their assessment of the effects of Tanzania's free secondary education policy on the quality of secondary education, Munisi, Namusonge, and Warema (2021) identified several challenges for the policy, including inadequate funding for schools, a delay in the government's distribution of capitation grants to schools, low parental involvement in their children's education, and a teacher shortage. As a result, stakeholders (headteachers) advised the government to make sure that capitation grants for all schools are disbursed in a timely manner and in an amount sufficient to comply with fee-free policy. As a result of the introduction of free secondary education, it should also create a strategic plan to address issues with quality indicators. Additionally, the study suggests that communities play essential roles in promoting and maintaining high-quality, effective schools. Due to difficulties experienced during the district's FSE deployment, several recommendations were made. As a result of false belief that education is free and that the government is responsible for meeting all of the needs of both students and schools, there is a low level of parental and community involvement in education. Stakeholders recommended that the government increase the funds provided per student and not delay in paying capitation funds to schools.

Stakeholders recommended that the government increase the funds provided per student and not delay in paying capitation funds to schools in another study conducted in Tanzania to evaluate the challenges influencing the implementation of the free secondary education program in Dar es Salaam. This will ensure that there is adequate and timely provision of school infrastructure and other requirements. In order to meet the growing enrolment of pupils, the report advises governments to build extra classrooms or schools and hire numerous teachers, particularly in the fields of science and mathematics. Teachers and school administrators, who

are stakeholders, urge community people to get education to dispel myths about free education and to understand the roles of the many stakeholders. This would encourage other interested parties to support funding for school facilities and improve parents' willingness to offer resources that are lacking in the school. Additionally, the stakeholders advise schools to identify revenue-generating initiatives and other sources of income rather than heavily relying on capitation funding from the government to finance their budget (Mndeme, 2020).

Stakeholders in Kenya proposed that the improvisation of teaching-learning materials can improve the implementation of the free day secondary education. In order to assist their children' education, parents and guardians should provide donations to the school. Donor funding may also come from alumni of the respective institutions and the government (Muhindi, 2009).

Research conducted by Matey (2020) in Ghana, asserts that stakeholders suggested that the free senior high school policy should have reliable funding sources, such as the legacy fund set up specifically for its activities. Stakeholders advise the government to find a long-term source of funding for the educational system and ensure that the double-track system is regularized into a single-track system by increasing academic user facilities and the number of both teaching and non-teaching staff in various senior high schools (Matey, 2020). This research supports Tamanja and Pajibo's (2018) assertion that those responsible for implementing the Free SHS policy through the secretariat should think about reaching an agreement on a dependable and long-term financing source that would be used exclusively for the program. The authors claim that with proper financing, infrastructure could be improved and the double track system, which is brought on by inadequate infrastructure, could be eliminated. Additionally, implementers might do a complete analysis of the cost of secondary education per student in order to distribute coupons to qualified students, which they might use in either

public or private senior high schools. By doing this, private schools' infrastructure and capabilities will be more effectively utilized, and parents and students will have more options when selecting a school.

## **2.5 Theoretical Perspective**

This section provides a description of the theory that guided the study. The study was guided by the systems theory.

## **2.6 Systems Theory**

Systems theory was originally advanced by Von Bertalanffy in the 1960s. As a practicing biologist, Bertalanffy was interested in developing open systems theory to understand how systems exchange matter with the environment as observed in every living system. For Capra (cited in Mele, Pels and Polese, 2010), systems theory is an interdisciplinary theory about any system in nature, in society and in many scientific fields, which provides a framework to study phenomena from a holistic approach. General systems theory defines systems as complexes of interacting elements (Bertalanffy, 1971). The theory focuses on problems of relationships, structures and interdependencies in a system. It proposes that a social system consists of individuals working together within a formal framework. For example, a school as a system draws resources, people, and finances from its environment and then brings them back into that environment (Kindyamtima, 2017).

### **2.6.1 Tenets of the Systems Theory**

The System theory focuses on how elements within a system interrelate, interdepend, and interact with each other and its environment to ensure the total functioning of the system (Bertalanffy, 1971). The basic system theory of every organization is made up of five major components: inputs, a transformative process, outputs, feedback, and the environment (Daft, 2010).



In this theory, inputs encompass the material, human, financial, or information resources required to produce goods and services of varying quantities and qualities. The transformation process involves the application of production technology by management to change the inputs into outputs. The outputs are the tangible products and services of the organization that possesses a market value. Feedback is any form of information about the output. The environment comprises the social, political, and cultural systems.

Grifths (1964) adds that systems like schools have subsystems and supra-systems with boundaries. Subsystems focus on analysing the relationship between enterprises internal components. Supra-systems focus on the connections between enterprises and other influencing systemic entities in their context. He explains a boundary of a system as the component that separates the system from its environment and filters the system's inputs and outputs (Oyebade, 2010).

### **2.6.2 Application of Theory to Study**

As an open system, the school is reliant on its surroundings. According to the theory, when examining school components, it is important to evaluate how each component interacts with the others as well as how it interacts with the outside environment. Additionally, because schools are open systems, they react to outside forces in an effort to achieve their objectives (Kindyamtima, 2017).

The establishment of the free senior high policy represents a shift in the surrounding community of the school. A school, according to Plomp and Pelgrum (1993), is a complex system made up of sub-systems at several levels, including but not limited to macro (at the national level), mezzo (at the school level), and micro (in the classroom and with the students). There are numerous decision-makers at these levels. Since a system like a school is made up of many interconnected parts that must work together as a whole in order for it to function, the

lack of even one component, such as money or infrastructure, can alter the way the system functions. Based on this assumption, the researcher determines which areas of the schools lack the resources that the government had pledged to provide as part of the free senior high school program while also investigating how the lack of these resources affects the ability of the schools to remain operational.

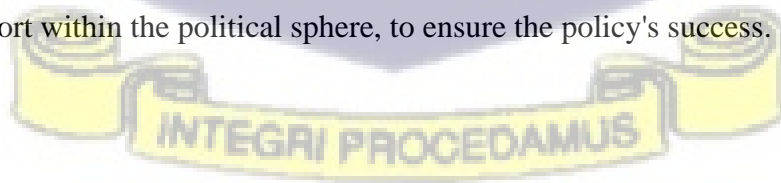
The school is evaluated as a process made up of five different types of inputs, according to Oyebade (2010), who draws on Hanson's Input-Process-Output-Feedback Model: human resources, such as students, teachers, administrators, caterers, and others; material resources, such as buildings, desks, books, equipment, and laboratories; financial resources, including money; constraints, such as legal and policy requirements; and parental expectations and inputs (Oyebade, 2010). At the transformative processing level, schools process materials, train people, or provide service through organizing and planning but it demands something would be done about the input. In testing the claims of this theory and acknowledging that studying elements of schools must take into consideration the interrelationships among its parts and their relationship with the external environment, it can be concluded that the free senior high school policy originates from its external environment from the government (supra system) with inputs into the school to ensure its efficiency and effectiveness.

The researcher, therefore, assesses the inputs of the free senior high school policy into the school in the form of human resources (such as students, teachers, administrators, caterers, and others), material resources (such as buildings, desks, books, equipment, laboratories), financial resources (such as money or funds), constraints (such as requirements of the law and policy), and expectations and inputs of parents (Oyebade, 2010). The theory proposes that the inputs from the external environment (funds, reading materials, elective textbooks, resources, and infrastructure like computer laboratory affect the functioning of the school. And since problems of relationships, structures, and of interdependence in a system affect the system, we can assess

that the lack of some inputs from the outer environment (the free SHS policy) and various parts of the system (the school and its related departments) are hindering the schools' daily activities which affect the outputs (students graduation results, overcrowding in classrooms, indiscipline in school) and feedbacks such as complaints from students, complaints from teachers or other stakeholders are the perspectives stakeholders turn to have on Ghana's free senior high school policy.

### **2.6.3 The Usefulness of the Theory**

Systems theory helps in measuring the performance of a system and controlling and computing the interactions among individuals in each department of the organization. In addition, it illustrates that if all parts of the organization's components such as inputs, transformative process, outputs, feedback, and environments are not coordinated then organization goals cannot be achieved. Also, organizations (schools as an open system) recognize that it is not self-content they rely on their environment for essential inputs as a source to absorb their output. In this research, the system theory illustrates that the effectiveness of the free senior high school policy hinges on the interconnected and interdependent components within the educational environment. These components encompass inputs (e.g., infrastructure), the transformational process (comprising teaching methods and instructional strategies), as well as feedback from stakeholders who express concerns about the policy's achievements and shortcomings. This highlights the critical role of additional factors, particularly funding and legislative support within the political sphere, to ensure the policy's success.



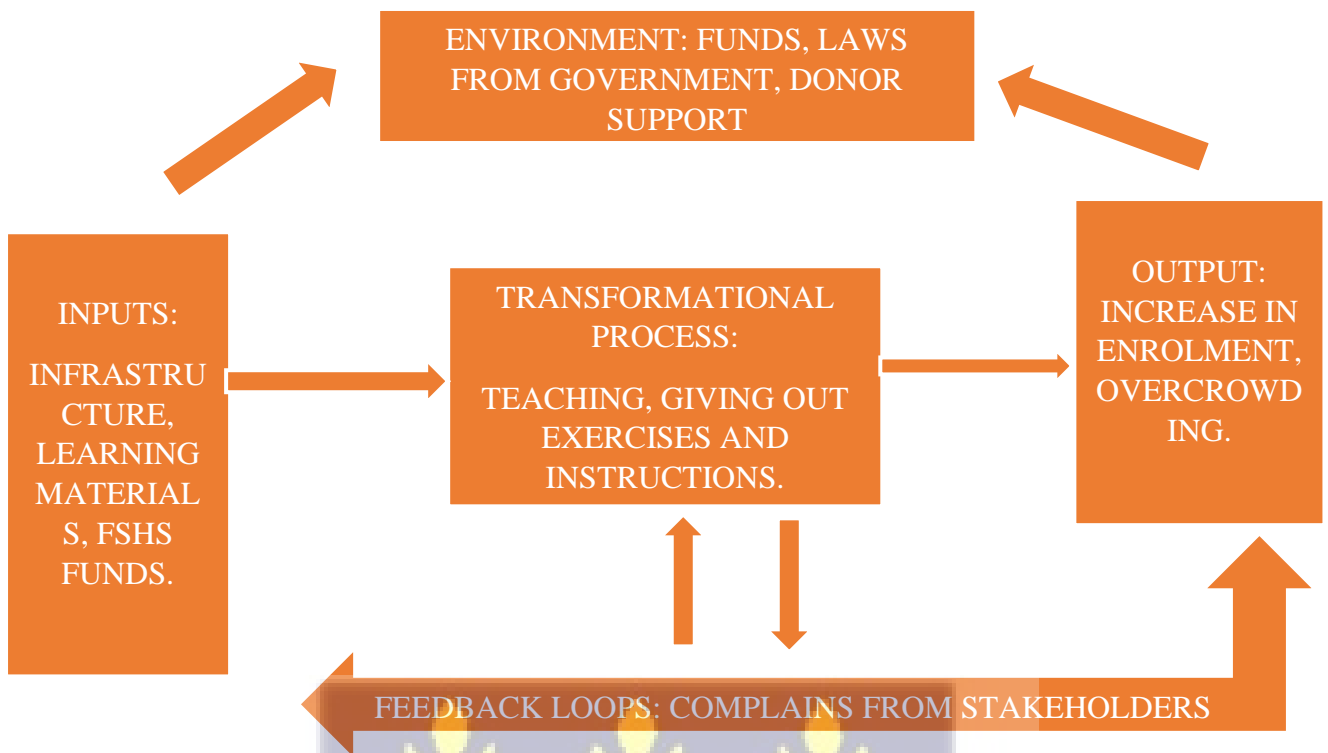
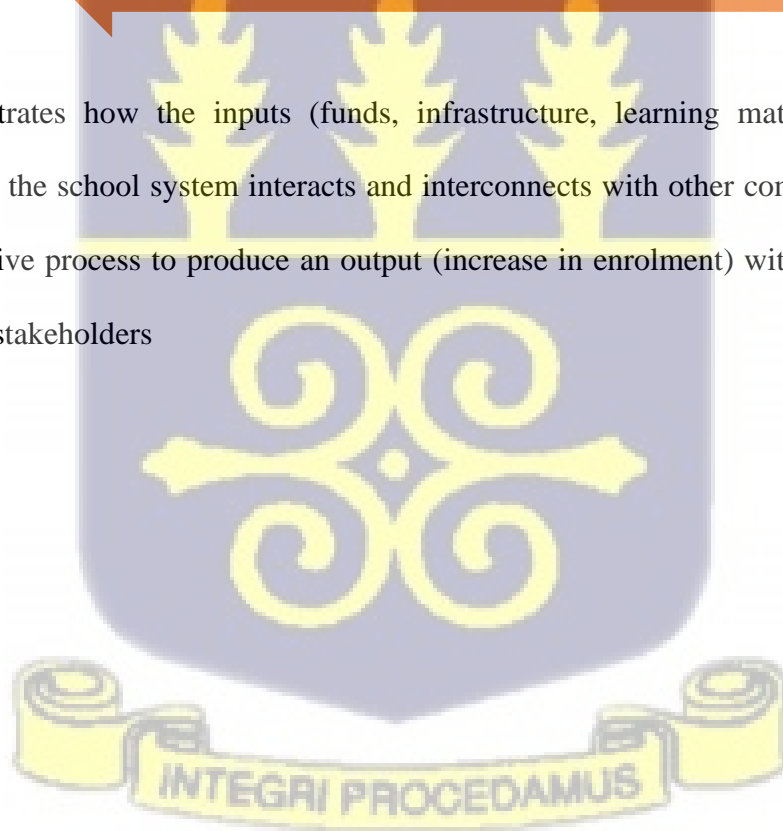


Figure 1. illustrates how the inputs (funds, infrastructure, learning materials) from the governments to the school system interacts and interconnects with other components such as the transformative process to produce an output (increase in enrolment) with the help of the feedback from stakeholders



## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the general research strategy adopted for the study. It discusses the research design, study area, study and target population and source of data. In addition, the chapter describes and provides justification for the sampling methods and techniques that were used in selecting participants as well as the justification. Also, data collection tools that were used as well as how the data generated was handled and analysed have been discussed. The final part of the chapter discusses the challenges encountered on the field of study as well as ethical considerations guiding the study.

#### 3.2 Research Design

The research design for this study was qualitative. A qualitative research approach that is also exploratory in nature, according to Creswell and Creswell (2017), offers a thorough grasp of what people experience. Additionally, rather than focusing just on generalized findings, this design helps researchers to comprehend a phenomenon from both the standpoint of an individual and a population (Abdullah et al., 2018). Thus, qualitative research design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to explore in-depth, the issues of interest and probe to gain a deeper understanding of stakeholders' perspectives of the Free SHS policy (Creswell, 2012).

A qualitative research design was employed because the researcher wanted to understand the experience and perspectives of stakeholders on the FSHS policy. Since the researcher set out to understand and interpret stakeholders' perspectives about the FSHS policy, the basic interpretative qualitative design was adopted for this study. The Basic Interpretative Qualitative Design (BIQD) is a research methodology that falls under the broader umbrella of qualitative

research. It is a systematic and flexible approach used to understand the complex meanings and interpretations individuals ascribe to their experiences and the social phenomena under investigation. This approach emphasizes exploring the lived experiences, perspectives, and subjective interpretations of participants, seeking to construct an in-depth understanding of the researched phenomenon. Thus, this design helped the researcher to understand the meanings stakeholders had about the Free Senior High School Policy. In this study, the researcher sought to understand a phenomenon, a process, the perspective and worldviews of the stakeholders involved in the free senior high school. These stakeholders' perspectives could only be understood if the meanings they assigned to situations is understood (Merriam, 2002). Cavazos stated Merriam's criteria for basic interpretative study as how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their world, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Cavazos, 2017).

### **3.3 The Study Area**

The study was conducted in selected schools in the Ga Central and Ga West Municipalities of the Greater Accra Region. This is because Ga West Municipality has two schools that are all day schools meaning that they do not provide boarding facilities. Additionally, Ga central is located within the urban enclave while the two schools (Adjen Kotoku Senior High and Amasaman Senior High and Technical School) in Ga West Municipality are located within both peri-urban and urban areas (Ga West Municipal Assembly, 2022). Furthermore, stakeholders' perspectives from both Municipalities were important since diverse experiences in each school in the municipality would be unearth and also through more light on the research. Also, these municipalities host two schools which are double track public senior high schools and as well as a single track senior high school. The Double Track calendar is an intervention that enables schools to house more students in the same facility. It is frequently driven by its potential to lessen overcrowding and, in the short term, decrease expenses compared to building

additional schools (Korthals, 2015). In a single-track system, staff and students are both in or out of the classroom at the same time over a school year. The entire student body and staff are split into two groups under the double-track system. A distinct group of students will always be using the school's facilities because one track is in class while the other is on vacation (Korthals, 2015). These schools are Amasaman Senior High and Technical School, Adjen Kotoku Senior high school and Odorgonno Senior High School.

The reason for choosing these schools was that, two of the schools, that is, Odorgonno and Amasaman Senior High and Technical school are operating on double track system, while Adjen Kotoku Senior High school operates on the single track.

### **3.3.1 Ga Central Municipal Assembly**

The Ga Central Municipal is one of Ghana's 260 Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs) and one of 29 MMDAs in the Greater Accra Region. Ga Central Municipal, with its capital Sowutuom, was formed from Ga South Municipal and is one of the new districts and municipalities established in 2012, which were all inaugurated simultaneously on June 28, 2012. Ga Central host Odogonno senior high school.

Odogonno senior high school was founded in 1940 located in Awoshie in the Ga Central Municipality in Greater Accra Region. The school admits both students who are boarders as well as day students, the school admits both genders and also runs a double track school system. The school has the capacity to host about two thousand five hundred students. One thousand of the students are boarders while one thousand five hundred are day students. The school offers General Science, General Arts, Business, Visual art, Agriculture and Home economics as programmes. The school admits students through the computerised placement system (Graphic Online, 2017).

### 3.3.2 Ga West Municipal Assembly

Ga West Municipality is one of the fast-growing peri-urban regions of Accra (Ashiagbor et al., 2019). It is located on the north western part of the Accra Metropolitan Area. Its capital is Amasaman which host Amasaman senior high and technical school. Amasaman senior high and technical school is one of the two public senior high schools found in the municipality. It is a day school and also admits both males and females' students. Courses offered in the school includes General Science, General Arts, business, visual arts, home economics, Agricultural science, core subjects include English, integrated science, core maths and social studies. The schools also offer technical courses such as applied electricity, auto mechanic engineering, building construction technology, catering, electrical installation work, fashion and design etc. Amasaman senior high school runs double track and hosts about thousand five students.

Adjen Kotoku senior high secondary school can also be found in the Ga west municipality. The school was founded in 2014 and is cited adjacent the new Kotoku market of Nsawam main road at Medie. The school is a day school, single track and also a mixed school. The school offers programmes such as Business, home economics, visual arts, general arts and also general science.

### 3.3 Target and Study Population

As described by Martínez-Mesa and colleagues (2016), the target population encompasses the complete group of individuals or subjects intended to be considered for drawing conclusions in a study. The authors elaborate that a study's target population establishes the specific units to which the study's results are intended to be relevant. The study population comprised of all beneficiary schools of the Free SHS policy in the Ga West and Ga Central Municipalities. The study population included stakeholders such as headteachers, teachers, parents and students.



Study population or sample refers to a subset of the population which have been selected by the researcher for his/her study purpose (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). Therefore, the target population for the study comprised of school authorities' members such as headteachers or mistresses, teachers, students in SHS 3, and parents in the selected schools. Students in SHS 3 was selected because the researcher believes that staying in school for at least 2 years is enough to possess the relevant knowledge on the benefits, challenges and also make recommendations to improve the policy.

### **3.4 Sampling Technique and Recruitment**

The researcher employed purposive sampling technique to select participants who could provide the relevant data for the study, this technique is considered appropriate because it helped the researcher to identify participants who possess vital information relevant to the study objectives (Tashakkor & Teddlie, 2003). Thus, the rich experiences of the research participants are some of the qualities they possess hence the reason why they were included in the study. For the students sampled for this study, they were to be in SHS 3. Teachers sampled for the study had to have worked within the schools for five (5) years and more.

The school authorities were engaged as contact persons and subsequently an introductory letter from the Department of Social Work explaining the purpose of the study was taken requesting access into the schools for the research to be undertaken. For school management committee members and parents who are members of the PTA, the researcher sent letters of introduction through the headmaster for access and request to participate in the study. Both males and females were equitably recruited if they meet the inclusion criteria. In addition, students or parents with disabilities were included if they meet the inclusion criteria as determined by the researcher.

### **3.5 Inclusion Criteria**

The students must be in their final year, specifically in Form Three. The teachers must have taught for more than five years and also school authorities comprised of the headteacher/mistress, head of academics or head of administration as well as parents school management committees' members.

### **3.6 Exclusion Criteria**

Students in SHS one and two were excluded from this study, also teachers who have taught for less than five years were excluded from the study as well. This because they may not have detailed information on the questions being asked.

### **3.7 Sample Size**

A total of 30 participants were targeted for participation in the study. The breakdown of the sample size is as follows; one (1) headteacher, two (2) head of academics, two (2) teachers each from the three schools; and a total of fifteen (15) students, five from each school. In addition, six parents, thus two (2) from each school. This sample size was chosen because according to Creswell (1998), a sample size between 20-30 is enough to achieve data saturation in a qualitative study.

### **3.8 Instruments for data collection**

Semi-structured interview guides were designed by the researcher and was used to collect primary data from the research participants. The interview guides were translated from English language to Twi (a local language) by experts in the Department of Linguistics at the University of Ghana, Legon. Twenty- four interviews were conducted in English with the following stakeholders: teachers, headteachers and students. Six interviews were conducted for parents who opted to have the interview conducted in the Twi language. The instrument had 42 questions. Five of the questions were on background characteristics, seven of the questions

were on challenges of the FSHS policy, five questions on benefits, twenty-one questions on perceptions of the policy and four questions on recommendations. The questions were open ended questions. Open ended questions were chosen because it gives the participants the opportunity to answer questions in their own words without suggestions from the researcher (Popping, 2015). Interviews for parents were conducted in Twi language at a place and time convenient to participants. A voice recorder was used in all the interviews after permission had been sought from participants.

### **3.9 Data Processing and Analysis**

The audio data collected from the field was kept and treated as private and confidential. The audio data in Twi were transcribed by the researcher into English Language. Additionally, field notes and audio recorded data in English language were transcribed and entered into a computer protected with a password only known by the principal researcher. The researcher adopted Charmaz (2006) three stage thematic standard coding to analyse the data:

- I. Creating initial codes: This step involves the researcher creating labels to identify the meaning of each segment of the transcript through the identification of action occurring words. The labels were created to categorize segments of the data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data (Charmaz, 2006). For example: Supervision by GES, Follow ups by implementers, Top-down approach.
- II. Focused code: this step involves the researcher identifying words and sentences that completed the action word. Example: implementation process.
- III. Themes: the researcher then combined the initial codes with the focused codes to form themes and write up was made using the themes formed.

### **3.10 Ethical consideration**

Application of ethical principles is necessary while doing research using human subjects as participation. The University of Ghana's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was consulted for

ethical approval. The researcher specifically followed the ethical principles of informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. To prevent plagiarism, all studies that were cited have been properly referenced.

In adhering to the principle of informed consent, all participants will be briefed about the purpose of the study, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in participating in the study. One of the benefits of participating in this study is that participants will get the opportunity to share their views on the issue, which they might have desired such opportunities. Some of the risks include time spent during the interview and risk of Covid -19 as the interview were be conducted face-to-face. For participants who were 17 years or younger, consent was sought from their caregivers. Participants were made aware that they are free to withdraw their participation at any stage of the data collection.

For anonymity, the identity of participants was not disclosed, but pseudonyms instead of their real names. In upholding confidentiality, the researcher ensured that data collected from participants were kept away from third parties. This was done by storing the softcopies on a personal laptop and in a private Google drive account, all of which were sealed with a password.

### **3.11 Measures to Ensure Credibility**

To bolster the credibility of this research, the researcher utilized peer debriefing. Throughout this process, the researcher collaborated with her research supervisors to validate the accuracy of the study and engage in thorough discussions to enhance and fine-tune the approach at every stage of the research process (Hughes, O'Regan, & Wornham, 2008).

Through member checking, which is an aspect of developing trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research, all participants were asked to validate the transcribed data the interview after the final transcription.

### 3.12 Limitations of the study

#### Language

Due to the fact that some of the interviews were conducted in Ghanaian languages the researcher was not able to get the exact English representation of some the words in transcription. It is therefore possible that some of the information may be lost in translation.

However, the researcher ensured that losses in some of these words are minimised.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and discussions along with the study objectives. This chapter presents findings on the socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants' perspectives, the stakeholders' views on the implementation of the Free Senior High School policy, and the challenges and benefits of the Free Senior High School policy.

#### 4.2 Socio-demographics of Study Participants

##### 4.2.1 Students

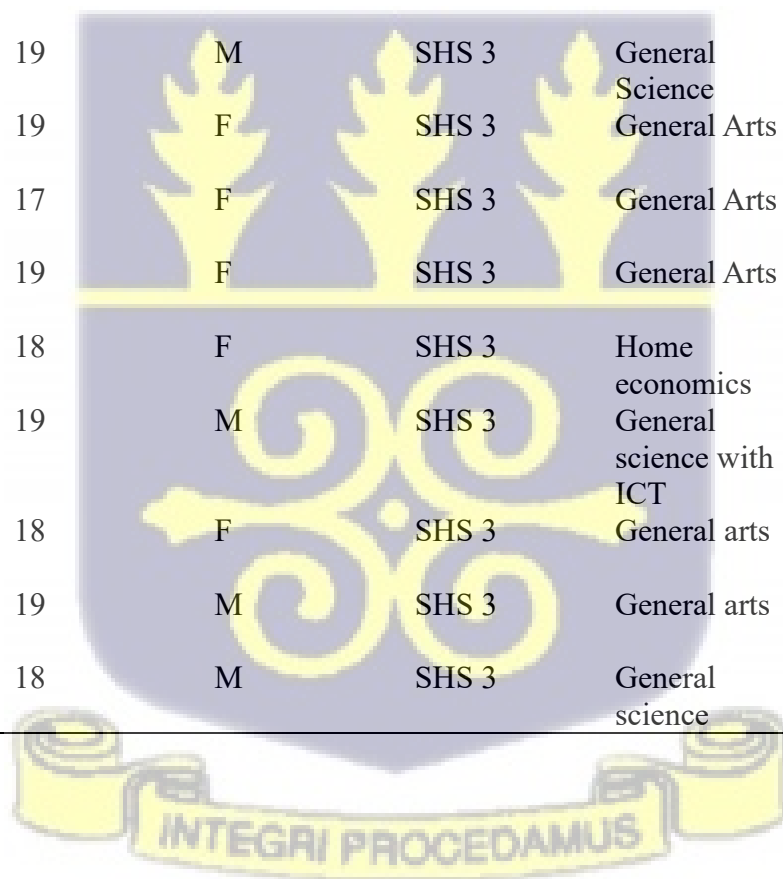
Table 4.1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the students who participated in this study. The researcher interviewed fifteen (15) SHS 3 students for this study. As previously explained, this category of students was selected because they have gone through three years of education under the FSHS policy and may possess vital and rich information to answer the research questions. average age of the students ranged from 17 to 21 years old. There were 6 (six) males and 12 (twelve) females, 10 (ten) of the students commute from home daily to school while 3 (three) were resident on campus and 2 (two) of the students were from far places and reside in a hostel near the school. Students were recruited from three schools, that is Amasaman senior high and technical school, Adjen Kotoku senior high school and Odorgonno senior high school herein referred to as A, B, and C respectively



**Table 1**

**Socio-demographic of students**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>subject</b>	<b>Student residence status</b>
<b>Student 1 (B)</b>	19	F	SHS 3	General arts with E-math	Day students
<b>Student 2(B)</b>	21	M	SHS 3	Business	Day students
<b>Student 3 (B)</b>	20	F	SHS 3	Visual art	Day student in a hostel
<b>Student 4 (B)</b>	21	M	SHS 3	General Science	Day student
<b>Student 5 (A)</b>	19	F	SHS 3	General Science	Day student
<b>Student 6 (A)</b>	18	F	SHS 3	General Art	Day student
<b>Student 7(A)</b>	19	M	SHS 3	General Science	Day student
<b>Student 8 (A)</b>	19	F	SHS 3	General Arts	Day student
<b>Student 9 (A)</b>	17	F	SHS 3	General Arts	Day student
<b>Student 10 (B)</b>	19	F	SHS 3	General Arts	Day student in hostel
<b>Student 11(C)</b>	18	F	SHS 3	Home economics	Day student
<b>Student 12 (C)</b>	19	M	SHS 3	General science with ICT	Boarder
<b>Student 13 (C)</b>	18	F	SHS 3	General arts	Boarder
<b>Student 14 (C)</b>	19	M	SHS 3	General arts	Day student
<b>Student 15 (C)</b>	18	M	SHS 3	General science	Boarder



#### 4.2.2 Teachers

The study also recruited six (6) teachers from the three (3) schools (illustrated by A, B, C) involved in the study, comprising of 3 male teachers and 3 female teachers. All the teachers had obtained bachelor’s degrees and have acquired 12 to 21 years’ experience in teaching. the table below indicates that the teachers teach more than a class, while some teachers teach from 1 to 3 and others either teach form 1 and 2 or form 2 and 3.

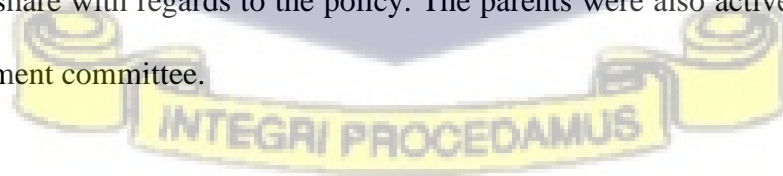
Table 2

Socio-demographic of teachers

Participant	Age	Sex	Level of education	Class taught	Work experience	Levels taught
Teacher 1(B)	37	M	Degree	Social student	8	SHS 1& 2
Teacher 2(B)	42	F	Degree	English language	12	SHS 2& 3
Teacher 3(C)	38	M	Degree	Visual art	10	SHS 2& 3
Teacher 4(C)	53	F	Degree	Home economics	18	SHS 1& 3
Teacher 5(A)	40	M	Degree	English Language	8	SHS 1& 2
Teacher 6 (A)	45	F	Degree	Physical education	21	SHS 1& 3

#### 4.2.3 Parents

The study also recruited six (6) parents or guardians of students currently in SHS 3, who had experiences to share with regards to the policy. The parents were also active members of the school management committee.





### Socio-Demographic of Parents

**Table 3**

Participant	Age	Sex	Occupation
Parent 1(A)	50	F	Farmer
Parent 2 (A)	54	F	Trader
Parent 3 (B)	52	M	Sand winner
Parent 4 (B)	45	M	Mechanic
Parent 5 (C)	34	F	Interior decorator
Parent 6 (C)	60	F	Retired matron

#### 4.2.4 Heads of School

The study also recruited one (1) head of school and two (2) head of academics who shared their experiences with regards to the policy. These authorities had had enough experiences at their post and amassed rich information to aid in this research.

**Table 4**

#### Demographic Information for School Head and School Authorities

Participant	Sex	Age	Educational background	Years of Experience
Head of school 1(A)	F	57	DEGREE	6
Head of academics(B)	M	50	MASTERS IN ECONOMICS	12
Head of academics (c)	M	52	DEGREE	5

#### 4.3 Benefits of the FSHS Policy

The first objective of the study set out to explore the benefits associated with the Free Senior School Policy from the perspectives of the stakeholders. Overall, five main themes emerged under this objective. Generally, the study participants were of the view that the policy has eased the financial burden of parents and guardians regarding secondary education in Ghana. Participants also shared that the policy has helped in the increment in enrolment, increased the

completion rate of students and also has motivated students. The themes below provide further and better particulars regarding the narratives and voices of the study participants.

#### 4.3.1 Ease of Financial Burden

The study participants shared the view that the FSHS policy came as a relief to many parents. According to them, unlike the years before the policy, parents now do not have to worry about paying admission fees before sending their wards to school. For instance, a guardian indicated that her cousin would not have attended secondary school if the policy was not in existence because they couldn't have afforded him together with their children. Examples of the narratives below further explain the theme.

*I was elated by the new policy; I had never imagined such a policy would become a reality. Without the Free Senior High School (SHS) initiative, I doubt my cousin would have had the opportunity to attend school, as none of us could have shouldered the extra responsibility of caring for him. With the policy's implementation, I encouraged him to work diligently for his Basic Education. (Parent, 5, C, Female).*

Likewise, a parent also had this to say:

*It has helped in the manner that; you don't have to pay for anything except for the child's provisions. Formerly you must pay some amount for house dues, PTA dues, and examination fees, but these have been taken care of by the policy. When you consider these things, you can certainly say that it has been helpful (Parent 1, A, Male).*

One participant who works as a teacher in one of the schools, for instance, said that the policy has offered the option to the deserving but poor students to also pursue secondary education. Another claimed that the FSHS had enabled even the most disadvantaged youngsters and orphans to experience what it was like to attend secondary school. The following narratives are from the participants:

*Well, this policy has provided opportunities for less privileged yet academically gifted individuals to access secondary education. Additionally, it has been beneficial for this same demographic, as it includes a provision for providing them with one meal a day (Teacher 6, A, Female).*

*For me, the program has been beneficial due to the support it provides for covering my school fees, essential textbooks, and additional expenses such as daily meals. This assistance has enabled me to pursue my secondary education independently. I'm responsible for my own well-being, as I live with my elderly aunt who can't provide for my needs, and this policy has made a significant difference in my life (Student 7, A, Male).*

*The Free SHS policy has made a significant difference in my life. I have two children, one of whom has already finished their secondary education, while the other is currently in Form three. Without this government initiative, I wouldn't have been able to afford to send them to school, considering my income from selling tomatoes at the Kasoa market (Parent 2, A, Female).*

#### **4.3.2 Increase in Enrolment**

Participants considered this theme as one of the biggest achievements of the FSHS policy. According to them, the policy has opened up opportunities for students who would ordinarily not have secondary school education because of their inability to afford its associated costs. Below are most shared views by participants:

*"When discussing enrolment, it was anticipated that enrolment would increase. Previous policies had already shown a positive impact on enrolment, and the introduction of this particular policy was expected to further boost enrolment. This expectation was realized as the overall school enrolment stood at approximately 300*

*students in 2017 when I initially joined, with fee-paying students in attendance. Since the implementation of the free SHS program, our student body has grown to approximately 900 students, a significant* (Head of Academics 2, B, Male).

Another view shared by a participant

*Enrolment has significantly increased. Last year, there were 45 students in my home economics class. This year, the number has increased to 70, making it challenging to have one-on-one interactions with all the students* (Teacher 4, C, Female).

According to the head of academics in school B, although previous policies also increased enrolment, with this kind of policy, where parents do not have to bear any costs associated with their wards' secondary school education, enrolment increased substantially.

Also, a female teacher in school C made it known to the researcher that, some students who had completed the Basic Education Certificate Examination some years ago but could not go to secondary school decided to re-write the B.E.C.E in order to benefit from the free policy, and be enrolled in school.

*Thanks to this policy, individuals who would have otherwise remained at home are now present with us. Take, for instance, a girl and a boy who finished junior high school in 2015. They were able to join senior high school in 2017, thanks to this opportunity. The young man has successfully completed senior high school, and I have even welcomed him into my family. Currently, he's working alongside my brother, saving money to pursue a university education. The recent exam results have been promising, and in cases like this, I can confidently affirm that this policy has indeed provided a tremendous opportunity.* (Teacher 4, C, Female).

### 4.3.3 Increment in Completion Rate

The FSHS policy has helped students to complete their SHS education without any financial constraints. This is because parents do not pay registration fees or other costs which usually causes their wards to drop out of school. This was identified in all three schools where the study was conducted. This is what some participants had to say:

*In my former school, there used to be instances where 15, 18, or even 20 students who had embarked on their secondary education journey in the first year found themselves unable to afford the registration fees for the WASSCE by the time they reached SHS 3. While they didn't drop out, they faced a significant obstacle in taking their exams due to these registration costs. However, thanks to the Free Senior High School (FSHS) policy, registration fees are no longer a hindrance, and students can now successfully complete their secondary education. (Head of Academics 2, B, Male).*

From the head of school in school C, though some students may be truant and not come to school often, but because they registered without paying any fees, they usually come to school partake in the final exams and most of them get passes on their certificate.

*Many students continue attending school and take the WASSCE (West African Senior School Certificate Examination). Out of the 500 students, the absence of around 5 students isn't a major concern. The main issue we face is truancy and students not staying in class. However, our school is actively addressing this problem. We have dedicated guidance and counselling departments that provide support to these students. To illustrate our efforts, I can share a success story from last year: I encountered a particularly challenging student who had a habit of not attending classes. Despite these difficulties, we registered him for the examination since registration was free, and I'm delighted to report that he now holds his certificate. (Head of school 1, C, Female).*

Some participants also shared that the FSHS policy has motivated a lot of students to aim higher, and study hard for opportunities in higher education.

*In 2017, our initial batch consisted of 53 students, all of whom achieved a remarkable 100% distinction. Notably, in the previous year, one of our students attained six As, while two others secured four As and two Bs. Many of our alumni are currently thriving in university, with three students earning scholarships from KNUST last year. The policy has proven to be a powerful motivator for our students, inspiring them to work diligently and pursue higher education. (Head of Academics 1, B, Male).*

A narration from a student:

*Thanks to the government's commitment to providing free education, many of us, as students, are dedicated to working diligently and achieving excellent grades. We believe that this investment in our education by the government is truly worthwhile. Personally, I'm driven to put in the time and effort required for my studies, with the knowledge that the government offers scholarships to the top performers in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). This policy for free senior high school education serves as a powerful incentive for us. (Student 10, B, Female).*

#### **4.3.4 Investment in Human Capital**

As per the feedback from participants, the free senior high policy holds great significance, aligning with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals. This agenda aims to ensure that every boy and girl can access free, fair, high-quality primary and secondary education that results in valuable and effective learning outcomes. Study participants emphasized that instead of relying on foreign human resources, the policy's implementation promises to equip Ghanaian youth with essential engineering and construction skills, thereby enhancing the nation's human capital. This narration further illustrates the point:

*This policy remains pertinent in the current context. A significant portion of our youth engaged in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), specializing in fields such as building and construction, engineering, and electrical, possess the capacity to rehabilitate deteriorating bridges and roads. Instead of incurring exorbitant expenses by hiring foreign personnel from countries like China, we can harness our own skilled workforce to address these infrastructure challenges. (Teacher 2, B, Male).*

Another participant had this to say;

*After completing our secondary schooling, we will have the abilities necessary to succeed and continue to the university, where we will be more skilled, and our earnings will also increase. Some of us are learning technical and vocational skills, such as how to fix electrical appliances, build houses, and build furniture. These are practical talents that will help us land employment or even become self-employed. I believe the FSHS policy was put in place so that the country could obtain more competent labour so that we could manage national problems without relying on outside knowledge (Student 3, B, Male).*

#### **4.3.5 Reduced Social Vices**

The free senior high school policy has also helped to take JHS graduates who often engage in hawking off the streets. It is also no longer the case that JHS graduates do not get placed into SHS and therefore find themselves on the streets. This has reduced the number of petty thefts and other social vices in many communities. Participants contended that there is high enrolment in schools because some students who would have been involved in social vices due to idleness are all in school. For examples a male student shared that:

*We are committed to the continuity of this policy, as it has undeniably enriched the lives of our youth. It has effectively reduced social vices, diminished instances of fraud, and minimized street hawking, which often exposes our youth to negative influences. With this policy in place, more of our young people are enrolled in school, striving to create brighter futures for themselves. (Student 4, B, Male).*

Similarly, a male teacher shared that:

*The policy has played a crucial role in diminishing the population of young Junior High School (JHS) graduates who might have otherwise resorted to life on the streets, potentially engaging in criminal activities. Instead, these students are now actively participating in their educational pursuits. Their ability to attend school is a step toward their positive development over the next three years. Even if they do not succeed in the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), I firmly believe that they will contribute positively to the nation, making them more of an asset than a liability, ultimately benefiting our society as a whole. (Teacher 1, B, Male).*

#### **4.4 Challenges Associated in the Implementation of the FSHS Policy**

The second objective was to explore the challenges associated in the implementation of the FSHS policy. Themes that emerged include; teaching related challenges which included: difficulty in managing classrooms, work overload, inadequate teaching and learning materials. Other themes that emerged are, confusion emanating from the double track system, compromised quality, delay in disbursement of funds to schools, inadequate infrastructure, lack of proper monitoring by implementers, poor stakeholder consultation.

##### **4.4.1 Teaching Related Challenges**

The difficulty teachers face in managing classes due to the rise in enrolment linked with the FSHS policy emerges as a subtheme under the teaching-related issues. Teachers claim that



because more pupils can now attend senior high school as a result of the FSHS policy, class management has become difficult. It becomes challenging to recognize and pin down the offenders. Additionally, most teachers also complained about the workload levels on them as a result of the FSHS policy and the tracking system. According to them, the number of contact hours and classes they teach have been increased coupled with the fact that some of the teachers do not have vacation any longer. The study also found inadequate teaching and learning materials as one of the challenges associated with the FSHS policy. According to the study participants, although government has promised to provide learning materials such as core textbook, it is unable to meet the demands. Further, the double-track system posed a challenge for all stakeholders in the study.

These are what some teachers said:

*Some individuals are primarily here for the enjoyment of the experience. Personally, I often leave the class feeling quite drained, and if I have another class following this one, it can also affect my performance there. The class is quite sizable, with around 75 students, which occasionally necessitates raising my voice due to its size. If it weren't free, I suspect many of them might have chosen to be elsewhere. (Teacher 2, B, Female).*

Another comment from a teacher;

*They come from diverse backgrounds, with varying levels of readiness to learn. Among them, some are eager to embrace knowledge, while others may require more encouragement. For those who are less inclined to learn, I adopt a proactive approach to help motivate them. I provide assignments, but unfortunately, a few are reluctant to complete them. There are instances when students may skip class, only to arrive after the lesson has concluded. When assignments are distributed, there are some who hesitate to attempt them. Additionally, there are cases where students may leave as soon*

*as they see the instructor entering the classroom. While we assign exercises and evaluate their progress, some may lack the necessary materials, like exercise books, to participate fully (Teacher 6, A, Female).*

A female teacher from school C shared her thoughts on work overload:

*In my initial clothing and textiles class, I began with a group of 20 to 30 students to instruct. However, as enrolment increased, my class size expanded to 90 students. Teaching intricate sewing techniques, such as working on the front, back, collar, sleeve, and more, is a time-consuming process. With this significant increase in the number of students under my guidance, I faced the challenge of managing their progress effectively. Consequently, my initial results suffered due to this considerable change. (Teacher 3, C, Female).*

Similarly, another teacher had this to say:

*As the head of the clothing department, I am on both tracks. So, when track A vacates, track B comes in and I need to be in school. So, for the past two and three years it has been hectic. The only vacations I get are public holidays and breaks for a few days. The long vacations are enjoyed by few teachers who leave and return to school. I know of a teacher friend who even travelled outside the country during the vacation (Teacher 4, C, Female).*

Also, some stakeholders made these complains about the inadequacy of teaching and learning materials:

*Parents also believed that purchasing textbooks was unnecessary because the government had promised to provide pupils with them in the policy. Therefore, even though the government only provided the core texts, they implied that the electives text books were also free. Consequently, some parents choose not to buy them for their*

*children. Even for the core texts, students utilize them for a year before returning them to the bookstore to borrow them for the following class. As a result, they don't have any readings to review when they get to form 3 (Head of Academics 2, B, Male).*

*The Free SHS program isn't as free as commonly perceived. While tuition is covered, it doesn't extend to essential study aids and learning resources. For instance, when parents provide transportation for their children to get to school but neglect to supply the necessary learning materials for practical exercises, it hampers the child's ability to work independently, practice what's been taught, and submit projects for assessment. Many parents are reluctant to purchase items such as beads and tools required for practical work, expecting the government to provide them (Teacher 5, A, Male).*

#### **4.4.2 Infrastructural Challenges**

Numerous schools in Ghana were struggling with infrastructure issues prior to the FSHS program. According to the participants, the FSHS policy has made the school's problems worse, increasing the carrying capacity of most facilities such laboratories, classrooms, and accommodation facilities. There is uncertainty in the system since some schools are still operating under the old single-track model, which required them to use the semester calendar. This model ran on a term-by-term basis. As teachers figure out how to adapt to the new system, the reopening and vacation dates for the green and gold tracks have proved challenging.

This is what stakeholders had to say:

*Already infrastructure was not very well grounded, and the program also demanded more than what existed, so naturally, infrastructure was overstretched. Additional desks have to be added to those in the classroom to accommodate the students. This causes overcrowding and is also prone to other challenges (Head of academics 1, B, Male)*

*I forgot to mention the infrastructure issue. I believe I may have mentioned it previously but didn't follow up. Currently, we have both Form 3 and Form 2 students enrolled, yet even with the Form 2s, we still lack sufficient classrooms. You might have noticed my friend walking by; she's attending a class in the assembly hall due to the lack of available classrooms. As a result, we don't have any vacant classrooms, and this poses a significant challenge when it comes to accommodating our students. Just two days ago, some of them were studying under the tree, raising concerns about where the Form 1 students will go when they enrol. As you can see, the construction of this classroom block remains incomplete. (Teacher 2, B, Female).*

*We have issues with the science laboratory but I heard they called expertise to check it and he said it's in a very bad condition so students can't use it. But the teachers said that we can manage it for now, by reducing the number of students that goes to the science laboratory at a time which will also take time (Student 15, C, Male)*

*Since I'm a student of information technology and the ICT lab has been shut down, you can imagine how I felt. When we are unable to use the lab to put what we have learned, like coding, into practice. For the time being, we can simply learn the theory and record the coding stages (Student 12, C, Male).*

Additionally, participants lamented on the challenges they encountered as a result of the introduction of the double track system:

*They implemented the double-track system in response to a surge in student enrolments. Some students opt for private classes during their two to three months of downtime, while others may get involved in social vices. It costs approximately 200 cedis for each subject these students choose to study. This situation often leaves parents questioning the activities their children engage in when left at home (Parent 6, C, Female).*

*"People often approach us with questions about when students will leave for vacations and when the school will reopen, but unfortunately, we lack that information. We recently received a calendar for the current semester, but it's labelled as a transitional calendar. As we proceed, we'll monitor how things unfold (Teacher 4, C, Female)*

*The double track system has been a disadvantaged to some of us, we don't get enough time to study. I get better results when I am in school studying compared to when I come home. I don't patronize extra classes because I assist my mum in her shop and at night I study. I am discouraged from studying because I never receive assistance when I need clarification on some mathematics topics (Student 5, A, Male).*

Students in school A and C complained about the double track system in their respective schools as seen in the above quotes, but students in school B did not encounter any problem since school B was a single track.

*Our school follows a single-track schedule, which means we don't face challenges regarding reopening and vacation dates. In fact, we spend more time in school, allowing us to prepare thoroughly for our final exams. (Student 4, B, Male).*

#### **4.4.3 Financial Challenges**

A major challenge expressed by the stakeholders is the delay in the disbursement of funds. According to one head teacher, the situation forces the school administrators to borrow to run the schools. To some of them, these delays have sometimes resulted in a shortage of necessities such as food and learning materials for students.

*There are delays in supplies and delays in the fund. Sometimes the heads and administrators have to use their own money or take out loans to operate the school. This affects the quality of learning (Head of academic 2, C, Male).*

*There are over 900 secondary schools and the government has to pay for their utility supplies. Moreover, provide them with reading materials as well as infrastructure. Sometimes the fund is delayed, so you end up crediting food stuff for students and when you do not pay on time, the creditors also chase you for their money (Head of academic 1, B, Male).*

*There is sometimes a food shortage in the dining hall, formerly we use to eat wheat bread every day for breakfast but now they have stopped so there are days we take the bread and other days also we don't. Sometimes, also there's no food in the dining hall so we would have to go back to the dormitory to get food from our chop box but some students do not have food in their chop box so they have to buy food from the canteen (Student 12, C, Male).*

#### **4.4.4 Quality Issues**

The participants also said that the standard of education has been lowered. This predicament is the outcome of various problems. The grade criterion for entry into secondary school has been decreased under the FSHS program to enhance access. Some teachers feel that the circumstance makes it difficult to complete academic work and has an impact on how well students perform in the WASSCE. This is what some participants said concerning this issue:

*Another thing is the cut-off points. Our people believe that everybody is meant to be in school. It's the idea behind this policy for most people but I think it's not the sole idea. Sometimes I have been fighting with people about that. I always say if we are all in school then who are those going to be in the skilled labour force? The fact that you have to be in the skilled area doesn't mean you are dumb (Teacher 2, B, Female).*

*The government wanted every young person who reached the age of attending a senior high school to attend school, and they succeeded in getting so. Regardless of how well or horribly they fared, everyone still showed up for class. There was no cut point, thus everyone attends school, so the results you received on the B.E.C.E are irrelevant. You can therefore envision the type of pupil you will have in the end if a student with low performance is handed to you. Considering the grade the student received from the start, you are the best instructor if you assist the student, even if he had grade E. Some of the students were even unable to read when they came (Teacher 3, C, Male).*

From head of academics:

*We, as head of schools, do not have the authority to dismiss or repeat a student for poor performance. If you have to repeat the student, it indicates that the parent's will have to pay the fees, their refusal will cause the student to drop out. In order for the student to complete school we leave him to go through the system (Head of academics1, B, Male)*

Another issue related to the double track system that is associated with the FSHS program is the fact that students have to stay home for long periods. The long stay in the homes causes the children to indulge in all kinds of deviant behaviours, especially the teenage girls getting pregnant and stopping school completely.

From a head of academics:

*Some of the girls got pregnant, and is it not good to deny such a person that opportunity to write exams. So, we find a way of getting them to register (Head of academics 1, B, Male).*

*When students return home after their track, some get into troubles. Since many of the girls come from very low-income families and depend on young men when they return home, some of them become pregnant. They attend class despite being pregnant because the policy states that no student should be expelled (Teacher 6, A, Female).*

Research participants also highlighted the lack of engagement with key stakeholders, who serve as the program's primary executors. According to their feedback, the limited issues that do arise are probably due to decision-makers not sufficiently considering the implementers. Furthermore, one teacher remarked that the focus of GES appears to be on enforcing rules rather than monitoring their compliance.

*GES just give their instructions, and they don't even monitor. They don't monitor at all and it is a big issue. they don't care how the policy is being implemented in schools and the challenges we encounter daily. (Teacher 3, C, Male).*

*As I am saying the policy has its strengths, but there were a few challenges and I am sure it is also because probably those at the helm of affairs, those who call the shots(government) were not listening to the implementers (teachers and parents). The whole policy is a top-down kind of policy. Having even implemented it, they should have gradually started going to various schools to monitor progress. Their ears to me were not on the ground enough. So that periodically they could be reviewing small, small. Because it seems they are overwhelmed (Head of academics 2, C, male).*

#### **4.4.5 Attitudinal Challenges**

Students' enthusiasm to attend school and learn has decreased as a result of the FSHS policy and its related double track system. Some children, according to one of the head teachers, are capable of taking extended absences from class. Another student finds it difficult to return to class once they've spent so much time at home.



*After a long break, some students find it difficult to return to school. Some students feel that since it is free, so they stop for a long while (absent) and come when they want, they even refuse to write examination to be assessed. But there were no checkmarks concerning how we should deal with such students. We do not have the right to also sack the student, or repeat the student this makes students truant (Head of academic 1, B, Male).*

*Some students absent themselves from school for more than a semester. You see them coming back and you can't just sack them. The girls get pregnant, and it is not good to deny such a person the opportunity to write exams. So, we find ways of getting them to register. Some are doing "okada" all around. It is a day school so you can't control them (Head of school, A, Female).*

*With the exception of a few students from my area, whose backgrounds make it difficult for them to be handled. I believe that the policy has lived up to my expectations. These students don't value education, but the school is doing everything it can to help them; with enough education, counselling, phone calls, and hard work, we will succeed. Many of the students don't care much about learning. They do not place a high priority on education. To convince them that they are here to study, we must put in extra effort (Head of school, A, Female).*

The study also found that most parents have withdrawn their responsibilities of caring and supporting their children because they perceive government would provide everything. For instance, a teacher participant opined that those parents are not even ready to come and see what is happening in the school. Even when parents are invited to schools, they are unwilling to attend meetings.

*Some parents naturally do not care about their children. They do not want to participate in any meetings in the school concerning their ward. The policy is free; hence all necessities will be provided to them, but there are also serious ones out there (Parent 6, C, Female).*

*For some of the parents, when their wards' uniforms are even torn, they are not ready to sew a new one. They want it supplied by the school. Once the school has given their wards two uniforms that ends it. But look at it, we are talking of adolescence and some of these girls and boys outgrow their uniforms. Some of the girls' uniforms become short, and their busts and hips cannot fit in. Even when they must pay for some practical periodically (exams, assignments) to be tested, parents are not ready to pay (Head of academic 1, B, male).*

A student had this to say:

*Our parents are not even ready to come and see what is happening in the school. When authorities invite them, they are unwilling to come. We want our parents to also support the school in their small way (Student 13, C, Female).*

#### **4.4.6 COVID 19 as a Challenge**

Data for this study was collected at the time when the country had experienced lockdown and closure of schools as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic had a detrimental effect on the nation's ability to implement the FSHS policy. The COVID-19 pandemic caused widespread school closures, harsh regulations restricting all social gatherings, and social isolation, which had an impact on senior high students' academic advancement. Participants said they could not assess such programs despite the ministry of education using remote learning through television and radio programs because of unsuitable learning environments at

home, gendered traditional roles they play, and a lack of devices like tablets, smartphones, and computers. This what participants had to say:

*The COVID 19 epidemic has an impact on students' academic performance and results. It's awful that some the students during the corona seasons had to stay home for practically a year while their peers were in class at school. Therefore, you cannot compare those who were at home with those who were at school. Despite the fact that they were all in form 1, those who were enrolled in school had gained more knowledge than those who stayed at home. Because we were unable to finish the syllabus even when they came back to school. This had an impact on their test outcomes (Teacher 3, C, Male)*

A teacher who held extra classes for students:

*During the corona season, some of my colleagues made the decision to hold extra classes for students who were home. But most parents could not afford it for their wards due to the economic hardships we were all experiencing. Due to the closure of markets and travel restrictions, the majority of parents were unable to go to the market to sell their items, which had an adverse effect on their children educational progress (Teacher 1, B, Male).*

*My teachers attempted to provide us with an online course to aid us during the break, but I lacked a computer to access it. When I learned that SHS students could use G.T.V. remote learning, I was unable to use it because my siblings were constantly watching cartoons. Additionally, this time conflicts with when I need to assist my mother in the kitchen while she prepares supper for the family (Student 13, C, Female).*

#### 4.5 Recommendations by Stakeholders on Improving the Free Senior High School

##### Policy

Some study participants think the government should take these into account to help address or improve the FSHS policy. Their ideas range from a cost-sharing strategy, to pro-poor targeting, teacher hiring increases, policy monitoring, infrastructure expansion, and prompt money releases, support from parents.

##### 4.5.1 Expansion of Infrastructure

All participants asserted that expansion in infrastructure will resolve issues of overcrowding, double track system, and indiscipline found in schools and assist teachers to deliver well.

*Infrastructure should be expanded in all schools to help accommodate the increase in enrolment. Government should not select specific schools to put in infrastructure especially the big schools in the urban areas (Teacher 4, C, female).*

*As enrolment numbers grow, it is crucial to expand our infrastructure to alleviate the issue of overcrowding in our school. For instance, today, I have to wait for approximately 20 minutes to access the laboratory due to the need for shared usage (Student 12, C, male)*

Another view shared by a teacher:

*Reducing classroom indiscipline can be achieved by enhancing infrastructure. When students have access to proper facilities that support their studies, they are more likely to pay better attention in class and be more engaged in their academic pursuits. (Teacher 3, C, M).*

#### 4.5.2 Governments Should Release of Funds on Time

The head of school and head of academics in the study indicated that delay in the release of funds remains a big challenge to them since funds are used to run the school.

*When we do not receive the funds from the government on time, we end up borrowing and taking loans from people. Sometimes we use our own money to run the school. When the fund is delayed, then we are in trouble. We sometimes hide when creditors come around. Because we do not have any more excuses to give (Head of school, A, Female).*

*Ensuring the punctual release of funds can effectively address many of the challenges we face in managing our school. When the Free Senior High School (FSHS) program commenced, everything was running smoothly with consistent funding and timely food supplies. However, this situation began to change over time, particularly after the election." (Head of academics, C, male)*

#### 4.5.3 Cost Sharing Strategy

The study participants were of the view that there should be a proper education and consultation to allow for cost sharing between the government and the citizenry. According to them the parents should be able to meet the government half-way rather than allowing the government to do everything. According to them government is overburdened.

*Parents can pay a percentage if not all of the cost. Though it's a free policy, out of the hundred percent, they should offer to pay about forty percent to lessen the burden on the government by absorbing the remaining cost. If you are unable to pay the forty percent, then there should be evidence of a level of financial stress. Moreover, the government can have a payment plan for such parents. Parents in the hinterland can*

*benefit from such schemes to help their wards access education. Parents should also meet the government halfway by buying some necessities needed in schools such as Calculators, textbooks, elective textbooks, exercise and notes books, paints, and brushes (Head of Academic 2, C, male).*

*We thought the government had the money for this kind of policy. The basic primary pupils have free education in public schools, so we thought he could do the same for SHS students. But hearing the challenges and complaints from our wards means he needs help. He should have told Ghanaians to support him, churches and even financial institutions could have helped, or even that parents should pay a percentage or half of the cost. (Parent 2, A, Female).*

#### **4.5.4 Must be Targeted**

Another view the participants expressed is that fact that even though the Free Senior High policy is good, the challenges with it would have lessened if it was targeted. The participants are of the view that some parents who could afford the fees should have been allowed to pay.

This is what a participant said:

*But I think the government should have looked very well before making the policy free for everyone. I think some people could have paid for their ward's education; such people should have been made to pay. People like my cousin should benefit from the policy (Parent 5, C, female).*

One head of academics was also of the view that parents who were well to do or from affluent background were willing to pay for children's education, but because it's a free education policy for all, they did not know what to do but left with their money.

*Yes, the rich did not see the need for the policy. When the policy was initiated five years ago, some parents could not believe it was free. They stood at the admissions office stunned by this information. Some stood by their land rovers and, four Wheels surprised that the FSHS policy was indeed free. They had the money to pay but left home with it since education was free for all (Head of Academic 2, C, male)*

#### **4.5.5 Increase Employment of Teachers and Increase their Remuneration**

All study participants asked for more teachers to be employed due to the double track system. Also, they wish each teacher teaches one particular track and their remuneration be increased to serve as motivation for them. This is a narration from a head of school

*We need more teachers because some teachers do not go on vacations but they teach in both tracks. More teachers will help and reduce their work overload, also they should be motivated. They start work as early as 7 am and close at 4;30pm. Look at the banks they start work at 8:30 am and close at 4 pm, but their remuneration is better, also they take all the clothing and transport allowances (Head of school 1, A, female).*

#### **4.5.6 Parents must Support Schools**

Though the free senior high school policy does not allow support from parents, it has become necessary that parents support their wards' schools in every small way due to the numerous challenges students encounter. These are some narrations from participants of the study:

*The government cannot cater for everything considering the number of children that have to be fed and given books and uniforms for free. We must do our part. The government may not provide all the books, and it is up to the parents to look out for such books and buy them for the child. In that sense, we are supporting the government. (Parent 1, A, farmer).*

This is what one head of school had to say about support from parents:

*The parents should be advised that though education is free, they have to contribute their quota. In big schools, they are getting the kind of support they need from parents and the old student's association. But here, parents have stopped supporting us. They see education to be free. They have understood that it is the government's money that must cater for us all* (Head of school 1, A, female).

#### **4.5.7 Monitoring of the Policy**

The study participants want government to monitor the FSHS policy periodically to reduce the challenges and help review it if necessary.

*GES should not just give instructions; they need to monitor what they said we should implement. Since they do not monitor there are always issues at school* (Head of Academics 2, C, male).

#### **4.6 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The goal of this study was to explore stakeholders' perspectives of Ghana's Free Senior High school policy in some municipalities in Greater Accra. The discussion highlighted some differences and similarities that exist in stakeholders' perspective of the free senior high school policy being implemented in these three schools. This is because each school had unique features differentiating it from the others as school A is a double track day school as well as a technical and vocational school that admits both boys and girls. School B is a day single track school admitting both girls and boys, while school C is a double track, day and boarding school which admits both boys and girls and also a well-resourced school. The diversities of these schools are instrumental in exploring the perspectives of stakeholders of the FSHS policy.



The discussions are conducted in line with the research objectives and the theoretical framework of the study.

#### **4.6.1 Benefits Associated with the Implementation of the FSHS Policy**

From this study, stakeholders revealed that the free senior high school policy has been beneficial in many ways. The policy makes senior high school, vocational and technical schools accessible to all students. According to some stakeholders the program has brought relief to parents who would otherwise have to bear the cost of secondary education of their wards. Further, study participants were of the view that the free senior high school policy has ease the financial burden of parents and serves as a relief to them. The policy has helped needy families to enrol their children in school and hence reducing financial pressures on parents since they do not pay fees. This is in line with Akyeampong (2009) assertion that needy families participate in education if there is funding for secondary education. Also, Obeng (2013), asserts that the cost of education has been identified to constitute significant proportion of the income of most people in Ghana whose lives are marked by abject poverty.

Moreover, the study participants opined that the policy was implemented to aid the poor or the less privileged. The policy has enabled the most disadvantaged youngsters and orphans to access secondary education. This study is in line with studies conducted on the impact of funding on enrolment and students' academic performance (Boatman & Long, 2016; Blanco & Menses, 2010; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013; Garlick, 2013).

The policy, according to stakeholders, has increased enrolment in all senior high school. The policy has also opened up an opportunity for students who would ordinarily not have secondary school education because of their inability to afford its associated costs. This is in tandem with Gajigo (2016), Muralidharan and Prakash (2013), Blimpo et al. (2015) who asserted that financial aid for students from poor background help increase enrolment in schools. Also,

Boatman and Long (2016) study is in line with this study that financial aid could be an influencing factor in aiding student enrol in college. The study finds free education as a catalyst for high enrolment as has been the case in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania (Chabari, 2010; Fwaya, 2014; Moranga, 2013; Muhindi, 2012). Studies from Matey (2020), Tamanja and Pajibo (2019) also acknowledged that the policy is accompanied by higher enrolment. To add to knowledge to what is non-existent in existing literature, the study found that because of the nature of the policy, enrolment also increased in rural schools and peri urban area (Category C schools) not only in Urban or Category A schools. This will influence government to equip these Category C schools with needed infrastructure since they are under resourced.

In addition, the participants opined that the free senior high school policy has aided students to complete their SHS education without financial constraints. This is because parents do not pay any fees or other costs which causes their wards to drop out of school. Studies by Duflo et al. (2017) proved the effects of scholarship grant for upper secondary school student. Their study revealed that scholarships winners were 55 percent more likely to complete secondary schools. Dynarski and Scott – Clayton (2013) opines that reducing the cost of education, either through grants, aids or other tuition subsidies increases rate of completion of senior high school students. Also, the free senior high policy has motivated the youth to aim higher, study hard for opportunities in higher education according to the study. According to Denny et al. (2014), Moussa et al. (2015), Natasha et al. (2011), Tatiana et al. (2016), funding has been found to be useful in improving the academic performance of students. In the study, Head of Academics from school B, stated that when free senior high school policy was initially instituted, the 53 students who registered for WASSE, all completed with 100 % distinction. He continued that the policy motivated many of the students to study hard and most of them are in the universities. The findings from the study are in line with a tenet in the systems theory that inputs such as

funds from the free SHS policy is processed through the transformative process by good teaching environment and the output leads to motivation of students for higher opportunities.

Moreover, it was found that the free senior high school policy has been able to take the youth who would have been hawking and engaging in social vices from the streets. The policy has made it possible for grandaunts to access senior high education. According to Pettinger (2012), education has a greater positive impact on society as a whole than it does on an individual since it gives people the social values that strengthen a country. According to a teacher who participated in the study, the policy has assisted in lowering the number of young JSS graduates who could otherwise have ended up on the streets. To him even when they fail their final exams, he believes they will be more of an asset than a liability because of the values they learn. This is in line with the idea that having access to a high-quality education, starting with a primary education, is essential for giving people the skills they need to pursue their personal aspirations. Equipping people with the knowledge, abilities, values, and attitudes required to contribute to the political, social, and economic advancement of their societies is done at the same time (Garcia-Penalosa & Wald, 2000; Pettinger, 2012; Saavedra, 2002).

According to participant, the policy has helped increase the human capital of the nation since SDG goal 4, is to guarantee that all boys and girls complete free, equitable, high-quality primary and secondary education that will produce useful and effective learning outcomes. Duflo et al. (2021), found that the impacts of free secondary education are numerous. It impacts the cognitive skills of the youth, increases literacy rate, and above all, secondary school graduates are able to continue to tertiary and selected into labour market. Their study revealed that scholarships winners are 10 percent more likely to have positive earnings and had significantly higher earnings. From a student participant, after completing secondary education, he will have the abilities necessary to succeed and continue to the tertiary, where he will be more skilled and secure a better job.

#### **4.6.2 The Challenges Associated with the Implementation of the FSHS Policy from Stakeholders' Perspectives**

Overall, five main themes emerged from the data. Themes that emerged include; Teaching related challenges with sub themes as: difficulty in managing classrooms, work overload, inadequate teaching and learning materials. Other themes that emerged are, infrastructural challenges, financial challenges, quality issues, attitudinal challenges and COVID 19 as a challenge.

The findings of the study revealed that the three schools under study encountered teaching related challenges. In the study, though school A is a double track day school and may be resourced in terms of infrastructure, their class room block was uncompleted but lessons were held in them due to the rise in enrolment. A teacher complained about not been able to manage class due to the number of students enrolled. Also, another teacher noted that some students were not ready to study, they refused to complete assignment. Due to their numbers, it was difficult managing such students. In School B, teachers had the difficulty in managing class due to the large size of class. Two classes were usually merged due to infrastructure deficit, and teachers had to shout throughout their course delivery. The above assertion is in consonance with the case in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, where school leaders coped with infrastructure deficit by increasing class sizes or merging classes/lessons (Godda, 2018; Kaguri et al., 2014; Werner, 2011). Findings from school C was not different. Some classes had about 90 students and teachers found it difficult teaching courses like sewing since its practical and teachers needed to attend to each student at a time. In the system theory, components such as inputs, transformative process, output, feedback, environment in the system for instance, a school interdepend and interact with each other and has a relationship with the environment. In relation to this study, challenges each school faced were due to the interdependence of the components in the school system. If inputs (funds, classrooms, science laboratory, computer

laboratory are in shortage due to increase in enrolment, this will affect the other components such as the transformative process which are teachers managing the class and also affect the output of students. This finding is in line with the findings of Munisi et al. (2021) that free education is threatened by huge class sizes brought in by high enrolment. Also, inadequate teaching and learning materials was found as a challenge to FSHS policy. Schools as a system in this study is evaluated as having components such as inputs which function together to achieve a goal. In this study if the inputs in school such as material resources (desks, textbooks, paints, beads, tools) are absent, how can the other components of the school function for the school to achieve its goal? Hence, the absence of a component (input) can change the system's functionality.

Also, it was found from the study that, there was inadequate teaching and learning materials in the schools investigated. But each school had its own challenge. In School A for instance, some parents refuse to provide their wards with the necessary learning materials like beads or paints for their practices. Teachers teach these skills at school and expect students to also practice them home, submit this work as projects for assessment. But if students are not provided with these items to work, how do they practice? Teachers in School C had to improvise some tools since they were not available. These findings corroborate with the findings of Matey (2020) and Addo (2019), that learning materials are inadequate in schools and affects the educational progress of students.

According to the study, double track system was seen as a challenge. Participants iterated that the double track system confuses them, reduces the period students stay in school and also parents complain about the cost of extra classes their wards patronise. A participant (student 5) in school A told the researcher that the double track has disadvantaged him. The reason being that he does not get enough time to study. The school calendar for the double track is short, and when he returns home, he has no assistance to clarify lessons he did not understand. A

parent also complained about the cost of extra classes which were being organised for students. If a parent is not economically sound, he cannot patronise it for his wards. They also complained that leaving their wards at home idle was also a problem since they constantly wonder what their children were up to. In the present study, two schools (A and C) run the double track system and encountered these challenges. School B on the other hand runs the single-track system and participants did not encounter such issues.

More so, inadequate infrastructure was revealed by study participants as a challenge that all three schools encountered and made the implementation of the policy difficult. Before the implementation, schools already had their share of infrastructure deficits and when the FSHS was introduced with increase in enrolment, the problems compounded. Head of academics in school B, revealed that infrastructure in his school was not sufficient and the FSHS program also demanded more than what existed such as classrooms, and this made infrastructure overstretched. For instance, additional desks had to be added to those in class rooms causing overcrowding, canopies were mounted as classrooms, assembly hall had to be portioned to serve as classrooms for other students when they had electives. Student 15 from school C, also had issues with the science laboratory. He said the facility was shut down for a while because it was in a bad condition, but teachers wanted them to manage it by reducing the number of students that use the facility at a time, meaning they had to go in batches. This finding is in tandem with Fwaya (2014) and Muchiri's (2012) finding that some Kenyan principals used a multi-shift system for the utilisation of library, classrooms and laboratory to avoid congestion. In the same school, information and technology students told the researcher that they only learned theory because their ICT laboratory had been shut down but they need to practice what they are taught in class. For school A, the head of school revealed that they did not have much problem with infrastructure since they have to improvise a science laboratory by using one of their classrooms available. This is contrary to the findings of Werner (2011) in Uganda where

teachers used their monies to construct wooden structures for students. Again, because the school is a day school, after class every day, students went home, she did not have any challenge with accommodation deficit. But the researcher observed that when lunch is served students take their lunch to class to eat since the school did not have any dining hall. This finding is consistent with the results of Amisah (2019), Tamanja and Pajibo (2019) that infrastructural deficit was affecting the quality of teaching and learning.

Also, the results of the study revealed that there were financial challenges in the schools. According to the study participants, government delays in releasing funds to authorities in secondary schools which debilitates their effort to manage the school. When this happens, school authorities were incapacitated to provide learning and teaching materials, food and other items needed to enhance the quality of the learning of students enrolled in the free senior high school. The results showed that the lack of resources such as funds and food sparked a borrowing approach where school administrators lent resources to support free SHS pupils. This endeavour supports Subair and Talabi (2015) claim that school leaders develop impromptu coping mechanisms to mitigate the negative effects of a reform. The free senior high school policy brought with it increase in enrolment of students thereby increasing the need for more funds to be released by the government. This result supports Addo's (2019) study, which examined the free SHS policy and identified several challenges to the policy's implementation in schools. When evaluating the policy, he found that delays in the distribution of funds to schools were leading to significant quality problems. This present study and that of Addo (2019) shows that the free senior high school policy lacks adequate funding to help achieve its goals. Moreover, the system theory posits that there is interdependence between the components of the system. Funds from the FSHS policy helps in running the day-to-day operations of the school and without it, other components in education will not function well.

Another finding from the study indicates that there were quality issues as a result of the introduction of the free senior high secondary education policy. Participants bemoaned that the standard of education has been lowered, due to the low-grade point for entry in to secondary school. Some teachers opined that this circumstance makes it difficult to complete academic work and has impacted on students' performance in WASSE. The free education despite its benefits, could not improve the quality of education in the secondary schools as it purported. Through the FSHS policy there has been increased in the enrolment of students which led to increase class size. Other things that led to the lack of quality are high teachers to students' ratio, the large class size which does not commensurate the available infrastructure in the various schools as cited by Moranga (2013) and Muhindi (2012) who disclosed that increased enrolment made classes overcrowded, increased teachers' workload and a surge in indiscipline on the parts of students which at the end affects grades of students during exams.

From the study findings, participants also reported about girls getting pregnant because of the FSHS policy and its related double track system. From the study, girls were getting pregnant after their long stay at home. This findings from the study are in contrast with studies on free secondary education. From these studies free secondary education reduces teenage pregnancies and early marriages among adolescents as found in studies by Duflo et al. (2021). Their study was also confirmed by Huylebroeck and Titeca (2015) that financial support by government decreases dropout due to early pregnancies.

The current study also found a decline in the motivation of pupils to study and attend class. They were able to skip school for an extended period of time. Head of academics from school B responded that since the policy did not give them checkmarks concerning how to deal with such students it is difficult to act. Also, because the policy does not allow head of schools to dismiss students, they do not take education seriously. Also, the automatic promotion has also



decreased their motivation to study. Students get promoted to the next level regardless of their performance in class hence this attitude.

Additionally, attitudinal challenges were seen as a major issue. The policy took away parents' responsibility to pay fees seems to have decreased parents' involvement in their children's education and this in turn negatively impacted students' performance. In the study, it was found that when parents were even invited to their wards school, they decline, since the policy will provide all the necessities their wards will need. Head of academics in school B, also reported that some parents even refuse to buy new uniforms, bags, note books and exercise books for their children when the old ones provided by the government is exhausted. They depend on government to provide everything. This is evident in all the three schools. And it was found in a study that when parents reduce their involvement in wards education, it negatively impacts on the ward's attendance to school. This finding is in line with the findings in (Huylebroecks & Titeca, 2015).

The study found that the Covid 19 pandemic had a detrimental effect on the implementation FSHS policy. School closures, harsh regulations restricting all social gatherings, and social isolation, had an impact on senior high students' academic advancement. Participants said they could not assess learning programs by the ministry of education on television. Despite using remote learning through television and radio programs, unsuitable learning environments at home, gendered traditional roles they played, and a lack of devices like tablets, smartphones, and computers made it impossible for study participants to assess these programs. According to the systems theory, a school is an open system that is reliant on its surroundings. The idea contends that when examining school components, it is important to evaluate how those components interact with one another as well as how they relate to the outside environment. Additionally, because schools are open systems, they react to outside influences in an effort to achieve their objectives (Kindyamtima, 2017). In this study, the school as open system was

influence by Covid 19 and its strict directives of school closure, social distancing, and since elements in the school are interrelated and interdependence on each other, it affected the goal of the school. For instance, schools were closed and students had to depend on online tuition and remote learning on radio and television. If students do not have access to devices such as television, tablets and computers; it will affect the overall goal. Also, participant of these remote learning does not have eye contact with tutors and moreover they could not ask questions if they did not understand lessons being taught. This defeats the relationships students have with their teachers in the school system.

The absence of consultation with stakeholders, who are the program's actual implementers, was another issue mentioned by research participants. According to study participants, issues arise as a result of policymakers not engaging the relevant stakeholders in the formulation and subsequent implementation of the FSHS policy. The implementation of the free senior high school policy is a change from the school's outer environment. According to Plomp and Pelgrum (1993), a school is a complex system made up of sub-systems at various levels, including but not limited to macro (national level, government directives, ministry of education, and G.E.S), mezzo (school, teachers, head of school), and micro (classroom and the students). These sub-systems include the bursary office, finance office, academic office, and book store. At these levels, various actors' contributions have an impact on choices. So, if there were no consultation with key implementers like school authorities, teachers and parents then it will affect the implementation of the policy.

#### **4.6.3 Recommendation by Stakeholders in Improving the FSHS Policy**

Under this objective, seven themes were derived. These are expansion of infrastructure, timely release of funds by government, cost sharing, targeting, employment of teachers and increase their remuneration, parents must support their wards, monitoring and evaluation.

All participants asserted that growth in infrastructure will answer concerns of overcrowding, double track system, and indiscipline found in schools and aid teachers to deliver well. From the study, it was found that, large classrooms have a detrimental impact on teachers' professional satisfaction and excitement for teaching, as well as on classroom activities and teaching strategies. This finding is consistent with (Blatchford et al., 2003; Yaman & Uygulamanda, 2009). Also, expansion in infrastructure which is inputs as a component in the system theory will help in the transformation process (teachers will deliver well) and also increase output.

Study participants asserted that delay in the release of funds remains a big challenge to them since funds are used to run the school, hence, they recommended that there should be timely release of funds. The FSHS policy brought with it increase in enrolment which required that additional teaching and learning materials and other infrastructure would be put in place to meet the demands of the students. As a result of this, head teachers had to either borrow or wait for the funds from government in order to run the day-to-day activities the schools. Base on this issue participants recommended that government release funds which could enable school administrators to get the necessary school materials to help improve the quality of teaching and learning in secondary schools. This study is in consistent with the systems theory that states that the various components of the school system coordinate to achieve the objectives of the free education policy. Funds are inputs and serve as an important component in the school system which helps in achieving the objectives of the free education policy. Lack of funds affects the transformative process (poor planning and management at school) which in turn affects the outputs (students' performance, completion rate) and overall functioning of the system in this case the school.

The study participants were concerned about the sustainability of the policy. The study's participants believed that in order to allow for cost sharing between the government and the

populace, there should be appropriate education and consultation. Instead of letting the government take care of everything, they contend, parents' ought to be able to compromise with it. They claim that the government is overburdened. From the findings, they were however of the view that the policy would have been effective if there was a bit of cost sharing between parents who can afford and the government. The fundamental cause of this stance was the multiple difficulties the new policy faced, together with the country's financial difficulties in meeting the needs of the other sectors of the economy. Yamda (2005) found a declining tendency in government spending on education after researching the trend. Bregman and Stallmeister (2002) thought that because African countries already struggled with a lack of resources and unstable economic foundations, they might not be able to give their citizens access to a high-quality senior high school education. Therefore, there will be problems maintaining the new policy if the government does not provide appropriate financing for education.

Also study participants also agreed that while the Free Senior High policy is a wonderful idea, there would have been less problems if it had been more specifically targeted. The participants believe that some parents should have been permitted to pay since they could afford the expenses. Evaluations of who is truly in need and who is not depend on local dynamics of poverty and how they impact demand for schooling is quite difficult to ascertain. However, targeting has been implemented in some nations due to budgetary restrictions to ensure that safety net programs benefit the intended beneficiaries the most (Domelen, 2007). Geographic targeting, where programs are available in some schools or districts but not in others, and behavioural targeting are the two often used targeting strategies (Essuman, 2019). The rationale for geographical targeting is to locate locations with need for education is greatest. On the contrary, Coady and Parker (2009) observe that many safety-net programs currently in place in developing nations are incredibly poorly targeted, with a considerable amount of programme

benefits leaking to higher income households and significant portion of low-income households are excluded. Lewin (2008) argues that systems that adopt selective fee waivers are better able to increase enrolments than systems that adopt a secondary system that is entirely fee-free. He also emphasizes that selective fee waiver systems are more equitable than fee-free systems like the free senior high school policy. Children from the Dalit community, Janajati ethnic groupings, and households in extreme poverty, for instance, are free from paying fees at the secondary school level in Nepal. Additionally, the introduction of stipends for girls in Bangladesh has eliminated financial hurdles to secondary school. As a result, there has been an increase in their enrolment in secondary schools, with more females enrolling than boys (UNESCO, 2012).

Further, study participants recommended that more teachers to be employed due to the double track system. Also, they wish each teacher teaches one particular track and their remuneration be increased to serve as motivation for them. the free senior high school policy has increased enrolment by 17% and 31% in 2017 and 2018 (Tamanja & Pajibo, 2019) hence causing deficits in infrastructure and also resulting in inadequate teachers due to the increase in enrolment. This affects quality teaching and learning as postulated by (Addo, 2019). Study participants recommendations are in line with Adul-Rahaman et al. (2018) that government must employ teachers and also motivate them to ensure the quality of education.

Also, study participants opined that, parents must support schools to curb the challenges face in the implementation of the policy. Despite the fact that the free senior high school policy forbids parental help, the difficulties students face has made it imperative for parents to provide whatever support they can to their wards' schools. Parents are also agents of the reform with significant roles (Hargreaves & Shirley 2009), though the PTA dues has been cancelled, study participants recommended that parents assisted school during the implementation crisis. This is in line with studies done by Njunwa (2010) and Godda (2018) that parents participate in

school development projects like building classrooms and teachers houses by giving monetary or material contributions.

According to the study findings, the government does not oversee the implementation of the FSHS policy in schools. As a result, the study's participants (the head of the academic department) urge GES to visit the schools to examine the policy's implementation and help address any problems that may arise. The analysis supports Isa's (2014) assertion that the primary duty of supervision in reforms is inspection. The findings in this study asserts that monitoring in Ghanaian schools is not as intensive as headteachers claimed. This in tandem with a study by Dauda (2011) that inspectors from the regional office of education came to inspect the work at the schools once in every year.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the study. It also gives conclusions and recommendations of the study. Its further anchors on the study's implications for social work practice.

This study set out to explore the stakeholder's perspectives on Ghana's free senior high school policy in two municipalities in the Greater Accra region. Specifically, the study explored the benefits associated with the implementation of the free senior high school policy in two municipalities in the greater Accra region of Ghana, the challenges associated with the implementation of the free senior high school of policy in two municipalities in the greater Accra region of the Ghana. It also explored the recommendations by stakeholders in improving the free senior high school policy in the Ga West and Ga Central municipalities of Ghana. The crux of the free senior high school policy was to make secondary school education in Ghana affordable. Many Ghanaians supported government's implementation of the policy initiative. For the past six years, there have been many and varied opinions on the implementation of the FSHS policy. However, there is little empirical information on stakeholders' perspectives on Ghana's Free Senior High school policy regarding its benefits, challenges and their recommendations.

The literature review was done in themes according the objectives of the study. This includes the benefits associated with the free senior high school policy, challenges associated with the implementation of the free senior school policy and recommendations by stakeholders in improving the free senior high school policy. The Basic Interpretative Qualitative Design was adopted for the study. This helped to explore in depth and bring about the different stakeholders' perspectives of FSHS policy to the spotlight from two municipalities in the

greater Accra region of Ghana. A non-probability sampling technique was used to select participant who qualify for the study. in all, 30 participants participated in the study including teachers, students, parents, headteachers, head of academics. Data for the study was collected through face-to-face interviews guided by a semi-structured interview guide. The data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using Charmaz (2006) three staged thematic standard coding. The systems theory as developed by Betalanffy in 1970 underpinned the study. All five components of the systems theory including inputs, transformation process, outputs, feedback and environment.

## **5.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**

### **5.2.1 Benefits of the free senior high school policy**

The study's findings showed that the policy eased financial burden on parents and guardians, it also resulted in an increase in enrolment of senior high school students. Further, the study's findings indicate an increase in completion rates of senior high school students. From the participants, the FSHS policy had helped in reduction in social vices as students turn to pursue higher education after graduation from SHS. Additionally, it was found that the policy has motivated students for higher education and acts as an investment in human capital of the country.

### **5.2.2 Challenges of the free senior high school policy**

The challenges identified in the implementation of the free Senior High School policy include difficulties in managing classrooms, work overload, and inadequate teaching and learning materials due to increase enrolment. The study further found that there was delay in disbursement of funds and inadequate infrastructure, lack of monitoring by the government as well as confusion as a result of the double track and compromised quality of education as barriers confronting the implementation of the FSHS policy.



### 5.2.3 Key recommendation of stakeholders

The stakeholders recommended the following:

1. There should be monitoring of the policy by government.
2. Infrastructure in all senior high schools should be expanded.
3. Government should increase employment of teachers and remuneration.
4. The government and parents should consider a cost sharing strategy.
5. The policy must target people who cannot afford the cost of senior high school education.
6. Parents must also support schools as measures to improve the implementation of the free senior high school policy.

### 5.3 Conclusions of the Study.

The study concludes that tuition free education increase access to secondary schools as fees associated with secondary education is abolished. Stakeholders in education agree that the implementation of the free senior high school policy in Ghana has addressed affordability of education. What this means is that the FSHS policy has the potential of boosting the human capital of the country as many Ghanaian youths would be exposed to knowledge acquisitions and skills development which is very useful for national development. The nationwide implementation of the policy addresses geographical equity, national cohesion and gap bridging.

The study's findings note that the FSHS policy implementation brought in its wave increased workload for existing teachers. The increase in workload posed difficulties for teachers managing classrooms. The policy implementation has also resulted in an increased need for teaching and learning materials, the lack of these materials comprises the delivery of quality education.

Moreover, monitoring of the policy by government, cost sharing with parents, targeting the vulnerable in the society, expansion of infrastructure and increase recruitment of teachers as well as motivating them were recommendations given by stakeholders as measures need to improve the implementation of the FSHS policy. The study therefore concludes that stakeholder's consultation is relevant for implementation of the free senior high school policy.

#### **5.4 Recommendations of the Study**

The findings of the study revealed that delays in disbursement of funds to SHSs affected the ability of headteachers to manage the affairs of the schools. Therefore, the study recommends that government should release funds on time for the smooth operations in the schools and also government should consider alternative sources of generating revenue to support the main policy funding stream.

The FSHS policy increased enrolment which brought about inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, merging of classes and shift system in the usage of facilities which puts pressure on the existing facilities. In this regard, the study recommends that government should expand infrastructure in all schools to accommodate the increasing number of students enrolled.

The study found that high enrolment rates climaxed in teacher shortages, increased workload for existing teachers and indiscipline in rate in the classroom. This study recommends that the Ministry of Education employs more teachers and also recruit national service personnel as support teachers to reduce the workload on teachers.

Additionally, study found that was no monitoring of the policy by the government and its agencies such as the Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service. Therefore, the study recommends that there should be periodic monitoring so that challenges can be resolved on time.

Further stakeholders such as teachers, parents, headteachers, school management committee should all be consulted in the implementation and reviewing of the policy in the future.

### **5.5 Implications for Social Work Practice**

Giving the many challenges identified in this study flowing from the implementation of the FSHS policy, these challenges present an increased need for psychosocial support. School social workers around the world help to address this need. The findings of this study therefore calls for the urgent need to introduce or to recruit school social workers who will provide the following services; conducting biopsychosocial assessment and social histories of students, assessing students for substance use, support systems, physical and emotional functions, barriers to academic performance and peer issues, providing direct therapeutic services such as individual, family or group therapies regarding specific issues including learning difficulties and other disabilities to school children at senior high school level.

Based on the systems theory, school inputs such as infrastructure, teaching and learning materials and funds are necessary conditions to enhance the transformational process of the school system. This in turn leads to increase in outputs of the school system in the form of increasing completion rates, increase in enrolment etc. In this regard, social workers could advocate for more inputs such as funds, teaching and learning materials, infrastructure for the school system to help the FSHS policy achieve its goals.

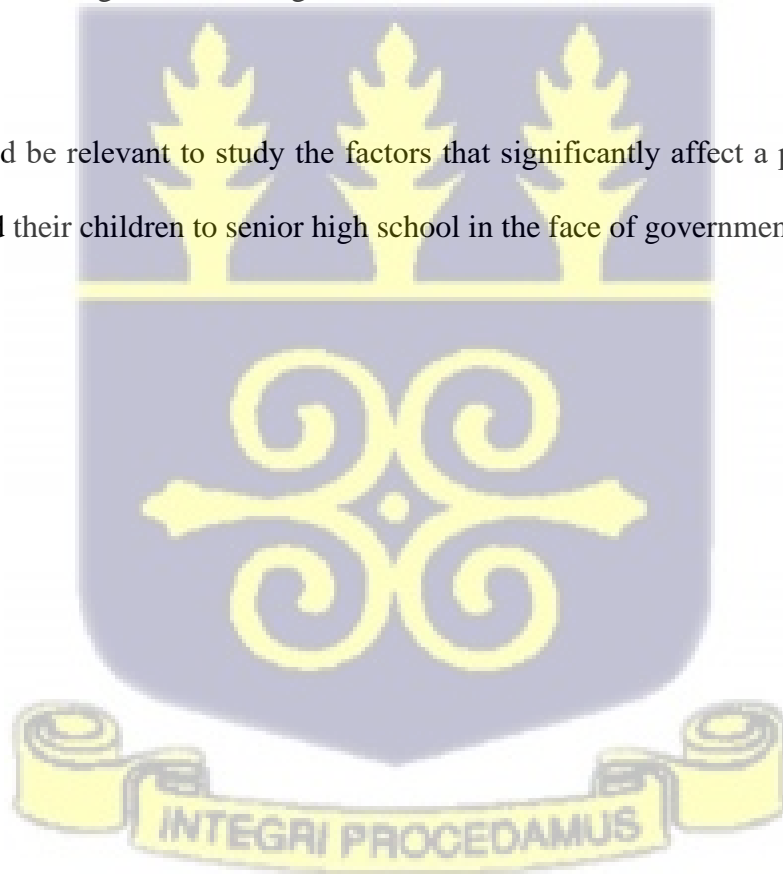
Following the issues of indiscipline and poor attitude of students towards school work as was found in the study, this brings into sharp focus the need for counselling and environmental support. Social workers should advocate for the recruitment of school social workers in senior high schools to compliment the role of regular teachers in identifying students' issues.

### 5.6 Recommendations for Further Studies

In future research, it will be vital to look into how government interventions and policies might be targeted to benefit the poor and students in rural and underserved areas more than the non-poor and those who live in more affluent places. Additionally, more students who live in rural regions must benefit from these initiatives.

Once more, reducing poverty and enabling more low-income students to attend secondary school on their own is insufficient. There is a need for research into the laws and plans that will raise education levels both quantitatively and qualitatively. This is because relying solely on demand-side initiatives to increase access to education could lead to problems in the classroom including overcrowding in senior high schools and a lack of teachers and instructional resources.

Finally, it would be relevant to study the factors that significantly affect a poor household's decision to send their children to senior high school in the face of government subventions.



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APPENDIX  
UNIVERSITY OF GHANA  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The general purpose of the study is to assess the implementation of the Free SHS (FHS) policy of the government of Ghana. In this discussion, I hope to learn about the views on the impact of the FSHS policy on efficiency, and effectiveness of the policy from your perspective. Also, I would like to get your views on the benefits and challenges you encountered as a parent with the implementation of FSHS. You would also be requested to provide some suggestions to improve FSHS implementation in Ghanaian.

Kindly note that the information you give is completely confidential, and I will not associate your name with anything you say in this interview. Also, I would like to record the interview so that I can capture the thoughts, opinions, and ideas you are giving. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time. If you have any questions now or after the discussion, you can always contact me on **0243655619**. Please sign the paper which contains the same information as I have read to show your consent to participate in the study.

**Parents**

**SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

Please tick [] the appropriate responses by clicking on the boxes  once and write in the spaces provided.

1. Sex:                                    1.  Male                                    2.  Female
2. Age of your child.....
3. Which school does your child attend?
4. What programme is she/he offering?  
.....
5. What work do you do?

**Perception of parents on the implementation of the free senior high school policy**

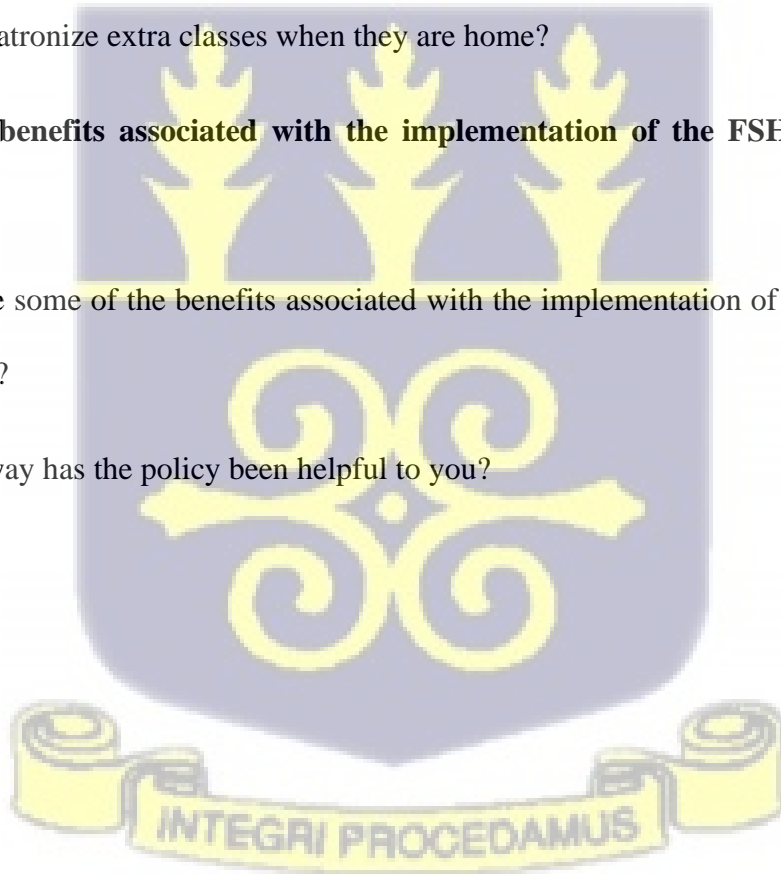
1. Can you share your views about the implementation of the FSHS policy?
2. Could you afford SHS education if the FSHS policy was unavailable?
3. Can you share with me your experience about the policy so far?
4. What were your thought about FSHS policy before it was implemented?

**Challenges related to the implementation of the FSHS in the schools.**

5. From your opinion what are some of the challenges of the implementation of the policy?
6. Do you encounter challenges with your children being home after their track ends?
7. Do you patronize extra classes when they are home?

**Ascertain the benefits associated with the implementation of the FSHS policy in the school.**

8. What are some of the benefits associated with the implementation of the FSHS policy in your opinion?
9. In what way has the policy been helpful to you?





**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE (SCH. AUTHORITIES)**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The general purpose of the study is to assess the perspectives of stakeholders the implementation of the Free SHS (FHS) policy of the government of Ghana. In this discussion, I hope to assess the FSHS policy and assess its efficiency, equity, responsiveness and effectiveness from the perspective of school management committees. Also I would like to get your views on the benefits and challenges you encountered at the school management level with regards to FSHS implementation. You would also be requested to provide some suggestions to improve FSHS implementation in Ghanaian.

Kindly note that the information you give is completely confidential, and I will not associate your name with anything you say in this interview. Also, I would like to record the interview so that I can capture the thoughts, opinions, and ideas you are giving. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time. If you have any questions now or after the discussion, you can always contact me on **0243655619**. Please sign the paper which contains the same information as I have read to show your consent to participate in the study.

**SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

*Please tick [✓] the appropriate responses by clicking on the boxes {} once and write in the spaces provided.*

6. Sex:                      1.  Male                      2.  Female
7. Age .....
8. School.....

9. How long have you been heading this school?

10. How long have you been a headmaster?

Objective 1

**Perception of the school authorities of free senior high school policy on effectiveness**

1. Can you share your perspectives of the implementation of the FSHS policy? (Probes: envisage the policy to be, purpose of FSHS, feasibility of FSHS)

2. From your opinion what do you think is goal / objective of the FSHS policy?

3. From your opinion has the objective of the FSHS policy being achieved?

4. From your opinion has the FSHS policy being fair to all? (Probe: rich, poor, vulnerable)

5. Can you share with me how you think the policy has done so far?

6. From your point of view has the FSHS policy implementation being efficient?

**Challenges related to the implementation of the FSHS in the schools.**

7. From your opinion tell me a little about the challenges encountered implementing the FSHS in your school (Probes: infrastructure [classroom deficit, accommodation facilities], maintenance, logistics, funds by government, teaching materials, overcrowding, teacher to student ratio, etc).

8. How you overcome these challenges?

**Ascertain the benefits associated with the implementation of the FSHS policy in the school.**

9. What are some of the benefits derived from the FSHS policy? Kindly tell me about some of them. (To the school, teachers, students, parents).

**Views on improvement in the implementation of the FSHS policy.**

10. What do you think we can do to improve the implementation of the policy?

**Probes:** at the school level, district, GES, and parents.

**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**  
**COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK**



Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The general purpose of the study is to assess the implementation of the Free SHS (FHS) policy of the government of Ghana. In this discussion, I hope to learn about the views on the impact of the FSHS policy on efficiency, and effectiveness of the policy from your perspective. Also, I would like to get your views on the benefits and challenges you encountered as a student with the implementation of FSHS. You would also be requested to provide some suggestions to improve FSHS implementation in Ghanaian.

Kindly note that the information you give is completely confidential, and I will not associate your name with anything you say in this interview. Also, I would like to record the interview so that I can capture the thoughts, opinions, and ideas you are giving. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time. If you have any questions now or after the discussion, you can always contact me on **0243655619**. Please sign the paper which contains the same information as I have read to show your consent to participate in the study.

**SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

*Please tick [✓] the appropriate responses by clicking on the boxes {☐} once and write in the spaces provided.*

- 11. Sex:                    1. ☐ Male                    2. ☐ Female
  
- 12. Age .....
  
- 3. School.....
  
- 4. Programme.....
  
- 5. Which form are you?.....

**Perceptions of Students on the FSHS**

- 4. What are your views on the FSHS?
- 5. From your opinion what do you think is goal / objective of the FSHS policy?
- 6. From your opinion has the objective of the FSHS policy being achieved?
  
- 5. Can you share with me how you think the policy has done so far?

**Challenges related to the implementation of the FSHS in selected schools in Accra.**

- 6. What can you say are the challenges you encounter regarding the FSHS policy? Probes (accommodation, infrastructure, overcrowding, transportation, food, logistics)

**The benefits associated with the implementation of the FSHS policy in the school.**

- 7. In your opinion what can you say are some of the benefits from the free SHS Policy.

**Suggestions for improvements in the implementation of the FSHS policy**

In your view, what do you think must be done to make Free SHS better?

**THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING**

**UNIVERSITY OF GHANA  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK  
INTERVIEW GUIDE**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The general purpose of the study is to assess the implementation of the Free SHS (FHS) policy of the government of Ghana. In this discussion, I hope to learn about views on the FSHS policy and also to gain your views on the benefits and challenges you encountered at the school management level with regards to FSHS implementation. You would also be requested to provide some suggestions to improve FSHS implementation in Ghanaian.

Kindly note that the information you give is completely confidential, and I will not associate your name with anything you say in this interview. Also, I would like to tape the interview so that I can capture the thoughts, opinions, and ideas you are giving. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time. If you have any questions now or after the discussion, you can always contact me on **0243655619**. Please sign the paper which contains the same information as I have read to show your consent to participate in the study.

**SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS**

**Teachers**

*Please tick [] the appropriate responses by clicking on the boxes {} once and write in the spaces provided.*

13. Sex:                      1.  Male                      2.  Female
14. Age .....
3. School.....
4. Programme.....

5. how long have you been teaching as a profession.....

6. When did you start teaching in this school.....

7. Which classes do you teach.....

**Perception of teachers on the of free senior high school policy (FSHS)**

7. Can you share your perspectives of the implementation of the FSHS policy? (Probes: envisage the policy to be, purpose of FSHS, feasibility of FSHS)

8. From your opinion what do you think is goal / objective of the FSHS policy?

9. From your opinion has the objective of the FSHS policy being achieved?

10. Can you tell me about your classroom experience with the students (Probe: Contact hours with students, giving out and marking out exercises, scheduling of exams).

5. Can you share with me how you think the policy has done so far?

6. From your point of view has the FSHS policy implementation being efficient?

**Challenges related to the implementation of the FSHS in the schools.**

7. From your opinion tell me a little about the challenges encountered implementing the FSHS in your school (Probes: infrastructure [classroom deficit, funds by government, teaching materials, overcrowding, teacher to student ratio, workload of teachers, number of teachers available etc).

**Ascertain the benefits associated with the implementation of the FSHS policy in the school.**

8. What are some of the benefits derived from the FSHS policy? Kindly tell me about some of them. (To the school and teachers).

**Views on improvement in the implementation of the FSHS policy.**

What do you think we can do to improve the implementation of the policy?

**Probes:** at the school level, district, GES, and parents.