

A STUDY ON THE PROSPECTS OF THE FREE SHS POLICY IN GHANA

A National Level Investigation of Practices, Experiences
and Opinions About the Policy

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BACKGROUND

The Ghana Free Senior High School (SHS) Policy was instituted in 2017 both in furtherance of Article 25 1b of the 1992 constitutional mandate to improve the accessibility of secondary education for all.

The policy revolves around five objectives. This research focuses on the first four.

1. **Removal of cost barriers** – total absorption of tuition and other supplementary fees
2. Expansion of **physical infrastructure** – construction of new facilities and upgrade of current ones
3. Improvement of **quality** of education
4. Improvement in **equity** in education
5. Developing **employable skills** – focus on 21st-century skills for global human capital development



A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Education policies in Ghana since 1951

The Irregular performance in WASSCE reflects the difficulty in determining the outcome of the quality of education under the Free SHS policy.

It is thus critical to review the Free SHS policy by investigating awareness and understanding, highlighting achievements so far, challenges and recommendations from policy and beneficiary stakeholders: parents/ guardians, students, teachers, headteachers, school finance officers and GES officials.

- **5th Year of Free SHS Policy**
September 2023 will mark the 5th year of implementing the Free Senior High School (SHS) policy.
- **1st WASSCE Exam in 2020**
The first-year group of Free SHS beneficiaries sat for WASSCE in 2020;
- **Performance is Course Specific**
They performed better than their previous counterparts (non-Free SHS recipients) in English and Core Mathematics but not in Integrated Science and Social Studies.
- **No Consistency in Performance**
The following year, in 2021, the reverse happened with improved Integrated Science and Social Studies performance and a decline in English and Core Mathematics.

- Tuition-free public primary education (1952)
- Tuition-free public elementary school education (1961)
- Free textbooks (1963)
- Scholarships for tertiary education both at home and abroad.
- Associated efforts to increase teacher training programs after the passing of the tuition-free policies

1951 - 1966
The Accelerated Development Plan for Education - 1951 | Education Act of 1961

1966
Reforms of the National Liberation Council 1966

- Removing the free textbook scheme to pass the cost burden to parents.
- Slowing the expansion of new primary schools
- Introducing stricter measures for awarding scholarships for overseas study

1995 - Present
Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) 1995

- FCUBE for the first 9 years; no enforcement strategies for the compulsory aspects;
- Free tuition, textbooks, teaching and learning materials;
- Subsidised the cost of exercise books and BECE fees for both public and private candidates (Ekundayo, 2018).

The Capitation Grant Scheme (CGS) - 2005

The Capitation Grant Scheme, provided funds of about \$3.30 per pupil per year to public primary and JSS

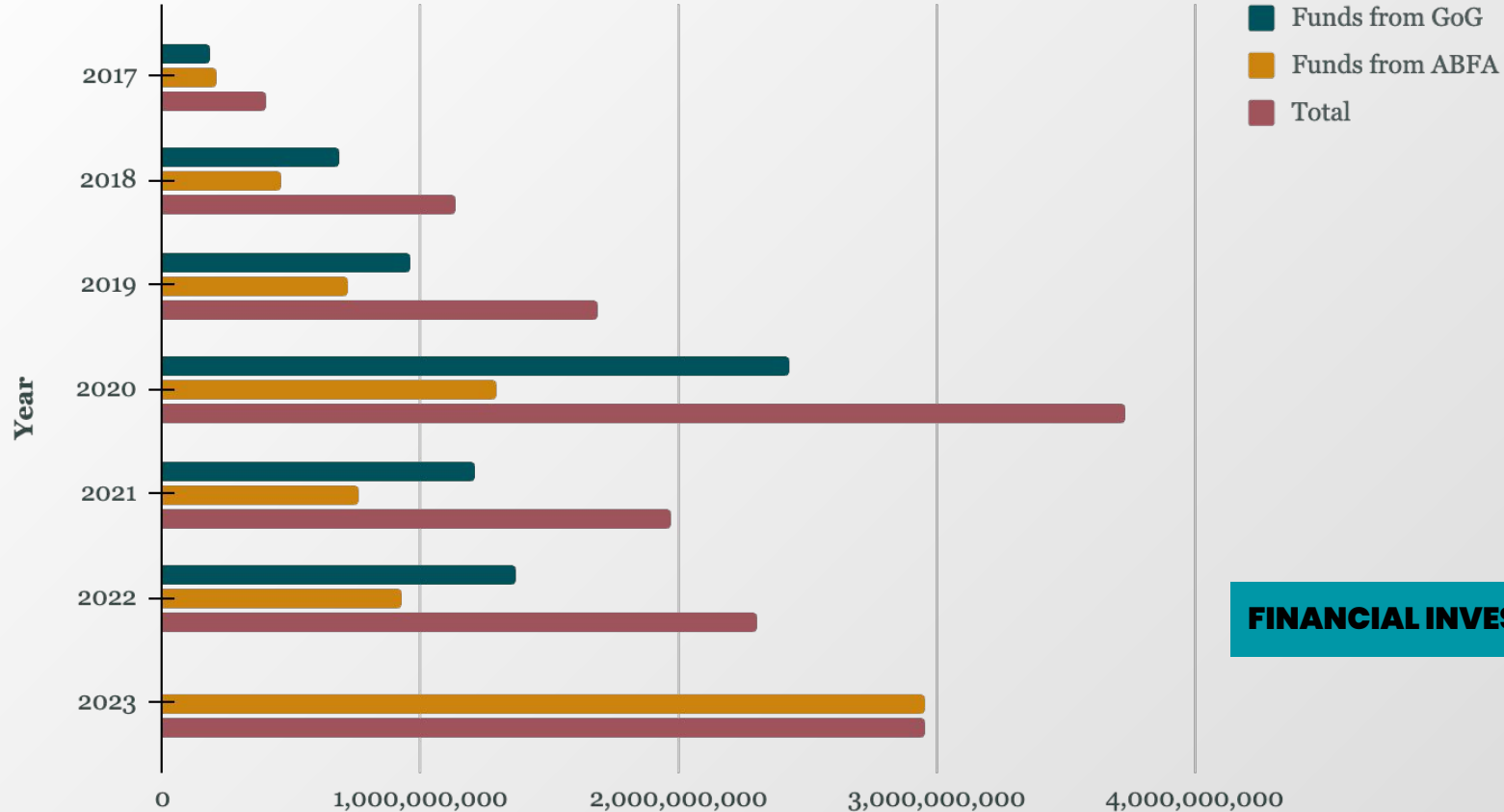
2017 - Present
Free SHS Policy

“free tuition, admission fee, textbooks, library fees, science centre fees, fees for ICT, examination fee, utility fee, boarding and meals” (Free SHS Ghana, 2018a)

2014 - 2016
The Progressively Free SHS policy

Partial funding to senior high education. Parents were exempted from paying some of the education costs

Budget Allocation for Goods & Services Under the Free SHS



FINANCIAL INVESTMENT

POLICY INFLUENCE-IMPACT ASSESSMENT

HIGH INFLUENCE, LOW IMPACT

- Government of Ghana
- NPP political party
- GNETF

HIGH INFLUENCE, HIGH IMPACT

- Ministry of Education
- Ghana Education Service
- Free SHS Secretariat

LOW INFLUENCE, LOW IMPACT

- NaCCA
- Community members of where the school is located

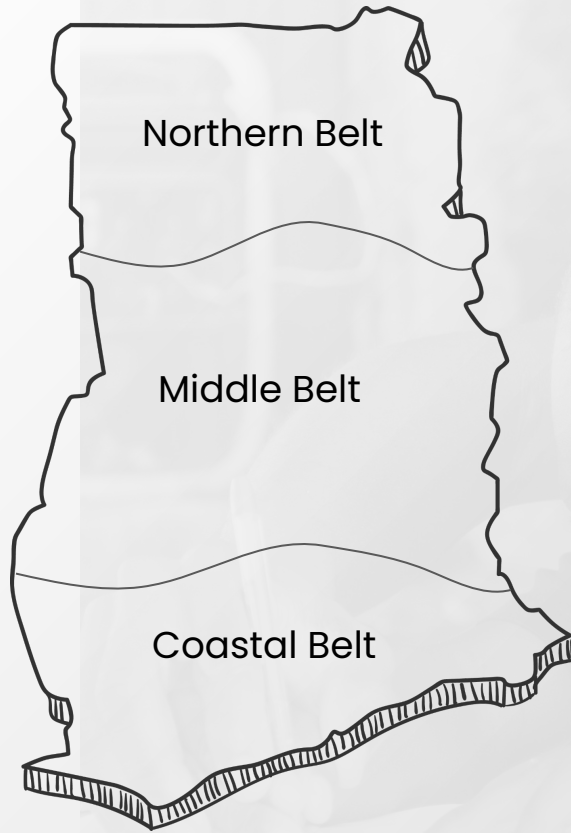
LOW INFLUENCE, HIGH IMPACT

- SHS students
- Parents/Guardians of SHS students
- Teaching staff and associated teacher unions (GNAT, NAGRAT, CCT-GH)
- Non-teaching staff and associated unions (TEWU)
- School management and associated unions (CHASS)

Who is most impacted by the policy and Who has the most power to influence any change?



RESEARCH
METHOD



Distribution of DATA COLLECTION

The country was divided into Northern, Middle and Coastal belts to ensure representation.

Consideration was made for the school category.

Selected respondents who refused to participate, convenience sampling was utilised for recruiting replacements.

STUDENTS: 510



TEACHERS: 258

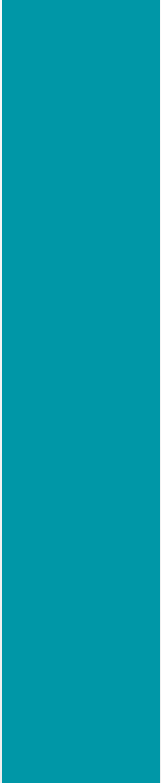


PARENTS/GUARDIANS: 1409



STAKEHOLDERS

District/Municipal GES Officers: 16
School Finance personnel: 40
Headteachers: 43

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1. What **achievements** have been made in line with the objectives of the Free SHS policy so far?
 2. What **challenges** have been encountered so far with the implementation of the policy?
 3. Are there any **recommendations** for both immediate and long-term solutions to mitigate the identified challenges?

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

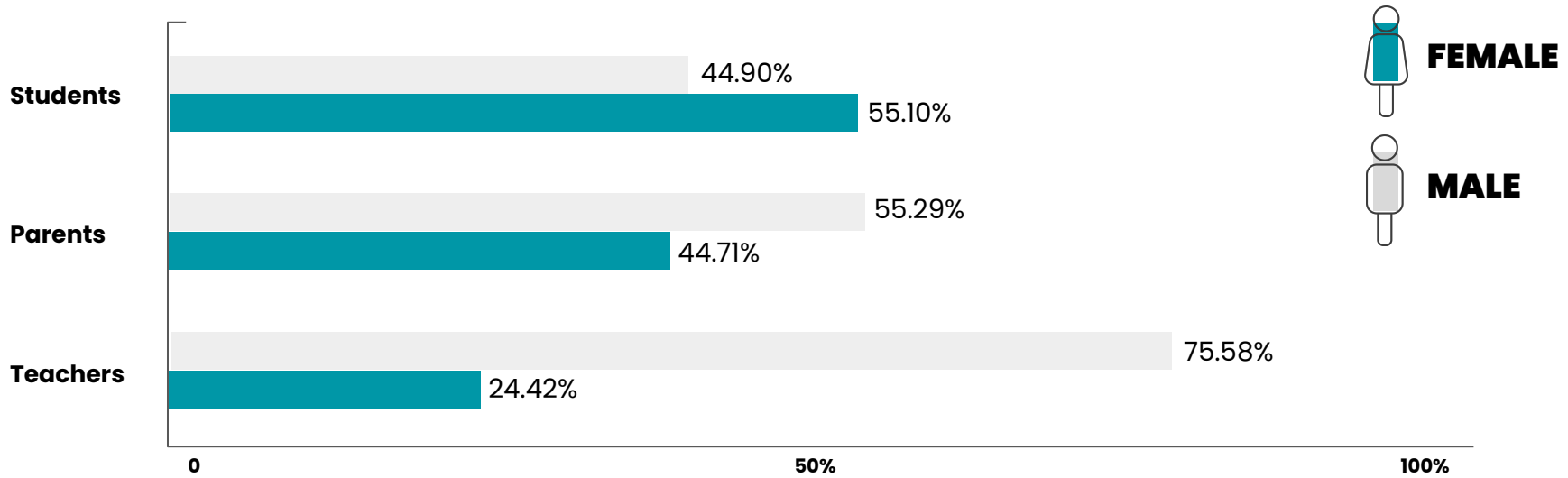


Limitations of the Study

1. Delays in **access to data** (over compartmentalization and bureaucracies)
2. **Authorization process** challenges (approval letters from GES and Ghana education service, conflicting time schedules and unavailability of school leaders to respond to interview)
3. **Fear of repercussions** for disclosure of information about Free SHS policy (especially school leaders, GES, Ministry of Education)

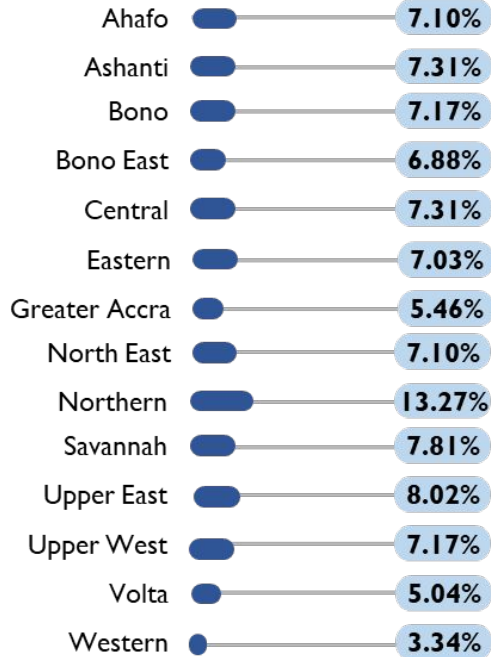
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS



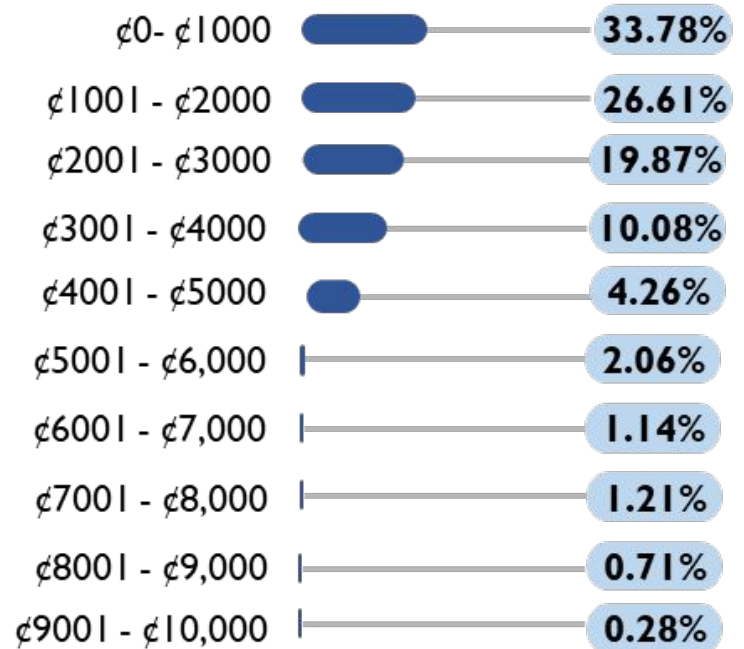


GENDER DISTRIBUTION

PARENTS

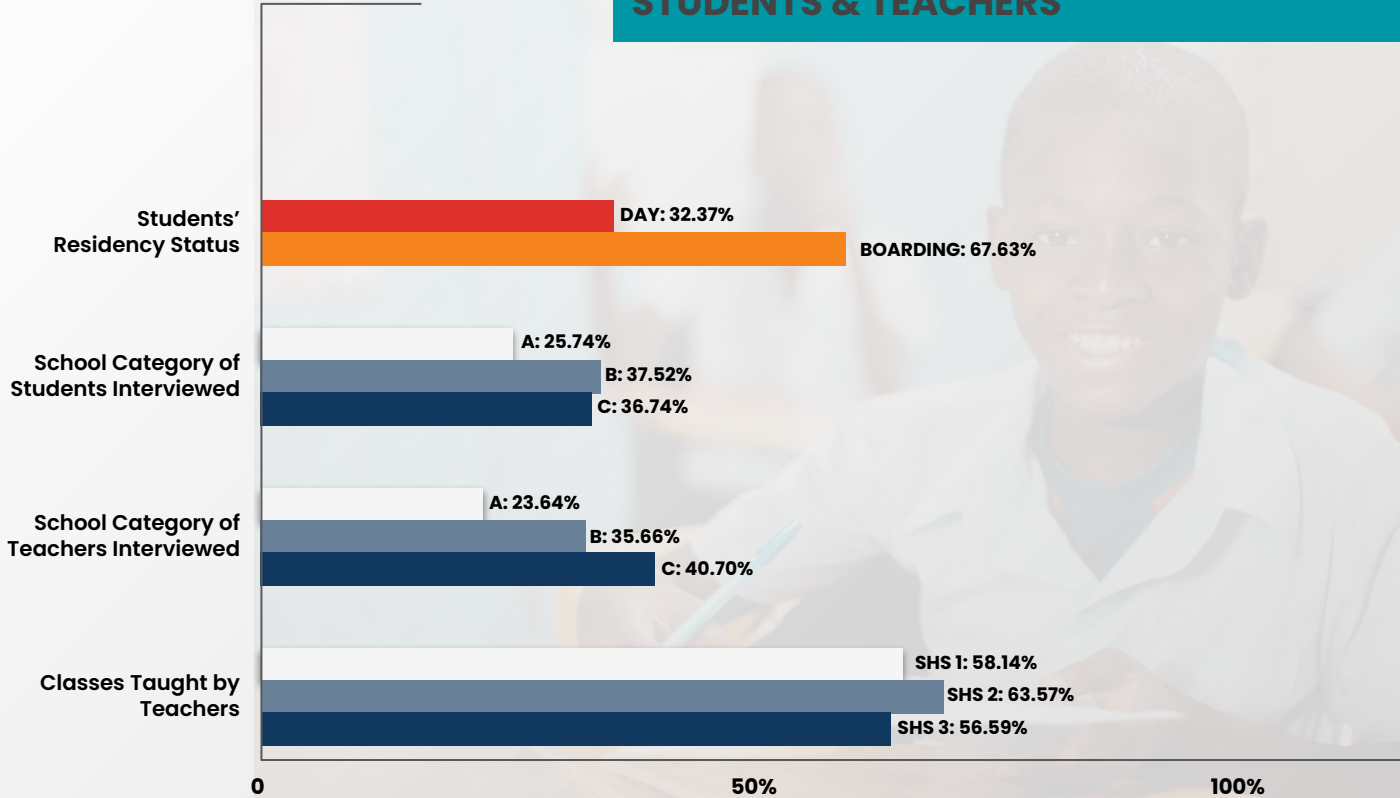


Regional Distribution of Responses



Household Income

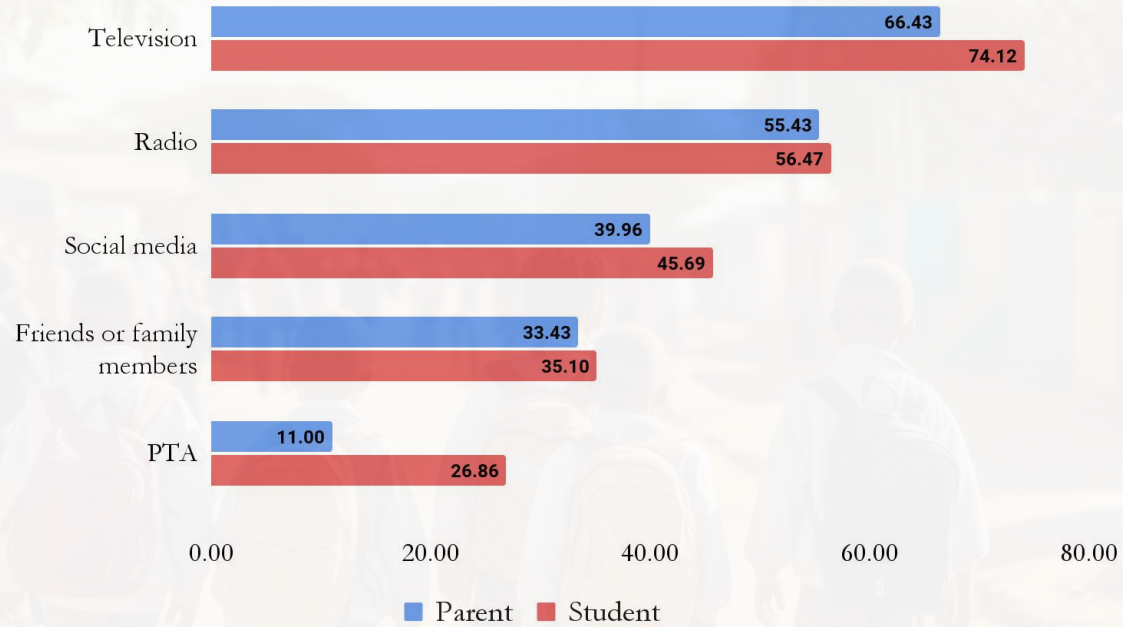
STUDENTS & TEACHERS



RESULTS

- There is **inconsistency in self-reported ratings of knowledge of the Free SHS Policy and the accuracy of eligibility** among parents and students.
- Parents and students who rate themselves as “very knowledgeable” still believe that the policy is only for students from low-income families or only for students with high academic performance.
- Even for parents/guardians who had previously had an individual in their household benefit from the Free SHS policy, 13.17% of them either did not know the details of the policy or still believed only students from low-income families or students with high academic performance qualified for Free SHS.

This clearly reveals a communication gap and presents a need to leverage current information channels to dispel wrong theories on how the Free SHS Policy works.



Sources of Knowledge for Both Students and Parents about Free SHS Policy



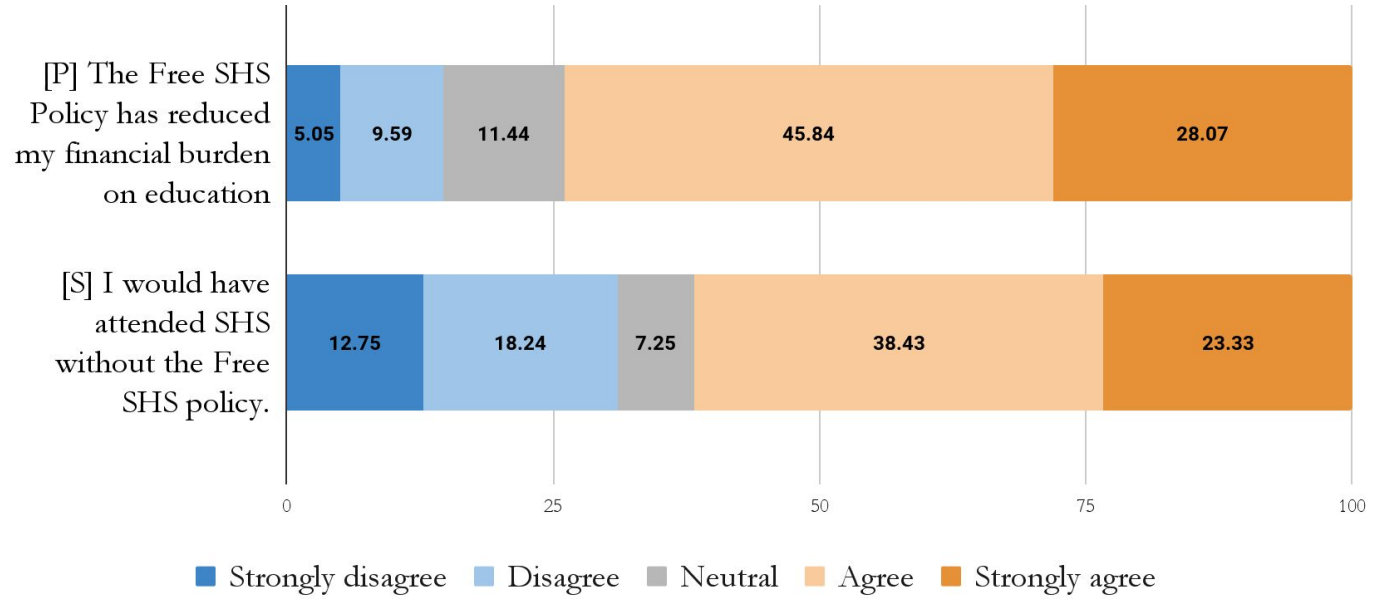
FINDINGS

- **28.62%** of parents/guardians admitted that they could not have afforded their ward's SHS without the policy with **73.92%** agreeing that the policy has reduced their financial burden on education.
- **30.98%** of students mentioned they would not have been able to attend SHS without the policy, thus highlighting the importance of the cost barrier removal.
- Headteachers and school finance officers indicated that removing cost barriers **allows students to engage in learning without the threat of being dismissed** for non-payment of fees.
- Students have the **assurance that their education will not be disrupted** by financial concerns, thus allowing them to focus on learning.
- Similarly, the **burden on school administrators to track and monitor student debtors** has been eliminated.

REMOVAL OF COST BARRIER



PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION FOR PARENT AND STUDENT RESPONSES ON INCOME AND AFFORDABILITY





- **Removing the direct cost barrier has led to an increase in access to SHS education in Ghana**, as reported by literature (Asumadu, 2019; Kwegyiriba, 2021; Asante et al., 2022).
- Partey (2018) reported that **enrolment rates across the country rose by 33% in 2017** when the Free SHS policy was first implemented. This was followed by a 39% capacity deficit in the 2018/2019 academic year as available enrolment rates surpassed seats actually available in schools, leading to the introduction of the double-track system (Mensah, 2019).
- Mohammed & Kuyini (2020) also found that the **average increase in enrolment during the first three years of Free SHS implementation was 1.5 times** than that of the Progressively Free SHS policy period under former President Mahama's NDC government.
- It can be concluded that by removing the direct cost barrier to SHS education, the Free SHS policy made SHS education more accessible.

EXPANSION OF INFRASTRUCTURE

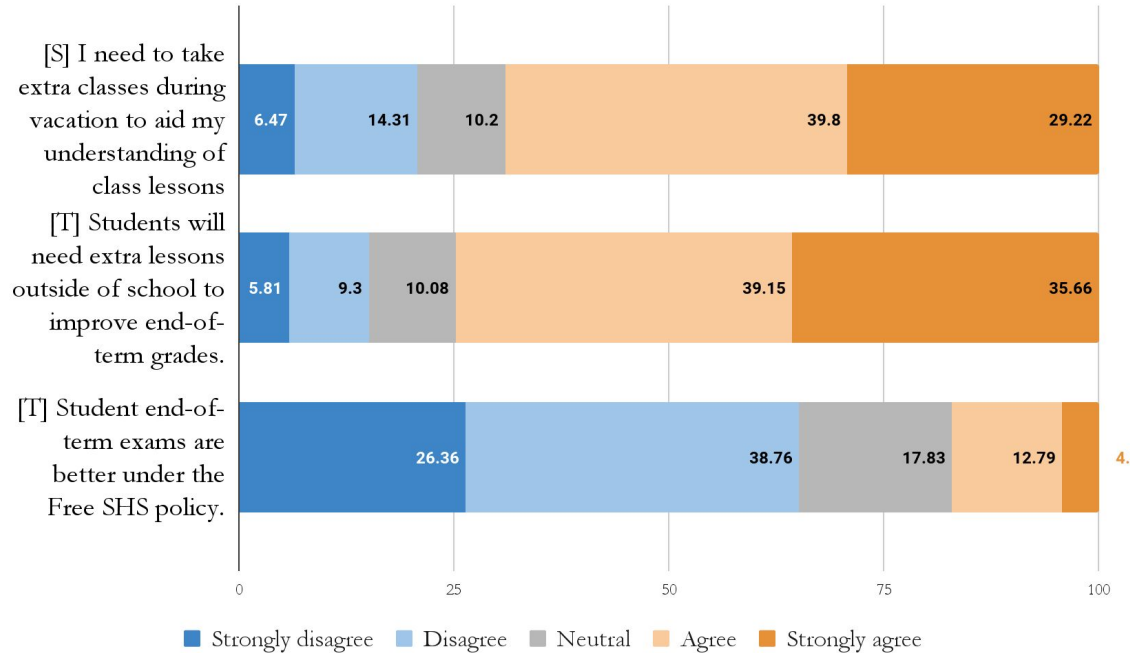
Although there have been some infrastructural developments at the national level, there might be a different reality for headteachers in their respective schools.



- For six category A schools (13.95% of sampled), three category B schools (6.98% of sampled) and two category C schools (4.65% of sampled), headteachers mentioned limited infrastructural improvement to dormitories, classrooms, class sizes, library resources, computer and science labs among others.
- This is in stark contrast to the marginal 1.55% of surveyed teachers who noted infrastructural developments. Some head teachers also noted the receipt of school buses as a part of FSHS infrastructure and resource improvement to enable students to participate in out-of-school experiences.

IMPROVEMENT IN QUALITY

The quality of education has **marginally improved** with the provision of educational inputs such as textbooks, and increased contact hours to facilitate students' understanding of subject material. **Educational inputs are however not sufficient.** It is also worth noting that the benefit of more contact hours follows a bell-shaped curve: there is a point where additional hours don't provide as much advantage as before. Finally, [the research finds no evidence to support increased educational outputs due to the policy.](#)



IMPROVEMENT IN EQUITY

Equity concerns have been partly satisfied with the policy implementation - **30% quota requirement for placing public Junior High Schools (JHS) students in elite category A and B schools.** This research reveals that the **fear of private JHS students switching to public JHS schools to take advantage of this policy mandate is unwarranted.**

Did you at any point switch from a private JHS to a public JHS?		
No, I completed in a private JHS	159	31.18%
No, I was already in a public JHS	306	60%
Yes, I switched from a private JHS to a public JHS	45	8.82%
Grand Total	510	100%

INEQUITABLE ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES:

Congested dormitories, insufficient classrooms, absent computer science, natural science and home economics laboratories, and inadequate teaching and learning materials. **The ratio of teachers to students is still too high despite recognized teacher recruitment efforts.** This issue is compounded by the fact that **new resource allocation prioritises already well-resourced categories A & B schools, creating an even more inequitable situation.**



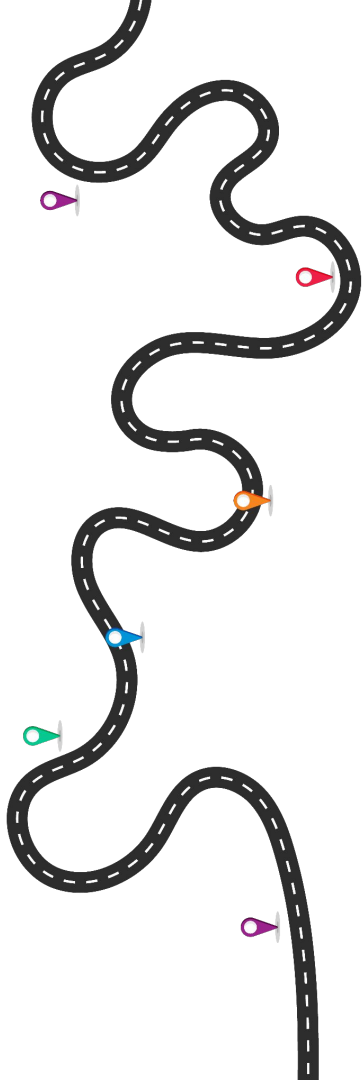
DOUBLE-TRACK SYSTEM:

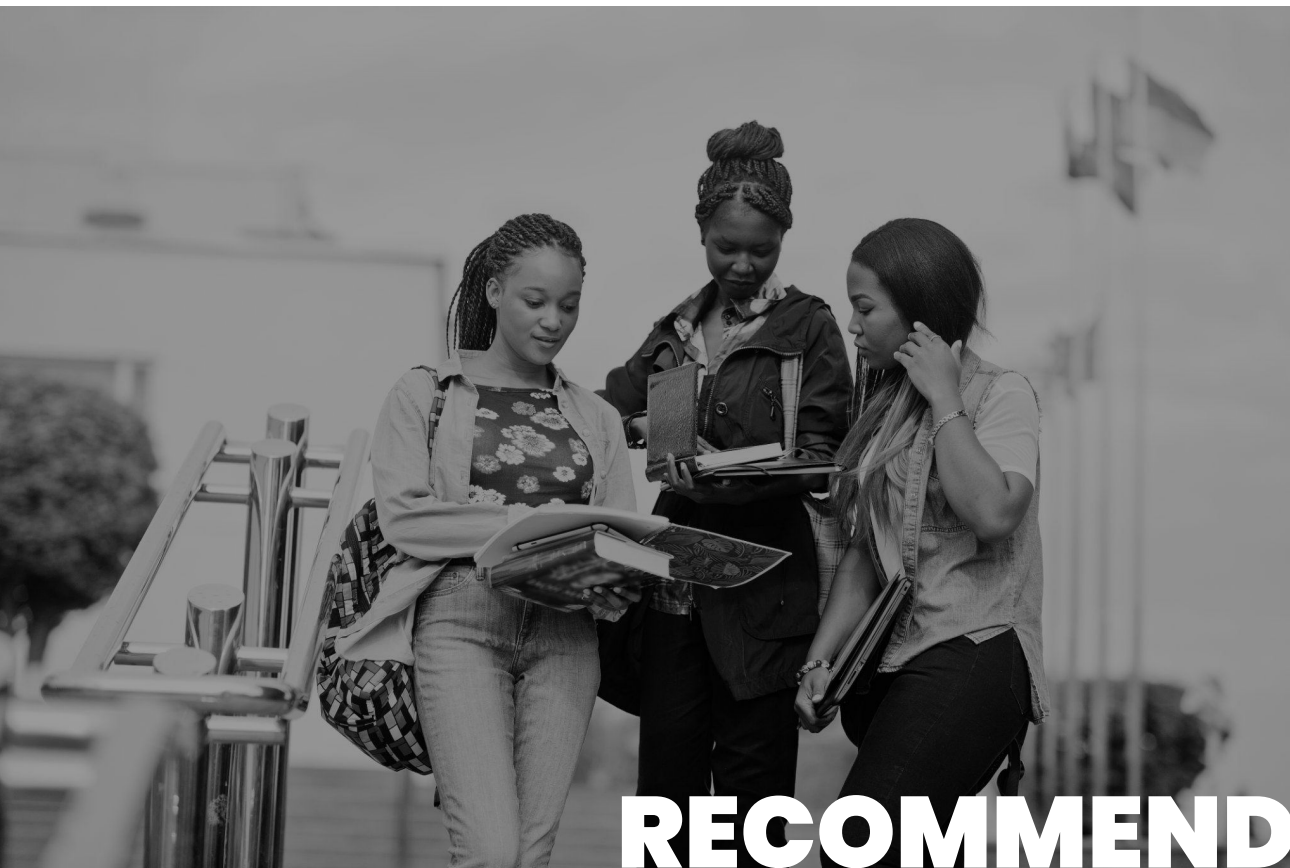
Although laudable, the consequence of this intervention is **remarkable pressure on infrastructure** and resources, including personnel. In addition, **longer vacation days as a result of the double-track might be hindering student learning.**



FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY:

With limited revenue streams to fund the policy, delays and shortages are commonplace. **Deferred payments to food suppliers, especially, result in food rationing, thereby affecting students' ability to learn.**





RECOMMENDATIONS



SUSTAINABLE FINANCE



Parents should bear the costs associated with boarding, with exceptions made for parents of students in category C schools and students placed into elite schools through the 30% quota. The rationale is that these parents are likely to be from low-income families.

Cost-sharing between parents and the government:

OPTION 1: Parents/guardians to contribute to their ward's school fees as a function of their income.

OPTION 2: A fixed cost-share program with government adoption of a greater share.

Diversify funding sources for the Free SHS program through fundraising, lobbying and concessions with private sector corporations and foundations.

At the school level, school administration can **solicit for funds from Parent Teacher Associations and Old Students Associations** in ways that do not discriminate or disenfranchise any group of students.

Source food items locally to help mitigate both logistical and financial issues associated with food supplies.



IMPROVING TEACHING & LEARNING





Empowerment of headteachers to be autonomous and make context-specific decisions while reducing reliance on government aid for the Free SHS policy. These decisions will adhere to the policy's framework and directives to maintain standardisation and cooperation between all stakeholders.

Provide timely and appropriate support services to students based on identified needs such as varying literacy levels, indiscipline and lack of motivation among the student body.

POLICY ADMINISTRATION

Reduction of bureaucracies for efficiency purposes by empowering actors such as headteachers to execute localised decisions.

Comprehensive policy review with extensive stakeholder engagement and perspectives should be factored into modifications.

Other Standalone Recommendations

Facilitating the timely availability of resources and infrastructure with the aim of scrapping the double track /transitional system.

Holistic improvements of public JHS to enhance the quality of graduates produced for second cycle institutions.

Increasing the capacity of tertiary institutions to admit the influx of graduating students who are recipients of the Free SHS policy.

Introduce new specialized educational programs to absorb the extra graduates away from polytechnics, universities and other tertiary level programs

CONCLUSIONS

Finance is a recurring concern. It impacts food supply, salaries, infrastructure development and, teaching and learning materials provision.

The current funding allocations are proving insufficient as evidenced by widespread finance and resource provision delays.

Review of the need for blind admission process.

Parents/ Guardians who earn over a certain threshold should not be beneficiaries of the policy.

This will help to address financing and equity concerns in tandem by resulting in more equitable outcomes. Additionally, equity parameters should be considered and factored into policy implementation. ***Free education for all is an equality and not an equity measure.***

Future Studies

Investigate the range of other projected benefits of the Free SHS policy including reduction in teenage pregnancy and development of employable skills in SHS.

The root cause of the Free SHS policy implementation challenges.

Questions?



Final Report
Raw Data