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MON: 'Daring To Be Free'. Free Senior High School (SHS) Education In Ghana- An Exercise In Inclusive Education Or Political Gimmick? (Bernie Asher)

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Abstract

In line with landmark declarations such as the Dakar Framework for Action which aimed to achieve “education for all (EFA) goals and targets for every citizen and for every society” (World Education Forum, 2000, p.8), countries such as Ghana have embarked on efforts to remove fees associated with both primary and secondary education. One such effort was introduced in 2017 by the NPP government in Ghana. Known as the Free SHS’, the aim of the policy was explained thusly by the president of Ghana:

“By free SHS we mean that in addition to tuition which is already free, there will be no admission fee, no library fee, no science centre fee, no computer lab fee, no examination fee, and no utility fee; there will be free text books, free boarding and free meals, and day students will get a meal at school for free” (Ghana News Agency, 2017).

Clearly the above policy aims at expanding the inclusivity of education in Ghana in line with international frameworks such as has been cited.

As commendable as this policy is it has not been without criticisms. For example is that, increased access has the potential to raise quality concerns-something that already confronts Ghana’s education system. Extant evidence already points to the fact the Ghanaian government has been unable to meet a significant number of important quality benchmarks such as teacher-student ratio (Partey, 2017). Now in view of this there is a high chance that ‘opening the floodgates’ in this way will further aggravate such problems (Partey, 2017).

Additionally it is possible that this venture can intensify extant difficulties associated with funding and infrastructure (Ghanaweb, 2017a).

Against this background, we undertake to conduct an investigation into the feasibility or otherwise of the Free SHS policy. The aim of the investigation is to how assess:

- ▶ how affordable and financially sustainable is the Free SHS policy given Ghana’s economic situation;

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and;

- ▶ to what extent can increases in enrolment in SHS be matched by corresponding increases in quality of education provision?

Two main sources of information are to be used for data collection- namely critical review of extant literature specifically newspaper articles and government policy documents on the Free SHS policy. Additionally academic literature that focuses on inclusive education will be reviewed. The second source is from a key informant in the person on the Deputy Minister of Education.

The format for presentation of the research findings is the research paper because it is deemed to permit for more exhaustive coverage of all aspects of the topic at hand while also permitting for a more informative presentation.

The project will end with an evaluation, based on the evidence, of the overall feasibility of the Free SHS policy and will hopefully provide recommendations about such policies ought to be rolled.

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