Why do universal policies fail to produce universal access? A critical look at politics of solution definition in Ghana's universal basic education policy

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The Politics of Solution Definition: Shaping the hidden side of the policy agenda

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Abstract

Basic education polices in Ghana have been consistently defined from a rights-based perspective and implemented through a universal framework. Consequently, universal education is defined by the political elite as policy solution in response to high child illiteracy, and the provision of equitable access to educational opportunities for all among children. However, with over two decades into implementation, the extent of 'free' and 'universal' basic education delivery has not translated into universal access for school-going children. By analyzing these policies from a non-rational conceptual perspective, this paper identifies two key features in the operationalization of Ghana's universal basic education policy that explains the tension between universality and access. First, the absence of universality as a guiding administrative principle in the implementation of basic education policies. And second, the increasing usage of universality as a tool for pursuing political interest. Implications for the implementation of a new free Senior High School (SHS) policy are further discussed.

1.0 Introduction

In the past two decades, the Government of Ghana's (GoG) policy direction towards basic education has been driven by a rights-based approach, influenced by the principles of universality and inclusion (Nudzor, 2012). With the introduction of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy, the Educational Capitation Programme (ECG) and subsequently, the Free Senior High-School (SHS) programme, successive governments have consistently defined the provision of fee-free universal basic education as policy solution to remedying high illiteracy rates and providing equitable access to educational opportunities for all among children (GoG, 1992). However, with over 20 years into the implementation of the FCUBE and universality as a policy solution, the extent of free and universal basic education still remains illusory to many Ghanaian children (Nudzor, 2013; UNESCO, 2011). This conflicting relationship between the intent and outcomes of the proposed universal policies underscore Kingdon's proposition (1984, 1995) that the definition of solutions within specific policy contexts are not always consistent with existing problems. Kingdon's assumption also questions how language and rhetoric are employed by the political elite in defining what acceptable policy solutions are, and by extension, challenging the assumption that universality is not always synonymous with access (Stefánsson, 2012; Anttonen, Häikiö & Stefánsson, 2012).

The tension between universality and access in Ghana's basic education policies, as described above, reflects how governments, and the political elite can hide behind the policy process in implementing their agendas. Specifically, it shows from the broader conceptual context, how the process of defining solutions, and the manner in which certain solutions ascend to priority lists of governments continue to remain a hidden component of the policy making process. Accordingly, what constitutes a feasible solution to universal access is often shrouded by the political agenda and incentives for the governing elite. In the following sections, I present the development of the proposed solution of universal access to basic education in the Ghanaian context, using the FCUBE and the recent free SHS programme as case examples. Also, the section will shed more light on how this process of adopting right-based polices, to be pursued through universal principles, has increasingly, become subject to the political incentives for the governing elite (Abdulai, 2015; Abdulai & Hickey, 2016).

From the government's perspective on basic education policy making, this troubled relationship between universality and access in the established educational policies is commonly interpreted from the rational interaction perspective (Nudzor, 2013) that was criticized by Rochefort and Cobb (1993). This rationalist way of looking at the policy process assumes that a well-crafted policy, subjected to effective financing and implementation strategies would deliver performance as conceived during formulation (Nudzor, 2013; O'Connor & Netting, 2011). Following this perspective, attaining fee-free access to basic education for all children is dependent on a logical interaction between well formulated polices, effective implementation strategies and government's ability to provide funding to operationalize universal access. While recent studies have highlighted the challenges surrounding access to basic education in the form of universal policy, much of the political elite's understanding of this policy paradox has generally overlooked the myriad political dynamics that impact how solutions are defined (Nudzor, 2012; 2013; Rochefort & Cobb, 1993), thereby ignoring the essential political and administrative reforms central to the realisation of universal access.

In this paper, I present the results of a scoping review (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005) used to map-out relevant literature with thematic focus on: universal policies, Ghana's basic education policies and the implementation and impact of the FCUBE policy. I argue that government's reliance on rationalist interpretations of the policy process, overemphasizes fiscal capacity as an explanation for the failures in attaining universal access, much to the neglect of the political incentives that play key roles in determining how solutions are arrived at.

2.0 Universality and access debate as binary principles in social policy

In its most rational essence, universalism is widely used to underline the centrality of things that are common to all people (Anttonen & Sipilä, 2014). In social policy contexts, universalism is generally employed to refer to measures of entitlement in the redistribution of resources in society (Titmuss, 1976). In the same social policy domain, universality is specifically used as a concept or ideal, an administrative principle and also for political purposes (Anttonen & Sipilä, 2014). In discussing the topic "Varieties of Universalism", Anttonen and Sipilä (2014) emphasized how universalism continues to be used as a concept or an ideal in guiding the frameworks of welfare states, and the distribution of social rights to its members. They also stressed that in Nordic countries, universalism is used as an administrative principle in

implementing certain welfare policies and programmes, whiles in other jurisdictions, and the concept is employed as a political tool for ideological reasons and purposes of maintaining the political interest of ruling elite. For instance, this is implicitly seen in the recent politics of social protection and welfare policies in Sub-Saharan Africa, where social-spending programmes in education, health and cash transfers are introduced by incumbent governments to maintain positive electoral appeal (Hickey, 2008; Abdulai & Hickey, 2016).

However, in tracing the history and the emergence of the concept of universalism in the social policy context, certain themes remain central. In his review of Titmuss' work on "Commitment to Welfare", Seldon (1968) pointed out that the embrace of universalism as a principle in social policy, historically, arose from the need to make social services available and accessible to the general population, and to remove any sense of stigma and inferiority attached to the use of public services. In his expatiation on the welfare state in the post-war period, Langan (1998, p.10-12) also showed that universalism as a principle took on additional meanings, especially within the post-war social policies in Britain. He maintained that ideas such as social citizenship and the attainment of equal citizenship were embedded in most social policies (Langan 1998, p.10-12; Anttonen et al., 2012). By adopting these measures, the aim was to ensure that universal distribution of social services, thus became a normative goal of social policy during the post-war period. By implication, the idea of citizenship, would come with the rights of entitlement to access basic social needs as health, knowledge food and shelter (Langan, 1998, p.10-12). These popular ideals however, eventually came to be seen as inadequate political strategies in Britain during the early 1990's (Anttonen et al., 2012). From the late 1970's and 1980's onwards, the Nordic model of universalism also came to assume a central position in the way we understand the principle of universality as an all-inclusive concept within the social policy literature. According to Anttonen & Sipilä (2014), universalism, from the Nordic conceptualisation, reinforced the notion of developing a welfare state that prioritises all citizens. Universalism from this Nordic framework, thus represented an approach to social policy, as well as a political goal in the development of social services and programmes (Anttonen & Sipilä, 2012).

Even though a slight differentiation is observed historically, the meanings of universality within post-war social policy in both Great Britain and the Nordic examples, largely reflect contemporary understanding of universalism in social policy contexts (Mkandawire, 2005). The

idea that universal policies should be based on rights and entitlements to all citizens, or a means through which all people have the same access to welfare services as education, health and social care (Anttonen et al., 2012; Langan, 1998, p.10-12). This all-inclusive understanding of universalism thus provides a conceptual lens in understanding the universality behind Ghana's basic education policies, particularly, the FCUBE and the free SHS.

3.0 Background to the FCUBE policy

Ghana's policy direction towards basic education since the early 1990's, has been largely driven by a rights-based approach, informed by principles of universality and inclusion (Nudzor, 2013). Under this context, a national policy for Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) was established in 1992 to underline the government's commitment towards providing fee-free compulsory universal basic education to all children of school-going age in Ghana (GoG, 1992). The central tenets of this policy are enshrined in the Government of Ghana's (GoG) directive principles of state policy, section 38, sub-sections one and two, which respectively state that:

(1) "*The State shall, provide educational facilities at all levels and in all the Regions of Ghana, and shall to the greatest extent feasible, make those facilities available to all citizens*" (GoG, 1992).

(2) "*The Government shall, within two years after Parliament first after the coming into force of this Constitution, draw up a programme for implementation within the following ten years, for the provisions of free, compulsory and universal basic education*" (GoG, 1992).

In operationalizing these constitutional provisions, the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ghana Education Service (GES), backed by financial support for the World Bank, launched its new programme dubbed 'Basic Education – A Right: Programme for the provision of Free, Compulsory and Universal Basic Education by the year 2005' (MOE/GES 2001, 34, cited in Acheampong, 2009; White & World Bank, 2004). In 1995, the FCUBE programme was thus launched by the government of Ghana, with a constitutionally binding time line of 10 years to achieve the programme's goals and target. On a whole, the FCUBE programme rested on two central goals. First, to make schooling from stage one to nine (children aged 5-13 years-old) entirely free and compulsory for all children. And second, to improve the quality of education services offered (Acheampong, 2009). By introducing these measures, universality was thus

defined as the operating principle underlying basic education attendance across the country. According to Nudzor (2013), underlying the need for the implementation of the FCUBE was the staggering national statistics from the Ministry of Education (MOE), which showed that about 22% of eligible grade 1 to 6 children of school going age were out of school. Closely related to this was also the fact that about 29% of eligible grade 7 to 9 children also found themselves out of school (MOE, 1996, 1998; Ghana Education Service [GES] 2004).

Five years into the implementation of the FCUBE policy, a nation-wide evaluation was conducted by the Ghana Education Service (GES) in 2000 (Nudzor, 2013). This was also followed by a World Bank impact evaluation of education reforms in Ghana (White, 2004). These evaluations, to a larger extent, shifted both the public and policy makers' attention to the meanings underneath the concept of 'free' and 'compulsory' universal basic education regime in by the FCUBE. As made public in the report, many schools had introduced contingency costs such as examination and general stationary, school management and among other fees to support teaching and learning activities, due to the loss of revenue in the form of tuition fees (Acheampong, 2009). Evaluation results also cited low retention rates, especially for girls due to the inability of their guardians to pay associated fees. Besides these revelations, the general effect of schools introducing subsidiary fees reinforced a situation where the ability to support both teaching and learning activities of schools depended much on "the wealth of surrounding communities" (Achempong, 2009, p. 8). Consequently, not only were those whose parents could not afford subsidiary fees sent home, the general practice of parents paying to support teaching and learning activities also meant that poorer areas and communities mostly ended up with poorer schools (Donge, 2003; Acheampong, 2009). Thus, fostering a quality gap between rural and urban schools (Gaddah, Munro & Quartey, 2015).

Following this revelation, a new scheme emerged: the Educational Capitation Grant (ECG). The grant was set up by the government in 2005 to accelerate the realisation of the FCUBE policy. Under this scheme, the government set out to provide basic schools with yearly amount of $3 (USD) for every child enrolled, with the intention of footing subsidiary fees and bringing relief to poor parents (Osei et al., 2009). According to some studies (Osei, Owusu, Asem, & Afutu-Kotey, 2009; Nudzor, 2013), the setting up of the capitation grant, on one hand, produced initial steady results for the FCUBE in terms of enrolment and retention in school. For instance, in

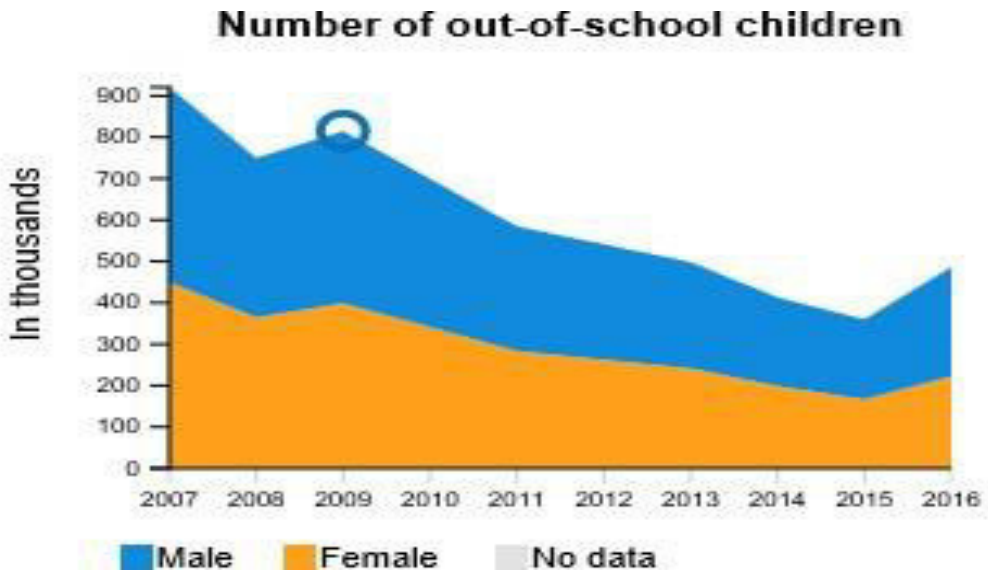
studying the "effects of the capitation grant on educational outcomes", Osei et al (2009) noted a 10 percent increase in enrolment in some piloted schools. A public expenditure tracking study by the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) in six districts, also showed a 13% growth rates in enrolment between the 2005/2006 and the 2008/2009 academic years. According to this study, the ECG was perceived as the major contributory factor to the steady rise in enrolment rates observed in the six districts (Ampratwum & Armah-Attoh, 2010). On the other hand however, later studies (Ampratwum & Armah-Attoh, 2010; Gaddah et al., 2015) have also shown how challenges such corruption and irregular release of funds by government have adversely affected the ability of the ECG to accelerate the delivery of 'fee-free' and universal basic education'. Consequently, this leads to the assumption that the universal intentions of the FCUBE policy has had limited impact on school enrolment and retention, especially for poorer and rural households. Thus the conclusion that neither the budgetary increase for basic education, nor the implementation of the FCUBE policy, has led to significant reductions in both the direct and indirect costs associated with schooling. This has shown to be especially true for children from poorer and rural households; in a manner that supports their full participation in the basic education system (Nudzor, 2013; Gaddah et al., 2015).

In summarizing the FCUBE policy as a defined solution to granting equal educational opportunities to all children, It is worth noting here that since its introduction in 1995, the FCUBE has certainly opened the door to basic education for many Ghanaian children from all socio-economic class and geographical locations. However, despite the gains made, sustained access to basic education still remains a challenge to many poor children in both rural as well as peri urban settings (Dunne & Ananga, 2013; UNESCO, 2017). In the first place, the FCUBE appeared to have missed its time-line and promise of delivering a fee-free basic education, and providing equal access to educational opportunities to all children by 2005. Secondly, the shift in policy attention after the post-2005 timeline to the Millennium Development Goals 2 (i.e. achieving universal primary education by 2015) also could not resuscitate the universal basic education dream (Gaddah et al., 2015).

The UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2017) for example, shows that the number of Ghana's out-of-school children and out-of-school adolescents increased between 2014 and 2016 (See figure 1.0 and 2.0). For many analysts, this outcome questions the meanings surrounding the

universality behind the FCUBE, and subsequently, what was meant by "free and compulsory" basic education. For instance, in studying the policy implementation paradox associated with the FCUBE, Nudzor (2013) underlined how in the first place, the 'free', 'compulsory' and 'universal' components of the policy were not adequately reflected in the implementation of the process. And second, the failure of the political elite in recognizing the inseparable nature of public and private costs associated with the concept of free and universal basic education. These outcomes, to a large extent, undermines much of the effort directed towards the creation and sustenance of a truly universal basic education to all school-going children, despite the universality and right-based approach that underpins basic education policy. This difficulty in attaining the universal dream of the FCUBE policy, perhaps, points to the bigger problems of the politics that surrounds solution definition in Ghana's education policy.

Figure 1.0 Number of out-of-school children 2012-2016



Source: UNESCO Institute of statistics, (2017). Ghana country statistics.

Figure 2.0 Number of out-of-school children and out-of-school adolescents

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Out-of-school children										
Total	920,794	750,303	815,040	...	584,468	659,463	498,432	413,314	360,029	486,343
Female	449,966	364,546	398,962	...	283,703	...	241,632	199,242	166,688	222,539
Male	470,828	385,757	416,078	...	300,765	...	256,800	214,072	193,341	263,804
Out-of-school adolescents										
Total	311,507	275,097	274,117	...	...	...	...	191,960	265,692	164,327
Female	155,711	138,734	139,262	...	...	...	...	97,113	55,871	82,426
Male	155,796	136,363	134,855	...	...	...	...	94,847	209,821	81,901

Source: UNESCO Institute of statistics, (2017). Ghana country statistics.

4.0 Discussion

Regardless of the universality and the rights-based approach that have underpinned the implementation of Ghana's basic education policy, the outcomes have certainly not yielded universal access-for-all in the basic field on which the policies were premised. This is particularly so for the FCUBE policy, and to some extent, from the initial fall-outs observed in the implementation yet another universal policy: the free SHS. Consequently, certain questions become central in analysing the tensions between universality and access in Ghana's fee-free educational policies, vis-à-vis the politics that surrounds how policy solutions are defined. Particularly in this context, the following questions are worth interrogating. **First**, what philosophy underlines the usage of universality by the political elite in Ghana's basic education context? And how is universality as a rights-based system implemented in the FCUBE policy? **Second**, what incentive structures shape the process of defining solutions? And what role do political parties and/ or the bureaucratic system play in defining the solution? **Third**, what implications do these have for the implementation and sustenance of government's recent free SHS programme?

To provide a critical understanding on why Ghana's universal basic education policies have faced immense limitations in delivering the intended universal access, this paper employs an interpretive non-rational approach to policy analysis (O'Connor and Netting 2011) in examining why the FCUBE policy output has not matched-up to the intended universal access. More specifically, it adopts Debora Stone's policy paradox (2002) perspective to highlight the socio-political dimensions that surround not only policy formulation, but also importantly, the politics surrounding how some policies emerge as solutions, and their inherent incentives within the policy making process. This interpretive nonrational perspective has also been espoused by Rocherfort and Cobb in their work: *The Politics of Problem Definition: Shaping the Policy Agenda* (1994), which criticizes the natural logical sequence approach (rational perspective) that informs Ghana's universal education policies (Nudzor, 2013).

4.1 What philosophy underlines the usage of universality? How is universality implemented by the political elite in Ghana's FCUBE policy?

Inherent in Ghana's universal policies, particularly within the basic education context, lie key principles of equality, inclusiveness and justice. These principles are echoed in a number of policy documents and constitutional provisions establishing the various basic education policies and programmes. For instance, in providing the legal framework for the establishment of a universal education policy, the 1992 constitution categorically states that "*All persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities*" (Chapter 5, Article 25, Line 1; GoG, 1992). The Ghana Education Strategic Plan of 2003-2015 and 2010-2020 also give directives for an inclusive education system to be achieved by 2015 including students with 'nonsevere' special needs into mainstream schools (MoE, 2012). These point to the centrality of equality, equity, inclusion and justice as underlying philosophies behind Ghana's universal policies in the basic education field. Despite these philosophical underpinnings, however, these values have not been fully realized in outcome. As illustrated in figure 1.0 and 2.0, thousands of eligible school-going children and adolescents still find themselves out of school in Ghana, for reasons ranging from household factors as poverty (Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2011) to infrastructural issues such as conducting schools under trees, and the lack of teaching staffs and materials in rural and poor communities (GoG, 2017).

The universal philosophy and right-based approach of the FCUBE programme has been difficult to translate into universal access for a number of key reasons. One thing though has become apparent – while universalism has remained the inspiration in the FCUBE's formulation, universalism, remains missing as an administrative principle at the implementation level (Stefánsson, 2012; Antonen et al., 2012; Anttonen & Sipilä, 2014). Historically, the philosophy underlying the emergence of universalism in social policy in post-war Europe (Britain) as well as in the Nordic context, was based on designing a framework for providing essential social services to all citizens (Anttonen & Sipilä, 2012). The universal approach therefore, comes with the aspiration to elevating certain social services such as basic education and health care as entitlements to social citizenship. The key, therefore, to attaining this level of universality in public policy, requires, as prevails in the Scandinavian operationalisation of the term, certain key actions. First, ensuring that social entitlements are institutionalised, and secondly, building structures that incorporates universality as a principal administrative code in the implementation of rights-based policies and programmes (Stefánsson, 2012; Antonen et al., 2012; Anttonen & Sipilä, 2014) as the FCUBE.

In exploring factors that stimulate improved basic education in developing countries, the UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality (Birdsall et al., 2005) for instance, stressed on the important role that well-functioning institutions play in delivering universal basic education. They identified institutional weaknesses, including low management capacity, non-transparent resource allocation as accounting for significant differences between some poor countries (i.e. Sri Lanka, Tunisia and Cuba) that have managed to build education systems with universal primary completion and those that are unable to do so (Birdsall et al., 2005). From their assertion, the argument can be made that universality does not only apply to the textual content with which policies appear, but also importantly, the ability to establish corresponding administrative mechanisms needed in producing effective and efficient public services, irrespective of geography and distance. From a critical perspective, this approach can be applied to the implementation of Ghana's universal basic education policies. Though the framing of the FCUBE policy was clearly embedded in a universal belief, it is also worth noting that its implementation process has lacked a clear institutional approach in establishing a sustained universal administrative principle for implementation. For instance, in analysing the FCUBE's implementation paradox, Acheampong (2009) and Nurdzor (2012) both illustrate the

government's naive attitude towards implementation by thinking that every school-going child in rural and urban Ghana will have equal access to basic education once tuition fees are abolished.

This approach, reflects a clear absence of universality as an administrative principle, and the failure in building institutional structures that could sustain the delivery of universal basic education to all Ghanaian children. these institutional lapses explain the existing difference between the FCUBE's universal ambition on one hand, and on the other hand, the situation where many children, especially in rural settings, face challenges of access, high drop-out and low completion rates (Acheampong, 2009). By ignoring, or not prioritizing the institutional and administrative aspect of implementing universal programmes, policy makers, or the political elite for that matter, create conditions in which as Widalvsky (1979) put it, defined solutions only become a tool for prolonging existing problems. By approaching policy analysis from an interpretive nonrational perspective, one can thus understand how universality, though may constitute the foundation on which certain social policies are carved, may nonetheless, fail in producing universal access as intended during policy formulation.

4.2 What incentive structures shape the process of defining solutions? And what role do political parties and the bureaucratic system play in defining the solution?

Among the various pathways of analysing public policy, Deborah Stone's policy paradox (2002) and Rochefort and Cobbs work on "*Problem definition, Agenda access and Policy choice*" (1993) put major emphasis on the interpretivist nonrational approach to studying policy. This approach seeks to take into consideration various thematic concerns that surrounds how policies are made, in order to fully appreciate how those policies function in the way they do. As such, these approaches among other things, invest time and attention into various political and socio-historical contexts that informs decision-making, as opposed to the conventional rationalist assumption that policies are constructed through a rational interaction between problems and solutions (O'Connor & Netting, 2011). As realized from the interpretivist nonrational perspectives prescribed by Stones (2002), and Rochefort and Cobb (1993, 1994), the process of defining solutions which eventually become adopted policies is often shrouded in politics, and also strategically influenced by state structures with political sanction (O'Connor & Netting, 2011). This suggests that policy making, and the process of defining which solution become policies is not without political interest and incentives. To understand how this phenomena of

political interest functions in welfare policy making, and in particular, Ghana's social protection and welfare policies, it is important to briefly engage recent theoretical and empirical literature on the political settlement and the politics of social protection in competitive Sub-Saharan African (SSA) democracies.

The political settlement approach (Lavers & Hickey, 2015; Hirvi & Whitfield, 2015) explains that the distribution of political power and political positions, especially in many states of the global South, also influences institutional distribution of public goods (Abdulai & Hickey, 2016). Consequently, the extent to which political power is evenly or unevenly distributed among competing political groups shapes the effectiveness and sustenance of the distribution of public goods, and for that matter social protection and welfare interventions enrolled by governments (Lavers & Hickey, 2015). According to this literature (Lavers & Hickey, 2015; Niño-Zarazúa, Barrientos, Hickey & Hulme,2012), SSA countries like Rwanda and Ethiopia, where only one dominant political coalition dominates (i.e. potential development coalition) tend to experience successful outcomes in effectively sustaining welfare interventions. Owing to the fact that they have no stronger internal competitions for political power, social assistance interventions pursued are only limited to the ones the government is committed to. In highly competitive democracies however, where more than one dominant political collation have to compete for power (i.e. competitive clientelism), social assistance and welfare programmes become "incorporated as an element of the political survival strategies employed by domestic political elites to build regime legitimacy, secure political allegiance, or win over electoral support" (Hickey, Lavers, Niño-Zarazúa & Seekings, 2018, p.11).

Accordingly, in countries like Ghana that have highly competitive two-party systems, the political elites are likely to have substantial incentives for initiating welfare policies and programmes that either appeal to their constituents or likely to swing electoral votes in their favour (Abdulai &Hickey, 2016; Grebe, 2015). To the extent that this occurs, the establishment of welfare policies and programmes stand the risk of being initiated more for purposes of political patronage and seeking electoral legitimacy, than for their inherent normative outcomes. The evidence from this literature feeds into the larger argument about the politicization of public goods provisions within the Ghanaian partisan-politic, where the establishment and continuous implementation of major welfare programmes like the National Health Insurance Scheme

(NHIS), the Ghana School Feeding Programme (SFP) and social cash-transfer programmes have largely been the outcome of campaign promises undertaken by the two major political parties (Abdulai &Hickey, 2016; Ayee, 2011). It is possible, therefore, to make the assumption that any attempt to understand the concept of 'free' behind the FCUBE and the free SHS policies, and how they how they emerged as defined solutions for Ghana's basic education, cannot be complete without also taking into account the political environment underlying their creation.

In such a competitive and partisan political climate, fundamental social services like basic education and their associated costs, thus become important political incentives for determining what solutions are available, and what policy options are deemed as probable solutions. The implementation of such proposed solutions, as emphasized by Wildavsky (1979), eventually tends to create new set of issues, and thereby ensures that public problems are never completely solved. This behaviour is clearly reflected in the FCUBE policy, which promised to deliver a free universal basic education to all Ghanaian children within 10 years of implementation. With more than two decades into its operationalization, studies (Acheampong 2009, World Bank, 2011 & Nudzor, 2013) have shown how difficult it has been for successive governments to still deliver the universal intent of the FCUBE programme, even though subsidiary programmes like the Capitation Grant have been established to accelerate the attainment of the FCUBE (Achempong). After the post-2005 time line, policy attention regarding the FCUBE was subsequently redirected to the Millennium Development Goals 2 (i.e. achieving universal primary education by 2015), in a quest to fulfilling the dreams of the FCUBE (Gaddah et al., 2015). In 2016, with the inauguration of the post-2015 global development agenda: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the Government of Ghana again, shifted its policy focus to achieving goal 4 of the SDG. That is, ensuring inclusive and quality education for all (UNCG, 2017).

The broader picture evidenced here is to understand universality as a political tool used by governing elite to achieve a political interest. Shrouding the FCUBE within the context of universality, presents the country in the international context as having universal education. At the domestic front, however, it has served at least, as a tool for securing electoral legitimacy on the grounds that, it presents both the ruling and opposition parties a justifiable theme to continually explain to the electorate their position on fulfilling a universal basic education to all children (Taylor, 2017). This becomes nothing more than employing universality to achieve a

political purpose, a phenomena which perhaps, underscores the very reason why the act of defining solutions and the manner in which particular solutions gain priority continues to be a hidden aspect of the policy making cycle. This perspective will be totally missed, if one is to only take into consideration the logical interaction between a well formulated policy, an effective implementation strategy and the fiscal capacity needed to push implementation through. At best, one is only likely to fall into the rationalist trap of pointing to any of the above interactions (i.e. formulation, implementation and finance) to explain the failures of the FCUBE policy in delivering the intended universal access.

5.0 What lessons does the analysis of FCUBE offer for implementing and sustaining a free SHS policy?

While basic education, from policy perspective, has been defined as free and compulsory for all children of school-going age, secondary education still has fees attached, and enrolment is limited by tuition costs, particularly for eligible/qualified students from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds. In recent times though, a system of limited partial scholarship is offered to particular population groups deemed eligible for secondary school enrolment (Duflo, Dupas & Kremer, 2017). This notwithstanding, literature shows that Ghana's gross enrolment rate in secondary schools is about two times lower than the gross enrolment in primary schools (World Bank, 2014, p. 3; Iddrisu, Danquah & Quartey, 2017). A World Bank official report (2014) on a secondary education improvement project in Ghana for instance, indicated that the gross enrolment rate for SHS in Ghana has hovered around 36%, while the Education For All (EFA) national review report on Ghana also indicates about 43% enrolment rate for the 2014-2014 year (EFA, 2014). Closely related to this is also the fact that about three-fourth of youth either do not have the required qualifications to enter SHS or are unable to afford the cost of moving to schools where they are placed by the Computerized School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS) (World Bank, 2014, p. 2). In attempt to making secondary education free and universal for all eligible students, discussions surrounding financing for secondary education rose to become a key political and election campaign in Ghana's past elections.

Figure 3.0 SHS enrolment trends in Ghana

Table 1: Enrollment trends in SHS			
SHS Enrolment	2008/09	2010/11	2012/13
GER	33.9	36.5	36.8
NER	17.7	24.3	23.6
Enrolment	490,334	728,076	842,587
Transition rate from JHS3 to SHS1	47.2	57.3	61.2
% of pupils in private education	10.0	8.9	8.5
Source: 2013 ESPR (EMIS)			

Source: World Bank, 2014

During the 2016 national elections, the then incumbent National Democratic Congress (NDC) government's campaign promised, as they choose to call it, a "progressively free SHS" to give the country the needed time to addresses issues surrounding infrastructure and quality. At the same time, then opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP) sturdily believed the country had the capacity to undertake immediate implementation of the free SHS. As such, the opposition NPP promised to redefine basic education to include senior high school (SHS), covering Technical and Vocational Educational Training (TVET) schools, and making it available and immediately fee-free for all qualified candidates (Fusheini, Adam, Kuyole, Ibrahim-Tanko and & Bekoe, 2017). The stern competition between the two parties in the run up to the elections, thus problematized universal education within the context of secondary education delivery in Ghana, and therefore created a politicized context within which solutions would be defined. By seeking to problematize secondary education delivery, the idea of offering a fee-free and universal secondary education was thus politically elevated into an incremental versus immediate-action policy intervention, requiring voters to have the final verdict on Election Day. From a public policy perspective, this incremental-transformative debate on how to respond to a proposed free

and universal secondary education, appeared as though it were the outcome of a well-designed programmatic policy proposals from both political parties. From a purely political lens however, one could also classify these contestations as mere electoral promises designed to whip up electoral vote, as neither party had come up with details of any programmatic plan, cost or draft proposals informing the implementation of the policy (Tylor, 2017).

The general elections was comfortable won by the opposition NPP, and with almost a year into assuming office, the new government gave a directive for the enrolment of the new SHS programme as promised during their election campaign. Though government redeemed its promise by beginning the implementation phase of the fee SHS policy (Agyeman & Andoh, 2017), the writing on the wall does little to suggest that a repetition of the FCUBE implementation process will be avoided. In the first place, even though initial implementation was only limited to incoming first year students, the initial implementation has been hit by challenges such as inadequate infrastructure and educational facilities, as well as concerns over the delivery of equitable and quality education to all students . Secondly, setbacks relating to financing has emerged, perhaps, as the biggest test in the implementation of the policy. The situation has become complicated by these challenges, especially when one takes into consideration the additional costs that would be incurred with the enrolment of new students for the second consecutive year. Already, the government has proposed donations from individual citizens to help support the implementation of the free SHS policy (Kuzordzi, 2017).

These signs, challenges the sustainability of the universal intent of the free SHS policy and its ability to create equitable opportunities for secondary education, particularly for children from poor and remote settings. The initial signs speak much about the nature of preparations and research that went into the development and formulation of a policy of such immense national significance, as well as the government's readiness for its implementation. The manner in which the free SHS proposal emerged as a policy solution to secondary education also brings into the discussion questions surrounding the motivations behind what political actors define as solutions in addressing identified problems. And specific to this paper, key questions such as: how was free SHS as a solution defined and what is free in this new policy? How did this solution become a government priority? And what caused their desire to take responsibility in pursuing it? These

remains important analysis that ought to be conducted, moving into the next phase of the free SHS policy implementation.

6.0 Conclusion

By exploring the universal deficits in Ghana's basic education polices from a non-rational conceptual perspective, this paper identifies two inherent features of the policies that explain the tension between universality and access. First, the absence of universality as a guiding administrative principle in the implementation of basic education policies (Stefánsson, 2012; Anttonen et al., 2012). And second, the increasing usage of universality as a toll for pursuing political interest. I present the argument that universality, as an entitlement philosophy, should not only influence policy conception and formulation, but also importantly, needs to reflect the product, implementation and performance phases of policy. Similarly, universality as an entitlement philosophy, needs to be employed as the central administrative principle (Anttonen & Sipilä, 2014) in implementing Ghana's basic education policies and programmes. In doing this, the institutional and administrative structures responsible for implementation needs to take cognisance of how the poorest in the remotest areas of the country could be reached to fulfil a fee-free and compulsory basic education for all. Finally, universality demands a strong political commitment backed by concrete financial plans to deliver universal access.

As it stands now, the implementation of universal education policies as solutions to both access and inequity in educational delivery, is inspired by the partisan political incentives of the governing elite. This behaviour, compromises not only on what really needs to be done to fulfil universal access, it also ensures that problems surrounding access ever really disappears. Operating under the pretext of universality in this context, also confines public analysis of policy failures to a rational interactionist perspective, which serves the political purpose of the governing elite - by keeping the failures of policy to be primarily a resource, formulation, strategic planning, or implementation problem (O'Cunnor and Netting, 2011; Nudzor, 2013). The policy goal of attaining universal access in basic education cannot be achieved through such a limited rationalist understanding of the policy process, especially as evidenced in the current status-quo. Government needs to pay close attention to the issues highlighted above in guiding

its educational policy implementation, while ensuring that universal solutions have the capacity to remove the bottlenecks of access.

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