

Politics



“The trick is to enjoy life. Don't wish away your days, waiting for better ones ahead.”

—Marjorie Pay Hinckley, Author



• FLASHBACK: President Akufo-Addo (right) and Vice-President Bawumia during the launch of the Free SHS policy

IEA survey... IEA survey... IEA survey...

Imperatives of secondary education

• Free or quality?

THE New Patriotic Party (NPP) may have won the 2016 election with its Free Senior High School (SHS) promise, but a significant number of Ghanaians still prefer quality to free education.

More than 15 months after the electorate settled the matter in the ballot box, and seven months into the implementation of the policy by the Akufo-Addo administration, the debate on whether priority attention should be given to free SHS or quality education still rages.

Public opinion, as confirmed in a recent survey conducted by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), tilts towards free SHS, with half of the respondents expecting the government to implement the policy in 2017, its first year of office.

The government has already met that expectation, having rolled out the free SHS programme last September, as it works out plans to improve the implementation process in the subsequent academic year.

But a significant number of Ghanaians, particularly tertiary education graduates, still believe improving quality education will serve the nation's interest better than providing free education.

“About the same proportion of tertiary education holders [as those who prefer free SHS] believe that quality education should be given more priority than free SHS,” according to the IEA survey on “Ghanaians’ expectations from the new government” which was conducted in March 2017.

Objective of study

The survey sought to gauge the delivery of the many promises made by the ruling party to the electorate in the 2016 election campaign and the priorities that must engage the attention of the government.

Specifically, it focuses on citizens' expectations of the new government in respect of providing free SHS, improving the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), creating more jobs, managing the rising cost of utilities, dealing with crime, and combating corruption.

Nationally representative sample of 1,641 mobile phone users were interviewed for the survey using the Random Digit Dialing (RDD) technology.

Quality education

The Akufo-Addo administration rolled out the Free SHS policy on

September 12, 2017, with funding being one of the critical resources needed to ensure the success of the initiative.

The Vice-President, Dr Mahamudu Bawumia, has underlined the government's commitment to finding resources to sustain an estimated GHe1 trillion “well thought-through” and “priority programme” of the government next academic year, beginning September 2018.

The Free SHS programme may succeed in increasing enrolment at the secondary level but it may yield no value for the beneficiaries and the nation as a whole if it overrides quality. That is the crux of the matter!

Although majority of Ghanaians (51.9 per cent), as indicated in the IEA survey, support the Free SHS programme, a significant number of them (34.3 per cent) want the government to give priority attention to quality education, by placing the teacher at the centre of delivery.

This means the quality of teacher training must be enhanced in order to improve the professionalism of teachers and quality of their delivery in the classroom. It also means

motivating teachers, especially those providing service in rural communities, in diverse ways to give their optimum.

Regional interests

The implementation of the Free SHS programme is nationwide. But the findings of the IEA survey strongly suggest the need for disaggregation of priorities in the implementation process.

Respondents in the three regions in the northern part of the country (Northern, Upper East and Upper West), for instance, are more interested in quality education than free SHS. That is so because they already enjoy free education.

It is, therefore, important for the government to channel resources at improving quality education in those regions rather than focusing attention on something that is already in existence.

On the flip side, it is quite understandable that respondents in the other regions are more interested in free SHS than quality education, given the fact that the Free SHS programme will ease financial burden on them.

However, there is the need for the government to also give priority attention to quality education in the implementation of the Free SHS programme.

Whether the focus is on the implementation of free SHS or provision of quality education, the underlying factor of success, which the government must deal with squarely, is the availability of funds and fiscal discipline.

In the three regions in the northern part of the country, which already enjoy free education at the secondary level, the success of the programme has often been challenged by late release of funds to schools. If that financial approach is maintained under the current dispensation, it would seriously undermine the success of the Free SHS programme.

Overall, there is a need for the government to ensure fiscal discipline in the implementation of the Free SHS programme and also focus on improving quality for the ultimate good of the country.

Quick Read

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