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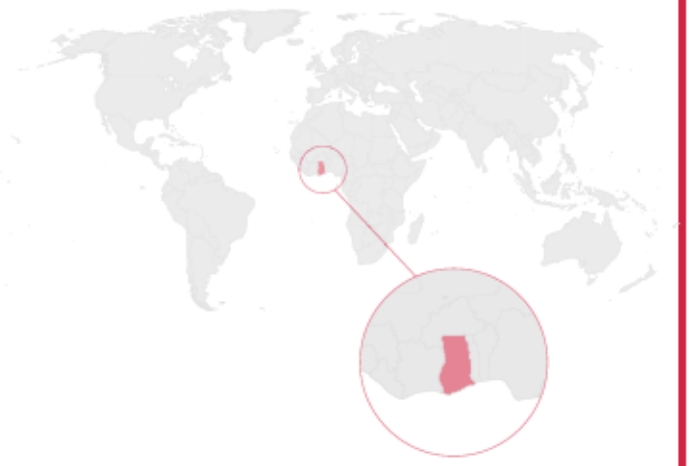

David Krogmann

Education Policy in Ghana – A Model Case for Development?

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Content

Country Map . . . 3
1. Introduction . . . 3
2. History . . . 4
3. Ghana's education system today . . . 5
4. Education finance . . . 6
5. Current challenges . . . 8
6. Inclusiveness and scope of service . . . 9
7. Global Transformations . . . 11
8. IOs and the influence of international actors . . . 11
   a. Global IOs: . . . 12
   b. Regional IOs . . . 13
9. Synthesis . . . 13
10. Conclusion . . . 14
References . . . 15

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Country Map

Source: https://ontheworldmap.com/ghana/ (Accessed June 10, 2024)

1. Introduction[1]

This paper illuminates how different developments in Ghana's national education system are related to global transformations in international politics, such as the rise and fall of various forms of political and economic socialism as well as decolonization. To do so, it traces education policy in Ghana regarding four dimensions. First, it examines the development of Ghana's education system over time and summarizes the status quo of said system. Second, it analyses how Ghana's colonial past as well as its short phase under a socialist government have influenced its education system. Third, it illuminates international influences from actors such as IOs and development aid organizations on education policy. Finally, it relates these findings to the inclusiveness and the scope of

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service of Ghanaian education policy as defined above. It does so by relying on qualitative content analysis of 20 selected policy documents as well as two semi-structured expert interviews. The documents were sampled from the Government of Ghana (GoG), the Ministry of Education (MoE) and different international organizations working in Ghana. The interviews were conducted in November 2023.

2. History

The roots of Ghana's current education system can be traced back all the way to the colonial era. Although Ghana's colonial history spans hundreds of years, its existence as a crown colony under British colonial rule is by far the most relevant to its current education system. Until 1874, three main avenues for the education of children can be distinguished, namely indigenous, localized education of various kinds, colonial and castle schools which mainly educated the children of the local elite, and education at missionary schools founded by Christian missionaries, mainly stemming from Switzerland's Basel Mission during the 19th century. Historically, part of the appeal of converting to Christianity was to have access to missionary schools. These latter schools presumably represent the first instances of teaching at schools in a more formalized and Western way, relying on a given curriculum and producing comparable results (Boadu 2021). Of course, it must be noted that the aims and objectives of these schools were rather heterogenous. What would today be considered the public schooling system was very limited to non-existent for the average colonial subject, and schools were very much "private" in today's common denomination. For missionary schools especially, the raison-de-etre was less to provide education in any post-enlightenment sense of the word, but to spread and foster Christianity in West Africa. Therefore, if they were combatting illiteracy, it was mostly a means to an end – illiterate Christians would not be able to read the Gospel. Naturally, religious studies were disproportionately taught and emphasized at these schools (Amenumey 2008).

In 1874, Ghana became a crown colony and fell under British rule. This most recent colonial period would last until Ghana's official independence in 1957, and in many ways laid the foundation for much of Ghana's education system today, while at the same time institutionalizing conflicts between colonial centers and periphery which still echo to this day. During the British colonial era, English became both the main official language and the language in which children were taught from primary school onwards. As with many other aspects of life under colonial rule, access to education, and especially quality education, was provided unequally. While colonial elites, such as the children of wealthy traders, officials in the colonial administration, or local leaders and chiefs, had access to colonial and castle schools, most of the population lacked access to basic education insofar as it went beyond what was considered necessary for colonial subjects. At the same time, a number of higher education institutions which still exist to this day were founded under colonial rule, such as the Accra College of Education in 1902 and the University of Ghana (formerly University College of the Gold Coast) in 1948.

In 1957, Ghana officially gained its independence from Great Britain under prime minister Kwame Nkrumah. Nkrumah, who went on to become Ghana's first president after a referendum in 1960, enacted several policies to transform Ghana from a colonial economy based mainly on the export of Cocoa and related products to an industrialized nation. Like many other African leaders of this period, Nkrumah was a socialist and saw Western colonialism and imperialism as a blight upon the African continent. A socialist economic system, he hoped, would be able to quickly propel Ghana's economy through a series of five-year plans. While these policies saw varying success, they had far-reaching implications for Ghana's education system. For one, and in stark contrast to previous colonial attitudes towards education for all, educated workers were now seen as a prerequisite for economic success. In 1961, Ghana thus introduced the first Education Act, which formally established access to universal basic education (UBE) for children in primary and middle school. Previously, in 1958, it had already set up a trust fund for education to finance the foundation of secondary schools throughout the country. It had also founded the National Teacher Training Council, which still exists today as the National Teaching Council (NTC) (Adu-Gyamfi, Donkoh, and Addo 2016). There was thus a lot of movement in the education sector in the early days of the Republic of Ghana, and government priorities favoured education over other policy fields as one of the key components of Ghana's envisioned rise. The Amissah committee, which was set up as an advisory body on education policy in the 1960s continued this trend. In an influential report from 1965, the committee recommended a practical basic education focused on vocational skills, which would allow Ghanaians to participate in the industrial workforce of a modern economy. The committee thereby solidified the institutionalization of the idea that quality education was a prerequisite for an industrial society. However, political developments in Ghana

would soon start to disfavour education policy, and "poor planning, inadequate resources and implementation challenges were largely responsible for the failure of the [Amissah committee's] scheme" (Avotri 2015, 153).

Between 1967 and 1981, there was a series of military coups in Ghana, during which power changed hands a few times. While these turbulent years saw various undertakings in education policy, such as the Educational Review Committee in 1973, such efforts were naturally carried out under less-than-ideal circumstances. The Ghanaian education system was thus in disarray during these years, and it took until the later 1980s to show significant improvements again. Jerry John Rawlings seized government in 1981. The Rawlings regime was authoritarian and militarist, but it was also in need of quick economic and political success to legitimize its rule. In a (for an authoritarian government) rather unusual step, it set out to largely decentralize administration, installing local government bodies with the so-called People's Defence Committees, but ultimately failing to properly localize bureaucracy due to perceived resistance by many of its bureaucratic elites (Ayee 1997). For education policy, this again meant challenges in planning, funding, but especially in implementation. These challenges presumably gave the impetus for what would become Ghana's first major education reform after its independence, namely the Evans-Anfom reform of 1987. Named after Ghana's special commissioner for education, Emmanuel Evans-Anfom, this set of policies reduced the length of pre-tertiary education to 12 years, establishing a 6-3-3 system for primary school (six years), junior secondary school (three years), and senior secondary school (three years). This system is still in place in Ghana today, with tertiary education typically lasting four to five years for bachelor's and master's degrees. The reform also replaced the traditional curriculum "with an integrated curriculum that emphasized a child-centered inquiry approach to teaching and learning" (Avotri 2015, 154), while retaining a focus on vocational, agricultural, and technical skills.

In 1992, Ghana held democratic elections for the first time since Rawlings took power. While it remains questionable to what extent the 1992 election was free and fair, as Rawlings' grip on the media and public perception proved difficult to compete with for competing parties, the 1996 election alleviated many of these concerns. Ghana's transition to democracy is therefore often seen as a model case in democratization for both African development and development policy in general (Interview 2 on Ghana, 2023). Between the Evans-Anfom commission and these democratization efforts, the period from the late 1980s to the early 2000s was one of significant development efforts that also targeted education policy. Three strategic objectives were especially prioritized by Ghanaian policy makers in the Ministry of Education (MoE). As Nudzor (2014, 1) summarizes, these were "improving access to and participation in basic education, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and improving the management efficiency of the education sector." The MoE also set out to implement a range of international agreements during this timeframe, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Declaration on Education for All, the Beijing Declaration on Women's Rights, the Lome Convention, and the Dakar Framework for Action (which would become the Millenium Development Goals) (Nudzor 2014).

The most important result of this period of development in Ghana's education sector was the final establishment of nationally provided free compulsory universal basic education from 1996 onwards, which was enabled by the constitutional reform of 1992. In another attempt of decentralizing the administration of education, the MoE declared implementing a more localized approach to education its fourth core objective in 1997. However, in retrospect, "a critical assessment of education policy in Ghana [...] suggests in rather stark terms that [...] education policy making and implementation is still perceived as adopting a hierarchical structure with its inherent practice of concentration of power at the center." (Nudzor 2014, 2).

After the turn of the millennium, the so-called Review of Education reforms in 2002 led to yet another set of educational reforms from 2007 on. As an interviewee pointed out, this suggests that some aspects of Ghanaian education policy are subject to a lot of change depending on political constellations, and are therefore more contested rather than technocratic. However, this 2002 reform is still very influential in the education system today and widely regarded as the most important historical reform in Ghanian education policy (Interview 1 on Ghana, 2023).

3. Ghana's education system today

These historical influences leave Ghanaian education with a number of important structural set-ups and challenges. This section will briefly illuminate some key data in this regard, starting with the schooling system.

Five levels of education can be distinguished. First, there are various pre-school options for children younger than six, but access may vary between urban centers and rural areas, as well as between different economic groups. For schooling, Ghana follows a 6-3-3 system, in which primary school is six years, junior high is three years, and senior high school is another three years long. After school, four to six years of Bachelor and Master programmes in tertiary education are common.

In addition to these public schools, there is also a large private schooling sector, the first examples for which were the aforementioned Christian missionary schools in the 18th century. Today, there are two types of private schools, namely local private schools (modelled on Ghanian system and following Ghana's national curriculum) and private international schools (modelled on other state's education system, e.g. French, German, British). Private schools are generally located in urban centers. In 2008-2009, 30% of schools were private. Private schools are mostly self-funded and registered by the Ghana Education Service (GES), relying also on the general Ghanaian curriculum provided by the GES. Despite being for-profit institutions, not all private schools are prohibitively expensive. There are low-fee private schools, especially Christian and Islamic religious schools in cities. However, especially tertiary education is increasingly privatized since the introduction of cost sharing and tuition fees.

In general, tertiary education has seen a significant upwards trend. Between 2004 and 2010 the number of public and private tertiary institutions in Ghana increased massively, as total student enrolment went up by a factor of 13, from 14.500 students to over 150.000 (World Bank 2011).

Education policy, on the other hand, is implemented on four levels: national level, regional level, district level and school level. The main actors in policy planning are the Ministry of Education (MoE), the Ghana Education Service (GES), the Curriculum Research Development Division (CRDD), the National Inspectorate Board (NIB), the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), and the National Teaching Council (NTC). An interesting peculiarity in Ghana is the role of its local chiefs. The chieftaincy system, in which traditional leaders in rural areas govern highly localized communities, is supported by Ghana's very constitution (Boafo-Arthur 2003). The chiefs also have their own federal government body, the National House of Chiefs. While many chiefs have resisted reforming education in the past, individual chiefs have recognized the potential of and demand for quality education for all, and have started to develop ways to foster education in their communities. In fact, this holds true for development policy in general:

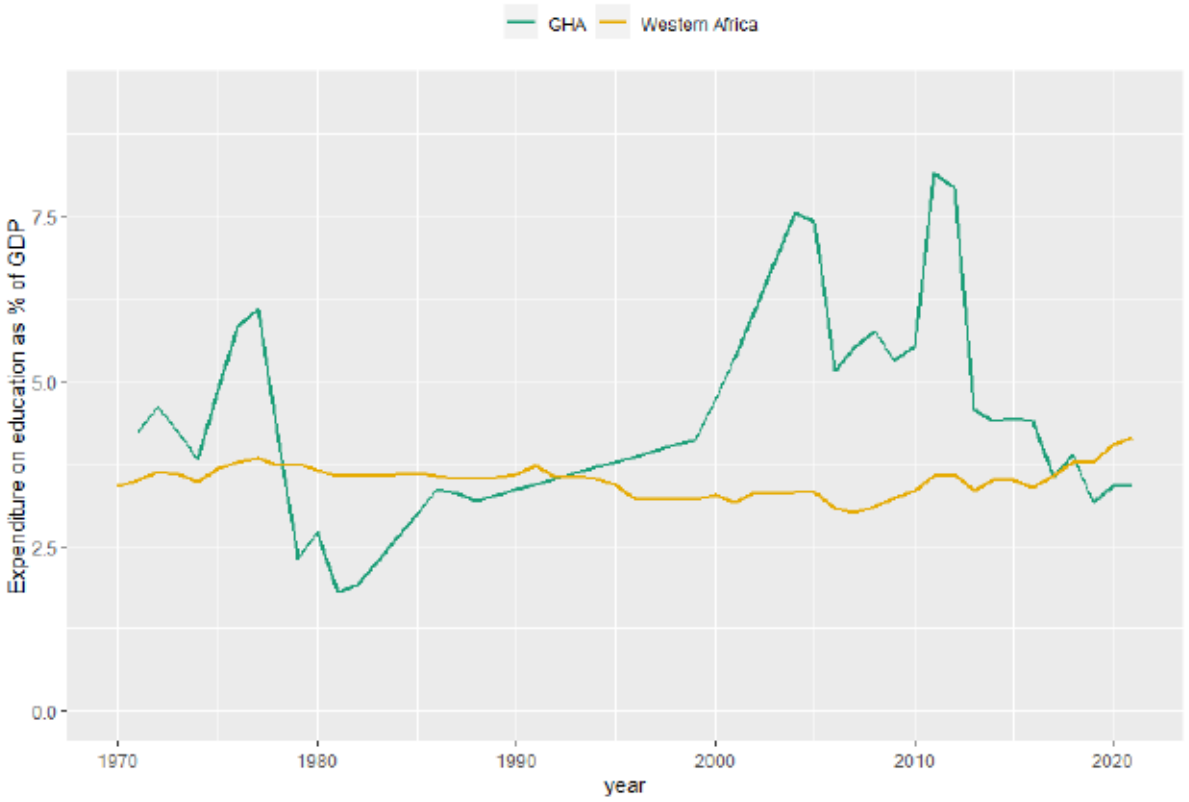
> The chieftains previously their message [sic!] was that their money, money from the palace is not for development. If we want development, we should go to the government because that is where we pay our taxes. [...] Now some are going to school and they see that they are ready to champion the cause of education (Interview 1 on Ghana, 2023, p. 11).

4. Education finance

Ghana currently spends about 3% of its GDP, or about 12-14% of its annual government expenditure, on education, which is in line with World Bank recommendations. As figure 1 shows, this percentage share has been falling since 2012, in part due to Ghana's economic growth rates in that same period. As Figure 2 shows, the trend is similar for government expenditure on education as a share of total government expenditure.

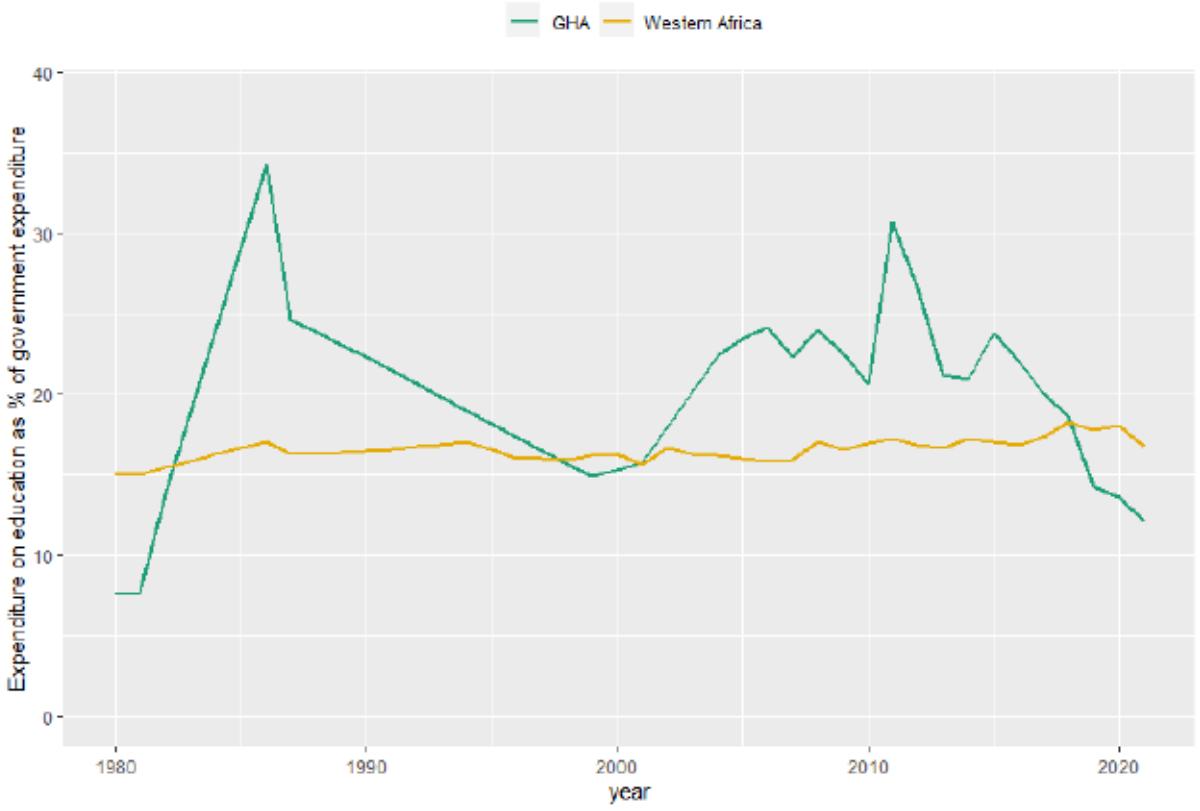
However, in absolute terms, government expenditure on education has, on average, increased steadily between 2004 and 2018, the latest year for which aggregate data are available (see figure 3). In comparison to other countries in the region, Ghana's expenditure on education is thus rather substantial. It also relies less on international funding than many of its peers, although a number of international actors contribute to the funding of education, such as the World Bank, USAID and the EU. Interestingly, there seems to be some divergence in views on external funding for education policy. For instance, a former World Bank official stated that funding was the least important part of the bank's work in Ghana, simply because the Ghanaian budget is comparably so large that funding by the bank could only ever amount to a miniscule fraction of it (Interview 2 on Ghana, 2023). On the other hand, some Ghanaian scholars and practitioners in education policy seem to regard international funding as crucial for the success of Ghana's education system (Interview 1 on Ghana, 2023).

Figure 1. Ghana's government expenditure on education, total (% of GDP)



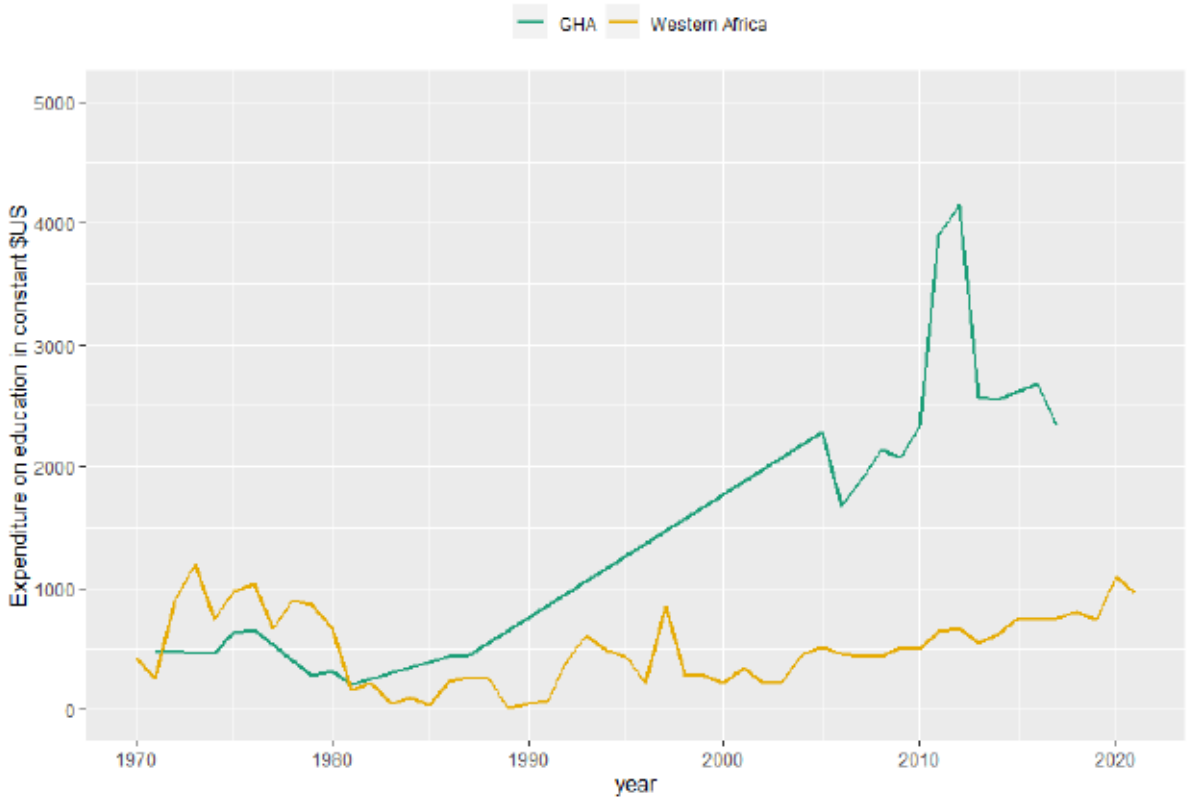
Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2024

Figure 2. Ghana's government expenditure on education, total (% of government expenditure)



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2024

Figure 3. Ghana's government expenditure on education, in million USD



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2024

5. Current challenges

Despite positive trends, Ghana's education system also has some persistent problems. These can be broken down into five core dimensions, namely: 1) a lack of schools and infrastructure, 2) insufficient retention of students (particularly girls), 3) limited budget and funding, leading to; 4) underpaid teachers, and 5) a curriculum which is seen as too broad and not adapted to local needs (Eshun 2015). More recently, there have also been concerns around rising graduate unemployment rates, as well as a large discrepancy between educational policy planning and implementation.

The lack of schools and infrastructure pertains to both primary and secondary education, but especially to the high school system. As for basic education, "generally speaking, indicators of access at the basic education level have improved considerably, but there are still large inequities by income, region, location (rural-urban) and gender" and "gross enrolment rates exceed 100% for kindergarten and primary and are over 85% for Junior High School" (Ministry of Education Ghana 2018, 7). Regarding the high school level specifically, the MoE (2018) notes that, while access to secondary education has improved, "textbook-student ratios have declined substantially since 2011/2012 [...]. There is also a need for investment in infrastructure to address increasing student to classroom ratios, which reached 48 in 2016/17, despite the much lower student-teacher ratios [...]" (Ministry of Education Ghana 2018, 7).

These challenges feed into the insufficient retention of students. For instance, the transition rate between junior high school and senior high school has improved to 68% in 2016/17, "but there are substantial inequities in access across wealth quintiles: those coming from the poorest 20% of households, the most deprived districts, and/or from rural areas are about five to six times less likely to access SHS" (Ministry of Education Ghana 2018, 7). Only 27% of students from the lowest income quintile complete the lower secondary education level (UNICEF 2022). Although specific data are scarce, these numbers are likely worse when adjusted for gender, with retention being lower among girls.

One of the premier obstacles in removing these challenges remains the limited budget and funding for education policy. While Ghana's government expenditure on the education sector has been rising in absolute terms, it has declined in relative terms (see figures 1, 2 and 3). Per student, education expenditure has indeed reached new lows for primary and secondary education. At the same time, questions regarding the affordability of free compulsory education have become more relevant for the average Ghanaian, as students are still obligated to provide many school-related items themselves, such as school uniforms or text books. Indeed, in a joint statement from 2022, the government and UNICEF considered Ghana's educational budget to be "woefully inadequate considering the enormous challenges such as inadequate textbooks and other learning materials" (UNICEF 2022, 3). In a similar trend, private schools have grown ever more popular for those who can afford them, since they are often seen as providing a better education than state-funded public schools. As Eshun (2015, 174) notes, "Private education is as old as the introduction of education in Ghana. What is new is that to get a good basic education means attending a private school." This also further drives inequality between urban centers and rural periphery, as private schools are rarely available or affordable in more rural areas.

Lastly, there are concerns about the discrepancy between educational planning and implementation on the ground, especially in rural areas, both regarding curriculum development as well as access to education in general. One major problem in this regard according to practitioners is the lack of continuity in educational planning between different governments. As one interviewee states,

> It is not that we don't have the expertise, we have some level of expertise. I will not say we have the high-level expertise, but some level of expertise, some are professors, some are doctors. They can do things. But there is too much of the political hand involved. (Interview 1 on Ghana, 2023, p. 2). [...] some aspects of the policy or the educational reform are [always] changing. For instance, the number of years a student must spend in school, it became highly political [...] students spent four years in school, three years in school, it became so political that whoever comes after four years changes it to three years. Then another person will come and change it back to four years. And then change it back to three years and so on (Interview 1 on Ghana, 2023, p. 3).

Such rapid changes of educational core systems may naturally be detrimental to educational outcomes.

6. Inclusiveness and scope of service

This section examines the inclusiveness as well as the scope of service of the Ghanaian education system in more detail. It seeks to assess which particularly vulnerable social groups can be distinguished and along which social cleavages they are separated, how these groups are supported or excluded by the education system, and how digitalization efforts in education policy may deepen or alleviate issues of inclusiveness and scope of service. The idea of inclusive education has seen some development over time in Ghana. The 2008 Education Act defines it as:

> The value system, which holds that all persons who attend an educational institution, are entitled to equal access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their education, which transcend the idea of physical location, but incorporates the basic values that promote participation, friendship and interaction (UNESCO 2021, 1).

The 2015 Inclusive Education Act updated this definition to a more concise and more encompassing definition, where inclusive education refers to "accommodating all children in schools regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions" (Government of Ghana 2015a, 24). It also explicitly mentions children from remote or nomadic populations as well as ethnic or cultural minorities.

Special attention is given to gender parity, which has been one of the key objectives of Ghanaian education policy for some time, and seems to be ingrained in its development philosophy. As one interviewee puts it, "One of our forefathers said that if you educate a man, you educate an individual. But when you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation, a whole family for development. [...] so there has been a lot of drive to do that" (Interview 1 on Ghana, 2023). Reliable data on adequate measures of gender parity in education, such as female enrolment rates or female literacy are not readily available, since there are a lot of data gaps for singular years or extended periods. However, what is available suggests that Ghana is underperforming regarding compara-

ble lower middle-income countries in adult female literacy, but overperforming in net female enrolment rates. For instance, in 2019, Ghana had a net enrolment rate of 87% for female children in primary school, compared to 86% for males (World Bank 2024a, 2024d). At the same time, the youth literacy rates are roughly on par, with 94% of males and 93% of females aged 15-24 being literate as of 2020 (World Bank 2024e). However, the adult literacy rates still show a significant discrepancy, with 84% of adult males and 76% of adult females being literate (World Bank 2024b, 2024c). This may be indicative of a lag between the implementation of policies aimed at gender parity and the targeted outcomes. It may also be indicative of cultural factors which may hinder the inclusion of women and girls in some societal groups:

> Due to the patriarchal structure of most societies in Ghana, systemic male domination and female subordination, socio-cultural and discriminatory institutions and structures restrict women (including the marginalized and the vulnerable) from access to equal opportunities including productive resources, such as land, credit, education and training opportunities among other support systems. (Government of Ghana 2015b, 16).

In some regions, these structures are reinforced by customs and traditions. Influential traditional authorities still limit gender parity in accord with perceived cultural roots and local traditions, including but not limited to access to education. Recently, the government has recognized this more explicitly:

> Traditional authorities especially queen-mothers and female chiefs play a vital role in what is culturally acceptable [...] [the Government of Ghana] will work with them to codify negative cultural practices and laws that infringe upon the rights of women and see to the abolishment of such practices and laws (Government of Ghana 2015b, 42).

These factors also feed into and reinforce inequalities between different strata of Ghanaian society, especially the divide between urban centers and rural areas. In reference to the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Exam WASSCE, the MoE states that:

> Gender disparities in performance, to the detriment of girls, exist across all regions for maths, science, and social studies, and, in the three northern regions, for English as well. At the school level, there are large disparities even within the same region: in some schools, nearly 100% of students achieve grades of A1 to C6, and in others 0% do so (Ministry of Education Ghana 2018, 7).

Refugees and ethnic minorities are not a hugely relevant issue. Although lots of refugees came during the 1990s as a consequence of instabilities in the surrounding region, their integration was "not difficult at all" (Interview 1 on Ghana, 2023). In fact, "integration [of ethnic minorities] with a few exceptions was not an issue. The social constraint was much more important than the ethnic constraint" (Interview 2 on Ghana, 2023, p. 4).

Similar to many other countries of its income range or indeed, many countries of much higher economic development as well, Ghana has struggled to digitalize its education system. While digitalization could help alleviate many of the challenges that its education system faces, it is also costly and requires a lot of expertise and planning, as well as sufficient funding. At present, digitalization also seems to be an afterthought in official education policies. None of the documents reviewed for this case study allocate significant space to issues of digitalization. Very recently however, this attitude seems to have changed. As Mahamudu Bawumia, vice president under the current government (as of 2024), said in an interview in 2023:

> We came to the conclusion that digitalisation was the best way to get inclusion in society and that we could leverage technology to address many issues. You are able to bring in efficiency in the delivery of public services, you are able to reduce corruption, you are able to increase access [to the poorest]. Historically the elites have generally been the beneficiaries of the inefficiencies that have come through since independence. For me and for us, digitalisation is a way of lifting up the poor to participate fully in society. (Ben Yedder, August 01, 2023).

While such statements connect digitalization with greater parity in education, digitalization remains difficult in practice. Since the infrastructure is often lacking and there is little competition among internet service providers, internet access is expensive, sometimes prohibitively so, and often unreliable in many regions. Again, this reinforces inequalities present in the education system, since privileged strata of the population will also have access to better internet or can afford a connection in the first place.

7. Global Transformations

This section covers how large-scale global transformations in decolonization and the socialist movement have influenced the education system of Ghana in general over time, as well as how they have affected coverage and scope of service, i.e. the "who gets what and to what extent" in Ghanaian education. Whereas remnants of Ghana's colonial history can still be found in almost all aspects of its education system, the short socialist phase under Kwame Nkrumah left almost no traces that would persist until today.

Colonialism is especially related to some of the challenges in education policy outlined above. This is also because the administration of education still relies on a system borrowed from the British, while being insufficiently adapted to the specific needs of Ghana. As one Ghanaian scholar notes:

> Whatever the colonial masters implemented is still with us in terms of the administration of schools. When you look at the administration of schools from primary to tertiary the way the system that they left behind, that system is still what we are using. The only thing that we have done is to add on to the system. But the system is still what we are using in terms of salary structure, in terms of salary implementation, in terms of work implementation and how to go about things in the educational system. [...] We have not completely thrown them overboard to pick our own system and our own ways going about things. (Interview 1 on Ghana, 2023, p. 7).

Since the language of instruction in Ghanaian schools is English, but many children grow up speaking only their native local language, like Ewe or Twi, they may struggle with the transfer from pre-school to primary school and therefore receive worse learning outcomes (Eshun 2015). The fact that grades 1-3 often use a mixed language format in which English teaching is supported by using the local languages does not always alleviate these problems. For how crucial the early years of schooling are, these challenges can persist far into an academic career for many children. Therefore, language barriers still stemming from colonialism may hinder inclusiveness. One interviewee recalls:

> I was teaching a [design] class to conceptualize and I was using my English language to explain. Now I wanted feedback from them about how they think and what they want to do. Out of a class of 100 only 5 people were using the English language to express and explain their concepts. The rest of the 95 wouldn't. I did all I could for almost two weeks [but] they were still creeping and hiding their thinking and creative mind until I said "Normally we are using English, today, for the sake of the class use the local language and explain your concept to me." (Interview 1 on Ghana, 2023 p. 8).

Interestingly, in all documents analysed for this paper, there were no explicit mentions of colonialism, while interviewees stressed its importance.

As for the short socialist phase in Ghana's independent history, there seems to be consensus that it did not leave any significant traces and does not hold particular relevance today (interviews 1 and 2 on Ghana, 2023). This contrasts with other country cases from the literature, where socialism had an influence on various indicators, such as gender parity or religious education (Dixon and Macarov 2016). Part of the reason for this absence is that the socialist government was rather short-lived and that it was Ghana's first government after formal independence (which meant that administration of various policy fields was still in its infancy). However, it could be argued that the value placed on access to basic education in Ghana, which was first introduced during the socialist phase, can be seen as a remnant from socialism. As workers' education was seen as prerequisite for industrialization, which was in turn prerequisite for a workers' state under a socialist economic model, Nkrumah's government put a lot of emphasis on education, especially vocational skills education, and training. This was a stark contrast to the previous colonial ideals on education. However, it remains questionable whether this change in attitudes was caused by socialism specifically, and was not just a by-product of political independence. After all, education is crucial for any independent national economy, be it socialist, capitalist or a mixed economy.

8. IOs and the influence of international actors

This section is concerned with the influence of IOs and other international actors on Ghanaian education policy. Next to IOs, it will mostly cover national development agencies, while disregarding NGOs and other non-state

actors. This is not to say that these actors do not play a role in Ghana. Rather, relations between nations and intergovernmental organisations are most likely to co-vary with global transformations in international politics, and are therefore more important to the purpose of this case study. In general, IOs may affect educational planning and policy making in national contexts through multiple vectors. IOs mobilize and disseminate knowledge and technical expertise (Niemann and Martens 2018), gather data (Martens and Niemann 2013), provide development funding (Jenks and Topping 2016), and create and reproduce norms and rules (Barnett and Finnemore 2004), as well as policy ideas (Zapp and Dahmen 2017; Swinkels 2020). Each of these vectors are relevant in the Ghanaian case.

a. Global IOs:

Large, globally active multilateral bureaucracies as well as national development agencies are probably the most influential international actors in Ghanaian development in general, and education policy specifically. Of the former, the "usual suspects" in UNESCO, UNICEF and the World Bank have been active in Ghana for decades. Of the latter, USAID and the DFID have contributed significantly, with the EU playing a major role as well.

Somewhat recently, the development architecture of the United Nations has seen an overhaul with the introduction of the sustainable development agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework, one of which is inclusive and equitable quality education for all (United Nations 2024). However, this infrastructure has been described as rather inconsequential by both scholars as well as practitioners (Biermann, Hickmann, and Sénit 2022). As implementation stagnates, it remains to be seen whether the SDG framework can achieve its rather ambitious objectives. It should thus not necessarily be treated as an influential factor in its own right in education policy, even though Ghana did sign the Incheon declaration for the implementation of sustainable education policy in 2015.

Producing, reproducing, and mobilizing policy knowledge and expertise is a large part of the work that international organizations do in education policy. This includes gathering and distributing educational data, such as performance indicators and large-scale assessments such as PISA or the WASSCE. It also includes best practices in educational planning, curriculum design, recommendations for educational spending, and many other aspects of education policy. For Ghana, there are numerous cases for this kind of international influence. First and foremost, the World Bank has acted a hub of policy knowledge, in line with its self-proclaimed role as the "Knowledge bank" (Mundy and Verger 2015). The influence of the World Bank has a lot of history, dating back to the mid-1980s. During the "neoliberal turn" in international education policy, the World Bank and the IMF were pushing for reduced public spending, privatization, and cost recovery in education, based on best practices that were supposed to enhance quality while cutting the costs of education overall (Eshun 2015). While the direct effects of this push are hard to quantify, these ideas presumably reinforced the turmoil of Ghana's education system under the Rawls regime. The World Bank typically works through a project-based approach, wherein it cooperates with national and local partners in various ways. Projects in Ghana have been diverse, ranging from nation-wide projects for the improvement of secondary education to very specific undertakings, such as local community empowerment projects. As radically different as these forms of government are, the World Bank has surprisingly even collaborated with the traditional chiefs in some regions as well, to the surprise of academic commentators. As Boafo-Arthur (2003, 149) notes, "It seems to me that this partnership is the first to be brokered between a traditional authority and the World Bank." World Bank officials have confirmed this novelty, also emphasizing the importance of local context and traditional roots for the success of educational projects, expressed for example in the World Bank's Traditional Authorities Project. As one official summarizes:

> Like the funding, the knowledge, and the know-how also have a very strong expiration date. And perhaps for sustainability's sake you really have to work on a scale that is relevant and sustainable in the local context. So no matter what kind of reforms and innovations you bring in, if it's not rooted in the local context then it's just abstract, academic and theoretical knowledge. (Interview 2 on Ghana, 2023 p. 6).

Through distributing knowledge, the World Bank has also contributed to the empowerment of women, showing how gender parity, achieved among other factors through quality education, can contribute to economic development in many ways (Anyidoho and Manuh 2010).

Naturally, the World Bank has also played a role in education funding. Although World Bank officials view direct funding as less important than other parts of its work, such as distributing expertise, it is still a crucial part of the World Bank's mandate. Ghana has been viewed as an exemplary case for the effective use of international aid among countries in the region since its democratization in the 1990s. This is because, in contrast to many of its peers, Ghana has not been involved in any internal struggles or outright wars for a long time, which means that it can better focus its efforts on successful development. This connection between peace and the efficacy of development aid has been referred to as the "peace dividend" in development policy (Interview 2 on Ghana, 2023). Ghana's government has recently attempted to diversify international funding for education further, seeking support for its long-term education plans. Thus,

> The MOE has actively engaged with a number of international organisations, which have made commitments [...] to support the education sector over the medium to long term. These include both traditional development partners as well as the potential for more co-financing, public-private partnerships, engagement with philanthropic organisations, and supporting NGOs and CSOs in education to seek additional resources to support the implementation of the ESP (Ministry of Education Ghana 2018, 88).

However, international development partners (DPs) only make up a fraction of Ghana's education budget. Between 2017 and 2022, DPs contributed about 4% of total education funding (UNICEF 2022). Of course, numbers do not always tell the whole story. IOs and other DPs can have significant impact through funding when they specifically target certain aspects of the receiving country. Other international actors which have been active in this regard include the EU, and national development agencies like the British DFID (which has recently been reformed into the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office), the German GIZ, and USAID.

Still, next to knowledge and expertise, the production and diffusion of policy ideas and norms is perhaps the most important vector of international influence (Verger 2023). This is especially true for influential global frameworks like Education for All. UNESCO and UNICEF have contributed significantly to the development of inclusive education in Ghana in this regard. For instance, Ghana's most recent education plan for 2018 - 2030 follows guidelines by UNESCO and the International Institute of Educational Planning (Ministry of Education Ghana 2018, 14).

b. Regional IOs

Interestingly, regional IOs do not seem to play a major part in Ghana. Contrary to other developing regions, such as South East Asia, regional integration in education policy is only in its infancy in West Africa. While the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has recently moved to establish its own education agency, thereby committing itself to further institutionalize education governance on the regional level (ECOWAS 2023), the future of this project remains questionable as of today. The African Union (AU) as the premier organization tasked with African regional integration has been plagued by issues of efficacy, funding and political direction for the last two decades, with economic development (and thus, education policy) as the weakest of its governance areas. Notably, there is a significant gap between frameworks and policies proposed by the AU, and what is actually implemented by its member states. This is especially true for complex issues like inclusion and access to basic education (Lang et al. 2019). Not unlike the EU, the AU has mostly targeted its efforts on the harmonization of higher education, also taking in expertise and inspiration from the Bologna process, which rather successfully harmonized higher education in Europe. Unlike the EU, however, African higher education institutions have not yet achieved a similar degree of harmonization and integration, and the higher education landscape remains fragmented (Woldegiorgis 2017). For Ghana, this means that its regional partners are less influential than its global DPs at present.

9. Synthesis

From a historical point of view, Ghana's education system has seen dramatic improvements over the past seven decades since its independence. Compared to its peers in the region, it has performed remarkably well in many

indicators, and is often seen as a model case for successful development. At the same time, inequalities reinforced through a number of both traditional and contemporary structures and processes are still very much present in its education system. These inequalities, although not atypical for lower middle-income countries, are often related to specificities of Ghana's very own history and colonial heritage, but also to its recent development success. They limit both de facto inclusiveness and coverage or scope of service at all levels of education, but especially so at the primary and secondary level. First, there is a significant discrepancy in quality and access to education between urban centers and rural periphery. Rural areas often show worse educational outcomes. Two other interconnected geographical cleavages lie between the Northern and the Southern regions of Ghana, as well as between coast and inland, with many of the urban centers like Accra being situated on the coastline. Finally, there are stark economic and social inequalities. While higher income families can afford quality private education, and often choose to do so, many children on the lower end of the income distribution receive poor education and often do not finish school. Women and girls are particularly affected by this dimension. These inequalities can also be mutually reinforcing. For instance, being born into a high-income family in an urban setting may alleviate some of the issues of gender parity for children. In turn, children in rural areas may suffer worse educational outcomes than children in urban areas regardless of gender or social status. Historical global transformations have played into these structures, or, in the case of colonialism, laid the foundation for some of them. While Ghana's socialist phase was too short to significantly impact education policy long term, remnants of colonialism still influence how Ghana's education system performs today. Local traditional structures may sometimes reinforce these struggles by placing emphasis on patriarchal values which run counter to those represented by government agencies and international partners. International actors have contributed to Ghana's education system in various ways. IOs such as the World Bank and UNICEF have provided funding, knowledge and expertise, as well as normative ideas on how education policy should be pursued. Inclusive education frameworks are an example of this influence.

10. Conclusion

This paper has examined the development and status quo of Ghana's education system regarding its inclusiveness and scope of service towards social groups. It has also related this development to historical global transformations on the one hand, and international influences through actors such as IOs or national development agencies on the other. It is important to note that this paper has not covered the systematic exclusion of groups from society, which would also entail their exclusion from the education system by transitive property. An example is the LGBTQI+ community. In 2024, Ghana passed a law which penalizes "identifying as LGBTQ" (Naadi, 2024). Insofar as people identifying as anything other than heterosexual are therefore systematically excluded from society, they are also excluded from education.

I argue that both colonialism and decolonization as well as the continuous involvement of international actors have had significant impact on inclusiveness in Ghana, especially regarding gender parity. Finally, the analysis also raises the question why some global transformative processes are more impactful than others. Why did socialism not leave any traces in Ghana's education system, although we should expect its focus on equality of outcomes to also extend to the education system? And why is decolonization still so relevant today? Of course, one part of a possible answer is the fact that the history of colonialism is so much longer than that of Ghana's short socialist phase. Still, it is safe to assume that a multitude of factors moderate how influential such transformations can be. Future research may help uncover these factors and how they covary with each other.

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