

Influence of Social Policy Intervention; An Analysis of Free Senior High School Policy in Ghana as a Tool to Improve Lives or a Tool to Gain Votes in Elections.

Mumuni Abdul Wahid

Pan African University Institute of Governance, Humanities and Social Sciences, Cameroon

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.804067>

Received: 09 April 2024; Revised: 24 April 2024; Accepted: 27 April 2024; Published: 06 May 2024

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine whether Ghana's policy of free senior high school education is intended to enhance lives or to gain votes in elections. Qualitative research methodology was used in this study. As a research design, the study used multiple case studies. Data for this study was also gathered through in-depth interviews with 200 respondents, who were students and parents from the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The research was based on a purposive sample approach. Purposive sampling was used because, according to Boateng (2021), it is used to select respondents who have ideas, information, skills, and experience about the topic under investigation. Secondary data and literature from articles and reports were also used in the study to help with the data collection.

This study looks into the effectiveness of Ghana's free secondary education policy as a means of enhancing lives or means of gaining votes. The majority of respondents (50%) cited greater enrolment and general access to education as the most desired benefit. This implies that the policy has significantly increased the number of Ghanaians enrolled in secondary education. Extra perks like free meals, uniforms, and textbooks probably help make high schools more family-friendly and affordable. The data generally shows favorable effects on educational access. The most valued benefit is associated with higher enrollment rates, whereas other benefits take care of obstacles related to cost of attendance. It is interesting that voting decisions appear to be influenced by the policy. A total of 90% of respondents felt the policy affected their vote, with 50% citing a positive influence in the previous election, compared to 10% who reported no impact. These results imply that the free secondary school policy influences voters' decisions in Ghana and is a successful educational initiative.

Keywords: Social Policy, Election, Senior High School, Votes

INTRODUCTION

1957 saw Ghana's independence. Ghana experienced protracted periods of military rule during the first three decades of its post-independence history. Following nearly ten years of quasi-military rule in the late 1980s, multi-party politics were reinstated in the nation in 1992, and a new constitution was enacted the following year. Since then, Ghana has hosted eight successful multi-party elections, three of which saw the center-left National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the center-right New Patriotic Party (NPP) share power. These three elections marked the beginning of Ghana's political party transition. After winning the presidential election held on December 7, 2020, Nana Addo Danquah Akufo-Addo, the current president of the NPP, first took office on January 7, 2017. Despite John Dramani Mahama, the NDC's candidate and

Akufo-Addo's predecessor, challenging the election results in the nation's Supreme Court and losing, President Akufo-Addo was re-elected in December 2020, amid the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, and this time on the platform of the NPP.

The state must take all necessary steps to improve the welfare of all citizens, including making social services more accessible, in accordance with the 1992 Constitution's directive principles of state policy. Essentially, the Constitution mandates that all governments: "ensure that all citizens have fair and reasonable access to public facilities and services;" "offer adequate livelihoods, employment opportunities, and public assistance to those in need;" "provide social assistance to the elderly that will enable them to maintain an adequate standard of living"; and "take all necessary steps to ensure the full integration of women into Ghana's economic development." Governments in Ghana have complied with these directives since the early 2000s, recognizing social protection as a strategic anchor to support more equitable and inclusive developments. Among the notable initiatives that took place at this time were the National Health Insurance System, Free Senior High School Policies, Universal Compulsory Basic Education, and Anti-Poverty Livelihood Strengthening (Ibrahim, 2020).

In both the 2012 and 2016 New Patriotic Party (NPP) national elections, education was a major theme. The New Patriotic Party (NPP) has prioritized education and pledges to implement a comprehensive, innovative, creative, and daring plan to revitalize Ghana's educational system. The NPP claims that it would raise the standard of education at the primary and high school levels and enact a policy of free education for all Ghanaian children up to the point of high school if elected to govern from 2017 to 2021. Because of this, the NPP plans to extend primary education to Senior High School (SHS), which will be accessible to all Ghanaians and include vocational, agricultural, and technical schools. Once the New Patriot Party (NPP) won the 2016 election, the crucial education initiative known as the Free SHS was eventually put into action. There is now a public discussion concerning its benefits and long-term viability. The purpose of this study is to determine whether Ghana's policy of free senior high school education is intended to enhance lives or to gain votes in elections.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Election Competition

The role of political parties must be carefully taken into account, as they may be motivated to suggest and carry out social policies when vying for political power and when in power because of the idea of electoral competition. The complexity of the latter makes it necessary to assess electoral competition's effects from the standpoint of the composite concept of regime effects on social policy (Hunter and Sugiyama, 2009; Nelson, 2007). In politics, political parties play a significant role, particularly in Africa's emerging democracies where representative democracy is valued highly (Lindberg, 2004). Political parties politicize economic and non-economic issues during election campaigns, bringing them to the forefront and grabbing public attention quickly to gain an advantage over rivals (Dragu & Fan, 2016; Grebe, 2015; Ward et al. 2015). Offering free education to all students is a popular initiative that garners votes from the standpoint of political economy (Correa et al. 2020). Thus, the phenomenon may provide an incentive for elections and encourage policymakers to increase spending on crucial sectors like education (Ha, 2015). Thus, policies that increase public access to education can be proposed and implemented by political actors not only as a public utility but also as a way to gain self-serving political advantages over rivals, particularly in competitive elections (Keefer & Khemani, 2005). This is especially significant in light of Ghana's growing democratic quality, where electoral competition has emerged as a crucial aspect of elections (Lindberg, 2004) and public officials, whether appointed or elected, play important roles in influencing systems that shape public policy and the political spectrum (Young et al. 2020). A large-scale study indicates that parties

entering governments are likely to carry out their policy promises, even though the preferences of the electorate expressed by political actors as a result of electoral competition are not always translated into government policies (Lindberg, 2004). Through their manifestos and election campaigns, Ghanaian political parties present voters with a wide range of policy options, setting the national political agenda (Ayee, 2016). From this angle, it is critical to consider the possibility that a nation's ability to provide free education may depend on the political parties' proposals to voters during election campaigns.

Regime Effect

One of the most important aspects of gaining and using power is undoubtedly the type of regime. This is due to the argument made by some academics that the type of regime affects the limitations that politicians must deal with when allocating resources (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1991). For instance, education is provided in democratic regimes but not in authoritarian ones, even though we believe that the use of power is responsible and sensitive to the needs of the people. This implies that, in contrast to authoritarian regimes where resource allocation is governed by economic forces, high levels of democracy allow room for popular demands and are more likely to result in the implementation of social policies like free education (Brown & Hunter, 1999). This is due to the fact that under democratic regimes as opposed to authoritarian ones, access to power is more inclusive and competitive. As new democracies spring up throughout Africa, voters frequently pay closer attention to elections (Payne, 2008), and citizens increasingly see social policy as a crucial component of their daily lives that is directly related to democracy (Ade'si'na', 2007). According to this theory, nations with more robust democracies are probably going to have toll-free policies than nations with less robust democracy indices. Notwithstanding these broad claims and anticipations, some academics contend that the straightforward differentiation between authoritarian and democratic regimes fails to encompass the crucial features that impact political conduct in the distribution of resources (Przeworski and Limongi, 1993). According to Peiffer (2012), social policies in Africa are not generated by democracy because social support is also provided by non-democratic nations in the region. Instead, African nations are forced to liberalize their political systems by external forces. Thus, the provision of social services in Africa is not ensured by democracy. The study explains this as a result of insufficient electoral incentives for these kinds of policies. To explore the ideal dichotomy between democracy and authoritarian regimes that can explain social policy outcomes, more precise political science concepts are needed, given the conflicting evidence on the relationship between regime type and social policy outputs. Consequently, I think about the function of electoral competition.

Ideological Lineage

A more universal social policy program is pursued by left-wing governments, which also tend to decrease social inequality, expand social civil rights like the right to education, and encourage the redistribution of national wealth, according to the traditional partisan theory of political outcomes. It is argued that because of their orientation, left-wing governments in less developed nations increase spending on education and social policies because they are more receptive to public demand (Ha, 2015). As early as the 1970s, social policy programs covering the majority of the population were implemented in Latin America, according to Huber et al. (2008) contend that although left-wing parties have a positive influence on them, right-wing parties can reduce spending on health and education, making it more difficult to provide services like free education.

In a recent study conducted in Latin America by Altman and Castiglioni (2020), panel data analysis was used to demonstrate that social policy is not solely pursued by left-wing parties, as right-wing parties also implement extensive social policies. Researchers Tavits and Letki (2009) argued that in post-communist Europe, right-wing parties are more inclined to adopt social policies and increase government spending in areas like education, health, and pensions, while left-wing parties are more fiscally conservative. Despite the

controversy and empirical criticisms surrounding the use of an ideological continuum or left-right political orientation coding, it remains the predominant classification method in literature, including studies on Sub-Saharan Africa conducted by Tawiah & Karungi (2020).

Nonetheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that existing global development goals, like universal secondary education as stated in the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 4), may inhibit such ideological inclinations from being a significant factor in the local implementation of policies, especially in developing nations like Ghana. Since international organizations have a significant stake in local political economies and policy formulation, political parties in government, which are consequently less ideologically aligned, are expected to realize global visions that are becoming more profound in the neoliberal era (Simmons and Elkins, 2004). Therefore, policies like free education must be implemented in response to global development visions rather than based on the ideological stance of governments or political parties. Notwithstanding the foregoing, decision-makers' ideological backgrounds must still be taken into account because they have a long history of influencing broad social policies.

Influence of Society

Social policies shift as a result of social structures, demographic shifts, and economic factors. Social policy can be determined in part by social factors. For instance, an aging population may necessitate increased government focus on social policies like health and pensions (Estes, 2001). Since the early and mid-2020s, there has been an increase in the enrollment in primary and lower secondary schools, meaning that many young people now require a high school diploma in order to move up the educational ladder. Psychological factors like family and personal aspirations for higher education consequently drive-up demand as more young people enroll in and complete lower rungs of the educational ladder (Plank, 2004). This indicates that new demands are placed on the education system at all levels by the very success of a state's efforts to increase access to education and provide opportunities (World Bank, 2009). In order to meet increased demand, fee-free measures are therefore anticipated to be introduced at the senior level in countries with higher enrollment rates at the lower secondary level than during periods of low enrollment at that level.

Comparative Studies of the Impact of Free Senior High School initiative on Equitable Access

The primary objective of all programs offering free senior high school is to increase access to education, especially for children from low-income families. Since the demand for education is based on cost, free education should theoretically allow enrollment growth (Sandholtz 2022; World Bank 2009). Higher enrollments, however, might not materialize if there is a cap on school capacity, if costs are prohibitive for the majority of students, or if removing fees results in a decline in quality that lowers demand (Bold et al. 2015). The majority of the studies analyzed found that offering free secondary school education increased school enrollment rates, but disadvantaged children were still excluded in certain countries. A comparison study discovered that eliminating senior high school fees resulted in a 6% average rise in senior high school enrollment (Asante 2022). Numerous studies conducted in different countries have confirmed this conclusion. For instance, the elimination of fees for girls in the Gambia's free high school education policy increased the number of girls completing high school by 55%, increased school enrollment rates by 5% (Gajigo 2016).

Remarkably, despite the fact that boys were excluded from the policy, the subsequent study discovered a favorable spillover effect on their school enrollment. Following the implementation of the free senior high school policy in 2016, Tanzania saw a notable increase in the percentage of students moving from primary to secondary education (Brandt and Mkenda 2020; Sandholtz 2022). Comparably, fee reduction reform in Kenya raised secondary school graduation rates from 6% to 16%, according to Brudevold-Newman (2021). After the implementation of the Universal Secondary Education (USE) policy in Uganda, administrative data indicated higher enrolment and graduation rates (Masuda and Yamauchi 2016), but survey data could

not corroborate these findings (Omoeva and Gale 2016). According to Borkum (2012), the fee-free schools’ policy in South Africa, which focused on schools in low-income neighborhoods, increased enrolment at the target schools by 2%. These schools were primarily in the lower classes. These findings were mainly supported by Garlick’s (2019) assessment of the same program, despite the fact that his analysis revealed a notable drop in enrollment in the higher grades, perhaps as a result of a decline in quality. This is the only study where enrollment decreased (partially) following free senior high school education.

Relative effects of free senior high school education on low-income or otherwise disadvantaged students were not the focus of many of the reviewed studies. This is a result of their heavy reliance on administrative enrollment data, which typically omits details regarding the socioeconomic backgrounds and other demographics of students. Omoeva and Gale (2016) discovered through survey data that the impact of Uganda’s policy of free senior high school did not differ according to wealth quintile and that the percentage of low-income students enrolled in secondary education remained extremely low. Even after the free senior high school policy was implemented in Kenya, the majority of primary school dropouts from low-income families decided not to enroll in secondary education (Ohba 2011). The high non-fee cost of secondary education, the opportunity cost of lost income, and the perception of a lack of job opportunities for recent high school graduates were the three main causes of this, according to the study. Therefore, these studies show that even in cases where fees are eliminated, the poor frequently encounter insurmountable obstacles when attempting to access secondary education. More encouraging results were seen in Tanzania, where the implementation of a comprehensive free senior high school policy eliminated the “elite advantage” in such transitions and allowed more high-ability impoverished students to transfer to secondary education (Sandholtz 2022). Similarly, in South Africa, where the no-fee school policy increased enrollment primarily in the poorest districts, more students were enrolled (Borkum 2012).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Qualitative research methodology was used in this study. As a research design, the study used multiple case studies. Data for this study was also gathered through in-depth interviews with 200 respondents, who were students and parents from the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. The research was based on a purposive sample approach. Purposive sampling was used because, according to Boateng (2021), it is used to select respondents who have ideas, information, skills, and experience about the topic under investigation. Secondary data and literature from articles and reports were also used in the study to help with the data collection. Following each interview phase, the data were transcribed and examined. For the purpose of finding themes and patterns in every dataset, I used a thematic analysis technique. All ethical guidelines pertaining to scientific research have been met by this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

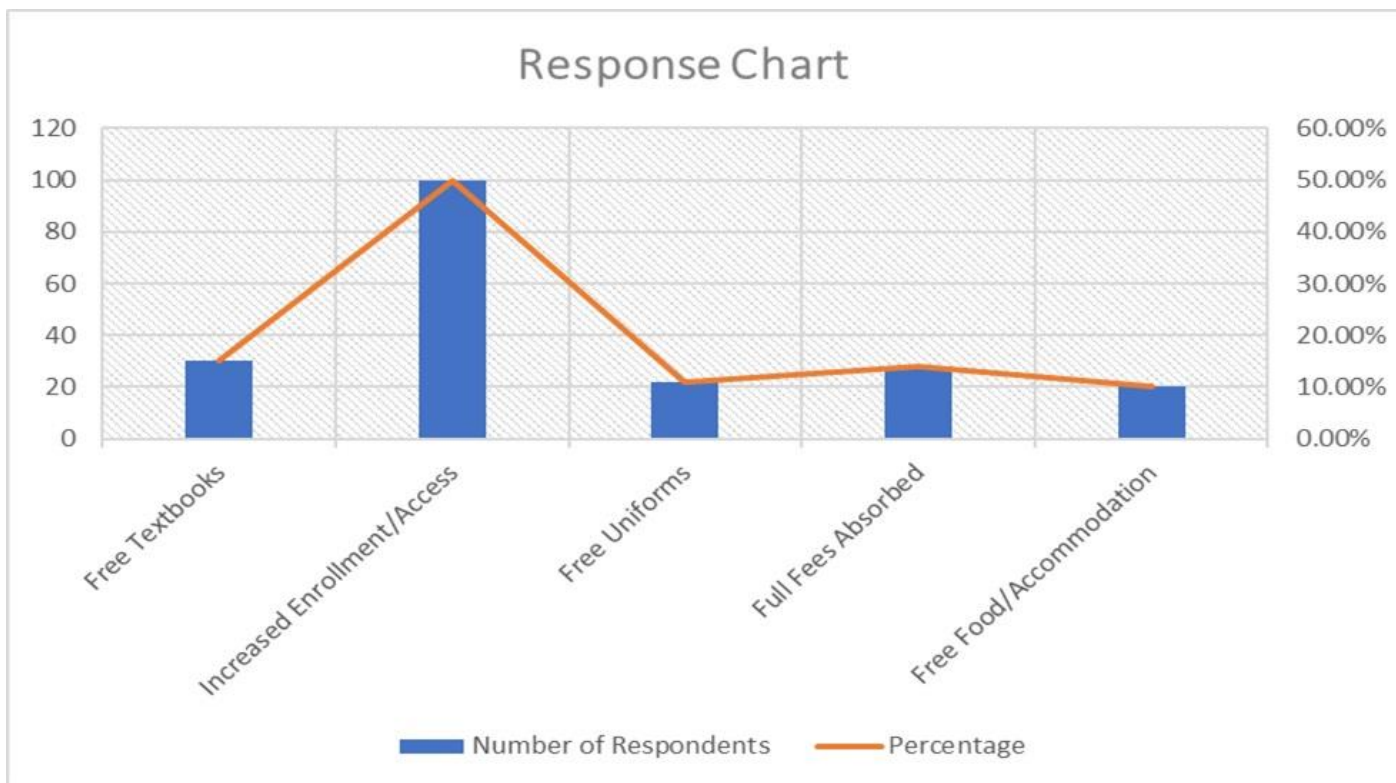
TABLE 4.1 How free senior high school policy has improved lives in ghana

Questions	Reason	Response
How has free senior school policy improved your life?	Provided free Text books	30
	Increased enrollment and Access to education regardless of status	100
	Provided free Uniforms	22
	Absorbed full exams and school Fees	28

	Provided free food and accommodation	20
		TOTAL = 200

(Source: Author’s Field research 2023)

Figure 4.1 Response Chart



(Source: Author’s Field research 2023)

From Figure 4.1 The most favored benefit among respondents to this survey was increased enrollment and access to education regardless of status (50%). This indicates that a greater number of Ghanaians have been able to access education thanks primarily to the free secondary school policy. Free textbooks (15%), free uniforms (11%), complete exam and tuition coverage (14%), and free food and lodging (10%) are some additional benefits mentioned by respondents. These extra advantages probably contribute to high schools’ increased affordability and family appeal. In general, the data indicates that Ghana’s access to education has benefited from the free secondary school policy. Higher school enrollment rates are directly linked to the most well-liked benefit, while other benefits assist in removing the financial obstacles that may prevent students from attending classes.

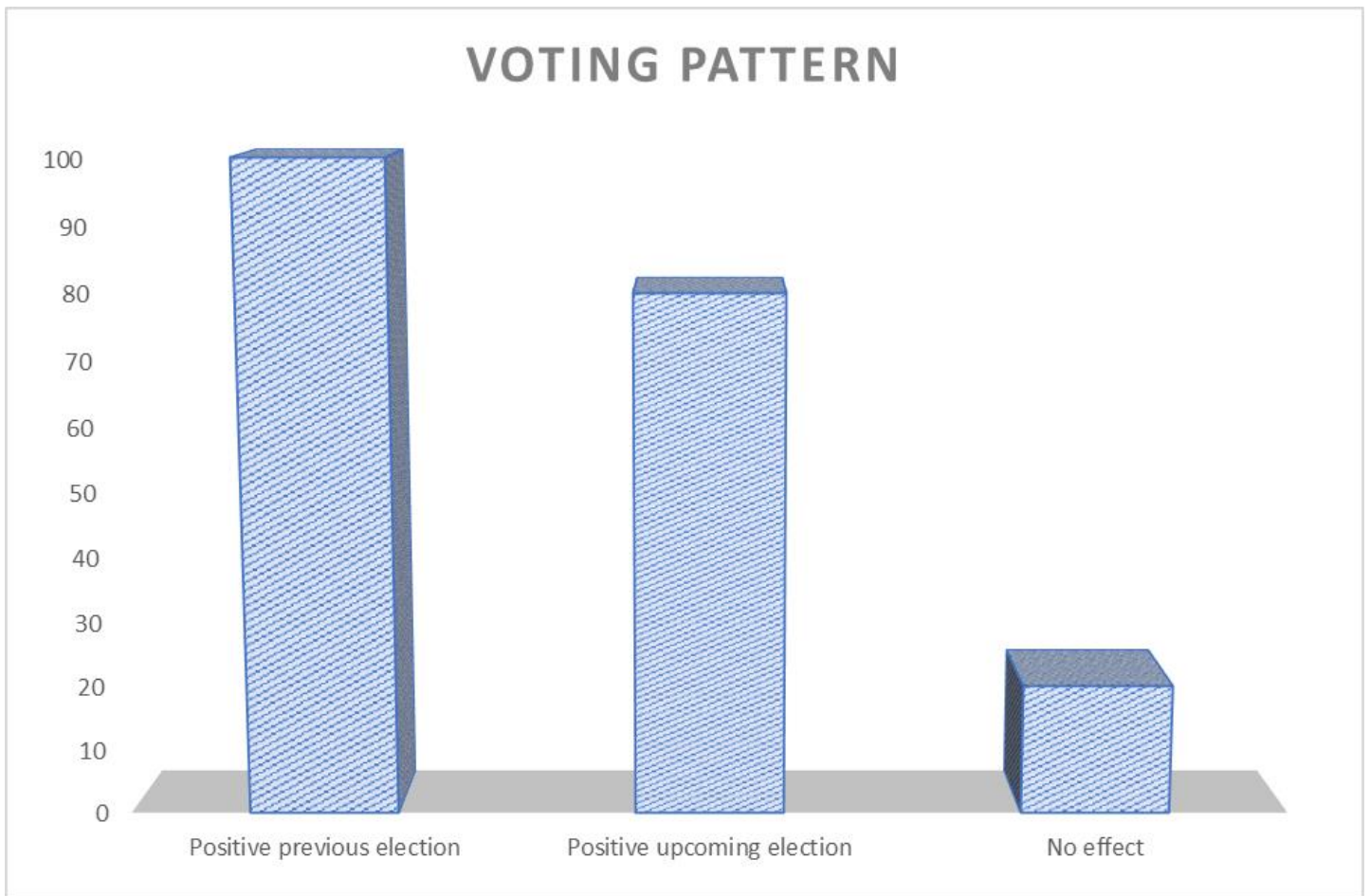
Table 4.2 Survey of voting pattern

Question	Reason	Response
Does/will free senior high school Policy have an effect in your vote pattern?	Yes, it had a positive effect in the previous election	100

	Yes, it will have a positive effect in the upcoming election	80
	No effect in upcoming or previous elections	20
		TOTAL=200

(Source: Author’s Field research 2023)

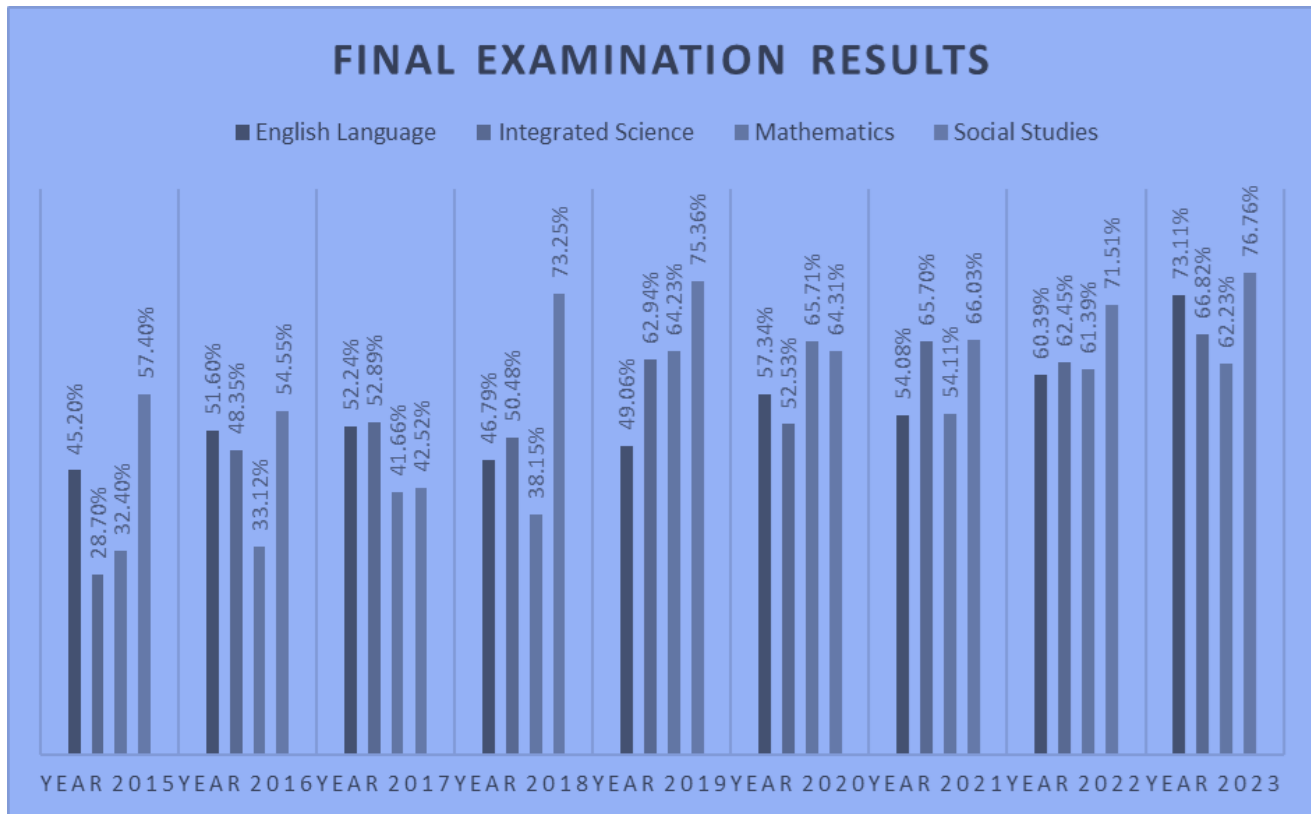
Figure 4.2 Voting Pattern



(Source: Author’s Field research 2023)

According to the survey, 50% of participants reported that the policy had a positive effect on their voting in the previous election, 40% thought it would have a positive impact on their voting in the next election, and 10% said it had no effect at all. 90% of those surveyed said they thought the free high school policy had a beneficial effect on how they vote. 50% of the respondents felt that policy had a favorable impact on their vote in the previous election. This is a significant proportion of the population. 40% of respondents believe that the policy will impact their vote in the next election in a favorable way. Drawing from this survey, a sizable segment of participants think that the policy of free high school has a favorable effect on how they vote.

Table 4.3 Final examination results from 2015-2023



(Source: GES)

From Table 4.3 The years,2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 are the Free SHS Graduates and the only years in the past 9 years that more than 50% of candidates obtained A1-C6 in all Core subjects and the 2023 results is the best in 9 years.

CONCLUSION

Strong evidence supporting Ghana’s free secondary school policy’s improved access to education can be found in this survey. The most sought-after benefit, 50% of respondents agreed an increase in enrollment, irrespective of background, translates into more Ghanaians obtaining secondary education. Aside from that, parental support and affordability are further improved by free meals and textbooks. All things considered; the data indicates that the policy has improved Ghana’s access to education.

Significantly, the policy has an impact on voters. The policy affected voters’ votes among 90% of respondent, with 50% of respondents saying it had a positive impact in the last election and 40% saying it would have one again. This indicates that a significant segment of the electorate views the policy as important.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey emphasizes how popular the free secondary education policy is among the general public.

Sustaining the program's success will require ongoing investment. In addition to access, more research might examine how the policy affects educational quality. This would give a more complete picture of the efficacy of the program.

Furthermore, the policy's noteworthy influence on voters implies its political significance. Recognizing the particular factors influencing voters (e.g., affordability, particular advantages) could guide the creation of new policies and outreach initiatives.

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