Implementing Quality Education: The Inevitability of a Co-owned and Context-based Conceptualisation as the Best Starting Point

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Abstract
This conceptual article argues for a co-owned contextual interpretation of the concept of quality education to create communal familiarity, co-agency and coherent communication necessary for its institutionalisation. The article analysed education policy documents including the current 2018-2030 education strategic plan which provides a blueprint for the development of education. The analysis revealed that quality education is an important policy concept that enjoys rhetoric. The 2018-2030 education strategic plan canonises quality education for its potential to equip Ghanaians adequately to meet the needs of the twenty-first century. However, quality education has failed to receive context-based conceptualisation perhaps because of the complex nature of the phrase. Drawing from Wittgenstein's (1953) warning against imprecise use of language, the article argues for a co-owned contextual interpretation of quality education to facilitate its successful implementation in Ghana. The article then shares how the Leadership for learning and the Singapore triad models of interpreting and applying policy concepts can benefit communal familiarity and application of policy concepts. The Ministry of Education should organise workshops for stakeholders to provide a co-owned interpretation of quality education, draw an action plan and educate the Ghanaian citizenry to understand and align their efforts towards its achievement.

Keywords: Quality education; co-owned contextual conceptualisation; implementation; education stakeholders; Ghana

Introduction

The quest for quality education has gained momentum globally in the past decade or two. Goal four of the current United Nations

Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs emphasises the provision of equitable quality education to all learners. Earlier, as Chinapah, H'ddigui, Kanjee, Falayajo, Fomba, Hamissou, Rafalimanana and Byomugisha stated, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) had jointly sponsored the "With Africa for Africa: Towards Quality Education for All" report. In this document, these organisations argued that quality education is a fundamental human right that needs which needs to be known and shared by all (Chinapah et al., 2000). Few years later, UNESCO published an anthology, "Cross-national Studies of the Quality of Education" (Pigozzi, 2006). The very title of this anthology bears testimony to the fact that the quest for quality education transcends national boundaries. As chapter two of the anthology emphasises, quality education is a salient global issue because Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), businesses, the public and various Ministries next to the Ministry of Education have come to appreciate the strong link quality education has with human and national development (Pigozzi, 2006). Thus, governments and education policymakers are under pressure to rethink quality education and how it can be achieved. It is no surprise that African Heads of State and Government in their 22nd Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union in Addis Ababa (African Union, 2014) declared quality education as imperative for achieving excellence in human resources capacity and development in Africa.

In Ghana, the term quality education has been part of the vocabulary of education stakeholders for many decades. I am one of the products of the 1987 new educational reform programme that replaced the ordinary and advanced level systems with junior and senior secondary school systems respectively. I still recall vividly how on numerous occasions, educators, in comparing their school days with ours reminded us that they enjoyed a better quality of education than we were experiencing. At the same time, I remember the proponents that brought about the junior-senior high school reform insisting that the reform was equipping learners with the quality education that would build their cognitive and psychomotor skills to make them creative and employable. Years later, especially since the implementation of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) in 2005 and recently, the 2017 free senior high education policies, quality education

became the catch phrase of the times. Polemics about how these policies ensure both access to and quality of education are achieved continue unabated. Education stakeholders, including politicians or policymakers, practitioners, researchers and learners continue to talk about quality education from their standpoint in both formal and informal conversations and documentation.

It is worthwhile to listen to any discourse on education today, be it on the airwaves, television, social and print media, or among people including the common men and women selling their wares in the market. What is common is a strong quest for quality education implying that quality education has become part of the national consciousness of Ghanaians. This is a reality which Marx and Engels had already emphasised in the 19th century when they stated that: "Language is practical; real consciousness that arises from necessity, and [is] from the very beginning a social product", as cited in Lock and Strong (2010, p. 85). In the current 2018-2030 Education Strategic Plan (ESP), which specifies Ghana's ambition to deliver quality education at all sub-sectors of education, quality education is strategically positioned and stressed a good twenty-eight times. In the "Foreword" to the ESP, the former Minister of Education, Dr Mathew Opoku Prempeh describes quality education as crucial for equipping Ghanaians with relevant education and skills for socioeconomic development and national orientation (Ministry of Education, 2018). Thus, achieving quality education is Ghana's education priority from kindergarten to tertiary level. This aligns with the United Nations' Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals on which the current global development agenda are anchored (Ministry of Education, 2018).

The current emphasis on quality education in Ghana is dynamic akin to what James (1971, p. 129) shared of his native USA about fifty years ago:

We now hear demands for 'quality education' from every side. This chorus of popular rhetoric, rising from the rich and the poor, from politicians and laymen, from bureaucrats and academics, from parents and from students, from the wise and from the silly, is stirring a mindless response all too acceptable in the ensuing din.

Decades later, and continents apart, Ghana has fallen prey to a similar challenge – a crescendo of responses which fail to articulate

collaboratively what quality education means in a Ghanaian context and how we can coherently align efforts towards its institutionalisation.

It is important to acknowledge that some scholars of the Ghanaian academic community have contributed to the discourse on quality education in project reports and academic journals. Some of these include: Ankomah, Koomson, Bosu, and Oduro's (2005) technical report titled, "A Review on the Concept of Quality in Education: Perspectives from Ghana", Adu-Agyem and Osei-Poku's (2012) "Quality of Education in Ghana: The Way Forward", and Boakye-Amponsah, Enninful, Anin, and Vanderpuye's (2015) "Achieving Quality Education in Ghana: Spotlight on Primary Education" articles. Worthy as their contributions among others may be to the discourse on quality education, there have been some major shortfalls relating to the question of what quality education means for Ghana. Firstly, as far as available current and relevant literature is concerned, there is no context-based co-owned conceptualisation of quality education for Ghana around which policymakers, practitioners, educators and learners can clearly focus and align their educational efforts.

Secondly, the available definitions of quality education presented by the above authors are for the specific contexts of their research, and turned to re-echo the general interpretations of quality education provided in UNESCO's (2004) "Education for all quality imperative" report. Yet, contextualised timing of meanings of concepts or what Lock and Strong (2010, p. 91) refer to as "chronotopes" is important. Otherwise, there is the propensity for language, the product of people's social interaction to become so formalised that it estranges its very creators (Marx as cited in Lock & Strong, 2010). This implies that clear context-based conceptual and operational definitions are crucial for appropriation and implementation of policy concepts that seek national development.

As acknowledged later in this article, quality education is a very complex phrase and for that reason, if Ghana fails to conceptualise it according to its existential needs but rather leaves it to freelance interpretation, the national outcome may be that of a treadmill. In other words, a co-created context-based conceptualisation of quality education by education policymakers and other stakeholders has the propensity to engender co-ownership, co-communication and coherence or alignment of efforts towards its achievement. Relying on

Wittgenstein's (1953) theory of language games, this conceptual article has a two-pronged objective: firstly, it argues for a clear definition of the concept of quality education in Ghana. Secondly, it justifies the need for a national co-owned conceptualisation of quality education. To demonstrate how collaborative familiarity or co-owning of policy concepts can inspire their application, I provide research and practice-informed case scenarios. I should clarify that it is beyond the aim and scope of this article to propose a definition of quality education since the central argument is a call for a collaborative definition that is informed by Ghana's existential needs rather than isolated atomistic interpretations.

The article is structured into four sections to enable a systematic engagement with the issue under consideration. The first section reflects the rise in demand for quality education by considering the dynamics that inspire a paradigm shift from an emphasis on access to education to a focus on quality of education. The second section focuses on the challenge of defining quality education. The third section relies on Wittgenstein's idea of language games to argue that notwithstanding the challenge of conceptualising quality education, it is imperative for a co-owned stakeholder clarification of the concept of quality education if Ghana is to achieve it. Related to the third section is section four which provides research and practice-based evidences to demonstrate how contextually interpreting or conceptualising quality education can lead to coherence, effective communication and application. The proposal of the case scenarios is also to offer insights into how co-owned conceptualisation of policy concepts can be done. The final section concludes the article.

The Rise in Demand for Quality Education

It is now common knowledge that scholars, policymakers, governments and their development partners, and practitioners increasingly converge in their appreciation of the crucial role quality education plays in achieving sustainable human and national development. Reimers and Chung (2016) of the Global Education Initiative at the Harvard Graduate School of Education corroborated this convergence. They stated that in a global survey of attitudes administered in forty-four developed and developing countries to identify the most important factor that gets people ahead in life, quality education ranked only on a par with hard work. In further comparison

of the perceptions of populations in developing and emerging economies and developed countries, quality education is considered even more important to the populations of the developing and emerging economies in getting them ahead in life. This perhaps, is based on the conviction that the enviable economic, scientific and technological heights which developed economies attained are traceable to the provision of quality relevant education to their citizenry. This view resonates with Eduardo Porter who in his May 2015 article in the New York Times, "More in School, but not Learning", asserts that "an educated population is a critical precondition for broadly shared prosperity – an essential tool for nations seeking a role in the global production chains driving economic growth around the world" (Porter, 2015, p. 1).

But who constitutes or should constitute the "educated population" that Porter is referring to? The privileged few? Obviously, the answer is a "No", because as international institutions including UNESCO, the World Bank, governments of both the developed and the developing world amply echoed, everyone should enjoy equitable quality education. The 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education for All and the 2000 Dakar World Forum on Education for All (EFA) reflected the deliberate desire of governments, international organisations and all advocates of education for every school-going child to enjoy formal education. This may have been the impetus for "universal primary education" as one of the core Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. By 2012, as Porter (2015) states, 75 per cent of children of primary school age in Sub-Saharan Africa were in school and an impressive 94 percent of South Asian children were enrolled in schools. However, does this phenomenal progress in access to education come with the needed quality where school graduates are educated sufficiently and holistically to exhibit competence, conscience, compassion and commitment that propel their nations to development? This is a difficult question to answer given that the degree of success in integral education differs from continent to continent, country to country and even within countries.

Notwithstanding these differences, scholars including the Stanford University's expert on the economics of education, Eric Hanushek is quoted by Porter (2015, p. 1) in his New York Times article as saying that, "we've made substantial progress around the globe in sending people to school but a large number of people who

have gone to school haven't learned anything". Hanushek seems to suggest that learning is a key determinant of whether or not education is of "quality". The caption of Porter's article, "More in School, but not Learning" resonates with Hanushek's view. In this article, Porter asserts that, "if the challenge was to provide a minimum standard of education for all, what looks like an enormous improvement too often amounted to a stunning failure" (p. 1) because quality is lacking. Earlier, UNESCO (2004) had acknowledged, based on research and experiential evidence, that a mere expansion in enrolment of children in school does not lead to a higher level of education unless it is accompanied by quality education. This realisation, among other evidences, may have inspired national governments, international organisations and lovers of education to intensify the quest for quality education. In the Dakar World Forum on Education For All, the need for quality education was stressed as evidenced in goals two, five and six of the forum (King, 2007) and recently, in goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals. It is argued that quality education for all, is not just one of the seventeen sustainable development goals but is central to the achievement of all of them (Reimers et al., 2016). I have stated earlier in this article that the explicit freewheeling desire for quality education is ubiquitous in mass media as well as printed documents in Ghana.

Quality Education in Ghana: What is There in the Plans?

Successive Ghanaian governments and their development partners have over the years shown interests in providing a holistic education for their citizenry. This, inter alia, is evidenced in a few documents some of which are analysed in this article. Analysing the main educational reforms in Ghana – the 1951 and 1961 Accelerated Development Plans (ADP) for education, the New Structure and Content of Education (NSCE) reform of 1974, and the 1987 New Educational Reform Programme (NERP), there is historical evidence that these reforms express efforts to provide equitable access to quality education. Even though, none of the documents explicitly mentions or emphasizes the concept of quality education nor defines it, they do express the desire of Ghana to provide holistic education which can be considered as coterminous with quality education. For example, the NSCE and NERP reforms emphasised the nation's drive to adequately educate the "heads", "hearts" and "hands" of the citizenry; that is to

educate cognitive, socio-affective and psychomotor faculties of learners.

At the beginning of the millennium, the Anamuah-Mensah's (2002) Committee that reviewed Ghana's education in the 21st century, and later, the 2008 Education Act 778 show that quality education was important for Ghana to achieve its developmental needs. Ghana's current 2018-2030 ESP has further expressed the nation's desire for quality education. As the Ministry of Education (2018, p. 13) states, "the overall goal of the education sector is to deliver quality education at all levels to equip Ghanaians with skills and competencies to meet the needs of the labour market, human development, poverty reduction, national integration, and international recognition". Therefore, it can be said that government education policy documents have embedded the desire to provide quality education.

However, the question remains: What is it that underline (s) quality education that equips Ghanaians at all levels? Is it a "learning nation" into which as the Ministry of Education claims, the ESP 2018-2030 ambitions to transform Ghana? If it is, what does learning denote for the policymakers and to what extent are other stakeholders of education including directors of education, headteachers, teachers, learners, parents, education researchers, and the media, part of this understanding? Do these stakeholders share in this understanding and own it? I raise these questions because some of the more successful efforts to promote, implement and enforce good policies are those that have been built upon the broad involvement of education stakeholders including teachers and students (Pigozzi, 2006; Reimers & Chung, 2016). I also wonder whether quality education at all levels implies that the concept carries the same meaning across the different tiers of the Ghanaian educational system – basic, senior high and tertiary levels, or whether it means different things at the different levels. If quality education has the same meaning or different meaning across the different sub-sectors of education, it is crucial to clarify it to enable stakeholders to cohere appropriate efforts for its achievement.

Recently, Huebner (2022) analyses the social theory of symbolic interactionism of the American pragmatist, Herbert Mead. The author emphasises the crucial importance of social process of cooperative social acts which can [engender] "the development of the social self, self-reflection and role taking" (p. 2). Huebner who talks about significant symbols – gestures or languages, advocates a

"universe of discourse" (p. 34) that enables people to share and develop co-owned familiarity or meanings of language. This is because the human ability to act rationally emanates from the already-ongoing social process. Thus, "the more we understand the shared meaning that symbols have for a broader group of communicators, the more we can craft wider plans of action, and stimulate our actions more effectively in the expansive social process" (Huebner, 2022, p. 68).

Scholars have provided varied and contested interpretations of access and quality as they relate to education. As explained in this article, the views of Hanushek, Porter, and UNESCO insinuate that access to education and quality of education carry different meanings, with access dealing with getting students enrolled in school and quality being linked to the effective learning of students arguing that learners can have access to education without learning. In his expanded vision of access to education, Lewin (2015) presents a different view of access arguing that access to education transcends mere enrolments in schools to include judgements of educational quality. Ideally, access and quality should go in tandem. However, in the Ghanaian context, challenges including inadequate government funding, poverty (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2018) and inadequate school leadership (Zame et al., 2008), among others, have made the project of improving access side by side quality, difficult to achieve in Ghana. Whatever be the case, the current reality is that quality education is the phrase that occupies policy, media and intellectual spaces. Thus, it is important to ask what the notion of quality means. What makes an education quality? Is quality something that can be measured? If yes, how? These are vexing questions and make the definition and communication of quality education challenging as the next section demonstrates.

Quality Education: The Challenge of Definition and Communication

The phrase, "quality education" is a dynamic concept that is difficult to unpack. As a product of a "marriage" between two already contested and complex words, "quality" and "education", quality education is an intricate and politically contentious (Porter, 2015) terrain to navigate with regard to its interpretations. "Its meaning becomes inseparable from the vantage points and the particular interests of the party or parties using the phrase" (Shedd, 1971, p. 138). Scanning

through available sources, I realise that the word "quality" features extensively throughout published literature in almost every discipline including education, research, leadership and development. For example, a search for the word in search engines including ERIC, BRI, JSTOR, Cambridge Core, and Google Scholar, revealed scores of usages or applications captured in phrases such as teacher quality, quality school, quality teaching, quality engineering, quality assurance, quality assessment, just to cite a few. An attempt to find its exact meaning in these different contexts of application shows that quality is a complex and convoluted concept that is extremely difficult to give an all-embracing meaning. In their technical report, "A Review on Quality in Education: Perspectives from Ghana", Ankomah et al. (2005) describe the concept of quality as very evasive and perplexing to define. Quality is a concept that people know when they experience it, but describing and explaining it is a more difficult task (Sallis, 1996). This notwithstanding, for the purposes of this article, quality education represents a dynamic human reality that is both a means and an end. As a means, quality education enables learners to cultivate and nurture their multiple intelligences and capacities to contribute to the common good of humanity. In other words, it is a process of sustainable growth that assures and sustains competence, conscience, compassion and commitment of learners through learning, teaching, leadership and assessment. The word "growth" in this context connotes a process of continual progress or development in knowledge, values and opportunities. Quality education becomes an end when its beneficiaries radiate the above qualities in daily professional and relational spaces.

Similarly, the word "education" presents a complexity in its interpretation by scholars. In most cases, scholars anchor themselves on values like human development and well-being as entry points to interpreting this concept. Thus, advocates of education ¬– individuals, governments, and organisations approach the interpretation of education through the lenses of concrete realities including economics, rights, sociology, leadership, psychology, health, and morality. From an economic point of view, for instance, scholars interpret education through its relationship to jobs and economic well-being (Hanushek & Woßmann, 2010) and inequality and socio-economic gaps (Machin & Vignoles, 2004). A common reality these authors acknowledge about education is its role in increasing human capital, labour productivity, innovative capacities of economies, knowledge of new technologies

and their transmission for economic growth. However, they also acknowledge that education can breed inequality and widen socio-economic gaps. This double propensity of education to empower and deprive is what led to the conceptualisation of education through other lenses such as rights, citizenship and equity. Writers like Howe and Covell (2005) and Reimers et al. (2016) are examples of scholars who consider education through the lenses of rights and citizenship functionally linking education to the creation of a world with sustainable peace, equal opportunities for women and men, and ecological sensitivity. What all these dynamics about the concepts of quality and education show is that even as atomic units, they are broad and complex. They encompass literally every aspect of human reality and must be attached to a specific discipline or human endeavour to make some level of sense.

If as atomic units, defining quality and education is like an exercise of getting a live cat to lie on its back, the job of unpacking these words in their conjoined form as "quality education", can only be more challenging. It may mean one thing to a politician or policymaker, researcher, headteacher, literate parent, an illiterate parent from an urban slum and one from a rural area, and quite another to a teachers' union official, a gender activist or an unemployed graduate. Thus, the meaning of quality education is inseparable from the vantage points and the particular interests of the party or parties using the phrase (Shedd, 1971). It means one thing if people believe education should be about the creation of a new social order, jobs, security, justice; and another if they feel it should simply transmit received values. The complexity of the phrase may have accounted for the preferential option for silence over and above endeavouring to give quality education a co-owned context-driven conceptual and operational construal in Ghana. Interpreting complex concepts like quality education contextually requires a degree of audacity to embrace what Reimers and Chung (2016) refer to as an adaptive challenge – the task required in ensuring and reconciling multiple perspectives to make education relevant and practical in response to different perceptions of what problems and opportunities merit the attention of education stakeholders.

Why Quality Education Needs Co-Owned Stakeholder Interpretation

The very fact that language in general and the concept of quality education for that matter is complex and difficult to define is a very good premise on which to argue for the phrase to be given a co-owned contextual character, calibration or interpretation. Human social life – experience, behaviour and practice, as Wittgenstein (1953) explains, are intricately linked to language and are inescapably expressed through language. This implies that the way Ghanaians interpret quality education can impress or depress, construct or deconstruct, and build or destroy the very blessings quality education seeks to achieve. Thus, an imprecise interpretation of language can be a recipe for confusions and distortions that depress social practice (Ribes-Iñesta, 2006) including efforts towards achieving quality education.

Many years ago, the Cambridge University's philosopher of language, Wittgenstein (1953) had sensed the danger of incoherence and imprecise use of language and warned that since language is already vague, imprecision in its usage can prove to be a disincentive to the very purposes it seeks to achieve. Like a toolkit with different kinds of implements, the functions of words can be as diverse as these implements. Thus, "what can be said at all can be said clearly" (Wittgenstein, 1922, p. 27). I can add that what is said clearly is premised on what is clearly contextually and collaboratively understood so that what is understood clearly and expressed clearly leaves no ambiguity in its application within the given context. This implies that creating meaning of concepts is a social construct that needs to be situated and clarified according to the changing times, places and purposes (Bakhtin, 1981).

If policymakers and other key stakeholders of education fail to give quality education a co-owned interpretation, there is the likelihood of freelance and incoherent interpretation and application, and the danger of losing out on achieving quality education in Ghana. This is because words have what Lock and Strong (2010, p. 91) refer to as "heteroglossia" that is plurality of possible meanings associated with their use – conventional and formalised meanings which people have about the words prior to their usage (conventional meaning) and the intended recipient sense making of these words in a specific context (intended meaning). A collaborative contextual sense making and use of policy concepts can avert confusion of interpretation.

Evidence from an eight-month empirical research involving two basic schools in the Central Region of Ghana by the author (2019) of this article can help to clarify better the danger of freelance, incoherent and lack of co-owned contextual definition of policy concepts. The qualitative case study focused on the processes of educational innovation and change implementation in Ghana using the Leadership for learning (LfL) Ghana programme as an example. Sixty-one (61) participants, purposely sampled for the research were headteachers, teachers, learners, parents, parent association chairs, school management committee chairs, and circuit supervisors (now school improvement support officers). One-on-one semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, observations and documentary analysis were used to gather data. Given that educational reforms or change implementation ultimately aim to improve quality of education, the research participants were given the opportunity to share their understanding of quality education. An interesting finding emerging from the study showed that even some educated parents, teachers and learners simplistically equate quality education to sterling achievements in standardised examinations irrespective of whether or not the outcomes reflect learners' personal transformation and knowledge of the subject matter. Of course, I acknowledge that performance in standardised examinations still remains one of the key criteria that academic institutions and organisations use to decide on which applicants get admission or jobs. However, it is equally simplistic to reduce the concept of quality education to the achievement of excellent examination grades. Another interesting finding emanating from the study pointed to the fact that some parents especially the poor and illiterate associate the concept of quality education with 'free' education where they are completely relieved of any financial commitments to their children's education. For them, by making public basic (kindergarten, primary and lower secondary) and senior high/secondary education in Ghana free, it means quality education has been achieved in Ghana. I do not intend to paint the picture that the views of my research participants are statistically representative of the over thirty-million Ghanaians. At the same time, the views point to the reality of freelance, varied and incoherent perceptions about policy concepts by policy consumers that can depress efforts toward the successful implementation of such concepts including quality education.

Expressing diverse views about quality education by education stakeholders is expected, given the concept's complexity. It also aligns with the morally rational and free nature of the human person which enables people to see and interpret reality differently. Yet, it can be more beneficial to embrace the adaptive challenge of discerning and pooling the divergent views into a co-owned, rich and context-based relevant interpretation of quality education. The danger of incoherence and unbridled atomistic perception of quality education is that stakeholders may be unable to pool ideas and workable strategies for its successful implementation. The audacity to provide a co-owned Ghanaian definition of quality education applicable to our context can specify the direction and coherence education stakeholders need to undertake the ambitious enterprise of implementing quality education. When the Ministry of Education leads education stakeholders to clarify what quality education means for Ghana, it can be a catalyst to think, rethink and formulate the fundamental purposes of education for the 21st century Ghana. Therefore, pinning down contextually such a complex phrase that is in common usage yet not properly understood is crucial (Locke et al., 1999) if the government of Ghana and its development partners are to achieve quality education. In the next section, I present evidence of how the co-owned conceptualisation of policy concepts as exemplified by the Leadership for learning (LfL) Ghana programme and Singapore's tripartite partnership facilitated the successful embrace and application of such concepts.

Co-owned Conceptualisation of Policy Concepts: Lessons from Two Models

The two models are the Leadership for learning Ghana (MacBeath & Dempster, 2009) and the Singapore's triad or tripartite partnership (Tan & Low, 2016). These models have proven to be useful in making education policies more co-owned, contextually relevant, communicable and implementable.

Lessons from the Leadership for Learning (LFL) Ghana

Evidences from the research conducted by the author (2019) on the processes that led to the successful incorporation of the LfL principles in Ghana show that people's collaborative and coherent familiarity with policy or change-oriented concepts inspire successful implementation. The LfL was a programme introduced to over a

thousand Ghanaian government basic schools from 2009 onwards through collaboration among the Ghana Education Service,the University of Cape Coast, and the University of Cambridge. As a distinctive framework that emphasises capacity-building (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2009), the LfL initiative is structured across five principles and practices. The LfL principles are a focus on learning, creating a conducive environment for learning, creating a learning dialogue, sharing of leadership, and sharing of accountability. The principles are aimed to improving the quality of basic education by making a potentially sustainable contribution to building and strengthening the leadership capacity of basic school headteachers in Ghana, and improving the quality of learning through school/classroom leadership (Jull et al., 2014). The five principles for practice, according to Frost and Swaffield (2008), two of the key researchers of the project insist, "were not a rigid checklist against which to compare success or failure of practice; rather, they are statements in which values are embedded, and are sufficiently concrete to enable people to clarify and refine their visions of ideal practice" (p.107). Thus, the initiators of the principles allowed the implementers including directors of education, circuit supervisors, headteachers, and researchers in Ghana to subject the five principles to critique and provide a contextual interpretation based on Ghanaian socio-cultural, economic and political realities. The contextually-inspired conceptual and shared understanding and communication gave these stakeholders confidence to own, teach and practise the ideals of the principles in their respective contexts. This disposition enabled Ghana Education Service (GES) to publish a 100-page Leadership for learning handbook for headteachers. It also brought about headteacher transformation, improvement in pedagogical adaptation, staff collaboration, and improvement in student outcomes (Malakolunthu et al., 2014).

Evidence from Tangonyire's (2019) research revealed that the most exceptional schools in successfully incorporating the ideals of the LfL principles were those that had contextual and shared understanding of the principles. For example, headteachers, teachers, students and parents of such schools had a shared belief that the principles were tools that revealed novel ideas about leading, teaching, and learning, but also reminded them of, and reconnected them to certain educationally beneficial cultural values such as hospitality, collaboration, mutual respect and appreciation, which the stakeholders were fast forgetting.

The shared familiarity and understanding of the principles motivated headteachers, teachers, students and parents to re-orient their attitudes and re-create structures, which attuned them to collaborative action, efficacy, co-agency, resilience and creativity. As the author explains, in interpreting the principle – creating conducive environment for learning for instance, stakeholders perceived it to denote the celebration of everyone's gifts and talents and contribution. Thus, parents felt free to share their expertise in the classroom and other aspects of the school as collaborators in development.

Perhaps the most useful creativity from this shared understanding was to interpret the Leadership for learning principle – shared leadership to mean that leadership is both positional and non-positional activity. They explain non-positional leadership to connote that everyone is a leader in the school. This spurred the sense of responsibility and co-agency. In short, the contextual interpretation of the LfL principles enabled members of the researched schools to understand them based on the local socio-cultural realities. This gave the stakeholders confidence, self and co-efficacy that inspired them to teach and practise the principles that they preached. It can be argued that if key education stakeholders collaborate to analyse and define the concept of quality education, it can engender familiarity, clarity, contextually relevant understanding, coherent and consistent communication of quality education, and how it can be achieved. The Singapore's tripartite partnership model of interpreting and applying education policy concepts can also offer useful lessons.

Lessons from the Singaporean Tripartite Partnership

The Singaporean triad is a tripartite partnership, which according to Tan and Low (2016) was developed by educators, Lee and Low for teacher education in Singapore. I acknowledge differences in geographical, socioeconomic, political, and technological experiences exist between Ghana and Singapore. However, a careful analysis of the tripartite partnership shows that the applicability of its philosophy of prioritising education stakeholder partnership or collaboration to define, communicate and implement policy concepts transcends the borders of Singapore. The triad is illustrated in figure 1.

Ministry (Policies)

**Desired
Goals of**

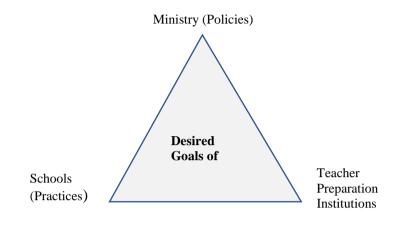Schools
(Practices)

Teacher
Preparation
Institutions

Figure 1. The Tripartite model for teacher education in Singapore
(Tan & Low, 2016, p.34)

With education policymakers situated at the apex of the triangle,
what this tripartite partnership does is to enable systemic, consistent co-
owned definition and coherent alignment of policy initiatives,
communication, and practices across different stakeholders of
education – the MoE, the National Institute of Education, and school
leaders and teachers (Tan & Low, 2016). The partnership enables all
the education stakeholders to be strategically positioned and gives them
a collaborative voice to analyse the needs of Singapore, identify its
contextually desired educational goals, and based on that interpret what
teacher education means for the country. By so doing, all the
stakeholders become familiar with this education policy goal and as a
result are able to express coherence in communication, ownership and
practice. According to Sing Kong Lee, a former director of the National
Institute of Education, "at the heart of Singapore's educational success
is [this] strong tripartite partnership" (Tan & Low, 2016, p. 35) that
gives policy goals a contextual relevance.

One of the beneficiaries of this visit, Lussier (2016) shares
something on how this tripartite partnership has made the general
concept of 'Teacher profession' co-owned, contextual and
communicable. He says that among Singaporeans, the idea of teacher

profession is connected to the understanding of teachers as leaders, carers, and inspirers in whose hands the future of Singapore rests. Thus, Singaporeans including teachers cohere in their belief that there is a strong connection between teachers' work in the classroom and the fate of Singapore. What this perception of the teaching profession means is that teaching is more than acquisition of good pedagogy and content knowledge but includes preparing teachers as leaders, inspirers and powerful brokers as far as Singapore's educational success is concerned (Lussier, 2016). Thus, government, teacher preparation institutions, teachers themselves and the rest of the citizenry respect this understanding and support it. This shows that the teaching profession receives a contextual meaning. Singapore's first Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew's (2000) 729-page classic piece, "From Third World to First World: The Singapore Story from 1965-2000" fundamentally explains that Singapore's success story stems from the Singaporeans' shared familiarity with policy concepts and goals that enabled them to be clear, coherent, committed, and focused in pursuit of such goals. Lipschitz (2016), another beneficiary, has the following to say about Singapore's story:

> The fact that [Singapore] has become a chart-topping nation is awe-inspiring. If the essential question is how, the simplest answer is the clarity of purpose and the steadfast commitment that have driven exceptional coherence through the educational system. Listening to Singaporeans, ranging from government official to school leaders, the country's ability to define a strategy and deliver corresponding results rivals some of the best companies in the United States (pp. 92-93).

The scope of this familiarity includes school children. Then as a doctoral student at the University of Cambridge, I was awestruck by the enviable familiarity with which about fifteen-year-old Singaporean learners who were on summer tour of Cambridge articulated Singapore's current educational goal of pursuing "value-driven student-centred" education. As one of them explained, "we are a multiracial and multicultural nation so we need values of independence, hard work, responsibility, tolerance and respect for others, and unselfishness to live and work with others in harmony". Tan and Low (2016) clarify the value-driven student-centred phase as one that envisions every school as a good school, every student as an engaged student, every teacher as a caring educator, and every parent as a

supportive partner. In other words, everyone matters if Singapore is to matter.

A lesson from this model is that quality education cannot be divorced from national consciousness given that language by nature is very much part of human consciousness that drives social processes of interaction and action. Ghanaians can learn from the tripartite model to transition from the usual mantra of: "the government says it wants to do A or B" or "government tells us to do C or D in a particular way" to "this is what we know and want to do as a nation, these are the reasons for that decision and this is how we will implement the decision". Such a communal familiarity and shared perception of and belief in quality education is a first necessary step towards its successful implementation.

Conclusion

In this article, I argue that human experience, behaviour, and practice are inescapably linked to and expressed through language. At the same time, language is vague, and vulnerable to different interpretations in time and space. Thus, an imprecise interpretation of language can be a recipe for confusions and distortions that depress social practice including institutionalisation of policy concepts. In analysing the current educational milieu and educational policy documents in Ghana including, the current 2018-2030 education strategic plan, I discovered that quality education is a policy concept the yearning for which has become ubiquitous among the citizenry. The existential prominence of quality education is in alignment with the prevailing trends across the globe where the concept is also a catchphrase especially in education fora and documents of international agencies. This is because as part of our consciousness, quality education holds the key to holistic human and socio-economic development of nations as well as global peace, security, fairness and harmony.

However, despite the enviable policy space quality education occupies and the potential role it plays in holistic human and national development, it has not received a contextually relevant interpretation to facilitate co-ownership, communication and implementation in Ghana. This conceptual article acknowledges the complexity of interpreting the concept of quality education. At the same time, it argues that the vague, complex, and heteroglossic nature of language implies

that an imprecise interpretation and application of quality education can depress efforts towards its institutionalisation. Linguistic phrase such as quality education also has the potential to estrange the very people who create it. Thus, it is crucial for policy makers and other key stakeholders of education in Ghana to embrace the adaptive challenge of providing co-owned contextual interpretation of quality education if its institutionalisation is to be successful. Using the Leadership for Learning and the Singapore's tripartite models of interpreting and applying policy concepts, the article provided the benefits of and useful lessons from communal familiarity and application of policy concepts. The following recommendations to the Ministry of Education may help to create a co-owned interpretation of quality education that will be contextually relevant to Ghana:

• The Ministry of Education and its agencies including the Ghana Education Service, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, and National School Inspectorate Authority should organise works on Quality Education for stakeholders of education to brainstorm what quality education means for Ghana. This will take into consideration the current national and global contextual realities.

• The co-learning and co-conceptualisation of quality education should clarify what quality education means at the different tiers of education – basic, senior high and tertiary levels. This can lead to a co-owned national conceptualisation of quality education.

• Based on the co-owned context-based meaning that is developed, the participants should draw up policy implementation/action plan that will embed the contours of quality education, its objectives, targets, and indicators.

• The National Commission for Civic Education, mass media (mass and print), and religious bodies can use their spaces and tools to educate or disseminate to the citizenry what quality education means for Ghana, its objectives and the indicators that will show that we are achieving it or not.

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