

Rethinking Education Policy Success/failure: Analysing Ghana's 'fcube' using the Three Dimensions of Policy as a Conceptual Heuristic

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Abstract

In education, the relativism with which claims of success or otherwise of policies are accentuated unmasks a lack of a systematic framework with which one could question what constitutes policy success and/or failure. This article aims at inducing a rethink of education policy analysis. In the process, the article after highlighting and describing the process, programmatic and political dimensions of policy, uses the illustration as a conceptual heuristic to analyse Ghana's Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE) policy and thereby provide an exemplar of the efficacy of the heuristic for policy evaluation. Subsequently, the relevance of this heuristic to theory, policy and practice is highlighted. The article portends that the conceptual heuristic it illuminates is important as it enables analysts (including educational administrators and managers) to see beyond the traditional problem-solving intent

and view policy equally as a language for framing political discourse and for getting people involved in democratic processes.

Introduction

In education, just like any other key public sector, claims about success or failure of policies could be said to lie very much in the eyes of beholder(s). Policy makers (whether governments, their agencies or officials, bureaucrats, political actors and interest group leaders) are most often seen or heard accentuating the success of educational policies conveniently, and mostly without any concrete evidence and criteria on the basis of which such conclusions are reached. In the same vein, agitations and counter claims of policy failures, mainly by policy recipients or beneficiaries, stakeholders and interest groups, are also commonplace in political and social life.

Obviously, this "postmodernist crass morass of extreme relativism

regarding policy success/failure" (Boyne, 2003, p. 222) raises, on the one hand, ontological and epistemological issue of whether any objective assessment of policy is possible. In particular, contestations over whether or not a particular policy has been successful give credence to the claim by some scholars that policy success or failure is "nothing more than a social construct reflecting existing power relations" (Marsh & McConnell, 2010a, p. 570). This consequently exposes a potential lacuna concerning our understanding of the dynamics and iterative nature of education policy processes. On the other hand (and most importantly for the purposes of this article), this apparent policy success/failure relativism raises a more critical concern of the lack of any systematic criteria with which practitioners could approach and make sense of the complex nature of education policy amid all its ambiguities, contradictions and accompanying political rhetoric by policy makers that their policies are achieving desired and/or intended results. This in practice thus makes it difficult for policy actors to explain, among other things, the phenomenon McConnell (2010, p. 3) refers to colloquially, and in public policy terms, as 'good politics but bad policy'. Similarly, the unavailability in education of any systematic criteria with which to understand many related and complex policy issues poses to educational researchers,

administrators and managers the challenge of understanding and identifying policy-making strategies that "attempt short-term success fixes but store up longer-term risks of failure" (McConnell, 2010, p. 4).

Admittedly, both of these issues regarding the apparent relativism involved in accentuating policy success/failure qualify as suitable candidates for serious academic interrogation. However, this article focuses mainly on addressing the later issue of lack of systematic criteria for assessing the success and/or failure of educational policies. The article aims to induce a rethink of existing models for evaluating education policy success/failure drawing on the "three dimensions of policy" (Marsh & McConnell, 2010a; 2010b; McConnell, 2010). In pursuit of this agenda, the article, after highlighting and describing the process, programmatic and political dimensions of policy, uses the illustration as a conceptual heuristic to analyse Ghana's Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE) policy implementation. This is done with the view to demonstrating its efficacy as a valuable guide and a tool for critical educational policy evaluations. Thereafter, the relevance of the conceptual heuristic to research, theory, policy and practice particularly in education, is discussed briefly in the conclusion. The article argues that the heuristic it illuminates

is important in the sense that it offers a valuable yardstick with which policy practitioners (including educational administrators and managers) can begin to approach questions about the extent to which particular education policies could be said to be succeeding or otherwise.

The dimensions of policy: a heuristic for establishing policy success/failure

Full details (including indicators which can be used to measure success/failure and the evidence which would be appropriate in relation to each of the indicators) of what this article refers to as the conceptual heuristic for assessing policy success/failure can be found in Table 1 below. This section of the article describes crisply features of the process, programmatic and political dimensions of policy which together constitute the heuristic this article advocates as a guide for evaluating and establishing the success or otherwise of education policies.

Process Dimension of Policy

The process dimension of policy developed apparently from the conception of policy as a "cycle" (Ball, 1990; 1993; 1994; Bowe et al., 1992). It adopts a postmodernist orientation to policy studies as a discipline and highlights the complex and contested nature of policy as a process rather than an end product

(Ball, 1994; Olssen et al., 2004; Ozga, 2000; Rist, 2000; Trowler, 1998). The policy process conception holds a different, more diffuse and less entrenched view from those other conceptions which view policy in quite straightforward terms as the actions of government bodies or institutions aimed at securing particular intended outcomes. The process dimension of policy argues that policy documents and statements are always a result of struggles, negotiations and compromises between the different individuals, groups and interests involved in policy making. This dynamism (notably the contested and disputed nature) of the process of policy making, according to Ball (1994) and Trowler (1998), for example, is evident at two levels: the points of 'encoding' and 'decoding' policy. The 'encoding' level (which is also identified as 'policy as text') is referred to by proponents of this tradition as the initial stage of formal policy making where ideas, values and aspirations of both the 'key actors' involved in the policy process, and the people and/or interests they represent are elicited and enlisted via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations. The 'decoding' level (which is identified as 'policy as discourse') according to adherents of the policy process tradition, is marked by the disputed and complex ways by which the policy messages and

outcomes are interpreted by policy actors and implementers in the contexts of their own culture, ideology, history, resources and expertise.

As one of the arms of the proposed tripartite conceptual heuristic for assessing and establishing policy success/failure, the process dimension aims broadly at finding out and documenting whether or not the policy whose success or failure is being assessed has 'democratic legitimacy' (i.e. if it is produced through due processes of constitutional and quasi-constitutional procedures), and whether or not it has the support of a 'sufficient coalition' (political sustainability). Other notable indicators of the policy process dimension of the proposed heuristic include: finding out whether or not the policy is based on new ideas and/or policy instruments (policy innovation) or it involves the adoption from elsewhere (policy transfer/diffusion); and whether the legislation paving the way for the introduction of the policy is passed with few or no amendments.

Programmatic Dimension of Policy

This dimension of policy is synonymous with what in policy terms is referred to as the "problem-solving conception of policy" (Nudzor, 2009a, 2009b). It depicts the traditional approach to policy making where policy is thought of as an event

and a guide, concerned fundamentally with setting out solutions to problems. The view originates from the state centred approach and its inherent rationalist foundation of policy processes which focus on the locus of power (Dale, 1989; Harman, 1984; Kogan, 1975; Nakamura & Smallwood, 1980; Smyth, 1994). This conception of policy presumes that experts trained in proper analytical techniques can apply their expertise to the political marketplace can discover and measure the impact of policy on citizen interests, can project policy consequences with some accuracy, and can affect the decisions of identifiable clients, who will use policy and its analyses to solve problems. The view is also driven by the "stages view of policy making in which one of the final stages is a timely recommendation to a client or timely intervention to solve pressing problems" (Shulock, 1999, p. 289).

The programmatic dimension of policy as a vital ingredient of the tripartite conceptual heuristic for assessing policy success/failure seeks to find answers to key operational questions such as: Is the policy being assessed implemented as per the stated objectives and intentions? Is it (i.e. the policy) achieving the intended/desired outcomes? Are resources readily available, and are they being used efficiently and expeditiously? As this dimension of

policy aims at securing solutions to problems, a crucial aspect of its assessment procedure involves finding out which actor interest the implementation serves. That is, ascertaining if the policy is benefitting a particular class, interest group, alliance, political party, gender, race, religion, ethnic group, territorial community, institution, ideology etc.

Politics or Political Dimension of Policy

What this article refers to as the political dimension of policy takes its roots in political science theory (rational choice theory to be precise) and its assumption that “rational self-interest among political actors is the driving force of political life and public policy” (McConnell, 2010, p. 25). The conception is based on the view that the processes of policy making or the types of policies chosen are not devoid of the political interests of policy makers. This view takes credence from the simple logic that if policy broadly is what policy makers (and in general, governments) choose to do or not to do, then policy makers (and in the same general sense, governments) do not just 'do' or 'engage' in processes and programmes, but also politics. Scholars in the political dimension of policy (for example Althaus, 2008; de Mesquita, Smith, Siverson, & Morrow, 2003; Edelman, 1977; May, 2005; McConnell, 2010) argue that

the success and/or failure of policies and programmes implemented can, and do have bearing on elections (in the form of campaigns, support and outcomes), strategic directions of governments (i.e. helping to keep policy trajectories of government on course or knocking them off course), and on leadership career pathways (helping turn leaders into 'heroes' or 'villains'). To put it rather bluntly, the political dimension of policy holds with significant fervour the notion that politics has tremendous bearing on the operational realities of policy-making and programmes adopted. To put this another way, the political dimension of policy holds the view that policies enacted and intended to serve specific purposes can, and do have important political consequences, hence the issue of achieving political goals need to be factored into any discussion of what constitutes policy success or failure (Marsh & McConnell, 2010a, 2010b; McConnell, 2010).

As a benchmark, and the last arm of the tripartite conceptual heuristic proposed in this article the political dimension of policy concerns itself mainly with finding out and establishing if the policy in question is politically popular. The process involves providing factual answers to questions such as: Does the implementation of the policy improved the government's chances of being re-elected? or Does the

policy implementation help secure or boost the government's credibility and integrity? These, genuinely, are quite complicated and extremely difficult questions to answer especially by self-commissioned independent studies. This is particularly so since governments in their bit to fulfil their manifesto promises are engaged in implementing multiple and complex policies all at the same time. That notwithstanding, the evidence to marshal as answers to these questions relate mostly, but not exclusively to, opinion polls, election results and media commentary.

Thus, as can be seen in the above illustrations, the three dimensions of policy are not mutually exclusive. As such, tensions and overlaps within and between them are inevitable. This notwithstanding, the three dimensions provide us with the most appropriate starting point for analysis. Essentially, and for policy analysis purposes, they serve as "building blocks which can help to capture the different facets of policy success/failure, as well as the real world politicking and contestation which surround public (including education) policies and their merits or otherwise" (Marsh & McConnell 2010b, p. 586).

Table 1: Dimensions of policy success/failure

Dimensions	Indicators	Evidence
Process	<i>Legitimacy in the formation of choices:</i> that is, finding out if the policy is/was produced through due processes of constitutional and quasi-constitutional procedures and values of democracy, deliberation and accountability.	Legislative records, executive minutes, absence of legal challenges (for example, Ombudsman), absence of significant criticism from stakeholders.
	<i>Passage of legislation:</i> ascertaining whether the legislation concerning the policy was passed with no, or few, amendments.	Analysis of legislative process, using legislative records, including identification of amendments and analysis of legislative voting patterns.
	<i>Political sustainability:</i> establishing whether or not the policy has the support of a sufficient coalition.	Analysis of support from ministers, stakeholders, especially interest groups, media, public opinion.

Innovation and influence: was the policy based on new ideas or policy instruments, or did it involve the adoption of policy from elsewhere (i.e. policy transfer/diffusion)?

Government statements and reports (for example, White/Green Papers), academic and practitioner conferences, interest group reports, think tank reports, media news and commentary, identification of similarities between legislation and that in other jurisdictions identification of form and content of cross-jurisdictional meetings/visits by politicians and/or public servants.

Programmatic

Operational: was the policy implemented as per the stated objectives?

Internal programme/policy evaluation, external evaluation (for example, legislative committee reports, audit reports), review by stakeholders, absence of critical reports in media (including professional journals).

Outcome: did the policy achieve the intended/stated outcomes?

Same pieces of evidence as above.

Resource: could the policy implementation process be described as efficient use of resources?

Internal efficiency evaluations, external audit reports/assessments, absence of critical media reports.

Actor/interest: did the policy (implementation) benefit a particular class, interest group, alliance, political party, gender, race, religion, ethnic group, territorial community, institution, ideology etc?

Party political speeches and press releases, legislative debates, legislative committee reports, ministerial briefings, interest group and other stakeholders' speeches/press releases/reports, think tank reports, media commentary.

Political	<i>Government popularity</i> : is the policy politically popular? Did it help government's re-election/election chances? Did it help secure or boost government's credibility?	Opinion polls, both in relation to particular policy and government popularity, election results, media commentary.
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Adopted and adapted from Marsh and McConnell (2010a)

Ghana's fCUBE Policy as Vignette for Analysis

The implementation of Ghana's fCUBE policy is written about widely (see for example: Akyeampong, 2009; Nudzor, 2012, 2013a, 2013b) and presents an interesting case for analysis, particularly for the purposes of this article. The acronym fCUBE was derived from the wording of Ghana's Fourth Republican Constitution of 1992, whose formulation and passage into law led to the establishment of the fCUBE policy. It (the fCUBE policy) was launched in 1996 in fulfilment of the 1992 constitutional mandate which states in Chapter 6, Section 38 sub-section 2 that:

The Government shall, within two years, after Parliament first meets, after coming into force of this Constitution, draw up a programme for implementation within the following ten years, for the provision of free, compulsory and universal basic education to all Ghanaian children of school-age. (Government of Ghana (GOG), 1992)

The 1992 constitution came into effect officially on the 7th of January 1993 and in line with the constitutional requirement, the then Government of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), through the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ghana Education Service (GES) issued a policy document in April 1996 to implement the fCUBE policy officially. The policy primarily sought to eliminate school fees in order to increase demand for schooling. The policy makers argued that the right to education was unequivocal, and that fees in whatever form constituted a disincentive to the enjoyment of that right. In other words, the crux of the argument, as Akyeampong (2009) succinctly put it, is that the invidious existence of indirect costs, such as compulsory levies on parents, needed to be controlled to safeguard the provision and delivery of basic education as a fundamental human right. Thus, at the heart of fCUBE essentially was the Government of Ghana's commitment "to making schooling from Basic Education Stage through to 9 free, compulsory and universal for all school-age children

and to improve the quality of education services rendered” (MOE, 1996, p. 1).

With financial assistance from the World Bank, the policy implementation process began in 1996 and was expected to be completed and the policy institutionalised by 2005. An fCUBE implementation plan, which adopts a range of strategies often referred to as the objectives of the fCUBE policy (MOE, 1996), was also developed to guide the implementation of the policy. These strategies revolved around three main components, namely: improving quality of teaching and learning; improving management efficiency; and improving access and participation in education (MOE, 1996); and were focused on demand and supply issues in educational provision in Ghana's basic school system (World Bank, 2004). With reference to the demand issues, investments went to support education policy and management changes with key areas targeted including (but not exclusively to): increasing instructional time, reducing fees and levies, improving headteachers' management skills and motivation levels, and improving school supervision. Regarding the supply issues of education provision, investments focused primarily on improving physical infrastructure and increasing the number of school places through the large-scale construction of

additional classrooms and schools (World Bank, 2004).

In 1997, (i.e. a year into the official launching of the implementation of the policy), a fourth component: decentralisation and sustainability of management structures: was added to the three components. This component, also known as the fourth objective of the fCUBE policy, was focused on decentralising management of the sector's budget for pre-tertiary education in Ghana to District Assemblies (DAs). This, in practice involved capacity building and devolving financial management responsibilities from central government to the district level (GES, 2004; MOE, 1996).

Although the year 2005 which the 1992 constitution mandated for the implementation and institutionalisation of the fCUBE policy had elapsed some eight years ago, the policy still appears to be on the policy radar of governments, and is being implemented arguably amidst some modifications and improvements. The interesting issue here concerns the fact that between the year 2000 and 2008, when there was a change of government from the government of the NDC to that of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), new policy initiatives intended to strengthen and revitalise the fCUBE policy implementation were introduced. Notable among these policy initiatives were the

'capitation grant scheme', 'the school-feeding programme', and 'the 11-year basic education policy' (GES, 2004; MOE, 2005). In the case of the capitation grant scheme, it was developed and launched first as a pilot programme in 2004/2005, and then launched country-wide in 2005/2006 to increase access to basic education. It aims primarily at removing the financial barrier to enrolling in schools while, at the same time, compensating schools for any loss of revenue incurred by eliminating students levies. It allocates a per pupil allotment of funding (i.e. 4 Ghana Cedis 50 Pesewas, per pupil per year) to all basic public schools from Kindergarten through to Junior High School to encourage effective implementation of decentralisation by empowering schools to plan and carry out school quality improvement activities (Maikish & Gershberg, 2008, pp. 8-9). The school-feeding programme, as the name implies, sought to provide at least a decent meal a day for vulnerable school children, particularly those living in deprived and poverty stricken communities, whilst the 11-year basic education policy extends basic education from 9 to 11 years, comprising 2 years kindergarten; 6 years primary and 3 years Junior High schooling.

Interestingly again, when in 2008, due to democratically held elections, there was a change in government

from the NPP back to NDC, new policy initiatives such as 'free exercise books', 'free school uniforms', '1 laptop computer per child', 'provision of classroom block vis-à-vis comfortable and age-appropriate furniture' are now being undertaken to consolidate the gains and successes attained by the previous administrations regarding the provision of free, compulsory and universal basic education to all Ghanaian children of school-age. Of course, the argument here is not necessarily that national education policies and programmes should or need to change anytime there is a change of government. However, if we conceptualise change (and indeed policy) as a political tool with which political parties and governments get to operationalise their ideologies, beliefs and political campaign promises then the commitment that successive governments have shown since 1992 towards the fCUBE policy implementation raises a number of critical questions worth interrogating. First, the question may be asked about what is interesting about the fCUBE policy to the extent that successive governments with differing political ideologies are committed to its implementing? Second, discerning minds may also want to know if there is any evidence to the effect that the fCUBE policy implementation inures to the electoral fortunes of political parties to the extent that ruling governments since 1992 have shown commitment to its implementation?

Using the three dimensions of policy as a conceptual heuristic, the analysis below attempts to answer these and other legitimate questions thereby unearthing the efficacy of the heuristic for assessing and establishing the success or otherwise of education policy. It is important to note however, that what this article proposes as a conceptual heuristic is neither a theory nor a model. Rather, it is a conceptual guide with which analysts can approach and begin to assess what constitute policy success and failure.

The Analysis

The analysis of the fCUBE policy implementation illustrated below is not intended to serve solely programmatic intents of policy analysis as most traditional forms of policy evaluations explicated in policy literature have demonstrated. Rather, the illustrations focus on exemplifying how the three dimensions of policy are helpful as a guide for making a holistic assessment of what constitute policy success and/or failure.

Process Success/Failure of fCUBE

Till date, this is one aspect of the fCUBE policy implementation which has not received any rigorous academic interrogation. As such, apart from the passing reference to the effect that the policy was introduced in response to a constitutional mandate (i.e. in fulfilment of the provision in Chapter

6, Section 38, sub-section 2 of the Fourth Republican Constitution of 1992), no documentary evidence pointing to how the policy evolved and the processes it underwent are available and are cited in any critical analysis of the policy. This, thus, creates a lacuna in our knowledge and understanding particularly about whether or not any democratic, political or legislative processes were involved in the enactment of the policy. For example, as things stand, it is not documented whether indeed there is any legislation or legal framework backing the implementation of the fCUBE policy. It is also unclear, that is, assuming a law was enacted to back the implementation of the policy, whether that legislation was passed in parliament with no, or few amendments, and whether it (the legislation) had what is called 'presidential assent' and the support of a sufficient coalition.

These issues are very crucial and their absence in any critical discussions and analyses may perhaps be advanced as the causal factors to the teething operational and conceptual implementation problems the fCUBE policy is faced with. For example, the absence of a legal framework or law to enforce the fCUBE policy intentions means that government cannot be blamed neither can it be held accountable in any court of law for not fulfilling its constitutionally mandated responsibility of providing free, compulsory and universal

education to its citizens. Similarly, the unavailability of any legislation to enforce the 'compulsory' component of fCUBE implies that parents and/or guardians who for one reason or the other could not send their children and/or wards to school could also not be prosecuted for committing any crime. Akyeampong (2009, pp. 181-182) alludes to the second of these issues in his analysis of the fCUBE policy. He asserts that "the 'compulsory' element of fCUBE signals the determination by government (and indeed the Ghanaian educational authority) to put pressure on parents to enrol their children for the full duration of basic education schooling, however, without an enforcement strategy that provision of fCUBE amounted to an empty threat".

This notwithstanding, the policy could be said to be successful somewhat in respect of the timing of its initiation and consequently the support and commitment this has garnered from the citizenry and both NDC and NPP governments towards its implementation. As cited by Nudzor (2012, p. 351), the fCUBE policy was initiated during the period Ghana embarked on a significant push towards deepening the provision and delivery of good quality and accessible education to all her citizens. This period in question embraced the era of major constitutional reforms, and was characterised by her participation in,

and endorsement of international agreements and conventions such as the Education for All (EFA), the United Nations Convention Declaration on the Right of the Child, the Beijing Declaration on Women's Rights, the Lome Convention, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and many others. The point to be made here forcefully is that Ghana's participation in, and endorsement of the proceedings of many of these conferences coupled with commitment to her own internal constitutional reforms in 1992 led arguably to major constitutional and educational reforms of which the fCUBE policy initiative was/is a formidable part. As Maikish and Gershberg (2008) also succinctly sum it up, the advent of the 1992 Republican Constitution and the policy acts that followed it set the stage for national provision of basic education in Ghana. In the absence of any credible and readily available information to the contrary therefore, this argument perhaps could be advanced to explain the interest, commitment and support that successive governments have demonstrated since 1992 towards the fCUBE policy and its implementation and institutionalisation.

Programmatic Success/Failure of fCUBE

The programmatic dimension of the policy in principle is geared towards establishing what is referred to in policy terms as the problem-solving

intent of policy analysis, and is the only area of analysis on the fCUBE policy which has received enormous attention and assessment (see, for example, Akyeampong, 2009; Global Monitoring Report, 2009; Maikish & Gershberg, 2008; MOE, 2000; Nudzor, 2012, 2013a, 2013b; Tomasevski, 2006; World Bank, 2004). The preponderance of research evidence available indicate that although the fCUBE policy implementation is bedevilled with teething conceptual, operational and logistical issues, the policy could be said to have made some significant strides as far as the attainment of its objectives are concerned.

Research reports on the fCUBE policy implementation suggest, among other things, that as a result of the introduction of fCUBE and its related EFA policy initiatives there has been significant surge in enrolment of pupils across the country, and that similar, if not tremendous strides have been made towards meeting EFA targets in such other areas as infrastructural development, gender parity and decentralisation. For example, Maikish and Gershberg (2008) analysed trends from 2002 to 2007 in primary and junior high school gross enrolment ratio (GER) and net enrolment ration (NER) across Ghana by sex, region and district deprivation level, and report significant increases in enrolment due to the introduction of the capitation grant scheme. They

assert that the margin of difference in GER between boys and girls decreased from 6.1% in 2003-2004 to 4.1% in 2006-2007 suggesting a fair impact of the capitation grant on narrowing the gap between girls and boys. They add, among other claims, that the basic school GER in deprived districts exhibited a steeper growth rate after 2005-2006 bringing the GER in deprived and non-deprived district basic schools from roughly an 8% margin to within less than 3% by 2006-2007 (cited in Nudzor, 2012, p. 356). The EFA Global Monitoring Report (2010) reverberate this issue of surge in enrolment as a result of the implementation of fCUBE related policy initiatives. The report indicates that as at 1999 the GER in primary education for boys and girls stood at 78% and 72% respectively, and that by 2006, this rose to 98% and 97% respectively. The report adds that a year on (i.e. 2006 to 2007) the GER for both boys and girls rose from a total of 98% to 104%. This means that between 1999 and 2007 the GER for both boys and girls rose from a total of 75% to 104%.

These issues are also trumpeted, in a policy document intended to tout the top 50 achievements of the late Professor Atta Mills led NDC Government within the first two years of its tenure (i.e. from January 2009 to January 2010). The government claims, as some of its topmost achievements, the distribution of free school uniforms and exercise books

to basic school pupils, expansion of school-feeding programme, replacing schools under trees, increase in the capitation grant, revamping collapsed science resource centre and reduction in SHS duration. Taking the issue of the phenomenon referred to in Ghanaian parlance as 'school under trees' (i.e. schools who due to unavailability of infrastructural facilities are forced to conduct teaching and learning activities under the shades of trees) as a case in point, the document claims that a sustained programme involving MOE, the Ghana Education Trust Fund (GETFUND) and resources allocated by the various DAs was put in place and has begun to ensure the elimination of these schools, and to provide schools throughout the country with decent classroom infrastructure. The document notes further that as at the time of publishing this report, 40% of the 4320 schools under trees had been eliminated and the infrastructural facilities of so many schools across the length and breadth of the country had been improved tremendously (GOG, 2010).

These are but few of the successes of the fCUBE policy, which to a large extent, are good indicators to suggest that perhaps the policy may be making some modest impacts as far as its stated objective and intentions are concerned. Regarding failures or what this article prefers to describe as constraints, the poor quality of

education is obviously one of the main setbacks this analysis of pinpoint. Available reports suggest that whilst pupils' enrolment is seen to be going up steadily as a result of implementing the policy, the quality of education appears to have deteriorated. For example, available statistics for the 2009 Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results indicate that out of a total number of 395,649 candidates who sat for that year's examination, only 198,642 (representing about 50.2%) qualified for placement under the Computerised Schools Selection and Placement System (CSSPS). The statistics indicate that the situation was worse for the 2011 academic year where only 46.93% of pupils achieved passes to gain entry to senior high schools (SHSs) (MOE 2012).

Similarly, Tomasevski (2006), in her Global Report on the State of the Right to Education, paints a rather gloomy picture of Ghana's effort at meeting the EFA and MDGs. In her assessment, she confirms that Ghana's commitment to free compulsory and universal basic education followed from the 1992 constitution which has affirmed that basic education shall be free compulsory and available to all Ghanaian children of school-age irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion, social and economic status, colour, creed, geographical location. She stresses that these constitutional

guarantees were inspired by the fact that prior to the official inception of fCUBE in 1996, education was neither free, compulsory, nor available to all those who could not afford the cost. Citing from a wide range of sources to support her claims of the failure of the fCUBE policy implementation, she adds:

...10 years after Ghana's implementation of the fCUBE policy, her educational performance has not improved... By 2003, merely 59% of 6-11 year olds enrolled in primary school... Although the current debt relief process in place might lead to making education less costly, there is no commitment to making it free in the 2003 Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP)... Although the PRSP have confirmed that one-third of out-of school children could not meet the high cost of education, there was no pledge to eliminate that financial barrier. The Government has only pledged that regulations on illegal fees will be enforced to ensure that the approved fees (which in most cases are disguised as 'levies') are charged... (Tomasevski, 2006, cited in Nudzor, 2012, pp. 354-355)

She contends, on the basis of these facts, that for education to be really

free (and perhaps compulsory and universal) in Ghana and elsewhere, all direct, indirect and opportunity costs would have to be identified so as to be eliminated through their substitution by public allocations.

In a recent evaluative case study of the fCUBE policy implementation, the Nudzor (2012) highlights the conceptual and operational challenges and dilemmas the policy implementation is faced with. This study sought to explore how Ghanaian policy implementers who mediate policy between policy makers and the actual implementers of policy at school level (i.e. head-teachers and teachers) conceptualised and articulated the fCUBE policy intentions encapsulated in the documents and how this process of mediation impacted on the process of implementation. The analyses of data gathered and the findings that emerged from the process leads him to argue that because of the existence of a significant blurring and/or ambiguity in meaning particularly of the components of the fCUBE policy title, the 'free', 'compulsory' and 'universal' intentions of the fCUBE policy cannot be said to be reflected visibly in the process of implementation. For example, he contends that since education has both public and private, indirect or ancillary cost elements, instituting the capitation grant scheme (which takes care of only school related costs such as sports levies, cultural fees, repair of

infrastructural facilities, provision textbooks etc) does not make schooling totally free. Similarly, the author puts forth the argument that since basic education is not totally free, it is difficult to make it compulsory. The reason for this, according to him, is that parents (or perhaps guardians) who break any law put in place to enforce the compulsory aspect of the policy could simply use poverty as an excuse to absolve themselves from punitive measures. Again, Nudzor (2012) uses the findings of his study to argue that because the 'universal' intent of fCUBE is not conceptualised and accentuated consistently with social democratic and progressive ideals of social justice and its related concepts such as inclusion, equality of opportunities and outcomes, fairness and equity which the policy sought to provide, that component of the fCUBE policy title could also not be said to be reflected adequately in the process of implementation. (See Nudzor, 2013a; 2013b for further exposition on the analysis indicating an emergent discursive shift in policy direction and language of implementation the fCUBE policy.)

So while the fCUBE policy is said to have chalked up some significant successes, the illustrations above go to show that the implementation process is also fraught with some pertinent programmatic setbacks.

Political Success/Failure of fCUBE
 This is the other dimension of fCUBE policy implementation which is seriously underdeveloped. As has been mentioned already, Ghana's fCUBE policy was launched in fulfilment of the 1992 constitutional mandate (which enjoined the government at the time to put together a programme for implementing the policy after Parliament has formally been constituted), coupled with the active participation in, and endorsement of key international conventions and agreements on the right to education among other critical and fundamental human right issues. This point also has been made earlier since its inception in 1996, successive governments have shown commitment to implementing the policy. Unfortunately however, what is missing (and which no research and/or analysis has yet addressed) is information on two key questions highlighted earlier, namely: Why both the NDC and NPP governments who have been alternating political power between themselves since the inception of the fCUBE policy in 1996 demonstrated commitment to its implementation irrespective of the fact both political parties share different political ideologies and beliefs?; and also, Is there credible evidence to the effect that the fCUBE policy implementation influenced the electoral fortunes of political parties in power to the extent that ruling governments since 1992 have shown commitment to its implementation?

Obviously, the answer to the first of these questions could be said to be implicit in the explanation provided earlier. One could argue that the Fourth Republican Constitution of 1992 enjoins political parties in government to implement the policy in fulfilment of a constitutional mandate. However, one is likely to run into problems, if by that same argument, one considers the fact that the same constitutional provisions (Chapter 6, Section 38 sub-section 2 of the 1992 Constitution) requires that basic education in Ghana should be compulsory and yet there has not been any law till date to enforce that component of the fCUBE policy. To the second of the questions put forward, it is interesting to note that although successive governments, since 1992, have demonstrated commitment, and are still showing commitment to implementing the policy, no information absolutely is available to buttress the point that they are doing so because they get to reap the benefits politically at the polls.

In spite of the argument put forward above, the position of this article is that the implementation of Ghana's fCUBE policy has been, and still is politically popular and perhaps successful for two main reasons. First, the fCUBE policy implementation is seen as successful because, as mentioned earlier in the paper, it boosts the credibility of successive

governments and indeed Ghana as a country that is committed to addressing constitutional and human rights issues. Second, the policy implementation is seen as successful not necessarily because its implementation inures to the benefit of any political party in government at the polls, but rather because it upholds the integrity of Ghana as a country which is not renegeing on the key international conventions and agreements she has subscribed to in principles, and which she is committed to implementing.

Thus, the discussion contained in this article can by no means be said to be exhaustive of all that needs to be said as far as the analysis of the fCUBE policy implementation is concerned. However, as the reports have shown, the analyses using the three dimensions of policy provide a useful lens with which to identify crucial ingredients of policy and to factor them into the discussion of what constitutes policy success and/or failure.

Summary and Conclusion

This article will end on the same note it started. The article starts off by problematizing the apparent relativism with which claims of success or failure of education policy is accentuated. It makes the point forcefully that this relativism has two implications for policy analysis. First, the paper notes that the

postmodernist morass of extreme relativism raises the ontological and epistemological claim held by some scholars that policy success/failure is nothing more than a social construct reflecting existing power relations. Second, and following from the first argument, it reinforces the claim of the lack of any systematic criteria with which scholars and practitioners could approach and begin to make sense of the complex nature of education policy success/failure. While acknowledging that these are legitimate issues warranting further academic interrogation, the paper focuses on the latter of the two issues. In the process, the paper after highlighting and illuminating the process, programmatic and political dimensions of policy uses this illustration as a conceptual heuristic to analyse the implementation of Ghana's fCUBE policy. Although the fCUBE presents an interesting case in terms of where and how it originates, the rationale for using it as a vignette for analysis rests in the quest to demonstrate the efficacy of what the article calls the conceptual heuristic as a valuable guide and a tool for critical education policy analysis.

The analysis shows that the implementation of Ghana's fCUBE policy could be said to be experiencing a mixture of successes and failures. Taking the programmatic dimension to assess the success and/or failure of the policy for

example, the analysis shows that the policy is making some significant strides in meeting some of its stated objectives. As a result of the initiation of fCUBE and its related EFA policy initiatives, enrolment has increased tremendously and so also are improvements in infrastructure, facilities and the provision of school-related materials (such as school uniforms, exercise books, laptops, computers, meals) to needy and disadvantaged pupils across the country. Regarding constraints and failures of the implementation process, the analysis notes that pupil enrolment appears to be increasing enormously at the expense of quality education. The analysis also indicates the 'free', 'compulsory' and 'universal' intentions of fCUBE could not be said to be reflected visibly in the implementation process because of blurring and/or ambiguities in the meanings of these components of the policy title.

Taking the process and political dimensions as benchmarks for analysing the fCUBE policy, the analysis considers the lack of credible and available information about the processes involved in enacting the policy, and any clear evidence of the policy inuring to the electoral fortunes of political parties in government as challenges or setbacks of the implementation process. The notwithstanding, the analysis contends that the fCUBE policy

successful politically and in terms of the processes for two main reasons. First, the uninterrupted implementation of the policy boosts the credibility of successive governments and indeed Ghana as a country that is committed to addressing constitutional and human rights issues. Second, it upholds the integrity of Ghana as a nation which is not reneging on the key international conventions and agreements she has subscribed to in principles, and which she is committed to implementing.

So while this article focuses principally on analysis of the fCUBE policy, the three dimensions of policy it advocates as a conceptual heuristic for analysing and establishing education policy success and/or failure is relevant to research, theory, policy and practice in many respects. Essentially, the conceptual heuristic proposed in this article is important to analysts (including educational researchers, administrators and managers) for the following two reasons:

First, approaching the question of whether or not a particular policy has been successful or otherwise using the three dimensions of policy enables the analyst to see beyond the traditional problem-solving intent and view policy equally as a language for framing political discourse (Shulock, 1999) and for getting

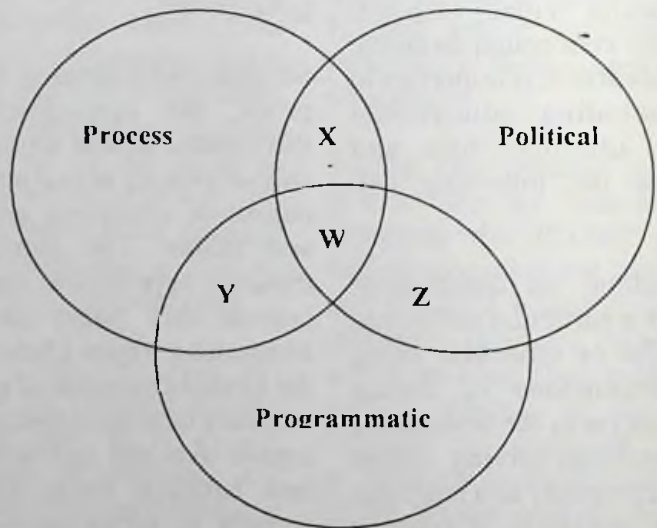
people involved in democratic processes. As has been demonstrated in this article, conceptualising and analysing policy using the conceptual heuristic this paper proposes has an added advantages aside helping to ascertain and document whether a particular policy is being implemented as per the stated objectives, and whether indeed the intended goals of that policy are being achieved. Using the three dimensions of policy as a heuristic, the analyst is enabled to explain how a particular policy emerged, and also to find answers to a host of other related issues bordering on whether the processes culminating to its enactment could be said to be democratically or politically legitimate, the interests being served by the policy as well as whether or not the policy boosts the credibility, popularity and electoral fortunes of government.

Second, and following from the first point, the conceptual heuristic illuminated in this article is a useful way of looking at and analysing what constitute education policy success and failure. The elements of the tripartite approach to viewing policy (which this paper proposes and illustrates in figure 1 below) show that the three dimensions of policy are not mutually exclusive and so there are of course overlaps and tensions within and between them. Of particular interest to education policy researchers, administrators and managers

who wish to assess and establish success are the points of overlap where they get the opportunity to examine varying degrees and combinations of synergy and tension (Marsh & McConnell, 2010, p. 587). The area marked W in the diagram is key in the analysis as it is where all three dimensions coalesce, and where the analyst gets to examine whether success in one dimension of policy necessarily accord with the others. Thus, apart from being analytically convenient categories, these three dimensions additionally offer analysts the opportunity to see beyond and identify the relationship between success and failure. Using the three dimensions of policy as a framework for analysing public

policy, McConnell (2010), for example, helps us to understand this point. He maps out a spectrum of outcomes ranging from policy success through to policy failure. In the process, identifies five different types of successes and failures across the spectrum (namely: policy success, durable success, conflicted success, precarious success, and policy failure). He argues on the basis of this that because success is not 'all or nothing' phenomenon, it is imperative, and also possible using the three dimensions of policy, to comprehend bundles of complex outcomes between the polar extremes of success and failure, as well as factoring in the role of varying perceptions" (pp. 55-62).

Figure 1: Synergy and tensions between the three dimensions of policy



Adopted and adapted from Marsh and McConnell (2010b)

Notes

1. The small 'f' in fCUBE is intended deliberately to show that there are contestations regarding the notion of 'free education'. In this context, the 'f' demonstrates the Government of Ghana's commitment to meeting what is referred to as the 'public cost' of education whilst parents/guardians take up the 'private cost'.

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