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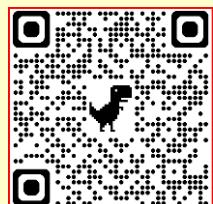
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“Political Economy and the Evolution of Education Reform in Ghana’s Fourth Republic (1993–2025)”

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ABSTRACT

This study will explore educational reform initiatives in Ghana's Fourth Republic (1993-2025) by examining how the ideological foundations of politics have influenced access, equity, and quality in education. The concept of political economy, grounded in institutional theory, provides a practical and analytical framework. Using a qualitative document analysis approach and employing multiple data sources (i.e., policy documents, government white papers, and academic literature), the study will analyze changes over time across six different administrations. The research indicates that, whereas policies such as Rawlings' Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), Kufuor's vocational and quality-oriented reforms, Mills' cost-reduction interventions, Mahama's Progressive Free SHS, and Akufo-Addo's universal Free SHS with an emphasis on STEM have succeeded in expanding access, with secondary school enrolment rates rising from 60% in 1993 to more than 90% in 2025, underlying issues of equity in quality, teacher retention, and accessibility for rural students still exist. Changes in governments and ideological competition between the National Democratic Congress (NDC) and the New Patriotic Party (NPP) have restricted a consistent mode of policy continuity and long-term planning. This study concludes that improvements in Ghana's education system can only be sustainable through cooperation across the political sphere toward evidence-based policies, and reviving investments in teacher training and infrastructure for equitable learning.

KEY WORDS: Ghana; education reform; political economy; policy continuity; Free SHS; equity and access; institutional theory

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

The education system in Ghana has experienced significant changes since the colonial period. Historical, political, and socioeconomic elements (e.g., geographic and historical factors) have all contributed to shaping the education that Ghanaians receive. For

example, education provided during the colonial era was primarily intended for administrative and missionary purposes, benefiting only a small portion of the indigenous population. Following independence in 1957, the educational reforms established during Kwame Nkrumah's era aimed to expand access to education,

including universal primary education. Later, in 1951, the Accelerated Development Plan was introduced to find schools and enroll children in various parts of Ghana. Following Nkrumah's presidency, sporadic reforms were implemented during successive military government regimes, culminating in an education reform in 1987. In 1987, the educational reform of the Provisional National Defence Council transferred the obsolete colonial system into a better accountability model: the 6-3-3-4 system had six years of primary school, three years of junior secondary school or middle school, three years of senior secondary school or senior high school, and lastly, four years of university or tertiary. The 6-3-3-4 system emphasized vocational and technical education (McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 2020).

The Fourth Republic, which commenced in 1993, relaunched democratic governance after decades of disruption. Since then, the NDC and the NPP have each pursued an educational agenda through an ideological lens. The NDC, which is connected to social democracy, has focused on equity and access, whereas the NPP's liberal democratic ideology has emphasized quality, skills acquisition, and market education (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2019). These reforms aimed to address ongoing issues of low enrollment, poor infrastructure, and quality equity; however, they were accompanied by policy reversals when parties changed government (Boakye, 2019).

1.2 Overview of the Fourth Republic

Since the establishment of the Fourth Republic in 1993, Ghana has alternated between democratically elected officials, from the National Democratic Congress (NDC) to the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and back. Democratic credentials were established by Jerry John Rawlings (NDC, 1993-2001) as a foundation for the state's functioning. John Agyekum Kufuor (NPP, 2001-2009) engaged in economic liberalization. The government of John Evans Atta Mills (NDC, 2009-2012) focused on a social welfare policy response to the shifting global economy. The former administration of John Dramani Mahama of the NDC (2012-2017) invested heavily in physical infrastructure. Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (NPP, 2017-2025) then expanded the ambitious free education policy framework. John Dramani Mahama's current administration (NDC, 2025-present) continues to build upon those gains, but with a specific focus on quality. Both the NDC and NPP have exhibited enduring continuities and discontinuities in their ideological practices, with the NDC adopting an interventionist stance and the NPP relying on a market-oriented approach to educational policy (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2024).

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite improvements, there are continuing gaps in the education sector in Ghana. The education system suffers from inconsistent policies because of the country's generally volatile political system. The consequence of the volatile political system is fluctuations and inconsistencies in policy, as well as the resources required to implement it. Access inequities are especially evident in rural areas. There are still quality issues regarding class size, teacher training, and supervision. Whenever political actors intervene, educators often find themselves making decisions based on political expediency rather than sustainable long-term solutions. Other issues, such as the digital divide and gender equality, are often exacerbated by political actors' interventions (Apusigah, 2021; Braimah & Abdul-Rahaman, 2020). This study aims to fill gaps in the research by examining the impact of regime-specific reforms on the education sector.

1.4 Research Objectives

The primary objectives are:

- To investigate educational reforms implemented during each regime in the Fourth Republic.
- To scrutinize the objectives, the means of implementation, the difficulties faced, and the results following these reforms.
- To analyze the reforms implemented in each regime and examine their overall impact on access, quality, and equity.

1.5 Research Questions

- What major educational reforms did each regime implement?
- How did political ideologies and transitions influence these reforms?
- What were the main challenges and results of these reforms?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research contributes to policy by revealing the patterns of stability and change in policy positions, thereby fostering greater awareness of educational policies that may facilitate bipartisan work in education. Furthermore, this study makes a significant contribution to the scholarship in educational studies that investigates the political economy of education in the African context. A broader contribution of the study will be to identify lessons that can be drawn to address policy instability, particularly in contexts similar to those presented in the findings. (Joshee & Goldberg, 2022).

1.7 Scope and Limitations

The study examines the period from 1993 to 2025, focusing on educational reform in primary and secondary education. It is limited in scope because it relies on secondary data, which may introduce inferential bias when evaluating the more recent regimes through historical lenses (Government of Ghana, 2023).

1.8 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative document analysis, drawing on institutional theory and political economy frameworks. Data sources included policy documents, white papers, education sector plans, and education studies focused on higher education in the Fourth Republic of Ghana (changes were introduced in 1993 and will continue through 2025).

The project entailed purposive sampling, in which we aimed to select documents directly related to education reform, educational policy implementation, and the ideologies that shape access, equity, and quality in public education. Credibility and reliability considerations supported efforts to establish evidence from key government documents (Canadian and U.S.) and peer-reviewed documents. Evidence of non-peer-reviewed or bite-sized literature was also included based on higher education implications emphasized through qualitative document analysis and plausibility drawn from the conceptual framework.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) model. Document texts were initially coded inductively for recurring ideas related to access and inclusion, improvements in the quality of education, ideological framings, and the recognized continuity of policy. Three main categories were identified as important for an analysis, based on the elements of the conceptual framework:

- (1) Structural and contextual factors (e.g., finance, governance, or preservice education and ministries of education and health);
- (2) Reform design and implementation (e.g., policy issuance and adaptation); and
- (3) Educational outcomes (positive or negative changes drawn from cumulative available data).

Triangulation purposes across umbrella government sources, academic literature, and donors' sources promoted validity of the evidence base, and systematic reflexive note-taking helped address interpretive bias as an investigator. Ethical considerations of representing sources accurately were maintained without server bias toward particular parts of evidence, or adopting a partisan position.

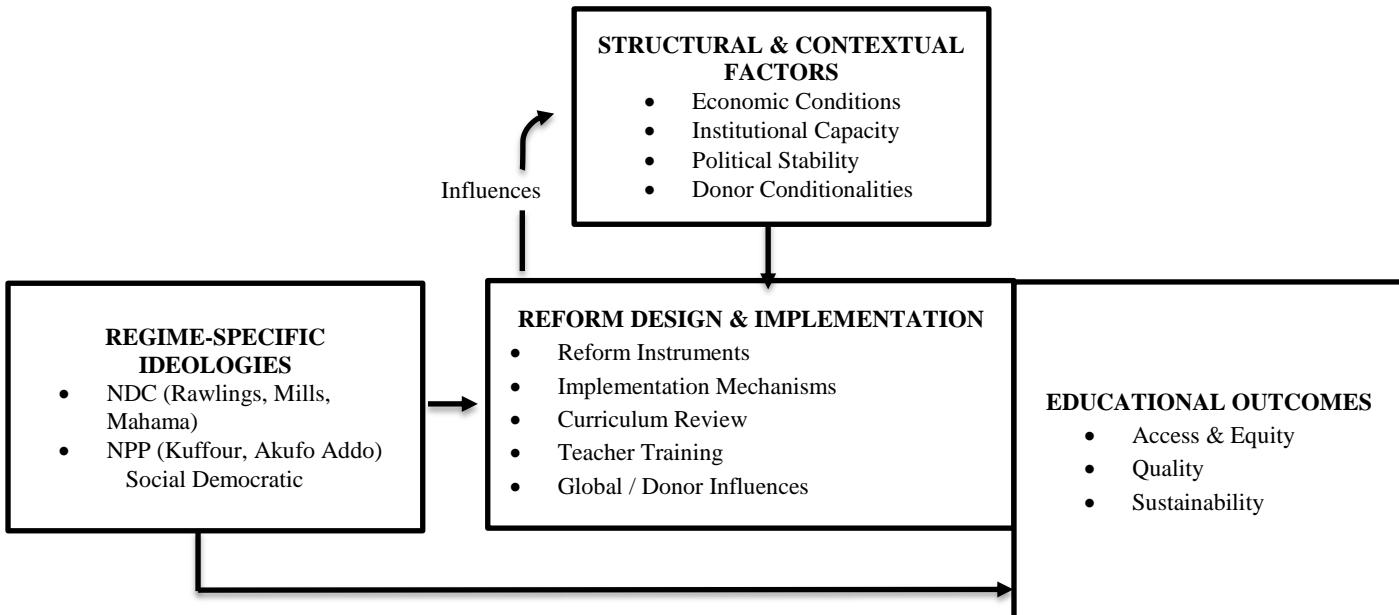
2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study merges institutional theory with a political economy lens to study education reforms in Ghana's Fourth Republic (1993–2025). Institutional theory states that previous policy decisions create

structural constraints that shape future reforms (Essuman, 2018). The 1987 reforms, under the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) leadership, established a 6-3-3-4 system (six years of primary, three years of junior secondary, three years of senior secondary, and four years of tertiary); this arrangement continues to influence subsequent policies, including FCUBE and the Free Senior High School (SHS). Recognizing the ongoing character of access-related policies across regime changes, efforts to shift the direction of access along ideological lines can be re-examined through a political economy perspective, in which education is perceived as politically constrained by power relations, ideology, and economic interests (Béland, 2019; Boakye, 2021). For example, the importance of NDC ideology highlights a progressive movement toward equitable access, chiefly through subsidy programs (Asia, 2013; Boakye, 2021) and infrastructure provision (above). In contrast, the NPP ideology is motivated by traditional market-based approaches that generate quality through vocational training and skills relevant to the economy. Ideological access, or the contexts that contribute to transformational policy changes, often occurs within the framework of larger, planned electoral strategies.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Regime-Driven Educational Reforms in Ghana's Fourth Republic (1993–2025)



Source: Author's construct

This theoretical framework employs institutional theory and political economy to examine educational reforms in the Fourth Republic of Ghana (1993–2025). Institutional theory posits that historically determined policy directions and institutional architecture shape and limit policy direction over time (Essuman, 2018). Political economy further informs our understanding of how readings of power relations, ideological beliefs, and material interests shape education policy (Béland, 2019; Boakye, 2021).

This perspective connects contextual factors, such as political stability, economic conditions, institutional capacity, and donor influence, with reform design features, including curriculum development, teacher training, and policy instruments. The analysis highlights the contrast between the NDC's social democratic political norms, centered on equity and access, and the NPP's liberal market political economic strategy, which emphasizes quality and vocational skills.

Together, these influences demonstrate how ideology, structure, and

context interact with educational outcomes in terms of access, quality, and sustainability during Ghana's Fourth Republic (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2019; Boakye, 2019).

2.2 Historical Evolution of Education in Ghana

The education system in Ghana changed from an elitist system under colonial rule to an expanded one after independence. Before 1957, the colonial system was to educate a small group of West Africans for roles in administration, and schools run by missionaries in Ghana, such as Achimota, a school for boys and girls, were restricted schools and schools with limited access to the majority of Ghanaians (McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 2020). In the postcolonial era, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah's Accelerated Development Plan of 1951, which aligned with nationalist goals, aimed to provide primary education for all. During the 1960s to the 1980s, political instability hindered educational advancement, and military regimes implemented intermittent reforms. In 1974, the Dzobo Committee had suggested vocational education. However, no action was taken due to the investment required until the 1987 PNDC reform, which

formally implemented the 6-3-3-4 education system. The reform placed a high priority on technical skills to support economic recovery under Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) (Akyeampong & Stephens, 2023). The politics and legacy of educational access and vocationalism influenced education policies in the Fourth Republic, but long-standing issues, such as infrastructure deficits, persisted.

2.3 Global Influences on Ghanaian Education

Ghana's education policies have often been influenced by international actors, who have financed programs aligned with national agendas. The IMF and the World Bank linked their support to the country's education reform agenda in the 1980s, which was labelled a structural adjustment program (SAP). These new reforms also promoted efficiency and access to education and supported later policies such as the FCUBE and Free SHS (Essuman & Akyeampong, 2018). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 4, also catalyzed changes, such as Free SHS, as they sought to realign Ghana with the global equity agenda (UNESCO, 2020). Other comparative cases, such as Kenya's free primary education, illustrate problems that Ghana faces as a trade-off between quality and increased strain on infrastructure and provide important lessons for Ghana (Ampiah, 2021). These global influences position Ghana within the framework of globalization and education, extending beyond its borders and shaping how Ghana approaches policy, finance, and resource allocation.

2.4 Existing Studies on Reforms in the Fourth Republic

The scholarship can demonstrate stability in access policies, for instance, changes from FCUBE to Free SHS; however, disruptions from regime change can alter access (i.e., reversing the duration of SHS, predominantly for political reasons) (Adu-Gyamfi & Adinkrah, 2022; Aziabah, 2018). Equity studies highlight gender inequities and rural-urban disparities in relation to enrollment gains (Apusigah, 2021). Quality studies identified a shortage of teachers and inadequate, outdated facilities (Casely-Hayford et al., 2025). All of these works call for depoliticized, evidence-driven policies, which are an inspiration for this study's comparisons.

3. Educational Reforms under Jerry John Rawlings (1993–2001, NDC)

3.1 Political and Economic Context

The Jerry John Rawlings administration in Ghana (1993–2001) was a significant era during which Ghana transitioned from military rule to a democratic regime and established the Fourth Republic. The economy was on an upswing as it began to recover under SAPs, while international donor organizations, mainly the IMF and the World Bank, encouraged the government to use education as a means of development, human capital, and social stability. Financial constraints compelled the government to adopt a cost-effective approach to satisfy the public and the international community regarding education, which, in turn, aligned with most development goals (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2019).

3.2 Key Reforms

The FCUBE (Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education, 1995–1996) was introduced to universalize basic education (primary and junior secondary) by abolishing fees and requiring attendance. It was built on the access goals of the 1987 reform, with the intent that all children, especially in rural and low-income areas, could attend school and receive a free education. The initiative made provision for textbooks, teacher training, and community involvement to encourage uptake. FCUBE derives much of its emphasis from the global Education for All processes, with a specific focus on equity

and enrollment. FCUBE processes were undertaken through nationwide campaigns, and donor support from the World Bank and UNICEF. The FCUBE initiatives marked a significant endeavor towards democratizing education in the new republic; it positioned basic literacy and numeracy as critical skills. FCUBE allowed subsequent policy initiatives to build on access (Takyi & Wiafe, 2019).

The 1993 Local Government Act promoted the decentralization of school management to district assemblies, aiming to increase responsiveness to local needs and improve efficiency. Thus, local authorities took responsibility for addressing regional disparities, increasing accountability, and promoting greater local ownership of schools. It also involved the establishment of district education offices to supervise schools and manage local resources, which enabled greater local engagement in educational governance. In this way, it was a policy for moving away from a centralized bureaucracy in Accra. Although building the anticipated capacity during implementation proved challenging, this was offset by the use of the training packages. In short, decentralization was underpinned by the democratic ideals of the Fourth Republic, which further laid the foundation for subsequent reforms in local education management policy (Essuman & Akyeampong, 2018).

The 1994 Education Review Committee aimed to examine the education system and recommend curricular changes to promote more practical and trade skills. Agricultural subjects and technical training subjects were given priority in the review process based on their economic importance. Quality improvements were also advocated, including better teacher training and school development to enhance student education. This review of the system provided a foundation for reform across the entire educational system and identified gaps that needed to be addressed, following the structure imposed after 1987. The recommendations emphasized life skills for students and acknowledged the cultural relevance of subjects included in the curriculum. The committee's inquiry work included stakeholder consultations across Ghana. It was noted that the committee's work aimed to make the education system more relevant to Ghana and its society. These reform systems and commitment to vocational emphases would not only influence subsequent regimes but would also persist in the policies and educational systems currently in use (Braimah & Abdul-Rahaman, 2020).

3.3 Objectives and Implementation

The goals were universal basic education, increased relevance of curricula, and the introduction of vocational training. FCUBE's framework focused on financial constraints and objectives. The Ministry promoted decentralization for efficiency, and increased curriculum relevance was an objective of the 1994 Committee. It was implemented through a nationwide campaign for FCUBE, funded by the World Bank and UNICEF, which included training district officials on decentralization, piloting curriculum revisions in selected schools, and a proposed teacher-training program (Takyi & Wiafe, 2019).

3.4 Challenges and Outcomes

Infrastructure inadequacies posed a significant challenge: 40% of rural schools lacked the basic classrooms and facilities necessary to make FCUBE effective in the most remote areas, and overcrowded classrooms led to lower-quality learning. Teacher under-supply (which estimates suggested was around 15,000 by 1998) also complicated teaching and learning, as many teachers were not qualified to teach the new curricula. Despite donor support, funding for implementation was inconsistent across regions. Urban areas were more advantaged and thus benefited more than rural areas,

resulting in rural-urban differences (Braimah & Abdul-Rahaman, 2020).

Decentralization increased capacity constraints, as local officials lacked training in education management, leading to inefficiencies in resource allocation and monitoring. There was also resistance from centralized bureaucracies that delayed and attenuated the transfer of authority. The level of community engagement was also inconsistent, undermining both community members' contributions to school governance and the development of robust local institutions (Essuman & Akyeampong, 2018).

The recommendations of the 1994 Committee delayed the implementation of the curriculum and its rollout, particularly regarding increased development and engagement in teacher training programs. Even the development of workshops fell short of integrating practical skills. If resources are not available in classrooms, vocational change is also limited there. Temporal stakeholder understanding and buy-in were mixed. Some regions and leaders moved quickly to adapt, while others introduced slower change processes. All of these changes demonstrated the complexity of a systemic shift (Addae-Mensah et al., 2022).

The outcomes were a remarkable increase in primary school enrollment rates from 60% in 1990 to 75% in 2001, an 8% decrease in dropout rates, and the establishment of FCUBE as a model for equity, particularly for girls, driven by increased enrollment in rural areas. The devolution to local, decentralized educational regimes led to improved local accountability in some districts and enhanced community involvement. The review of the curriculum by the 1994 Committee emphasized relevant and practical skills; however, while schools and curricular were expected to commence implementation in 1997, implementation was gradual. Overall, the reforms created conditions for equity; however, ongoing quality issues remained at the forefront (Takyi & Wiafe, 2019).

Positive achievements also included raising public awareness of educational rights, which facilitated a culture of democracy. Partnerships with donors were also strengthened, and technical support was provided. Increases in enrollment contributed to improvements in literacy, which advanced national development. However, improvements in quality, as measured by test scores, were only modest. These outcomes informed future regimes in building on access while working on quality (Boakye, 2019).

3.5 Analysis

Rawlings' reforms demonstrated significant path dependency from the 1987 PNDC reform, but maintained the 6-3-3-4 structure and the access dimension of that reform. The NDC's social democratic ideology also emphasized access to schooling in the FCUBE, maintaining, in line with global frameworks such as Education for All, an emphasis on equity to ensure inclusive education. While decentralisation was seen as a mechanism for promoting democratic governance in education, limited resources hindered its positive impact and effectiveness. The 1994 Committee's recommendations ultimately shifted the conversation away from FCUBE change. They began to draw a connection back to the vocational relevance of education, which influenced the skills-based policies of the later reforms. The reforms set precedents for policies across alternating regimes and illustrate how historical structures limit change (Boakye, 2019).

Nonetheless, this assessment suggests that political factors underpin the process of reforming changes associated with Rawlings' democratic transition, and infrastructural constraints highlight the limitations of large-scale programs in less developed contexts. The

findings, although limited, suggested a quality gap that both the new NPP and the NDC governments planned to address through their reforms. The reforms during this period illustrate the struggle between ideology and institutional inertia in Ghana's educational evolution (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2019).

4. Educational Reforms under John Agyekum Kufuor (2001–2009, NPP)

4.1 Political and Economic Context

The administration of John Agyekum Kufuor of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), from 2001 to 2009, was enthusiastic about economic liberalization, with the support of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative. The NPP's philosophy of liberal democracy reinvoked the significance of human capital in impacting industries the seriousness of managing education as an indicator of global competitiveness. A stable democracy and increased donor development funding further legitimized ambitious reforms (Armah, 2020).

4.2 Key Reforms

The 2002 Education Review thoroughly assessed the system's needs in terms of access, quality, and relevance. It documented the need, which is both time-sensitive and pressing, to update the curriculum, increase infrastructure development, and establish a foundation to support education and training initiatives considered essential to the economic vision. The review drew on stakeholder consultations conducted nationwide. There were recommendations to infuse ICT and vocational skills into the curriculum. This review initiated the steps to inform and recommend the New Education Reform in 2007. It highlighted a need for evidence-based policy development. It noted concerns about inequity in rural education. It effectively created a pathway for the Kufuor government (Ghartery, 2019).

The 2007 New Education Reform increased the duration of senior high schools (SHS) from 3 to 4 years to encourage greater curriculum diversity. It included kindergarten in basic education to strengthen the foundation of early childhood education. The reform's update identified ICT integration as a way to modernize the teaching and learning process immediately. The reform's goal was to produce graduates with skills and competencies for a globalized economy. Curriculum updates included entrepreneurship education, cultural education, and the integration of ICT. The reform was launched with teacher-training programs. This reform addressed the previous criticism that the 3-year SHS structure outlined in the 1987 structure was too short. Overall, it represented the shift toward qualitatively enhancing the education system (Ampiah et al., 2023).

Capitation Grants were established to reduce parental costs and provide schools with per-student funding. The policy intentionally sought to remove barriers to access for economically disadvantaged families. The grants were distributed based on student enrollment to ensure schools received operational funding. At the same time, this initiative was meant to protect enrollment gains from FCUBE constitutional provisions (FCUBE, 1992). The reform provided schools with incentives for accountability. The implementation of this grant system included oversight mechanisms to prevent misuse of funds. The capitation grant was a driver for equity in basic education. The capitation system also informed subsequent subsidy policy (Salifu & Addo, 2018).

The School Feeding Program supplied meals to students in basic schools located in underserved areas of the country. The objective of the program was to improve attendance and nutrition among schoolchildren while also addressing poverty-induced school

dropouts. The program was pilot-tested in rural districts with the support of a donor partner. School feeding should be integrated with health promotion initiatives to support child development. Meals will be sourced from local suppliers to promote the development of local agriculture. The reforms focused on targeting vulnerable populations, such as girls. Monitoring will also take the form of testing to ensure that standards around nutrition and meals are being met. Schools participating in the initiative experienced gains in retention and enrollment (Ghartey & Otami, 2022).

The Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (COTVET, 2006) was established to enhance vocational training and ensure curriculum alignment with industry needs, thereby promoting employability. COTVET established a framework of standards for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, while advocating for partnerships with the private sector and promoting skills development to drive economic growth. Implementation involved curriculum redesign. COTVET dealt with youth unemployment. It was also a precursor to the vocational emphases in subsequent reform (Lauglo & Maclean, 2020).

To ensure high-quality higher education, the National Accreditation Board (NAB, 2007) was established. The NAB had established accreditation standards for universities and programs. The NAB also conducted evaluations to maintain academic integrity. The NAB was designed to resolve incoherent approaches to higher education. The NAB wanted countries to recognize international degrees. For implementation, the NAB conducted inspections, developed guidelines, and monitored institutional frameworks to ensure compliance. The NAB continued to support quality assurance. The earlier reform has enhanced tertiary standards (Ampiah et al., 2023).

4.3 Objectives and Implementation

The objectives were to develop market-relevant skills, augment cultural and practical relevance, and increase access. To implement these objectives, a redesign of the ICT and entrepreneurship curricula was undertaken, capitation grants were disbursed directly to schools, school feeding support was piloted by the World Food Programme, partnerships with industry were established to inform COTVET's actions, and accreditation work was conducted with NAB (Ghartey, 2019).

4.4 Challenges and Outcomes

The rapid introduction of the 2007 reforms placed a strain on resources, with 30% of schools unable to provide SHS in a double-track mode. Classrooms became overcrowded, and the delivery of the curriculum became problematic. Teacher preparation was ineffective at preparing teachers to deliver the new content. Difficulty was compounded in rural schools due to inadequate facilities. Thus, planning issues were raised from the aforementioned situations (Ampiah et al., 2023).

There were delays in paying capitation grants, disrupting 20 percent of schools. Some schools misappropriated funds, prompting an audit of these schools. Inflation also hampered the program's ability to distribute capitation grants effectively. There was also an inequitable distribution of the capitation grants in rural areas. All of these factors supported access to equity (Salifu & Addo, 2018). The School Feeding Program faced logistical challenges due to limited infrastructure in remote locations. Although the nutritional thresholds were standardized, the rollout was hindered by funding constraints. Added, there was a general lack of sustainability due to reliance on informal community engagement. These factors ultimately limited program efficacy (Ghartey & Otami, 2022).

COTVET's underfunding prevented the vocational program from

reaching its full scale, with only 40% of the planned curricula delivered. There were delays in establishing relationships between industry partners. Work on teacher training for technical skills fell behind. Regional differences remained. All these contributed to challenges to reaching employability outcomes (Lauglo & Maclean, 2020).

Tertiary education institutions opposed taking on the costs themselves to facilitate evaluation. Limited capacity meant that evaluations were not undertaken, and quality assurance standards were inconsistently enforced, with private universities facing more scrutiny than public universities, all of which negatively impacted the quality of higher education (Ampiah et al., 2023).

In general, literacy and basic education attendance increased by 15% in 2009 (Clarke-Midura & Gillispie, 2022). The literacy rate rose by 65% for children. Vocational enrollment increased by 10%, and standards were improved for tertiary certification. This extended senior high school curriculum, despite raising criticism. The general reforms advanced human capital development (Ghartey & Otami, 2022).

4.5 Analysis

Kufuor's reforms represented the NPP's focus on quality and vocationalism, while the NDC's focus on equity. The 2007 reform, coupled with COTVET's market-driven ICT integration, capitation, school feeding, and support for access and FCUBE, enabled market-driven innovations, including ICT integration, capitation, and school feeding, which supported access and FCUBE. With financial liberalization, the NAB accelerated tertiary education reforms in tandem with economic liberalization to enhance global competitiveness. However, the hard-fought implementation revealed underlying resource gaps that influenced future reversals (Lauglo & Maclean, 2020).

This analysis illustrates the political implications of reforms that allocate HIPC funds to secure electoral victories. In an SHS extension, path dependency also applies in the preservation of basic structures. Some outcomes were the trade-offs between access and quality. The changing ideological dynamics of this period in Ghana's education policy are evident in the current shifts in Ghana's political stance on education (Armah, 2020).

5. Educational Reforms under John Evans Atta Mills (2009–2012, NDC)

5.1 Political and Economic Context

The NDC government of John Evans Atta Mills, which came to power between 2009 and 2012, also emerged during a period of global financial crisis. Thus, given the prevailing economic distress that the NDC administration seemed to prioritize, social welfare was a key component of the party's social democratic ideology. The NDC placed importance on education as an avenue for poverty alleviation; hence, Rawlings and Kufuor both criticized Kufuor's extension of SHS (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2024).

5.2 Key Reforms

The Reversal of the SHS Duration in 2010 reduced the SHS from a 4-year course to a 3-year course, thereby mitigating costs associated with SHS and the time required by public health systems. The policy indicated that secondary education was less expensive and offered improved educational opportunities under the post-1987 structure, alleviating parents' concerns about the length of schooling. It was to reduce the curriculum content to maintain a proportionate balance of curriculum time. Parliamentary approval was granted. The reform was prompted to increase enrolment by expediting the commitment

rate. It was written to address issues raised during public consultation meetings. This change also indicated the policy's flexibility (Takyi, 2019).

The Free Supplies Distribution provides essential supplies, including working uniforms, exercise books, and laptops, to students at both the basic and secondary levels. This initiative is a targeted intervention for low-income families designed to reduce costs to improve student attendance. The delivery included the One Laptop per Child program (Duncan, 2018). Supplies were delivered during school hours, usually at the district education offices. The initiative aimed to improve equity, especially for girls, through education, health, and nutrition initiatives. Attention was paid to ensuring that supplies would arrive at the intended recipients in the same condition as when initially delivered. It depends on capitation grants (Salifu & Addo, 2018).

Continued Capitation Grants provided per-student funds to maintain access gains. This enabled schools to operate with little dependence on parental fees. They were adjusted for inflation. It promoted accountability and efficiency in school districts. Implementation was required to ensure timely distribution mechanisms. It supported racial equality in basic and secondary education. The reform was intended to close funding gaps left over from previous regimes. It also contributed to subsequent subsidy expansion (Yawson, 2021).

5.3 Objectives and Implementation

The goals were cost reduction, enrollment improvement, and equity. In Takyi, a parliamentary vote to reverse the SHS was reversed, district offices distributed supplies, and improved capitation funding was secured with donors' aid and government budgets (Takyi, 2019).

5.4 Challenges and Outcomes

As enrollment increased, the infrastructure was tight, with 25% of schools overcrowded. This caused low learning quality in secondary schools. In comparison, the teacher-to-student ratio increased. Rural schools were particularly affected. These challenges were reflected in capacity limits (Yawson, 2021).

Free supplies favoured urban areas, thereby exacerbating the gap between rural and urban areas. It had logistical hurdles to deliver. Several maintenance issues arose due to inadequate support. Equity goals were partially met. The problems also decreased program impact (Salifu & Addo, 2018). The reversal of SHS led to curriculum compression, potentially reducing the amount of content. Teachers were retraining for better syllabi. Public attention followed in the debate on quality. The implementation was slow in some areas. These issues would then serve in subsequent curriculum reforms (Boakye, 2020).

Fifteen percent of districts reported restrictions on school operations due to increases in cap-to-dollar grants. One district needed a separate audit of the misuse cases. Inflation had eroded the value of the grants. The monitoring of grant compliance activities was inadequate. Challenges in cap-to-dollar grants also impacted operational effectiveness (Takyi, 2019). On average, 90 percent of students in Ghana are enrolled in school, and the dropout rate has decreased by approximately 10 percent. Providing free school supplies increased student attendance, especially for girls. The reintroduction of Senior High School (SHS) improved access to secondary schooling, with capitation grants of eight percent helping to sustain school operations. The quality of education improved, as evidenced by the slight improvements in test scores in Mathematics and Sciences (Yawson, 2021).

5.5 Analysis

Mills' reforms echo the Equity-Driven ideology of the NDC, with a particular focus on cost reductions to maintain access gains. The SHS reversal highlighted the political motivation for opposing Kufuor's policy, reflecting the politics of electoral power that emerged from the discourse on political economy. Rawlings' FCUBE allows a free supply and capitation based on its path dependency. The reforms focused on addressing the immediate historical economic difficulties arising from the global crisis. However, the quality challenges, for example, overcrowding, continued to influence subsequent infrastructure priorities. This glimpse into the history demonstrates the ramifications of regime change on policy redesign (Boakye, 2020).

The analysis captures how global forces interact; the reforms aim to align with SDG 4, but were limited by financial constraints. Enrolment gains yielded short-term outcomes, but the outcomes primarily reinforced social welfare objectives. Mahama's expansion strategy depended strategically on Mills'. This point in time demonstrates ideological continuity among NDC (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2024).

6. Educational Reforms under John Dramani Mahama (2012–2017, NDC)

6.1 Political and Economic Context

The Mahama administration (2012-2017) focused on infrastructure development, despite Ghana facing deep economic challenges, including inflation and energy crises. In relation to the concept of social democracy, the NDC was motivated by providing means for equal access for all, especially for the poorer regions of the country, and responding to public demands relative to the SDG 4 goals (Avura, 2022).

6.2 Key Reforms

Free SHS was later formally approved by the Federal government in 2015, with the Federal government reimbursing day students from low-income backgrounds. This pilot program aimed to eliminate fees in order to improve access to secondary education for rural and low-income students. It focused on equity in northern and rural areas. It included boarding subsidies for certain groups, with the monitoring phase to be implemented. The reform addressed dropout rates caused by costs and served as a precursor to the full implementation of Free SHS. This initiative was representative of public election promises (Quaicoe, 2019).

E-blocks/Community Day SHS built over 100 new secondary schools in rural areas. This was designed to increase capacity and reduce regional disparities. Schools included dormitories, libraries, and ICT laboratories. This project focused on poor areas. Private contractors managed construction. The reform is integrated with community development. It tackled infrastructure under previous regimes. This program opened access to rural education (Ferdinand, 2024).

Expanding teacher training to improve training programs and subsidies for teachers. This helped to increase enrollment and improve the quality of instruction. Partnership with teacher colleges offered scholarships. One in-service training focused on new curricula. The reform also addressed rural teacher shortages. It was designed to enhance teaching skills. Implementation included capacity-building for 10,000 teachers. This policy played a crucial role in enhancing quality (Kadingdi, 2020).

6.3 Objectives and Implementation

Goals included improved rural equality and teacher effectiveness.

The implementation process included phased fee subsidies, the construction of E-blocks, a small building structure built by private contractors, teacher training in partnership with colleges, and donor funding (Kadingdi, 2020).

6.4 Challenges and Outcomes

Funding shortages delayed E-block completion, with only 50% of the project finished by 2017. Contractor issues prolonged timelines. Rural logistics complicated construction. These challenges limited capacity expansion. Public criticism arose over delays (Ferdinand, 2024).

The implementation of the Free SHS program has increasingly put a strain on facilities, which were not designed for the rising enrollment, with no corresponding increase in infrastructure. There were some administrative hiccups with distributing subsidies. Rural schools had a tougher time implementing these changes. The equity of education must be noted, but it has only been partially achieved. The above challenges pointed out the challenges of scaling (Quaicoe, 2019).

Funding shortages for teacher training limited the program's reach to 10,000 teachers. The lack of quality support for in-service training posed real issues at the school level. Retention rates among teachers working in rural schools remained low. Capacity-building efforts also did not adequately support the implementation of new curricula. Each of these factors negatively affected instruction effectiveness (Kadingdi, 2020).

Some outcomes of the project included a 10% increase in rural secondary enrollment through E-blocks, which resulted in an additional 50,000 new places in enrollment capacity. The progressively free SHS program resulted in a 12% reduction in dropouts in the affected districts. Teacher training improved instructional content knowledge for 10,000 teachers. Quality also improved gradually, as measured by learning outcomes and specific test score improvements, through access to infrastructure and the expansion of rural education access (Casely-Hayford et al., 2025).

Evidence of positive outcomes was also seen in community engagement of E-blocks, which helped improve local ownership of the schools. Subsidy policies improved girls' school enrollment. Training programs afforded some limit to professional development. These were changes prior to the implementation of Free SHS. Overall, these responses were success in advancing the issue of equity (Avura, 2022).

6.5 Analysis

Mahama's reforms were designed to build on the NDC's equity legacy, with Progressively Free SHS as a temporary measure before the complete abolition of fees. The NDC's e-blocks were unfavourable to improving educational infrastructure, a central theme of social democratic governments. Teacher training provided professional development opportunities, engaged in collective bargaining agreements with unions, and ensured that new teachers were mentored and coached in a Certified program. The reforms dealt with directly associated with the principles of political economy and developed from electoral pledges aimed at improving access in these constrained fiscal environments. Path-dependent findings can be seen in Mill's subsidies. NPP expansions are a shame to the outcomes in rural access, plausible. The NDC objective demonstrates a continuation of NDC administrations (Quaicoe, 2019).

Nevertheless, the analysis highlights challenges to implementation due to funding limitations, reflecting the constraints of the

geographic context of development; additionally, politically driven influences, such as a power crisis, diverted reform processes. The founding role of reforms under Free SHS exemplifies policy development. The focus for this generation was redemptively progressive, as it addressed areas of need that were diminishing and paid less attention to established wealth and privilege (Avura, 2022).

7. Educational Reforms under Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (2017–2025, NPP)

7.1 Political and Economic Context

The New Patriotic Party (NPP) administration of Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo focused on post-COVID recovery and economic challenges from 2017 to 2025. Education was singled out as a significant factor in bolstering the country's resilience and competitiveness for socio-economic growth. In the case of the NPP's liberal model, education was aligned with component skills, as public demands for a better education system prompted discussions aimed at achieving global commitments as prescribed and meeting Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Akyeampong & Dunwody, 2024).

7.2 Key Reforms

The government introduced the "Free Senior High School" system in 2017, eliminating costs associated with all secondary education, including tuition, boarding, and meal fees. In part due to the implementation of free secondary education, a double-track system was established to cope with the high volume of enrolled students, to achieve universal access to secondary education, at least in theory. Financing was based on a large budget from oil revenue; the program aimed for 100% enrollment, with a focus on low-income students and a massive investment in infrastructure and rehabilitation. The launch was also a politically relevant campaign promise fulfilled. Overall, this policy represented a radical transformation of secondary education (Salifu, 2018).

The updated secondary curricula in the 2019 Curriculum Reforms emphasized the development of critical thinking and digital skills. It includes STEM and entrepreneurial studies relevant to 21st-century students. This also included teacher training. The reforms widened the quality gaps in previous educational systems. The rollout of the reforms included nationwide workshops for educators. The reforms were part of the global discourse on education (Asante, 2024). The intended curriculum was digitized (Curriculum), thereby providing enhanced learning outcomes (Asante, 2024).

STEM initiatives have established specific STEM schools and programs to support STEM education. Organizations partnered with industry to develop a curriculum that would further narrow the technology gap. Some program components included scholarships for students pursuing STEM fields. The married agenda sought to encourage innovation that contributed to local economic development, and new laboratories were built. This reform has implications for youth employability (World Bank, 2021).

Infrastructure expansions consisted of new school builds and renovations to existing school sites. These additions totalled 200 more classrooms and dorm accommodations to accommodate the increased enrollment rates. The scope of the project was articulated as addressing overcrowding and the capacity considerations of the Free SHS programme, and was funded by the Government and donors. Other attributes of modernised facilities included ICT labs. The expansion was of considerable significance in dealing with regional equity issues. This supportive education reform was

considered a contributing factor to increased access to education and sustainability (Addae-Mensah et al, 2022).

7.3 Objectives and Implementation

The aims are universal secondary access, quality enhancement, and conformity with global trends. The execution consisted of a budget allocation of 1.2 billion Ghana cedis for Free SHS, teacher training workshops, collaboration with STEM schools, and infrastructure projects, financed from oil revenues (Salifu, 2018).

7.4 Challenges and Outcomes

The dual-track system contributed to crowded classrooms at multiple schools, with several exceeding their capacity by 120%. The complex nature of the scheduling interrupted students' learning. The teacher's workload increased, and there were more issues in rural schools. As a result, quality questions emerged (Addae-Mensah et al., 2022).

By 2020, a teacher shortage of 30,000 had developed, which hindered the effective delivery of the curriculum. Teacher training was inadequate to support STEM and digital skill training. Teacher retention in rural schools was also a significant issue. This was a major contributing factor impacting the extent of effective instruction delivery in rural schools. A public debate was held regarding the welfare of classroom teachers (Poku et al., 2022).

The expansion of infrastructure took longer than planned due to factors related to funding (or the lack thereof) and contracting issues. COVID-19 lengthened the overall timelines. Rural logistics made construction work more difficult. Such problems negatively impacted the extent of capacity relief being offered. There were budget overruns (World Bank, 2021)

The 2019 curriculum reform faced opposition from teachers who had not been informed about the new pedagogies. Digital access to resources was limited within rural contexts. Resource materials and the pilot project of direct spaced instruction occurred more slowly. There was a lack of fidelity and consistency in implementing both the new curriculum and the funded activities. These, and other complicating factors, influenced the quality goals (Asante, 2024).

Outcomes included 1.2 million beneficiaries in the Free SHS program and secondary enrollment of more than 90%. Participation in STEM subjects increased by 15%. Infrastructure development added 100,000 places for students. Curriculum reforms gave rise to modest increases in test scores. Overall, access was altered, but quality fell behind (Poku et al., 2022).

7.5 Analysis

Akufo-Addo's reforms demonstrate the NPP's priority placed on quality in education. The Free SHS extended Mahama's progressive model into a national, or universal, program. Reforms to STEM programs and curriculum placed greater emphasis on labour-market skills, reflecting a market economy and aligning with the NPP's commitment to liberalization. Infrastructure advancements also focused on access issues and demonstrated courage in policymaking, as uncertainty and confusion were spurred by COVID-19 in November 2020. Path dependency is evident in the use of already subsidized forms. The enrollment results immediately reflected the planning efforts for nation-building. As a whole, the period evidences ideological differences with the NDC (Asante, 2024).

Nonetheless, the analysis demonstrates sustainability concerns related to over-enrollment and shortages resulting from the constraints of rapid expansion. The government's political variables, as part of a campaign promise, motivated the introduction of Free SHS. The net equity impact of the reforms was mixed, with rural-

urban gaps continuing. This period's changes (factors) influenced the current government's Free SHS improvements (Akyeampong & Dunwody, 2024).

8. Educational Reforms under John Dramani Mahama (2025–Present, NDC)

8.1 Political and Economic Context

John Dramani Mahama's second presidency (2025-present) follows the 2024 election and focuses on the economic situation, including inflation and debt. The National Democratic Congress's belief in social democracy values social equity and quality. It builds on previous reforms as Ghana recovers from COVID-19, and internationally, early childhood development has become a focus (Government of Ghana, 2023).

8.2 Key Reforms

The Free SHS Improvements phase eliminates the double-track system, offering a simpler secondary education. The initiatives respond to issues of overcrowding and quality that existed during the Akufo-Addo government. The intent is to upgrade the quality of teaching and learning through a single-track timetable. The policy involves undertaking some infrastructural works to increase capacity. Its implementation is being piloted across a few regions. Policymaking has emphasized sustainability and equitable access as key components of the reform's socioeconomic intent. The government administration has made budget reallocations to support this initiative. The underpinning of the system is based on previous improvements in access (Oduro, 2023)

The Bright Beginnings Initiative expands early childhood education by establishing new kindergartens. The initiative, through teacher training, aims to enhance children's foundational skills. The initiative has been designed to benefit vulnerable groups. Five hundred new kindergartens are proposed as part of a plan to expand childhood education nationwide. Play-based learning will be emphasized in the curriculum. Work will be done through partnerships with non-governmental organizations to support the program's implementation. The initiative aligns with global approaches in early childhood education. Overall, the reform seeks to promote quality over time (Inkoom, 2021).

The National Education Forum collaborates with stakeholders to develop consensus-driven policy. Its overarching purpose is to reduce the political volatility that impacts reforms. The Forum consists of educators, parents, and specialists. The consultation and forums for forums provided initial consultations and produced draft framework documents. This reform promotes a bipartisan approach outright. It is about addressing push and pull factors that have hampered systematic progress. Monitoring and evaluation encompass all voices, which can be considered as supporting policy (Government of Ghana, 2023).

The Zero to Hero Literacy Program, designed for participants in disadvantaged rural and northern communities, identifies and addresses literacy issues. This program employs mobile outreach units. The program focuses on developing foundational reading skills. The program also has a community engagement component. The research of this program was trialled in 50 districts and produced encouraging results. There are also digital resources for students and teachers. The literacy reform/scheme provides an opportunity to support struggling students and advance equity objectives (Oduro, 2023).

National Research Fund increases allow for a 10% increase in funding for educational purposes. The National Research Fund aims to support innovation and evidence-based policy. Grants go to universities. The reform aims to improve research capacity. Implementation is shared with the ministry and GTEC to support teacher development and curriculum improvement. The fund will facilitate collaboration among academic teachers. The intention is to be sustainable (GTEC, 2022).

8.3 Objectives and Implementation

The Mahama reforms are focused on improving the quality of education at all levels, promoting equity for underserved populations, and increasing access to basic education with long-term developmental benefits. The improvements to the free SHS are supposed to alleviate the logistical challenges posed by a double-track system of education to bring about a long-term solution to secondary education for development. Bright Beginnings is designed for the early childhood sector to build cognitive foundations and address gaps in access to pre-primary education. The National Education Forum aims to facilitate the collective advancement of policies and reduce the disruption caused by partisanship. Zero to Hero is designed to promote equity in literacy, with a special focus on rural populations, to address illiteracy. The increase in research funding and budgets is to promote innovation and more evidence-based reform (Inkoom, 2021).

Each implementation will have different characteristics and be staged, so the sector will be surprised by its ability to absorb change. For the Free SHS improvements, implementation will occur in three phases. The first phase involves a pilot in 20 districts, with new classrooms to be built through public-private partnerships and the utilization of oil revenue. The rollout of Bright Beginnings will be constructed in 500 under-resourced districts. At each kindergarten, 5,000 teachers have completed four professional development workshops made possible by international donors, including UNESCO. Since January 2025, the National Education Forum has conducted three national consultations with over 1,000 stakeholders, resulting in the drafting of a national education strategy. The Zero to Hero program is currently underway in 50 rural districts, using mobile literacy units equipped with digital tablets and supported by community volunteers and NGOs. For the 2025 fiscal plan, the parliamentary-approved budget will allocate 10% of the total to the education sector each year. The research fund has also awarded its first series of grants, with the intention of supporting 10 universities in their research on curriculum effectiveness and improved teacher retention (Government of Ghana, 2023; GTEC, 2022).

The pretend options and strategies for the application clearly outline a coherent position built on past experiences. The advocacy quality improvement also aligns with the curriculum reform under Akufo-Addo, and the aspects of inclusiveness develop from the tenets of equity established during Rawlings' reforms. The pilot programs, which allow for revisions based on feedback, will also support the design's flexibility. Working with funders, such as the World Bank, which provides technical support and monitoring, will be a recurring process. The reforms encourage the use of evidence and data for decision-making, including evidence tracking from a baseline survey anticipated for early 2025, as evidence of change will be monitored to guide improvement. The significant stakeholder buy-in of the forum also reduced the risk of implementation. Overall, it may roll out in phases to produce observable improvements by 2030, operating in a manner that aligns with SDG 4 (Oduro, 2023; Inkoom, 2021).

8.4 Challenges and Outcomes

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Funding for the double-track phase-out is limited due to other economic priorities. Additionally, a single track has substantial infrastructure: it requires attention, and transition offers are slow in rural communities. In an environment where we must manage pacing issues, there is pressure on basic programming to meet community expectations (GTEC, 2022).

Despite these challenges, Bright Beginnings has experienced delays in kindergarten construction due to logistical issues. There is slow progress in teacher professional development for early childhood education. Additionally, rural access to equity remains less equitable. These challenges directly relate to the company's big-picture goals. They view this as an opportunity to incentivize donors (Inkoom, 2021).

The National Education Forum has difficulty engaging its actors. Building consensus requires significant time among stakeholders, and there may be political bias in the dialogue with specific stakeholders. Implementation has not progressed. These issues constrain depoliticization (Government of Ghana, 2023).

The logistics of the Zero to Hero Literacy Program are challenging in remote parts of Ghana. Maintenance is required for vehicle-based units. Education is different in the communities. There is a need for localization of literacy materials. These issues limit the depth of reach (Oduro, 2023).

The equity research fund has a competitive grant program with relatively few awards at this stage. The degree of university capacity varies by institution. There is an expanding research focus on education. All of these variables can affect the impact of innovation. Ongoing evaluation is important (GTEC, 2022).

The outcomes included, on average, a 10% reduction in classroom congestion through the phase-out pilots. The Bright Beginnings program enrolled 20,000 kindergarten students. The large forum resulted in the production of a draft policy framework with a small number of educational practitioners. The Zero to Hero literacy program improved literacy rates on average by 5% with the target audience. The research fund granted 10, representing the decentralization of the education research grant process (Oduro, 2023).

8.5 Analysis

Mahama's reforms also continue the NDC's focus on equity, through adjustments to the Free SHS program to address overcrowding concerns, a priority of Akufo-Addo. Bright Beginnings would focus on early childhood and improving the quality of foundational education. The National Education Forum is addressing a formally depoliticized policy challenge as a new policy direction. The Zero to Hero program would address equity in literacy, and the research fund would support beneficial innovation. These reforms are based on a political economy framework and must address the economic impacts. Path dependency is observable through the adjustments of the Free SHS program. Outcomes are displaying imminent signs that they will be significantly more inclusive than prior iterations. Previously, the plan of action served as a building block for achieving access to education gains along a historically optimized trajectory (Amoah, 2022).

Nonetheless, the analysis remains that resource constraints continue to be challenges, reinforcing the development context. Political frontiers are defined through an analysis of the 2024 election, establishing the priorities of political influence. Subsequently, the reforms' emphasis on stakeholder feedback may serve to moderate future volatility. The timeline indicates NDC's attempt to blend

quality and equity (Government of Ghana, 2023).

Table 1: Educational Reforms and Outcomes in Ghana's Fourth Republic (1993–2025)

Regime / Period	Key Reforms	Primary Objectives	Major Challenges	Key Outcomes
Jerry Rawlings (1993–2001, NDC)	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE); Decentralization of school management; 1994 Education Review	Expand access; Improve curriculum relevance, Promote equity	Infrastructure deficits, Teacher shortages, Limited decentralization capacity	Enrollment rose from 60% to 75%; Increased local participation; Persistent quality gaps
John Agyekum Kufuor (2001–2009, NPP)	2007 Education Reform; Capitation Grants; School Feeding Programme; COTVET & NAB establishment	Improve quality and vocational skills; Enhance equity; Expand early childhood education	Funding delays, Overcrowding, Uneven implementation	Literacy improved by 15%; Increased vocational and tertiary enrolment; Strengthened quality assurance
John Evans Atta Mills (2009–2012, NDC)	SHS duration reversed (4 to 3 years); Free school supplies; Continuation of Capitation Grants	Reduce costs; Maintain access; Promote equity	Overcrowding, Curriculum compression, and Inflation affecting grants	Dropout rate reduced by 10%; Slight test score improvement; Cost savings achieved
John Dramani Mahama (2012–2017, NDC)	Progressive Free SHS; E-block (Community Day) schools; Expanded teacher training	Promote rural equity; Improve infrastructure; Enhance teacher quality	Underfunding, Project delays, Rural logistics issues	Rural enrolment up 10%; 50,000 new school places; Improved teacher competence
Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo (2017–2025, NPP)	Universal Free SHS; 2019 Curriculum Reform; STEM schools; Infrastructure expansion	Achieve universal access; Enhance quality and STEM focus	Overcrowding; Teacher shortages; COVID-19 disruptions	Secondary enrolment >90%; 1.2 million beneficiaries; STEM participation +15%
John Dramani Mahama (2025–Present, NDC)	Free SHS Improvement; Bright Beginnings (early childhood); National Education Forum; Zero to Hero Literacy Programme	Improve quality; Expand early learning; Depoliticize reform; Promote literacy equity	Limited funding; Implementation delays; Logistical barriers	10% reduction in classroom congestion; 20,000 new kindergarten enrolments; Literacy +5% in rural

9. Comparative Analysis and Discussion

9.1 Cross-Regime Comparison

Regime/President	Key Reforms	Objectives	Challenges	Outcomes
Rawlings (1993–2001)	FCUBE, Decentralization, 1994 Review	Universal access, quality	Infrastructure, teacher shortages	Enrollment to 75%
Kufuor (2001–2009)	2007 Reform, Capitation, School Feeding, COTVET, NAB	Skills, access	Hasty rollout, funding delays	Literacy to 65%
Mills (2009–2012)	SHS reversal, Free supplies, Capitation	Cost reduction, equity	Overcrowding, quality gaps	Enrollment ~80%
Mahama (2012–2017)	Progressive Free SHS, E-blocks, Teacher training	Rural equity, skills	Project delays, underfunding	Rural enrollment +10%
Akufo-Addo (2017–2025)	Full Free SHS, 2019 Curriculum, STEM, Infrastructure	Universal access, quality	Overcrowding, teacher shortages	Enrollment >90%, 1.2M beneficiaries
Mahama (2025–Present)	Free SHS improvements, Bright Beginnings, Literacy, Forum, Research Fund	Quality, inclusivity	Resource constraints	Early gains in literacy, infrastructure

Source: (Gyamfi et al., 2020; Osei, 2023).

Nonetheless, the report revealed that resource limitations remained constraints or barriers that persisted within the development context. The political impacts of the 2024 Election will further define national priorities. The stresses related to stakeholder engagement regarding reform will reduce the volatility of future engagements. The current timeframe presents an opportunity to consider the NDC's movement toward both quality and equity (Government of Ghana, 2023).

9.2 Political Influences on Reforms

The exchange of political power from the NDC to the NPP has opened new avenues for educational reform, often resulting in a series of simultaneous instability and overturn (Bronwen et al, 2018). The ideological divide between the NDC's social democratic approach to equity and the NPP's liberal value placed on quality and skills has led to both policy changes and an underpinning of instability, all within the election cycles. For instance, Mills'

overturning of Kufuor's four-year term was a response to public discontent following the NDC's campaign promises. It validated Mills' direction in public policy, which diverged from Kufuor's policies (Aziabah, 2017). Likewise, Akufo-Addo's Full Free SHS program is also premised on Mahama's progressive Free SHS model, which was established to undermine the NPP government. However, while it was set up differently, the NPP called it its own, not a continuation of Mahama's idea, but rather a new project of the NPP, in the same way the NPP's Free SHS model is.

Electoral stakes have led regimes to opt for immediate populist measures, such as abolishing fees, rather than pursuing longer-term sustainability. The FCUBE of Rawlings consolidated transitional democracy, while Kufuor's home-grown initiatives drew from the HIPC funds to produce visible, tangible benefits. Transitions usually lead to breakages/discontinuities, as evidenced by the SHS period flip-flops that waste human resources and baffle stakeholders (Boakye, 2019). The current administration under Mahama has made refinements in light of the upcoming 2024 election, leaning toward bipartisanship forums to prevent a repetition of the ups and downs in the future. Global pressures, such as the SDGs, intermingle with domestic politics to compel regimes toward access objectives, regardless of ideology and philosophy.

In general, political arguments are grounded in the concept of political economy, in which reform is viewed as a product of power relations and ideologies. Others, such as the National Education Forum, have attempted to decouple the politics, but political partisanship remains a significant barrier (Quaicoe, 2019).

9.3 Overall Impacts

The combined effect of the reforms instituted during the Fourth Republic has significantly improved access to education. Secondary enrollment is anticipated to reach over 90% by 2025, compared to 60% in 1993. The government attributes this increase to FCUBE, Free SHS, and student subsidies, thereby improving access to and the quality of education more equitably, as various individuals can now overcome poverty barriers and access quality education (SDG 4) (Little & Lewin, 2021). There has been an improvement in equitable access, and the enrollment of rural and female students has increased by 15-20% compared to the three previous regimes. That said, enhanced access to education remains notably absent in the country's northern regions, due to limited educational resources and poor infrastructure.

The evidence regarding quality is mixed: overall literacy rates have risen to 75%, although students' standardized test scores have improved at a modest pace, despite increasing enrollment and teacher shortages. Kufuor and Akufo-Addo's vocational reforms improved the employability of many students and created pathways to economic freedom, since a productive workforce is essential to the economy. Overall, the success is threatened by sustainability issues. One way to understand the economics of education is through funding, particularly in relation to the economy's size (20% of GDP is allocated for education, even when there are related educational budget shortfalls) (World Bank, 2021).

Reforms as a social initiative are supporting a sense of national solidarity among the populace, while human capital is emerging. However, barriers to equity exist due to inequalities in providing access to digital and STEM resources. Overall, the early childcare agenda will address near-term inequities by building on previous momentum for long-term benefits. Overall impacts show progress despite political and resource constraints (Casely-Hayford et al., 2025).

9.4 Gaps and Emerging Issues

Long-standing gaps include teacher retention, which, with an annual turnover rate of 20% in rural areas, contributes to challenges in the quality of delivery and other regimes. There are still gaps regarding the digital divide in institutions, as estimates suggest that only 30% of schools are ICT-ready. Similar challenges persist in lightly populated and rural areas that are already disadvantaged (Armah, 2021). There is still a gap in STEM gender equity between males and females, with females not yet exceeding 40% in enrollment, despite improvements in both enrollment and participation.

There are emerging problems related to post-COVID learning loss, which is projected to be at least one to two years (basic skills) for this population, and, therefore, there is a need for targeted recovery programs for students. Climate change has resulted in impacts, such as flooding, that disrupt schools; thus, school infrastructure must be resilient to these impacts. The emergence of A.I. and digital learning presents a positive opportunity, but, unless proper funding is directed, it has the potential to exacerbate gaps (Akyeampong & Dunwody, 2024).

Addressing these emerging problems will require bipartisan action, additional funding, and potentially a broader focus on research. The current underpinning research fund can help fill gaps, but action needs to be taken to see improvements. Increasingly, these problems are eroding the sustainability of education, necessitating pre-emptive action (GTEC, 2022).

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

10.1 Summary of Findings

The educational reforms of the Fourth Republic have evolved from a focus on access to enhancements in access and quality in recent administrations. The FCUBE and the decentralization of a universal basic education system, developed in response to the country's learning needs after the initial era of military rule under Rawlings. Kufuor and the NPP built upon Rawlings' work, adopting a focus on vocationalism and quality. Kufuor also cemented free basic education through capitation grants and expanded secondary schools in 2007. Mills made successful changes during his shorter term in government by legislating an end to the SHS duration and funding free instruction and school supplies, focusing on educational costs during the economic crisis. Mahama's first term established equity through the Progressive Free SHS and E-Blocks, which continued to prepare the educational system for upcoming quality improvements in youth development. Akufo-Addo's comprehensive Free SHS program has achieved widespread secondary enrollment, despite knowledge-quality conflicts arising from congestion, while simultaneously emphasizing STEM subjects. The existing Mahama administration upholds the Free SHS policy, emphasizes early childhood education, and encourages bipartisan exchanges. These reforms are indicative of ideological shifts in the National Democratic Congress's (NDC) focus on equity and the New Patriotic Party's (NPP) focus on a skills orientation, and, over time, of historic path dependency and the SDGs' imposition on education. The cumulative effects of these reforms will vary: there will be a tremendous improvement in gross enrollment, i.e., access, but important issues of quality and equity remain in debate (Ministry of Education, Ghana, 2018).

Continuity in access policies is contrasted with disruptions caused by changes in regimes and possibly in the duration of SHS, for example. It appears that reforms have been politically motivated, using education as a political tool for electoral purposes. Economic contexts, ranging from SAPs to post-COVID recovery, have

informed resource allocation. In summary, the Fourth Republic transformed the Ghanaian state of education, although the sustainability of this transformation is questioned (Adu-Gyamfi et al., 2024).

10.2 Policy Recommendations

To ensure continuity, establish a bipartisan Education Council that includes APP and NPP members, a teacher representative, and representatives from various stakeholders. The Council will review reforms, limit reversals, and offer recommendations on evidence-based policies. The Council could also serve as a vehicle for long-term planning to manage ongoing instability and change. The Council could meet regularly, agreeing on priority issues related to quality and equity, and approving funding allocations in a less politically partisan manner than the current allocation model. It is worth noting that this recommendation is based on models of successful implementation in other established democracies. Implementation will require cooperation with the legislative authority. Monitoring the council will enhance accountability (Joshee & Goldberg, 2022).

Support teacher development by training 50,000 more teachers by 2030, especially teachers who stay in rural schools. Programs can include STEM and digital skills for educators. Partnerships with colleges and universities can be beneficial for enhancing pedagogy. Housing stipends and salary incentives can help to retain teachers. This discusses chronic shortages over the years and transitions of changes in government. Donor funding can help programs. The educational problem can be evaluated by assessing the impact on quality. Supporting teachers is a key component of sustainable education reform (Armah, 2021). Embed regular evaluation systems in the reforms; employ data analytics for impact evaluations: an annual review system would be able to surface issues around enrollment, quality, and equity; independent audits could safeguard against misuse of resources; for example using capitation grants for purposes other than education; stakeholder evaluation would allow stakeholders to voice their experience of changes; this recommendation would encourage adaptive policy-making; technology may support data collection; these systems would build on established global best practices; successful implementation would be predicated on continued capacity-building in the Ministry Of Education (Little, and Lewin, 2021).

10.3 Areas for Future Research

Future research should employ longitudinal and comparative designs to evaluate the long-term effects of education reforms in Ghana on equity, quality, and the labour market. For example, longitudinal studies to follow beneficiaries of Free SHS could provide evidence on employment, social mobility, and gender. Mixed-methods studies, which incorporate surveys and follow-up interviews, may also yield valuable conclusions.

Furthermore, comparative studies with other African countries that have implemented fee-free education (for instance, Kenya and Tanzania) could help identify context-specific factors influencing policy sustainability and public effectiveness. Comparative work could take the form of cross-national policy analysis or a differences-in-differences framework, allowing systematic comparisons of education reforms and their impact.

Additionally, there is a need for impact evaluations of integration in a digital world or the early childhood programme called Bright Beginnings (and others), using pre- and post-assessments to track learning outcomes. These could be done in collaboration with an agency like UNESCO or the World Bank to augment data collection

and analytic sophistication.

Finally, however, studies should centre on evidence, longitudinal, and comparative mechanisms to inform sustainable education policy reform in Ghana and similarly developing contexts.

List of Abbreviations

- COTVET: Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- FCUBE: Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education
- FSHSP: Free Senior High School Policy
- GTEC: Ghana Tertiary Education Commission
- ICT: Information and Communication Technology
- NAB: National Accreditation Board
- NDC: National Democratic Congress
- NPP: New Patriotic Party
- PNDC: Provisional National Defence Council
- SDG: Sustainable Development Goal
- SHS: Senior High School
- STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
- TVET: Technical and Vocational Education and Training
- UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

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