

Journal of
Education and Practice
(JEP)

**Enhancing the Implementation of Ghana's Free Senior High Policy:
The Role of Private Providers**



CARI
Journals

Enhancing the Implementation of Ghana's Free Senior High Policy: The Role of Private Providers

¹Ernest Malir Lagnang, ^{2*}Francis Nangbeviel Sanyare,  ³Gladys Diedong

¹PhD candidate, University of Business and Integrated Development Studies
Faculty of Social Science and Arts, Department of sociology and social work

²Senior Lecturer, University of Business and Integrated Development Studies
Faculty of Integrated Development Studies, Department of Development Studies

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9924-7913>

³Assistant Registrar, University of Business and Integrated Development Studies
School of Graduate Studies and Research



Accepted: 23rd Feb, 2026, Received in Revised Form: 10th March, 2026, Published: 24th March, 2026

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examined the role of private Senior High School providers in Ghana's free senior high school program, highlighting the potential contributions of private secondary education to the program's success. It addresses the lack of research on educational leadership and administration issues faced by non-state schools, particularly in Ghana, and contributes to the literature on public-private partnerships in education.

Methodology: This qualitative study, guided by an interpretive paradigm and realistic phenomenological methodology, explored the experiences of Ghanaian private senior high school administrators regarding the free SHS policy. Eight private SHS providers from the Bono East Region were interviewed using a standardized guide. The data were analyzed inductively, integrating interpretive phenomenology and thematic analysis, to identify key themes related to administrators' roles and challenges.

Findings: Evidence from the data showed that the participation of private SHSs in the implementation of the free SHS policy would address infrastructure deficits and eliminate the "double-track system." This partnership would enhance access, quality, and equity in senior high education systems. Private SHS providers face challenges, such as declining student enrollment, financial constraints, and the inability to hire subject-based teachers. Adaptive strategies such as alternative revenue generation, fee reduction, and extending the contact hours of teaching were adopted by private senior high providers to overcome these challenges.

Unique contribution to theory, practice, and policy: The study is explorative in nature and relied solely on primary data collected from Interviews with private senior secondary education providers. It contributes contextually to our understanding of the potential of private-public partnerships in education service provision for successful policy implementation. We further gain an understanding that enabling private participation in education service delivery is essential for policy success in contemporary Ghana.

Keywords: *Free Senior High School, Sustainable Development Goal 4, Private Secondary School, Education Service Providers, Public-Private Partnerships*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

There is a global recognition of the importance of formal education in enhancing citizens' capacities as a catalyst for national development (Pal, 2023; Thelma, 2024). Global perspectives converge around a strong case for expanding senior high education as a foundation for overall national growth. Access to secondary education for citizens is believed to contribute to economic development, poverty reduction, equity, and social cohesion (Salifu, 2022). Research indicates a growing preference for a collaborative approach between governments and stakeholders to achieve sectoral development, including, but not limited to, manufacturing, healthcare, and education (Akomea-Frimpong et al., 2023; Kaye-Essien, 2025)

This study defines the "private sector" as comprising domestic and international investors. Some private institutions are driven by financial gains, whereas others drive philanthropic investments to support governmental initiatives in key areas (Salifu, 2022). Researchers maintain that private-public partnerships (PPP) in the context of education involve a binding agreement among public and private institutions regarding risks, benefits, and expense sharing for a specific project.

In Ghana, both the state and non-state sectors actively participate in the provision of education, with distinct roles and voices (Colenso & Zaidi Hai, 2024; Kaye-Essien, 2025). This study defined public-private partnerships (PPP) in education as a cooperative effort between state and non-state organizations to provide educational services that support the country's developmental objectives (Granoulhac, 2021; Warsen et al., 2018). The extant literature defines the primary objective of public-private partnerships in education as a collaborative alliance between public and non-public entities aimed at "advancing the achievement of education-related sustainable development goals of enhancing quality learning results" (Patrinos et al., 2009, p. 1).

In many developing nations, partnerships involving the public and private in education enable non-state entities, such as private senior high school (SHS) providers, to autonomously create and administer profit-driven or charitable academic establishments across various tiers of the educational hierarchy Salifu (2022). Research shows four principal categories of private schools exist in developing nations: state-subsidized institutions such as those in Ghana and the Gambia, partially subsidized faith-based schools in Lesotho, Kenyan community-established schools with partial government support, and independent private schools in Ghana (Duflo et al., 2021).

This study restricted its scope to non-subsidized private SHS providers in the Bono East area of Ghana. Owing to recent developments in Ghana, the state has resolved to fully finance public secondary education under the FSHS program. This is not entirely new, as Salifu (2022) points out. In Uganda, public-private partnerships enable private school owners to collaborate with the government to successfully provide qualified students with secondary education. The extant

literature has demonstrated that this cooperation has benefited educational institutions, as they leverage both financial and material support to achieve demonstrable excellence in educational outcomes such as enhanced student test performance (Butt & Munir, 2025; Crawford et al., 2024).

Until recently, the Ghanaian government was reluctant to engage in private schools. However, their exclusion from the FSHS policy has detrimental effects on their operations, endangering their survival and contributing to job creation and economic growth (Bonsu, 2019). Throughout Ghana's 16 regions, more than 250 private SHSs can accommodate approximately 180,000 students annually. Despite owners' willingness to accept half of the government's expenditures for public secondary school students, the government's failure to include them has significantly impacted their operations (Bonsu, 2019; Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021). This study explores how private secondary education providers can contribute to the successful implementation of Ghana's FSHS program.

This research is motivated by the existing literature, which indicates that the private sector's engagement in basic education expanded more rapidly worldwide than its participation in senior school education, particularly in developing nations (Arcia et al., 2023; Biygautane & Clegg, 2024; Rind, 2022; Swai, 2025). Nevertheless, the studies did not provide any explanation for the difference. The question is whether private secondary education administration is difficult to manage. It is further driven by the government of Ghana's advocacy of high academic standards, equity, and access, which would lead most guardians to opt for state-owned secondary schools over non-state ones (Salifu, 2022). Despite the importance of this issue for the country's development, there is limited evidence regarding the role of non-public (private SHS) providers in the successful execution of the FSHS program or the challenges faced by these providers. Additionally, limited information is available regarding the steps taken by the management to overcome these obstacles. This lack of information would likely limit the government's comprehension and value of the effects of implementing the FSHS policy on secondary school investments by private school providers. The study also assumed that, by highlighting the challenges faced by private senior high school administrations, the government would be more likely to implement policies that would ensure the survival of these vital players in the country's development. We also expect a deeper understanding of how partnerships with private secondary school providers lead to quality access and equitable education.

This study is pertinent as it adds to the growing body of knowledge regarding school administration and leadership that challenges the long-established dominance of Anglo-American perspectives (Hammad & Shah, 2018). Despite the rapid expansion of private schools over the years, Hammad and Shah (2018) contended that studies on educational leadership are severely lacking. This study fills a gap in the literature by exploring the role of private SHS providers and the administrative issues faced by non-state schools around the world, with an emphasis on the overlooked Ghanaian setting.

In addition, this study is relevant because there is a rising demand to increase the body of literature on public-private partnerships (PPPs) in education. This is to help developing nations better understand how to reach Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to ensure that all people have access to high-quality education that is both affordable and accessible by 2030 (Rad et al., 2022; Zickafoose et al., 2024). Lastly, since the private sector has a greater interest in public-private partnerships, it is crucial to study how private education providers contribute to second-cycle education, given the Ghanaian government's implementation of the FSHS program.

2.0 OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Case for the Adaptation of Free Senior High School in Ghana

Article 25(1b) of Ghana's Constitution provides governments with all forms of education that are available, accessible, and appropriate. President John Dramani Mahama (2012-2015) progressively introduced free education, inspired by this provision. The idea was to find effective and innovative ways to lower the cost of education for guardians, parents, and infrastructure development. This approach led to the implementation of several infrastructure initiatives. The NDC (2012) announced plans to construct 200 new high schools, focusing on regions and districts lacking such institutions. Therefore, the previous NDC-led administration prioritized providing cost-free secondary school education, adhering to a gradual roadmap, and constructing adequate facilities to elevate the standards of education (Bonsu, 2019). However, non-resident students were the primary target audience for this type of funded secondary education (Sanyare & Lagnang, 2025). The policy covers costs such as test fees, entertainment activities, libraries, athletics, cultural events, science and math quizzes, information and communication technology, and tuition.

According to Adu-Ababio and Osei (2018) the Nana Akufo-Addo administration (2016-2024), it took an expansionist approach and made a radical commitment to the universal implementation of FSH, which included fully subsidized textbooks, tuition, admission fees, science centers, computers, libraries, and utilities as part of its measures. They further posited that the goal was to relieve parents from stress and provide a solid human resource foundation for Ghana's young people. There appears to be a consensus among Ghana's major political parties that all qualified Ghanaians must access free secondary education in line with the requirements of the agreed educational Goal 4 of the SDGs that children must have completed both primary and secondary education, which must be free, equitable, and of a high standard by 2030 (Adu-Ababio & Osei, 2018; Sanyare & Lagnang, 2025).

The Free SHS initiative guarantees comprehensive and impartial education for citizens of Ghana to accomplish the high-standard education SDG 4 (Free SHS, 2018; United Nations, 2017). The Ghana Education Service has approved school fees to remove financial barriers. The cost includes housing, uniform costs, tuition, and meals. This policy emphasizes the significance of holistic education for young individuals in Ghana; however, teacher policy reform, which aims to

enhance educational standards, often receives less attention (Mohammed & Kuyini, 2021). Implementing the FSHS policy in 2017 led to a 33.2% increase in enrollment (Ministry of Education, 2018). Such an increase significantly impacts the ability of infrastructure and human resources to accommodate the excess.

The infrastructural issues identified in the report have caused students to commute long distances to school. Overcrowding in classrooms and dormitories has led to disease outbreaks, and the inflated teacher/student ratios have resulted in inadequate monitoring of students (Bonsu, 2019). To address infrastructure challenges, Ghana's government introduced a double-track system (Bonsu, 2019). Mensah (2019) claims that a double rack arrangement results in an incomplete curriculum because of the increased frequency of holidays. This section examines the role of private SHS providers in implementing the FSHS, explores potential developments in response to the challenges they face, and examines how they overcome these challenges in the context of government execution of the FSHS policy.

2.2 The Free SHS Policy: Issues of Access, Equity, and Quality

Ghana, among other nations, executed the fully funded senior high school policy in September 2017 by the Nana Akufo-Addo government to fulfill their campaign promise. The implementation was anchored in three main themes: access, equity, and quality, with them defining the meaning of the themes (Partey, 2017). Salifu (2022) maintains that ensuring accessibility, an automated selection process assigns all Ghanaians who complete the final junior high school exams (BECE) after the ninth academic year of basic school to a public SHS. Subsequent administrations between 2010 and 2017 expanded the public SHS, adding 152 new institutions to reach a total of 872, acknowledging that accommodations are crucial to guaranteeing access (Partey, 2017).

The government is currently working to construct more of these schools to have sufficient room for an increasing cohort of eligible candidates (Partey, 2017). Nevertheless, Patrinos et al. (2009) evaluating the function and effects of fully financed public SHS schools in emerging nations reveals that despite numerous attempts by developing nations to increase school access and enrollment, enrollment rates still fall short of expectations. The surveys state that indigenous people, girls, and other underprivileged and marginalized groups are the most severely impacted, making it challenging to achieve universal education. Despite Ghana's public SHSs offering admission to 472,730 basic school graduates in the 2017–2019 academic year, predictions indicate that over 5.3% failed to secure admission (Partey, 2017).

Equity in policy implementation necessitates the removal of gender-based barriers to enrollment prospects, disability status, religion, ethnicity, and geographic region (Salifu, 2022). This procedure ensures that all eligible Ghanaians receive equal educational assistance. However, Partey (2017) disputes this idea of fairness; he contends that to ensure that children from low-

income families receive greater support, equity in the policy should prioritize educational support based on needs. Partey (2017) asserts that rather than ensuring equity, implementation ensures equality.

Quality: The term “quality” is very controversial and difficult to quantify without a standard. The ratios of students to teachers, textbooks, classrooms, and desks are some of the metrics used to assess the quality of global educational practices (Partey, 2017). Ghana aims to achieve a learner-teacher ratio of 25:1 at the second-cycle level. Partey (2017) argued that most second-cycle school classrooms have a 35/40:1 ratio. This policy aims to address the impact on quality. In 2018, the government implemented the double-track system as an interim measure to divide newly accepted SHS students into two streams, specifically to address the issue of overcrowded classrooms (Salifu, 2022).

2.3 Challenges Facing the Private Schools’ Providers

Globally, the administration of both public and non-profit educational institutions faces several operational challenges. These challenges include competition from public secondary schools, the execution of a fully funded senior high school policy, increasing management costs, a shortfall in financial reserves, few opportunities to earn extra money, and changes in the education system (Salifu, 2022). Competition from public schools arises because in certain nations, they can deliver educational quality comparable to that of private institutions (Salifu, 2022). In this context, parents are inclined to enroll their children in state schools because of the advantages of reduced or waived fees (Matey, 2020).

Most nations that implement cost-free and, on occasion, mandatory education policies pay no fees to attend public schools, making them the preferred choice for many parents, leading to a decline in enrollment in private schools (Kaye-Essien, 2025; Matey, 2020). The escalating administration costs are a significant challenge confronting private schools (NDI, 2025). Inflation and the cost of goods and services are said to be significantly burdensome to private school operators, who may feel compelled to shift the cost of the financial obligation to consumers’ guardians (Salifu, 2022). The cost of rearing children subsequently requires caregivers, leading to a decrease in admission numbers. Further, private operators struggle to provide competitive compensation to attract and retain skilled educators and support personnel. Most highly qualified educators choose to attend government institutions that offer more favorable compensation structures, along with prospects for career growth (Linh et al., 2022; Obeng & Ansah, 2024)

Insufficient reserve funds arise from the increasing operational expenses of schools and the delayed or absent payment of ward fees by guardians. The absence of substantial reserves significantly hampers the initiation of developmental initiatives focused on the expansion of tangible amenities (Appau et al., 2025; Brown, 2025). Most financial institutions are frequently

reluctant to extend credit facilities to private schools because of concerns regarding repayment defaults; hence, their viability is not ensured.

In comparable circumstances, many private educational institutions possess restricted options for supplementary revenue generation, as they predominantly depend on tuition fees to cover operational expenses (Salifu, 2022). Nevertheless, some private educational institutions receive cash from individuals who lease their facilities for social events, although this revenue remains insufficient to qualify as fiscal recovery (Salifu, 2022). Certain private schools function as profit-driven enterprises that secure funding through tuition fees and other revenue-generating activities. When the management status of a private school transitions to a charitable organization, sustaining its existence without external donations becomes challenging (Arum, 1996; Salifu, 2022).

3.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This framework presents the PPP concept as the foundation for this study. It considers public-private partnerships (PPPs) in the center course as a compromise between state-business and corporate ties. Robertson et al. (2012) showed that PPPs in education have become significant in developing countries. This conclusion is based on substantial evidence that governments in these nations cannot ensure inclusive education at the elementary and secondary levels in the absence of private enterprise investment.

PPP in education takes many different forms worldwide, with government-funded education, whereas non-public institutions deliver academic support services (Salifu, 2022). According to Hassan and Ahmed (2024), contracts are used to deliver certain services, such as building, managing, or maintaining facilities, in adequate numbers and conditions, at a predetermined cost and over a predetermined period. Other types of public-private partnerships regarding education enable non-public entities to financially support government/state schools. The financial package comprises teacher wages, textbooks, and student awards. According to various sources (Bano, 2008; Duflo et al., 2021; Pârnu & Voicu-Olteanu, 2009; Verger, 2012), public-private partnerships within the educational system promote a positive rivalry among the management of public and private schools. The rivalry coerces the two industries to enhance teaching innovations and deliver excellence to entice the majority of applicants.

Improving educational quality is critical to every nation's socioeconomic development. The significance of public-private partnerships (PPP) in education lies in their ability to provide dynamic workforce management. Private school administrators have the freedom to employ qualified teachers due to their autonomy. Duflo et al. (2021) posited that PPP offers teaching roles to candidates in instruction positions and allows state governments to select agreements with the highest learning outcome for children at the lowest possible cost.



Figure 1: Conceptual Framework adopted from Tilak (2010)

Governments have set a baseline for quality delivery so that the management of private schools must adhere to (Patrinos et al., 2009). PPP in education enables governments and private school administrators to share the risks associated with providing education. Some argue that risk-sharing will likely enhance the efficiency of education delivery (Verger, 2012). Scholars assert that public-private partnerships (PPPs) in education offer philanthropists an opportunity to offer diverse forms of assistance to governments, as research indicates that governments in most developing nations struggle to guarantee universal access to high-quality education (Verger & Moschetti, 2017). While public-private educational partnerships offer numerous advantages, they also present certain disadvantages. Tilak (2010) asserted that the state might forfeit the supervision of education as a state investment if public-private partnerships lead to its privatization.

Furthermore, the proliferation of educational choices for parents and their children could lead to a socially stratified society in which affluent families can afford superior institutions and enroll their children in prestigious schools. By contrast, underprivileged families, lacking such financial means, relegate their children to inferior educational institutions. When this happens, students from low-income families may lag in pursuing a high-quality education (Patrinos et al., 2009).

4.0 METHODS

The interpretive paradigm, which maintains subjectivity and a social constructive base of knowledge, and that reality is a multiple and relative concept, guided the qualitative investigation of this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Hence, the realistic phenomenological methodology anchored our assessment of the perspectives of Ghanaian private senior high school administrators regarding the execution of the free SHS policy (Cresswell, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Phenomenological research helps delineate people's consciousness and experience with a phenomenon, like a relative's passing, a personal sense of identity as a teacher, the process of actually teaching, the feeling of belonging to a minority group, or the thrill from a football victory. This lent credence to our choice of research method in that the researchers selected this method to explore, comprehend, and characterize the role and encounters of private SHS providers in the Ghana Bono East region context, which, in this study, the researchers considered to be "minorities" in the field of education delivery.

The study participants were all authorized and licensed non-public school (private SHS) providers within the Bono East Region. To make the selection, we employed two types of purposive sampling: modal purposive and purposive (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The researchers started by using a modal purposive sampling strategy to sample the Bono East Region of Ghana.

The researcher's choice of the region was motivated by the fact that the region is notably among the most highly concentrated of people in the nation, with a respectable number of private SHS.

According to (Gborsongu & Korsah, 2022), the area is also well known in the country for its superior private senior high schools, attracting many applicants. Again, the researchers applied an expert purposive technique to recruit eight private SHS providers from eight approved nonpublic schools (private SHSs) within the region. The rationale for selecting eight private SHS in the region for the study was to have a fair representation of key characteristics relevant to the research variable, such as the school's classification, location, and student population above 170. These providers were business owners or managers who exercised control over management decisions, including operational responsibilities, and implemented decisions that affected their schools. The researchers also selected them because of their significant knowledge of the management challenges faced by private SHS in Ghana and their expertise in developing contingency measures to address policy ramifications. After personally visiting their offices, we approached all participants and briefed them about the purpose and aims of the study we wanted to accomplish

This study used a standardized interview guide tool for data gathering. The interview guide consisted of eight open-ended questions exploring the PSHS providers' experiences. The tool included eight semi-structured questions seeking experiences in secondary education following the enactment of the FSHS policy in Ghana.

The researchers conducted in-person interviews with each of the eight participants and recorded their responses on electronic recorders. As emphasized by Houghton et al. (2013) the researchers, they collected data to guarantee reliability and credibility. The study maintained written records as a precautionary measure to ensure data integrity. The researchers transcribed the data verbatim and conducted an inductive analysis integrating interpretive phenomenological content and thematic analysis techniques to investigate the unique role and consistent administrative knowledge of maintaining the private SHS, considering the context of the free SHS policy (Noon, 2018). As patterns appeared, we coded and classified the data using analytical approaches, which also helped us distill the vast amount of data into key themes that mirrored the study's goals (Johnson & Christensen, 2024).

This research strictly followed standard ethical protocols, as humans were used as participants. The first applied for and received ethical clearance from the University of Business and Integrated Development Studies, Wa, with Certificate Reference Number UBIDS/RERB/002/2024/7/08/02 from the start of the study. The researchers approached the survey participants to seek their permission to participate in the interviews. A permission form that properly explained the purpose of the study and its possible implications, with the option to participate or not, was given to the willing and approved respondents. In accordance with this concept, the participants were made aware of the purpose of the research, its ramifications, and their ability to decline participation. The participants were made aware of the intent of the research,

potential risks, the choice to partake, and the liberty to leave the research at any moment. The data regarding the respondents were treated sensitively and with anonymity. Thus, the participants' confidentiality and anonymity were respected, and the respondents' names were replaced with a special code.

5.0 RESULTS

This section summarizes the findings of the interviews conducted with participants to investigate the role of private secondary school providers in Ghana's successful rollout of free SHS. The findings highlight their crucial role in the successful implementation of the policy, the efforts made by private SHS providers to prevent school collapse, the challenges they encounter due to Ghanaian public schools implementing the free SHS policy, and the strategies employed by private SHSs to remain operational in education. Three key themes were analyzed from the data: the role of the private SHS provider in effectively executing the free SHS program, the challenges Ghanaian private SHS managers face, and their strategies to overcome these challenges.

5.1 The Role of Private Secondary School Operators in Achieving the FSHS Policy

According to Laporta (2020), PPP is a mechanism under New Public Management (NPM), which illustrates that collaborative risk-sharing bonds exist among the state and private entities, driven by a shared ambition to achieve specific social/public policy goals. Ghana features the value of new public management among the initial nations in Sub-Saharan Africa to embrace the values of New Public Management (Haruna & Kannae, 2017). In 2011, Ghana established a comprehensive nationwide strategy to oversee public-private partnerships. The Ministry of Finance created the Public Investment Division (PID) to oversee public-private partnerships within the PPP program.

The effectiveness of these collaborations relies on their adaptability to diverse cultures and local contexts, along with their degree of community involvement (Frimpong et al., 2023). These contributions include infrastructural provision, educational access, teacher training to enhance learning outcomes, and the provision of employable skills to SHS graduates. However, since the free SHS policy was put in place, more cooperation between public and private senior high schools can be crucial for improving teaching and learning outcomes, because cooperation is not based on the specific needs of a specific institution (Acquah et al., 2024; Akuffo, 2025).

5.1.1 Adequate infrastructure

The lack of appropriate infrastructure is one of the primary barriers to implementing free SHS (Bonsu, 2019). Partey (2017) reported that some students resort to sleeping in classrooms, prompting school officials to repurpose academic facilities, including science laboratories, into temporary classrooms and dormitories to meet urgent demands. As a result, students do not have access to high-quality learning materials to strengthen their proficiency abilities or opportunities to apply scientific theory.

“As part of Ghana's educational system, our objective is to deliver high-quality teaching and learning to the country's citizens. If the government recognizes our crucial role and incorporates us into the policy, it will alleviate the infrastructure burden. This is because we will take on some of the students, allowing the state government to enhance the inadequate infrastructure in public senior high schools” (IDIV, P-PSH).

5.1.2 Quality delivery

The theme for implementing the free SHS policy concludes with the word “quality.” “Quality” is a disputed phrase that is hard to quantify, devoid of predetermined criteria. (Partey, 2017) asserted that education quality is measured internationally using specific criteria such as the student-to-teacher ratio, student-to-textbook ratio, student-to-classroom ratio, and student-to-desk ratio. However, in Ghana, the recommended student-to-teacher ratio for senior high schools is 25:1. Partey’s observations, however, show that senior high schools tend to have a 35/40:1 ratio of classroom space. This has implications for the quality that a policy aims to achieve.

“The classrooms are spacious enough to meet the standards recommended by the Ghana Education Service. This is a fundamental component of high-quality education, provided the government is willing to listen to our recommendations. Including our schools in the policy will alleviate the enrollment pressure on state secondary schools. For example, many students will choose our schools over others during the school selection process due to the high quality we foster in our students” (IDIV, P-PSHS).

To alleviate the problem of congested class spaces, the government has developed a short-term mitigation strategy known as a double-track system, which divides newly accepted senior high candidates into two batches. The first batch, labeled “Green Track,” enrolls students for a 41-day term, while “Gold Track,” the second stream, enrolls students for an additional 41-day term following the vacation of students on the “Green Track” calendar. However, both tracks of student batches joined together to attend school for an additional 41-day term, totaling 82 days.

“Government has the discretion to prioritize quality and accessibility in education. The existence of a double-track system stems from the government's disregard for our requests. As stakeholders in education, the government requires minimal consultation to include us in the policy, enabling us to contribute to the achievement of the desired goals. It's not that we produce poor results; we consistently perform better, even with limited resources. Therefore, we implore the government to reconsider its stance and include us in the policy; for instance, they should eliminate the double-track system if they take us into account. (IDIV, P-PSHS)

5.2.3 Equipping senior high school graduates with employable skills

Frimpong et al. (2023) posit that the free senior high program aligns with Ghana’s education service curriculum, which prioritizes test-taking skills instead of equipping them in the workforce.

Thus, a significant number of graduates who are unable to afford to pay for tertiary education forfeit work opportunities, exacerbating Ghana's increasing youth unemployment rate.

"We are in the same task force together; we don't have a different curriculum; the GES lays the standard, so it is our responsibility if the government accepts us. As part of the policy, we will support by providing and creating all achievable possibilities to train students to fit and secure meaningful employment after graduation" (IDIV, P-PSHS).

5.2.4 Administration Challenges of Private SHS in Ghana

The free SHS policy benefited Ghana's socioeconomic development, and all stakeholders, including inclusive private senior high school providers, supported its implementation (Salifu, 2022). However, private senior high school providers have raised several concerns about how regulation affects school management. The challenges identified by this study of private senior high school providers include issues of falling enrollment in private SHS, threats to management vision, placing a burden on the capacity to hire quality and subject-matter experts, difficulty in maintaining the school infrastructure as a result of shortfalls in revenue mobilization, running advertisements, and adequately paying the salaries of existing staff.

"The free SHS policy has had a profound impact on our enrollment figures. Following its implementation, our school has faced a significant challenge in recruiting students, with enrollment numbers plummeting to just a fraction of its typical intake, thus, empty classrooms and furniture" (IDIV, P-PSHS)

Some schools have provided data analysis on this impact, claiming that before the introduction of the free SHS policy, their institutions attracted large numbers of students, enrolling more than 300 in the first year. However, our institution had fewer than 150 entrance applications. This finding has significant implications for administrative affairs. The providers also complained that implementing the free SHS program strained their capacity to employ as many skilled instructors as possible, compared to the initial numbers.

"Currently, the government offers competitive pay and benefits, including paid study leave; this has led to a surge in recruitment at public SHSs. As a result, our schools have faced a substantial brain drain, losing many of our dedicated and hardworking teachers to public institutions. Recently, we have witnessed more than five teaching staff members vacating their positions to join the public high schools. This situation may result in the recruitment of teaching staff who have lower qualifications" (IDIV, P-PSHS)

The providers expressed bitterness about how the policy has affected their ability to generate enough cash to cover operating expenditures. A decrease in student enrollment has robbed the institution of the necessary financial resources to sustain the institution's facilities and advertisements, and adequately remunerate our personnel.

“The students serve as our primary sources of revenue, with the fees we charge being utilized for the school's administrative tasks, staff payments, and advertisements. However, the current situation presents a significant challenge as the student population has significantly decreased, negatively impacting our revenue” (IDIV, P-PSHS).

According to (Salifu, 2022, p. 8), state funding policy has hindered the ability of private senior schools to realize their management visions. Their goal as private SHS providers is to rank their schools among the “rapidly growing private SHSs in Africa.” However, the program’s execution “led to a drastic drop in student enrollment, which became a threat to their vision.”

“As it stands now, our forward look has become blurred. We have a vision; we determined that our school would become a world-leading choice senior high school in Ghana and worldwide, championing and delivering result-oriented educational services and values that satisfy our patrons. However, implementing the free SHS policy has obscured our vision, as it has become a popular choice among parents, making it difficult for us to achieve our goal” (IDIV, P-PSHS).

5.2.5 Adaptive method by private SHS provider to remain operational

This is in addition to the challenges accounted for by private SHS providers. The need to understand their actions regarding the outcomes of the FSHS initiative remains effective. However, our results indicate that private SHS providers have implemented various strategies to mitigate the effects of the FSHS program on their operations. Data from the participants revealed that they adopted one revenue-generating method, which rented out their facilities for other people to host their programs, such as church programs and short teaching courses.

Some private SHS providers also disclose that they “invest significant effort and commitment into advertising their schools and programs to persuade and entice potential students with the exceptional learning opportunities they present.” They also announced the inclusion of extended class hours for all the students.” The participant, who was a private SHS provider, made the following statement:

“We are enhancing the groundwork for quality teaching so that our students will always come out with the best results and attract better tertiary institutions in both Ghana and the global world. We believe that we will attract our potential clients with the best results comparable to the state institution” (IDIV, P-PSHSP).

Additionally, as part of the adaptive measures, one participant responded that to remain operational, they lowered the fees they used to charge the students; this, he said, motivated some students to patronize them as a result of introducing the policy.

“We have no other alternative at this stage, especially now that the public SHS is being made free, than to cut off part of our school fees for both resident and non-resident

students. We don't even maintain what we charged previously, nor do we talk of increasing it, so we manage the little we collect with the students" (IDIV, P-PSHS).

6.0 DISCUSSION

This section of the research discussion adheres to three themes: the role of the private provider in enhancing the execution of the free SHS policy, challenges faced by private providers, and the strategies adopted by private providers to overcome the situation.

6.1 The Role of Private SHS Providers in Achieving the Success of FSHS Policy

The development of senior high schools by private providers or governments, in collaboration with private companies through partnerships, has evolved into an increasingly essential facet of education. The available literature (see e.g Barrera-Osorio & Raju, 2015; Barungi & Kasirye, 2015) indicates that secondary public-private partnership school arrangements have benefited developing countries like Kenya and Uganda by providing financial and material support. Empirical testing demonstrated the success of these collaborations, resulting in excellent educational outcomes.

For example, Uganda discovered that building partnerships with the government boosted students' test performance (Barrera-Osorio & Raju, 2015). Therefore, improving the FSHS policy by using this technique is crucial. All the participants in this study supported their cooperation. They regarded the alliance as a solution to Ghana's educational infrastructure deficit, which has a significant impact on educational quality. For example, the introduction of the policy has resulted in a rapid increase in student enrollment, placing enormous strain on Ghana's public senior high school infrastructure.

This implies that the policy will obstruct the anticipated outcomes, particularly at the secondary level. Severe infrastructure deficiency results in students being unable to attend school or experiencing a substandard learning environment, which contributes to poor student outcomes. Ghana's government could potentially partner with private SHS providers to address infrastructure deficiencies and remove access barriers in implementing the FSHS initiative.

The results from the participants confirm what the literature advises that the government forming partnerships with private senior high school providers has increased pupils' test scores in senior high schools in Uganda (Barrera-Osorio & Raju, 2015). Based on these findings, private senior high school providers advocate for policy inclusivity. They asserted that they have mechanisms in place to support the policy and that its implementation will bring about positive changes in the learning environment, including reduced teacher-pupil ratios, enhanced supplies of teaching and learning resources, and in-service teacher training. Their opinions illustrated how private SHS providers working in cooperation with the state to deliver secondary education can work more practically, efficiently, and successfully in this setting.

6.2 Challenges and frustrations of the private school providers

The second theme, the challenges and frustrations of private SHS providers, arises from data analysis in response to the second study objective, which was to investigate the issues affecting private SHS providers, considering the execution of Ghana's free SHS policy. In plain terms, the findings revealed that participants' challenges and disappointments stemmed from difficulties such as declining student numbers, incapacity to employ more skilled teaching staff, and financial struggles, which affected operating costs. Respondents' elegy: These challenges and difficulties hampered the accomplishment of the school principal's strategic objectives.

Studies by Benveniste et al. (2013), Härmä and Adefisayo (2013), and Ohara (2012) show that private SHS providers encounter issues worldwide, some of which are the outcome of free SHS policy initiatives. This study confirms Härmä and Adefisayo's (2013) assertion that, in most nations implementing tuition-free policies, parents may favor them, leading to declining enrollment in private schools. According to the participants in this study, declining enrollment reduces private schools' revenue mobilization capacity, which has a knock-on effect on their ability to secure resources for managerial activities, such as hiring expert teachers and executing infrastructure development projects (Salifu, 2022).

Härmä and Adefisayo (2013) have lamented the position of private school providers, claiming that to maintain school operations, some private SHS providers with small student numbers raise school fees, exacerbating their plight as guardians and carers pull out their children, considering high fees. Possibly because of this, private SHS providers and participants in this study chose to decrease their costs, even though enrollments were declining. The reduction produced positive outcomes for all providers except for one, who claimed that it exacerbated the already perilous condition of generating large operating cost deficits.

6.3 Measures by the private school providers to address the situation

Private SHS providers use adaptive response strategies to overcome policy ramifications. It is important to examine this topic because it helps us understand how private SHS providers dealt with and overcome the problems caused by the free SHS policy in Ghana, which they saw as harmful. In this context, the actions of provider-participants are termed adaptive response measures, which are essential to manage the outcome of the policy decision.

The results indicate that PSHS providers' adaptive response strategies include fostering a culture of academic excellence to ensure a viable advantage with state institutions, boosting digital marketing strategies to emphasize our qualifications and services, lowering tuition, and seeking additional income. Facilitate actions of leasing halls and class spaces to faith-based groups and celebrants. Salifu (2020) and Verger and Moschetti (2017) stated that a key trait of good school management is the capacity to examine recent events that could impact school performance and create workable plans to reduce unintended consequences.

This trait is exhibited by the provider-participants in this research, who, through creativity, used new strategies to alleviate the impacts of the free SHS policy in Ghana. Research indicates

that private school providers in various parts of the world, aiming for better results, have used similar methods, such as borrowing from banks and renting out their facilities for social events.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This study investigated the role of PSHS providers in Ghana in the effective implementation of the FSHS program. To obtain a broader perspective on the issue, this study carefully considered the challenges faced by private SHS providers and the strategies they employed to overcome them. The research underscored that incorporating private SHS providers into the policy will increase the infrastructure burden on the government, enabling it to address infrastructure issues in due course.

Once again, the partnership will encourage both parties to work together to provide access, equity, and quality education in Ghana, thereby strengthening the partnership between the state and private sector. The nation's execution of the free SHS policy adversely affected private SHS providers, leading to decreased enrollment, challenges in attracting skilled teachers, and reduced income generation.

In response to these challenges, private senior high school providers have adopted adaptive strategies, including enhancing academic quality to compete with public schools, amplifying marketing for credentials and services, offering lower prices, and pursuing supplementary income-generating activities. The findings highlight the precarious relationship between the Ghanaian government and private senior high school providers, along with constitutional issues that policymakers need to resolve to facilitate effective public-private cooperation in education. This collaboration is crucial, as it enables the government to achieve the SGD 4 objective for impoverished nations.

Internationally, the challenges identified by provider-participants may help explain why some studies (Salifu, 2020) suggest that non-public funding for second-cycle education is not as significant as that for basic education, particularly in developing nations. We advocate for additional research into the roles and challenges encountered by private senior high schools in developing countries that are adopting free secondary education initiatives. We believe that this approach will enable us to analyze and differentiate roles and challenges as they emerge in diverse situations. These findings initiate a global discourse on identifying effective measures to facilitate the successful engagement of the non-state sector in shaping educational outcomes and achieving SDG 4 in poor nations.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The research primarily recommends that the Ghanaian government review the FSHS policy, taking into account stakeholder decisions and incorporating private secondary schools into the policy to address infrastructure challenges and targeting improvements in the arms of the policy, such as access, equity, and quality, that address high-quality education and inclusiveness. Further, the

government should reevaluate the constitutional provision that limits state support exclusively to non-private schools. Finally, fiscal assistance to support private sector partners in education could facilitate more active public-private partnerships in the nation's educational system.

REFERENCES

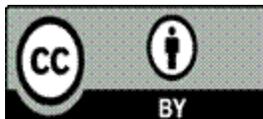
- Acquah, A., Attila, F. L., & Yalley, C. E. (2024). A critical review of the Free Senior High School policy in Ghana within the framework of development of curriculum. *Journal of Advance Research in Social Science and Humanities (ISSN 2208-2387)*, 10(5), 23-28.
- Adu-Ababio, K., & Osei, R. D. (2018). *Effects of an education reform on household poverty and inequality: A microsimulation analysis on the free Senior High School policy in Ghana* (9292565893).
- Akomea-Frimpong, I., Jin, X., Osei-Kyei, R., & Kukah, A. S. (2023). Public-private partnerships for sustainable infrastructure development in Ghana: a systematic review and recommendations. *Smart and Sustainable Built Environment*, 12(2), 237-257.
- Akuffo, A. G. (2025). In pursuit of equity in upper secondary education: the curious case of Ghana's free senior high school policy: In pursuit of equity in upper secondary education. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 52(3), 2255-2280.
- Appau, W. M., Alhassan, T., Attakora-Amaniampong, E., Ameyaw, S., & Quansah, J. Y. D. (2025). From Maintenance Gaps to Financing Strategies: Managing School Facilities in a Developing Country. *Journal of Real Estate, Construction & Management*, 29776570251387405.
- Arcia, G., Holloway, A., & Mulcahy-Dunn, A. (2023). Guide to public-private partnerships in basic education. *USAID) under the Data and Evidence for Education Programs (DEEP)*, https://www.edulinks.org/sites/default/files/media/file/Guide_to_Public_Private_Partnerships_in_Basic_Education.pdf.
- Arum, R. (1996). Do private schools force public schools to compete? *American sociological review*, 29-46. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/2096405>
- Bano, M. (2008). Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) as 'anchor' of educational reforms: lessons from Pakistan. *Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2009*.
- Barrera-Osorio, F., & Raju, D. (2015). Evaluating the impact of public student subsidies on low-cost private schools in Pakistan. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 51(7), 808-825. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2015.1028535>

- Barungi, M., & Kasirye, I. (2015). Performance of Public-Private Partnerships in delivering social services: The Case of Universal Secondary Education Policy Implementation in Uganda. <https://nru.uncst.go.ug/handle/123456789/3686>
- Benveniste, L., Carnoy, M., & Rothstein, R. (2013). *All else equal: Are public and private schools different?* Routledge. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315023458>
- Biygautane, M., & Clegg, S. (2024). Public-private partnerships for school infrastructure development: International review and recommendations for Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*.
- Bonsu, A. (2019). *Examining the Politics of Social Policy Implementation: A Case of Free Senior High School Policy in Ghana* [University of Ghana].
- Brown, G. M. (2025). Exploring the Management of Challenges by Low Fee Private Schools in the Ekumfi District. *University of Cape Coast*.
- Butt, A. I., & Munir, M. (2025). Impact of Formative Assessment on Students Performance in Public Private Partnership Schools: A Developing Country Perspective. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(3), 51-59.
- Colenso, P., & Zaidi Hai, A. (2024). "All Hands on Deck": The Critical Role of Non-State Actors in Basic Education in Low-and Middle-Income Countries. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 99(5), 566-577.
- Crawford, L., Hares, S., & Todd, R. (2024). The impact of private schools, school chains and PPPs in developing countries. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 39(1), 97-123.
- Cresswell, J. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research*. Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. sage.
- Duflo, E., Dupas, P., & Kremer, M. (2021). *The impact of free secondary education: Experimental evidence from Ghana* (28937).
- Frimpong, S. O., Hilton, K., Bhirgo, P., Aloo, F., Kumirai, A., & Arthur-Holmes, F. (2023). Towards a successful free senior high school policy in Ghana: the role of non-profit organisations. *Voluntary Sector Review*, 14(3), 519-530. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1332/204080521X16567495388628>
- Gborsongu, P. M., & Korsah, L. A. (2022). Efficacy of the Computerised Schools Selection and Placement System in Bono Region of Ghana. *International Journal of Educational Management and Development Studies*, 3(3), 27-47.
- Granoulhac, F. (2021). La Private Finance Initiative et les infrastructures scolaires au Royaume-Uni: vingt ans après, quel héritage? *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique. French Journal of British Studies*, 26(XXVI-2).

- Hammad, W., & Shah, S. (2018). Dissonance between the “international” and the conservative “national”: Challenges facing school leaders in international schools in Saudi Arabia. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 54(5), 747-780. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X187858>
- Härmä, J., & Adefisayo, F. (2013). Scaling up: challenges facing low-fee private schools in the slums of Lagos, Nigeria. *Low-fee private schooling: Aggravating equity or mitigating disadvantage*, 129-152.
- Haruna, P. F., & Kannae, L. A. (2017). Implementing Good Governance Reform in Ghana: Issues and Experiences with Local Governance 1. In *Public Administration in Africa* (pp. 135-151). Routledge.
- Hassan, M. M., & Ahmed, A. R. (2024). Examining Internal Factors Impacting Higher Education Institutions Readiness for Implementing Public–private Partnerships to Foster a Knowledge Economy in Post-conflict Somalia. *Innovative Higher Education*, 49(5), 849-863.
- Houghton, C., Casey, D., Shaw, D., & Murphy, K. (2013). Rigour in qualitative case-study research. *Nurse researcher*, 20(4). <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2013.03.20.4.12.e326>
- Johnson, R. B., & Christensen, L. B. (2024). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. Sage publications.
- Kaye-Essien, C. W. (2025). The co-governance of basic education: assessing the complementary effects of intergovernmental support, municipal capacity, non-governmental organization presence and international development assistance. *Governance*, 38(1), e12879.
- Linh, V. K., Dung, T. A., Quy, H. T. N., Thanh, P. C., & Tien, N. H. (2022). Reforming salary system to improve competitiveness of public higher education in Vietnam. *International journal of multidisciplinary research and growth evaluation*, 3(1), 541-549.
- Matey, J. (2020). The effect of free senior high school policy on the lives of parents and wards in Ghana. *International Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Scope (IRJMS)*, 1, 27-36.
- Mensah, J. (2019). Sustainable development: Meaning, history, principles, pillars, and implications for human action: Literature review. *Cogent social sciences*, 5(1), 1653531. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2019.1653531>
- Mohammed, A. K., & Kuyini, A. B. (2021). An evaluation of the free senior high school policy in Ghana. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 51(2), 143-172. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2020.1789066>
- NDI, B. (2025). Financial Management, Challenges, and Coping Strategies of Private Schools in Sanchez Mira: Its Effect on School Management. *AIDE Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 11, 191-216.

- Noon, E. J. (2018). An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Barriers to the Use of Humour in the Teaching of Childhood Studies: Revised version-original published 10 May 2017, Vol 5, No 3. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice*, 6(2), 113-120.
- Obeng, R. A., & Ansah, F. (2024). The Struggle to Retain Adept Academic Staff in Private Higher Education Institutions in Ghana: Are Compensation Practices to Blame? *International Journal of African Higher Education*, 11(1).
- Ohara, Y. (2012). Examining the legitimacy of unrecognised low-fee private schools in India: comparing different perspectives. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 42(1), 69-90. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2011.632537>
- Pal, S. (2023). Education as a catalyst for economic development: A comparative study. *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, 12(5), 1138-1142.
- Partey, P. (2017). Access, equity, quality of free SHS: Farce or reality. Retrieved September, 12, 2022.
- Pârvu, D., & Voicu-Olteanu, C. (2009). Advantages and limitations of the public private partnerships and the possibility of using them in Romania. *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences*, 5(27), 189-198.
- Patrinos, H. A., Osorio, F. B., & Guáqueta, J. (2009). *The role and impact of public-private partnerships in education*. World Bank Publications.
- Rad, D., Redeuş, A., Roman, A., Ignat, S., Lile, R., Demeter, E., Egerău, A., Dughi, T., Balaş, E., & Maier, R. (2022). Pathways to inclusive and equitable quality early childhood education for achieving SDG4 goal—a scoping review. *Frontiers in psychology*, 13, 955833.
- Rind, G. M. (2022). *Evaluating the role and impact of public-private partnerships in education in achieving the goal of equitable access to quality education in the Sindh, Pakistan* [Miami University].
- Robertson, S., Mundy, K., & Verger, A. (2012). *Public private partnerships in education: New actors and modes of governance in a globalizing world*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Salifu, I. (2022). State-Funded Secondary Education Policy: Implications for Private School Management in Ghana. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 21(4), 719-732. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2020.1823997>
- Sanyare, F. N., & Lagnang, E. M. (2025). Perspectives of educational stakeholders on the implementation of Ghana's Free Senior High School policy in the Wa Municipality of Upper West Region, Ghana. *Ghana Journal of Development Studies*, 22(2), 78 - 97. <https://doi.org/10.4314/gjds.v22i2.4>

- Swai, C. (2025). Strengthening private sector engagement in education: comparative lessons for Tanzania. *Cogent Education*, 12(1), 2590838.
- Thelma, C. C. (2024). Civic education and national development: A comprehensive analysis of Zambia. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 50(6), 170-190.
- Tilak, J. B. G. (2010). Public-Private Partnership in Education *The Hindu*, 24, 1-16.
- Verger, A. (2012). Framing and selling global education policy: the promotion of public-private partnerships for education in low-income contexts. *Journal of Education Policy*, 27(1), 109-130. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2011.623242>
- Verger, A., & Moschetti, M. (Eds.). (2017). *Partnering with the private sector in the post-2015 era? The main political and social implications in the educational arena*. FEPS-Solidar.
- Warsen, R., Nederhand, J., Klijn, E. H., Grotenbreg, S., & Koppenjan, J. (2018). What makes public-private partnerships work? Survey research into the outcomes and the quality of cooperation in PPPs. *Public Management Review*, 20(8), 1165-1185.
- Zickafoose, A., Ilesanmi, O., Diaz-Manrique, M., Adeyemi, A. E., Walumbe, B., Strong, R., Wingenbach, G., Rodriguez, M. T., & Dooley, K. (2024). Barriers and challenges affecting quality education (Sustainable Development Goal# 4) in sub-Saharan Africa by 2030. *Sustainability*, 16(7), 2657.



©2026 by the Authors. This Article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)