The Effectiveness of the Free Senior High School Policy in Ghana: A Moral Development Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The secondary agents of social connections are schools. Since schools have access to trained professionals and resources, it is assumed that this is the only place where students' moral and ethical development can be reinforced and flourish. As a result, the school's role is to support students in developing their moral judgment. However, present students' behaviour in the post-free senior high school period is getting out of hand, both on school campuses and in society. This has raised a lot of questions about the effectiveness of the free senior high school policy on students' moral development. This necessitated research into how the policy has affected students' conduct and moral development. The researchers employed a descriptive survey design for this study. Interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data from forty-one (41) participants, consisting of twenty-one (21) students, ten (10) teachers, and ten (10) parents in Sefwi Wiawso Municipality in the Western North Region of Ghana. It was established that the policy has led to mass moral literacy (moral education). On the other hand, other challenges have impaired students' moral development. The findings call for and necessitate that those with a vested interest in the free senior high school policy do an evaluation and revision of the program.

Keywords: *Ghana, Free Senior High School Policy, Morality, and Moral Development, Double Track System*

INTRODUCTION

A country's degree of development increases as its population becomes more educated. It decreases illiteracy, makes people better residents and workers, and teaches them to distinguish between right and wrong. Through education, people learn about and adhere to the rules and norms of their society, thereby making it a better place to live. In Ghanaian communities, education influences a person's abilities, attitudes, and beliefs as well as the standards and values. Therefore, schools in Ghanaian communities set reasonable goals and provide students with a suitable learning environment, fostering in them the moral, intellectual, physical, social, and aesthetic growth necessary to become contributing members of society. Because of this, the Ghanaian society needs education if it wants to successfully pass on all of its knowledge, norms, values, and skills to future generations.[1]

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[1] Ransford Pinto, "The Effect of Western Formal Education on the Ghanaian Educational System and Cultural Identity," *Journal of Negro Education* 88, no. 1 (2019): 5–16.

However, in the period of the Free Education Policy (FEP), it has reached a point where it instils anxiety and terror in the minds of those who worry about Ghana's future as a country and the future of its throngs of youthful inhabitants. Students receiving free education are increasingly exploiting social media records to commit immorality and offend authorities with obscene and indecent words.[2] In this era of FEP, truancy, thuggery, disobedience, smoking, armed robbery, violent conduct, demonstrations, flirting, stealing, vandalism, drug offences, and examination malpractice are just a few of the student behavioural issues that society is dealing with, according to Francis Britwum, and Sandra Aidoo.[3] Many educational stakeholders have expressed their concerns about the recent events as a result of these behaviours. The current Senior High School (SHS) curricula, according to Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, include some topics that excite students without fostering their moral and spiritual development, leading to immoral behaviour among today's free senior high school students.[4]

Notwithstanding these assertions, after the release of the 2020 West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) results, the public concluded that free SHS has had a good impact on students. The WASSCE results of the first group of free SHS candidates, according to President Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, have validated the government's decision to make significant investments in high-quality free education for children.[5] It is believed that the free SHS program has increased educational quality and raised educational standards.[6] Despite being labelled as immoral, the 2022 class of students that took the WASSCE have been said to be the finest SHS pupils in the past eight years. Others believe that the 2022 free SHS class has demonstrated the effectiveness of the Free Senior High School (FSHS) policy.[7] According to Opuni-Frimpong, the curriculum in the era of free SHS has given preference to science and technological education with little consideration given to the development of the moral fibre of the social order, which he claims is setting the stage for the country's production of "intelligent criminals" and consequently increasing immoral behaviour among students at the SHS level.[8] The aforementioned discussions have emphasised the necessity for further research into how the FSHS policy has affected students' conduct and moral development. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the success of Ghana's policy of FSHS from the standpoint of moral development and quality. Using a descriptive survey design, interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data from forty-one (41) participants, in Sefwi Wiawso Municipality, to ascertain the impact of FSHS on the moral development of students in the Municipality.

The Free Senior High School Policy: Origin, Characteristics and Advantages

The Ghanaian government made free, mandatory, basic education a constitutional necessity to bridge the achievement gap between the wealthy and the deprived. The Free and Compulsory Universal Basic

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[2] Ellis Ferdinand, "Final Year WASSCE Candidate Who Insulted Akufo-Addo in Viral Video Apologises," Education Ghana, August 8, 2020, accessed December 28, 2022. https://educationghana.org/final-year-wassce-candidate-who-insulted-akufo-addo-in-viral-video-apologises/; Delali Adogla-Bessa, "GES Probing Chiana SHS Students Who Insulted Akufo-Addo in Viral Video," Citi Newsroom, November 14, 2022, accessed December 28, 2022. https://citinewsroom.com/2022/11/ges-probing-chiana-shs-students-who-insulted-akufo-addo-in-viral-video/.

[3] Francis Britwum and Sandra Aidoo, "Moral Decadence as a Potential Predictor of Students Academic Performance in Some Selected Senior High Schools in the Kumasi Metropolis, Ghana," *International Journal of Learning and Teaching* 14, no. 3 (September 9, 2022): 153–68, https://doi.org/10.18844/ijlt.v14i3.7301.

[4] Christian Yalley, "'STEM Education without Morals, Spiritual Values Breed Intelligent Criminals' – Opuni-Frimpong," MyJoyonline, March 10, 2022, accessed January 01, 2023. https://www.myjoyonline.com/stem-education-without-morals-spiritual-values-breed-intelligent-criminals-opuni-frimpong/.

[5] "Performance of Free SHS students in WASSCE justifies investment — President," Graphic Online, published on March 12, 2022, accessed on January 01, 2023. https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/education/performance-of-free-shs-students-in-wassce-justifies-investment-president.html

[6] Erica Apeatua Addo, "The Quality of Education Has Improved under Free SHS Programme | Ghana News Agency," Ghana News Agency, 2022, https://gna.org.gh/2022/11/the-quality-of-education-has-improved-under-free-shs-programme/.

[7] The Business & Financial Times, "WASSCE Result 2022, Prove Free SHS Is Working Well – Akufo-Addo ," B&FT Online, December 6, 2022, https://thebftonline.com/2022/12/06/wassce-result-2022-prove-free-shs-is-working-well-akufo-addo/.

[8] Yalley, "'STEM Education without Morals, Spiritual Values Breed Intelligent Criminals' – Opuni-Frimpong."

Education (FCUBE) initiative, which was first implemented in 1995, set a deadline of 2005 for achieving education for all.[9] Abdul-Rahaman *et.al.*, add that this policy covers eleven years of universal basic education, which are divided into two years of kindergarten, six years of elementary school and three years of Junior High School.[10] Such measures resulted in a long-term, unprecedented increase in the number of students enrolled, even from family members, because parents were no longer required to pay for their children's education. As a result, there is a greater demand for senior high school education in the nation, which puts more strain on family finances because parents have to cover their children's tuition and utility fees at this level.

As part of the government's policies to reduce and control this financial burden on the family unit, the Free Senior High School policy introduced by the government has been perceived as a positive step for Ghanaians. The Progressively Free Senior High policy put into place in 2015 was replaced by this policy.[11] This progressively free senior high school policy was a way for the government to partially sponsor education at the Senior High School level. Some educational expenses, including exam fees, entertainment fees, library fees, dues for the Students Representative Council (SRC), sports and culture fees, science development fees, math quizzes fees, co-curricular fees and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) fees, were waived for parents.

Nurudeen Abdul-Rahaman *et.al.*, claim that governments across the globe have improved their educational systems by establishing sponsoring initiatives meant to lessen the economic burden on families and increase accessibility and excellence in education.[12] To end parents' financial hardships when paying for their children's tuition, the Ghanaian government converted from a progressive free senior high school policy to a free senior high school policy in 2017. This move was made to combat poverty. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has named the Free Senior High School policy to be among the outstanding social and economic reform programs that directly impact senior high school families and pupils.[13] Particularly, parents and legal guardians have been exempt from responsibility for their obligations.

Equity in education, according to Meira Levinson, Tatiana Geron and Harry Brighouse, occurs when each student has access to the materials required to learn the fundamental abilities of reading, writing, elementary arithmetic, and the overall development of the whole being. They further claim that it accelerates economic growth, social ideals, and security and judges educational performance in society by its outcomes rather than the money invested in it.[14] Thus, every nation's economic, social, and moral development is slowed by educational inequality. This might have been the impetus behind Ghana's decision to make primary education free and required under the 1961 Educational Act.[15] As a result, on September 12, 2017, the administration introduced the mandatory Free Senior High School Policy. Thus, the government pays all costs associated with attending public senior and vocational high schools, including boarding expenses, textbook costs, meal expenses, and other expenses.[16] According to statistics, the Free SHS educational program has benefited over 1.6 million schoolchildren as of the

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[9] Kwame Akyeampong, "Revisiting Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) in Ghana," *Comparative Education* 45, no. 2 (2009): 175–95.

[10] Nurudeen Abdul-Rahaman et al., "The Free Senior High Policy: An Appropriate Replacement to the Progressive Free Senior High Policy," *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies* 6, no. 2 (2018): 26–33.

[11] Gabriel Asante and David Agbee, "Responding to Access and beyond in Fee-Free Policies: Comparative Review of Progressive Free Senior High and Free Senior High School Policies in Ghana," *ScienceOpen Preprints*, 2021.

[12] Abdul-Rahaman et al., "The Free Senior High Policy: An Appropriate Replacement to the Progressive Free Senior High Policy."

[13] John Osae-Kwapong, "IMF Support: Free SHS Worth Saving ," Graphic Online, July 16, 2022, https://www.graphic.com.gh/features/features/imf-support-free-shs-worth-saving.html.

[14] Meira Levinson, Tatiana Geron, and Harry Brighouse, "Conceptions of Educational Equity," *AERA Open* 8 (2022): 23328584221121344.

[15] Shadrack Osei Frimpong et al., "Towards a Successful Free Senior High School Policy in Ghana: The Role of Non-Profit Organisations," *Voluntary Sector Review*, 2022, 1–12.

[16] Kyei-Nuamah David and Larbi Andrews, "Free Senior High School Policy in Ghana: Implementation and Outcomes against Policy Purposes," *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development* 6, no. 6 (2022): 1207–22.

end of 2021 since it began in 2017.[17] Similar to this, 2.2 million schoolchildren were established to enrol in the Free SHS after the 2022 school selection and placement process.[18] Consequently, the Ghana Education Service (GES) launched the Double Track (DT) system in September 2018 as a transitory means of increasing enrolment without making equivalent infrastructural improvements.

The DT system was created to address the challenges of increasing student enrolment and sparse infrastructure in many of the nation's top senior high schools. The double-track system was an innovation that made it possible for schools to house more students in the same space, hence reducing overcrowding during this free education era as a result of a rise in student enrolment. The system separates all of the students and staff into two tracks, with one track attending classes while the others are on vacation, and vice-versa. The first track is known as the Green Track, and the second is also known as the Gold Track. The first batch of students, known as the "Green Track," typically reports to school and attends classes for one semester at a time as the Gold Track students are on vacation, while the second group, known as the "Gold Track," reports to school or attends classes while the Green Track students are on break. Since senior high school became free for all students in Ghana, enrolment has surged by 50%.[19] This is important for Ghana's growth since mass education can end poverty, starvation, sickness and certain communal issues in Africa. One of the best policies in Ghana's educational history is this particular policy. It promotes innovation and ideas with the potential to significantly increase productivity.

Finally, the advantages of free education in Ghana go beyond simply relieving parents' financial burdens. The present policy for senior high school education is to offer free instruction. This entails free tuition, free library, free boarding, free scientific lab fees, free exam fees, free utility fees, free meals for boarders as well as day students, nonpayment of Parents Teachers Association (PTA) dues and free textbooks for all Senior High School learners. These policies are designed to upsurge school enrolment, enhance quality in terms of academic achievement, social principle, and moral development and most importantly, relieve parents of the financial burden of covering their children's tuition.

Morality and Moral Development in the Ghanaian Perspective

According to Mette Buchardt, morality which is derived from the Latin *moralitas* (manner, character, proper behaviour) is the process of learning to distinguish between virtues and vices.[20] In this sense, morality can be used in a descriptive way to denote a code of conduct within a particular society, group, or individual, or to denote a code of conduct that spell out specific conditions put forward by all rational persons. In this sense, "morality" can be used to describe a set of rules for behaviour that apply to a particular society, group, or person, or it can refer to a set of guidelines that are agreed upon by all reasonable people. It could be for this reason that Don Browning defines moral development as the process by which children absorb the standards of right or good and wrong or bad in their social order, based on their collective cultural and social norms and laws.[21] Kohlberg affirms that moral development is the systematic way through which individuals acquire the skills to recognize the differences that exist between what is right and wrong using logic, as well as acceptable and unacceptable values in society.[22]

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[17] The Business & Financial Times, "Free SHS Policy, Not a Failed One - Education Minister," B&FT Online, October 3, 2022, accessed on January 15, 2023. https://thebftonline.com/2022/10/03/free-shs-policy-not-a-failed-one-education-minister/.

[18] Ghanaian Times, "Free SHS Has Increased SHS Enrolment by 50% – Bawumia," May 27, 2022, https://educationweb.com.gh/education/free-shs-has-increased-shs-enrolment-by-50-bawumia/.

[19] Ghanaian Times, "Free SHS has increased SHS enrolment by 50% – Bawumia."

[20] Mette Buchardt, "Church, Religion, and Morality," *A Cultural History of Education in the Age of Enlightenment*, 2023, 25.

[21] Don S Browning, "Moral Development," *Encyclopedia of Religious Ethics*, 2022, 126–32.

[22] Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development/2 The Psychology of Moral Development* (Harper & Row, 1984).

According to Durkheim, these values serve as the groundwork for the moral well-being of every society as it provides structure and unity.[23] Dinama adds that morals consist of principles, standards and routines of behaviour which are acceptable and are looked upon as appropriate or important and are observed in high regard by the individuals in the community or society.[24] Therefore, when someone can exhibit courtesy, charity, honesty, unity, cleanliness, discipline, diligence and frugality, it means the person has developed moral character. In other words, morality is represented in every society by a set of standards based on culture, family and community, and these norms are imposed upon the individual by the prospect of sanctions and punishment that may be minor or severe. Woolfolk adds that this system of norms and values outlines the kind of behaviour expected of every individual within the society or community as a whole; it creates a dichotomy between what is generally seen as "good" and what is generally seen as "bad."[25]

In African countries like Ghana, morality and moral values are mostly concerned with sustaining positive interpersonal connections. Ghanaian morality has historically been characterised as communalistic, humanistic, or anthropocentric, this-worldly morality, religious, taboo, and ancestral.[26]

According to Wiredu, in Ghana, morality is basically following the laws that ensure that one's interests and those of everyone else in society are harmoniously balanced. Moreover, he argues that morality is motivated by an intellectual and compassionate connection with the interests of others and does not simply refer to compliance with the demands of the harmony of interests.[27] Gyekye defined morality in the Ghanaian context as "a system of social rules and conventions intended to regulate people's behavior in a society." It is rooted in people's perceptions of good and bad character and appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. According to him, morality is social and derives from interpersonal relationships; without human society, morality would not exist.[28] Therefore, rape, murder, domestic abuse, theft, assault, vandalism, embezzlement, substance abuse and animal abuse are all regarded as immoral in Ghanaian society, along with more common deviant actions including tardiness at work, swearing in public, incorrect body language, dishonesty, and gossiping, since they do not promote societal coexistence nor derive interpersonal relationships among citizens.

Many scholars have made the case that social and cultural traditions determine and mould people's morality when it comes to moral growth in Ghana. Among the well-known academics who have adopted this position are Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu. George Anderson Jr. on the other hand, thinks that religion influences and shapes Ghanaians' morals since all Ghanaians are religious.[29] Although Gyekye acknowledges the influence religion has on the Akan people of Ghana, he believes that society, not religion, is the true arbiter of morality. By making this claim, he clarifies that under Akan's moral philosophy, what is "good" or of "moral value" is established by how it affects people and human civilisation, and this serves as a source of moral development.[30] The argument put out by Wiredu, who appears to be siding with Gyekye, is that while moral duty is not produced by fear of divine retribution, it may serve to direct people's thoughts in that direction. Although the threat of being apprehended can stop a thief, if the robber had any morals, he would never have considered robbing in the first place.[31] All these stands play a major role in moral development, religion, and society and the people's traditions determine a group's morality as they all inculcate moral values into

[23] W.S.F. Pickering, "Durkheim and Moral Education for Children: A Recently Discovered Lecture," *Journal of Moral Education* 24, no. 1 (1995): 19–36.

[24] Baamphatlha Dinama, "The Path so Far: Introducing Moral Education in Botswana Senior Secondary Schools," 2012.

[25] Anita E. Woolfolk, *Educational Psychology* , 9th ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2004).

[26] Aden Husien and Olira Kebede, "The Conception of Morality in Indigenous African Culture," *International Journal of English Literature Culture* 5, no. 3 (2017): 57–64.

[27] Kwasi Wiredu, "Moral Foundations of an African Culture," *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies* 1 (1992): 192–206.

[28] Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Sankofa Pub. Co, 1996).

[29] George Anderson Jnr, "Religion and Morality in Ghana: A Reflection," *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2013): 162–70.

[30] Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Temple University Press, 1995).

[31] Wiredu, "Moral Foundations of an African Culture."

the individual in their unique way. Society is the one that establishes religion based on its culture, beliefs, emotions, attitudes, and actions; as a result, they inculcate moral value in people according to their moral convictions.

Addai-Mensah argues that moral values must be instilled in young people in African countries like Ghana. He contends that teaching young people about indigenous cultural values is the most effective strategy to enhance children's moral development and character growth.[32] As a result, moral educators such as parents, priests, teachers and others need to play their part in instilling Ghanaian indigenous cultural values in children through social interactions and supervision. The values that children are taught serve as a moral compass that guides and guards them in their adult lives. This may be the reason Piaget claims that all developmental traits are the result of actions.[33] This means that people construct and reconstruct to expand their worldview through interactions with the environment. Children follow the rules whilst having fun. Piaget finally concluded that moral growth proceeds through several stages just like all developmental processes.[34] Consequently, Addai-Mensah declared in his study that a child is born unconscious of the moral norms of Ghanaian society, therefore, values like kindness, generosity, humility, respect for the elderly and compassion must be inculcated in children at the desirable stage.[35] Consequently, it is the responsibility of moral educators to recognise these stages and help children cultivate the desired moral values at the appropriate stages to help the child appreciate the need to be morally upright.

The Free Senior High School Policy System and Students' Moral Development
The school acts as a secondary socialisation agent and is charged with assisting students in the formation of their moral judgment. In Ghanaian society, there are a set of values that guide the behaviour of every member and it is expected that the school instils in children the principles of hospitality, chastity until getting married, truth, manners and respect, covenant commitment, hard labour, and excellent character. According to Piaget, schools have a responsibility to help students and youngsters grow morally in addition to intellectually.[36] The free senior school policy system has the same objective in mind when it comes to moral growth.

All Ghanaian children and teenagers who are admitted to public second-cycle institutions through the Computerised School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS) are entitled to a three-year scholarship that covers their tuition costs under this system of educational policy. The expense of all tuition, all boarders' meals, and all non-boarders' lunch are covered by the government.[37] This has led to a substantial increase in enrolment since fees and other expenses have been absorbed by the government but retention is still threatened by many socioeconomic factors that lead to dropping of students out of school. As a result, many students, especially females, do not complete their senior high education because of teenage pregnancy, parental negligence and early marriages which affects learners' moral development.[38] This may be a result of what students encounter on campus these days. According to social learning theorists like Bandura, socialisation and observation of others are the primary ways that children learn morals or immorality.[39] This suggests that moral values are developed by children through socialization and observation of others in the school or social environment. Both Durkheim and Freud concur that the formation of moral standards is significantly influenced by

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[32] Peter Addai-Mensah, "The Role of Akan Values on Moral Upbringing of Children in Contemporary Society," *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology* 2, no. 4 (2020): 96–101.

[33] Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (Routledge, 1932), 195.

[34] Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (Routledge, 1932), 198.

[35] Addai-Mensah, "The Role of Akan Values on Moral Upbringing of Children in Contemporary Society," 100.

[36] Norbert Elias, *Society of Individuals* (Cambridge: polity press 1989), 79.

[37] Emmanuel Tamanja and Edison Pajibo, "Ghana's Free Senior High School Policy: Evidence and Insight from Data," in *EDULEARN19 Proceedings* (IATED, 2019), 7837–46.

[38] Tamanja and Edison, *Ghana's free senior high school policy: evidence and insight from data,* 7838.

[39] Albert Bandura, "Social Cognitive Theory of Moral Thought and Action," in *Handbook of Moral Behavior and Development* (Psychology press, 2014), 45-50.

societal values.[40] Therefore, the proper relationship that exists between parents, teachers, school administrators or other authorities and children has a significant impact on the development of children's morality.

In the same way, the nature of increased student enrolment has consequently caused other problems like heavy teaching loads, movement of students in and out of schools, teacher shortages and inadequate instructional materials. This is a threat to students' moral development, according to Pajibo, with the assertion that this policy is in an already existing school setting that is full of problems such as the nonexistence of well-committed teachers, the absence of proper guidance and counselling services and deprived management and supervision.[41] Research has revealed that small class sizes lead to active participation among students in the learning process, whereas large class sizes lead to less involvement of students in the teaching-learning process.[42] Similarly, Piaget's two stages of moral development state that involvement in problem-solving fosters children's moral growth. He went on to say that social interaction is the starting point for children's moral development. According to him, participation in groups is where moral development happens.[43] In this case, less engagement and participation in class because of increased enrolment and class sizes may hinder students' moral development as a result of heavy teaching loads on teachers.

The Double Track concept has led to numerous popular senior high schools around the nation battling the challenge of growing student demand with limited infrastructure. Notwithstanding that, it has given room for students to spend long holidays which has led to an interruption in the rhythm of learning, instruction and education in general, which may result in a loss of knowledge, skills, and social values. It also allows learners to engage in unethical behaviours, thereby affecting their moral development.[44] Although implementers of the double track may succeed in reducing costs in a given period, the absence of co-curricular activities such as sports activities, cultural programs and inter-school competitions may deprive students of the social and aesthetic benefits of education, moral values, principles, and moral development as a whole.[45] Shortening the school day and semester suggests that quality over quantity is being compromised and that pupils are losing some in-class instruction and extracurricular activities. Once more, teachers who work more than one session tend to become more worn out. Additionally, it is frequently said that the double-track system contributes to social issues because it allows students to spend less time in class and more time at home, which has an impact on their cultural values and moral development.

It is believed that the new curriculum and cocurricular activities have prioritised Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics education with little attention given to the development of the moral fibre of the society, which is setting the stage for the training of "intelligent criminals" for the country.[46] Consequently, according to Asare-Danso[47] and Amuah,[48] most teachers have a good understanding of the subject matter of moral education and have pedagogical knowledge, but some of them do not. Opuni-Frimpong has asserted that due to this prioritisation, moral values such as honesty, mutual respect, civility and social responsibility that would help individuals to live good lives and at

[40] Emile Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy* (New York: Free Press,1976), 44; Freud Sigmund, "Civilization and Its Discontents" (Translated by Strachey James. New York: WW Norton and Company, 1930), 71-75.

[41] Tamanja and Pajibo, "Ghana's Free Senior High School Policy: Evidence and Insight from Data," 47-52.

[42] Kelly Bedard and Peter Kuhn, "Where Class Size Really Matters: Class Size and Student Ratings of Instructor Effectiveness," *Economics of Education Review* 27, no. 3 (2008): 253–65.

[43] Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, 67.

[44] Jackie Shinwell and Margaret Anne Defeyter, "Investigation of Summer Learning Loss in the UK—Implications for Holiday Club Provision," *Frontiers in Public Health* 5 (2017): 270.

[45] Mark Bray, *Double-Shift Schooling: Design and Operation for Cost-Effectiveness*, vol. 90 (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2008), 20.

[46] Yalley, "'STEM Education without Morals, Spiritual Values Breed Intelligent Criminals' – Opuni-Frimpong."

[47] Seth Asare-Danso, "Assessing Technological, Pedagogical and Content Knowledge of Religious and Moral Educators of Colleges of Education in Ghana: A Survey," *International Journal of Education and Social Science* Vol. 4 No. 11; December, 29 (2017): 31-34.

[48] Uriel Amuah, "Assessing the Pedagogical Content Knowledge of Religious and Moral Education Teachers at Basic Schools in the Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem Municipality" (University of Cape Coast, 2021), 82-86.

the same time become productive, contributing members of society are lacking in schools.[49] In light of this, educational stakeholders must be explicit about the status of morally deserved recognition, condemnation, reward and punishment in accordance with Ghanaian moral standards in the curriculum and among students at different educational levels.

METHODOLOGY
The researchers employed a descriptive survey design for this study. This design enabled the researchers to obtain accurate information about the effectiveness of the free senior high school policy in Ghana from the perspective of moral development. The descriptive survey was employed in the study since it sought information from a large number of participants at once to determine the current status of how the free SHS policy has affected students' conduct and moral development.[50] The target population for the study was made up of SHS students, teachers, and parents in Sefwi Wiawso Municipality. The Municipality has five (5) Senior High Schools but to enhance the collection of in-depth data three (3) of them were purposively selected for the study. With the aid of a simple random sampling technique, a seven-person student focus group was formed in each of the schools. Similarly, a purposive sampling technique was used to select ten (10) teachers and ten (10) parents. Therefore, the participants consisted of twenty-one (21) students, ten (10) teachers, and ten (10) parents, totalling forty-one (41). An interview was the instrument used to collect data from both parents and teachers while a focus group discussion was used to collect data from the students. The results have been descriptively presented, analysed and discussed according to the themes that emerged during the interview and focus group discussion in the subsequent sections.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
This section presents, analyses, and discusses the findings according to the themes from both interviews and focus group discussions. The themes were generated from the issues that were discussed in the course of the researcher's interaction with the participants. The collected data have been analysed and interpreted in light of how the free SHS policy has impacted students' moral growth and behaviour. The themes were organised in the following ways based on the issues that came up in the focus group discussions and interviews: enrolment and students' moral development; school climate and students' moral development; and the double-track system and students' moral development.

Enrolment and Students' Moral Development
Participants in the discussion of school enrolment focused on two distinct factors that have an impact on the behaviour and moral growth of students. They contended that lower school enrolment typically has a good effect on students' moral growth, whereas increased school enrolment typically has a detrimental effect. According to the respondents, in the case of the FSHS policy, school enrolment has increased drastically, placing pressure on teachers and school amenities and leading to overcrowding in classrooms and campuses as a result of a shortage of staff and school resources. Most students, as well as parents and teachers, consider this aspect as central to the endeavour of students' moral development. As one female teacher from Sefwi Wiawso Senior High School observed:

> *"Students' indiscipline has been exacerbated by the high student-teacher ratio and overcrowding in classrooms. This has led to disruptive behaviour, lesson skipping, immoral behaviour, violence, lying, and academic dishonesty among students. Also, it has influenced students' disregard for teachers, prefects, and the school administration, as well as their use of drugs, taunting of other students, absenteeism, failure to turn in homework, and verbal attacks on other students, teachers, and the general public."*

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[49] Yalley, "'STEM Education without Morals, Spiritual Values Breed Intelligent Criminals' – Opuni-Frimpong."
[50] Lorraine R Gay, Geoffrey E Mills, and Peter W Airasian, *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications* (Pearson Higher Ed, 2011), 41.

The following statement by a mother, which was shared by the majority of parents, exemplifies their stance:

> "*The smaller the class size, the higher the possibility that a teacher will devote additional time to individual students. Large class sizes make it difficult for teachers to maintain and instil discipline in students as they mount further challenges for classroom management, student control, marking, planning, and assessment.*"

Both views expressed above suggest that the increase in enrolment as a result of the FSHS policy in Ghanaian Senior High Schools has had a detrimental effect on the moral development of students in both the classroom and the school in general since teachers are unable to carry out their responsibilities effectively due to a higher student ratio. As a result of the high student-teacher ratio, teachers and school administrators find it difficult to use the appropriate procedures, sanctions, and pedagogies to instil moral values in learners and give learners individualized attention. This was one of the causes cited by Britwum and Aidoo in their study when they found that indiscipline behaviours such as truancy, thuggery, disobedience, smoking, armed robbery, violent behaviour, demonstrations, flirting, stealing, vandalism, drug offences and examination malpractice have reached the highest level during the implementation of the FSHS policy.[51]

These behaviours go contrary to the moral principles of Ghanaians. According to Gyekye, morality in the Ghanaian context is social and derives from interpersonal relationships.[52] Therefore, rape, murder, domestic abuse, theft, assault, vandalism, embezzlement, substance abuse and animal abuse are all regarded as immoral in Ghanaian society, along with more common deviant actions including tardiness at work, swearing in public, incorrect body language, dishonesty, and gossiping, since they do not promote societal coexistence nor derive interpersonal relationships among citizens. Bandura[53] and Durkheim[54] posited that socialisation and observation of others are the primary ways that children learn morals or immorality. Therefore, the high student-teacher ratio creates an avenue for students to copy deviant behaviours from other students since teachers find it difficult to educate, sponsor, coach, counsel and direct learners.

School Climate and Students' Moral Development

The respondents declared that school climate plays a major role in students' moral development since a sustainable, controlled and positive school climate promotes students' moral development and the knowledge required for an industrious, contributive, and sustaining natural life in a self-governing social order. This climate includes values, customs, standards, principles, societal norms and expectations that support students in feeling socially, empathically, emotionally, and physically secure and comfortable. This implies that school administrators have to create a social and educational environment that encourages learning, academic success, and the moral development of students both inside and outside of the classroom. According to the teachers, creating a conducive school climate is very difficult in the era of the FSHS policy due to some major challenges. The headmaster's reply that follows makes this point very obvious:

> "*Currently, the school has infrastructure and staffing deficits, although the population of students has increased drastically. Food shortages are the order of the day in all senior high schools. This makes it difficult to create a positive physical environment, social environment, and instructional environment to support student welfare, foster moral development, and implement disciplinary measures.*"

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[51] Britwum and Aidoo, "Moral Decadence as a Potential Predictor of Students Academic Performance in Some Selected Senior High Schools in the Kumasi Metropolis, Ghana," 153–16.
[52] Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, 55.
[53] Bandura, "Social Cognitive Theory of Moral Thought and Action," 45-50.
[54] Durkheim, *Sociology and Philosophy*, 44.

According to the findings, the climate and culture of the school have the potential to influence how students develop morally, but the high population in senior high schools and the lack of school amenities have created a negative school climate in the physical environment and the social environment which may hinder the moral development of students. Weissbourd, Bouffard, and Jones claim that schools with positive climates have students, teachers, and administrators who are kind, reverential, and loyal to their schools, societies, as well as the global community.[55] Nevertheless, the higher student-teacher ratio, increased workload of teachers and lack of resources do not create fertile ground for these experiences. Similarly, Piaget's two stages of moral development state that involvement in problem-solving fosters children's moral growth, but the school climate creates a little avenue for that due to the high student-teacher ratio and lack of school amenities.[56]

The Double-Track System and Moral Development

Teachers' discourse on the impact of the double-track system on students' moral development was dominated by higher literacy ratios among Ghanaian adolescents in the era of the free senior high school policy. Teachers' conversations revealed that although there are infrastructure deficits in senior high schools, the Double-Track System has given many people the chance to learn literacy skills, which support the moral growth of the students. They argued that literacy empowers students to analyse options, take into account a variety of pertinent considerations, and come to responsible conclusions regarding difficult ethical dilemmas they encounter. As one teacher explicates:

> *The double-track approach encourages ethical literacy since it opens up opportunities for more students to be admitted, which enables them to develop the ability to recognize their own and other people's styles as well as be adaptable and sensitive in any situation they encounter. Students who are knowledgeable, and proficient in reading and writing are better able to reflect on their own actions, respond quickly and empathetically, ask questions, and put themselves in other people's situations.*

This suggests that teaching and learning facilitate students to build positive goals in different life phases, explicit aspirations of their own, a sense of responsibility, a respectful attitude towards others, and positive values, character traits, and manners. This could be the reason why Kohlberg asserts that education serves the manifest functions of socialisation, social control, social placement, culture transmission, fostering moral values, and serving as a change agent.[57] Therefore, the double-track system has promoted mass education and, hence, students' moral development.

Contrary to the assertions of the teachers, the students and the parents believe that although the double-track system has promoted mass education, it has given room for students to take long breaks, which sometimes results in a loss of knowledge and moral values. It also permits students to act unethically, which has an impact on how they develop morally. This is illustrated by the following comment made by a parent:

> *Although some schools' enrolment has been reduced as a result of the double-track system, it provides students who are on break the opportunity to partake in a variety of frivolous activities like drug usage, premarital sex, occultism, and early romances. In my opinion, the double-track system needs to be examined by the government because it has both good and bad aspects.*

The participants declared that the double-track system has both positive and negative impacts on learners' moral development. Student enrolment at the senior high school level in Ghana has increased significantly with the introduction of the double-track system, hence, increasing the literacy

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[55] Richard Weissbourd, Suzanne M Bouffard, and Stephanie M Jones, "School Climate and Moral and Social Development. School Climate Practice Brief.," *National School Climate Center*, 2013.

[56] Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child*, 67.

[57] Michael S Pritchard, "Kohlbergian Contributions to Educational Programs for the Moral Development of Professionals," *Educational Psychology Review* 11 (1999): 395–409.

ratio and fostering moral development among adolescents. Nevertheless, it has created the avenue for longer vacations, which allows learners to engage in immoral behaviours that affect their moral growth.

SUMMARY

It is clear from the findings that to some extent, the Free Senior High School policy has had a positive impact on students' moral development since it gives every child the benefit of enrolling in a school that develops their moral literacy. The Free Senior High School policy has given every school child the opportunity to absorb the standards of right or good and wrong or bad in their social order, based on their collective cultural and social norms and laws. According to Durkheim, these values serve as the groundwork for the moral well-being of every society as it provides structure and unity.[58]

Notwithstanding that, it was established that schools faced significant infrastructural and resource challenges which hinders students' moral development. The challenges, which include overcrowding, lack of infrastructure, instructional materials, and a high student-teacher ratio are influential barriers to students' moral development. Mureithi *et.al.,* claim that the following elements have been found to affect students' moral competence: teachers' punctuality, commitment, guidance and counselling programs, capable school administration, cordial interactions with students, unambiguous rules and regulations, and teachers' integrity.[59] Due to the aforementioned challenges, senior high schools find it extremely difficult to accommodate these needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussion above the authors make the following recommendations:

1. In light of the effects of overcrowding on school climate and students' moral growth, authorities must establish cut-off points and admit students under these benchmarks, rather than the current practice of admitting everyone into the system. The cut-off point system would assist in redistributing the student body among the various senior high schools across the nation based on their strengths and weaknesses to lessen overcrowding and create a favourable environment that supports students' moral development.

2. Authorities in charge of the policy should take a second look at the nature and impact of the Double-Track System on students' moral and social development to stop the threat of immoral behaviours like preterm births and other social vices indulged in by students during vacations that hinder students' moral development.

3. The government must take the required actions through the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Education Service, and other stakeholders to expedite the provision of school amenities and the recruitment of teachers for senior high schools. As a result of the rising student enrolment, issues such as burdensome teaching loads, students' movement in and out of classrooms, a lack of teachers, and substandard teaching materials have emerged, all of which are detrimental to students' moral development.

4. Given the findings, it would be beneficial for the Ministry of Education to take into account reaching an agreement on a dependable and sustainable financing source specifically designated for the policy through the Free Senior High School Secretariat. This will make it easier for schools to receive financing on time and will lessen problems with the free senior high school, which are not favourable to students' moral growth.

5. To uphold and enhance the standard of senior high education and foster a positive learning environment that supports students' moral development, the Ministry of Education must, through the secretariat for the free senior high school, periodically provide an evaluation of the free senior high school program.

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[58] Pickering, "Durkheim and Moral Education for Children: A Recently Discovered Lecture,"36-45.

[59] Mary Murangi Mureithi et al., "Influence of School Factors on Development of Academic and Moral Competence of Secondary School Students' in Embu West District, Kenya," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 3, no. 19 (2013): 186–90.

CONCLUSION

The school serves as a secondary socialisation agent and is tasked with supporting students in developing their moral judgment. Every member of Ghanaian society is expected to act by a set of values, and schools are supposed to teach students the virtues of hospitality, chastity until marriage, honesty, respect, and hard work, as well as covenant commitment and great character. The Free Senior High School policy is expected to not overlook these Ghanaian values. Schools are one of the most crucial environments for students to develop their moral and social values, even if they are by no means the only location where this happens. Schools provide numerous opportunities for discussion and participation on moral and social issues.

In these interactions, the free senior high school administrators play a critical role. To some extent, students' moral and social success depends on the ability of educational policymakers and implementors to mobilize the necessary resources needed for moral energy and wisdom. Based on the findings, stakeholders in the free senior high school policy must review and assess the policy, which will improve decision-making and foster the kind of school communities and climate that encourage students' moral development.

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