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Impact Assessment, the Capitation Grant Policy and the Rhetorics of Academic Achievement: A Neglected Methodological Approach to the Education Finance Policy Process in Ghana

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Abstract:

This article examines the crucial role that Impact Assessment plays in structuring positive outcomes for academic achievements in public basic schools in the education finance policy milieu. The Capitation Grant policy is used to make this case, and to show that understanding and using Impact Assessment as a paradigm becomes a useful foundation to establish a well-grounded policy implementation process. This view stems from the fact that Impact Assessment has proved itself to be a dominant method that incorporates impact considerations in the policy process for efficient and effective policy outcomes. Impact Assessment is therefore considered a useful paradigm for knowledge production towards policy implementation, and suggests that application of Impact Assessment in the terms expressed, offer a comprehensive guide to educational finance policy implementation. The author argues the paradigmatic approach to Impact Assessment based on six basic, consecutive questions that relate to each other but independent at the same time. With this end in mind, two main objectives are pursued. Firstly, it makes explicit the six basic questions for structuring an Impact Assessment paradigm. Secondly, the two main Impact Assessment paradigms currently in competition with each other are compared. There is a further explanation about how these two currently predominant Impact Assessment paradigms answer the six questions. Consequently, the paper presents the dominant paradigm to develop a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations, and values which inform policy research. Finally, the variability of the different answer options is considered between the two paradigms in order to determine comprehensive ways of defining and grounding educational finance policy Impact Assessment practice.

Keywords: *Paradigm, education finance, scientific policy community, ideological assumptions, academic achievements, policy implementation*

*"Before I draw nearer
to that stone to which you point"
said Scrooge, "answer me one question.
Are these the shadows of things that Will be,
or are they the shadows of things that May be, only?"*
(A Christmas Carol – C. Dickens)

1. Introduction

This paper makes a claim that the trajectories of Impact Assessment (IA) is quintessential policy making tool and it uses Ghana's Capitation Grant policy to validate this thesis. Impact Assessment is a relatively good tool for policy decision making that involves a standardized set of procedures designed to evaluate the prospective impacts that a policy measure will have on the policy environment. IA does not however, relieve public policy and policy makers from the duty of (pre-) determining at which point prospective impacts should be deemed too great to justify a particular policy. This view therefore places IA typically at the center of contentious public policy decisions that involves difficult trade-offs between ethics or morality, education and society. Consequently, this makes IA a tool for decision making and for social learning with regards to the effect of a policy on the fabric of the social unit including their wellbeing, progress and development. This means that IA sets expectations and measures the changes (for better or worse) of specific policies or policy interventions on the society and its people.

These ideas impute that measuring the impact of policies is a valuable and meaningful practice that helps: to validate the policy effort; demonstrate the improvements sought; connect the society to the policy and secure public support; prove a positive return on investment; and secure funding for ongoing efforts, among myriad other reasons. In this sense, the paper posits that doing IA for the Capitation Grant policy in Ghana would lead to the attainment of the

above benefits in terms of educational outcomes in public basic schools and help to ensure that the desired improvement in learning takes place as an outcome of the Capitation Grant policy (taking into consideration other intervening variables as well). This connotes that the application of IA to the capitation grant policy process would reveal IA as an increasingly important tool for demonstrating the value of policy initiatives, especially as it seeks to facilitate the engagement of both benefactors and the Government (the investor), and to promote support of the Capitation Grant policy by these stakeholders to enhance pupils' academic achievements.

The above claims are explicated by a view from Adamu-Issah et al. (2007) that pupils' academic achievements primarily reflect the success or failure of a nation's educational policy. For this reason, some Ghanaians believe and have advocated for 'fee-free' access to education to build the human resource needed to develop the country. The key argument advanced by proponents of school fees' abolition is that, school fees and other direct education related costs to households represent a significant obstacle to enrolment especially among the poor and vulnerable households (USAID, 2007). Consequently, if school fees are abolished, it will make it easier and less costly for children with financially challenging backgrounds to enroll in schools and eventually help in achieving some of the education related goals in societies. As a result, and since long time ago, Ghana has sought to make education accessible, free and compulsory to all children of school going age in order to produce the manpower required for the various sectors of the economy. Thus, per the Education Act of 1961 parents were duty bound to send their children who were of school going age to school to avoid prosecution. The Act of 1961 Section 2(1) stated *inter alia* that:

Every child who has attained the school going age as determined by the Minister shall attend a course of instruction as laid down by the Minister in a school recognized for the purpose. Any parent who fails to comply with the provisions in preceding subsection commits an offence and shall be liable to a summary conviction to a fine not exceeding ten pounds'. (Government of Ghana in Adamu-Issah, et al., 2007)

Successive governments have therefore introduced a number of educational policies that are oriented towards providing education for all citizens of school going age.

Consequently, the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy of 1995 was formulated by the Government of Ghana to provide free education for all children of school going age. A remarkable feature of the FCUBE policy is to enhance equity in the provision of educational services and facilities for all children with particular focus on girls, as a measure for parents and other stakeholders of education to acknowledge the importance of educating the girl-child. This notwithstanding, improving the quantity and quality of education has remained an important goal for Ghana, and this has been the *raison d'être* for the country's subscription to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and compliance with its own local constitutional requirement. The effort to improve the quantity and quality of education thus calls for policies to address both demand and supply-side constraints of education. These include the provision of more textbooks, classrooms, trained teachers which will tend to ease off the supply-side constraints to universal education.

In order to achieve this goal, the Capitation Grant (CG) policy was introduced to address this demand-side constraints to education. For example, the Ghana Education Service's (GES) guidelines for the distribution and utilization of capitation grants identified some parents' inability to pay school fees as one of the reasons why some children in Ghana do not attend school. So, the capitation grant policy was introduced in the 2005/2006 academic year to address the demand-side issues. Under the scheme, every public primary school was to receive an amount of GH¢3 (then equivalent to US\$3) per pupil enrolled per year to enhance teaching and learning in the schools. Thus, the capitation grant was meant to pay off the cost incurred in the process of educating pupils in public basic schools. However, this paper makes a claim here that most schools in the country have been unable to achieve this goal irrespective of the policy's target to improve teaching and learning. This view makes it pertinent to examine the role of IA in the capitation grant policy process within the context of the policy goals achievement. And as noted above, IA offer an important platform for decision making in the policy process and could help to measure the outcomes of the capitation grant in terms of its goals because it is a means for measuring the effectiveness of policies *ex ante*, as well as judging the significant potential changes they seek to bring and if need be, put in place the necessary tools to make adjustments during the implementation of the policy.

This paper therefore acknowledges the relevance of IA as an important tool to determine the possible outcomes of the Capitation Grant policy before its implementation. However, the literature specializing in IA show concerns over the conceptual and theoretical deficiencies of the subdiscipline (Becker, 2003; Ross & McGee, 2006; Howitt, 2011) in relation to policy making. Various reasons are put forward to explain this. Some are of a practical nature that relates to both the format of IA reports and the strict deadlines within which IA practitioners tend to work. These hinder the development of a thorough theoretical apparatus (Ross & McGee, 2006). Other explanations bear on the backgrounds of IA practitioners as they mostly come from the natural and technical sciences, and this tends to impede the grounding of their work in policy theories and theories of social change. This tendency further inhibits the analysis and understanding of the theoretical concepts used for IA (Lockie, 2001; Howitt, 2011). Burdge and Vanclay (1996) have also claimed that the social sciences have a critical and discursive orientation which contrasts with the main objective of IA, which is to identify and predict the impacts of a policy. Lastly, another set of reasons refer to the rejection encountered in some institutional and organizational contexts of critical reflection on the nature and origin of IAs. Such reflection leads to the questioning of the structures of power and inequality which lie at the root of many policy impacts that are endured by societies and local communities (Kemp, 2011). In spite of these views, the paper makes an argument that some of these theoretical and conceptual shortcomings may be partly solved through methodological approaches which, in the form of procedures, lay down a series of steps or phases for the execution of IA, and which tend to be linked to a set of specific techniques and tools (Fontes, 2014). There is however, still much work to be done in the discussion and thorough grounding of the theories and conceptual bases of the role of IA in the policy process. This article attempts somehow to address some of

these theoretical challenges starting from the ideas of Vanclay (2003), in terms of understanding IA as a paradigm which combines knowledge, techniques and values using the Capitation Grant policy. In other words, this paper believes that understanding of IA as a paradigm may be useful as a foundation on which to build more robust and better-grounded IA knowledge production for policy making as will be adumbrated with the Capitation Grant policy.

The paper therefore classifies IA as a scientific paradigm with a structure for approaching reality that tends to establish: what set of explanations of this reality (in the form of core truths) are acceptable for the scientific policy community within the capitation grant policy context; what ethical or ideological assumptions underpin scientific research for the policy; what problems and fields of the policy research should be the object of attention; and what set of theories, methods and techniques should be used. The concept of paradigm as used in this paper is epitomised by Kuhn's idea of the paradigmatic revolution (Kuhn, 2012). The central feature of Kuhn's concept is competition. When enough internal anomalies emerge, when deficiencies in explanatory power appear, and when the social environment in which the old paradigm is inscribed changes, the social environment can no longer respond to new scientific challenges. Thus, alternative paradigms start to emerge, around which the scientific community's practices can acquire new coherence. In this regard, IA should in consequence provide policy analysis with a regulatory set of beliefs. This will be core paradigmatic propositions in line with which policy impacts are appraised, observed and analysed. Likewise, this set of beliefs should bring meanings to the processes of change set in motion by the policy, and to the factors (causes) which lie behind these processes and their consequences (impacts). Finally, an IA as a paradigm will equip the policy analyst with coherently organized theories, methods and techniques which are derived from the set of beliefs or principles at the heart of the paradigm. Consequently, this paper argues that IA should start from a series of paradigmatic principles (explicit or not) that are previously accepted by policy analysts, and tends to lead to a choice of methodological and theoretical instruments which combines to provide an internally consistent analytical perspective. This makes it possible for all IA practice, 'or even a discrete step of predicting social impacts' (Vanclay, 2006), to be framed within a paradigm. This will even include those policy IA practices which are presented as technical, objective, goal-oriented and politically neutral. All of these must share a deep paradigmatic structure, and start out from a set of beliefs and central principles which should precede every study and give it unity (Lockie, 2001).

This approach to IA as a coherent and competitive complex practice is grounded in Guba and Lincoln's (1994) analysis of the nature of paradigms. According to these authors, paradigms provide answers to a set of questions that are basic to every scientific project. These questions and the way they are answered are inter-connected, hence the answer to one creates the conditions for answers to all. This emphasises the need for the establishment of a paradigmatic coherence. For Guba and Lincoln, the three main questions that help to organise a paradigm are ontological, epistemological and methodological. This paper adapts this approach, and adds three further questions which attempt to complete the concept of the paradigm applied to IA for the Capitation Grant. These are: an axiological question, a theoretical question, and lastly a governance question. Thus, the IA done for the capitation grant policy should be internally articulated around a paradigm which responds to these six questions.

With this end in mind, this paper embeds two main objectives. Firstly, the author makes explicit the six basic questions that are salient for structuring an IA paradigm for the capitation grant policy. Secondly, the two main IA paradigms currently in competition with each other, the technocratic and the constructivist (Vanclay, 2006), are compared, analysing how each organizes its responses to these six questions. In this way the paper presents the dominant paradigm, in order to develop a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations, and values which inform IA for education finance policy implementation.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The numerous educational policies introduced by the Government of Ghana to improve the academic performance in public schools have had their challenges and have led to further introduction of successive policies to ameliorate the challenges. In spite of these efforts, the challenges have persisted and pupils' academic performance continue to drop as evidenced by the year-on-year poor Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results with some schools registering zero percent scores in recent times. The Great Oaks District is a very typical example of this problem where there has been successive downward trend in pupils' academic performance in the BECE from an average performance in 2012 of 78% pass from a total of 309 candidates to 2020 levels of 47% pass out of 431 candidates (Great Oaks District Education Office, 2021). In order to solve to such problems, the Government of Ghana introduced the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy to abolish all fees charged by schools and also provided the capitation grant for each pupil enrolled in a school but this has not helped in any way to over-turn the falling academic achievements of pupils. The problem that underpins this study therefore is that pupils' academic achievements have not improved in the Great Oaks District since the introduction of the capitation grant in 2005, in spite of the initial thought that the capitation grant will help to improve academic achievement. This introduces skepticism about the causal relationship between the capitation grant and pupils' academic achievements in the way envisaged by the policy.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

The study sought to find the effect of the capitation grant on the academic achievements of pupils in basic schools in the Great Oaks District.

1.3. Objective of the Study

This study sought to:

- Assess the relationship between the capitation grant and pupils' academic achievements in the Great Oaks District.
- Examine how capitation grant affects the academic achievements of pupils in the Great Oaks District.

1.4. Research Hypotheses

- H_01 : There is no significant relationship between capitation grant and pupils' academic achievement in the Great Oaks District.
- H_{A1} : There is a significant relationship between capitation grant and pupils' academic achievement in the Great Oaks District.

1.5. Research Question

The research question for this study is:

- How does the capitation grant affect the academic achievements of pupils in the Great Oaks District, and in what ways could impact assessment help to determine the policy outcomes?

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Relationship between Students Grants and Academic Achievements

This paper takes a view that there is a close relationship between the capitation grant and pupils' academic achievement in Ghana because the capitation grant is part of the platform for government's injection of funds into education so as to provide quality education. The key assumption of this position is that once the funds are available, management can provide the necessary resources such as infrastructure, personnel and logistics needed for teaching and learning. This suggests that the provision of necessary funding for education is the *quo vadis* for higher academic achievements among pupils. In this regard, Ekanem and Ekpiken (2013) have remarked that improving quality in the basic education involves increases in educational expenditure, and this will enhance academic achievement (as measured by standard tests). They have further claimed that massive increase in spending should support policies that ensure decent learning conditions and opportunities for effective learning achievement of pupils. Ekanem and Ekpiken (2013) have further suggested that this money is needed to hire bright and experienced professionals who would produce higher levels of achievement and better-motivated pupils. Elijah (2013) however contradicts the view expressed above and suggests that no positive relationship exist between educational expenditure and pupils' academic performance.

Their argument is that continuous annual increases in expenditure on education seem not to improve the low pupils' learning achievement in basic education. Ankomah (2012) has also argued that in Ghana, the cost of education keeps rising each year without a corresponding improvement in pupils' academic achievement especially at the basic level. Further studies on the effect of per-pupil expenditures on academic achievement find either no relationship or rather a weak relationship, while other studies conclude that increasing per-pupil expenditures has a significance positive impact on student achievement (Alexander & Simon, 2010). These researchers have claimed that despite the lack of consistent findings, leading researchers in the area acknowledge that any effect of per-pupil expenditures on academic achievement may depend on how the money is spent and not on how much money is spent. This argument stems from the existing evidence that the typical school system does not use resources well in promoting student achievement (Elijah, 2013). Ankomah (2012) has justified this view and argued that in spite of Ghana Government's increased expenditure on education, low levels of academic performances have been seen at Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), and there have been instances where some schools have recorded zero percent at the BECE.

The argument adduced for this view is that financial expenditure has failed to determine the academic achievements of pupils in a lot of instances as argued by Babalola (2001), Alexander and Simons (2010), and Bracey (2005). Further studies by Oguntoye (1983), Bajah (1979) and Thomas (2011) have also shown that there is no significant positive relationship between educational expenditure and pupils' learning performance. These studies suggest that there are too many intervening variables that make it impossible for such causal relationship to simply occur. Hence, this paper takes a view that although the Government of Ghana may increase capitation grant to schools, the requisite impact on academic achievement might be lacking if attention is not given to other variables that are equally important determinants of pupils' academic achievement. Ekanem (2011) has identified some of these variables to include: the proper management and utilization educational funds; effective work assignment and allocation of staff responsibility; effective control of teacher behavioural patterns; arousal of staff interests; teacher job enrichment and enlargement; elimination of corrupt practices in the education system; and increased teacher self-efficacy. These are adequately determined through the conduct of IA for educational finance policies. This paper consequently takes a view that the student achievement goals in basic schools in the Great Oaks District would be achieved if IA is conducted on a policy that seeks an increased and effective spending on education in the district such as the Capitation Grant policy.

2.2. Effect of Financial Investment on Academic Achievement of Pupils

Akin to the views taken above, it is instructive to also note that most studies use proxies such as free education policy for education costs (Deininger, 2003) and public and private costs (Akpotu, 2008) to assess the effect of governments' expenditure on academic achievement. Akpotu (2008) believes that the costs at the basic school level still represent a much heavier burden (with respect to GNP per capital) in some countries. Globally, formal educational system is result-evaluation oriented and hence, a student that seeks very high standard of performance has to probably

internalize achievement as a personal goal. This leads to the examination of academic achievement as the level of performance that is exhibited by individual. It has to do with mental effort and skill acquisition. According to Nnadozie (2011), it is the extent to which one is able to accomplish a task, trade, profession, training or learning, and can thus be conceived as the level of proficiency, or knowledge demonstrated by an individual after learning has occurred (Iwundu, 2005). Ubulom (2009) has however identified several variables that affect pupils' academic achievement to include: intelligence, creativity, attitude, emotion, social background, family background, leaning environment, learner's age, and sex among others.

The above notwithstanding, one of the key functions of managerial decisions in education is the ability to minimize cost and maximize educational efficiency. Over the years, the share of public spending on education has been so large that it becomes a burden on both the government and the society. The inter-sectoral competition for public funds and indeed the continuous increase in cost of education is a serious concern. Stakeholders of education therefore expect to see remarkable effect of public expenditure in education resonating in pupils' academic achievements at all levels of education. In this regard, Apkotu (2008) believes that pupils should perform better in well-funded schools. However, research has sought to answer the question of whether education expenditure correlates with student performance. The findings indicate a lack of consistent evidence on whether education expenditures related to academic achievement. Hedges et al. (1994) studied the effect of per-pupil expenditures on academic outcomes, and he found either no relationship or a relationship that is either weak or inconsistent. But Hanushek (1994) analysed the same data used by Hedges et al. (1994) and concluded that increasing per-pupil expenditures has a significant positive impact on student achievement. Despite the lack of consistent findings, research has acknowledged that any effect of per-pupil expenditures on academic outcomes depends on how the money is spent, and not on how much money is spent. So Hanushek argues that 'few people would recommend just dumping extra resources into existing schools'. This enjoins policymakers to reconsider the question of whether increases in government-spending on education necessarily lead to improved pupils' achievement. This determination may better clarify whether future increases in education spending would yield substantial improvements for pupils. It will further help to determine whether future increases in education spending can be expected to yield tangible improvements for pupils, and IA plays a key role in such determinations.

3. Methodology

The research used the mixed method approach with surveys and interviews as methods for data collection. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2012) have described the mixed method research design according to two major dimensions based on: time order (concurrent versus sequential); and paradigm emphasis (equal status versus dominant status). Deriving from this classification, the study used the mixed-methods sequential explanatory design which consisted of two distinct phases: quantitative followed by qualitative (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012). This approach helped to provide a fundamental understanding of the research problem (Moghaddam, Walker, & Harre, 2003). Furthermore, the two data sets were triangulated to establish the consistency in the findings obtained from the two different methods.

The target population for this study comprised all basic schools in the Great Oaks District while all basic schools in the Almond Green Circuit constitute the accessible population. The sample used for the study included 30 pupils, 33 teachers and 6 headteachers from 6 basic schools. The aggregate sample size therefore was 69. The teachers and headteachers were selected with the purposive sampling technique, and the simple random sampling method was used to select the pupils. Due to the sensitive character of the data, and in order to comply with the research ethics of confidentiality and anonymity, the paper used pseudonyms to identify the site for the research. Consequently, the names Great Oaks District, Almond Green Circuit and St. Joseph Father Catholic Junior High School are used.

3.1. Instrumentation and Data Analysis Procedures

Questionnaire and interview guide were the two instruments used for collecting data in this research. The face and content validity of the questionnaire was established with 2 headteachers and 3 administrators of the capitation grant respectively. Thereafter, the questionnaire was pre-tested at the St. Joseph Father Catholic Junior High School to establish its reliability through the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient which yielded a result of 0.9. Percentages, and frequency Tables were used to analyse the data, and relationships between the various variables were obtained by cross tabulations. Linear regression test was used to test the significance of the relationships between the variables, with the level of significance of the variables pegged at $P < 0.05$. This was done to avoid drawing biased conclusion. The qualitative data on the other hand was analysed using thematic analysis to expatiate the quantitative data. Prior to the analysis, the researcher established the trustworthiness of the interview guide in line with Guba's model which outlines dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability as elements of trustworthiness (Elo et al., 2014). The research used the Impact Assessment theory as the analytical framework for the data analysis.

4. Data Analysis

The data for this study are presented under two subjects that pertains to the research objectives and are presented below:

4.1. Relationship between Capitation Grant and Academic Achievement

As part of strategies to achieve the first objective of the research, a hypothesis was formulated to aid the process: H01: there is no significant relationship between capitation grant and pupils' academic achievement.

Linear regression was used with a model containing the full variable set (capitation grant and pupils' academic achievements) as presented in Table 1.

Model	b	Beta	R	R ²	t	Sig.
Constant	.298				2.776	0.69
Capitation grant	1.223*	0.597			1.289	0.05
			0.597	0.356		

Table 1: Forced Entry Regression of Capitation Grant with Pupils' Academic Performance

Source: Fieldwork Data (2022).

Note. B=Regression Coefficient, Beta= Standardized Regression Coefficient,
R =Multiple Correlation Coefficient, R² = Adjusted R Square. *=Recurring Decimal

The analysis yielded significant relationship between capitation grant and pupils' academic achievements ($R=0.597$, $R^2=0.356$, $t= 1.289$, $p= 0.05$). This model fit was fair and explained 29.9% of the variance in the teachers' satisfaction with academic performance scores. Thus, the capitation grants significantly predicted pupils' academic achievement with $t = 1.289$, and $\text{sig}= 0.05$. The beta weight of the predictor suggests that capitation grant contributes 59.7% on pupils' academic achievement. The R Square value was 0.356. This indicates that 35.6% of the variance in pupils' average performance is explained by the independent variable, which according to McClave et al. (2005) constitute a moderate effect.

In linear regression, the model takes a form of equation that contains a coefficient (b) for each predictor (equation: predicted pupils' academic achievement= $0.298 + (1.223 \times \text{capitation grant})$). This b-value (0.298) indicates the individual contribution of each predictor to the model. The b-value tells us the relationship between the outcome (pupils' academic achievement) and the predictor (capitation grant). According to the model the b-value of 1.233 is positive, meaning that as the capitation grant increases, student's academic achievement increases.

The standardized regression coefficient (beta) gives a measure of contribution to the predictor model. The large value of beta indicates that a unit change in this predictor variable has a large effect on the criterion variable. In this study, capitation grant 35.6% explains the bulk of the variance in pupils' academic achievement. The t- value and significant values give a rough indication of the impact of each predictor variable – a large absolute t-value and small p-value suggests that a predictor variable is having a large impact on the criterion variable. Based upon statistical analysis, the null hypothesis is accepted at significance level of 0.05 meaning that the capitation grant has a direct relationship with pupils' academic achievement. According to Aleker (2010) investment in education depends on the proportion of resources allocated to education and the method of financing cost of education. Education investment project involves money spent as well as the alternative forgone in order to produce education, be it explicit cost (in the form of cash payment) or implicit cost (use of resources without corresponding cash payment). Aleker's study found there is no significant relationship between capitation grant and pupils' academic performance. The results from the study support what some researchers have argued that cost of education is not a valid prediction of pupils' learning achievement since financial expenditure have failed to determine the final academic performance of pupils. In this regard, Alexander and Simons (2010) have argued that expenditure variables are not important predictors of pupils' learning achievement. Bracey (2005) has also said that United States spends more on education than any other nation, yet the money makes no difference in pupils' academic performance.

Ideally, improving quality in the basic school level involves increases in educational expenditure in order to enhance academic achievement (as measured by standard tests). The present situation is that massive increase in spending (private and social) should support policies that ensure decent learning conditions and opportunities for effective learning achievement of pupils. This view is however contradicted by a study conducted by Arat (2010) who found that calculated F-ratio (F_c) of 3.64 at degree of freedom ($df=1$, $df_2 = 239$) was less than the Table value (F_t) of 81.07. Hence, the null hypothesis in Arat's study was accepted that there was no significant prediction of academic staff unit cost on pupils' learning achievement. The implication of this was that, effective application of unit cost of academic staff in the universities could not be used to determine the student' learning achievement in the universities. The outcome of Arat's study was in consonance with studies such as Oguntoye (1983), Bajah (1979) and Thomas (2011). In these studies, there were no significant positive relationship between expenditure and pupils' learning performance.

In the current study however, the hypothesis reveals that the capitation grant can be used to determine the pupils' learning achievement. This means that a change in expenditure on basic schools could lead to a proportionate change in pupils' learning achievement. The uniqueness of this finding was derived from the fact that ordinarily more spending in education ought to improve the quality of performance.

4.2. Effect of Capitation Grant on Pupils' Academic Achievements in Great Oaks District

The main focus of the research question was to find out from respondents how the capitation grant scheme positively affects pupils' academic achievements. The intention was to find out their perceptions on how the capitation grant was positively affecting pupils' academic performances. To achieve this goal, respondents were first asked about their knowledge on the uses of the scheme. The data from the respondents are presented in Table 2 below:

Usage of grant	Teacher f %		Headteacher f %		Pupils f %	
Teacher motivation	0	0	0	0.0	3	10.0
Support school running	33	47.8	6	8.7	28	40.6
Allowance for headteachers	0	0	0	0.0	2	2.9

Table 2: Perceptions on Provider of Capitation Grant

Source: Fieldwork Data (2022)

From Table 2, all teachers (47.8%) and all heads (8.7%) indicated that the capitation grant was used to support the day-to-day running of the schools. However, 10% and 2.9% respectively perceived that the capitation grant was used to motivate teachers to work harder and as payment of allowance for headteachers. This indicates that the respondents know that the grant is used to support the smooth running of basic schools, but it is important to note that the key beneficiaries of the scheme do not have the full information. Indeed, the capitation grant was introduced in 2004/2005 to support basic schools financially and administratively. Table 3 also shows that indeed, the respondents thought the capitation grant affected pupils learning.

Perception	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Teachers	10	14.5	23	33.3
Headteachers	2	2.9	4	5.8
Pupils	8	11.6	22	31.9
Total	20	29	49	71

Table 3: Perceptions on Whether Capitation Grant Affects Pupils' Learning

Source: Fieldwork Data (2022)

Table 3 contains data on respondents' perception on whether the capitation grant affect pupils' learning. Majority of the respondents aggregating 71% are of the view that the capitation grant does not make any contribution to pupils' academic achievement. This view contradicts Okamura and Yoshida's (2010) assertion on impact of capitation grant on pupils learning. Okamura and Yoshida's study affirms that the capitation grant alone cannot deliver important education outcomes. This is corroborated by the interview data that the capitation grant contributed to teaching and learning in schools as the grant was used for the payment of services like: exam paper printing; in-service training for teachers; preparation and usage of teaching and learning materials (TLMs); school infrastructure maintenance; and administrative work. This position is elaborated further with the statement that:

When the money is brought to the school, it becomes very helpful in printing our examination papers. Since most of the pupils cannot afford to pay for the bills, the capitation grant absorbs this cost that would have otherwise been pushed to parents. (Interview data, Respondent #1)

Another respondent added that 'this money brought to the school is what is used to repair the damaged parts of the school building as well as broken chairs and desk' (Interview data, Respondent #7). Respondent # 11 also added that:

Our teachers tell us most of the things we use in the school are provided by the government. Every academic year, our school is provided with sets of books by the educational directorate. On top of this we have been supplied with the atlas of Ghana and Africa which has immensely supported our social studies class.

These views are further affirmed by quantitative data on the capitation grant's contribution to quality teaching and learning. This is presented in Table 4.

Activity	Teachers f %		Headteacher f %		Pupils f %	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
In-service training	21	63.6	4	66.7	30	100
Provision of TLMs	27	81.8	6	100	30	100
Repair works	30	90.9	6	100	30	100

Table 4: Capitation Grant's Contribution to Quality Teaching and Learning

Source: Fieldwork Data (2022)

Table 4 shows that 63.6% of the teachers, 66.7% of the heads and 100 of the pupils believe that the capitation grant is used to organise in-service training for teachers, and this puts teachers in a better position to teach well by applying the appropriate teaching and learning methodologies thus resulting in efficient and effective teaching and learning. Secondly, 81.8% of the teachers, 100% of the heads and 100% of the pupils thought that part of the capitation grant is used for the training and the preparation of teaching and learning materials (TLMs), and this has resulted in the enhanced use of teaching and learning materials. Thirdly, 90.9% of the teachers, 100% of the heads and 100% of the pupils also thought that part of the capitation grant was used for repair works. These mean that these ways of using the capitation grant have led to improved facilities and general academic environment for effective teaching and learning. It is exactly for such outcomes that the grant is made available to public basic schools to help upgrade facilities such as teaching and learning materials, furniture, textbooks, hygiene and sanitation, health facilities, infrastructure and sports equipment. The availability of, and easy accessibility to such facilities, which are in good condition enhance the quality of

teaching and learning. In the interviews, Respondent # 4 explained that 'the capitation grant is sometimes used to purchase drugs for the schools' first aid box for pupils' health ... but for the timely intervention of drugs in the first aid box, a student might have lost his life'. Indeed, per the Capitation Grant Scheme administration guidelines, schools can use the grant to cover expenditure on: the provision of teaching and learning materials; school management (including testing, training and stationery); community school initiatives; support to needy pupils; school and cluster-based in-service training; minor infrastructural repairs; and payment of sports and culture levies.

The data also indicated that the capitation grant has negative effects on teaching and learning and for that matter quality education as presented in Table 5.

Respondents	Yes		No	
	F	%	F	%
Teachers	33	47.8	0	0.0
Headteachers	6	8.7	0	0.0
Pupils	28	40.6	2	2.9
Total	67	97.1	2	2.9

Table 5: Perceptions of Negative Effects of Capitation Grant on Teaching and Learning

Source: Fieldwork Data (2022)

Majority of the respondents totalling 97.1% believe that the capitation grant has had some problems and cited a number of reasons. The interview data explained that the introduction of the policy has put pressure on existing facilities like classrooms, furniture, and books, among others due to the increase in enrolment brought about by the introduction of the policy.

Enrolment levels in schools have risen since the introduction of the policy. I have been in this school and the community for more than 21 years and have seen much regarding pupils' response to schooling. With the introduction of the grant which came with free uniforms and fees totally abolished, majority have been enrolled by their parents (Interview data, Respondent #4).

As evidenced by the USAID (2007), the increase in enrolment figures following school fees abolition was more likely to overwhelm the available supply of schools, teachers, and education materials. The respondents also mentioned that some teachers felt reluctant to teach because of the feeling that some head teachers put the capitation grant money to personal use. The policy has also resulted in a certain mindset that government is paying for all fees and therefore most parents were not ready to pay for other school levies. The data revealed however that the money for the capitation grant is either not released or not released on time. The data presented this as an issue which negatively affects teaching and learning since schools were not allowed to charge fee from pupils to run the school. Respondent # 8 in the interviews said that 'for more than two years, our school has not received its share of the capitation grant. The head tells us that any attempt to reach the educational directorate on this issue has proved futile so he will not pursue the issue again'. Another respondent added that:

the grant does not come often. Even when it is paid it is not done on time, which affects effective administration of the school. The problem created is that the government does not permit schools to charge fees from parents, yet it will not provide the school with money. This has had negative impact on teaching and learning (Interview data, Respondent #3).

Another respondent retorted that:

Sometimes we are asked to buy chalk and/dusters to school because there is none to be used. Even when you tell your teacher that you do not have money, he will insist that you should find the money and buy the chalk. You can be whipped and this sometimes deters some pupils from coming to school (Interview data, Respondent #10).

Research by the Brookings Institute (2009) has found that capitation grant disbursement often falls short of schools' expectation, which makes it difficult to execute activities and improve service delivery. Ampratwum and Armah-Attoh (2010) tracked the Capitation Grant policy (CGS) implementation in 30 public schools for the 2008/09 academic year. The report points to poor management and utilization of funds. The following were the findings: irregular release of the grants; poor maintenance of student records, and a weak or limited capacity to develop school improvement plans. Thus, overall, empirical evidence on the CG policy suggests that although the CG has contributed to increasing school enrolments, there are some problems in its administration that affected the quality of public basic school service delivery. The argument is that funds are released to schools by the Government for administrative purposes, especially to reduce the administrative bottlenecks. However, running a school for fee free and universal basic education involve service delivery activities and some infrastructural expenditure, and this cannot be achieved if there are delays with the disbursement.

These indicate that although financial injection in education is important, it does not guarantee improved academic achievements. Besides, Mupa and Chinooneka (2015) have identified that one of the things that hinder academic achievement is failure to do things differently where necessary. They believe that pupils' academic achievements depend partly on the calibre of teachers who handle them over time. Thus, teachers who demonstrate adequate knowledge in their profession and apply requisite teaching skills with motivational acumen affect pupils' academic performance positively. The MOESS (2007) has also identified teacher management and deployment as one factor that affect quality education in Ghana. Marchand and Weber (2020) have also tied pupils' academic achievements to the availability of resources in their

right quantity and quality and shows that despite pupils' intellectual dispositions and related pedagogical approaches of teachers, effective learning that leads to academic achievement cannot be realized if there is resource lag.

4.3. *The Urgency of Integrating IA in the Policy Process: Some Procedural Issues*

The CG policy has endured some challenges in terms of goals achievement – that is, improving the academic achievement of pupils. These challenges make a case for inculcating IA practice as part of the policy process to determine the stakes involved with the policy before it is implemented and where necessary, the appropriate remedial measures put in place towards the attainment of the stipulated goals of the policy. In this regard, the paper takes a view that the political contexts and legislative requirements for policies are important to assure the effectiveness of policies, and it takes the incorporation of IA to achieve total effectiveness of the policy. The IA process enjoins practitioners to examine the procedural level of the policy to determine how the IA requirements will actually be carried out. Per the data, it can be argued that stakeholder (or public) participation is a crucial element. The data indicated a lack of understanding of most of the CG issues from the key beneficiaries of the policy (the pupils), and this complicates putting IA goals into practice. This points to a wide range of procedural norms even within a given legislative context relating to how, when, and to what extent stakeholder (public) participation is sought. At the lowest level is the use of nodality which is the provision of information to the public, through leaflets, newspapers, and other one-way forms of communication (see Odei-Tettey, 2021). In this sense, accessibility of information is critical. However, this has become one of the most common procedural critiques levied against IA - that the documents produced are often highly technical and lengthy, and thus do not really accomplish the goal of informing stakeholders and the general public. Furthermore, it is a challenge for practitioners to create a document that is at once thorough and accessible both in terms of relations with the public and usefulness for decision-makers (Alton & Underwood, 2003).

This paper further takes a view that information provision is only a small part of meeting the goal of public participation in IA because participation implies a two-way process that goes beyond the disclosure of information. The collection of feedback from the public, through surveys or interviews, is one common method. But this falls short of true participation because power is entirely in the hands of the experts to collate and present this feedback and to integrate into the IA produced. Hence, public meetings can sometimes be a more meaningful way of incorporating participation that can lead to greater accountability of decision makers and IA developers. The paper argues here that public participation does not imply opposition necessarily. Indeed, it can also be a constructive process that will improve the policy goals and the ultimate decision and lead to better relations in the future. All too often the local residents may have more knowledge of the local area than outside experts and can provide valuable assistance to decision makers. This makes timing crucial in the sense that for participation to be effective it must be done early, so that concerns can be adequately addressed and input integrated before entrenching antagonism (Kwiatkowski & Ooi, 2003) as shown by the ambivalence of some stakeholders of the Capitation Grant.

Furthermore, and to remove the uncertainties surrounding the CG, it becomes important to establish a community advisory group, or a body of key stakeholders that represent the greater public as another way to integrate participation at a very high level by inviting the public to play an active role in shaping the outcome of the CG policy. This approach acknowledges that the public is not just to be placated, but may genuinely have something to contribute to the assessment and design process (see Arnstein, 1969).

The timing in which IA takes place is another procedural variable that is important to focus on in the CG policy process. For IA to have meaning, and to be able to influence the outcome of policies, it must take place early on, where options are still open and alternatives truly exist. Too often however, IA is done only after a great deal of policy planning has taken place and is used only as a tool to justify and give legitimacy to a predetermined decision or design plan (Alshuwaikhat 2005). This view notwithstanding, there can still be some value in a retrospective IA, as it can provide valuable information on mitigation options and on-going management, but it falls short of the goal of being a proactive tool that institutionalizes foresight. Hence, appropriate timing has to be scheduled for the Capitation Grant IA process in order to enhance its outcomes.

The link between IA and the CG policy management, or how the IA is used after the point of decision making, is another important issue to focus on. In practice, the IA documents usually contain a wealth of data and information that are too often ignored or even discarded as soon as a decision is made and the policy is implemented. However, one of the goals of the IA has always been to provide information and recommendations to improve the policy throughout its life cycle, but the process is often bereft of procedures to translate this goal into reality and therefore renders the value of IA as a management tool untapped.

This paper therefore recommends a shift in IA away from narrowly focusing on the accuracy of predictions, and rather toward linking IA recommendations with the CG policy implementation process. This effort will call for legally binding prescriptions in the IA document for implementation of the CG policy and impact mitigation. At his point in the discussion, the paper adapts the underlisted 'best practices' from Barrow (1997) and recommends them as the complete paradigm that encapsulates the ontological, epistemological, methodological, axiological, theoretical and governance questions that are pertinent for structuring IA for the CG policy. These questions constitute the pertinent characteristics for promoting an effective IA process for an educational finance policy such as the Capitation Grant policy. These elements are:

- Timing: assessment should be initiated early in process, before major policy decisions are made and alternatives are ruled out.

- Assessment techniques: systematic and interdisciplinary analysis should be performed using a variety of assessment techniques and incorporating educational, social, cultural, and economic impacts as well as indirect and cumulative impacts.
- Independence: objective review of results should occur to ensure scientific integrity.
- Public disclosure: IA results should be published before decision about the policy implementation is made in a way that is accessible and widely available for review.
- Public participation: participation should take place at various stages and suggestions incorporated into the policy and decision making.
- Follow-up: IA results should be integrated into on-going policy implementation and compliance monitored.

In the light of the issues discussed so far, the paper argues that the constructionist paradigm offer itself as the dominant paradigm for structuring the IA process for the CG policy because it provides appropriate framework for accomplishing the six fundamental questions raised above for an IA paradigm suited for the CG policy implementation.

4.4. Beyond the Capitation Grant and the Need for IA in the Educational Finance Policy Process: The Conclusion

Per the findings from the study, it may be concluded that there exists no direct relationship between capitation grant and pupils' academic achievements. This means with increase in expenditure on education, pupils' academic performance is not likely to be positively affected because there are other intervening variables. The data has shown that the capitation grant does not affect pupils' learning directly. However, the release of the grant to schools on time is very helpful in the smooth running of the schools. The findings have proved that indeed there are problems militating against the capitation grant policy which needed to be tackled. The paper therefore takes a view that making education free and compulsory to all children of school-going age and largely achieving this through policy initiatives like the Capitation Grant, Free Exercise Books (FEB), and the School Feeding Programme (SFP) *are necessary but not sufficient conditions* to attain improved academic achievements among pupils. As pointed out in the previous section, these challenges provide a platform for embedding educational finance policies with IA practices so as to structure the outcomes of such policies. The paper takes a view that, inspite of its imperfections, there is little question that IA has firmly established itself as the dominant means for incorporating impact considerations into policy decision making for efficiency. At the same time, the IA process remains in a constant state of evolution and flux, and this paper has sought to fashion out a model for supporting education finance policy implementation. This is informed by dint of the data analysis that has shown that there is a need for more sweeping changes in the educational investment policy process in Ghana so as to achieve the policy goals. This level of critique looks at the educational investment policy process in tandem with IA process by focusing on the interfaces between the IA process and the surrounding policy context, and advocates for a more radical, bigger-picture view *ex ante* of the changes that are needed in order to make such policies more effective, especially at the implementation phase. This view seeks to promote an evolution of IA in Ghana's educational policy, particularly the most cutting-edge developments in the field as practiced elsewhere.

The idea embedded in the argument is that the goal of IA is to institutionalize damage prevention, and to push forward an anticipatory, proactive approach to dealing with outcomes of policies. The model of IA promoted by this paper seeks to establish a process that can be carried out at the policy, planning or programme level, and advocates that before an educational policy (whether national or international) is passed, its impacts should be assessed and evaluated. Sustainability goals of the policy then would trickle down from the highest levels of decision making to the implementation level based on the results of the assessment and decisions that follows. In addition to the model being more anticipatory and broadening in terms of the scope of IA, it would provide a way of capturing cumulative and indirect impacts that can go unnoticed in any educational policy environment as a result of the narrow focus of non-IA policy implementation.

Perhaps Sadler's idea may be instructive for this search for a good paradigm for doing impact assessment for education finance policies (and in this instance, the Capitation Grant policy). Sadler (1996) has long ago indicated that despite the many methodological and administrative advances in IA, recent experience in many countries confirms that there is still considerable scope for strengthening the process especially in four key areas, namely: scoping, evaluation of significance, review of IA reports, and monitoring and follow-up. Hence, as an answer to Scrooge's question in the prelude of this article, this paper iterates that IA is the stone that casts 'the shadows of things that will be', to bring the methodological issues back to the educational finance policy process in Ghana.

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