

Beyond Continuity: Options for reforming teacher trainee allowance policy in Ghana

Michael Kpessa-Whyte 

Abstract

Popular resistance to policy change often frustrates reform-minded policymakers and politicians, and this has been the story of the teacher trainee allowance policy in Ghana for more than two decades. Due to its cash-benefit-distributing nature and design, the policy has developed a coalition of beneficiaries and sympathizers with vested interest over the years whose opposition to change has rendered it path-dependent. But is it the case that trainee allowances cannot experience path-departing change? This paper offers insight from institutional analysis of policy change with a special focus on incremental and evolutionary change and argues that a strategic combination of mechanisms of change could alter the existing path of policy in a manner that ensures adequate funding for students while enabling policymakers to achieve the objectives of allowing Colleges of Education in Ghana to operate at optimal capacity in their quest to address the issues of deficits in the supply of professional teachers. In particular, it shows that layering student loans as an alternative option that coexists with trainee allowances in a manner that links the former to automatic placement in the job market while denying the latter such an opportunity would be instrumental in placing the policy in path-departing change.

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1 Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana

***Corresponding author:** Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana.
Email: mkpessa-whyte@ug.edu.gh

Introduction

For more than two decades, various efforts to reform teacher trainees allowance policy in Ghana have been met with fierce resistance by beneficiary and allied groups. But is it unreformable? Although the policy has been instrumental in supporting beneficiaries in the pursuit of their professional development, it came under attack from policymakers due to budgetary constraints arising partly from increasing demands. In an initial effort to avoid the wrath of beneficiary groups, policymakers imposed an admission quota on Colleges of Education, compelling them to admit far below their optimal capacity as a containment strategy. Yet the limitation of admission into Colleges of Education has implications for the ability of governments to address the critical issue of the shortage of professional teachers in the country. Thus, the policy puzzle faced by governments has been how to address the deficit of professional teachers without imposing an additional financial burden on the public purse. More specifically, in what ways can policymakers pursue such a reform without (a) compromising the need to ensure that Colleges of Education operate at full capacity, (b) imposing additional financial burden in the form of increases in statutory cash transfers to teacher trainees? and (c) incurring the wrath and resistance from beneficiary groups? Drawing on insights from theories of policy continuity and change, this paper argues that policymakers can achieve policy change through an incremental reform process that gives teacher trainees multiple options regarding accessing funds for their education. Specifically, the paper argues that a reform agenda that retains the existing teacher trainee allowance but adds student loans as an alternative option with linkages to job placement in the labour market upon successful completion would provide the necessary incentives and impetus for path departing policy change.

The paper is an analytical think piece that methodologically draws on insights from existing literature, other secondary data sources, and key informant information. Apart from reliance on scholarly literature especially in the discussions about theories of public policy stability and change, data from government documents, opinion articles, traditional and new media sources, and individuals with pertinent knowledge of the empirical issues involved in the teacher training allowance policy in Ghana were also useful in putting the pieces into an analytical whole. The reliance on multiple data sources has been beneficial in clarifying fuzzy issues. This approach also helped to triangulate and validate the information obtained and used in the paper. In what follows, the paper is divided into five sections. To provide an appropriate conceptual home for the discussions, the first of the subsequent sections discusses the institutionalist perspectives on policy stability and change. This is followed by the second section which focuses on the substantive matters of the teacher training allowance policy and the unsuccessful attempts by policymakers to change it. In the third section, the paper shares insights about the nature of resistance mounted against the failed reform initiatives. While section four draws on the innovations in institutionalist theories of change to propose

possible win-win options for path-departing policy change, the final section shares some reflections on policy change in a democracy and why mechanisms of incremental policy change open new windows of opportunity for policymakers to navigate the complexities of policy effects on electoral politics.

Theories of policy continuity and change

Policy change is inevitable but not always that easy. The necessity for policy change is often shaped by prevailing socio-economic circumstances but as historical institutionalists have argued, public policy change “responds less directly to social and economic conditions than it does to the consequences of past policy” (Hall, 1993, p. 277). Taking this as a starting point, historical institutionalists argued that social policies reinforce their initial logic and are thus often path-dependent. Krasner (1984) argued that policies are ‘path-dependent’ when they become sticky with that path until a major social or political force disrupts the path and sets in motion a path departing change. Thus, for early historical institutionalists, policy changes are only possible at critical junctions at which major development disrupts the policy path and opens new windows of opportunity (Kingdon 1984) for policymakers to introduce new changes. Developing a policy further along the original path does not only increase commitments to its direction, but it also constrains the possibility of choosing a different path at this point because the existing path may have been “locked in” (Thelen, 2003). In such situations, policy changes are only possible in moments of punctuated equilibrium because most policies tend to remain relatively stable for long periods and are sometimes only punctured by a sudden exogenous event (Baumgartner & Jones, 2018).

Historical institutionalists often seek to understand and explain the development of public policies over time; hence they tend to pay more attention to the effects and impacts of institutions and policies in shaping politics. Pierson and Skocpol (2002), for instance, argued that by taking “time seriously, specifying sequences and tracing transformations and processes” (p. 695) of a given political phenomenon across time, historical institutionalist scholars view path-dependency as a central unit of analysis, but this has made it difficult for them to observe endogenous induced incremental changes. Hacker (2002) argued that critical junctures are periods of “political opportunity when significant new policy departures may be put in place or when forces of change are strong enough to cut into the ongoing path-dependent development of an existing policy and alter its trajectory” (p. 59). Criticized for being overly deterministic and unable to explain policy changes in the absence of critical junctures, historical institutionalists revised their original arguments, acknowledging that, path-departing policy changes in the absence of ‘critical junctures’ are possible, but are largely contingent upon past decisions and bounded by policy legacies, (Hacker, 2002, 2004; Mahoney, 2000, 2006; Thelen, 2003; Thelen & Steinmo, 1992).

However, such policy changes depend on policymakers' ability to engineer reforms without upsetting the constituency of beneficiaries whose interest it is, for an existing policy path to be maintained (Pierson, 2002). Policies that appear sticky can be reformed if intended changes are viewed as an evolutionary and incremental process. Scholarly works in the social policy field have drawn attention to mechanisms through which policies that otherwise appear unchangeable, can be changed without necessarily igniting conflicts between beneficiary groups who depend on the policy's maintenance, and policymakers wishing to cut costs. In particular, (a) policy layering, (b) policy displacement, (c) policy conversion, and (d) policy drift are perceived as instrumental in shaping path-departing policy. Layering involves the ability of policymakers to work around existing policies with "vested interests and long-term expectations" (Hacker 2004, p. 248) by adding new policies without immediately dismantling the old one. Thelen (2004) argued that grafting new policies onto an otherwise existing stable one has the potential to overhaul the entire policy trajectory and result in transformational changes. Thus, rather than directly replacing one policy with another, the processes of layering can engineer policy change in a manner that allows policy makers to reconfigure and repurpose existing policy structures to respond to new challenges without necessarily disrupting the existing status quo (Thelen, 2004; Campbell 2004, Fitch-Roy et al., 2020). Streeck & Thelen, (2005) argued that the most interesting thing "about change through layering is that it can set in motion path-altering dynamics through a mechanism of what we might think of as differential growth. The classic example from the welfare state literature is the layering of a voluntary private pension system onto an existing public system" in the United States (p.23).

As a mechanism for policy change, displacement is the deliberate art of adjusting to an existing policy to place it properly on a path departing change or "change through the active destruction of prior arrangements and the creation of new alternatives in their place" (Bick, 2016, p. 345). Thus, displacement is shaped by the emergence and diffusion of new policy ideas, which then "call into question existing, previously taken-for-granted organizational forms and practices" (Streeck & Thelen, 2005b, p. 19). Displacement is one of the less theoretically developed mechanisms of policy change, and it seems to "be a consequence of another mechanism of gradual policy change and not necessarily a "standalone mechanism in itself" (Van der Heijden, 2014, p. 9) Here it can be deduced from the works of Streeck and Thelen (2005b) that layering lend itself to displacement because the potential for a layered policy to make a transition and eventually displace an existing one is high if it can "attract enough defectors from the core eventually to displace it" (p.24). Mahoney and Thelen (2010) argued that policy displacement can be catalyzed by disruptions resulting from revolutions or in the form of slow-moving process but almost always occur when new policies "are introduced and directly compete with (rather than supplement) an older set of institutions" (p. 16). Policy displacement is facilitated by shifts in the balance of power in the form of changes in government that is accompanied by windows of opportunity to pass new laws or simply undertake

amendments of existing policies to displace its original purpose, structure and direction (Hacker, 2004). Bick (2016) observed that in democracies displacement can be shaped by decisions of courts when they strike down or invalidate existing legislations “for being inequitable or in violation of human rights” (p.345). Table 1 below provides an illustration of the four major mechanisms that policy makers can deploy to place an otherwise path-dependent policy on a path-departing change.

Table 1. Four mechanisms for policy change

Mechanisms of Policy Change	Displacement	Layering	Drift	Conversion
Definition	Slowly raising the salience of subordinate relative to the existing dominate policy	New element attached to an existing policy slowly challenge and change their status, structure and logic of appropriateness	Neglect of policy maintenance in spite of external change in the policy on the ground	Redeployment of existing policy to new purposes by attaching such new purposes to the old structure of the policy.
Mechanism	Defection	Parth-departing change of policy or Differentiated Growth	Deliberate neglect	Redirection Reinterpretation
Elaboration	<p>Institutional incoherence opening space for deviant behaviour</p> <p>Active cultivation of new logic of action inside an existing policy framework</p> <p>Rediscovery and activation of dormant or latent policy resources</p> <p>Invasion and assimilation of new policy ideas</p>	<p>Newly attached policy begins to grow faster to outpace the old one</p> <p>New policy supplants the old one as it receives and drains support from the old one</p> <p>New policy destabilizes the old one leading to a compromise between the two that results in defeat of the old policy</p>	<p>Change in policy outcomes effected by (strategically) ignoring opportunities for adaptation to changes in policy circumstances.</p> <p>Enactment of policy change through deliberate neglect by keeping rules the same in the face of evolving external conditions affecting the stability of policy.</p>	<p>Draw attention to lack of foresight in the existing design of the policy by showing its unintended negative consequences</p> <p>Note the intended ambiguity of institutional rules of the policy; policies are compromises</p> <p>Reinterpret the rules upon which the design of the policy is based from below</p> <p>With passage of time and changing external conditions, coalitions for change emerges in support of redeployment</p>

Source: adapted from Streeck & Thelen (2005), p. 31

In the case of conversion as a policy change mechanism, it involves the ability of policy makers to creatively preserve existing policies but reinterpret and redirect the same policies to address new challenges (Mahoney and Thelen, 2010, Thelen 2003). Here, policymakers’ objective is not necessarily to directly change the existing policy given that such a change may invite resistance from beneficiary groups. Instead, policymakers take advantage of changes in circumstances and flexibilities of the policy, to reinterpret

it and put it to new use so as to make it appropriate for addressing new or emerging challenges (Thelen, 2000). The word conversion was borrowed by Thelen from Streeck (1997), who used it to discuss shifts from “labor productivity-enhancing practices from managerial techniques into the rights of workers, and thus into constraints on management” (Streeck, 1997, 203) as part of a broader interest in understanding how actors or organizations exercise agency when confronted with changes in their external environment. Mahoney & Thelen (2010) argue that in some instances, “conversion results from the incorporation of new supporters or the assumption of power by a new political coalition that, rather than dismantle old institutions, uses them in new ways” (p.18). Some scholars however do not see conversion as a standalone policy change mechanism, rather it is perceived as one that is operationalized when other mechanisms are activated. Boas, (2007) for instance argues that “layering is the means by which conversion ultimately occurs; the two processes are intimately interconnected” (p. 50). Hacker (2004) offers useful insights into how conversion as policy change mechanism was deployed in social policy reforms in the United States.

Drift as the name suggests, refers to policy change through the deliberate actions of non-maintenance of the existing policy so that it can drift away over time. As Mahoney & Thelen (2010) argues, often the window of opportunity for the use of this policy change strategy is made available “when rules remain formally the same but their impact changes as a result of shifts in external conditions” (p. 17). Under such circumstances, policy actors are able to engineer policy changes simply by deliberately refusing to respond to changes in the external environment that undermine the effectiveness of the policy. Here, the very decision of policymakers not to act or take tangible action to address threats to an existing policy is in itself an action to induce policy change. Streeck & Thelen (2005) observes that despite earlier historical institutionalist arguments about stickiness or stability of social policies, policy stability is not automatic, rather it is dependent on the “active maintenance” of policy actors whose refusal to do so could result in drifting away of the policy. Policy drift, which essentially is about the discontinuity of an existing policy through deliberate non-maintenance is a change mechanism to the extent that it opens new windows for policymakers to initiate real change either through conversion or layering, which when done creatively can result in displacement. In effect, policymakers can engineer policy change through a creative process that allows the four change strategies discussed to operate in mutually supportive roles in a manner that shapes path-departing change. In the next empirical section, the paper introduces Ghana’s teacher trainee allowances policy and shows how previous attempts to reform the policy has been constrained by self-reforming feedback effects.

Teacher trainer allowance policy and reform initiatives

Teacher trainee allowance has been in existence since the colonial period. It began with the establishment of teacher training colleges by the Christian missionaries to produce

teachers and church workers. Over time, the policy was adopted initially by the colonial administration and later by postcolonial governments and used as an instrument to incentive the recruitment of persons into the teaching profession. Notwithstanding the turbulence that characterized Ghana's political development in the postcolonial period, the policy has persisted. The allowance is a social cash transfer by the state to persons admitted into the country's educational institutions responsible for training professional teachers. The payment of cash benefits to the trainees took the form of a bulk transfer of funds to the respective colleges of education for onward disbursement to the trainees after the colleges have deducted feeding and other expenses (Afful 2016). In the estimation of policymakers, the "allowances are intended to cover the living costs and purchase of materials necessary for the teacher training course...and "most of this allowance goes to the feeding of trainees whilst at college only a small amount is left for other expenses including purchase of materials necessary for the teacher training course" (Akyeampong, 2001, p. 57). Kpessa, Beland & Tekpo (2022) noted that due to the cash benefits associated opting to be trained as a professional teacher, "teacher education became very popular with Ghanaians, as many people opted for a career in teaching, especially because the allowance serve as a stepping stone for persons who otherwise could not afford to further their career beyond secondary education. Additionally, would-be-trainees were encouraged by the policy due to the free tuition, free boarding, and feeding in the course of the training in the colleges" (p.9).

In the early 1980s, Ghana was compelled by economic regression, social decay, and political instability to subscribe to IMF-sponsored neoliberal reforms and set in motion state retrenchment of social policies. Ghana made the transition from military rule to democracy in the early 1990s and that meant the policymaking could no longer remain within the closed-circuit domain of bureaucrats and politicians as ordinary citizens anticipate that at the very least they will be consulted and allowed to participate in the policy processes (Kpessa. 2011). For teacher trainee allowance policy, it was not until the 2000s that it became a topical issue on the policy reform agenda. For instance, in a budget preparation guideline prepared under President John Agyekum Kufour of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) in 2008, the government was quite categorical on its intention to convert teaching training colleges to tertiary institutions to pave the way for trainee allowances to be replaced by students' loans. This was in part intended to ensure parity in the tertiary education sector since others especially those in the universities were already relying on student loans (see e.g., Kpessa-Whyte et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, in the period immediately following shifts in power political power in 2001, the Teacher Trainees Association (TTAG) approached the government and suggested that trainee colleges be elevated to tertiary status, the government of John Agyekum Kufour saw it as a window of opportunity to address the burdens imposed by the trainee allowance cash policy on government finances (Kpessa-Whyte et. al. 2022). Subsequently, the government proceeded in a cabinet decision to "upgrade the Training Colleges to diploma awarding institutions and changed their designation to College of

Education”, (Kpessa-Whyte et. al, 2022, p. 11). When the NDC government assumed the reins of power in 2009, it moved further to enact the Colleges of Education Act, (Act, 847) to give legal recognition to the new status of the colleges as well as situate them directly under the appropriate regulatory agency responsible for tertiary education in Ghana. Consequently, teacher trainees were informed that the avenues for trainee allowances were now closed, and all teacher trainees were transferred to the Ghana Education Trust Fund to access student loans. Thus, having cleared the institutional and legal hurdles, policymakers affirmed in 2014 through the President’s annual State of the National Address that:

The availability of teachers has been a major challenge. Because of constraints of paying teacher trainee allowances, the Government previously imposed quotas on admissions into colleges of education. Annual admission to these colleges was therefore restricted. With the recent decision to transfer teacher trainees onto the Students Loan Trust, it has made it possible to increase the number of trainees in the colleges of education from the previous 9000 to 15000. This would improve the supply of teachers and open up the opportunity to many young people who want to take up teaching as a profession. Unfortunately, it has become apparent that the training of these professionals does not always translate into an availability of teachers in certain areas (Republic of Ghana, 2014, p. 26)

According to policymakers, the decision to place teacher trainee allowance on the reform agenda was shaped by several factors. First, the transition of the teacher training colleges to diploma-awarding tertiary educational institutions was completed and that gave rise to their rebranding as Colleges of Education. With this shift, equity demands that teacher trainees receive the same treatment as students in other tertiary institutions such as polytechnics and universities who fund their education mostly through student loans. Second, the government subscribed to an IMF program that required curtailment in expenditure, and as is always the case, programs usually delivered through social policy like the teacher trainee allowance often fall victim to such requirements. Third, the use of a quota system in admissions perpetuated a legacy of persistent teacher deficit that left several classrooms, especially in basic schools without professionally trained teachers and this was seen as injurious to the human resource requirement of the country. Fourth, the liberalization of higher education has resulted in the emergence of private Colleges of Education whose students are not beneficiaries of the teacher trainee allowances raising questions about the unequal treatment of the same category of students (see Kpessa-Whyte, Beland & Kafui, 2022).

The Minister of Education further justified the decision to swiftly replace teacher trainee allowances with student loans in a Cabinet Memo indicating that the new policy was projected to (a) ensure equity in the treatment of all students in tertiary education in relation to access to funding support from the state, (a) to “free financial resources

that could be rechanneled to improve the quality of teaching and learning'; (c) eliminate abuse of teacher training as a stepping stone to other professions because only persons genuinely interested in teaching will take up admissions and access the loans; (d) to free up limitations imposed on admission through the quota system and enable Colleges of Education to operate at full capacity; and (e) to accelerate the ruling National Democratic Congress' social democratic objective of ensuring an annual 30% increase in the supply of professional teachers in the country (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Resistance to teacher trainee allowance policy reforms

Opposition to the swift replacement of allowances in the form of cash transfers with students loans was fiercely resisted by the teacher trainees who deployed several tactics to ensure their desired effect in manifest. First, the agitations began with public pronouncements against the policy by a renowned educationalist, I. K. Gyasi. In expressing his opposition to the decision to scrap the teacher trainee allowances, the educationist, spoke to the media and argued that the allowances were instrumental in shaping his initial interest in the teaching profession in the 1950s. Appealing to history with a sense of nostalgia, Mr. Gyasi asked the government to rethink its decision because in the 1950s when he was a student in a teacher training college in Kumasi, he was able to acquire the necessities of life out of the trainee allowances and that ameliorate the burden imposed on him by poverty. While admitting that the economic circumstances of today are different from those of the 1950s, he argued that the swift replacement of the teacher trainee allowances would eliminate a vital incentive that motivates people to take up careers in the teaching profession, and this might exacerbate the already precarious teacher deficit facing the country's educational sector. He argued further that the new policy of placing all teacher trainees on student loans imposes a cost in the form of future repayment on the individual trainees and this "could reduce the number of prospective teachers who may be unwilling to enter the profession because of the loan conditionalities being introduced by government" (Myjoyonline, 2013). This early intervention raised the resistance profile and gave the beneficiary groups renewed energy and oxygen.

Second, the teacher trainees adopted an open hostility towards government officials and policymakers who were playing a central role in the reform processes. For instance, teacher trainees at the Kumasi College of Education disrupted and prevented government officials from participating in an interactive program designed to explain the rationale and principles that foreground the reforms. As reported in the press:

Drama unfolded at the hall of the Kumasi Teachers Training College in the Ashanti Region when frustrated teacher trainees hooted at the Deputy Minister in-charge of Tertiary Education, Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa over government's policy that scrapped teacher trainee's allowance when he paid a visit to the campus for a programme dubbed 'Campus Connect. The protest by the teacher trainees was to register their displeasure about the scraping of the teacher

trainees' allowance and called for its immediate restoration. According to them, government's decision to replace the teachers allowance with a students' loan scheme is affecting prospective teachers, especially those in the Ashanti region. The irate teacher trainees later formed a human circle and chased the minister out of the hall (Kojo, 2015).

The national leadership of TTAG subsequently apologized to the deputy minister and the delegation hackled by the students and called for dialogue while maintaining its opposition to the reform option championed by the government. According to media reports, the national leadership of TTAG stressed that while they share in "the hardships and sentiments of teacher trainees across the country, due to government's withdrawal of teacher trainee allowances, we do not believe that seeking redress to the issue should be done in a manner that shows disrespect to our leaders and elders" (Nyarko, 2015)

Third, the Teacher Trainees Association of Ghana (TTAG) solicited and obtained the support of teachers' unions in the education sector. The union which includes the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), the National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT), the Teachers and Educational Workers Union (TEWU), and the Colleges of Education Teachers Association of Ghana (CETAG) among others in the education sector have thousands of members who were previous beneficiaries of the teacher trainee allowance, so they did not only relate to the issues, but some also have an emotional and nostalgic affinity to the policy. Led by GNAT, the teacher unions expressed their opposition to the replacement of the allowances with student loans and asked the government to withdraw the replacement policy. Their view, imposing loans on trainee students was inhumane and insensitive to the plight of teacher trainees (Obour, 2013), and a major 'a drawback to the progress so far made in the area of attracting and retaining qualified teachers in the classroom' (Ghanaweb, 2015) especially given that the allowances have been instrumental in shaping career development of people entering the teaching profession (Keli, 2016). Some of the other unions including NAGRAT also joined the public agitations and expressed their displeasure with the government's reform (Ansah, 2016).

Fourth, the teacher trainees drawn from the various Colleges of Education in the country initiated a series of public protests and demonstrations as part of their broader strategy to keep the issue in the public conversation and to compel the government to reverse its decision. In a brief statement to the media, the Eastern-Greater Accra (EGA) Sector of the TTAG, Jacob Ladzekpo said "after the allowance was scraped, we have realized that it is causing so much problem on the campuses, students do not have resources to buy instructional materials" (Citinewsroom, 2014). In one of such public protests, the national president of TTAG submitted a petition on behalf of the association to the government arguing that the change in funding policy for teacher trainees was adversely affecting trainees especially those in level 100 emphasizing that the "decision and change of policy on teacher education we strongly believe will be very detrimental to the future of education in our country, taking into consideration the historical antecedent

that led to the implementation of the allowance scheme and the positive effect it has had on teacher education in particular and basic education in general over the years.” (Teacher Trainee Association of Ghana TTAG, 2014). The protests notwithstanding, the government remained firmly committed to the reforms arguing that shifting from cash transfer allowances to student loans was instrumental in bringing about equity in the tertiary sector and useful for ensuring that the Colleges of Education were able to operate at full capacity as far as increasing the number of professionally trained teachers was concerned (Osei, 2024).

Responding to the government’s insistence, TTAG adopted a fifth strategy which involved the boycott of lectures by teacher trainees in all the colleges of education across the country. In a statement issued and signed in May 2015 by its national president to announce the boycott of lectures, TTAG demanded the restoration of the trainee allowance regimes by arguing among others that, (a) Ghanaian parents are unable to fund the cost of teacher training (b) the withdrawal of the allowances was driving persons otherwise interested in the teaching profession to other areas, (c) the student loans were woefully inadequate and incapable of meeting the cost of fees, and (d) the policy imposed an additional burden on affected students who often abandon classes in search of other income generating activities to supplement their living expenses in school. The boycott which affected all the thirty-eight public Colleges of Education in Ghana involved over 38,000 teacher trainees and received wide and sustained publicity through regular media debates (Ghanaweb, 2015). In a direct response to the boycott of lectures, the General Secretary of the ruling party, NDC, was reported to have told the teacher trainees that ‘if you won’t stay on campus and be trained as teachers without the trainee allowance, pack your things and leave. We don’t care (Kissi-Appiah et al., 2016).

One respondent in the interviews for this study claimed that the uncompromising stand of the government compelled the teacher trainees to politicize the issue by inviting the assistance of the then opposition party (New Patriotic Party) and candidates in the build to the 2016 presidential and parliament elections as a sixth and final strategy in their resistance to the reforms. It was their considered view that by politicizing the issues, the profile of the conversations will be elevated, and the parties will be forced to make public commitments to which they could be held accountable at a future date. An official of TTAG for instance argued that ‘the scrapping of the allowance by the government has inflicted on them “unbearable hardships”’, warning, ‘over 35,000 of us will advise ourselves if the government fails to bring back the teacher trainee allowance scheme’ (see *The Chronicle*, 2015). The NPP saw this development as a window of opportunity and sent a delegation to meet with the leadership of TTAG, where the party asked for the support of the teacher trainees in exchange for the restoration of the allowances (Tagbor, 2020). This pact between the NPP and TTAG escalated the issues and moved it to become one of the major and contentious debates in the period leading to the 2016 general elections. Speaking to teacher trainees at the Dambai College of Education, Mahamudu Bawumia indicated that the NPP was of the view that the restoration of teacher trainee

allowances was nonnegotiable as it considers it such a policy as an important mechanism for promoting human resource development for accelerated development of the country (Ghanaweb, 2016). The NDC argued that the NPP was engaged in propaganda, but the trainees were categorical in their resolve to make their electoral choices based on the issue of teacher trainee allowances with others urging their colleagues to stand in readiness to vote against the NDC and John Mahama and the NDC (Kissi-Appiah et al., 2016). The NPP won presidential and parliamentary elections and reversed the reforms by restoring the teacher trainee allowances albeit with many challenges including delays in payment, reintroduction of admission quotas, and persistent politicization of the issue.

From an institutionalist perspective, the inability of policymakers to reform teacher trainee allowances is not particularly surprising because Ghana's teacher trainee allowances policy has over the years developed a huge constituency of beneficiaries who make their career and livelihood decisions based on the cash benefits they receive. As a result, mobilizing to resist the attempt to dismantle the policy was for many a matter of saving the lifelines of their careers. Historical institutionalists argue that often formation and activities of interest groups follow the enactment of policies (Pierson, 1993), and this is true of the teacher training allowance policy. TTAG as an association of trainees has been in existence before the reforms but the social identities of its members were reconfigured within the context of the reforms, and this facilitated their mobilization against replacing allowances with student loans (Kpessa-Whyte et al. 2022). By being able to frame the reforms as an imposition of cost and pain, the teacher trainees courted the sympathy of a large section of the Ghanaian public, and this "made it possible to perceive the government as insensitive and undeserving of the mandate to govern. Individual teacher trainees were unequivocally clear in making known their decision to participate in the electoral process with the sole purpose of dislodging the government" (Kpessa-Whyte et al, 2022) consistent with claims by historical institutionalist perspective on policy feedback which points to an energized participation of interest group members in the political processes for a desired effect (Campbell, 2004). The restoration of the trainee allowances after the political transition in January 2017, raises the question of whether it is too path-dependent to experience path-departing change. As discussed in the next section, reform of the policy is possible if policymakers route their approach through incremental change that draws on institutionalist perspectives on policy change.

Options for path-departing reforms of teacher trainee allowance

Policies that transfer benefits to people are often sticky and path-dependent, and hence difficult to change in the absence of critical junctures that cut through their path of continuity. The teacher trainee allowance policy shares this feature. A close evaluation of the teacher trainee allowance policy shows that it is characterized by some of the major policy feedback effects that served as impediments to policy change. For instance, the decision by policymakers to opt for policy change through a radical reform that swiftly

ends the status quo; and start a new option in the form of student loans made the reforms contentious. Arguably, reforms of a sticky policy like the teacher trainee allowances have a greater chance of success if the reform processes seriously prioritize displacement through layering to allow the policy being reformed to drift away. To displace an existing policy, policy makers ought to have simply grafted or introduced their pet option of student loans and any other possible alternative ideas to the policy environment and leave them to exist alongside the teacher trainee allowance; and give individual teacher trainees the freedom and opportunity to choose one source for funding their training. In other words, the objective of policymakers to do away with teacher trainee allowances can be achieved without the usual rancor if policymakers draw on insights from the principles of policy layering to achieve policy conversion in a manner that allows existing teacher training allowance policy to grow out of favour among its principal beneficiaries by experiencing policy drift that culminates in policy displacement.

In pursuing policy change, appropriate sequencing of change mechanisms is instrumental in shaping the chances of success. The choice of replacement as a mechanism in the teacher trainee allowance reforms was one of the reasons for its failure. The objective of policymakers was to replace the allowances with student loans or convert the allowances into loans. To achieve this objective without rancor and interest group agitations, policymakers ought to have chosen displacement as a mechanism of policy change. With displacement as the mechanism of change, policymakers have the opportunity to make some adjustments in the policy environment to place the existing policy on the path of “active destruction of prior arrangements and the creation of new alternatives in their place” (Bick, 2016, p. 345). In this case, the creation of a new alternative policy can be done through layering, which involves adding a new policy to the existing one without upsetting vested interests around the status quo in a manner that overhauls the entire trajectory of the policy environment and allows the old policy to drift away. To apply this to reforms in the teacher trainee allowance situation, a few sequential steps need to be considered by policymakers.

Policymakers are responsible for ensuring that all tertiary students in Ghana are treated fairly and have equal access to opportunities for funding their education. Furthermore, fairness and equity require policymakers to address the teacher deficit gap by increasing the number of professional teachers and eliminating the admission and operational quotas imposed on Colleges of Education. Although the primary preference of policymakers has been to replace the teacher trainee allowances with student loans, the first step in this process of meaningful reform should not begin with a swift replacement of the existing policy. Rather, policymakers would be expected to maintain the policy as it currently exists; and introduce other options as alternatives that can be articulated as providing opportunities to give teacher trainees to choose among an array of funding options based on how they want their learning experiences and life courses to be shaped. In other words, the optimal way to achieve policy change without upsetting beneficiary groups is to approach reforms through an incremental route that prioritizes the freedom

of target groups to make decisions, especially concerning choices; and how such policy choices available are designed that could prove instrumental in shifting beneficiary preferences from reliance on the status quo to new options.

As such once the teacher trainee allowance policy is maintained as it exists, policymakers can introduce the students' loans in a layered form as an alternative based on choice. Given that teachers are trained for both public and private educational institutions, the important adjustment required in the policy environment is to decouple the graduation of professional teachers from automatic placement in the teaching job market of public schools as has been the case, and instead link automatic job placement to the financing option a teacher trainee chose for funding their training. Because trainee allowances are considered a drain on government finances, and part of the overall objective is to allow them to drift away, it would not witness any further improvement as a way to dim its attractiveness. In contrast, the students' loan as an alternative can be made to ensure financial adequacy in terms of the amount of money available for those depending on it, after all, it will be repaid. In this case, students who elect to finance their training as professional teachers through trainee allowances would not expect to benefit from automatic employment in public schools while those who opt for student loans can expect to be automatically employed upon graduation as part of the government's overall strategy to address both teacher shortage as well as the ability of such teachers to pay back their loans over time. Similar incentives can be extended to trainees who financed their professional education without depending on either loans or allowances, while special scholarship schemes could also be established to provide complimentary rewards for teacher trainees with exceptional brilliance and qualities.

The net effect of this approach is that over time, the once-upon-a-time attractive and popular teacher trainee allowances policy would experience policy drift by enabling the financing of teaching training in Ghana to go through a process of policy conversion without the kind of resistance associated with actions that cut back on benefits. Arguably, the drift of teacher training allowance would occur through a deliberate lack of further positive adjustments of the policy, while at the same time student loans option is given attention on terms of positive adjustments that allows it to be the preference of trainees by default. Thus, by inserting student loans in the financing arrangement as an option through layering, and enhancing its design with attractive as well as appealing designs, the path would have been set for the gradual displacement of the teacher trainee allowance policy regime which would have been edged out of existence by the layered students loan option.

Conclusion

In a democracy, policy change is not as easy as enthusiastic policymakers may wish especially when they are the source of benefits for citizens who are intrinsically connected to public debates and electoral politics. Therefore, deciding to reform public policies requires thorough and critical analysis that evaluates the winners and losers when

policies are changed, as there will always be losers and winners. Such evaluations should explore and understand the constellation of actors embedded in the policy, their resource capabilities, and the extent to which they can mobilize and engineer resistance when reform options are not aligned with their interests. Although the unsuccessful attempt to reform teacher trainee allowances in Ghana illustrates the arguments by path-dependent scholars on the institutional stability of policies that transfer benefits to segments of the population, it is arguably the approach adopted by policymakers that has encouraged the continuity of the policy. Policies that transfer benefits are resistant to change because beneficiary groups often plan their lives and livelihoods around the benefits they derive from the policy; and would not hesitate to mobilize in defense of any perceived changes that have adverse implications for their well-being. In democratic political systems where leaders are chosen through competitive political party contests, public policies that transfer or distribute benefits to all or some members of the population are difficult to change partly because in such contexts politics is often structured by public policies. Reform-minded actors risk an electoral defeat resulting from the mobilization of beneficiary groups and their sympathizers, especially during elections as a means to preserve the status quo or punish leaders and political parties for initiating reforms that are perceived to be cost-imposing. Ayee (2017) for instance, argued that the decision to swiftly change the mode of funding for teacher trainees from allowance to student loans in Ghana was among the factors that injured the NDC's electoral fortunes in the December 7 2016 presidential and parliamentary elections.

Future interest in reforming teacher training allowances in a manner that achieves the objectives of policymakers to ensure optimal operation of the Colleges of Education in Ghana without additional burden on budgetary allocations; and the expectation of teacher trainees to have access to adequate funding for their education can strategically draw on insights from innovations in institutional theory that points to sources of policy change albeit incremental. The sustained interest of scholars in understanding how policies that are otherwise considered path-dependent yield to path-departing change has resulted in the discovery of strategic mechanisms to orchestrate such reforms. In the case of the teacher trainee allowance policy, a less contentious option available to policymakers would be the deployment of policy layering that allows student loans as the preferred option of policymakers to be grafted into the existing policy environment. Aided by design features that guarantee automatic job placement for trainees who opt for student loans, the layered policy (the student loans) will destabilize the trainee allowance policy leading to a compromise that ultimately would compel the latter to drift into displacement as the former incentivized with design features to elevate its comparative attractiveness to trainees, and become positioned as the option of choice by default. As van der Heijden (2011) noted, layering is an indispensable tool in the armory of institutional theorists due to its ability to initiate policy change in a manner that appears to give beneficiary groups options but eventually results in desired change as the favourability of layered policy by design edges out the status quo.

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ORCID

Michael Kpessa-Whyte  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5504-3919>

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