

# Factors that Influence Changes in Public Funding and Their Implications for Student Access: The Case of the University of Ghana

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**Abstract:** This study explores the factors that influence changes in public funding for higher education and their implication for student access at the University of Ghana. Grounded in the framework of resource dependence theory, the research adopts a qualitative methodology, using in-depth interviews with 11 participants and documentary analysis to address the study's objectives. Over time, both the allocation of public funding to higher education and the accessibility of university education for students in Ghana have experienced significant shifts. These changes have raised concerns, particularly about their implications for equitable student access and the broader sustainability of higher education funding models in the country. The factors include the state of the national economy, competing needs of the various sectors of the economy, low prioritization of higher education, a shift of focus from education, and overspending in election years, which have had some implications for student access.

**Keywords:** Public funding, student access, changes, public universities

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars widely agree that university education plays a crucial role in developing a skilled workforce, promoting innovation, and supporting national economic growth. At the same time, higher education is consistently linked to broader social outcomes, especially the promotion of social mobility through increased access to knowledge and opportunities for personal and professional growth (Marginson, 2016). As a result, the important role of university education in fostering national development has led governments in both developed and developing countries to prioritize investment in higher education (UNESCO, 2023). For example, in developed nations like the United States, the government provided nearly \$60 billion in 2023 to support university research and development (USAFacts, 2025). In Australia, the government allocated about \$19.1 billion to universities during the 2022 financial year (Australian Government, 2022).

In Africa, governments, in their quest to make university education financially viable, also allocate a portion of their national budget to higher education. For example, the Nigerian government allocated ₦683.4 billion to higher education in 2024 (TETFund, 2024). These investments appear to be strategically directed toward expanding access to higher education as a driver of national development. In the Ghanaian context, Atuahene (2008) argues that declining financial resources, coupled with rising demand for higher education, constitute the sector's most significant challenge. This funding gap further contributes to limited accessibility, poor affordability, weak faculty recruitment and retention, and deteriorating infrastructure. Evidence increasingly shows that the cost of higher education continues to rise, while government expenditure on the sector is declining in relative terms. For instance, public funding for higher education in Ghana has declined in real terms between 2020 and 2024, as evidenced by falling government expenditure on education from 13.63 percent of total public spending in 2020 to 12.04 percent in 2023 (Macrotrends, 2023). Eduwatch (2023) further notes that inflation eroded the real value of the 2024 education budget, deepening funding constraints for higher education institutions.

This study examines the factors that drive changes in public funding and the subsequent effects these changes have on student access at the University of Ghana. The analysis in this study is guided by the lens of resource dependence theory, which posits that both internal and external factors can affect the resources available to an organisation (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). By applying this theoretical

framework, the study provides insights into the dynamics that shape public funding allocations and highlights their implications for student access at the University of Ghana.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Recent analyses underscore that sufficient and sustainable funding is essential for ensuring equitable access to higher education, given that financial barriers continue to disadvantage students from low-income and marginalized backgrounds (UNICEF, 2024). Historically, state appropriations constituted the dominant revenue stream for public universities, enabling institutions to maintain relatively low tuition levels while expanding access (Coughter&Gowde, 2024). However, multiple analyses show that this pattern has shifted significantly over the past several decades, with institutions, particularly large research universities and state flagships, becoming increasingly dependent on tuition revenue as state support declined (Coughter & Gowde, 2024). At the same time, inflationary pressures have intensified the financial strain on institutions. The 2024 Higher Education Price Index (HEPI) shows that operating costs, particularly salaries, benefits, and other core expenditures, continue to rise at rates higher than general consumer inflation, placing additional pressure on institutional budgets (Commonfund Institute, 2024).

The global landscape of higher education financing has increasingly become a focal point of scholarly debate, driven by persistent socio-economic pressures, declining public investment, and expanding cost-sharing regimes (Johnstone & Marcucci, 2010). Recent analyses emphasize how widening inequalities and constrained fiscal space, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, continue to shape tuition-fee policies, student-loan reforms, and targeted funding mechanisms (World Bank, 2023). At the same time, the rapid digitalization of higher education has introduced new cost structures and equity concerns, prompting calls for financing models capable of sustaining digital infrastructure while safeguarding access for disadvantaged learners (UNESCO, 2021).

Scholars increasingly note that higher education faces a combination of financial challenges arising from factors playing out across many countries and changing demographic realities (Clarket al.,2024). Recent scholarship highlights a clear divergence in higher education trajectories between the Global North and the Global South. In many advanced systems, the massification of enrolments has already been achieved, and demographic contraction, particularly declining youth populations, is now driving enrolment downturns and associated financial pressures (de Wit, Altbach, & Glass, 2025). Conversely, much of the Global South continues to grapple with the challenges of expanding access amid rapidly growing student demand, often under conditions of limited resources and strained public infrastructures (Tepe et al., 2024). With more than 250 million students enrolled in over 22,000 universities worldwide, higher education remains a deeply global enterprise, and at the same time, decreasing public investment and rising demand are accelerating the privatization of higher education and the expansion of private and online provision developments that raise ongoing concerns regarding ethics, equity, and quality assurance (de Wit, Altbach, & Glass, 2025).

For example, recent analyses show that state funding for higher education in the United States continues to mirror broader economic cycles, expanding during periods of fiscal growth and contracting during economic downturns. This pattern is further shaped by the fiscal health of individual states and shifting political priorities, producing a funding environment that is often uneven and unpredictable. Such volatility poses persistent challenges for public colleges and universities, which rely heavily on state appropriations to sustain core functions—including faculty and staff compensation, student financial aid, and essential academic and support services (National Education Association, 2025).

Emerging evidence suggests that funding for higher education in India continues to rely predominantly on government allocations, with private contributions such as student fees, endowments, and donations playing a comparatively smaller and often declining role. This public-sector dominance shapes the financial landscape of Indian higher education and underscores ongoing concerns about resource adequacy, equity, and institutional capacity (Teachers Institute Planning and Management of Higher Education, 2023). Sharma (2022) critically evaluates policy proposals surrounding the privatization of higher education in India, arguing for a broader exploration of alternative financing mechanisms, including revised tuition-fee structures and expanded student-financing models.

Current research indicates that Japan's higher education system, long anchored in substantial public investment, has experienced a gradual but notable shift toward more diversified funding arrangements (Huang, 2018). Policy reforms, demographic pressures, and broader economic conditions have

collectively driven institutions to rely increasingly on mixed revenue streams, including tuition fees, competitive grants, and targeted financial-aid schemes (Fujikawa,2025). This evolution illustrates how national policy choices and economic constraints shape the financing landscape of higher education and influence institutional sustainability (Huang, 2018).

Recent scholarship indicates that Russia has experienced a sustained decline in state budget allocations for higher education, a trend that has intensified amid broader fiscal pressures and shifting national priorities (Arzumanyan, 2024). This reduction in public investment has prompted renewed calls for more efficient use of institutional resources. At the same time, the development of university endowment funds, an important supplementary financing mechanism in countries such as the United States, has progressed slowly in Russia (Arzumanyan, 2024). The limited scale and maturity of these endowments constrain universities' ability to diversify revenue streams, with implications for institutional competitiveness, long-term financial stability, and overall educational quality (Sedash, 2022).

In Africa, the evolution of higher education financing models reflects a complex interplay of cultural, political, and economic forces, shaped by historical legacies, shifting governance priorities, and the pressures of contemporary market-oriented reforms (Oketch, 2023). Farooq and Abdallah (2020) examine the persistent financing challenges facing higher education in Africa, noting that rising enrolments and the pressures of globalization have pushed institutions to consider privatization and other private revenue sources as strategies for addressing widening funding gaps. For example, Kenya's experience illustrates that free-tuition policies on their own do not necessarily translate into expanded access or more equitable outcomes. Efforts to introduce a functional income-contingent contribution system have faced significant structural barriers, including the dominance of informal employment, limited graduate earnings, and persistent graduate unemployment, all of which complicate effective loan recovery and long-term system sustainability (Oketch, 2023). Moreover, recent studies highlight persistent challenges of financial constraint in Nigeria's higher education system, where government funding has proved insufficient. In response, institutions have increasingly explored outsourcing and other internally generated revenue strategies as mechanisms for supplementing public funding(Mohammed, Sani, & Musa, 2018).

### **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Jeffrey Pfeffer, an American business theorist, and Gerald R. Salancik, an American organizational theorist, introduced resource dependence theory in 1978 while at Stanford University (Pfeffer &Salancik, 2003). The main principle of the resource dependence theory is that "to understand the behavior of an organization, you must understand the context of that behavior-that is, the ecology of the organization" (Pfeffer &Salancik, 2003:1). Organizations cannot sustain their existence unless they remain responsive to changes in their external environment. (Pfeffer &Salancik, 2003). This suggests that resource dependence theory is fundamentally anchored in an organization's relationships with its external environment. It assumes that organizations are subject to environmental influences; consequently, the most effective approach to managing an organization depends on the characteristics of the environment within which it operates. Scholars in organizational theory have long emphasized the critical role of the organizational environment in shaping resource changes (Cannon & St. John, 2007). The environment encompasses the forces, actors, economic conditions, societal pressures, associations, customer-supplier relationships, competitive dynamics, legal frameworks, and institutional structures surrounding an organization that shape its performance, operations, strategic choices, and resource flows, ultimately determining its opportunities and threats(Pfeffer &Salancik, 2003).In many African countries, national governments have been the single source of the external environment, financing public higher education (Wangenge-Ouma, 2007).

However, public funding for higher education has experienced a steady decline over the years. According to Teferra and Altbach (2003), the central challenge confronting African higher education systems at the start of the twenty-first century has been the persistent decline in public funding. Economic conditions in most African countries became particularly severe in the late 1970s and continued to deteriorate throughout the 1980s, leaving many national economies in a state of profound distress(World Bank, 1988).In the context of public universities, the broader macroeconomic environment has been characterized by sustained crisis (Saint, 1994). State funding for public universities is closely tied to a country's economic conditions, and fluctuations in the broader economy inevitably influence the level of government allocations to these institutions (Duderstadt & Womack,

2003). It is important to recognize that organizations face no difficulty when resources are supplied stably and predictably; vulnerability arises when environmental conditions shift in ways that make those resources uncertain or no longer guaranteed (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Problems arise not because organizations depend on their environments, but because those environments are often unstable or unpredictable. When external conditions shift, organizations face heightened risks to their survival. As part of the broader societal landscape, the relationship between higher education institutions and their environment has also evolved. Fluctuations in public funding have made this environment increasingly uncertain, with direct implications for student access.

#### **4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In this article, the research employs qualitative methodology. Bryman (2016) posits that qualitative research is a research strategy that emphasizes words rather than quantification in data collection. To this end, the research draws on in-depth interviews and systematic document analysis conducted at both the University of Ghana (UG) and the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE), now known as the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC). (GTEC is one of the departments of the Ghanaian government, which oversees universities and other post-secondary institutions). In all, seven participants were interviewed from the University of Ghana, and two participants from the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) were also interviewed, making a total of nine participants. These participants were purposively selected based on their expertise and involvement in matters relating to higher education funding and student access at the University of Ghana. As Rubin and Rubin (2005) argue, the reliability of qualitative inquiry is strengthened when researchers engage participants who hold extensive knowledge and informed perspectives on the issue being explored.

The following participants were interviewed: Pro-Vice Chancellor; Dean of Students' Affairs; Deputy Director of Finance; Director of Academic Affairs; Head of the Institutional Research and Planning Office; Head of Budget; Recruitment Officer for International Students; Head of Planning, Research and Policy Development; and President of the Student Representative Council (SRC). In line with the purposive sampling strategy, the researcher selected and interviewed these participants based on the following criteria:

- a. These participants have been directly involved in funding and access-related decision-making processes at the University of Ghana.
- b. These participants are well-versed in the challenges facing the University of Ghana, especially the persistent issues surrounding student funding and access.

The study draws on a wide range of documents, reports, and other materials related to the financing of higher education and student access in Ghana. Documents collected for this study include official government publications, educational policy reports, annual reports, strategic plans of the university, and budget statements. Engaging with documents pertinent to the research topic significantly enriches the informational depth of qualitative studies. Consequently, the capacity to identify, interpret, and critically analyze documentary sources forms a fundamental skill in qualitative research practice (Patton, 2017).

#### **5. UNIVERSITY OF GHANA**

The University of Ghana was established on August 11, 1948, by ordinance as the University College of the Gold Coast, under affiliation with the University of London (University of Ghana, 2019). On August 22, 1961, an Act of Parliament (Act 79) was passed to allow the university to become a fully-fledged university, resulting in the name of the university changing from University College of Gold Coast to the University of Ghana. The university has about forty-five academic departments (University of Ghana, 2019).

#### **6. FINDINGS, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION**

This section explores the factors driving changes in public funding at UG through the lens of resource dependence theory. According to Pfeffer and Salancik (2003), an organization's survival hinges on its ability to secure and sustain access to critical external resources. However, because these resources are shaped by shifting environmental conditions such as political priorities, economic cycles, and policy reforms, the patterns of public funding that universities rely on are inherently unstable. From this perspective, fluctuations in government allocations are not random; they reflect broader changes in the external environment to which UG must continually adapt. In the sections that follow, I examine the

specific factors that have shaped changes in public funding at the University of Ghana and consider how these shifts influence student access. Each issue is discussed in turn, drawing directly on the empirical evidence generated by the study.

### **6.1. Factors that Influence Changes in Public Funding and Their Implications for Student Access at the University of Ghana**

As the researcher examined trends in public funding at the University of Ghana (UG), six key factors emerged as the primary drivers of change. These included the overall condition of the national economy, competing demands from other sectors, the relatively low prioritization of higher education within government spending, the shift of Focus from Education, Ad Hoc Budgeting, and the tendency toward fiscal overspending during election years. Together, these elements help explain the fluctuations observed in UG's public funding over time.

### **6.2. State of the National Economy**

As discussed by the Ghana Statistical Service (2024) and the World Bank (2024), from 2018 to 2019, Ghana's economy grew robustly on the back of oil production, services, and agriculture, with real GDP growth above roughly 6.0 percent per year. The COVID-19 shock in 2020 sharply slowed growth to near-stagnation, followed by a rebound in 2021. By 2022–2023, however, severe macroeconomic imbalances, high deficits, rising debt, currency depreciation, and surging inflation pushed Ghana into debt distress and an IMF-supported adjustment programme, with growth moderating to low single digits.

The central concern for analysts, policymakers, and stakeholders in higher education is the sustainability of financing amid Ghana's current sluggish economic performance. With the economy experiencing sluggish growth in recent years, critical questions emerge about the future of higher education funding: Where will the necessary financial resources come from, and how might constrained public finances affect student access? The tension between declining fiscal space and rising demand for higher education raises significant implications for affordability, enrolment patterns, and the long-term capacity of institutions to deliver quality education. An interviewee opined on the capacity of the national economy to increase funding to public universities as follows:

In general, the Ghanaian economy is not performing as expected, and the revenue shortfalls make it difficult for the government to keep increasing state funding to the universities. Since the government is not getting the expected revenue, public allocations to the universities would continue to fluctuate. This is the reason the universities have been encouraged to diversify their funding sources.

This is consistent with Jongbloed's (2000) claim that developing world countries such as Ghana are cutting down their expenditure towards the higher education sector due to the poor economic situation in their countries.

### **6.3. Competing Needs of Various Sectors of the Economy**

The role of government in a developing country such as Ghana remains central to national development outcomes. Public expenditure is critical for providing social amenities, supplying merit goods, and implementing social protection programmes that promote equity and human capital formation. Recent analyses highlight that Ghana's government continues to shoulder substantial responsibility for financing essential services, particularly in education, health, and infrastructure, due to limited private-sector capacity and persistent structural constraints (World Bank, 2024).

Ghana's economy comprises five main sectors, each with at least six sub-sectors. The five main sectors include Administration, Economic, Infrastructure, Social, and Public Safety. Table1 shows public spending by sector.

**Table1.** *Public Spending by Sector, 2019*

<b>SECTOR</b>	<b>EXPENDITURE (GHC)</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Social	14,352,226,408	58.31%
Public Safety	4,511,596,928	18.33%
Administration	4,510,066,254	18.32%
Economic	1,037,802,633	4.21%
Infrastructure	207,453,215	0.84%

Source: Government of Ghana, 2019

Table 1 presents the five major sectors competing for the total allocation of GHC24,619,145,438 (Government of Ghana, 2019). The Social Sector alone comprises eight subsectors, including the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the National Commission for Civic Education, the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, and the National Labour Commission, and Ministry of Education (Government of Ghana, 2019). The Ministry of Education comprises several key subsectors, including Basic Schools, Secondary Schools, Universities, Technical Universities, Nursing Training Colleges, and Colleges of Education. Collectively, all subsectors within the broader Social Sector share an allocation of GHC14,352,226,408. The study indicates that competition from other sectors of the economy makes it difficult for universities, including UG, to receive a consistent flow of government financial resources. Consequently, fluctuations in public funding for UG can be attributed, in part, to competing demands on the national budget across multiple sectors. Still, the study could not establish whether it has implications for student enrolment. Reflecting on the competing needs of various sectors of the Ghanaian economy, an interviewee noted the following during an in-depth interview:

Some of us have been advocating for a more significant role of government in funding universities. Still, the truth of the matter is that the government is saddled with many public sectors, which are competing for the same limited resources of the country. Therefore, depending on the priorities of the government, a sector may receive less funding, and unfortunately, the universities seem to have fallen under less-funded sectors.

This aligns with Johnstone’s (2009) argument that the global decline in public funding albeit with some exceptions stems from competing public needs both within the education sector (such as primary and secondary education) and beyond it (including infrastructure, public health, housing, social welfare, and other governmental functions), as well as from governments’ limited capacity to expand tax revenues. This is consistent with resource dependence theory, which posits that governments face persistent pressure from multiple sectors competing for limited resources, pressures that, in some cases, lead to fluctuations in the availability of public funds (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). However, an interviewee believes that higher education institutions can benefit immensely from competition for government resources, as explained below:

Depending upon the priorities of the government, higher education institutions can benefit immensely from competition for public resources. For instance, any government that prioritizes higher education will always make sure that enough funds are allocated to the sector instead of the other sectors.

#### **6.4. Shift of Focus from Education**

The study shows that the government’s shifting focus from education to other sectors, particularly administration, has contributed to the fluctuations in public funding experienced by UG. Reflecting on the shift of focus from education, a participant noted the following during an in-depth interview:

As recently as the 1990s, university education was free. The government bore all the costs, including paying allowances to students. What we see today is a total shift from education in general to other sectors like security and health.

This aligns with Jongbloed’s (2000) argument that developing countries such as Ghana are reducing their expenditure on higher education because national governments often prioritize other sectors, particularly the basic social needs of the population, over investments in higher education. Table 2 below shows trends in public spending in Ghana from 2011 to 2016 as a percentage of GDP.

**Table 2.** *Public Spending by Sector, 2011-16 (percent of GDP)*

SECTORS	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Public Administration</b>	<b>1.85</b>	<b>9.32</b>	<b>8.59</b>	<b>24.81</b>	<b>10.01</b>	<b>8.75</b>
<b>Economic Spending</b>	<b>1.18</b>	<b>2.61</b>	<b>1.85</b>	<b>0.95</b>	<b>0.47</b>	<b>0.41</b>
Ministry of Food and Agriculture	0.16	0.25	0.17	0.11	0.09	0.09
Ministry of Energy	0.65	1.65	1.32	0.51	0.10	0.10
<b>Infrastructure Spending</b>	<b>1.65</b>	<b>1.07</b>	<b>1.28</b>	<b>0.58</b>	<b>0.57</b>	<b>0.60</b>

<b>Public Security Spending</b>	<b>2.03</b>	<b>2.23</b>	<b>2.45</b>	<b>1.79</b>	<b>1.66</b>	<b>1.51</b>
<b>Social Spending</b>	<b>6.09</b>	<b>9.01</b>	<b>6.95</b>	<b>6.17</b>	<b>6.53</b>	<b>4.61</b>
Ministry of Education	4.44	6.18	4.81	4.63	4.10	3.35
Ministry of Health	1.29	1.29	1.29	1.29	1.59	1.16
<b>Other Spending</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>

Source: World Bank, 2017

Table 2 shows that the government has shifted public spending away from the Social Sector, which includes Education, towards administrative expenditure. The data further indicate that Social Sector spending has declined substantially as a share of GDP. The Social Sector, including Education and Health, accounted for the largest share of public spending in 2011 (6.09 percent). However, since 2014, the Administration Sector, which covers expenditures related to debt management, exchange-rate depreciation, and other government obligations, has absorbed more than two-thirds of total public spending. The Administration Sector, which accounted for only 1.85 percent of GDP in 2011, rose sharply to 8.75 percent by 2016. In contrast, the Social Sector, including Education, declined markedly over the same period, falling from 6.09 percent in 2011 to just 4.61 percent in 2016. Moreover, Education spending fell from 4.44 percent of GDP in 2011 to 3.35 percent in 2016. In effect, the rapid expansion of the Administration Sector has crowded out expenditures on Education and Health, which together constitute Social spending. Similarly, public funding to UG declined sharply over the same period, dropping from 58.1 percent in 2011 to just 9.2 percent in 2016. In contrast, student enrolment increased from negative 24.0 percent in 2011 to 26.0 percent in 2016.

### **6.5. Ad Hoc Budgeting**

Negotiations between the government and higher education institutions remain the traditional mechanism for allocating public funds to individual institutions. However, the amounts agreed upon through this process are typically anchored in historical spending patterns rather than actual expenditure needs, and these negotiated allocations are subsequently distributed to institutions (Salmi & Hauptman, 2006). The study finds that a key factor contributing to the decline in public funding at UG is the government’s reliance on an ad hoc budgeting process and the absence of a well-functioning funding formula. A funding formula provides a comprehensive framework that identifies national resource availability, assesses the needs of higher education institutions, including projected student enrolments, and outlines the strategies and mechanisms required to address institutional challenges (Salmi & Hauptman, 2006). The absence of a funding formula reflects inadequate planning for the financial resources required by higher education institutions. As a result, the higher education sector in Ghana lacks a clear strategic direction and a coherent basis for advocating increased public investment, leading to inconsistent allocation of government funds to institutions (Newman & Duwiejua, 2015), including UG. The following views illustrate the crux of the challenges confronting UG as a result of the ad hoc budgeting process and the absence of a funding formula:

The funding framework considers the costs of higher education and student enrolments. Unlike ad hoc budgeting, the funding formula ensures that as enrolments increase, public funding does not decline, but increases to match enrolment increases because the funding formula determines enrolment targets to foster planning and distribution of funds to the higher education institutions. Ad hoc budgeting does not consider all of these, but just historical trends of funding.

This supports the view that funding formulas are intended to enhance fairness in resource allocation by linking public funding to defined performance criteria (Salmi & Hauptman, 2006). Such criteria often include indicators like student enrolment and retention; therefore, institutions that expand their enrolment are positioned to increase their share of public funds (Newman & Duwiejua, 2015). The study concludes that the absence of a funding formula accounts for the inconsistencies in public funding at UG because the current funding framework disregards the number of enrolled students, hence the minimal relationship between public funding and student access at UG. For resource dependence theory, the absence of an effective mechanism for resource distribution accounts for inconsistencies in resources to organizations (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003).

However, the assertion that the ad hoc budgeting process does not consider enrolment must be argued with caution, as explained by an interviewee:

Even though the ad hoc budgeting process, strictly speaking, does not focus on the student as the unit of production to determine the total funding allocation from the state, the universities negotiate the budget with the government, having in mind the present number of students enrolled. Therefore, it may not be completely accurate that the absence of a funding formula leads to downward changes in public funding.

### **6.6. Overspending in Election Years**

The study finds that government overspending during election years has contributed to the decline in public funding allocated to the University of Ghana. The following views of a participant illustrate the crux of the matter confronting UG because of the government's overspending in election years:

Every government in power wants to win and maintain power, and in an attempt to maintain power, the government sometimes spends more than planned. If you look at all the election years, the government spent more than projected. The resultant effect of spending more than planned on universities (including UG) is less public funding.

Ghana has long experienced widened fiscal deficits during election years, as government spending typically escalates in efforts to secure electoral support, at times causing fiscal targets to be exceeded by as much as double (Songhai Advisory, 2019). For example, in 2008, an election year, the government recorded a budget deficit of 6.5 percent (Bawumia, 2013), significantly higher than the projected deficit of 4.0 percent (Government of Ghana, 2007). In the same year, public funding to UG declined sharply, falling from 18.0 percent in 2007 to a negative 19.5 percent in 2008 (Kwasi-Agyeman, 2021). However, the reverse is the case concerning student enrolment, as enrolment increased from 2.4 percent in 2007 to 18 percent in 2008 (Kwasi-Agyeman, 2021). In 2012, another election year, the government's deficit target was 6.7 percent, yet the actual deficit rose to 12.5 percent (Songhai Advisory, 2019). Correspondingly, public funding to UG fell sharply, declining from 58.1 percent in 2011 to 26.5 percent in 2012 (Kwasi-Agyeman, 2021). Despite this decline, there was an improvement in student enrolment from negative 24 percent in 2011 to negative 6.0 percent in 2012 (Kwasi-Agyeman, 2021). Furthermore, overspending during the 2016 election cycle contributed to a decline in public funding to UG. Ghana's budget deficit target for 2016 was 5.3 percent, yet the actual deficit widened to 7.8 percent (Songhai Advisory, 2019). During the same period, public funding to UG fell sharply, decreasing from 21.8 percent in 2015 to 9.2 percent in 2016 (Kwasi-Agyeman, 2021). On the other hand, student enrolment rose substantially from 0.9 percent in 2015 to 26 percent in 2016 (Kwasi-Agyeman, 2021). Therefore, it can be argued that overspending in election years by the government reduces public funding to UG. However, it cannot be argued that overspending in election years affects student access.

Nonetheless, as argued by an interviewee, the need to obtain an electoral majority may prompt governments to spend more on education and to prioritize education over other sectors within the national budget.

While it is widely believed that spending in general elections is associated with decreased public spending in the various sectors, in some instances, the quest to win an election has resulted in increased state expenditure on education in general to win the hearts and minds of many stakeholders in the education sector.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Globally, debates on higher education financing continue to intensify, largely because state funding for tertiary institutions has become increasingly constrained. The data from the University of Ghana (UG) clearly reflect this trend, showing notable shifts in the level of public funding over time. Several factors accounted for the changes. These factors include the state of the national economy, competing needs of the various sectors of the economy, the shift of Focus from Education, Ad Hoc Budgeting, and overspending in election years, which have had some implications for student access.

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