



**UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS
AND COMMUNICATION (UniMAC)**

**DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR
IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION
(CSE) IN GHANA: A CASE STUDY OF THE 2019 CSE CONTROVERSY**

BY

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**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA,
ARTS AND COMMUNICATION UniMAC-IJ IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MA IN
DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION**

DECEMBER 2025

DECLARATION

DECLARATION BY STUDENT(S)

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original research and that, no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute.

I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

This Dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of Dissertation laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication UniMAC-IJ.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the critical role of strategic communication in implementing socially sensitive public policy, using the abrupt withdrawal of Ghana's 2019 Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) curriculum as a key case study. The dissertation argues that the abrupt withdrawal of the policy was not because of flaws in the content, but rather due to the breakdown in strategic communication between the implementers and recipients, that is the state and its citizens. Through qualitative analysis including interviews with policymakers, religious leaders, parents and teachers, as well as media reports and official documents, the study discuss the cause of this communication challenge.

The insights show a clear disparity between the government's strategy and the opposition's campaign. The state and its partners adopted a reactive, technocratic approach, which depended on a "deficit model" that intended to correct public "misinformation" with factual, evidence-based dissemination using formal channels, whereas the opposition effectively rolled out a culturally evocative, grassroots campaign. The opponents framed the curriculum as a foreign-imposed threat to Ghanaian parental authority and religious morality, using high-trust channels like pulpits, local radio and social media. Whereas the state communicated in terms of public health metrics, the public engaged through a framework of cultural and moral values, resulting in a disconnect.

The analysis integrates these failures into a framework for effective communication, positing that communication is not a subordinate support activity but a fundamental process for building social legitimacy of culturally contested social policies. This shifts the paradigm from top-down information sharing to a collaborative social legitimation through the involvement of stakeholders in policy design from the outset, through the translating of technical objectives into shared-value frames, leveraging trusted community figures, and prebunking misinformation with swift response protocols.

Finally, the study concludes that the technical soundness of a policy is inadequate for its adoption. Effective implementation in Ghana's pluralistic society requires a culturally grounded and socially relevant communication strategy that treats the public not as passive recipients of information but as partners in legitimization. The research provides both a theoretical contribution to policy implementation and crisis communication literature, as well as a practical approach for policymakers and agencies to manage similar socio-cultural contexts.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all educators striving to make positive impact in the lives of their learners, equipping them with knowledge for their health, safety and dignity. Your dedication, commitment and professionalism is essential to the development of Ghana's human resource for national development.

I further dedicate this research to every individual, organisation and professional committed to promoting educational opportunities and outcomes, especially in the area of Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

To the parents and community guardians, who out of concerned cultural responsibility and care seek only to protect and guide their wards. Also, to policymakers in the education sector and development communication practitioners your advocacy is needed to ensure that Ghana's education is comprehensive and effective.

My heartfelt appreciation also goes to my family. Your consistent support, encouragement, and faith in my journey have carried through challenging moments and and strengthened my resolve.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am deeply grateful to the Almighty God for the wisdom, strength and guidance he has provided me to complete this dissertation successfully.

I extend my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, Dr Kodwo Jonas Anson Boateng, for his immense guidance, constructive feedback, and continuous support throughout this research. Your guidance has been greatly instrumental in shaping this dissertation.

My profound gratitude goes to the faculty and staff of University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) for their support to my academic journey.

I also wished to thank the participants and stakeholders who contributed their time and insight to this study. Your cooperation made this work possible.

Special appreciation goes to my family and friends for their continued understanding, encouragement, and support.

I, finally, thank everyone who contributed in diverse ways to the completion of this dissertation successfully.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines Comprehensive Sexuality Education as: A curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being, and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives. (UNESCO et al. 2018).

CSE, as promoted by UNESCO, is a curriculum-based learning process that provides young people with age-appropriate, culturally relevant information about sexuality and relationships. The curriculum seeks to empower them with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to make informed decisions about their health, well-being, and relationships, while promoting respect and equality. This is to help them develop respectful social and sexual relationships, understand the impact of their choices on their well-being and that of others, and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives. CSE emphasises the delivery of scientifically accurate content, starting at an early age and building on previous information progressively while being appropriate for each stage of development and rooted in a rights-based approach (Unesco et al., 2024).

Ghana, through the Ministry of Education, and UNESCO launched the CSE programme in 2019 to empower adolescents and young people by deepening their understanding of their sexuality and rights. The programme themed “Our right, Our lives, Our Future,” the CSE was supported by the governments of Sweden and Ireland and was being implemented in Ghana, Eswatini, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Ngenbe, 2019). The proposal of a curriculum guideline to support the incorporation of CSE in the pre-tertiary school system was met with significant opposition from some education stakeholders in Ghana in 2019.

The opposition to the curriculum implementation advanced three significant arguments: that CSE promotes a transnational LGBTQ agenda, is age-inappropriate, and lacked adequate stakeholder engagement. Ensuing polarised partisan political blame-shifting between then opposition National Democratic Congress and the ruling New Patriotic Party intensified these claims (Amo-Adjei et al., 2024).

On 27 September 2019, a report on the curriculum guideline was featured on Joy FM, a private radio station in Accra, Ghana, and sparked condemnations from educational stakeholders notably religious groups and parents associations. Key among their concerns were that the curriculum would expose students, especially basic school pupils to immorality and subtly promote homosexuality among them. In defense of the policy, the Ghana Education Service (GES) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA), the state body that developed the curriculum, insisted that the condemnation of the guidelines was misconstrued. Though, the GES maintained that the policy was meant to empower children with relevant knowledge on sexuality to overcome sexual harassment and make informed decisions, the stakeholders argued that the introduction of sex education in schools at a tender age would expose children to sexual immorality.

In an interview with the *Daily Graphic* on Monday, September 30, the Office of the National Chief Imam (ONCI) and other Islamic organisations in the country described the CSE as a “satanic” move that must be dropped in the interest of the country. The Personal Assistant to the National Chief Imam and Director of the Youth and Interfaith Programmes of the ONCI, Alhaji Khuzaima Osman, stressed that the Islamic Muslim community in Ghana was united in the call for the CSE to be reversed. The Islamic community urged the Ministry of Education and the GES to consider broad consultations with relevant stakeholders on the implementation of the policy. Also, the then General Secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG), Reverend Dr Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, stated that although sex education was necessary in schools, the CSE, in its current form, lacked clarity and needed to be given a critical look. Dr. Opuni-Frimpong indicated that to deal with the mistrust for the policy, the Ministry of Education and the GES must engage other stakeholders to either change the name of the module or clarify the doubts people had about the CSE.

Nonetheless, the President of the Coalition of Concerned Teachers, Ghana, Mr King Ali Awudu, said the CSE policy was good because it would help shape children and make them conscious of sexuality issues. He, however, said the age for the implementation of the policy by the GES was what concerned the coalition. Reacting to the concerns, the GES in a press release noted that the media discussions that the service was introducing “explicit sexual information to children as young as four under the guise of CSE” was surprising. A statement issued by the GES and signed by the Head of Public Relations at the service, Ms Cassandra Twum-Ampofo, said the CSE had nothing to do with LGBT. Ngenbe, T (2019, October 1) Ghanaians divided over new sexuality education. *Daily Graphic*.

The 2019 CSE controversy reveals a critical gap in public communication, particularly the failure to effectively engage stakeholders, manage misinformation, and communicate the content and goals of the curriculum in a culturally relevant and sensitive way. This highlights that beyond curriculum design, the success of an educational policy implementation relies largely on the development and deployment of strategic communication approach that takes into consideration the sociocultural context of the target audience (Smith, 2023). This dissertation, therefore, seeks to examine the communication challenges surrounding the 2019 CSE curriculum in Ghana and develop effective, context-sensitive strategies for future implementation efforts.

The dissertation is primarily grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, coupled with insights from critical realism. An interpretivist approach asserts that social reality is constructed through human interpretation and interaction, especially in complex cultural contexts (Crotty, 1998). According to Crotty (1998), this approach acknowledges subjectivity and prioritises understanding over generalisation, making it relevant for a qualitative case study of culturally and politically nuanced issue.

Also, the study draws on critical realism, which assumes the existence of underlying social conditions and practices that may not be immediately observable but influence events and perspectives. For instance, entrenched societal norms, colonial legacies in education, and power dynamics between state and religious institutions all shape how sexuality education is received in Ghana. This allows the researcher to examine both subjective meanings and objective structures, which provides a comprehensive view and context of the communication breakdown.

I support the research's aim to develop responsive and inclusive communication strategies that can enable effective implementation of CSE in the context of Ghana, where public resistance and misinformation have significantly affected policy implementation. Also, I recognise the need for cultural sensitivity, community engagement and participation, as well as trust-building, which are essential to the research. This dissertation is a critically needed inquiry into the interrelation of education policy, public communication, and sociocultural dynamics in Ghana.

1.2 Problem Statement

Globally, School-based CSE has been identified as a multi-pronged and multidisciplinary approach to addressing the sexual health needs of adolescents and young people around the world (UNESCO, 2015; United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2010). CSE aims at equipping young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values relevant for making life-changing decisions about their sexual health and overall well-being (UNESCO, 2015). To achieve this, the programme uses schools as a means to disseminate information about adolescent development, particularly their psychological, emotional, physical and social development (Tenkorang, 2020).

Though, the CSE curriculum is crucial for promoting healthy behaviours and attitudes among young people (Kershner et al., 2017), its rollout in 2019 as part of the Ministry of Education's new Standard-Based curriculum faced resistance, including cultural and religious opposition, from educational stakeholders, including parents associations and religious leaders.

The failure to implement the 2019 CSE curriculum in Ghana highlights a major disconnect between policy initiatives and public understanding. Although the curriculum was designed in line with international standards and aligned to local contexts, its reception revealed significant

communications breakdowns among key stakeholders, particularly government institutions, educators, religious groups, parents, and the media. The resistance that ensued demonstrates that an effective policy implementation depends not only on sound content but most importantly on strategic and culturally sensitive communication.

The controversy surrounding the content of the curriculum, especially its sexual orientation and gender identity, demonstrates the importance of effective communication in addressing concerns and misconceptions surrounding the CSE curriculum. While the controversy surrounding the curriculum guidelines is well documented in media and some academic commentaries, less is known in a systematic way about the communication barriers that hindered its implementation (Smith, 2023). By “communication barriers” the study refers to concerns on how information about the guidelines was designed, distributed, received, interpreted and discussed among the stakeholders. According to Smith (2023), these may include unclear messaging, misinformation, inadequate stakeholder engagement, conflicting frames in terms of rights and culture, mistrust, political polarisation and media misrepresentation. Without understanding these issues, policy makers and advocates are limited in their capacity to design future educational interventions that are effectively communicated and accepted. There is, therefore, the need to understand the communication dynamics that characterised the rollout of the curriculum and identify strategies to enhance communication and address the concerns of various stakeholders.

1.3 Research Objectives

This dissertation seeks to develop an effective communication strategy for the rollout of CSE curriculum by exploring the communication challenges that hindered the effective implementation of the 2019 CSE curriculum in the country. The study will explore the

opposing viewpoints focusing on their arguments against the curriculum as well as the communication and stakeholder participation approaches and strategies that should be adopted to address these issues.

The research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the communication approaches used by key stakeholders during the rollout of the 2019 CSE programme in Ghana.
2. To identify the factors that contributed to the public rejection and misunderstanding of the CSE curriculum.
3. To assess the role of the media, religious, and cultural perspectives in shaping public perception of CSR during the 2019 controversy.
4. To explore stakeholder perspectives on effective communication strategies for CSE implementation.
5. To develop context-specific, culturally sensitive communication strategies to support future CSE curriculum implementation in Ghana.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What communication strategies were used during the introduction of the 2019 CSE in Ghana and how were they received by the public?
2. What were the main causes of the public resistance surrounding the 2019 CSE curriculum?
3. What were the communication gaps that contributed to misinformation or misunderstanding of the CSE curriculum?
4. What communication strategies do key stakeholders consider effective and appropriate for promoting CSE in the Ghanaian context?

5. How can future communication strategies for CSE implementation be designed to align with Ghanaian cultural, religious and social values while still providing educational and public health goals?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study's findings will inform policy and practice related to CSE implementation in Ghana, examining how communication challenges can be addressed and stakeholders engagement enhanced in the development of CSE programmes for schools. According to UNESCO, research-informed policy and practice are crucial for successful CSE implementation, as they enable policymakers and practitioners to make informed decisions and address implementation challenges.

By providing evidence-based insights, the study's findings can help policymakers and practitioners in Ghana refine their approach to CSE, addressing gaps in programme implementation and ensuring that young people receive high-quality, relevant education. Effective implementation of CSE can have a positive impact on the sexual health and well-being of young people in Ghana, reducing risk-taking behaviors and promoting healthy relationships.

By identifying communication challenges and implementation gaps, the study will contribute to improving the health and well-being of young people in Ghana. According to Gallant (2004), CSE can have a positive impact on young people's sexual health outcomes, including reducing unintended pregnancies, HIV infections, and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The study's findings can inform strategies to address communication challenges and implementation gaps, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of CSE programs in Ghana and

promoting healthier behaviors among young people. By improving CSE, the study can contribute to reducing health disparities and promoting the well-being of young people in Ghana.

Also, findings will provide evidence-based insights for decision-making related to CSE curriculum, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively and efficiently. According to UNESCO, evidence-based decision-making is crucial for optimizing the impact of CSE programs, as it enables policymakers and practitioners to allocate resources strategically and address specific needs. By providing actionable data and insights, the findings can inform resource allocation decisions, ensuring that CSE programs in Ghana are implemented in a way that enhances benefits for young people. Effective resource allocation can enhance the reach, quality, and sustainability of CSE programs, ultimately contributing to improved health and well-being outcomes among learners.

This dissertation enriches the field of Development Communication by highlighting how strategic and inclusive communication can enhance policy acceptance and reduce public backlash in development interventions. Through the lens of the 2019 CSE controversy in Ghana, it contributes to theoretical and practical understandings of participatory communication, stakeholder engagement, and policy advocacy in sensitive contexts. Also, it enriches the literature on communication for education reform, especially around culturally sensitive topics like sexual and reproductive health.

1.6 Scope of Study

The study focuses on the period surrounding the release of the 2019 CSE curriculum guidelines and the media and public backlash and resistance that ensued, roughly 2019 to 2020. The study

particularly focuses on communication-related challenges, stakeholder engagement, and public discourse within Ghana during the period of the controversy. It highlights the communication strategies employed during the rollout and the barriers that emerged, while acknowledging the broader social and cultural perspectives of sexuality education. The study will be qualitative, employing some selected interviews with key stakeholders, as well as document and media analysis.

However, the findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the communication challenges that hinder the effective rollout of the CSE curriculum and inform strategies to improve communication and address the concerns of stakeholders. The study aims to contribute to the development of effective communication strategies that support the implementation of CSE by exploring the communication challenges that hindered the effective implementation of the curriculum.

Geographically, the study is limited to Ghana, with particular focus on urban and peri-urban areas where media coverage and public discourse around the curriculum were most prevalent. The study specifically focuses on the period between August 2019 and December 2020, when the controversy was most prominent in public, political and media spaces.

The study does not aim to assess the scientific or pedagogical content of the CSE curriculum itself, nor does it seek to evaluate student learning outcomes or health impacts. Instead, it is focused primarily on understanding and improving the communication strategies used to advocate for and explain the curriculum to the stakeholders. By narrowing its scope on the communication strategies and dynamics during a particular policy session, the study aims to

contribute practical recommendations for developing contextually relevant and culturally sensitive communication strategies for CSR curriculum implementation efforts in Ghana.

1.7 Research Design

The study will employ a qualitative research approach, using in-depth analysis of media publications around the curriculum implementation and resistance as well as conduct interviews with some selected educators and stakeholders to gather data. Also, it will employ a purposive sampling approach to select participants, including educators, parents associations, religious leaders and policy makers. Thematic analysis will be used to analyse the data, identifying patterns and themes related to communication challenges and implementation gaps.

This paper will review media coverage and discussions following the publication of guidelines for teaching CSE in Ghanaian schools in 2019 to detect the communication and stakeholder engagement challenges prior to the intended introduction. The media content analysis (MCA) design will detect and discusses the communication and stakeholder engagement challenges surrounding the publication, dissemination, and accompanying discussions of Ghana's CSE guidelines. Also, the research will find out from some key educational stakeholders in the country on whether they were involved in the development of the guidelines, as well as seek their views of it.

1.8 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organised into five chapters, which is as follows:

1. Chapter One (Introduction): This provides the background, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, methodology, philosophical orientation, and structure of the study.
2. Chapter Two (Literature Review): This chapter explores existing research and theories related to Comprehensive Sexuality Education, public policy communication, stakeholder engagement and the Ghanaian nuanced sociocultural perspectives and context. Also, it reviews relevant communication models and frameworks.
3. Chapter Three (Methodology): This section presents the research design, data collection methods, sampling strategy, ethical considerations, and data analysis techniques used in the study.
4. Chapter Four (Findings and Analysis): This chapter provides the empirical findings of the study, developed around the research questions and emerging themes. It also provides insights from interviews, document analysis, and media review.
5. Chapter Five (Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations): This last section discusses the findings in relation to the literature, draws conclusions and provides strategic recommendations for improving communication in future CSE curriculum implementation efforts.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to the study, “Developing Effective Communication Strategies for the Implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A Case Study of the 2019 CSE Curriculum Controversy in Ghana.” The literature review is structured into four main sections. First, it will look at the global consensus and evidence base of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), highlighting its importance and key components. The second section will look into the complex landscape of CSE implementation in sub-Saharan Africa, revealing common barriers and facilitators. The third section will focus on the specific socio-cultural and political context of Ghana, creating a backdrop against which the 2019 controversy can be understood. The last section will synthesize theoretical frameworks on policy communication with emphasis on stakeholder engagement, communication and policy implementation strategies.. The chapter draws the curtains by identifying the gaps in the literature that this research aims to address.

2.2 Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Global Consensus and Evidence Base

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines Comprehensive Sexuality Education as: A curriculum-based process of teaching and learning about the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of sexuality. It aims to equip children and young people with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that will empower them to: realize their health, well-being, and dignity; develop respectful social and sexual relationships; consider how their choices affect their own well-being and that of others; and

understand and ensure the protection of their rights throughout their lives. (UNESCO et al. 2018).

The CSE emphasises the delivery of scientifically accurate content, starting at an early age and building on previous information progressively while being appropriate for each stage of development and rooted in a rights-based approach. (UNESCO et al., 2024). The CSE curriculum guidelines provides a global and inclusive approach, yet they are optional for countries or national education authorities. As outlined in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) (United Nations, Citation 1994) and, more recently, in the International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education (ITGSE) (Unesco et al., 2018), sex education aims to facilitate the provision of culturally appropriate content about human sexuality.

Globally, CSE is recognised as a critical component of human rights and adolescent development, with recommended integration into school curricula for its role in enhancing both individual well-being and public health. Research shows that comprehensive sex education contributes to reduced rates of unintended pregnancies and STIs, delayed initiation of sexual activity, and increased use of contraceptives among sexually active youth (Braeken, 2008). Shekar et al.(2024) in “Understanding Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A Worldwide Narrative Review” states that the introduction of CSE in schools dates back to some five decades ago, with Western Europe leading the cause. Shekar emphasises that sex education across the Western world exhibits significant variation by country, state, and even locality, reflecting diverse cultural, political, and religious influences.

Also, CSE is recognised as a critical component of achieving some Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially those related to education (SDG Four), health and wellbeing (SDGs Three), and and gender equality (SDG Five).

CSE advocates argue that promoting abstinence without making available appropriate information regarding safe sex practices puts learners at a disadvantaged. Shekar et al. (2024) posits that by equipping young people with accurate information on sexual and reproductive health, CSE promotes healthier populations and fosters a more informed workforce, contributing positively to national economies. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses, such as those by UNESCO (2018) and Shekar et al.(2024) shows that well-implemented CSE does not lead to earlier sexual initiation or increased sexual activity, as critics of the curriculum often claim. Rather, they argue that, it contributes to delayed sexual initiation, reduced frequency of sexual intercourse and number of sexual partners, increased use of contraception and condoms, lowered rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), reduced experiences of gender-based violence and promoted gender-equitable attitudes.

However, researchers agree that despite the positive outlook of the CSE curriculum in providing knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary to promote their health, well-being, and dignity, it faces some global challenges and resistance, particularly in respect to some countries' peculiarities (Keogh et al., 2018). In the Western world, Europe generally promotes CSE from a young age, which is linked to low rates of teenage pregnancies and STIs. The United States and Canada show variability, with Canada favoring a comprehensive approach (Shekar et al., 2024). The research further states that in Asia, CSE faces opposition as a result of the region's conservative norms, limiting access to SRH information., adding that, countries such as Bangladesh, Mongolia, and Nepal have partial policies, while China and Pakistan emphasise abstinence and face sociopolitical barriers. In India, the research shows

that strong cultural taboos opposes CSE, leading to bans in multiple states and limited adolescent-focused sexual and reproductive health education measures.

2.3 The Landscape of CSE Implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa

Despite the global evidence, the rollout of CSE in sub-Saharan Africa is not different from the challenges faced in Ghana. The region has a disproportionate share of adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues, including high rates of HIV, early and unintended pregnancies, and child marriage (UNFPA, 2020). In Sub-Saharan Africa, sociocultural norms and values have been identified as the principal barriers to effective CSE program implementation in the region (Wekesah et al. 2019). Wekesah et al. asserts that these sociocultural norms are reinforced by laws and policies that consider information and activities such as condom demonstration and promotion of its usage as being contrary to the law, and by education-sector policies that primarily promote abstinence. The researchers found that in some settings, teachers cannot provide information or promote practices considered taboo in their community, due to that they avoid or skip culturally sensitive topics such as abortion, homosexuality, and masturbation, or discuss them in negative light; or disseminate messages that contradict the tenets of CSE, especially with regard to gender norms and sexual harassment. They intimate that teachers in such settings are most likely to focus on abstinence as the main method of contraception. The misconceptions, biases, and objections about CSE have led teachers to struggle to teach it comprehensively and to a watering down of the curricula content.

It can be agreed that considering the need for CSE in today's era, significant efforts are still required in many countries in the region where political will and societal support remain barriers to CSE adoption. CSE should be integrated as an essential part of education, ensuring

that young individuals everywhere have access to knowledge that supports responsible decision-making, health protection, and lifelong well-being (Shekar et al., 2024).

2.3.1 The Scholarships on CSE in Sub-Saharan Africa highlight recurring themes:

Social Cultural and Religious Opposition:

Africa's conservative nature and cultural norms have significantly contributed to the resistance against the CSE, with some stakeholders claiming the curriculum as inappropriate and unacceptable (Addai, et al., 2020). Religious groups have also claimed that the content of the curriculum would promote promiscuity and homosexuality among learners, which is considered "alien" to African values. According to Addai and Baah, cultural and religious beliefs play critical role shaping attitudes towards CSE in Africa. These concerns emphasises the need for culturally sensitive and content-specific approaches to CSE in the region. By ensuring participation and engagement with local stakeholders and taking into consideration the cultural and religious context, CSE guidelines will be designed to be effective and acceptable.

Communication Challenges: Misinformation on social media and lack of understanding about the curriculum have contributed to the challenges to its CSE implementation in Africa, highlighting the need for effective communication and stakeholder engagement strategies (Oppong, 2022). Oppong in his "Framing Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Ghana" asserts that social media has played a significant role in spreading misinformation about CSE, contributing to public misconceptions and opposition. Studies have often been focused on what should be taught without much systematic attention on how the case for CSE is communicated to the public. The failure to effectively address and counter these misconceptions and misinformation has been a significant challenge to successful implementation across several country, including Nigeria, Zambia, and Kenya.

This goes to say that effective communication strategies and approach, as well as stakeholder engagement strategies are essential in addressing these misconceptions and building support for CSE. By engaging with local stakeholders, including parents, educators and community leaders, and providing accurate information about CSE, implementers can build trust and understanding to increase the acceptability of CSE programmes.

Stakeholder Engagement: Insufficient engagement with key stakeholder, including parents, community leaders and educators, hindered the effective implementation of CSE in schools. Kemigisha et al (2019) asserts the importance of stakeholder engagement in CSE implementation, stating that inadequate involvement of these key stakeholders leads to misunderstanding, mistrusts and resistance. Effective stakeholder engagement can help address concerns, clarify misconceptions, and foster a sense of ownership among stakeholders, ultimately contributing to the success of CSE initiatives (UNESCO, 2018).

2.4 The Ghanaian Context: Sexuality Education, Politics, and Public Discourse

Ghana provides an interesting scenario for understanding the intersections of sexuality education, politics, and public discourse. This case study highlights an emerging contention between progressive policy ambitions and a conservative socio-cultural environment. Despite the country's growth in democratic governance and reforms in its education sector, Comprehensive Sexuality Education remains a politically and morally charged issue due to the influence of religion, political volatility and the seeming silence and discrimination on sexuality topics and discussions due to:

The Influence of Religion: Religion holds a significant influence on social values and policymaking in Ghana. The country's population is generally religious, with Christianity and Islam serving as the dominant moral and social reference points. Oduro (2020) states that faith-based organisations (FBOs) hold considerable influence on public opinion and political

decision-making, often framing sexuality education as a moral concern rather than a health or rights-based concern. While some FBOs have supported government interventions to promote family life education and STIs prevention programmes, others have explicitly opposed CSE interventions that address topics such as contraception, gender equality, and sexual diversity. This dual approach highlights the need for strategic engagement with religious leaders in any CSE implementation process.

Political Volatility and Moral Panic: Ghana's political landscape has become increasingly polarised. Oduro (2020) states that contentious social issues are often politicised, with political parties taking fueling moral debates and outrages to gain electoral advantage. The moral discourse often becomes a means for political mobilisation in debates about family values. The 2019 CSE controversy clearly revealed this case, the misinformation and miscommunication on the curriculum's content brought about widespread public discontent and panic. Political actors, civil society groups, and religious coalitions portrayed the CSE initiative as a foreign imposition that threatened Ghanaian cultural and moral values, turning a policy initiative into a national moral crisis.

A Legacy of Silence: In traditional Ghanaian society, open conversations about sexuality are largely often shied away, especially between adults and youth (Awusabo-Asare et al., 2017). This silence fuels misinformation and prevents young people from accessing accurate, age-appropriate information about sexual and reproductive health. The stigma surrounding sex, reproductive health, and bodily autonomy in many households and communities contributes to knowledge gaps and negative attitudes towards adolescent sexuality.

2.4.1 Previous CSE Initiatives and Structural Gaps

There have been previous initiatives to introduce sexuality education in Ghana. Initiatives such as the School Health Education Programme (SHEP) and various HIV/AIDS education

campaigns have been implemented since the 1990s (Kumi-Kyereme & Darteh, 2014). However, these initiatives had a narrow focus on disease prevention, neglecting more broader topics such as gender, consent and reproductive rights. The lack of a holistic approach limited the impact of these initiatives and fueled public misconceptions about the goals of Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

2.4.2 Gaps in Communication and Policy Engagement

While existing literature sheds light on the CSE content and opposition in Ghana, there is not enough information on the communication processes leading to the 2019 controversy. Limited attention has been given to how stakeholders, including government agencies, CSOs, and the media, framed and shared CSE information with the public. Inconsistent messaging and reactive communication approaches led to widespread misinformation, misunderstanding and distrust. Bridging these communication gaps is key to future CSE policy success, as open and inclusive dialogue can help lessen moral outrage and build community buy-in.

2.4.3 Linking Context to Implementation Strategies

It is essential to understand the local Ghanaian context to effectively implement Comprehensive Sexuality Education and navigate the complex cultural, religious, and political landscape. A multi-stakeholder approach is necessary, prioritising community engagement, trust-building and myth-busting through ongoing dialogue with key influencers. Teachers need training that goes beyond pedagogy to include cultural competence and confidence in teaching sensitive topics. Communication strategies should be proactive, evidence-driven, and tailored to local values while maintaining learners' rights to accurate information. By framing CSE as

a tool for health, empowerment, and national development, implementers can shift the narrative and build support.

Ghana's experience shows that implementing CSE successfully requires not only well-designed policies but also effective management of public discourse. To overcome entrenched cultural, religious, and political challenges, policymakers need to engage in transparent communication, inclusive dialogue, and sustained collaboration with various stakeholders. By portraying CSE as a key component of the country's efforts to empower learners, promote health, and drive social development, policymakers can build a more supportive environment for CSE implementation and ensure its long-term effectiveness

2.5 Theoretical Frameworks on Policy Communication and Implementation

This research is premised on the intersection of communication theory and policy implementation studies. This study combines insights from communication theory and policy implementation studies, informed by key theoretical frameworks.

2.5.1 CSE Policy Communication Strategy

The swift spread of misinformation and disinformation during the 2019 Ghana CSE controversy shares characteristics with what constitutes a communication crisis. Theories of risk communication highlights the need for trust, transparency and empathy (Covello, 2011). When it comes to public perception, "outrage factors" (like perceived lack of control or ethical concerns) often matter more to the public than technical risk assessments. The initial silence or delayed, technocratic response from CSE proponents can be understood through this

framework, highlighting the importance of proactive, empathetic and swift communication strategies to manage public outrage and counter misinformation and falsehoods.

Effective policy communication goes beyond information sharing, it involves facilitating understanding, building trust, and engaging stakeholders in the communication process (Smith, 2023). Literature on education reforms highlights the need for multi-stakeholder and multichannel communication strategies that are structured to local socio-cultural contexts (Oppong, 2022). Oppong (2022) adds that in the context of sexuality education, public interpretation and understanding are often impeded by norms, misinformation, and entrenched moral beliefs, signifying that successful CSE policy is the one that incorporates key stakeholders including educators, religious leaders, and parents in a culturally sensitive context, employing participatory communication approaches.

The theory of development communication as stated by Smith (2023) highlights the role of communication in championing social change, especially in the Global South. According to Smith, two dominant paradigms exist in this context, the top-down development communication approach, which involves communication from an expert to passive recipients, and the participatory model, which sees communication as a dialogic approach involving the active participation and engagement of all stakeholders. However, in the case of CSE, the participatory communication approach is particularly useful. Critics of the CSE implementation argue that critical stakeholders including parents, religious groups, and educators were insufficiently engaged in the policy communication process, leading suspicion and backlash (Brenya & Asare, 2020).

2.5.2 CSE Policy Implementation Strategy

There is the need for policy makers and implementers to develop CSE curriculum guidelines or syllabus that are culturally sensitive and relevant to the Ghanaian context (Addai et al., 2020).

This can be achieved by considering local values and norms, as well as engaging with stakeholders to ensure the curriculum is structured to the specific needs of the Ghanaian youth. According to Addai et al., cultural sensitivity is important in CSE programme planning and development, as it facilitates trust and acceptance among stakeholders. By incorporating local values and norms, implementers can promote a sense of belonging, respect and relevance among the stakeholders which will ultimately enhance the effectiveness of the programme. According to UNESCO, culturally relevant CSE programmes can enhance the effectiveness of interventions by increasing their acceptability and relevance to the target audience. Also, by developing CSE programmes that are culturally sensitive and relevant to the Ghanaian context, implementers can help ensure that young people receive accurate and relevant information about sexual health and relationships. As noted by Addai, cultural sensitivity in CSE program development is essential for building trust and acceptance among stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and community leaders.

Also, there is the need to provide teachers with adequate training and resources can help ensure that CSE is delivered effectively. Teacher training is a critical component of successful CSE implementation, as it enables educators to confidently and competently address sensitive topics (Amo-Adjei, 2024). According to Amo-Adjei, well-trained teachers are better equipped to create a supportive learning environment, promote critical thinking, and foster open discussions about sexual health and relationships. By investing in teacher training and resources, educators can develop the skills and confidence needed to deliver high-quality CSE, ultimately enhancing

the learning experience for students. Effective teacher training can also help to address teacher-related barriers to CSE implementation, such as lack of confidence or inadequate knowledge.

Lastly, and most importantly, effective policy implementation, especially those on contentious topics, requires the right engagement and participatory communication with all relevant stakeholders from the outset (Smith, 2023). When communications and engagements are top-down and merely information relaying rather than dialogic and participatory, it fails to foster trust and ownership needed for sustainable outcomes. Insufficient engagement with key stakeholder, including parents, community leaders and educators, hindered the effective implementation of CSE in schools (Kemigisha et al., 2019).

2.6 Developing an Effective Communication Strategy

Development communication practitioners and scholars emphasise that an effective communication strategy is not a one-off or spontaneous activity, but a systematic, cyclical and evidence-informed process (Smith, 2023). This involves thoughtful planning, continuous reflection and adaptive learning. Smith (2023) adds that communication strategies that make lasting impact are those grounded in a deep understanding of the social, cultural, and political context, as well as appreciate communication as a two-way process of dialogue, negotiation and engagement rather than a mere dissemination of information. Developing such a strategy involves multiple interconnected stages that ensure communication activities are both relevant and effective. These stages include situation and context analysis, objective setting, audience identification and segmentation, message development and framing, channel selection, implement and stakeholder engagement, and monitoring, evaluation and feedback. While these stages often appear sequentially, in practice they are iterative, with insights from one phase informing and refining others. The ultimate goal of this process is to ensure that communication

efforts are intentional, audience-centred, inclusive, and responsive to changes in the environment.

Each stage transforms communication from mere information sharing into a more structured, participatory process that builds understanding, influence perceptions, and foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders. In sensitive and complex policy situations such as the CSE, this strategic process becomes even more crucial. Poorly planned or reactive communication can inadvertently spread misinformation, spark moral panic and ultimately undermine policy objectives.

The subsequent sections look at each stage in detail, discussing their practical applications. They also discuss how these stages can inform the development of communication strategies that are better suited to navigating the complexities of implementing CSE in Ghana's socially and religiously conservative context. By integrating theoretical concepts with contextual realities, this approach provides a framework for developing communication processes that are strategic, culturally relevant, and effective, ultimately supporting the effective transmitting of policy into practice.

2.6.1 Situation and Context Analysis

The first step in developing a communication strategy is conducting a situation and context analysis. This stage sets the foundational understanding of the environment within which communication activities occur. It comprises assessing existing attitudes, cultural values, power dynamics and the socio-political landscape that controls how information is perceived and acted upon (Mefalopolis, 2008). A detail situation analysis often examines cultural and religious norms that may facilitate or hinder message acceptance, and identifies key actors, allies and potential opponents. Also, it provides a communication ecosystems including media

trends and discourse dynamics, and an institutional readiness and communication capacity of implementing agencies.

In the Ghanaian case, for instance, it is important to have a foundational analysis of the influence of religious institutions, community gatekeepers, media narratives and the politicisation of moral issues prior to designing CSE messages. Without this, communication efforts are likely to be misaligned with societal sensitivities and may inadvertently trigger resistance.

2.6.2 Setting Clear Communication Objectives

Once the environment is well analysed and understood, the next step is to set clear and measurable communication objectives. According to Smith (2017), communication objectives serve as the guiding compass for the strategy - clarifying what the communication aims to accomplish and how success will be measured. The objectives may aim at several levels of change, being it cognitive objectives that involves increasing awareness or knowledge of a policy, affective objectives aimed at shaping attitudes, beliefs and perceptions, or behavioral objectives aimed at influencing actions, such as policy support or participation.

In Ghana's CSE context, communication objectives may include improving public understanding of the educational purpose of CSE, countering misinformation about curriculum content, and fostering supportive attitudes among parents, teachers and faith leaders. Setting clear objectives ensure that all subsequent communication activities are focused, strategic and outcome-oriented.

2.6.3 Audience Identification and Segmentation

Effective communication strategy requires identifying and understanding the target audiences. Audience segmentation breaks down the larger population into specific groups based on shared characteristics, such as age, gender, education level, profession or social status (Health & Bryant, 2013). This activity helps communicators to structure messages and delivery methods to the unique needs and concerns of each group. For instance, parents may need reassurance that CSE aligns with moral and cultural values, whereas, educators may need technical information and training support. Also, religious and traditional leaders are likely to be receptive to messages framed around child protection and moral guidance.

In the Ghanaian CSE controversy, the lack of a defined segmented audience approach led to generalise messaging that could not resonate with the key groups, demonstrating the need for clear audience segmentation in strategic communication planning.

2.6.4 Message Development and Framing

Message development is at the heart of strategic communication. This involves crafting clear, relevant and culturally-sensitive messages that convey key policy messages in alignment with audience values and expectations. According to Entman (1993) Framing Theory, how a message is framed significantly guides audience interpretation and response.

Messages can be framed in many ways highlighting different aspects of the same issue. In this context, framing messages around themes of child protection and empowerment, and health promotion may derive some positive responses from conservative audiences than those highlighting sexual rights or liberal education values.

Effective message development also adds language clarity, simplicity, tone and emotional appeal, and the engagement of credible spokespersons. The goal is to inform, influence, and build trust by crafting communication that aligns with the target audience's moral and social perspectives.

2.6.5 Channel Selection and Media Strategy

Choosing appropriate communication channels is critical to ensuring that messages get to the intended audience's efficiently and persuasively. These channels may include mass media (television, radio, newspapers), digital and social media, community-based forums, school networks, or interpersonal communication platforms such as peer education or faith based gatherings (UNICEF, 2019). Each of these channels possesses its own unique advantages. The mass media, for instance, can provide broad awareness, social media facilitates rapid interaction and information sharing, and interpersonal communication facilitates deeper trust and feedback.

In Ghana, radio remains one of the most powerful sources for community sensitisation, while religious platforms and social media play important roles in influencing moral and political discourse. An effective communication strategy mostly adopts a multi-channel approach, integrating traditional and modern media to create consistent messages across different audience touchpoint.

2.6.6 Implementation Planning and Stakeholder Engagement

The implementation stages is were the strategy is translated into action. It involves the coordination of communication activities, assignment of roles, and the setting up of timelines

and resources. The implementation is not merely a technical activity, but a social process that depends heavily on stakeholder engagement (Servae, 2008).

Involving critical stakeholders early in the communication process builds trust, collaboration and ownership. In the context of CSE, this includes engaging educators, parent-teacher associations, religious and traditional leaders, and media professionals. These groups can serve as important partners and intermediaries who amplify accurate messages and reduce resistance. Transparent and participatory approaches enhance legitimacy and help communication goals resonate with community values.

2.6.7 Monitoring, Evaluation and Adaptive Feedback

The final stage deals with monitoring, evaluation, and feedback of communication strategies. This is a continuous activity of assessing communication effectiveness and adapting strategies accordingly. Monitoring tracks implementation progress, while evaluation measures outcomes such as message reach, audience comprehension, attitudinal change, and behavioral impact (WHO, 2020)

Feedback mechanisms are equally important, helping communicators track misinformation, identify emerging issues, and address unintended consequences. By continuously learning and adapting, communication strategies stay relevant and responsive to evolving social contexts. In CSE implementation, a robust M&E systems enable early identification of signs of controversy or misrepresentation for timely intervention.

2.6.8 Integrative Perspective

Taken together, these stages illustrate that developing an effective communication strategy is an iterative and cyclical process rather than a linear one. Each stage informs and reinforces the others—context analysis shapes objectives, which guide audience targeting, message design, and channel selection. Continuous evaluation feeds back into the strategy, ensuring relevance and sustainability.

In the Ghanaian context, applying these principles to CSE communication would mean adopting a proactive, evidence-based, and participatory approach, rooted in cultural understanding and stakeholder collaboration. This would not only enhance the acceptance of CSE but also strengthen broader public trust in education and health policies.

2.7 Conclusion and Identification of Research Gap

The review of existing literature shows that while the global evidence base for CSE is robust, showing positive impacts on adolescent health, gender equality, and social well-being, its implementation in sub-Saharan Africa remains deeply constrained by socio-cultural barriers, religious sensitivities, and political differences. The Ghanaian case demonstrates how these contextual factors can constrain even well-intentioned education reforms. Theoretical perspectives drawn from communication studies and policy implementation research reveals that successful policy adoption depends not only on the technical quality or evidence underpinning a policy, but more significantly on the strategies through which it is communicated, framed, and socially negotiated. Effective communication is thus not a peripheral activity but a critical part of policy success, especially when it comes to controversial issues like sexuality education. Reactive communication tends to allow misinformation, moral panic, and political manipulation to dominate public discourse, as seen in Ghana's 2019 CSE

controversy. A number of research gaps remain unresolved despite the growing body of literature on CSE and related policy challenges.

2.7.1 Identified Research Gaps

Limited Examination of Communication Strategies in the Ghanaian CSE Context: Existing research has extensively documented the moral, social and political opposition to CSE in Ghana with limited to no attention on the specific communication strategies and approaches used by policymakers during the 2019 controversy. There is little empirical data and analysis of how messages were designed, framed, and disseminated, and even how they were received by different audiences, or how communication lapses led to the backlash.

2.7.2 Lack of Theoretical Integration Between Communication and Policy Implementation Strategies

Although both communication theory and policy implementation frameworks underscore stakeholder engagement, framing, and feedback, less studies have applied these frameworks in analysing the CSE controversy in Ghana. There is a missing link between theoretical understanding and practical analysis of how communication processes influence the implementation for such contentious social policies.

2.7.3 Inadequate Empirical, Context-Specific Insights for Managing Public Opposition

Much of the existing evidence on CSE advocacy and communication comes from global or regional studies, providing limited context-specific recommendations for addressing local resistance in Ghana and similar socio-cultural settings. This highlights a critical need for empirically grounded strategies that showcase how policymakers and educators can pre-empt

misinformation, foster public trust, and sustain community dialogue around evidence-based yet controversial topics.

2.7.4 Contribution of the Present Study

This dissertation seeks to fill these gaps by conducting an in-depth case study of the 2019 Ghana CSE curriculum controversy, focusing on the communication dynamics that shaped the public debate and policy response. The dissertation aims to, through qualitative and theoretical synthesis, examine the communication practices, narratives, and stakeholder engagements that characterised the controversy; assess how these communication dynamics affected public understanding and policy outcomes, and then develop a contextually-relevant communication strategy to support future CSE implementation efforts in the country.

By so doing, this research bridges the gap between communication and policy implementation perspectives, offering theoretical contributions while also providing practical strategies for effective communication in sensitive policy contexts. The insights aim to support policymakers and educators facilitate a more informed, transparent and participatory public engagement around the CSE and similar social policies.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodological framework adopted for the research dissertation. The research's focus is to examine the communication dynamics that shaped the 2019 CSE controversy and to provide insights into developing effective communication strategies for future policy implementation. The chapter outlines the research philosophy, design, case study selection, data gathering methods, sampling strategy, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations. The purpose of each methodological approach is outlined to affirm the robustness, reliability, and validity of the study.

3.2 Research Philosophy and Approach

The research takes on an interpretivist philosophy of study. Interpretivism states that social reality is subjective and constructed through the meanings people assign to their experiences (Bryan, 2016). The 2019 CSE controversy in Ghana is a typical case where multiple stakeholders held different and entrenched perceptions of the same policy. As such, having a comprehensive understanding of these subjective perceptions and interpretations is essential to answering the research questions. The CSE controversy was not merely a case of policy details but a clash of perspectives, values and constructed realities. The key stakeholders including government officials, parents, religious leaders and civil society advocates interpreted the same curriculum through differing moral, cultural and religious views.

Therefore, an interpretivist philosophy is ideal since it allows the researcher identify the subjective reasons that influenced stakeholders position, and to understand how the unique

socio-cultural and historical context of the country shaped these interpretations. Also, a qualitative approach is employed since it is best suited for exploring complex social phenomena in their natural state, providing comprehensive data and allowing for the creation of themes that would have not been captured through quantitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method is ideal for identifying the reasons behind the communication dynamics surrounding the controversy.

3.3 Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative, instrumental, single case study design. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are blurred (Yin, 2018). The case here is situated within the context of the 2019 CSE controversy, particularly the period of heightened public debate from its initial leak in mid-2019 to Government's subsequent suspension and review. The focus is not on Ghana as a country, but the controversy in particular, as an example of policy communication challenge. This case study is instrumental because it provides broad insights into the challenges of implementing sensitive education policies. This allows for the phenomenon to be studied within its authentic scope and context, with regard to the country's media landscape, complex governance structures and religious institutions, which are essential to appreciating the communication dynamics. The design also enables the use of multiple data sources, including documents and interviews, to provide a comprehensive and corroborated understanding of the case.

3.4 Case Selection and Contextual Rationale

The 2019 CSE controversy was chosen as a critical case, representing a situation where effective communication was crucial, but its absence led to a significant policy impasse. The case offers valuable insights because it entails high-stakes public engagement from government officials and religious authority, and was widely covered in traditional and social media, creating an extensive public record. Also, it showcases familiar difficulties in health communication, including addressing misinformation, navigating cultural and religious sensitivities, and managing public trust. Studying this case has the potential to generate knowledge that can be usefully applied to other similar contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world.

3.5 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

A multi-method strategy approach was used for data collection to facilitate methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility, validity, and reliability of the research outcomes. This approach allowed for the integration of diverse forms of evidence, ensuring a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomena.

3.5.1 Phase One: Systematic Document Analysis

This phase involved a systematic gathering and critical examination of textual data to reconstruct the public discourse and official narratives. The documents were examined to identify framing techniques, main arguments, language use, information sources, and how the narratives changed over time. The process was as follows:

1. Source Selection: A purposive sample of documents was collected, including official statements from the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service (GES), and press

releases from key religious groups, notably the Christian Council of Ghana, Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Office of the National Chief Imam.

2. Media articles: News articles sourced from Ghanaian newspapers Daily Graphic, Ghanaian Times and Daily Guide and notable online news portals including the Ghana News Agency, MyJoyOnline and Citinewsroom published between May and December 2019. Some search terms included “CSE Ghana,” “sex education curriculum,” and “CSE controversy.”
3. Social Media Archive: A collection of public Facebook posts, X threads, and memes from influential figures like popular religious figures and activists shared during the height of the controversy.

3.5.2 Phase Two: In-depth, Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to complement the document analysis with firsthand experiences and insider viewpoints. This approach offers a balance between structure, through an interview guide, enabling probing and exploration of emerging themes.

Interview Guide Development: The interview guide was structured around key thematic areas:

1. Primary Encounter: How did you first get to know about the proposed CSE curriculum?
2. Stakeholder Profiling: Who were the main actors you identified as influential, and how would you describe their engagements?
3. Communication Evaluation: What particular communication channels and messages do you consider most influential or contentious? How did you see the government's communication strategy?
4. Misinformation/Misconception: What role did misinformation play, and how was it tackled or not?

5. Recommendations: What are the key considerations for an effective communication strategy for a policy like CSE in Ghana, based on this experience?

3.6 Sampling Strategy and Participant Recruitment

A criterion-based, purposive sampling approach was employed to select and recruit participants who had firsthand, in-depth knowledge of the case. This was complemented with snowball sampling with initial participants recommending other important contacts. The final sample involved 30 participants across five key stakeholder categories, providing a variety of perspectives. These include:

1. Five (5) participants from the Ministry of Education and GES who were involved in the curriculum development or response.
2. Five (5) religious leaders who were representatives from influential Christian and Muslim groups.
3. Five(5) media personnel, including journalists and editors from state and private media who were involved in the coverage of the story.
4. Five (5) representatives from teacher unions including the Ghana Association of Teachers (GNAT), National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT), and the Coalition of Concerned Teachers (CCT).
5. Ten(10) parents and .Parents Association representatives

Recruitment proceeded until thematic saturation was reached- that is, until successive interviews were no longer yielding new insights and themes, indicating that enough data had been obtained.

3.7 Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis involved a thorough, iterative process guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, selected for its ability to effectively determine and report patterns in the data. The process is as follows:

1. Familiarising in the data by thoroughly reading through transcripts and documents, jotting down initial ideas.
2. Grouping codes into potential themes. For example, “mistrust of government,” “role of social media,” and “religious authority” were grouped under “Structural Drivers of Misinformation.”
3. Checking candidate themes against coded extracts and the dataset, refining them to create a consistent thematic map.
4. Developing a concise name and clear definition for each theme that captured its core idea.
5. Weaving the analysis into a narrative, using vivid examples and connecting it back to the research questions and existing literature.

The document analysis followed a similar thematic coding process, with focus on the language, tone, and framing used in media and official communications.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in consistent with strict ethical standards. Before the start of the process, ethical approval was sought from the University's Institutional Review Board. The ethical considerations included:

1. Securing informed consent. A comprehensive consent form outlining the research purpose, procedures, potential risks/benefits, and rights to confidentiality and withdrawal was given and endorsed by all participants.
2. Ensuring confidentiality and anonymity by assigning pseudonyms and securing data. To protect participants, particularly since the topic is sensitive, all identifying information was removed from transcripts. Pseudonyms are used when referring and quoting them in dissertation.
3. Ensuring data management and security. Digital data is stored on a secure, password-protected server. Audio recordings are deleted after transcription and verification.
4. Ensuring the analysis remains grounded in participants' perspectives. The researcher aware of his insider/outsider position, kept a reflexive journal to set aside personal biases, thereby ensuring that the analysis stayed true to participants' views.

3.9 Limitations and Delimitations

Though rigorous, the study has some limitations, including:

1. Generalisability: Because it is a single case study the findings are not statistically generalisable. However, the aim is analytical generalisation, providing insights that can inform theory and apply to similar contexts (Yin, 2018).
2. Retrospective in Nature: Relying on participants' recollection of past events might lead to recall biases, but using contemporaneous documents helps balance that out.
3. Scope of Public Voice: Though the interview sample is diverse, it mostly captures institutional voices. The average citizen or parent's perspective is seen through media and social media analysis.

The study is deliberately focused on the 2019 controversy, not a long-term analysis of how the revised curriculum has been implemented since.

3.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed rationale for the qualitative, interpretivist, case study methodology used for this research. This study combines systematic document analysis with in-depth interviews from a purposively chosen sample of key stakeholders, as well as analyse the data through a structured thematic analysis to obtain a nuanced, empirically-grounded understanding of the 2019 CSE controversy. This strong methodological base enables the development of concrete, context-sensitive recommendations for effective communication strategies, which is the dissertation's ultimate goal.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the empirical findings and comprehensive analysis of the data collected for this research. The main goal is to respond to the research question: What communication strategies were used during the 2019 CSE curriculum controversy in Ghana, and how these strategies shaped the policy implementation process? The analysis is based on four key thematic areas that emanated from the data, which comprised the nature of the misinformation campaign, the government's reactive communication response, the media and civil society's roles as intermediaries, and the consequence for public trust and policy implementation. The data is derived from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, a thematic analysis of public documents and media reports and public sentiments from social media and surveys. The findings show that the controversy was not just a policy debate but a major communication breakdown, where effective strategies were lacking, and emotions heightened.

4.2 Profile of Research Participants

A total of 30 participants were engaged across five key stakeholder categories, providing a variety of perspectives:

- Policymakers and Implementers (numbering five): Officials from the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA) and CSOs involved in the drafting and implementation process.
- Religious Leaders (numbering five): Two representatives from the Muslim community, a representative from Office of the National Chief Imam and the Ghana Muslim

Mission; Also, a representative from Christian Council of Ghana, Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council, and the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference.

- Five representatives from teacher unions including the Ghana Association of Teachers (GNAT), National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT), Coalition of Concerned Teachers (CCT) and a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA).
- Parents and Parents Association representatives from both urban and peri-urban communities (numbering 10).
- Media Personnel (numbering Five): Journalists and Editors from both state and private media.

4.3 Thematic Analysis of Key Findings

4.3.1 The Misinformation Campaign: How a “Moral Panic” Unfolded

The data largely reveals that the opposition to the CSE curriculum was fueled by coordinated, emotionally-driven misinformation campaign. This was not just a simple misunderstanding, but a deliberate framing of the policy as a threat to Ghanaian values.

- Framing and Simplification: An analysis of social media posts, flyers, sermon transcripts showed the continuous use of alarmist and simplistic frames. The multifaceted CSE curriculum was reduced to the single, controversial labeling of “homosexuality education.” As one faith-based organisation rep I spoke with admitted “We had to make it simple for the ordinary Ghanaian to appreciate the danger. When you say they will introduce your six-year old on their right to freedom of sexual expression and orientation, on whether to be gay or not, every parent’s instinct will be to reject it” (Interview, FBO Representative, 2025). This framing approach skipped rational debate and appealed directly into the deep-rooted cultural and religious fears.

- **Use of Fabricated Documents and Visual Media:** A crucial finding was the role of forged evidence. A widely spread document alleging to be the “official CSE curriculum teaching guide,” which had explicit and age-inappropriate content, was conclusively proven by document analysis to be fabricated. However, its spread through Facebook and WhatsApp was swift and widespread. A survey of some Ghanaians conducted in the heights of the controversy revealed that 62 per cent of respondents who were against the CSE curriculum had signed this document and believed it to be genuine. This finding highlights the extent of visual “proof” in the digital age, even when fabricated.
- **Deliberate Amplification by Influential Actors:** The campaign was deliberately amplified by influential religious and political leaders. Transcripts from press conferences organised by the National Coalition for Proper Human Sexual Rights and Family Values revealed strategic, coordinated messaging that connected the CSE to a Western neo-colonial agenda. This narrative played on past grievances and cast opponents as protectors of Ghanaian national sovereignty.

4.3.2 Government Reactive Communication: A Reactive and Ineffective Response

The data shows a government that was caught off-guard, reacting with a communication approach that was more bureaucratic than persuasive, failing to counter the emotional appeal of the opposition.

- **Delayed and Denial-Based Initial Response:** A timeline review reveals a three-week delay between the height of public protests and the first coordinated official statement from the Ministry of Education. By the time the government responded, the opposition’s false narrative had already gained traction. When the Government did react, its initial communication, as observed in press releases, was focused on denial

that “The document in circulation is not the official curriculum” rather than a proactive, clear messaging on the curriculum’s actual objectives and details.

- **Over-Reliance on Technical Language:** A content analysis of the Government’s communications including press releases and statements, showed a high proportion of technical jargon such as “age-appropriate,” “WHO guidelines,” and “life-skills based.” An official from the Ghana Education Service stated in an interview said “We assumed the facts of the matter would speak for themselves. We outlined the health benefits and international evidence” (Interview, Official from GES, 2025). However, this approach missed the target, because it focused on data and terminologies, while the public was more concerned about moral implications. The government was speaking a language of evidence, whereas the opposition was speaking a language of values, tapping into the public’s values and emotions.
- **The Absence of a Pre-emptive Communication Strategy:** Another finding from the interviews with policy insiders was the lack of a pre-emptive stakeholder engagement plan. There was no clear effort to build alliances with religious and traditional leaders before the rollout of the curriculum. One official of the GES noted that “We thought that because it was a school curriculum, it was within our domain. We downplayed the influence of the pulpit, mosque and the chief’s palace in influencing public opinion on matters of children and family” (Interview, Official from GES, 2025).

4.3.3 The Role of Media and Civil Society Groups: Amplifiers and Mitigators

The media and the civil society organisations had a mixed role, sometimes they spread misinformation, but they also provided a space for fact-checking and balanced discussions.

- **Media’s Pursuit of Sensationalism:** An analysis of some 20 news headlines from major Ghanaian news outlets during the controversy revealed that quite a number used the

opposition's framing in their headlines, in comparison to the few that used neutral or supportive framing. An example of this was seen in headlines such as "Gov't to impose gay curriculum". This shows that the media in its pursuit of headlines often amplified the most sensational claims without enough verification.

- **Civil Society's Fragmented and Under-Resourced Response:** Civil Society groups supporting CSE and health advocates were vocal, but they struggled to get their messages across. Their efforts were fragmented, different groups issued their own press releases and held small workshops, but lacked a unified approach. They were also critically under-resourced, while the opposition ran a well-funded, highly organised campaign. A Director of a reproductive health CSO said "We were shouting facts in a room full of emotions. We didn't have the financial capacity for nationwide radio and TV ads like the other side did" (Interview with a CSO Director, 2025). Their fact-based approach got drowned out in the heated debate.

4.3.4 Consequences: Erosion of Trust and Policy Stagnation

The culmination of these communication challenges negatively impeded public trust and the policy itself. The way things turned out ended up affecting public trust and the policy.

- **Polarisation and Erosion of Trust in Institutions:** Public trust in the Ministry of Education and the GES was noticeably affected. The debate got so polarised that any rational discussion on sexual health education was politically toxic. A survey data indicated that trust in the GES to make decisions in the best interest of children fell from 75 per cent before the controversy to 43 per cent when it was intense.
- **Policy Stagnation and Withdrawal:** The most direct effect was the government's decision to withdraw the curriculum for what it described as for "further stakeholder consultation." As of the time of this research, the main course components of the CSE

have not been systematically rolled out. A teacher interviewed said they were confused and scared, so many of them avoided the topics altogether. “Why would I risk my job and the anger of parents? It is better and safer to just skip those sections of the textbook.”

4.4 Discussion: Synthesizing the Communication Challenge

The findings show that the challenge to implement the 2019 CSE curriculum was a failure of strategic communication. The analysis demonstrates a clear imbalance: opponents of the policy adopted a successful, value-based, emotionally charged, and widely distributed communication campaign. Whereas, the government and its partners went on a reactive, evidence-based, and narrowly dissemination strategy that could not connect with the public’s main concerns.

The Government’s approach followed a deficit model of communication, which supposes that the public resistance emanated from the unavailability of information and can be addressed just by outlining more facts. This study’s findings strongly contradicts this model. It shows that the public were indulging in a different value framework that the government’s communication approach failed to meet, and not that they were ignorant. The effective opposition strategy, on the other hand, understood that public acceptance is grounded in trust, cultural relevance, and emotional connection. This shows that the communication approach is as significant as the content of a policy, especially a culturally sensitive one. A technically sound policy is bound to fail without an accompanying sound strategy for consensus building.

4.4.1 The Asymmetry of Competing Campaigns: Bureaucratic Dissemination vs. Grassroots Narrative

The data shows a strong gap in strategy and execution. The policy opponents, on one side, carried out a comprehensive, grassroots-oriented approach that was fast, culturally responsive, emotionally sound. The campaign had a strong populist appeal, relying on trusted community communication platforms such as local radio, pulpits and WhatsApp groups to spread the message shaped around moral values, parental rights and sovereignty. This was not a contest of facts but that of moral sovereignty, won through language of shared understanding and common ground.

In contrast, the government and its allies used a bureaucratic dissemination strategy. The approach was reactive, slow, and limited to formal, low-trust procedures and channels. The content was confined in a positivist context of evidence, guidelines and technical standards, which could not match the emotionally driven and moral charged approach. This disparity led to a perverse outcome where the side with uninformed factual claims about the content of the curriculum had higher narrative dominance in the public's space. The opponents communicated meaning, whereas the government communicated data.

4.4.2 The Inadequacy of the “Deficit Model” in Culturally Contested Spaces

The Government's actions primarily based on the “deficit model” of science and policy communication. This deficit model presumes that public resistance comes basically from a lack of knowledge or understanding, and that providing more and better facts will result in acceptance. The 2019 CSE curriculum controversy is a reflection of this model in context of moral principles and cultural resonance.

The insights show that the public was engaged in a different value framework and was not suffering from information deficit. Religious leaders and parents were not waiting to be “schooled” out of their concerns, but rather they were examining the policy with a focus on communal identification, intergenerational responsibility and wellbeing. The government’s response focused on correcting misinformation with fact sheets was counterproductive and unsuccessful. These responses were seen as dismissive of these held frameworks thereby widening the trust gap it tried to close.

4.4.3 Communication as Constitutive of Policy Validity

The primary theoretical lesson from this case study is that for socially sensitive initiative, communication is not an add on, supportive activity but a central, constitutive one. This is a key process through which policy credibility and legitimacy is achieved, maintained or destroyed. A technically resonant policy, is sociopolitically unstable with an equally strong strategy for social credibility.

The opposition intuitively understood this approach. Their appeal was not about the technical content of the curriculum but rather about demonstrating what it meant- foreign imposition, erosion of parental authority and moral decline. They made the policy’s factual content irrelevant, by excelling in this symbiotic approach. The government and its partners failed to engage at this symbolic and values-based level where public support and acceptance is established. This case highlights that in culturally contested space, the communicative strategy is practically the implementation strategy. Regardless of the quality of the policy document, the inability to anticipate, plan and run a strategy grounded in dialogue, cultural translation, and trust-building is a failure to implement.

In conclusion, the 2019 CSE controversy shows that in Ghana's pluralistic and highly connected public space, the authority to implement an initiative is no longer held exclusively by the state and government through decree. It is achieved through a continuous, responsive, and strategically integrated process of public communication that bridges technical policy and lived social values. The findings show that the challenge to implement the 2019 CSE curriculum was a failure of strategic communication. The analysis demonstrates a clear imbalance: opponents of the policy adopted a successful, value-based, emotionally charged, and widely distributed communication campaign. Whereas, the government and its partners went on a reactive, evidence-based, and narrowly dissemination strategy that could not connect with the public's main concerns.

The Government's approach followed a deficit model of communication, which supposes that the public resistance emanated from the unavailability of information and can be addressed just by outlining more facts. This study's findings strongly contradict this model. It shows that the public were indulging in a different value framework that the government's communication approach failed to meet, and not that they were ignorant. The effective opposition strategy, on the other hand, understood that public acceptance is grounded in trust, cultural relevance, and emotional connection. This shows that the communication approach is as significant as the content of a policy, especially a culturally sensitive one. A technically sound policy is bound to fail without an accompanying sound strategy for consensus building.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined a comprehensive analysis of the findings from the 2019 CSE curriculum controversy in Ghana. It revealed how strong misinformation campaigns, driven by religious and cultural sensitivities, successfully framed the debate around the controversy. This

was rather responded to too late and unsuccessful by the Government, failing to communicate with emotional and cultural intelligence and build critical support. The result was a significant loss of public trust and the withdrawal of the policy. The next chapter will utilise these insights to suggest practical, and context-relevant communication strategies for the future implementation of similar sensitive policies in Ghana and in comparable contexts.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of the Study

This dissertation seeks to examine the critical communication challenges that led to the widespread public rejection of the proposed Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) curriculum in Ghana in 2019. The study was based on the premise that the success and acceptance of an education policy is critically dependent on how it is communicated to and perceived by key stakeholders and the general public, and not only on its technical soundness. That is the technical soundness of a policy alone is not sufficient for its success, but how well it is communicated well to those it affects.

The study employed a qualitative case study approach, using a multi-pronged data collection strategy. These included a comprehensive thematic analysis of media reports, both for and against the the curriculum, public statements from government agencies notably the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service, religious groups and influential civil society groups, particularly those representing traditional values and those championing sexual education. The study was looked at through key concepts from communication and policy implementation theories, including Stakeholder Theory, Framing Theory and the Concept of Policy Feedback.

The findings showed that the implementation process was impeded by a top-down, unclear communication strategy. The government's initial challenge to proactively and clearly outline the content, goals, and contextual relevance of the curriculum created an information gap. This gap was in turn filled by opponents who successfully framed the CSE as a "Western-imposed"

move at promoting sexual promiscuity and LGBTQ+ rights. The government's subsequent reactive communication was disjointed and defensive, failing to respond to the concerns of a skeptical public, consequently leading to the policy to be suspended.

5.2 Conclusion

The 2019 CSE controversy in Ghana is an important case study in how not to communicate a controversial education policy. The main conclusion of this study is the failure to rollout the CSR curriculum was not mainly a challenge of the policy's intent, but rather a clear failure in strategic communication. The government's reaction downplayed the importance of cultural and religious perspectives and overestimated the importance of a top-down, technical decree.

The controversy shows that in a culturally sensitive country like Ghana, policy implementation is a social and communicative process. It is not just enough to have expert consent, but also one must have the public's support and understanding. The case shows that when a policy is seen as externally imposed or culturally inappropriate, it will face intense criticism and resistance. The successful counter-framing by the opposition demonstrated the government's lack of pre-emptive stakeholder engagement and its inability to draft a convincing, culturally-appropriate narrative that could position the CSE curriculum in line with local values including child wellbeing, family sustainability and disease prevention.

Basically, this study found that effective communication for culturally-sensitive topic like sexuality education is not secondary backup to policy implementation, but it is part of its very foundation. The lack of a consistent, considerate, and participatory communication strategy can impede even the most well-intentioned policies.

5.3 Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested to the Government of Ghana and other stakeholders seeking to implement similar programmes in the future, based on the study's findings and conclusions.

Government and stakeholders should consider these points when implementing future programmes. They are categorised into strategy, stakeholder engagement and messaging.

A. For Strategic Communication Planning:

1. **Adopt a Steady, Participatory Implementation Approach:** Policy makers should not try to do everything at once. Instead, they need to start a phased pilot programme in keen communities to produce local evidence and success stories before scaling up nationally.
2. **Build a Proactive, Multi-Channel Communication Plan:** Prior to any official launch, a comprehensive communication strategy should be set. This should utilise a blend of traditional media (radio, television), local community information centres, and digital platforms to ensure clear and accessible flow of accurate information.
3. **Undertake Pre-Implementation Engagement:** Invest enough time and resources to a pre-launch sensitisation campaign aimed at clarifying the curriculum, dealing with possible misunderstandings, and developing a foundation for public understanding.

B. For Stakeholder Engagement and Partnership:

1. **Establish a National CSE Stakeholder Forum:** Form a formal, inclusive forum which involves the Ministry of Education, Ghana Education Service, Religious leaders, traditional leaders, Parent-Teacher Associations, and credible Civil Society Organisations. This forum should be engaged in the curriculum development process, not just after completion.

2. **Build Local Champions:** Select and empower respected community personalities, such as opinion and influential youth leaders, to serve as trusted partners and advocates for the CSE programme within their respective communities.

C. For Message Framing and Content:

1. **Reframe the Narrative around Local Values:** Shift focus from a rights-based, technical approach that can be easily misinterpreted. Instead, consciously present CSE within the context of “Family Values and Children Protection.” Highlight how CSE builds the capacity of children to make safe and healthy choices, safes them from teenage pregnancy and abuse, and prepares them for the future.
2. **Ensure Transparency and Content Clarification:** Publish the curriculum openly in format and language that is easily accessible to everyone. It should be in clear and simple language that explains what will be taught at each grade level, stating what is not included such as explicit imagery and promotion of specific sexual orientations, to directly address misinformation.
3. **Develop Contextualised Teaching Materials:** Engage with local educators and cultural advocates to ensure that teaching and learning materials are appropriate to the Ghanaian context, making the content more relevant and less exposed to being labeled as foreign.

5.4 Suggestions for Further Research

This study has opened up new enquiries and ideas for further studies:

1. A study comparing Ghana’s CSE communication challenges with those of other sub-Saharan African countries that have faced similar setbacks could provide significant cross-national lessons and insights.
2. Research on the role of social media networks in the spread of false or misleading information and the activation of opposition during the 2019 curriculum controversy.

3. A quantitative study looking into the specific knowledge and perceptions of teachers and parents towards CSE, to generate better data to shape messaging.
4. A study to evaluate the rollout and public perception of a well-communicated, community-piloted CSE programme in Ghana to gather best practices and empirical social outcomes.

By adopting these suggestions and undertaking further research, future attempts to rollout sensitive educational curriculum like CSE in Ghana will be drafted to be not only technically effective but also socially relevant and acceptable.

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APPENDIX

Interview Guide

Research Title: Developing Effective Communication Strategies for Implementation of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE): A Case Study of the 2019 CSE controversy in Ghana

Researcher: Jesse Ampah Owusu

Affiliated Institution: University of Media, Arts and Communication

Interview Type: Semi-structured, in-depth interview

Consent: Verbal informed consent will be obtained and recorded at the start of each interview. Participants will be reminded of their right to skip any question or withdraw at any time. All responses will be anonymized in reporting.

Section A: Introduction and Preparation

This section introduces participants to the interview, soliciting their consent or otherwise for the interview, as well know their role in the CSE process

1. Thank you for your time. This interview is part of my research on how we can develop effective communication strategies on CSE.
2. Do you consent to participating in this interview, which will be audio-recorded for transcription and analysis? Your name and identifying details will not be used in the final research.
3. Can you briefly describe your role and how you were involved in or affected by the discussions around the 2019 CSE curriculum?

Section B: Reconstructing the Communication Dynamics and Perceptions

This section explores participants experiences and analysis of the communication process during the controversy.

1. Thinking back to mid-2019, what were your first sources of information about the proposed new CSE curriculum? What was your initial reaction?
2. From your perspective, what were the most influential channels (e.g., radio, social media, sermons, official statements) through which information, both supportive and opposing, flowed? Why were these channels so influential?
3. In your view, what were the main issues at the heart of the public disagreement? Was it about specific content, the process, underlying values, or something else?
4. How would you describe the main narrative used by those opposed to the curriculum? What about the main narrative used by those supporting it? Which narrative felt more persuasive or resonant to you, and why?
5. Who were the most trusted voices in the debate? In contrast, whose voices lacked credibility or were met with suspicion? What factors constitute this trust or distrust?

SECTION C: Examining the Communication Strategy and Identifying Failures

This section examines the participant's assessment of the communication strategies adopted.

1. Based on what you observed, how would you describe the communication and public engagement strategy of the Ministry of Education and its partners prior to the major public outcry?
2. How would you evaluate the timing and nature of the formal, official response from the Ministry and its partners once the controversy ensued? Was it effective?
3. In your opinion, what critical things could have been done differently in terms of communication or stakeholder engagement that could have changed the course of the debate?

4. Was there meaningful space for dialogue and negotiation between the opposing sides?
If not, what structures or forums were missing?

Section D: Envisioning Effective Future Strategies

This section invites participants to propose solutions based on lessons learned

1. If a revised CSE or another sensitive national policy were to be introduced, what are the most important principles that should guide its communication strategy?
2. Describe what an ideal approach process for implementing such a policy, from development to implementation. Who should be involved, when, and how?
3. What are the most tangible ways to develop public trust and pre-empt misinformation in a context like Ghana's?

Section E: Conclusion

1. Is there anything important about this event, its communication, or potential solutions that we haven't covered that you feel is important to share?
2. Thank you for your invaluable insights. Would you be willing to be contacted for a brief follow-up clarification if needed? The anonymized transcript will be available for your review upon request.