

A comparative study of driver training regulatory systems in Ghana and Sweden, from the Safe System Approach perspective.

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Abstract

Background

Road traffic accidents is a significant global health problem. The World Health Organisation reported that the number of global road traffic fatalities reached 1.35 million in 2016. Worst affected are people within 5 – 29 years old, vulnerable road users (VRUs) e.g., pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists, particularly in developing countries. For instance, the annual rate of road fatalities (died within 30 days of crash) in Ghana was estimated by the government to be 7.63 per 100,000 population in 2016 and 8.31 per 100,000 population in 2020. Thus, increasing by about 9%. Thus, despite the implementation of three national road safety strategies (from 2001 to 2020), Ghana's goal of reducing road traffic fatalities by 50% by the year 2020 has not been achieved. At the same time, countries like Sweden have been far more successful in reducing traffic fatalities and serious injuries. The 2021 annual rate of road fatalities in Sweden was 2.0 per 100,000 population, which is about 76% lower than the Ghanaian rate. This difference in the two countries is due to several factors such as traffic safety policy, transport system design, safety culture, driver training, etc. Previous research confirmed that most road crashes are caused by human factors, e.g., errors and violations. The Safe System Approach is widely considered effective for improving traffic safety. One of the guiding principles of The Safe System Approach is that road traffic safety is a shared responsibility among road designers, builders, managers, road users and vehicles. Thus, it opposes the simplistic claim of over blaming only the road user. Mindful of the evidence that developing countries are the worst affected by road traffic deaths and injuries, and lacking a Safe System Approach, a comparative study of driving licencing, teaching, and testing regulatory systems in Ghana and Sweden was conducted.

Aim

The object of the study was to identify formal requirements that needs to be enhanced in the Ghanaian driving training and regulatory system, from a Safe System Approach perspective and best practices.

Methods

Document analysis of driving licencing, driver training and testing requirements and materials in the two countries was performed. The analysis is carried out only for Category B (vehicles up to 3500 kg) as it is the commonest type of driving licence in both countries. The analysis is divided into three actors, i.e., learners, driving instructors, and driving examiners.

Findings

The results suggest that:

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- there are similarities in driver licensing and regulatory systems in the two countries in aspects such as minimum age and health requirements.
- there are also major differences in aspects such as learners, private training (layman), age for starting to train, compulsory education, goals and context for driving, eco-driving, written examination, and probatory period, availability of training facilities for driving instructor training, the duration and comprehensiveness of driver instructor training.

Conclusion and policy implication

Further development in the regulation of private training, the comprehensiveness (goals and context of training) of training of drivers and driving instructors and, decentralisation in the provision of instructor training, are required to improve driver training and regulatory systems in Ghana.

From the Safe System Approach perspective, it is clear seen that the Ghanaian system for teaching learners is not aligned with best practices, i.e., teaching learners higher order driving skills such as risk avoidance, modal choice, route planning. Best practices also show that experience is an important factor while driving. In Sweden, it is allowed to start practicing at a lower age (16), while in Ghana one can obtain his/her driving licence aged 18 with very little experience. Moreover, there is no probatory period either. These differences might have a huge impact on traffic safety when comparing both countries.

The compulsory training courses on risk make Swedish drivers more aware of risky behaviours and the consequences of such behaviours. For instance, the impact of speed in the braking distance and on sharp curves as well as on slippery roads. With these theoretical and hands-on experiences, traffic safety is increased on Swedish roads. Whereas, in Ghana such compulsory education is not in place, leaving Ghanaian newly examined drivers with relatively very little expedience on such important factors while driving (e.g., speed, braking distance, curves, slippery roads)

Our findings point out specific aspects where the driving training and regulation can be aligned to best practices in Ghana, which can contribute significantly to achieving the country's road traffic safety targets.

Keywords: *driver training, driver license, Safe System Approach.*