

Quality Basic Education in Ghana: Prescription, practice and problems

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1. Introduction

The sixth EFA goal aims at improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence for all so that recognised and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. However, the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 issued by UNESCO (2004) reports that “in the many countries that are striving to guarantee all children the right to education, the focus on access often overshadows attention to quality. Yet quality determines how much and how well children learn and the extent to which their education translates into a range of personal, social and developmental benefits” (p. 4). The Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 therefore stressed the quality of education as a prime determinant of whether Education for All is achieved. The second goal set out in the Dakar framework commits nations to the provision of primary education of good quality for the achievement of better cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes.

Even though Goal 6 of the Dakar Framework for Action emphasizes the need to improve all aspects of the quality of education, Schaefer (2000) in a global study on “Assessing Learning Achievement” indicates that African countries are among countries with less than 50% of its children achieving literacy, numeracy and life skills mastery. Schaefer found that a large proportion of children do not have basic functional skills to read, write and enumerate after year four of their educational experience. The UNESCO (2004) report confirms these findings and shows that too many pupils are leaving school without mastering a minimum set of cognitive and non-cognitive skills.

The Government of Ghana has shown enormous commitment to the achievement of “Education for All” (EFA) through its poverty reduction strategy. Central to the Government of Ghana’s (GoG) Poverty Strategy Reduction (GPRS) is the provision of quality education. One of the key quality of education policy indicators under the Education Sector Plan (ESP) and GPRS II is to improve the quality of teaching and learning for enhanced pupil/student achievement and the improvement of the quality of academic and research programmes. Under the GPRS II the policy is to improve the quality of teaching and learning and enhance the linkage between academic research in all sectors of the economy (MOESS, 2007). It seems highly likely that the achievement of universal participation in education is fundamentally dependent upon the quality of education available.

Factors usually considered when determining the quality of education can be grouped into

input variables, process and systematic factors, outcome variables (such as examination results), and proxy measures (such as repetition and dropout rates). The questions that remain are what are the critical factors that determine the quality of education offered by schools and how do these factors influence the performance of learners? This seems to differ from country to country as the goals of education are not the same. In Ghana, the measurement of the quality of education has focused principally on resource inputs and outcomes. Hence, the quality of education is measured against stated curriculum goals and objectives, and a range of elements including the level of student achievement, the qualification of teachers, pupil-teacher ratio, the availability of textbooks, school facilities and equipment, and cognitive achievement. Whether education provided is of good or poor quality depends on the degree to which it measures up to the goals and objectives prescribed.

This paper will therefore look at the prescription of what pupils are expected to achieve, the conditions under which they are expected to achieve them and the resources which will be available to them. The paper will then look at what is obtained in practice, the problems that need to be confronted and measures which need to be taken to ameliorate the situation to improve the quality of education at the basic school level.

2. Prescription and Practice

2.1 Curricula Aspirations

At the primary school level the teaching of mathematics emphasizes mathematical knowledge and skills that should help the young person to develop competence in basic numeracy so as to function effectively in society. The skills taught include the ability to use numbers competently, read and interpret numeric data, reason logically, solve problems involving calculations and mathematical reasoning, as well as communicate effectively with other people using accurate mathematical data and interpretations. Also, pupils are required to develop interest in the use of mathematics and the ability to conduct investigations using mathematical ideas. It is the acquisition of these qualities and the important quality of functional mathematics that education in Ghana aims to emphasize in the teaching and learning of mathematics in the school system (See CRDD, 2007c).

In the case of science teaching and learning, the goal is to raise the level of scientific literacy of all students and equip them with the relevant basic integrated scientific knowledge needed for their own survival and for the development of the country. It is also expected that scientific experiences in school will cultivate in pupils an interest and love for science that will urge some of them to seek further studies in science as preparation for careers in science. Some of the positive attitudes and values pupils are expected to develop include the spirit of curiosity, creativity and critical thinking; skills, habits of mind and attitudes necessary for scientific inquiry; the spirit of curiosity for investigating and understanding their environment; communicate scientific ideas effectively; and use scientific concepts for explaining their own lives and the world around them. For successful study of Science at the basic school level, the curriculum

requires that pupils should have good observational skills, mathematical skills and communication skills (CRDD, 2007b)

As the official language, English is the language of government and administration. It is the language of commerce, the learned professions and the media. As an international language, it is the most widely used on the internet and in most parts of the world. In Ghana, English is the medium of instruction from Primary 4 in the school system. According to the English language curriculum, “this means that success in education at all levels depends, to a very large extent, on the individual’s proficiency in the language. It is for these and other reasons that English Language is a major subject of study in Ghanaian schools” (CRDD, 2007a, p ii). The learning of English language in the basic school is to develop in pupils the basic language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing; attain high proficiency in English to help pupils in their study of other subjects as well as in the study of English at higher levels; cultivate the habit of and interest in reading; and communicate effectively in English.

2.2 Quality of Teachers

Findings from a study in Sri Lanka reported by Tatto (2001) show that first, teacher development makes a difference in what the teacher does in the classroom, and what the teacher does in the classroom is positively correlated with pupil achievement. Second, teachers who undergo a teacher development programme do perform differently from those who do not. While the first are more informed about the subject matter and pedagogy, the latter seem to turn to traditional instruction-probably derived from their own personal experience as students- to direct their teaching. The issue of providing quality education to pupils is directly related to the quality of teachers in the system. Hence, attention must be paid to the process of teaching and the knowledge teachers need to have in order to teach properly. The Ministry of Education aims at providing quality teachers through the upgrading of teachers at the basic school level to at least a Diploma status. Teacher development as a vehicle to increase quality education has become more prominent in Ghana in recent years.

Table 1 shows the proportion of classroom teachers with proper professional training at the different levels in Basic education. At the KG level, the percentage of trained teachers increased from 2006/07 to 2007/08. At the primary level, the percentage of trained teachers in public schools has been decreasing over the years both nationally and for the 53 deprived districts. The disparities between the deprived districts and the national averages have been increasing over the same period. The situation is similar at the Junior High School level. These trends can at least partially be explained by the increased number of national youth employment placements in schools.

Table 1. Percentage of Trained Teachers at the Basic School Level

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Kindergarten				35.3%	42.9%
Primary National	73.9%	72.4%	70.8%	62.1%	59.4%
Primary Deprived	55.3%	53.2%	55.9%	42.8%	37.2%
Junior High National	84.2%	83.5%	85.5%	77.2%	76.4%
Junior High Deprived	75.9%	73.9%	77.7%	64.2%	62.9%

Source: MoESS (2008)

The ten districts with the lowest percentages of trained teachers are all deprived districts. Since trained teachers are a key aspect for the delivery of quality education, the Teacher Education Division (TED) has developed a number of programmes to upgrade the qualifications of teachers.

2.3 Pupil-Teacher Ratio

Fewer children to a teacher promote increased attention to individual pupils in the class. This gives the teacher the opportunity to pay more attention to pupils with learning difficulties and to assist them. The pupil teacher ratio (PTR) is therefore another key indication of quality and efficiency in Ghanaian schools. The target PTR at the KG level is 25:1, at the primary level 35:1 and at the Junior High level 25:1. These targets are much lower than established international norms.

Table 2 shows that in kindergartens, there has been a sharp increase between 2006/07 and 2007/08, mainly owing to the large increases in enrolment in kindergartens. The PTR is now 51:5. The new policy of compulsory kindergarten is relatively new and hence the number of trained teachers is not high enough to keep pace with enrolment in kindergarten.

The national average at the primary level is now 34:1. This has almost reached the target of 35:1. However, in the deprived districts, even though the PTR is decreasing, it is still higher than the national, which is 34:1. The national average at the Junior High level is 17.4:1. Again, in the deprived districts the PTR is higher but is decreasing, towards the national goal.

Table 2. Pupil-Teacher Ratio at the Basic School Level

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08
Kindergarten National				32.8	51.5
Primary National	34.0	34.9	35.7	33.5	34.1
Primary Deprived	39.5	41.9	40.2	36.3	38.0
Junior High National	18.6	19.0	19.4	17.6	17.4
Junior High Deprived	20.9	22.0	22.5	18.9	19.1

Source: MoESS (2008)

There is much disparity in the pupil-teacher ratio between urban and rural districts. The PTRs in all the major metropolitan districts are in the low twenties. The PTRs in very rural and

deprived areas are in the region of 40-60:1. The PTRs demonstrate poor deployment of teachers, over-supply of teachers in response to reported vacancies and very light subject teaching loads (MoESS, 2008).

2.4 Textbooks

The quality and availability of learning materials strongly affect what teachers can do. According to Howson, Keital and Kilpatrick (1982) “the textbook continues to be a major influence on classroom: in many cases it still effectively determines the curriculum” (p. 61). At the primary and JHS level, each student is expected to have 3 core textbooks out of 9 textbooks. These textbooks are: English language, Mathematics and Science. This implies a ratio of core textbooks per pupil of 3:1.

There is a better ratio at the JHS level than for the primary, potentially because the increase in enrolment in JHS has been less than in primary. For curricula which depend heavily on the use of textbooks by teachers and pupils, this ratio is woefully inadequate. The situation on the ground is even worse. Currently, the pupil-core textbook ratio (PCTBR) at the primary school level is 1.68:1. This means that each student only has one or two textbooks. The JHS national core textbook ratio is 2.5:1. Wide disparities however, exist among districts. The fact that not all pupils have textbooks affects negatively the effectiveness of lessons since the Ghanaian basic school curricula are heavily dependent on textbooks. Lack of textbooks means children have to depend very heavily on what teachers write on the chalkboard. Pupils also do not get the opportunity to use textbooks at home for practice.

2.5 Pupils’ Cognitive Achievement

Cognitive development is identified as a major explicit objective of all education systems (UNESCO, 2005). However, if quality is defined in terms of cognitive achievement, ways of securing increased quality are neither straightforward nor universal. Thus, from the cognitive development perspective, quality exists when students demonstrate knowledge. Assessment of learners’ progress, using cognitive tests, serves a number of purposes. It can provide an indication of how well items in the curriculum are being learned and understood. Also, it can provide a signal as to how well learners have done at the main exit points from the school system, thereby typically helping educational institutions or employers to select those best qualified for further education. The MOE has put in place or availed itself to the following assessment tools:

- (a) School Education Assessment (SEA)
- (b) National Education Assessment (NEA)
- (c) Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE)
- (d) Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)

The SEA is an assessment intended for school-level diagnostic use. Designed as a multiple choice and constructed response examination, the assessment measures how well students can complete core objectives in mathematics and English language. Results of the SEA at the school

level are not intended for comparison across schools and regions. Rather, the assessment results highlight the areas of English language and mathematics which need to be addressed.

Parents in each community can also be provided information through School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAM) on how their school performed on each of the assessments. The results of the SEA are meant to help teachers and school leaders improve the focus and content delivery in the classroom. The results are therefore not intended to serve as an overall measure of student achievement.

The SEA examination was implemented for the first time in Ghana in July 2006. Approximately 515,000 students participated in the examination across ten regions of the country. The examination was administered at the Primary 2 and Primary 4 levels in mathematics and English language. Overall results on the Primary 2 English examination highlighted that students were able to use appropriate greetings, tell time, read words and phrases, as well as read short sentences.

The National Education Assessment (NEA) is an indicator of Ghana's education quality at the basic level. The minimum level of competency on the test implies achieving a score of 35%. The score required to achieve proficiency is 55%. The test was administered to primary 3 and primary 6 across the country in 2005 and 2007. The results of NEA can be compared across the districts and regions in Ghana.

The Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) is the examination taken at the end of the basic education cycle, which determines whether or not a pupil is able to progress on to second cycle education. The BECE examination is structured so as to ensure that approximately 60% of students each year obtain aggregate 6-30, and so little variation is to be expected. The results of the BECE gives more of a relative ranking of students since each subject test score is reported in stanines, a statistical measure derived by dividing the normal bell curve into nine intervals for purposes of standardized reporting. Since the top mark in a subject is reported as having a score of one, the best aggregate score a student can have from taking six subject tests is a six.

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is a worldwide assessment which takes place every four years and provides data about trends in mathematics and science achievement over time. It assesses the knowledge and skills of students aged 9-10 and 13-14 in over 60 countries, and enables researchers to collect extensive background information about the quantity, quality, and content of teaching, which can be used to make comparisons among participating countries. Findings from the survey are used to inform education policy and to improve teaching and learning in mathematics and science for students around the world. Ghana participated in the TIMSS assessment in 2003 and 2007 with students in JHS2.

2.6 Pupils' Performance in SEA

The SEA examination was implemented for the first time in Ghana in July 2006 and was to be repeated in 2008. Approximately 515,000 students participated in the examination across ten Regions of Ghana. The mathematics and English language examinations were administered to pupils in the Primary 2 and Primary 4. The results show that Primary 2 pupils had difficulty with

listening comprehension and higher order analysis skills, particularly reading comprehension. Pupils encountered difficulties in reading a passage and answering questions where the answers were not directly in the text – but required a level of understanding and abstraction. Scores on these types of items showed that 40% to 50% of pupils were able to select the appropriate answers. In the Primary 2 mathematics test, pupils appeared to be learning basic addition and subtraction well. The results showed that more instruction time on multiplication, fractions and ordinal numbers is needed (see MoESS, 2008).

Primary 4 pupils struggled with the correct use of subject and verbs and, similar to Primary 2 pupils, reading passages and correctly responding to questions which required inference were also difficult for them. The results of the test suggest that Primary 4 pupils require remediation and additional support in fractions, writing numbers in words, and concepts of basic geometry. These results cut across schools, districts and regions in the country.

2.7 Pupils' Performance in NEA

Table 3 gives the scores for 2005 and 2007. As can be seen in Table 3, the mean score was just above the minimum competency level for primary 3 English, primary 3 Math and primary 6 Math. The scores for primary 6 English language were slightly better. Furthermore, between 2005 and 2007, there has been a decrease in the percentage of students achieving minimum level of competency for primary 3 English and Math. The scores increased slightly for primary 6 English and primary 6 Math by 9% and 8.5% respectively. These increases demonstrate an improvement in learning at the primary 6 level. However, overall, the scores are still quite low. Usually, a country would hope that approximately 75% of children achieve the minimum level of competency but on average, the scores are well below that level. Furthermore, the percentage of students achieving proficiency is very low.

Table3 NEA Scores for 2005 and 2007

	2005			2007		
	Mean	Minimum Competency	Proficiency	Mean	Minimum Competency	Proficiency
primary 3 English	38.1	50.5	16.4	37.6	50.1	15.0
primary 3 Math	36.6	47.2	18.6	35.0	42.6	14.6
primary 6 English	43.1	63.9	23.6	44.2	69.7	26.1
primary 6 Math	34.4	42.7	9.8	35.7	46.2	10.8

Source: MoESS (2008)

The mean scores in both mathematics and English language were below 50% at primary 3 and primary 4 in 2005 and 2007. Less than half of the pupils in primary 3 obtained the competency level of 35%. In the case of primary 6 mathematics and science, about two-thirds of the pupils achieved the minimum competency level. A greater proportion of pupils in primary 3 and primary 6 were not proficient in English language and mathematics. The results were however better in English language.

The results in Table 3 also show that about 90% of primary 6 pupils did not reach proficiency in mathematics in 2005 and 2007. In English language, only about one-fifth of primary 6 pupils achieved proficiency. In the case of primary 3 pupils only about 15% achieved proficiency in mathematics and English language. The performance of primary 3 and primary 6 pupils in the NEA is therefore very disappointing.

The NEA results also indicate that the girls did slightly better than the boys in English in both primary 3 and primary 6. However, boys significantly performed better than girls in mathematics in primary 3 and primary 6. A higher proportion of boys than girls reached proficiency in both primary 3 and primary 6 in mathematics.

When the performance of the private schools was compared with that of public schools in 2005, it was found that private schools performed significantly better. The mean scores of primary 3 pupils in the private schools were 69.7% for English language and 60.3% for mathematics. The same trend was seen in English language and mathematics at Primary 6. In the private schools, the mean scores percent for English in primary 3 (69.7%) and primary 6 (65.6%) was higher than that for mathematics at 60.3% and 59.2% in primary 3 and primary 6 respectively. A higher percentage of pupils in private schools also reached the 35% and 55% criteria for English language and mathematics compared to pupils in public schools. These results seem to indicate that Mathematics appears to pose a general problem for primary school children in Ghana. Generally, pupils' performance in mathematics and science was very poor suggesting that pupils are not mastering minimum competencies in English language and mathematics.

2.8 Pupils' Performance in TIMSS

Ghana participated in the TIMSS in 2003 and 2007. The results are shown in Table 4. Ghana was at the bottom of the league table of participating countries just ahead of South Africa. The international average score for mathematics was 467, and Ghana scored 276. The international average score for science was 474 and Ghana scored 255. In 2007, Ghana registered improvement in scores in mathematics and science. Ghana's score, 309, was one of the lowest, and it is statistically significantly lower than the TIMSS scale average of 500. This poor performance placed Ghana at the 47th position on the overall mathematics achievement results table when the 48 participating countries were ranked by their mean performances. Ghana's score was lower than those obtained by all the participating African countries. Ghana's performance level has improved from that of 2003. The 2007 score, 309, was significantly higher than the 2003 score of 276, a 33 point increase. In summary, Ghana's performance in mathematics at JHS2, though improved significantly, remains among the lowest in Africa and the world.

In science, Ghana's score, 303, was one of the lowest, and it is statistically significantly lower than the TIMSS scale average of 500. This poor performance placed Ghana at the 48th position on the overall science achievement results table when the 48 participating countries were ranked by their mean performance. Ghana's score was lower than those obtained by all the participating African countries. However, Ghana's performance level in 2007 improved over that in 2003. The 2007 score, 303, was significantly higher than the 2003 score of 255, a 48 point

increase. In summary, Ghana's performance in science at JHS2, though improved significantly, remains among the lowest in Africa and the world.

In mathematics, the performance of boys (319) was significantly higher than that of girls (297). In science the performance of boys (316) was significantly higher than that of girls (288). Comparing IIMSS assessments in 2003 and 2007, both boys and girls improved in all the content areas as well as cognitive domains.

Table 4: Average Score on TIMSS 2003 and 2007 for JHS2 Students

Countries	Mathematics		Science	
	2003	2007	2003	2007
Singapore	605	593	578	567
International Average	467	500	474	500
Tunisia	410	420	404	445
Morocco	387	-	396	-
Botswana	366	364	365	355
Ghana	276	309	255	303
South Africa	264	-	244	-

Source: Anamuah-Mensah et al (2009)

2.9 Pupils' Performance in the BECE

Table 5 gives the proportion of students obtaining an aggregate score of 6-30 on the BECE in 2007. An aggregate score of 6-30 is considered a passing score, but realistically students must score in the range 6-18 to have any chance for admission to SHS. It is clear from the table that with the exception of Greater Accra region, girls in all other regions lagged behind boys in achievement. This pattern of achievement is not limited to 2007 and raises questions about resource allocation and supply of qualified teachers among the Regions. With respect to achieving gender equity, the issue is not only getting parity in the enrollment numbers, but in the quality of education boys and girls receive as well.

Table 5. BECE Results-Percentage of Boys and Girls with Aggregate 6-30 by Region

Region	Boys	Girls
Upper West	62.08	37.92
Greater Accra	49.91	50.09
Eastern	57.08	42.92
Central	57.94	42.06
Western	58.59	41.41
Ashanti	55.97	44.03
Brong Ahafo	61.59	38.41
Volta	60.35	39.65
Northern	69.86	30.14
Upper East	60.55	39.45
All	62.08	37.92

Source: MoESS (2008)

2.10 School Governance and Management

In order to strengthen school governance and community engagement, all schools are required to form School Management Committees (SMC) by 2005. Membership of SMCs includes representatives from local communities, parents and teachers. The SMCs are expected to support headteachers in the general management of the schools and assist them in identifying priority areas for school development and mobilising community support. Parents in each community can also be provided information through School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAM) by circuit supervisors on how their school performed on each of the assessments.

Each public basic school was expected to have a School Management Committee (SMC) in place by December 2004 and to be active by 2005. Each school is also expected to have a School Performance Improvement Plan (SPIP). The SPIP is a requirement for accessing the capitation grant, and must be endorsed by the SMC. The SPIP which is to be produced on an annual basis outline the key actions the school will take to improve school management, the school environment, and more effective teaching and learning practices. Circuit supervisors also monitor teaching and learning in schools and give support to teachers in the classroom.

The figures for SMCs in public basic schools show that by the end of 2004 less than two-thirds of schools had established SMCs. In addition to SMCs, all schools are required to produce School Performance Improvement Plans (SPIP) on an annual basis, which outline the key actions the school will take to improve school management.

3. Challenges and Problems

There is concern that the rapid expansion of basic education would undermine quality provision especially where no effective strategies are in place to train and retain teachers. There is therefore the potential risk to initial gains in enrolment since demand may soften if quality deteriorates. With regard to quality and relevance it is generally agreed that more needs to be done.

It is one thing to achieve 100% access and another to provide quality. The number of children who participate in schooling and the number of years of schooling by themselves are therefore not as important as the quality of education they receive. If children attend school but are not able to achieve better learning outcomes, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills, then they do not have meaningful access to education. Unfortunately, the quantitative aspect of education rather than the qualitative aspect has become the main focus of attention in recent years for policy makers and governments (UNESCO, 2004). Quality of education seems to have become a subordinated priority to quantity of education as a result of policies seeking to improve educational access in Ghana. In many cases it seems educational expansion has come at the expense of quality.

It is very clear that even though PTR, PCTBR and BECE results are essential, they are not sufficient indicators in assessing the quality of education. What seems to be equally important is how input resources into schools and classrooms are utilised to promote quality education. The

poor quality of pupil learning reflects the poor quality of teaching. Most teachers lack supervision of and feedback on their instructional practices. The quality of basic education is quite dependent on effective supervision and monitoring, and although, the GES has designed an administrative structure including an Inspectorate Division of the GES and the establishment of circuit supervision in all circuits within an education district, supervision is perceived to be extremely weak and ineffective (MoESS, 2008). School heads and teachers in the schools are left to do their own thing. They attend school and teach as and when they like. Lateness and absenteeism are thus very rampant in the schools and teacher-pupil contact hours are consequently very low (MoESS, 2008).

There is a general perception in Ghana that educational standards are low in public urban and rural schools compared to private schools. This is because compared to public schools private schools have generally been performing better at the BECE and in SEA and NEA examinations. Many parents therefore continue to patronise private schools as a means of getting quality education for their wards. In 2007/08, private school enrolment stood at 24% of the total national enrolment of 9,507. In 2005/06 the number of private schools stood at 2,990. In 2007/08 this number has increased by 36% to 4,068. Increasingly, Ghanaians are developing an individualistic outlook to education where looking for a good school and even paying for it is becoming common even though the Ministry of Education continues to emphasise fee-free education in public schools. The major differences between private and public schools are the superior English language facility of the pupils; greater availability and use of textbooks by pupils; and more access to whole-class extra classes as well as special tuition for pupils (Ampiah, 2008).

Language is the most important tool in the teaching/learning process. The choice of the language of instruction used in school is of utmost importance. Initial instruction in the learner's first language improves learning outcomes. The importance of its effective use in basic education cannot therefore be over-emphasized. In basic education there have been two languages: L1 being the child's vernacular and L2 being English Language which has a much wider use in education. For many decades, the official policy regarding these two languages in education has been the use of vernacular as a medium of instruction as well as one of the subjects to be studied at lower primary (P1-P3), while the English language is a subject. From primary 4 onwards the English language becomes the medium of instruction as well as a subject. This policy seemed to work almost perfectly until it began to generate a controversy between policy makers and language professionals. Policy makers now regard this policy as unworkable and they believe it has been the cause of a lowering of standards in basic education. Policy makers therefore proposed the use of English Language as a medium of instruction right from Day 1 in Primary 1. Language experts, however, disagree with this new language policy in favour of the original policy.

Following a series of small-scale efforts that established the effectiveness and feasibility of mother-tongue literacy instruction in Ghanaian primary schools, in 2007, the Ministry of Education has taken the decision to develop and extend quality bilingual literacy instruction to all primary school learners within a two-year period. This has led to the rapid development of the

National Literacy Accelerated Programme (NALAP), a transitional bilingual literacy program in 11 Ghanaian languages for kindergarten through grade three.

The exclusive use of the local language for instruction has always faced very serious implementation challenges. Some teachers can neither speak, nor read the local language of the locality where they teach; most classes in the urban areas are multilingual; and textbooks are written in the English language while children are instructed in the local language using these textbooks. It must also be noted that:

The (TIMSS, 2007) study revealed that a majority of Ghanaian JHS2 students (66%) never spoke English at home or did so infrequently. Home language was found to be associated with lower achievement in science and mathematics. The poor grasp of basic scientific and mathematical concepts by the majority of the students had been attributed to their inability to read and comprehend the English language used in the test (Anamuah-Mensah, Mereku & Ampiah, 2009 p. xviii).

Teaching and learning methods which emphasise the inquiry method and social constructivism where learners construct their own knowledge and understandings based on what they already know and the socio-cultural context in which they find themselves (UNESCO, 2004) were not very popular with the teachers. This approach to teaching has been claimed by some education analysts to be very suitable for helping pupils develop positive attitudes and process skills through hands-on and minds-on activities (UNESCO, 2004) which the Ghanaian basic school curricula appears to encourage. However, these methods do not seem to resonate well with the Ghanaian basic school curricula (Ampiah, 2008). Rather “teaching is largely by exposition with little opportunities for learners to engage in practical and problem solving activities, which generate deeper understanding” (Anamuah-Mensah et al., 2009, p. xx)

Ghanaian primary and junior high schools are filled with a high proportion of untrained teachers. This is because the percentage of trained teachers in the basic education sector is not increasing in line with the output of the 38 Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) as retention in the sector is poor. The attrition rate is as high as 5%. To fill the gap created by the lack of trained teachers, increasing numbers of untrained teachers are recruited to fill teaching vacancies. The number of untrained teachers at the basic school level stood at 47% in primary school and 33% at the JHS level in 2007 (MoESS, 2007). This has serious implications for the delivery of quality education to pupils in basic schools.

Figures for SMCs in public basic schools show that by the end of 2004, less than two-thirds of schools had established SMCs, which may imply that many head teachers and communities do not see the necessity of SMCs. A study by Ampiah and Yamada (2009) in two districts in the Central Region shows that head teachers and the District Directors of Education (DDEs) seem to give the impression that the roles of the SMCs are not very clear to a majority of head teachers as they were not unanimous about the roles and responsibilities of SMCs in the schools. Areas where SMCs seem not to be functioning very well were finance and school governance. This is not surprising since head teachers did not see financial and governance issues as being in the domain of SMCs. Generally, SMCs were not functioning in the two Districts studied.

The role SMCs should play seems not to be acceptable to some head teachers. This creates a bottleneck in the administration of schools. In some cases, the school heads simply work with the SMC chairman to make decisions without the consultation of the whole committee. Some head teachers were therefore performing some of the functions designated for SMCs. No wonder, SMCs are largely seen to be ineffective.

Many schools have SPIPs, however, they are often not endorsed by the SMCs and the PBME is unaware of any effort to check whether an up-to-date SPIP is in place and is endorsed by the SMC before giving the school its capitation grant. Involvement of the community in the teaching and learning process is generally low due to the high illiteracy rate and apathy. The School Performance Appraisal (SPAM) which is to be used for discussing pupils' test results with parents and members of the community is no longer active (MoESS, 2008).

4. Suggested Measures to Tackle Education Quality

The measures to improve education quality in Ghana is aptly summarised in the Global Monitoring Report published by UNESCO (2008). According to the report "Improving quality of education is one of the most effective strategies for strengthening demand. Enhanced quality requires a focus on smooth progression and learning outcomes, rather than pupil headcounts. Increasing textbook supply and quality, strengthening teacher training and support, and ensuring that class size is conducive to learning and that children are taught in an appropriate language are key elements in raising quality" (p.77).

If the government of Ghana and the Ministry of Education will pay attention to these issues, then good quality education could be delivered to basic school pupils sooner than later.

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