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ACCELERATE ED+ POLICY BRIEF

Advancing Education Solutions: Research for Scaling up Education Innovations in Emergencies and FCV-Affected Areas of Burkina Faso, Ghana, and Nigeria

Education in Fragile, Conflict, and Violence Contexts in Ghana's Upper East Region: Situational Analysis of Out-of-School Children and Education Innovations

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Abstract

The policy brief presents a situational analysis of education in fragile, conflict, and violence (FCV) contexts in Ghana's Upper East Region, focusing on Kassena Nankana, Bongo, and Bawku West districts with varying risk profiles. It aims to assess the status of education and the impact of education innovations on out-of-school children (OOSC). Using a mixed-methods approach that combines literature review with structured and semi-structured field interviews involving government and non-government stakeholders, key informants, household heads, school leaders, teachers, and students, the study found that Bawku West recorded the highest number of OOSC, with 234 dropouts (52% boys and 48% girls). Insecurity accounted for 89% of school closures, which lasted an average of four days and up to 19 days. These disruptions exacerbated learning challenges, alongside significant teacher shortages, high attrition, uneven deployment—particularly in insecure areas and low female teacher representation. Less than half of schools had structured psychosocial support, despite 41.7% hosting displaced learners. Although gender parity among OOSC was nearly achieved, structural drivers such as poverty and displacement remained critical. Many children engaged in labour during school closures, and fewer than 5% were enrolled in Accelerated Education Programmes (AEP), reflecting broader gaps in education innovations, including limited remedial classes, radio learning, and mobile education systems. Overall, these compounded challenges especially in medium-risk areas like Bawku West have increased OOSC. Existing interventions, such as Complementary Basic Education (CBE) and psychosocial support, remain inconsistently implemented and heavily reliant on external funding. This underscores the need for recommendations that emphasize integrating crisis-responsive education into national strategies, expanding flexible learning pathways, improving teacher retention, strengthening institutional coordination, and investing in adaptive data systems capable of responding effectively to instability.

Introduction

This policy brief examines the state of education in Fragile, Conflict, and Violence (FCV) contexts in Ghana's Upper East Region, where recurring insecurity, poverty, and displacement continue to disrupt learning and limit access to quality education. Focusing on Kassena Nankana, Bongo, and Bawku West districts, the brief highlights how these overlapping challenges are increasing the number of out-of-school children and weakening the effectiveness of existing education systems and interventions. It underscores the urgency of strengthening education responses that are resilient, inclusive, and adaptable to crisis conditions, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized learners

Key Findings

Effect of school disruption and structural constraints
– Based on the household interviews in the study districts, 89 percent of school closures are a result of insecurity.

Although most of the school closures are temporary, they significantly disrupt learning continuity. On average, school closures last four days per incident, however, in

some cases last up to 19 days, affecting curriculum coverage and interrupting learner's progression. These disruptions have direct consequences for school participation. This is evident from the data which shows the number of out-of-school children from study districts increased by 90.1 percent (171 – 325) after closures. The cumulative school closure significantly contributes to pushing vulnerable children out of the system. Data from the head teacher interviews indicate that these interruptions accumulate over time, reduces instructional time and weakens student engagement. The disruptions interact with existing structural constraints which makes it difficult for the system to sustain consistent participation and learning.

Teacher deployment – Teacher deployment across the three districts remains varies as many trained teachers are unwilling to accept postings to conflict-prone and insecure areas, while others leave shortly after deployment due to safety concerns. In the 2024/2025 academic year, for instance, teachers were not deployed to the Bawku West despite 214 recorded vacancies. The retention of teachers posted to these areas compound these challenges. This is reflected in the growing number of teachers applying for transfers based on insecurities as the main reason. Teacher shortages discourage school attendance, with some learners turning to illegal artisanal mining (galamsey) because it is perceived as a quick source of income.

Psychosocial Support - Psychosocial and learner support systems remain limited across the three districts. Only about 10% of schools report the availability of structured psychosocial support initiatives and/or gender-sensitive materials, while 33% have functional counselling services. This highlights significant gaps in basic support provision. These gaps constrain schools' capacity to support learners affected by trauma, stress, and displacement in FCV contexts. Underlying these limitations is weak system-level capacity, as FGDs with teachers indicate limited integration of psychosocial training within teacher training institutions, and 75% of schools report no teacher training in child protection or emergency response. These findings point to systemic gaps in addressing psychosocial needs of learners, with implications for their participation, wellbeing, and ability to engage effectively in learning.

Gender-related factors – At initial stages, the study shows that girls' participation is almost equal to boys (boys 49.42%, girls 50.58%), but this balance diminishes as girls reach adolescence. At this level, dropout risks

increase due to factors such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and household labour responsibilities. These social pressures are reinforced by structural and institutional gaps within the education system. For instance, 75% of the surveyed schools lack adequate menstrual hygiene management facilities. This contributes to absenteeism among adolescent girls. Fifty seven percent (57%) of the schools have anti-sexual harassment policies, limiting protections that support their continued engagement. These factors contribute to a gradual disengagement of girls from the education system as they transition into adolescence.

Structural and contextual drivers of educational exclusion - Multiple interconnected factors contribute to educational exclusion across the districts. Conflict and insecurities disrupt schooling and discourage attendance, while displacement and migration increase pressure on host schools and interrupt learning continuity. Economic vulnerabilities compound educational exclusion. With over two-thirds of household earning below GHS 1,000 per month and 58% relying on informal livelihoods, most families depend on children's involvement in income-generating activities to survive. Galamsey is increasingly becoming a preferred option for many young boys, often at the expense of schooling. These economic pressures not only reduce attendance but also increase the risk of permanent dropout. Harmful social norms reinforce gender inequalities, and limited access to alternative learning pathways reduces opportunities for out-of-school children to re-enter education.

Gaps in access to education innovations –

Although several education innovations exist, their reach and effectiveness remain limited. Accelerated Education Programmes provide important pathways for out-of-school and over-age learners, yet access remains uneven, particularly in the most affected areas (11% in Bawku West, 14.3% in Kassena Nankana, and 57.1% in Bongo). The limited availability is reflected in the low enrolment of learners in AEPs (5%) and catch-up programmes (7.7%). Remedial learning initiatives are also inconsistently available and often depend on individual teacher efforts rather than institutionalised approaches. Head teachers revealed that the absence of AEPs limits the reintegration of displaced learners into the schooling system.

Fragmented learner support and alternative education approaches - Psychosocial support initiatives for learners remain fragmented. There was limited training for teachers and a lack of dedicated

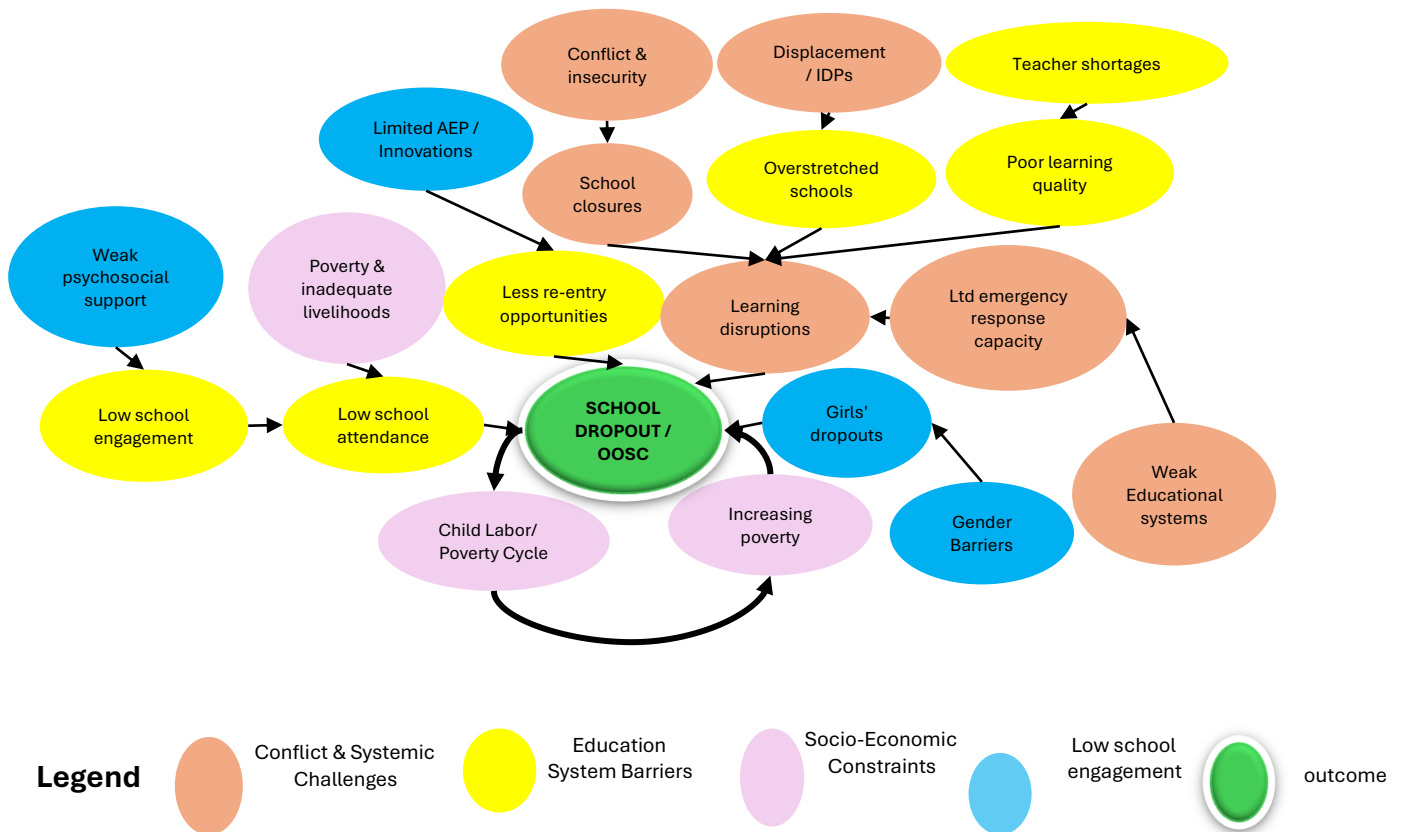
counsellors in many schools. Gender-focused interventions, including mentoring programmes and support for pregnant girls, have improved awareness but remain insufficiently scaled. Also, alternative learning approaches such as radio-based education and mobile learning are absent, limiting continuous learning during school closures.

Policy and Institutional Gaps - At the policy level, several institutional gaps constrain effective EiE implementation. Although national policies recognise the importance of EiE, integration into routine planning and budgeting remains limited. This leads to reactive rather than proactive responses. There is also a disconnect between national frameworks and district-level implementation, particularly in the most fragile areas. District education officials disclosed that coordination among key actors remains weak, causing fragmented interventions and uneven coverage. The data showed that district-level institutions often lack the capacity, personnel, and resources required to respond effectively to education disruptions. While psychosocial support

structures and teacher deployment and retention systems are inadequately institutionalised.

Weak monitoring, data Systems, and sustainability mechanisms - Monitoring and accountability mechanisms are also weak, limiting the enforcement of existing policies. Headteachers indicated that the location of some schools made it difficult for frequent visits and monitoring. Data from the GES and interaction with district education officials shows that education data systems do not adequately capture crisis-related indicators such as school closures, displacement, and re-enrolment trends. The continued reliance on donor-funded and project-based interventions for AEPs and other informal initiatives at the community level limit sustainability and scalability.

Fig 1 maps the key drivers of educational exclusion across the selected FCV districts and their causal linkages.



Policy Recommendations

Strengthening coordination and teacher support in fragile districts – A more coordinated and institutionalised approach is required to strengthening education in FCV districts in Ghana. District-level coordination mechanisms should be strengthened to improve early warning systems, monitor disruptions, and ensure coherent responses among education authorities, local government, civil society organisations, and humanitarian actors. This further goes to reinforce the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2018-2030 which emphasise the need to decentralise educational management for improved district level coordination and ensure equitable deployment of teachers in all part of the country. Teacher recruitment and retention in FCV districts must be improved through targeted incentives, including hardship allowances, secure accommodation, transportation support, and professional development opportunities. Thus, this recommendation supports Ghana’s effort to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4.C and 4.5 which seeks to increase the supply of teachers in developing countries and eliminate disparities in education access for vulnerable populations. It also aligns with SDG 16.6 which seeks to develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels of governance.

Institutionalising psychosocial support and expanding flexible learning pathways - Psychosocial support should be institutionalised within the education system by integrating it into teacher training. To complement this, structured school-based counselling systems and psychosocial support should be established in line with the ESP 2018 - 2030. It also aligns with the CBE Policy which support flexible learning pathways for OOSC through AEPs and SDG 4.a and 3.4 which promotes a safe and inclusive mental health and wellbeing. Also, expanding flexible learning pathways is essential, including scaling up AEPs, complementary education initiatives, and remedial learning programmes to support out-of-school and over-age learners.

Integrating EiE into planning, budgeting, and data systems for sustainability - There is a need to integrate EiE into national education planning and budgeting processes to ensure preparedness and sustainability. Strengthening crisis-sensitive data systems will improve the ability to track school disruptions, displacement, and re-enrolment trends, enabling more effective and evidence-based decision-making. These actions are critical to building resilient education systems capable of sustaining learning in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. This further goes to reinforce the ESP 2018-2030 which promotes integration of emergency preparedness, resilience and data driven planning within the education sector and supports the realisation of SDG 17.18 and 17.14 which both seek to enhance capacity-building for high quality, timely and reliable data, and policy coherence for sustainable development.

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