

# EDUCATION POLICY PAPER 2

## The Quality and Inclusivity of Basic Education across Ghana's three northern regions: assessing learning effectiveness and efficiency towards the post 2015 era

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# ABSTRACT

Sub Saharan Africa has been focussed on the attainment of universal primary education over the last 15 years with little emphasis on learning effectiveness and efficiency. The failure of governments and civil societies to address learning outcomes within contexts like Ghana has resulted in the inability of the majority of primary children in rural deprived areas to read, write and numerate. Limited mixed method approaches to research inside sub Saharan African classrooms have limited policy direction and remedial action. The “Quality of Education Research in Northern Ghana” was undertaken in 54 basic schools across the three northern regions over a three month period. The research used mixed method approaches with evidence gathered from in-depth classroom observation, interviews with pupils, teachers, and other community members.

Key findings from the research suggest that very little learning is taking place in Ghanaian primary classrooms in the North, particularly those governed by the state, as compared to mission based schools. District management practices, school governance and head teacher leadership, have failed to ensure teacher accountability and effectiveness, child inclusion, and learning over the last 15 years. Education planning and community demand mechanisms have also failed to address the need for teachers and school management to be accountable in the learning process. Policy implications suggest that more emphasis should be placed on head teacher leadership, teacher commitment, tracking learning outcomes/assessment and teaching methods/strategies.

1. Associates for Change is a research and consulting firm based in Ghana. AFC is focused on social and economic development analysis for policy reform, monitoring and evaluation.
2. This paper is based on a paper which was originally delivered at the UKFIET International Conference on Education and Development – Education & Development Post 2015: Reflecting, Reviewing, Re-visioning. Oxford, 10-12, September 2013. It is also based on research carried out under the TENI (Tackling Education Needs Inclusively) project supported by the VSO and Comic Relief.
3. Less than 25% of Primary 6 children are able to read and numerate according to the National Education Assessment Reports of 2011 (MOE, 2011)
4. Basic Education in Ghana includes Primary and Junior High Schools.

***“What is at the centre of quality education is whether children are learning basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life”***

(EFA Goals, UNICEF, 2010).

One of Ghana's greatest developmental challenges over the last 20 years has been the attempt by state and non-state actors to improve the quality of public education. The Government of Ghana spends a large proportion of its GDP (6.3% in 2011) and annual national budget (25.8% in 2012) on the education sector. Yet, consistently, research suggests that the education and learning outcomes among Ghanaian children continue to be among the worst in the world; with less than 25% of Ghana's Primary Class 6 children able to attain basic literacy skills after eight years of public schooling (MOE, 2012; Casely-Hayford, 2011). Despite significant donor contributions to the sector (over 3 billion USD as of 2010), the quality of basic education for the vast majority of Ghana's rural areas remains sub-standard and in many cases, a loss to family welfare when comparing the opportunity costs for families experiencing extreme poverty in the northern regions of Ghana (Korboe, et al., 2010; Casely-Hayford, 2000).

According to the 2012 Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2012) Ghana has made significant strides particularly in respect to access and participation of children at primary level. The cancellation of school fees and the introduction of capitation grants in 2005, the introduction of compulsory pre-school education in 2007, and the achievement of gender parity in basic school enrolment in 2010, has enabled Ghana to be one of the leading countries in Sub Saharan Africa in terms of reaching the EFA Goals for 2015. However, the EFA report (2012) indicates that literacy levels among Ghanaian children graduating from Primary 6 are still very poor.

Kraft (2003) identifies various challenges to quality teaching and learning in Ghanaian primary schools which include the fact that the current language policy is “in a state of flux” and does not reflect current language of instruction research; that materials and training for ESL do not take into account the second language reality in Ghana; that few teachers have a solid grounding in teaching basic literacy; that text books are inadequate in terms of both content and number so that “if and when children learn to read there is almost nothing for them to read”. Furthermore Kraft finds that the whole school development process is having little effect on quality, and teachers have very little input into the process of reform.

The Mckinsey report (Mourshed et al, 2010) also assesses Ghana's performance as “poor” in terms of school development. As the Mckinsey report suggests, country systems in places like Ghana are unlikely to leapfrog into a level of development and that it is most likely that systems which are performing “poorly” will develop to the “fair category,” but will require the following to move forward: “the interventions. in this stage focus on supporting students in achieving the literacy and math basics: this requires providing scaffolding for low-skilled teachers, fulfilling all basic student needs, and bringing all the schools in the system up to a minimum quality threshold”(p. 20.)

The quality of education has a direct impact on the education system's ability to be a driver of change and a

route out of poverty for the masses of rural poor who experience social exclusion and economic deprivation. The large body of research works on Ghana's education sector points to one important ingredient which is seemingly not present in the majority of basic schools: enough quality teaching and learning. The VSO Ghana supported this research study on the Quality of Education in Northern Ghana through its work under the "Tackling Education Needs Inclusively" (TENI), which supports programme activities and research focussed on quality education across the three northern regions of Ghana.

The post 2015 EFA agenda is focussed on inclusiveness and quality in education given that the majority of developing countries have reached the access and participation targets at primary school level. This shift has required that government's like Ghana, focus more on improving the quality of their teacher training and ensuring that teachers at lower primary level have the requisite skills, attitudes and competencies to address early grade reading. It also requires that innovative approaches to deploying trained teachers and identifying untrained teachers in rural deprived areas are adequately supported with in-service training and coaching.

## Research Design and Sampling Criteria

The design of the Quality of Education study in Northern Ghana included both qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the key promoters and inhibitors of quality and inclusive education. The study sampled six districts in the three northern regions, comprising one TENI project and one Non TENI project district in each region. In each district the most recent Performance Monitoring Test (PMT) and School Education Assessment (SEA) data for English was used to identify and rank high and low achieving schools. A cluster selection of schools approach ensured that two primary schools and one Junior High School (JHS) were selected in close proximity to one another. The cluster sample approach also ensured that at least one relatively high achieving and one low achieving primary school were sampled in each of the clusters. The schools sampled in a cluster were also within a short distance of each other, with one or both primary schools sending children to the nearby JHS selected for the study. Other sampling considerations were that all schools should have a full complement of class levels (i.e. P1 through to P6; JHS 1 to JHS 3). The schools were within a 2 hour drive from the district capital. This enabled researchers to reach the schools in remote areas within a realistic time frame to conduct one day of research and maximise on the time taken with the teachers and students at the school.

The schools' sampling framework meant that a variety of schools (mission and non mission), and community and teacher characteristics which represented a cross section of schools in each of the districts (e.g. trained and untrained teachers, community volunteer teachers etc) were investigated. School selection also took into account rural and urban dichotomy. The sampling design also considered well-resourced schools where there was adequate community support and supply of teaching and learning inputs, compared to poorly resourced schools. One third of the schools were in urban areas and two-thirds of the sampled schools were located in rural areas (i.e. 3 urban and 6 rural per district). These contextual factors provided a varied sample to explore the learning and research questions:

***Learning Question:*** What are the key drivers of change that promote or inhibit the achievement of inclusive

5. This is based on the rebased GDP figures in the Annual Education Sector Performance Report, 2012.

6. Taken from Spending report in Annual Education Sector Performance Report 2012

education, with emphasis on the education needs of girls and children with disability, and the retention, transition and performance of disadvantaged children?

**Research Question:** What are the factors promoting and inhibiting systemic change in educational quality and inclusion at basic education level, with emphasis on girls and children with disabilities?

The conceptual framework for the study was developed based on the quality of education frameworks used by the World Bank and UNESCO for investigating school quality, inclusivity and learning effectiveness across education systems. Based on this framework four spheres of inquiry for the research were identified: the child/home setting, community setting, the school and the classroom setting, and the policy level. Focal group interviews were held with teachers, parents and children at the upper primary level in each of the schools. Two comprehensive classroom observations at the lower and upper primary level were also conducted, along with follow up interviews with the teacher observed, and in the case of the upper primary and JHS levels, a focal group discussion was held with a cross section of children in the class. A range of regional and district level stakeholders were interviewed concerning the issues surrounding the quality of education.

A rigorous approach to investigating the quality of teaching and learning processes in the classroom is the central focus of the study. This included scrutiny of teacher commitment/attitude, time on task, classroom learning climate and teaching methods, during 86 classroom observation events across the 54 schools at lower and upper primary resulting.

## Key Findings

The 'Quality of Education Study' in Northern Ghana found that basic school outcomes are not adequate for the achievement of quality education. The general trend across many of the 54 schools was that various factors contributed to a "culture" in schools that inhibits change and often reproduces the status quo. At the school level, teacher absenteeism and low levels of time-on-task were endemic across the 54 schools visited and were perpetuated by the poor supervision at the district level and poor head teacher leadership arising from, in some cases, a perceived lack of autonomy or support; and in others, a lack of will to enforce professional norms.

At the classroom level, teacher centred methodologies, intimidating teacher demeanour, and overuse of physical and verbal punishment, meant that in many cases little or no learning was taking place in the classrooms observed at basic level. Although in some classes teachers adopted a more nurturing approach towards pupil interactions and invited higher participation through the use of questioning, the methodology used by many teachers relied on pupils' ability to memorise or rote-learn facts or repeated pronunciations and meanings of words. Furthermore, the use of English as a language of instruction hindered learning among pupils, particularly in reading lessons where teachers' poor knowledge of literacy teaching was further exacerbated by the use of texts that were beyond the comprehension of students. Assumptions that these methods result in low levels of learning are buttressed by results from Performance Monitoring Tests and National Education Assessments, which indicate that more than 70%

7. The research team used the EFA Quality Framework and the Heneveld's Framework (World Bank, 1994) as the core conceptual frameworks to guide the research study design.

of children in the rural zones of the northern regions leave P6 without having achieved reading proficiency.

Findings from interviews with community members indicate that there is a strong will by parents to support the work of the school, but this is inhibited by a perceived lack of social capital on the part of parents who see themselves as “unqualified” to judge the work of teachers or the school, due to their own lack of education or “illiteracy”. Community groups (particularly Parent Teacher Associations [PTAs]) therefore limited their oversight of markers of school efficiency/effectiveness to: teacher attendance, adequacy of school infrastructure, and evidence that written work completed by their wards is marked. Teaching in these schools, however, continues to fall short of the objective for quality education outlined in the EFA goals, and as schools continue to produce pupils with low levels of achievement, this situation is unlikely to change even in the longer term.

## Context of Teaching and Learning

Evidence gathered from the Quality of Education Study in Ghana shows that head teachers who demonstrate strong leadership are key promoters and facilitators of quality education at school and classroom levels. The study however found that in many schools this was not the case and that head teacher leadership across the six districts was not effective in stimulating a culture of effective learning. The majority of the head teachers neither queried nor even checked their teachers' use of instructional time and level of absenteeism. In most schools the head teacher's role was confined to checking teachers' lesson notes, recording important incidents in the school logbook and performing other administrative functions for the Education Directorate (e.g. financial accounting, collecting statistics and organising delivery of materials from the District Education Office [DEO] to the school).

Fewer than ten (10) head teachers across the 54 schools demonstrated leadership skills that encouraged an effective learning environment. School Management Committee and parent interviews reveal a loss of confidence among the communities in relation to the effectiveness and commitment of their teachers and head teachers in delivering quality education. The parents interviewed were well aware that education was a key to children's ability to escape the poverty and the hardship of the community, and they were supporting several activities in order to ensure that their schools were provided with adequate supplies, infrastructure and incentives to make them function effectively. The challenges were that their own head teachers and district education offices were not dealing with complaints of mismanagement, high rates of teacher absenteeism and unlawful behaviour of teachers within the school environment. The District Education Oversight Committee and the District Assemblies are to oversee the proper functions of the management systems set up within the District Education Officers, but these structures were either weak or non-functional across the six districts studied. Even though Ghana Education Service (GES) policy empowers the head teacher to manage their schools in line with laid down procedures, many of the head teachers observed lacked the moral leadership qualities to act on teacher absenteeism, and were not actively carrying out procedures to ensure effective time on task. It was therefore clear from the research that structures put in place to promote accountability at the management and classroom levels are too weak to have an impact on quality teaching and learning.

The problem is further exacerbated by challenges with regard to material inputs and teacher supply. Data

8. District Assemblies are the highest governing and administrative body at the district level. They oversee all educational interventions and are responsible for education oversight.

collected from the 6 Education Directorates and 54 researched schools across the three northern regions revealed the inadequate supply of exercise books and lack of textbooks/syllabuses, inequitable teacher deployment and a high and growing prevalence of untrained teachers. The Directors of Education further complained that most of the teachers lacked the basic knowledge and skills related to effective teaching methods to impact on pupil learning and that there was an endemic problem with the deployment of trained teachers to “deprived schools”. As a result the rural community schools had a much higher proportion of untrained teachers, compared to those in urban areas. Out of 137 trained teachers, only 26 (28%) could be found in rural schools. These characteristics were reflected in the observed classrooms, as can be seen from the following table. Table 1 below suggests that there was generally a higher pupil teacher ratio in rural classrooms which further exacerbated the difficulties faced by rural schools.

**Table 1- % of Trained teachers, Pupil teacher ratio and % with a syllabus**

Evidence from lesson observations generally buttressed the views of District Directors that few teachers

	Urban West Mampoussie District	Rural WMD	Urban East Mampoussie District	Rural EMD	Urban Bongo	Rural Bongo	Urban Talensi Nabdam District	Rural TND	Urban Jirapa	Rural Jirapa	Urban Lawra	Rural Lawra
Average PTR*	37	45	37	52	26	52	38	44	44	39	51	30
% Trained Teachers	100	25	20	44	80	40	60	40	100	60	100	78
% Trained Teachers	0?	38	29	56	57	55	33	62	67	36	67	70
% Trained Teachers	80	12.5	60	22	60	22	40	0	80	12.5	80	37.5

(Source: Quality of Education Study Sample of Observed Classrooms, 2012) \*Pupil Teacher Ratio

demonstrate the basic skills required for quality learning to take place. These observations included detailed descriptions of a range of teaching behaviours, and levels and types of pupil participation: Lesson Preparation, Lesson Delivery, Language of Instruction, Subject Knowledge, Teaching Methods, Use of teaching-learning materials, and Teacher Attitude to Pupils with Learning Needs, Gender Sensitivity, Discipline, Learner Encouragement, Student Participation, Assessment, and Time on Task.

### Teacher attitude and demeanour

9. The trend of higher PTR (Pupil Teacher Ratio) in rural schools is reversed in the case of the sampled schools of the Upper West, due to the higher proportion of Roman Catholic (RC) schools sampled in the urban centres of this region.

Performance of teachers across the 86 classrooms observed varied in terms of these different indicators. There was evidence of lesson planning in only 30% of classrooms; lesson delivery was generally teacher centred, although there was an attempt in some lessons (particularly lessons based on English grammar), to involve students by using questioning that required pupils to model how to adapt grammar rules to different contexts. Very few teachers (less than 20% of the sampled schools) used textbooks or other teaching and learning materials and where these were in evidence they took the form of visual aids. The extent to which pupils were encouraged to participate or were assessed relied largely on the demeanour and methodology adopted by teachers. Teachers whose lessons constituted a lecture invited little or no participation from students, whereas teachers who used a less didactic strategy and questioned pupils were more successful in enabling students to take part in the lesson. A key indicator however, for observers to assess whether the children understood the lessons being taught and the potential for learning, was the language of instruction used by teachers.

## The Language of Instruction

Children attending school in Ghana face the challenge of having to access most of their basic education through the medium of a foreign language. Research shows that young children acquire a second language more efficiently between the ages of 3 and 8, but successful acquisition of a second language requires proficiency in the mother tongue. It is therefore important that children's language skills and vocabulary are firmly embedded in their mother tongue before learning a second language, especially if the second language has complex and irregular grammatical structures and spelling rules. Moreover, there needs to be a reasonable level of proficiency in the second language before a child is able to use it effectively for learning (Abadzi, 2006). Education policy in Ghana supports this by outlining the need for teachers to use L1 at the kindergarten (KG) and lower primary levels up to P3. However, evidence from classroom observations indicates that this policy was not being adhered to and in most cases was not well understood by teachers across the study districts.

Table 2 below summarise the evidence from the classroom observations, and illustrates the way language is being used and understood in these classrooms. The lessons are classified according to whether the teacher used only local language (All L1) or only English (All L2). In some cases teachers were using either a Ghanaian language or English for most of the lesson, with some switching to the other language; these instances are classified as Most L1 and Most L2. Where teachers used both languages for a proportionately similar time, they have been classified as a mixture. For each classification there is an indication of whether pupils understood. The evidence for this analysis is drawn mostly from classroom observation notes relating to levels of student participation. This is further validated by evidence from focal group interviews with children from that same classroom. Table 2 illustrates the comparison of language of instruction used between upper primary and JHS and lower primary. Lower primary classes include P1 to P3; upper Primary is P4 to P6.

10. The percentage of students achieving proficiency in Maths at P3 was: 13% for Upper East, 11% for Northern and 9% for Upper West as against the national average of 18.2%. The achievement rates for P3 English were 13% for Upper East, 19% for Northern and 11% for Upper West, compared to the national average of 24.2%. In P6 maths, Upper East had 9%, Northern 4%, and Upper West had 8%, as against national average of 16%. In English, the percentage achieving proficiency for P6 was: Upper East had 20%, Northern 17%, and Upper West 16%, as compared with the national average of 35%. Source?

	All L1	Under standing by pupils	All L2	Under stand	Most L1	Under stand	Most L2	Under stand	Mixture of L1 and L2	Under stand	Total lessons
Lower primary	4	4	2	0	5	5	10	4	10	10	31
Upper primary & Jhs	2	2	30	18	0	0	13	10	10	9	52
Total	6	6	32	18	5	5	23	14	20	19	80

(Source: classroom observation note, Quality of Education Northern field research, 2012)

### Table 2---Language of instruction and Pupil understanding

Most teachers in the lower primary classes use L1. However when teachers use only English, the pupils are not able to understand the lesson being taught. L1 is used to a much lesser degree at upper primary levels and at JHS, but what these figures illustrate is that in a little under half the classes where English was either wholly or mostly used, students were unable to understand the lessons being taught.

In the sampled schools the policy of using L1 for lower primary is not being universally adhered to, moreover evidence from interviews indicates that some schools have a policy of whole school English usage and students are punished for “using the vernacular”. However, this analysis of classroom practice indicates that students in P4 and above still struggle to access lessons that are wholly or mostly delivered in English. A strict adherence to the policy of only using English in the upper primary and JHS is therefore not serving the needs of pupils who have not yet reached a level of fluency. In many cases the content of textbooks was beyond the English fluency levels of the students. Teachers used the strategy of translating the text orally and children were observed to “brighten up” and were more able to answer the comprehension questions previously asked in English.

### The Teaching of Reading

Most lessons observed across the 86 classrooms were literacy lessons, with approximately 30 lesson observations engaged in reading lessons. The focus of the teacher was often to help students learn to pronounce the English or Ghanaian Language word “correctly” during their echo reading events. Students were “drilled” to memorise each word, its pronunciation and the meaning of a word - with each new word learnt in isolation. Children memorised large sections of their textbooks, but could not read a simple word taken out of the context. In just one lesson out of the entire 86 classroom sample, a teacher was observed discussing reading strategies that could be used to evaluate why a word was pronounced in a certain way or to identify any particular phonetic sound/pattern that occurred in the word so that pupils could recognise this sound or pattern in other words. Very little instruction was based on using child-

See RECOUP papers particularly Thompson and Casely-Hayford, (2006) on the Financing and Outcomes to Basic Education in Ghana.  
Daily Graphic article of 5 July 2013  
Daily Graphic, 12 July 2013

centred learning materials or allowing children to read from books on their own. Generally if individual children were given time to read they were chosen to do so because they were “good readers” and could model the reading for the rest of the class. The main finding from classroom observations was that literacy teaching skills were lacking; teachers across the six districts in the north were not utilising basic reading strategies – application of context, whole word development, decoding, rhyming etc.

In terms of comprehension of a text, the meaning was usually first explained by the teacher in English and later in the mother tongue. Comprehension questions that follow this explanation were often answered on the basis of the students' ability to comprehend what the teacher said. There was often no evidence that the teachers guided the student to use comprehension skills to find the meaning of the sentence or text. The questions asked were relatively closed and low order, so that the questions themselves formed a tag for the answer and in many cases teachers elicited a chorused response. Comprehension skills such as inference, synthesis, judgement or application were not taught. This limits pupils' ability to read texts in other subjects and be able to synthesise or adapt the information. Corroborative evidence of pupils' lack of comprehension skill can be found in the results of the National Education Assessment Test which show that pupils in the three northern regions in particular achieved poor levels of literacy.

The trends in terms of school management and teaching and learning described above cut across all 54 schools sampled in the study to varying degrees, but the performance in terms of school development was by no means homogeneous. On the basis of an holistic overview of schools based on the evidence gathered from teachers, pupils and parents, different profiles emerge which are categorized as those schools whose structure and systems were more likely to enable a high learning environment, those where limited or no structures were in place and therefore little learning could take place, and those that fell between these two extremes.

There was evidence of a few (fewer than 10 out of 54) schools demonstrating characteristics of “high” learning environments. The characteristics of these schools followed similar but not always identical patterns. The high learning schools in the sampled sites had a head teacher with strong leadership qualities, and a clear vision for school development that included the on-going training and support of his/her teachers. Head teachers ensured effective time on task was maximised by teachers and that children who were without a teacher were not left alone for the entire day; these heads also maintained strong links with the community who responded by ensuring the school had the necessary support to function effectively. At the classroom level, the head teacher mentorship and support meant that even untrained teachers within the school were able to facilitate effective learning environments for their pupils. However, while some of the schools fit this profile, most schools (46) did not, and were categorised as either “medium” or “low” learning environments/schools.

### Inclusive and Gender Differentials

Evidence from the Quality of Education Research suggests that the majority of teachers understood the need for boys and girls to be treated with equity in the classroom. This finding is confirmed by the responses from pupils interviewed. The challenge lies in the fact that in some cases where pupils were not treated equally it was because teachers were focusing on the more “able” students or those who were able to respond to questions easily. No more than half the teachers observed demonstrated some sensitivity to learner needs. Sensitivity was generally characterized by teachers giving support in the form of direct

questions or slowing the pace of the lesson for less able children or children who were considered “slow learners” – that is to say those pupils who were not able to easily access the lesson at the same pace as those pupils who are described as “brilliant” students by the teacher. The most pressing challenge in terms of inclusion of children with special educational needs (particularly those children with moderate to severe learning difficulties) is that teachers felt ill-equipped to “handle” such children at the school level in terms of inputs and at the classroom level because teachers are not confident and do not feel they have the expertise. Another belief identified among the teaching force was that there is “little point” in even trying to teach children who have more than moderate learning difficulties.

In terms of the approaches that teachers claimed to use (during post lesson observation interviews), these were similar in almost every case- that teachers were placing children with hearing or visual impairments close to the chalkboard, writing more boldly, and speaking clearly. The only departure from this was in Jirapa District where teachers referred to pastoral care as a strategy to ameliorate the difficulties around bullying which some differently abled children experienced. Evidence from interviews with parents and other community members indicates that many parents of children with special needs feel that they should not be enrolled in mainstream schools; the perception is that they can only have their needs met at a special school. There is also a perception that mainstream schools are not a safe environment for children with special needs.

### **Schools with High Learning Environments**

Research findings suggest that there were a range of factors which interplay with each other to produce quality “high” learning environments. These included: effective teacher supervision and management, accessibility to adequate TLMs particularly text books, high levels of teacher commitment, support by all stakeholders, particularly parents, and high levels of school discipline facilitated by the head teacher. Findings from the research also suggest that there were only a few District Assembly schools which had a high learning environment comparable to mission schools. The findings suggest that high learning schools had strong Head teacher leadership providing a lot of support to teachers related to their pedagogical and instructional practices and other professional development opportunities for their teachers. Teachers in the high learning environments also paid particular attention to children with SENS. There is a high level of discipline among both the staff and the pupils in the schools. The high learning schools also had a cordial community school relationship as well as strong sense of community-school ownership.

Teacher performance is one of the most important aspects of quality education and, as the main determining output of the school performance of provides quality education. However, in order for any classroom to be a high learning environment, there needs to be other supports in place. Overall school performance or school effectiveness is determined by the interplay of a range of dynamics between teachers and students which contribute to ensuring that classroom practice is consistently good. Evidence gathered for the quality of education research study suggests that those schools situated in an urban community and particularly schools managed by Religious Units (particularly Roman Catholic), are more likely to exhibit the necessary dynamics which promote quality learning; a strong management structure which includes supervision and support for the development of teachers and collaboration with the community as well as adequate material and human inputs. At the classroom level, the expectation would be that the teacher has some years of experience and has achieved trained teacher status.

However, while some of the schools identified by this analysis fit this profile, there are also some notable exceptions.

Of the 54 sampled schools, very few presented the range of factors described above. A higher proportion of schools, were found to exhibit some of these factors but were found wanting in other respects, and these have been categorized as “medium learning” environments. In the medium learning environment there was a degree of discipline among the staff. Professional development of teachers was low, with heads rarely mentoring their staff. Neither the head teacher nor the Circuit Supervisor provides any support to improve teachers' classroom performance. The Circuit Supervisors' visits to these “medium” learning schools were simply to convey information to the teacher, checking their lesson notes and exercise books. Here the communities would assist the school by paying for a community volunteer teacher since there might be high rates of absenteeism among the trained teaching force.

### Schools with Low Learning Environments

The vast majority of schools observed across the study areas had “low learning environments” with a learning efficiency profile quite different from the learning environments indicated above. These schools had problems with head teacher management and leadership, the poor supply of vital school inputs such as furniture, TLMs and qualified teachers. Some of the schools had no furniture for the children to sit on and the children were forced to work on the floor. The low learning schools had often strong support by the community members towards their wards, but less support to their schools in terms of provision of community teacher volunteers. Professional development among teachers was sporadic; the untrained teachers received no training from the heads or district offices. The head teachers and Circuit Supervisors did not provide mentoring to improve teaching skills or teacher commitment. There is also a high degree of indiscipline among teachers which further weakened the community confidence in their teachers' ability to deliver quality education in the school.

Zangu (a rural community in East Mamprusi, Northern Region) is one example of a school with a “low” learning environment. Both observed teachers performed poorly across almost all of the quality of education indicators. Evidence from the head teacher's interview indicates that the school suffered from a lack of material and human inputs and support from GES was not forthcoming. Professional development was very sporadic, and the last in-service training was held in the year previous to the research. The Head also describes the Circuit Supervisor (CS) support as giving encouragement and checking lesson notes, but there was no mention of any mentoring either on the part of the CS or the head, despite the fact that there is a paucity of trained teachers in the school. Although the relationship with the community was cordial the school was yet to put this on a more formal footing by holding meetings with the PTA or SMC. Evidence from the focal group interview with girls from the school indicates that there was a high degree of indiscipline among the teachers, which had a detrimental effect on community confidence in the school's ability to deliver quality learning:

*“Mostly the teachers either come to sit without teaching or absent themselves a lot from school. Prefects act as teachers and beat us up and down. Therefore, our parents have decided to allow some of us to remain home instead of going to school. This makes our parents give us out for marriage, some run to the south for 'kayayo'(head portorage in markets) to get fast money for themselves and some parents too feel the daughter's times are wasted at school so they send*

*them to Nalerigu (town about 10 miles away from Community) to school there.”*

(Source: Focal Group interview with Girls at Northern Basic School, Quality of Education Research 2012)

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE POST 2015 AGENDA

The post 2015 agenda places a strong emphasis on improving educational accountability and stresses the importance of improving the quality of teaching and learning over the focus on access to primary education. The Quality of Education Study in Northern Ghana found a significant challenge in achieving higher levels of teacher accountability in Ghana due to the blockage between the teaching force and the institutions that were responsible yet unable to hold the teaching force accountable (e.g. District Education Offices). The findings suggest that stronger more committed school management and head teacher is needed in Northern Ghana to ensure that the vast majority of teachers are attending? (present in) schools, improving lesson preparation, using a relevant language of instruction in the classroom, and focussed on assisting children that have differential learning needs, and improving child confidence levels in learning. It is clear from the study that there is a breakdown in the education system and that there has been little or no progress in terms of teacher accountability in the education sector over several years. Unfortunately over the last 15 years there has been little action taken by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to ensure higher levels of teacher accountability particularly at the primary and junior high school level, in order to achieve learning efficiency particularly for the poor. Despite significant levels of donor assistance and intervention programmes the synergy needed to promote learning efficiency have remained out of reach for the Ghana government. Findings from this study suggest that although some specific measures and programme interventions have been put in place at significant cost to the Government of Ghana and the donor community, these measures and programmes will require that collective action and a more coherent framework of intervention, starting with disciplinary action for head teachers, is well articulated for the school management to be effective in holding teachers accountable and promoting learning efficiency in Ghana. Some of these measures will include the articulation of a language of instruction policy for basic and secondary education in Ghana, ensuring minimum levels of learning assessment and efficiency at primary school, and teacher quality measures put in place for underperforming schools.

In recognition of this and other studies, the MoE has begun stronger measures to strengthen the chain of accountability between school managers and teachers with particular reference to time-on-task and the endemic problem of teacher absenteeism in Ghana. Following the release of this current study: the Quality of Education Study in Northern Ghana in June, 2013 among senior officials at the MOE, the Ministry, including the Minister and Chief Director, took action by paying random unannounced visits to schools in the Volta Region, resulting in sanctioning of District Education Directors and teachers who remain absent for more than 10 days- “GES to sanction teachers, directors for absenteeism” and “teachers to be sacked after 10 days of absence”.

However, findings from classroom observations where instruction is largely teacher centred with an onus on rote learning particularly in the teaching of reading, indicate that there is also a need to look at the

extent to which teacher training and on-going professional development is meeting the goal of achieving quality. Findings from the MUSTER studies (Akyeampong, 2003), show that there is a strong emphasis on subject knowledge teaching in Colleges of Education in Ghana. Furthermore teaching of pedagogy is constrained by the methods used by lecturers who are themselves promulgating a more didactic approach than modelling more participatory methods themselves. In terms of in-service training, there is limited evidence as to its efficacy. More importantly, however, there appears to be no structures for holding teachers accountable with regard to the extent to which teaching strategies and methods learned at training events (pre and in-service) are used in their daily classroom practice.

In general, teaching in Ghana continues to fall into the categories that Kraft described in the early 2000 period as “Stage 1”, which means there is no form and no substance or “Stage 2”- some form but no substance.” However, because the process of changing teacher behaviours is a long and intensive one, the current teacher accountability model in Ghana which relies on district and circuit supervision, is having little or no impact. Kraft (2003) argued over 10 years ago that in order to properly improve teaching skills, interventions should take the form of on-site training and guidance to get “back to the basics,” particularly with regard to literacy and numeracy. The Quality of Education Study in Northern Ghana study suggests that poor accountability structures have further eroded teacher instructional practice and attitude towards teaching, rendering classrooms at a very low level of learning efficiency.

The Government of Ghana has put in place several interventions to improve the quality of basic education, including the National Accelerated Literacy Programme (NALAP) which has introduced an upgraded national bilingual literacy programme and includes training of all teachers at the lower primary level and substantive injection of textbooks, workbooks and other teaching learning materials. Support from DFID and USAID have also attempted to improve the quality of education through successive bilateral aid programmes which aim at whole school development, improving teacher competency and textbook provision, but evaluative studies in Ghana demonstrate that very few of these interventions are sustained after the project life cycle of intervention. The MOE's inclusive education policy has attempted to implement inclusive education in at least 63 districts, often without any assurance that quality education is available at the school level with a minimum level of teacher attendance, supervision and classroom preparation for children with special needs. The fragility of the education system without the basic minimum quality standard creates a risk for children at high risk due to the socio-cultural norms in practice at the school level.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to achieve what the McKinsey report (Mourshed et al, 2010) refers to as “a minimum quality threshold”, and to further deepen levels of teacher accountability across the education system in Ghana, it is essential that the role of head teachers is further professionalized and that school managers receive the kind of training that will enable them to fulfil their responsibilities in terms of managing teachers' attendance, ensuring discipline and a minimum standard of teaching and learning at the classroom level. Head teachers need to become mentors and facilitate the provision of “scaffolding” for low-skill teachers; and also put in place appraisal processes that include appropriate targets on minimum literacy outcomes for children at lower primary level. Most importantly training colleges need to focus more on the orientation, attitude and demeanour of the teacher by promoting concepts such as empathy, care and

child friendliness in the classrooms. The MoE's current focus on early grade reading is a step in the right direction and should be pursued rigorously by ensuring one hour of literacy at a minimum, and that an adequate budget is in place for full scale roll out of the National Accelerated Literacy Programme to be sustained. It may also require that the Government of Ghana revisit its inclusive education policy to ensure that the minimum quality threshold is reached before whole scale replication and scaling up of inclusivity in public primary schools.

School development and improved school management systems require a similar intensity of support in order to ensure that head teachers, particularly at primary level, are given strict disciplinary procedures to follow/ enforce and are able to use a level of autonomy to hold teachers accountable for all aspects of their professional behaviour. These measures will ensure that school development does not simply stop at the school input level but that professional development of teachers and better structured management procedures are put in place from national to school levels.

The task of improving accountability therefore cannot solely be focused on ensuring that teachers are in classrooms for a greater percentage of the time, but that Ghanaian teachers become more committed to improving the quality of education for their students. This will require more public awareness, community advocacy and mechanisms for monitoring the learning outcomes of pupils at lower and upper primary levels of education in order to fulfil the requirements of the 2015 agenda: whether children are learning "basic skills, especially in the areas of literacy, numeracy and skills for life". Most importantly this will require core moral leadership, strengthening and assessment of head teachers, to ensure that the teaching force recognises that the teaching profession requires both a moral as well as professional reorientation in Ghana, to achieve a higher quality of primary education over the next ten years.

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