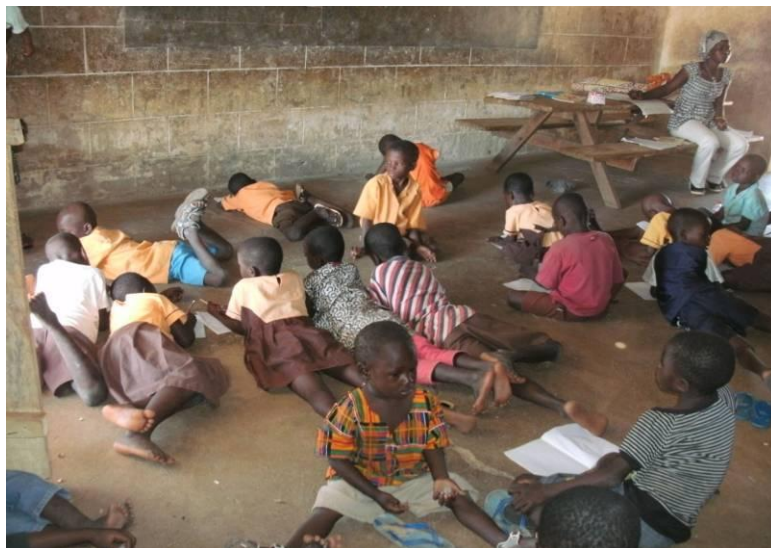




The Quality and Inclusivity of Basic Education across Ghana's three northern regions: a look at change, learning effectiveness and efficiency

Final Executive Summary

Research under the Tackling Education Needs Inclusively (TENI) Project



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By: Dr Leslie Casely-Hayford, Dr Alhassan Seidu, Ms Sheena Campbell, Mr Thomas Quansah, Mr Kojo Gyabaah, and Ms Adam Rukayatu,

Associates for Change (TENI Research Team)¹

www.associatesforchange.org

Tel: (233) (21)245 612 /3

¹ Supported by Mr. Bukari Francis, Dr Abdullahi Abubakari, Mr Imranah Adams Mahama, Ms Marian Owusu Afriyie and Ms Charity Bukari. Please see Annex 1A for a full list of all field researchers.

1.0 Background to the Quality of Education Research

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 particularly at the primary and Junior high school levels. The Government of Ghana spends a large proportion of its GDP (6.3% in 2011)² and annual national budget (25.8%)³ 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 read and attain basic literacy skills after six 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 poor 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) also reveals that literacy levels among Ghanaian children graduating P6 are still very poor.

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 on Ghana’s education sector points to one important ingredient which does not appear to be happening in the vast majority of Ghanaian basic schools: enough quality teaching and learning. The VSO Ghana through its work under the “Tackling Education Needs Inclusively” (TENI) has made significant strides in supporting a longitudinal research project with its partners which opens up the debate on why children are not learning in Ghanaian classrooms across the Upper East, Northern and Upper West Regions. These three regions have consistently performed poorly in relation to national assessment testing over the last twenty years including the NEA test which assesses the proficiency in English and Maths of P3 and P6 pupils.⁴

The Quality of Education Research was designed to provide policy makers, government officials and NGO advocacy groups at national, regional and district level with sufficient evidence to act on findings and ensure that qualitative change and learning outcomes are improved within the education

² This is based on the rebased GDP figures in the Annual Education Sector Performance report, 2012.

³ Taken from Spending report in Annual Education Sector Performance report 2012

⁴ 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 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%.

sector. The main objective of the Quality Education Study under the Tackling Education Needs Inclusively (TENI) research project was to investigate the drivers and inhibitors of quality basic education across the three northern regions of Ghana. The research question that sought to address this was: “*What are the key drivers of change that promote or inhibit the achievement of inclusive education, with emphasis on the education needs of girls and children with disability?*” (i.e. retention, transition and performance of disadvantaged children particularly girls and children with special needs). The initial research project was designed as an ongoing process of supporting partner interventions among the Ghana Education Service (GES) and civil society sector in order to strengthen inclusive education, improve quality and address the key learning questions arising in the project. The TENI Research on Quality Education and collaboration between VSO and AfC started in August, 2012 and involved 4 weeks of field research across three regions of Ghana with 24 researchers visiting 54 schools. Interviews were conducted with over 250 teachers, 86 classrooms were observed and over 500 parents and children were interviewed on the question of learning and why learning is or is not taking place in Ghanaian primary and JHS classrooms.



Primary Children answering questions in the Upper East

Research Design and Sampling Criteria

The design of the study 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, one TENI project and one Non TENI project district in each region (see section on TENI interventions)⁵. 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 performing schools. A cluster approach to school selection ensured that two primary schools and one JHS were selected in close proximity to one another. The cluster approach also ensured that at least one 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 access schools in rural areas within a realistic time frame in order to conduct the

⁵ The main interventions implemented by the TENI partners in Talensi-Nabdam District (Upper East), West Mamprusi District (Northern) and Jirapa District (Upper West) included school performance review processes, strengthening of inclusive education practices by teachers and district education directorates, community awareness raising and action planning, and the creation of gender clubs.

research over one and a half days and maximise the time taken with the teachers and students at the school.

The schools that were sampled enabled the team to investigate a variety of schools (mission and non mission), community and teacher characteristics which represented a cross section of teacher characteristics in each of the districts (e.g. trained and untrained teachers, community volunteer teachers etc). School selection also took into account rural and urban dichotomy⁶. 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 sampled were in urban areas and two-thirds were located in rural areas (i.e. 3 urban and 6 rural per district). These contextual factors provided a varied sample to explore and compare across the different sub-categories of the research questions. The following key learning and research questions were explored in the study:

1. What are the key drivers of change that promote or inhibit the achievement of inclusive education, with emphasis on the education needs of girls and children with disability? And the retention, transition and performance of disadvantaged children?

Research Question 1: 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?

Sub-research questions included:

- To what extent does teacher attitudes/profile impact on education quality and inclusiveness of basic education in Ghana?
- How can we create/generate demand for improved education quality, learning outcomes and performance among marginalized and disadvantaged communities and children?
- What are the most important roles, practices and strategies at school/community level for improving education quality and inclusiveness (i.e. retention, transition and performance) among disadvantaged and marginalized children in Ghana (i.e. girls and disabled)?
- What good practices ensure community participation in improving quality and inclusiveness in basic education in Ghana?
- Why are disabled children not entering, accessing and/or remaining for the full cycle of primary schools in northern Ghana? (Baseline)
- What policies, resourcing and implementation processes are needed to bring about quality education and inclusiveness in northern Ghana?

Consultations with the Implementing Partners (IPs) and GES revealed that there should be four spheres of inquiry for the research: the child/home setting, community setting, the school and the classroom setting, and the policy level in order to fully analyze the inhibitors and promoters to quality education. Focal group interviews were held with teachers, parents and children at the upper primary level in each of the schools. Two comprehensive classroom observations of children being taught at the lower and upper primary level were also conducted along with follow up interviews with the teachers observed and in the case of the upper primary level, focal group discussions were

⁶ Nine schools were selected for the research in each district; this selection took into account the rural/urban dichotomy. One third of the schools were urban and two-thirds rural (i.e. 3 urban and 6 rural per district). 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.

held with a cross section of children in each of the classes observed. The team also interviewed a range of regional and district level stakeholders concerning the issues surrounding the quality of education.

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 systems⁷. A rigorous and detailed approach to investigating the quality of teaching and learning processes at the classroom became the main pivot around which the study focussed. This included a focus on teacher commitment/attitude, time on task, classroom learning climate and teaching methods. A review of the literature revealed that key aspects of learning effectiveness were related to teacher methods, teacher commitment/ attitudes, usage of teaching learning materials and time on task which had a direct impact on pupil attainment, retention, and completion (Abadzi, 2006). The key pillars of the research were therefore to investigate the question of learning effectiveness in Ghanaian primary schools and Junior high schools by using classroom observations, focal group discussions with children, parents and community members along with school based observation of head teacher learning facilitation/ leadership and management at the school level. The team also investigated the district support for teaching and learning processes in the study schools. The context of learning also played a significant role in the design and analysis in order to capture the varied socio cultural patterns and influences across the three northern regions.

The Quality of Education Report

Three key documents were produced as part of the Quality of Education Study: a full research compendium of the detailed analysis from across the three regions, a synthesis report which summarises the main findings supported by evidence and the executive summary/policy brief. Two other volumes are also available which complement the study - a detailed research annex and a case study volume. This executive summary is the third document and serves to briefly outline the key findings and implications for key actors planning interventions in the education field, researchers and policy makers.

The three documents use a similar structure; an overview of literature describing the historical and current state of education in Ghana and sub-Saharan Africa. Findings from field research are described and analysed so that different contexts are compared (for example rural/urban and District Assembly and Faith Schools) and promoters and inhibitors of quality learning identified. Each aspect of the research is examined according to the main pillars of the research. School inputs are examined from the perspective of the District Education Office and by drawing on evidence of the activities and views of teachers, community members and community leaders. The quality of teaching and learning is assessed based on a detailed analysis of different aspects of teacher attitude/behaviour, time on task, sensitivity to learner needs and methodologies in the classroom. Child readiness to learn and the extent to which communities support the child's learning process and demand for quality are also described. Across each of these key pillars of the research, the promoters and inhibitors impacting on access to quality education by girls and children with special needs were examined.

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 across the research districts, community /schools and classroom learning environments.

Creating an enabling environment for teaching and learning at district levels

Data collected from the 6 Education Directorates and 54 research schools indicate that there are major challenges being encountered in the delivery of quality basic education in Ghana. These challenges include the inadequate supply of exercise books and lack of textbooks/syllabuses, inequitable teacher deployment and a high and growing prevalence of untrained teachers. Evidence from interviews with staff at each of the District Directorates indicates that these were considered the main inhibitors of quality delivery of education. The Directors of Education further complained that most of 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 which had a higher proportion of female trained teachers. In all the urban sampled schools the total number of teachers surveyed was 195 of which 97 (63.4%) were female compared to rural schools which had a trained female teaching population of 36%. Out of 137 trained teachers only 26 (28%) could be found in rural schools. The characteristics of teachers were also reflected in the observed classrooms, as can be seen from the following table. The findings suggest that there was generally a higher pupil teacher ratio in rural classrooms which further exacerbated the difficulties faced by rural schools.⁸

	Urban WMD	Rural WMD	Urban EMD	Rural EMD	Urban Bongo	Rural Bongo	Urban TND	Rural TND	Urban Jirapa	Rural Jirapa	Urban Lawra	Rural Lawra
Average Pupil Teacher Ratio	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
% with syllabus	0	38	29	56	57	55	33	62	67	36	67	70
% Female 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)

Teacher absenteeism and lateness to school was the key challenge with teachers in some districts travelling on average one hour by motorbike to reach their schools (e.g. West Mamprusi). Findings indicate that districts had very poor accountability structures in place with limited functionality due to the close social relations between district circuit supervisors and the teaching force including the head teachers.

Interviews at the school and community level also suggest a high level of collusion taking place between circuit supervisors and teachers particularly in relation to the non disclosure of recalcitrant and absentee teachers particularly in the Northern Region. Several head teachers and SMC’s explained that the district education office was not acting on complaints about teachers who had absented themselves for long periods of time or were habitually late due to the distance from their homes to the school. Despite larger numbers of district education staff and the presence of high level structures for educational oversight (e.g. District Education Oversight Committee DEOC), one of the

⁸ The trend of higher PTR in rural schools is reversed in the case of the sampled schools of the Upper West, due to the higher proportion of RC schools sampled in the urban centres of this region.

main findings from PTAs and SMCs focal group interviews was that the district education offices were not acting on the complaints lodged by the SMC's and some SMC's had given up complaining about their teachers.

All the six research districts showed an interest in the inclusive education policy but its implementation required much more awareness and training by teachers. The education of children with SENs was a low priority in all the schools as many of the teachers interviewed felt they had not had adequate training in handling pupils with SENs.

2.0 School Characteristics and Learning

The evidence from the school observations across the 54 schools reveals that the majority of head teachers and teachers observed demonstrated a lack of commitment to their roles and responsibilities which had devastating impact on the learning effectiveness and school quality. This was illustrated by the fact that as field researchers arrived at the beginning of the school day they discovered that the full complement of teachers were often not yet at the school. In some cases the teachers arrived during the mid morning and in most cases when lessons were scheduled to begin, there would be a number of classes full of children with no teacher. In several schools observed the pupils themselves were not in the classroom but playing in the school compound; a situation which persisted in some schools the entire day.

The children got to school around 7:30 and there was no teacher to teach them. All the classes and the main football park were invaded by pupils playing, jumping, banging doors and a few pupils remained silently seated. It was some few minutes to 8:00am when a volunteer teacher arrived at the school. He said he was not feeling well because he had an accident and was just coming around to see how the children and few teachers were doing. The head teacher arrived shortly after wards.

The head teacher picked up his chalk and went straight to the class. All other classes that had no teachers in them remained noisy and neither the volunteer teacher nor the head teacher did anything to control the noise. Apart from the English class that was observed by the research team, no class was taught and meanwhile all the children were rolling on the ground, playing 'Ampe', football, sleeping and some went back home because there was no teaching going on.

This situation was however not strange and no child seemed worried about this. They all played and accepted it as normal as they never reacted. The head teacher in his interview told us, that "if you are a parent and your child comes to school and plays and go back home and there is no other school around better than this... then what can you do about it".

(Source: School Observation Note from a primary school in the Upper West)

Furthermore, in many schools it was noted that even if lessons were being delivered, it was likely that teaching would not recommence after either the first break (around 10:00 am), or the second break (around noon). Teachers were often not prepared for classroom teaching with few TLMs being used and often no lesson notes to refer to.

The Quality of Education Research revealed clear management and oversight lapses within the teaching force due in some cases to lack of enforced disciplinary procedures by District Education offices. Evidence from both the head teachers and the teaching staff revealed that in a number of schools there was very little onsite supervision by circuit supervisors and in general there were poor levels of mentoring and/or professional development provided. The study found many examples of unacceptable head teacher leadership; in some cases head teachers were found to be incapable of promoting an effective learning environment, particularly in the rural schools due to the low levels of commitment. Most of the rural schools lacked a sense of direction as head teachers exhibited weak leadership qualities and found it difficult to manage and supervise their teachers. However, there were a small proportion of head teachers who demonstrated the strong leadership in facilitating

school effectiveness in often very deprived school environments; head teachers of faith-based schools, mainly Catholic schools were found to be better able to manage their schools compared to head teachers of District Assembly (DA) schools. Some faith-based head teachers had a clear management vision for school which was strengthened by the SMC/PTA and Church while the same could not be said for the majority of DA head teachers. Rural schools with weak head teacher leadership rarely followed any type of structured timetable due to high rates of teacher absenteeism and lateness. Head teachers when interviewed cited the following reasons for teacher absenteeism:

Table 2.0 Reasons for Teacher absenteeism by Districts

Upper East		Northern		Upper West	
Bongo	Talensi-Nabdam	East Mamprusi	West Mamprusi	Jirapa	Lawra
1. Teacher sickness	1. Teacher sickness	1. Teacher sickness	1. Teacher sickness	1. Teacher sickness	1. Teachers sickness
2. Attending to family / social issues,	2. Attending to family/ social issues	2. Attending to family/ social issues	2. Attending to family/ social issues	2. Attending to family issues	2. Attending to family / social issues
3. Salary issues (delay and collection)	3. Salary issues (delay and collection)	3. Salary issues (delay and collection)	3. Salary issues (delay and collection)	3. Salary issues (delay and collection)	3. Salary issues (delay and collection)
4. Distance Education	4. Distance Education	4. Distance Education	4. Distance Education	4. Distance Education	4. Distance Education
5. Problems of transportation	5. Problems of transportation	5. Problems of transportation	5. Problems of transportation	5. Problems of transportation	5. Problems of transportation
6. Attending workshops and meetings	6. Attending workshops and meetings	6. Engaged in extra economic activity	6. Engaged in extra economic activity	6. Attending workshops and meetings	6. Attending workshops and meetings
	7. Lack of decent accommodation within community/ commuting long distances	7. Weak school management	7. Lack of decent accommodation within community/ commuting long distances	7. Engaged in extra economic activity	7. Engaged in extra economic activity
		8. Lack of decent accommodation within community/ commuting long distances	8. Teacher Drunkenness	8. Lack of decent accommodation within community/ commuting long distances	
			9. Rainfall		

(Source: Head teacher interviews, Quality of Education field research, 2012)

With regard to physical infrastructure the evidence suggests that the majority of schools were not adapted for children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Only 18 out of the 54 schools surveyed had access ramps to the classrooms. In addition, only 6 out of 54 schools had educational materials adapted for use with different learner needs. The study also found that teachers with specialized skills for teaching SEN were non-existent in the schools sampled. For the physically challenged the school location remained a serious obstacle as many schools are located a long distance away from the community over terrain which is not easy to negotiate for those who have difficulties with mobility.

There was very limited usage of teaching and learning materials across all the observed classrooms in the three regions. In some schools teaching and learning materials were stored in head teacher's office and were not being used – this was particularly the case for materials provided by the NALAP programme. No single school/classroom had a full complement of text books and other teaching and learning materials to support effective teaching and learning. The majority of schools/classrooms lacked access to basic TLMs such as teaching aids and textbooks. A few classrooms had teachers' guides and a few textbooks for pupils. In the majority of the classrooms there were no textbooks and in several classrooms teachers lacked access to the GES syllabus.



(P4 pupils sharing a textbook in the Upper West)

With respect to school sanitation facilities, many schools had adequate toilets and urinals for boys and girls, however it was observed that those schools that did not have urinals and/or toilets were located in rural areas. In a significant number of schools, although toilets were available, they were in very poor condition. The Quality of Education study also found very few schools having access to other school amenities such as electricity, library and computer laboratories. The lack of these facilities served as an inhibitor to promoting quality learning in the schools. Lack of electricity supply also prevented schools from using computers to support their ICT programmes with practical lessons. The condition of the classrooms across the three northern regions in terms of lighting, ventilation and space was not always conducive to learning. Over a quarter of the sampled classrooms were poorly lit due to substandard windows and poor ventilation. Most of the school blocks visited had honey comb windows which made the classrooms dark and poorly ventilated. Consequently the classrooms were very hot particularly in the afternoon making it difficult for children to concentrate on their learning.

The key findings from the context of classroom teaching are that certain trends can be identified when comparing the different contexts of the schools from which the lesson observation data is drawn. Across all three regions which were visited as part of the research, there were different types of teachers observed in the urban schools compared to those in the rural areas.⁹ Teachers in the rural schools tended to be male with a high proportion of untrained teachers including community service volunteers, National Service personnel, NYEP teachers and pupil teachers. Class sizes were often larger in the rural schools with a shorter supply of resources such as textbooks and syllabuses.

Inside the classroom: a look at teaching and learning

The context of the school learning environment became quite important in exploring the promoting and inhibiting factors related to quality education in northern Ghana. School based observations suggest that the classrooms which the research team was observing were frequently the only classes in which lessons were taking place across the whole school. In some cases there was only one lesson being taught by one teacher present in the school at the time of the visit in a school and there was another 5 classrooms with children waiting to be taught. The research remit was that two lessons should be observed in each primary school: one at the lower primary level and one lesson at the upper primary level. The main focus of the research was on observing the language and literacy period in the school. An in-depth interview with the teacher teaching the lesson and a quick check of

⁹ In most cases there was a higher proportion of trained teachers in the urban schools with a much higher proportion of female teachers.

the pupil exercise books was also part of the classroom assessment; children's focal group discussions, head teacher and teacher focal group discussions were part of the larger field work.

Classroom observations revealed that in most cases there was little or no learning going on in the 86 classrooms observed and that the "basic skills" for literacy (referred to in Goal 6 of the EFA document source: UNICEF) were not being taught. This was often due to the fact that pupils could not access the language of instruction (e.g. if it was wholly or mainly English), the demeanour of the teacher and their approach to the children (harsh) and finally the basic ability of teachers to use simple methods for children to learn to decode or sound out words and therefore break through to reading.

Language of Instruction

The evidence shows that apart from the methodological challenges, one of the greatest inhibitors to learning in the classrooms observed was the language of instruction across the entire primary school. The most challenging arena was at the lower primary level where in the Upper East, English was the main language of instruction used in the classroom with the Northern and Upper West Regions having a mixture of local language interspersed with English¹⁰. Unfortunately, there was very little evidence that the government's well designed bilingual literacy programme (NALAP) was embedded in the classroom system of instruction with the books remaining unused in the vast majority of head teacher offices and no evidence of lesson notes based on the NALAP approach across the 54 schools/research sites (only three classrooms were observed using NALAP strategies and one of these did not have lesson notes but used some of the materials).¹¹

The Quality of Education Study found that at the primary level (particularly lower primary) the sole use of English as the medium of instruction inhibited quality education delivery, particularly in the rural schools. Each school in the sample was using their own approach to the language of instruction depending on the location, teacher background and policy of the school head. The policy of using either English or Ghanaian language, whichever was appropriate was also not being upheld in most primary schools visited. The findings suggest that where schools, particularly at lower primary, were teaching using the mother tongue and then English children were learning and enjoying the learning process more. Classroom observations suggest that if pupils could not understand the teacher then very little learning was experienced by pupils in the classrooms observed; this was further confirmed in focal group discussions with the pupils. In some cases, particularly at the upper grade level and in the Upper East, teachers were delivering lessons wholly in English and observers noted that in many of these cases the majority of pupils were unable to understand the concepts being taught. The language of instruction in the Northern and the Upper West Regions was mainly in the Local language (LO1) with English being used as the language of instruction in only a few schools such as the urban mission schools in these regions.

Evidence from the research indicates that pupils in JHS classes more frequently understood English. In the Upper East it was observed that the practice of not allowing pupils with poor English competency and Maths achievement levels to transit from P6 to JHS contrary to GES policy meant that many JHS pupils were better able to speak and understand English compared to the two other

¹⁰ The Upper East had a peculiar difference due to their rejection of the local language instruction since one of the main languages was not accepted as a "Ghana Education Service Official Language."

¹¹ The Gurune speaking areas in the Upper East such as Bolga district, did not implement NALAP as a result of non-inclusion of the language as one of the 11 approved languages by GES; schools in Talensi-Nabdam and Bongo districts were among the sampled schools.

regions where the practice of repeating children at the upper primary level was not common. Furthermore, in some classes the level of English being used by the teacher and required in the lesson or text was beyond the English fluency of the students. These lessons were ostensibly comprehension lessons but usually the only comprehension lesson that students were exposed to was the meanings of individual words. Often the meanings of English words were provided by the teacher and it was then up to the student to memorise the definitions. In some cases the meanings were translated into the pupils' mother tongue but the result was the same – the word and its translation will need to be memorised. Findings from the school and classroom based assessment revealed that teachers were interpreting the process of reading to mean: pronunciation, recitation and memorisation with very little understanding of the importance of helping children decode.

Head Teacher Leadership and Management

The main findings suggest that the process of helping children learn was not being facilitated by the majority of head teachers considering the high rates of teacher absenteeism, limited usage of time on task and lack of preparedness by teachers for classroom instruction (e.g. lesson notes or usage of teaching learning materials/textbook access). The vast majority of teachers observed were not facilitating learning within their classroom environments due in some cases to the limited rapport/relationship with learners in the classroom. More commonly the strategy of using chorus repetition and memorization, along with the absence of effective teacher learner relationships limited the pupils' ability to learn especially with regard to basic reading skills. The poor commitment levels on the part of teachers, head teachers and circuit supervisors and some administrative line officers reveals very poor management practices which resulted in often ineffective learning environments for children.

Fewer than ten head teachers¹² across the 54 schools demonstrated leadership skills that encouraged an effective learning environment (e.g. high learning, time on task). 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. Parents were well aware that education was a key to children's ability to escape the poverty and 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 satisfactorily with complaints of mismanagement, high rates of teacher absenteeism and unlawful behaviour of teachers within the school environment (e.g. school based abuse). 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. The high levels of indiscipline found within the trained and untrained teaching force suggest that very strong head teacher leadership was required to promote and ensure quality education. Even though GES policy empowers the head teacher to manage their schools in line with laid down procedures, many of 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.

¹² Examples include: St Anthony in Jirapa, Manga primary school in West Mamprusi and Gomlana Primary, East Mamprusi, Adakudugu, Bongo, Zauringo in Talensi Nabdram

3.0 Teaching Methodologies and structure to ensure inclusivity and quality learning

The classroom observations inquiry also focussed on the teaching methodologies, strategies and instructional approaches teachers were using, particularly in language and literacy instruction¹³ across the 86 classrooms observed; the research team explored how teachers were creating an inclusive child friendly classroom environment by helping facilitate participation of all pupils in the learning process (by gender and special needs). Key findings from the classroom observation and FGD's with pupils suggest that teachers rarely used child-centred and child friendly teaching methods such as: class discussions, role play, demonstration, group work, brainstorming, experiential or hands on approaches. In the majority of classrooms observed, there was little evidence that the teachers had made any preparation for the lesson with only one third of the classrooms showing evidence of lesson plans and very few classrooms actively using TLMs.

The Quality of Education study also found that teachers found it difficult to handle large class sizes, multi-grade classes and disadvantaged groups of children, and that there was a general lack of competence and confidence in the use of strategies to facilitate learning for SEN children. On the subject of head teacher support, teachers interviewed reported that head teachers sometimes supported them through school based in-service and the provision of teaching learning materials for lesson preparation yet school observations and teachers interviewed suggested that this was very limited. Most classrooms did not have any teaching learning materials in easy access of the teachers. In a significant number of schools TLMs were kept in the head teacher's office with limited signs of utilization.

Key findings suggest that there were certain strategies and methods which were promoting learning across all 86 classrooms observed and these mainly related to the approachability of the teacher and the openness of the teachers towards creating a non threatening learning environment among students. Classroom observers noted that children were often taught by asking them to answer close ended questions, echo/repeat and memorise answers; the way reading was taught often did not involve any decoding skills in teaching reading across different subject areas.

The Teaching of Reading

In the majority of cases, lessons observed across the 86 classrooms where literacy lessons were being taught, teachers were either teaching English reading or reading in the mother tongue, some aspect of grammar, or how to structure a piece of writing. In a small number of classrooms a mathematics or science lesson was being delivered but because the remit of the research was to observe the teaching of literacy and reading, these subjects formed the majority of lessons observed. Approximately 30 reading lessons were observed and the majority of these reading instructional lessons followed a similar pattern.

A reading lesson would be based on a passage usually taken from the pupils' textbook. At some point in the lesson the teacher would identify certain key words from this passage and these would be shared with the students. The key words were usually those that had been highlighted in the textbook or on the blackboard. In some cases the teacher would discuss with pupils before the reading began what they understood about the topic on which the text was based. This was not typical however. The actual reading would usually take the form of

¹³ Approximately 75% of lessons observed were language lessons.

the teacher reading the text aloud for the students to hear and then reading it again and again so that pupils would read the same passage usually as a whole class chorus. Some teachers varied this pattern by getting smaller groups to read after him/her and others might use students to do some of the reading aloud. But in virtually every reading lesson this pattern of read and repeat was used for the majority of classroom instructional time.

If students made pronunciation errors during their echo reading these would be corrected by the teacher. In just one lesson out of the 86 observed was a teacher observed actually discussing with pupils reading strategies they could use 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 they could recognise this in other words. Very little instruction was based on using teaching learning materials such as flashcards, small books or posters. Generally if, individual children were given time to read, they were chosen to do so because they were “good readers” and could therefore model the reading for the rest of the class. There were only two classrooms where teachers were seen in helping children sound out words using flashcards, in small groups or individually.

The main finding from classroom observations across the three northern regions of Ghana indicated that the “basic skill” of reading was simply not being taught effectively. Conversely, in many of those lessons where some aspect of grammar was being taught, teachers were adopting a much more participatory approach where students were encouraged to answer questions about the learning objective and given the opportunity to orally practice the target language.

Teacher Attitude towards Different Learner Needs

Evidence from the field work revealed the key reasons why children with special needs were not entering, accessing and remaining for the full cycle of primary education in northern Ghana. Observation at the school and classroom levels suggests that teachers were often not creating and supporting a safe learning environment which made it even more challenging for children with special needs; lack of teaching and learning materials adapted for children with special needs and limited knowledge of how to teach children with special needs meant that SEN children were often ignored, isolated, or allowed to roam the school compound. Interviews with teachers suggested that other than adopting the strategy of sitting hearing or visually impaired children at the front of the class, they did not have enough training to ensure they were confident in handling SEN children and in some cases they confessed that there was little point in trying. Peripatetic officers at the district level also did not have enough resources to visit schools on a consistent basis. Lack of supervision at the school level was also a key barrier to the special needs child being enrolled and staying in school due to the high rates of bullying, stigmatization and abuse by other children. Observers noted at the schools visited, pupils were largely unsupervised and in some cases, schools were found to be dangerous for children with special needs; particularly those with severe challenges.

Evidence from discussions about special needs children indicated that a universal strategy for dealing with children with special needs (visual and hearing impairments) was adopted by most teachers observed: the teacher would sit the special needs learner close to the blackboard and write clearly and speak loudly. Other types of special needs children with moderate to severe learning difficulties were not supported in the classrooms since most teachers reported not having the expertise to “handle” these types of children. Evidence from the focal group discussions with children and classrooms observed illustrated that children with moderate to severe learning needs were told to sit outside the classroom or allowed to roam around the school compound since teachers were not able to facilitate learning for these children and in some cases they did not see the point in trying.

The main findings suggest that the process of helping SEN children learn was not being facilitated by the majority of teachers who lacked skills in handling them. Secondly, teachers were not facilitating “high learning” classrooms due to the lack of teacher pupil interaction, limited usage of participatory teaching approaches particularly in the teaching of reading and concentration on a few pupils to answer questions. Findings from classroom observation and interviews with children suggest that the key factors inhibiting quality education with respect to SEN children were mainly related to teacher attitude and conduct towards SEN children. Parents pointed out that the SEN children were often neglected or not taught in the classroom. Teacher interviews suggest that they believed SEN children should be placed in special needs institutions such as school for the Blind and Deaf; their comments suggest that by bringing them to primary schools parents were “*wasting teachers time*” and disturbing the teaching and learning process of other children.

Access to quality education by Special Education Needs (SEN) children was a key focus of the TENI research study. Interviews with parents and the parents of children with special needs revealed that non-schooling of SEN children was high among the communities in Northern Region and especially in the rural areas of all the regions. This was closely linked with the expensive nature of educating SEN children in terms of the provision of the necessary aids (wheel chairs, etc), the unsuitable nature of the mainstream school system and the lack of attention for SEN children by teachers and in some cases the bullying by other pupils. Across the three regions, 17%, 15% and 12.5% for Northern, Upper East and Upper West (respectively) of parents said they were not in support of SEN children attending school because of the burden it placed on both the child and the parents.

Teachers pointed to the lack of SEN teaching and learning materials/equipment and the fact that they were not specially trained to handle SEN children as a key barrier to learning. Additionally teachers blamed parents and community stigmatisation of children with severe special needs by hiding them at homes and not sending the SEN children to school regularly. Some parents complained of their inability to buy wheel chairs and that they could not carry the child to and from school daily. For the SEN child the greatest inhibitor to quality education was the community/teacher/pupil stigmatization. Children spoke of the challenge of lack of appropriate materials to support SEN education and teachers’ negative attitude towards SEN education.

Another aspect of teacher sensitivity towards learners needs related to their ability to be **gender sensitive** in the classroom with respect to their treatment of boys and girls. Evidence from field level interviews with children and classroom observations suggests that in the majority of cases teachers were using strategies to ensure that both boys and girls were given the opportunity to participate in the lesson. Where this was not the case, it was either because the lesson was delivered as a lecture and overall participation was sparse; or as some observers noted, that the teacher was focussing his/her attention on those pupils more able to answer questions or read a text – one example of this was a teacher who felt that girls were less able to understand the more complex aspects of science. The situation in terms of gender balance was quite different outside of the classroom, both in the school and the home context girls had the heaviest workload.

In terms of **feedback strategies** by teachers in the classrooms, there were only a few classrooms observed across the three northern regions where observers described teachers as constructively commenting on the level of success learners were achieving. There was very limited encouragement by teachers in the classroom observed. For example, if a pupil gave an incorrect answer the teacher questioned that pupil and other students about what it was that made that answer incorrect. In most cases teachers would ask another student for the “right” answer or would simply supply it themselves therefore missing out on the opportunity to lead the pupil to think critically about what they were

doing and reinforcing the idea that any given question has a correct answer and this needs to be memorized.

Evidence from classroom observations and follow up interviews with teachers revealed that only a few teachers were aware of classroom corrective strategies that promoted learning apart from using praises and clapping for right answers. Pupils were encouraged to participate in lessons mostly through questions requiring yes/no responses and questions requiring recall of simple factual information. Teachers' dominant motivation strategy was to praise or ask pupils to clap for colleagues answering correctly. Very few teachers either actually discussed why a particular answer was right or wrong or discussed how pupils could work out the right answer if they initially got it wrong.

There was also clear evidence that teaching and learning processes among children were being inhibited by the high levels of verbal and physical abuse of learners by teachers in the classroom. Behaviour patterns of teachers suggested that children were being used for hard labour on the teachers' farms, menial tasks at the school and children were often asked to kneel in the sun as part of the normal disciplinary practices. The most damaging behaviour pattern among teachers was the consistent and wide spread negative verbal chastisement when pupils were unable to answer a question and the distancing of the teacher from the pupils by very rarely asking pupils who were considered "slow learners" questions or showing any interest in a pupil in their classroom.

The issue of **disciplinary practices** as observed in classrooms across the three northern regions of Ghana appear to have been influenced by the presence of the research team. There were only a few cases of disciplinary action being taken in the presence of the research team. The few teachers who used some form of disciplinary action did so with caution. Classroom observers reported that there was very little poor behaviour exhibited by students and as a result of which, examples of disciplinary practice were either not always observed or there were very few during the course of lessons. Nonetheless there were a few cases where teachers (or in one case the class leader – a pupil) used some form of physical punishment and in others, teachers' verbal reprimands were quite harsh or threatening. In contrast, evidence gathered from focal group interviews with teachers and head teachers and other FGDs – particularly those with the pupils – indicates that in most cases teachers were still using physical and verbal chastisement/punishments for behaviours in their classrooms as a form of classroom management.

FGDs with children suggest, that teachers used corporal punishment on a regular basis and that the "cane" was in widespread use. FGD's also suggest that there was a high level of physical and verbal/emotional abuse going on in schools in the North. Interviews with head teachers and FGDs with teachers suggest that caning was still the main method of disciplining pupils' misbehaviour or non performance in classes. Some children said that "caning had to be done in order that they would be corrected". Students believed caning was a good practice and accepted it as a way to correct their behaviour. Pupils also mentioned in several instances (12 Focal group discussions with girls) that caning was the main reason they absented themselves from school.

Assessment of Children's Learning

Evidence from across Ghana suggests when parents know the degree to which their children are performing in the school this can have a positive impact on the efforts and demand they make for quality education (Casely-Hayford, et al. 2010). The Link Community Development Evaluation (AfC, 2010) found that where SMC's and parents are given the opportunity to learn about the results

of their children's progress in the core subject areas this can stimulate change in the school through usage of the school performance appraisal process. In this process parents and teachers sit down to discuss the situation of children at the school and see how best both sides can support child learning in the classroom. The evidence from this study also suggests that there is a significant breakdown in the teachers' ability to assess children's learning in the classroom and this had a ripple effect on the parents' ability to assess the child's learning due to the fact that very few exercises are available on a regular basis for the parents to review. Performance monitoring tests appear to be very important mechanisms along with School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAMs) in order to ensure that teachers are held accountable for their work and the learning process of the child¹⁴.

4.0 Child Readiness

In most instances, the Quality of Education Study found that children came to school wanting to learn, researchers noted that most children were "waiting from about 7 am to 9am for their teachers to arrive at the school yet they were also several factors which prevented their readiness to learn. Findings from the Quality of Education research revealed four key factors inhibiting child readiness to learn across the three study regions including: economic, socio-cultural, environmental and psycho-social responses to learning (including responses to the learning environment). Findings from the Quality of Education Study suggest that: poverty remains a key barrier to child readiness to learn across the three regions. Parents' inability to provide the basic needs for children in school continues to be a major reason for children staying out of school, dropping out and unable to complete the full cycle of basic education.

Based on evidence from FGDs with pupils, teachers, SMC /PTAs and parents, it was concluded that child readiness in the three northern regions was challenged by a number of inhibiting factors. Although children are ready to learn, teacher attitudes and the poor school learning climate hampered pupils' readiness to learn. Poverty was a significant inhibitor of child readiness by preventing parents from being able to adequately support their children in school with their basic needs including adequate food. Poverty accounted for many children going to school hungry. The field work evidence revealed that child readiness was affected negatively by traditional practices of assigning specific roles to gender. In this regard children, mostly girls were affected by "forced marriage", a heavy burden of household chores and other traditional roles which required supporting adults (including teachers) which made them more vulnerable and at risk of abuse. The study also revealed that the gender roles of children in the home were in the majority of cases transferred to the school realm with girls being responsible for sweeping the school compound and fetching water while boys did the weeding.

The findings from focal group interviews in communities suggests that only a few teachers, head teachers and parents were working hard to promote child readiness. In some communities, the SMC/PTAs had contributed to improving child readiness through their support to the schools and teachers in order to promote learning (e.g. infrastructure etc). Some communities had contributed financially to supporting the volunteer teachers and making efforts to accommodate teachers in the community. Findings from the TENI midterm review (2012) suggest that communities enhanced their recruitment of community volunteer teachers, worked on strategies to prevent school children from attending night time activities such as video shows due to the impact of gender clubs. TENI

¹⁴ The TENI programme implemented the School Performance Reviews (SPR) and School Performance Assessment Meetings (SPAM) which according to the mid term review in 2012, led to greater awareness among parents of inclusive education, increased involvement in school development and community action planning; reports also suggest that greater efforts were made by community groups and leaders to outlaw negative cultural practices.

communities were also outlawing negative socio cultural practices and increased their awareness and support for children special needs in education.

On material insecurity the study concluded that poverty was affecting learning outcomes of children since it often forced them to work on a seasonal and daily basis in order to meet their basic needs. Girls particularly left school to engage in “Kayayo”¹⁵ in order to raise the funds to support their basic needs in school and the boys engaged in menial jobs and mining activities to support themselves and their families. Poverty prevented most parents from being able to support their children effectively in school. Parental interviews revealed that poverty contributed to the out of school phenomena and drop out of children from schools due to child labour and the migration of children to work.

On the subject of children’s perception and assessment of their own learning across the 54 northern schools, the evidence suggests that children were very ready and willing to learn but were experiencing learning in very harsh school climates/conditions. On the issue of pupils assessing teacher pedagogy the evidence reveals that pupils were not happy with the methods teachers were using since they were not participatory. Pupils also reported that when teacher’s used interactive approaches this inspired them to learn more effectively. Children also reported that the methods involving the combined use of English and the Ghanaian languages as a medium of instruction was more effective in helping them learn compared to teachers who used only English as the medium of instruction. Although there were a significant number of children particularly in urban centres and at Junior High Schools who felt that all school interactions should be in the English language as they gauged their ability to speak and understand English as an indicator of their own success. On the subject of teacher supply and distribution in the three northern regions, most rural schools lacked female teacher role models with male teachers predominant in most of the rural schools. The study also found that girls preferred an “all girls school” since they felt more confident that they would be able to develop their full capacities and not be hindered from speaking out in class.

The quality of education study in northern Ghana revealed that girls were the most affected by child readiness factors since some parents were unable to provide for their basic needs such as sanitary materials during their menstrual cycle and even if these are available, girls stated they had to either remain at home or go home during the school day. This issue was a major source of worry for girls interviewed especially in the Northern Region. Focal Group interviews with girls further revealed that this has led several girls (particularly in the Northern Region) to engage in transactional sex activities with older men to enable them to provide for their basic needs.

The most common inhibitor mentioned by different stakeholders across the 54 schools is related to poverty. Despite the fact that the capitation grant has meant that many more children can access the basic school system, there are still other costs that parents have to meet in order to ensure their children are ready for school, these include the purchase of uniforms, appropriate footwear, exercise books and pens or pencils. There was evidence from several focal group interviews with children that they resorted to working at the illegal mining sites (“galamsey”) or by transporting goods across the border in order to meet these costs themselves. Another key finding from the study revealed that children were experiencing high levels of hunger during their classroom experience as a result of insufficient feeding before and during school. This resulted in children having to leave early to go home to eat. Focal group discussions with children also pointed to the fact that hunger often left them unable to concentrate and focus in the classroom and prevented them from learning.

¹⁵ Girls work as head porters in urban market centres.

5.0 Community Demand for Quality Education

Communities were highly active in contributing to the improvement of quality across extremely deprived areas and in families with poor socio-economic levels. Evidence from the Quality of Education study reveals that rural communities were often supporting the quality improvements in their schools by paying small stipends for community based teachers. Communities were also building kitchens and providing cooks from the community and in some cases were providing food during the “hunger season”. But communities were also well aware that they were obtaining substandard educational outcomes and provision from the State. For instance, some communities were so disappointed with the results of the BECE tests that they directly confronted teachers with their complaints and then proceeded directly to district education authorities. District Assemblies were also well aware of the poor learning results from the schools across their district despite the heavy investment by DAs.

Surprisingly, these same communities had several NGO’s and other interventions working in them but there was limited evidence that these agencies were bringing closure to issues of poor quality education. There was limited evidence that enough work was being done to effectively follow up and ensure that issues raised by communities at SPAM/SPR events were being acted upon by DEO’s or District Assemblies and District Education Oversight Committees. Findings suggest that external agencies were working with individual communities but not in a visible manner nor district wide basis; and that most projects had attempted to empower the communities by speaking out about their issues and consulting the local authorities but not enough SMC’s were voicing their concerns collectively in order to build a case at the District Education office. Findings from the study suggest that DEOs recognised the weak and vulnerable state of PTA’s and SMC’s and had not facilitated effective channels of communication to strengthen/accompany communities in acting on quality education challenges being faced by communities.

The research revealed that most communities were fatigued and disempowered in their attempt to demand quality education and that an objective “third force” was needed to accompany communities in seeking action for poor quality learning environments in the north. Communities interviewed feared the potential breakdown of teacher/ community relations if they took issues too far since they were “warned” by district education officers that they might be denied access to trained teachers which might lead to closure of community school. Some communities had suffered such closures in the past and experience in struggling to get their schools back. Communities were aware of the need for better teaching and learning outcomes and were making significant contributions to school improvement in spite of frustrations they experienced from dealings with education authorities and the District Assembly. District Assemblies were also well aware of the poor results from the schools across their districts despite DA’s investment in education.

Focal Group interviews with the PTA/SMCs across the 54 communities indicated that the parents believed that they did not have adequate social capital to put pressure and ensure that action was taken at the district level for problems to be solved. Some FGI’s with community members, SMC’s and PTAs suggested that even chiefs did not want the matters to be taken up at district education offices in order not to risk losing the few trained teachers who were posted to their schools. Parents particularly women expressed the fear that their children may be harshly punished due to the complaints by parents. The evidence from the study suggested that more collective action across several PTA’s and SMCs was needed to attract attention by district authorities and possibly the media in order to stimulate action.

Key Community Barriers/Inhibitors to Quality Education

Findings from the community focal group interviews and score card exercise indicate that communities' perceptions of barriers and inhibitors to quality education were mainly related to the lack of commitment and dedication by teachers towards the promotion of quality education. Parents and community members recognised that teachers were not always regular at school, and in some cases were worried that their children were not learning; in several cases parents felt helpless and incapable of holding teachers accountable partly due to the fact they did not feel that the District offices were able to act objectively on complaints. According to community members and parents, there have been several attempts to address indiscipline among teachers by reporting them to the district office but their efforts did not result in action. In communities where there was strong head teacher leadership, school governance and a good relationship with community members and teachers, the researchers observed higher levels of discipline among the teaching force.

Another key inhibitor of quality education as indicated by parents and communities was the inadequacy of trained teacher supply to their schools and the unwillingness of trained teachers to accept postings to especially rural communities. Most teachers preferred to live and work in the urban areas because of the ready access to suitable social amenities. Most parents especially in rural schools complained that trained teachers preferred not to live in the community even if they had provided accommodation free for them. Closely linked to inadequate teacher supply was the issue of teaching and learning materials across schools. Communities complained that there was very limited TLMs supplied to their schools and this had affected their children's ability to learn.

Potential promoters of Quality Education

From the parents' perspective, the most important promoter of quality education was the presence of a committed regular head teacher and teachers, and adequate numbers of trained teachers at the school level; second to this was an adequate supply of textbooks in sufficient quantities for all children and the presence of a school feeding programme. SMC/PTAs, parents and community members were particularly concerned about head teacher, and teachers' attitude towards their work. SMC's and community members were keenly aware of the investment they had made in their children and knew that lack of teacher punctuality and teacher absenteeism would have a serious impact on their children's future. Teacher regularity, punctuality, presence in class, and proper teacher supervision were key issues parents and community members reported consistently across all three regions but most prominent in the Upper West and Northern Regions.

Parents also noticed that more focus of teachers on their work with children in the classroom was pivotal to improving their child's learning. They measured the outputs of teachers through a review of their children's note books and the level of English they could speak. They were aware that teachers were engaged in other activities such as farming and other income generating activities as well as distance education programmes. Fieldwork revealed that parents wanted teachers to be more focussed on their work; additionally, teachers also felt that parents should make more effort to adequately feed, clothe and provide their children with school materials before coming to school.

With respect to the processes promoting quality education, interviews with the District Chief Executive and District Education Directors suggests that more supervision was needed to ensure that circuit supervisors were effective in monitoring schools. DDE's also felt that head teachers needed to ensure teacher preparation was adequate in order to ensure efficient and effective instruction/ time on task in the classroom. Teacher competency and more importantly, teacher commitment were seen as vital for arresting the problems of low levels of learning achievement across the three northern

regions of the country. Directors also mentioned the need for more training in child-centred and child friendly approaches in order to promote inclusiveness and equity and ensure that individual child's needs were being met.

Adequate numbers of pupils' assignments and assessment were seen as key to promoting quality. Head teachers and teachers expressed the view that efficient and regular quality supervision and monitoring was essential to promoting quality. Interviews and school based observations revealed that proper record keeping, particularly related to pupils' assessment could help track performance and improve quality education delivery. FGDs with teachers revealed that head teachers needed to carry out far more pedagogic support at the school level such as school based inset/ classroom observation with post observation discussions. Pupils in all three regions were unanimous in their view that the key promoter of quality education was the teacher's positive behaviour and attitude: *'Only our teachers can teach us. Our parents go to farm; if teachers teach us well and give exercises and mark we will learn more'*. Pupils also spoke of the need for adequate availability of learning resources in order to ensure learning: textbooks, exercise books, pens, classrooms, tables and chairs.

With regard to quality promotion in relation to SEN children's inclusiveness and the girl child FGD with Girls' Education officers and peripatetic officers revealed the need for more:

- Sensitivity to SEN/gender issues and care of girl/SEN pupils
- Teacher knowledge of girl/SEN education strategies
- Use of appropriate pedagogy for girl/SEN pupils
- Community support and encouragement of the education of SEN pupils
- Teachers fair treatment of all pupils in school/class (including SEN)
- Parental support and provision of girls'/SEN basic needs at home and in school
- Provision of gender sensitive and SEN teaching and learning materials

6.0 Key Conclusions

The key drivers of change to promote inclusive education for all

Findings from all three northern regions reveal several different quality promoters: the most important is a change of attitude towards the commitment of the teaching force and education administration to manage public basic education across these regions. Underlying the visible needs of school quality was whether the resources and supplies to promote school quality would be used effectively and efficiently. FGD with teachers, SMC/PTAs and Scorecard reports all concur that if local education authorities, education sub-committees of the District Assembly, Head teachers and teachers, opinion leaders, Chiefs and elders and SMC/PTA and parents work prudently and are committed to improving education quality, quality education in Ghana will be achieved in public basic education schools in the three northern regions. Unfortunately the study found that this commitment and dedication to education improvement was often absent particularly among the direct education providers (e.g. district education officers, heads and teachers)¹⁶.

In some instances however, some synergy between head teachers, community and district education officials had been achieved and there was clear evidence of a few "high learning" schools across the schools sampled. The characteristics of these schools followed similar but not always identical patterns. Various other research and evidence from the Quality of Education Study suggests that schools situated in an urban community and particularly schools managed by Religious Units

¹⁶ This will be further explored under the second TENI research study in 2013/14.

(particularly RC) are more likely to promote quality learning. 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 ongoing training and support of his/her teachers. In “high learning” schools observed: the head teachers maintained links with the community and the community demonstrated an interest in ensuring the school had the necessary provisions to function. At the classroom level, the head teacher mentorship and head teacher support meant that even untrained teachers within the school were able to create a high learning environment for their pupils. However, while some of the schools identified as “high learning” environments fit this profile, there were far more schools which did not and were categorised as “low learning” schools.

The study also found that despite significant resources being put into the public education system by central government and donor agencies in order to improve direct teaching and learning processes, instructional practice, and to increase access to relevant materials and teaching learning aids, these were not always adopted or sustained in schools which were poorly managed (e.g. NALAP, EQUALL, etc). For instance, where schools had access to the needed educational resources and training to improve instructional practice, impact was often short-lived as exemplified by NALAP and EQUALL initiatives. The findings suggest that in systems where there are high rates of instability (e.g. teacher absenteeism, very poor modelling of head teacher leadership etc), investment and more financing is not always the way forward. Changing behaviour and attitudes particularly of the managers and staff of these resources appears to be at the heart of the change process in order to improve the quality of education in Ghana’s northern sector. This is likely to be the main focus of the coming phase of research under the TENI project.

Structural inhibitors to quality change included a clear blockage between the teaching force who was in some cases undermining educational quality change and the population who was unable to hold the teaching force accountable. The poor teacher performance/output and incapacity of communities to hold teachers accountable constituted a major inhibitor to quality delivery of education. The findings also suggest that the District Education Offices who are responsible for providing oversight, management and the key to negotiate or uphold a level of accountability at the school level were often dysfunctional. Some head teachers who recognized that their own teachers were “*out of control*” felt that they alone could not manage the teachers under their authority since they had “*friends at the district offices who would find ways to overrule their decisions*”. Being a strong head teacher and school manager within this context was therefore becoming very difficult in northern Ghana where the vast majority of teachers observed were not focussed on serving their people. In this learning atmosphere the following recommendations to bring about change within the civil society sector and the Ghana Government are made:

- Fully externalise the oversight of teachers at the district levels. This is likely to involve the new assessment and inspectorate bodies (i.e. National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, National Inspectorate Board, National Teaching Council)
- Strengthen teacher disciplinary procedures by enforcing sanctions on non performing and absentee teachers by using salary freezes and systems of demotion particularly for non performing head teachers.
- Ensure effective oversight of the District Education Office by the District Assembly, District Education Oversight Committee (DEOC)
- Track school progress and student achievement by implementing a performance monitoring tests in every district (PMT’s should be implemented by the District Assembly) and establish

national standards/milestones in literacy and numeracy for primary schools¹⁷; reinstitute performance contracts with head teachers.

- Ensure that National assessment testing (e.g. Early Grade Reading and Numeracy Assessments, National Education Assessment results are easily available to District Assemblies and District Education Offices in order hold schools/teachers accountable).
- There should be staff rationalisation at district education offices to release professional teachers in administrative positions to work particularly in rural schools.
- Ensure clearer oversight to the recruitment of pupil teachers in order that committed and long serving community volunteer teachers receive opportunity for training and employment in the GES.
- Strengthen and/or set up child protection mechanisms which can ensure that complaints by communities, parents and children related to school based abuses can be reported. This system of complaints should involve an oversight committee at district level made up of District Education Office representatives, Social Welfare, CHRAJ, Police force and one or two other child rights and protection agencies.
- Ensure the election of PTA/SMC assemblies at the district and regional levels in order to ensure that a representative voice of parents is strengthened and that complaint/follow up mechanisms of recalcitrant teachers/ dysfunctional schools are brought to the public attention.

The study also found that **teaching and learning practices** at the classroom level were in many cases not promoting quality learning outputs. As such the following recommendations are made to remediate issues around classroom discipline, teaching methodology (including the language of instruction used), and participation especially in terms of the inclusion of children with special needs, girls and other disadvantaged groups:

Discipline policies with regards to pupil discipline should be reviewed so that schools use child friendly guidelines for disciplining students and abolish corporal punishment in basic schools; review school policies to reflect these guidelines to ensure alternative strategies to verbal or physical abuse are instated¹⁸. Policies should be fully integrated into school and staff training and undertaken in collaboration with both parents and pupils to ensure that procedures are transparent and staff are held accountable.

Language of Instruction: policies for how and when teachers use pupils' first and second language of instruction across the primary system should be articulated to teachers by the MOE/GES as a matter of national urgency in order to ensure quality education. Already the Government of Ghana has developed a bilingual education approach at lower primary which gradually transitions children from L1 to L2 from KG to Primary 3 class. The National Accelerated Literacy Programme (NALAP) should be fully financially and technically supported by the Ghana Government on a yearly basis in order to ensure that this "flagship" programme is fully embraced and effectively implemented.¹⁹

Child-centred methodology: One of the greatest constraints teachers have in using child-centred and/or participatory strategies/methodologies is their attitude and relationship towards children in

¹⁷ This testing will be developed and designed by the District and use for monitoring by the district authorities to track school progress.

¹⁸ Basic Education Division is finalizing a set of Child Friendly standards and procedures for schools based on UNICEF best practice globally.

¹⁹ A high level meeting with key Government Stakeholders and the World Bank in Rwanda (2012) identified Ghana's NALAP programme as one of the most successfully designed early grade reading, literacy and numeracy programs in Sub Saharan Africa.

their classrooms. Therefore any trainings or guidance given to teachers needs to include practical strategies of child friendly behaviour amongst teachers, moral leadership qualities, emphasis on learning outcomes using child friendly teaching methods, peer teaching using participatory methods in often under resourced schools and dealing with large class sizes. This training should be mainstreamed in the following areas:

- Review methods taught at training colleges and how teacher trainers are modelling participatory approaches;
- Encourage head teachers to mentor their teaching staff in an informal and formalised manner;
- Expand in-service training to all members of teaching staff, particularly untrained teachers
- Phonic methods for assisting teachers teach reading skills at primary level are needed;
- Sustaining programmes which use phonetic/syllabic and mother tongue approaches should be adequately financed by MOE (e.g. NALAP)

Gender: the majority of teachers were aware of the need to ensure that both boys and girls fully participate in teaching and learning activities. However, some aspects of school life are still gender-insensitive to pupils e.g. teachers' attitudes to girls' attainment in science; children's roles when cleaning the school compound and preparing for the school day. Inhibitors to girls' access included poor sanitation facilities in schools, early age pregnancy, sexual abuse by male peers and teachers. The key recommendations include:

- Reviewing and implementing gender policies in schools which include: guidelines for distributing roles and responsibilities among children at the school, guidelines for how to deal with the incidence of school based abuse, guidelines for care, protection and counselling of girls. Ensuring re-entry procedures are in place for early pregnancy of girls in school.
- Implement, refer and enforce legal procedures for girls' subjected to sexual abuse at school (e.g. Policy Force);
- Review and strengthen life skills curriculum to include sex education particularly with regard to strategies to avoid pregnancy.
- Ensure that there are sanitation facilities available in schools for girls;

Inclusion: The GES should review carefully its inclusive education policy and strategy to ensure that it is adequately prepared to work in unstable learning environments where the policy of integrating children is being promoted. Given the findings from this study, careful consideration should be taken in integrating children with mild to medium learning impairments particularly in under supervised learning environments. Much more work is needed to prepare attitudes and behaviours of teachers who are going to work with children who are differently abled and may be integrated into mainstream schools in Ghana. Teachers need to receive much more current/relevant pre and in service training on teaching methodologies for facilitating learning among differently abled children;

National policy on inclusion – a rigorous review of implementing inclusive education policy in Ghana is needed particularly with respect to:

- Training implications
- Infrastructure of schools
- Community and teacher support
- Cost implications of enabling all schools to facilitate special needs education
- the issues and attempting to present the situation to the public on a regular basis.

From a grass roots perspective, the key drivers of change for attaining quality education in Ghana will be to strengthen the voice and visibility of children and parents who are primarily suffering from poor quality delivery of education. Children will have to organise themselves particularly those who have dropped out of school or have not transitioned to JHS or SHS due to a host of inhibiting factors. Children and youth in the communities should be organised in order to have a stronger voice (e.g. SFL graduates who have completed JHS but not continued; others who are still not in school).

Secondly, parents who are already in SMC's and PTA's should be empowered by following some of the best practices of VSO, LCD, ISODEC and PRONET to organise/elect more regional and district level assemblies; these bodies should hold conventions to ensure that on a yearly basis SMC's assess the state of affairs of their schools across their districts in collaboration with the Regional Coordinating Councils and the District Assemblies. Once these platforms are strengthened at district and regional level, the performance monitoring tests and SPR and national assessment data can provide ongoing evidence of the state of affairs in the schools that they represent. These forums should be developed in order to ensure they are sustained, institutionalised and seen by both the State and civil society as a constituency based forum able to speak on behalf of parents in the country.

Grassroots change will also require that much more work is carried out by NGO's to ensure that the mechanisms to seek redress by the PTA's and SMC's are available at the district and regional levels. Continuous awareness creation through TV and radio on the rights of parents and children to quality education should be pursued including their training on the teacher code of conduct and other child rights legislation and quality education delivery. Ghana has set up the legislative instruments and institutions to protect children's basic human right to quality education. Unfortunately, the population is still not fully aware of these mechanisms and institutions which are resourced to ensure that public primary education is able to provide acceptable learning outcomes for all Ghana's children.