



## **Cost-Effectiveness: Consideration for scaling Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) in Ghana**

### **Introduction and objectives**

Over the last decade, Accelerated Education Programmes (AEP) and Girls Focus Models (GFM) programs has emerged as key innovations for providing foundational education to out-of-school children and addressing rural-urban disparities in education (AEWG, 2020, Associates for Change, 2022). The AE programming are flexible, age-appropriate programs, designed to provide accelerated education to school-going-age children who have dropped out of formal schooling or never attended school before. The AEPs aim to strategically provide learners with numeracy, literacy, and life skills equivalent to formal basic education using effective pedagogy that matches their level of cognitive maturity. These innovative models have the potential of addressing the out-of-school prevalence particularly in underserved communities and among marginalized groups (Effectiveness Study Report, 2023). However, knowledge about the cost-effectiveness of AEP programming is limited.

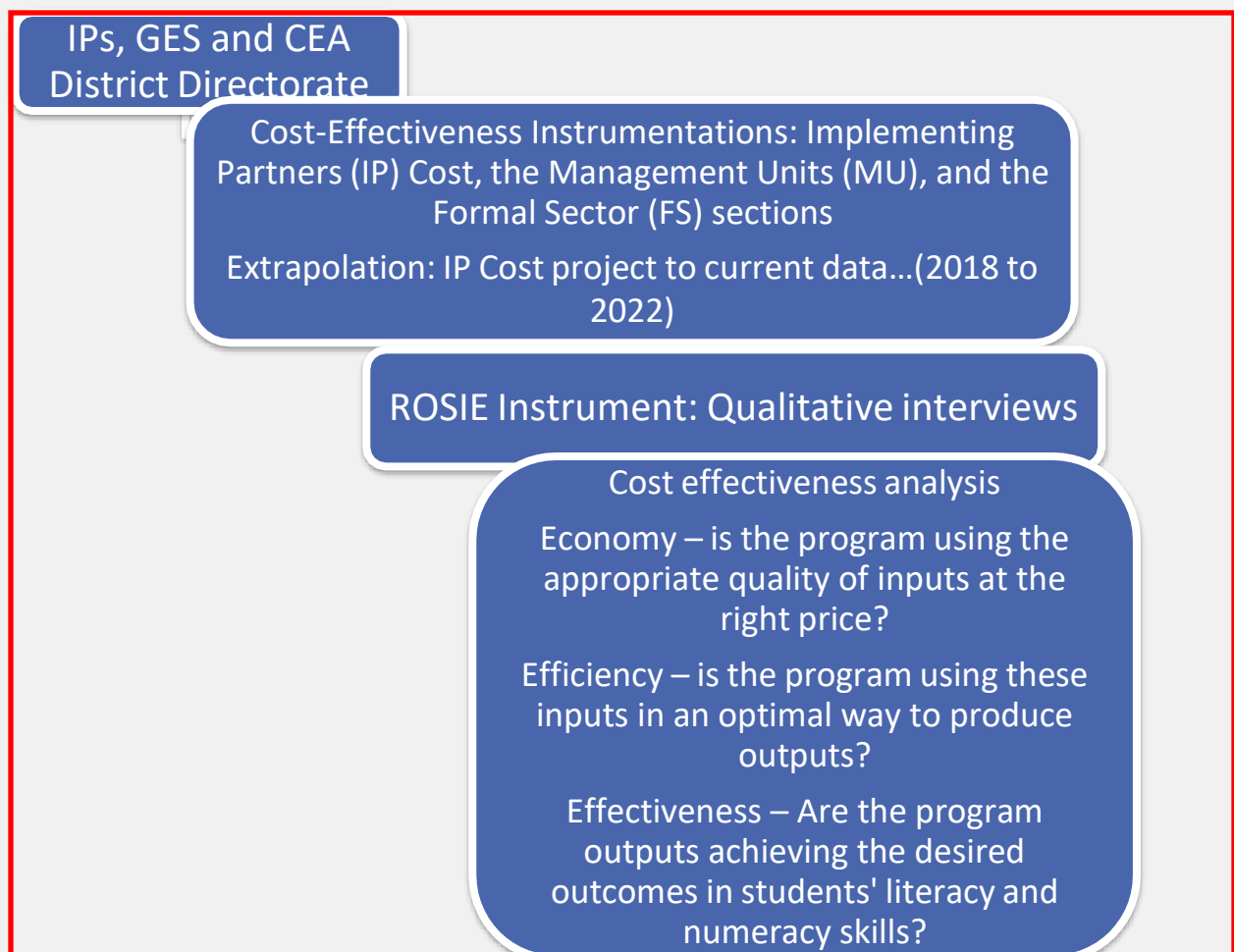
The need for understanding the cost-efficiency of education programming is particularly germane for resource-constraint developing countries since it is critical to ensuring resource optimization amid limited financial resources. In addition, giving the dwindling donor budgetary support for education in recent years, providing interventions for the OOSC, targeting vulnerable populations must do so within a constrained resource envelope. As part of efforts of effectively addressing the out-of-school challenge and advocate for government uptake of alternative education pathways, research on the cost-effectiveness of alternative education interventions cannot be overemphasized. Evidenced produced from such analysis will serve as critical consideration or catalyst for policymakers seeking to understand the alternative education models that will provide value for money in terms of reaching out to OOSC in rural deprived communities. The Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) and girls-focused models being implemented in the three Northern Regions of Ghana by both Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and government agencies (CEA) provide the appropriate platform to do such value-for-money analysis with the cost of formal schooling in Ghana as a benchmark.

This study therefore aims to provide evidence on the cost-effectiveness of AEPs and Girls Focused Models (GFMs) programs implemented in 3 regions and over 8 districts in the Northern part of Ghana. In achieving the broad aim, the research was driven by three key objectives:

1. To determine the unit costs of AEP and Girls Focused Models (GFMs) programs in Ghana?
2. Undertake similar cost determination of public basic schools to provide a benchmark to the AEP.
3. Determine the effectiveness of AEP programme the program vis-à-vis the formal sector.

## Methodology

A sample of three (3) IPs working within the Kumbungu, Gushegu, and Talensi Districts of the Northern and Upper East Regions of Ghana are drawn for the study, with a long history of implementation of AEP programmes and could provide significant information of AEP programme costing over a long period. In addition, three (3) district Ghana Education Service offices from the same sample district were selected for the formal sector costing data.



The study adopts a Cost-Effectiveness Instrument developed by UKaid for the study with inputs from the Brookings Childhood Cost Calculator (3) Tool. For the qualitative component the ROSIE instrument was used. The cost-effectiveness instrument comprised three sub-sections: the Implementing Partners (IP), the Management Units (MU), and the Formal Sector (FS) sections. The costing of the AEPs was done using an input cost approach, where costs were estimated by major cost categories and by cost per unit: (1) estimating the total cost of core project inputs such as operational costs, training cost, administrative costs, production and distribution of TLMs, capacity building cost, monitoring and evaluation cost, and office costs, (2) integrating academic data to determine cost per unit (i.e. per student) and (3) Cost projections based on secondary data were cost data was lacking.

The cost-effectiveness or Value for Money (VfM) analysis was done within the DFID (2011) 3Es framework, in terms of the Economy, Effectiveness and Efficiency of the program. An in-depth interviews were conducted with structured ROSIE questions. These interviews are intended to provide qualitative background to scaling up and unravel strategies put in place by state and non-state actors for long term financing of AEP programmes. The data was transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis.

## Findings

- ❖ CSOs implementation of CBE programmes cost an average operational cost of GHS1, 513.00 compared to the formal sector operational cost of GHS1, 852.00.
- ❖ Cost drivers are mainly delivery costs and exacerbated by the current exchange rate volatility and inflationary pressures.
- ❖ AEPs are observed to be cost-efficient, transitioning over 90% of AEP beneficiaries at an average cost of GHS816 (US\$71) compared to the formal sector cost of GHS 962(US\$83). The average entry point of AEPs graduates is P4, skipping about three years of formal schooling, has implication for cost savings.
- ❖ Unit Cost of AEPs at the national government through the Complementary Education Agency level is estimated at GHS599 (US\$50) in 2022/23.

IPs	IP Operational cost per student in GHS [US\$]				
	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	Average
<b>Delivery costs per student</b>	<b>784</b> [68]	866 [75]	975 [85]	1,503 [131]	1,256 [109]

<b>MU cost per student</b>	161 [14]	177 [15]	200 [17]	308 [27]	257 [22]
<b>Total</b>	945 [82]	1,044 [91]	1,175 [102]	1,811 [157]	1,513 [131]

Source: Cost-Effectiveness study (2023)

*Table 2: Public basic schools spending per student, GHS*

<b>Unit cost (GHS)</b>	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>	<b>2022/23**</b>	<b>Average*</b>
<b>Primary school</b>						
<b>Delivery</b>	467	1,025	1,057	1,106	962	821
<b>Management &amp; agency</b>	93	153	161	165	142	128
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>559</b>	<b>1,179</b>	<b>1,218</b>	<b>1,271</b>	<b>1,103</b>	<b>949</b>
<b>JHS schools</b>						
<b>Delivery</b>	4,144	4,984	7,288	7,216	6,002	5,386
<b>Management &amp; agency</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>4,144</b>	<b>4,984</b>	<b>7,288</b>	<b>7,216</b>	<b>6,002</b>	<b>5,386</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,703</b>	<b>6,162</b>	<b>8,506</b>	<b>8,487</b>	<b>7,105</b>	<b>6,335</b>

**Table 3: Cost effectiveness**

<b>CBE programme, GHS [</b>	<b>2018/2019</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>	<b>2021/22</b>
<b>Cost per AEP student</b>	531	652	642	674
<b>Cost per AEP graduates</b>	545	659	655	771
<b>Cost per AEP transitioner</b>	551	678	675	816
<b>Formal sector, GHS</b>				
<b>Cost per promoted student (formal sector)</b>	381	908	894	960
<b>Management cost per promoted student (formal sector)</b>	76	136	136	143

- ❖ Investment required to eliminate the over 1.2 million children out of school, is estimated at an amount of GHS150 million (USD Equiv. 12.5 million) yearly for the next four years. Equivalent to 0.7% and 0.5% of the budget allocation to education sector in 2023 and 2024, respectively.
- ❖ International Donors remain the major source of funding for the implementation of accelerated education programing in Ghana. With major funding coming from DFID and the World Bank.
- ❖ Institutionalization of the Complementary Education Agency shows the foundation for full government uptake.
- ❖ Government commitment to allocating an equivalent of 1% of education budget allocation to the Complementary Education Agency has been missed for two (2) consecutive years.

### **Recommendations**

- ❖ Measuring the cost-effectiveness of AEP requires IPs to document accurately and comprehensively costing and outcome data from the inception of the program, building this into the program monitoring and evaluation reports.
- ❖ Ensuring the scalability of AEPs is vital for effectively addressing the OOSC challenge in marginalized and deprived communities in Ghana, given the proven cost-effectiveness of this alternative education innovation.
- ❖ We encourage government scale-up with an annual budgetary allocation for 250,000 children, estimated to cost GHS150 million (USD Equiv. 12.5 million).
- ❖ To help improve efficiency in public basic schools spending, there is the need for increase resource allocation to school management for continuous monitoring.
- ❖ The CEA should be clothed with the capacity to coordinate all CBE programmes across the country. This will ensure proper coordination of effects by both state and non-state actors and provide a comprehensive database on all pockets of CBE programming across

the country. This will enable the proper tracking of progress in addressing the OOSC challenge.

- ❖ Although all IPs generally operate the same approach to CBE, there are notable differences in implementation driven in part by IPs experiences and capacity for local contributions. This was not looked at in this study due to the challenges of data accessibility. Future research should look closely into this variation to unravel their relative effectiveness.

**Table 4: Budget Allocation for Complementary Basic Education in Ghana.**

Year	No. of OOSC	Unit cost, GHS	CBE Proposed Budget to address the OOSC crisis – Presidential commitment (GHS)	Projected Education Allocation** (GHS)	Share (% overall budgets Allocation)
2023	250,000	599 (US\$50)	149,750,000	22,900,000,000	0.7%
2024	250,000	599 (US\$50)	149,750,000 (USD Equiv. 12.5 million)	27,938,000,000	0.5%
2025	250,000	599 (US\$50)	149,750,000	-	0.4%
2026	250,000	599 (US\$50)	149,750,000	-	0.4%
2027	200,000	599 (US\$50)	119,800,000	-	0.2%

*Based on Government budget allocation to education sector, 2023 and 2024.*

### Limitations

The study acknowledges two main limitations. First, while the study was set up to collect data from three CSOs implementing Accelerated Education Programs, comprehensive data, based on the template deployed, could only be obtained from only one CSO. Leading to the cost extrapolation bases on secondary cost data. Secondly, the cost estimates based on the extrapolations should be interpreted with caution, as this is only an attempted approximation of the actual cost of AEP implementation.

For more information about the Cost Effectiveness study, please visit our website: [www.associatesforchange.org](http://www.associatesforchange.org) or email [afcghana@yahoo.com](mailto:afcghana@yahoo.com) / [comdev9@yahoo.com](mailto:comdev9@yahoo.com).