Ghana Journal of Education: Issues and Practice (*GJE*)

Meaningful Learning in Ghanaian Basic Schools: Critical Contextual Evidence of Stakeholder Participation

Christine Adu-Yeboah

Institute of Education, University of Cape Coast

Email Address: cadu-yeboah@ucc.edu.gh/nhyiraba.aduyeboah68@gmail.com

Abstract

Basic education has received much attention in national and international discourses, with the formulation of national policies on free and compulsory basic education. In many Ghanaian communities, the assumption is that the government is the sole financier of public basic education. Therefore, parents take almost no responsibility for their wards' education. This study used the mixed method approach to explore the perspectives of stakeholders at the basic school level to understand the teaching and learning contexts for evidence of patterns of practice and innovative strategies that promote stakeholder involvement towards meaningful learning. In three different settlement areas and school types, copies of a questionnaire were administered to 384 teachers and head teachers in 28 schools; interviews were conducted with 28 head teachers and 9 focus group discussions were held with primary 6 pupils. Some key findings were that due to delayed government supplies, schools experienced inadequate basic resources which hampered smooth running of academic work. While some head teachers solicited for assistance from old students, philanthropists and Non-Governmental Organisations, others did nothing about the situation but waited for the government supplies. The study therefore concluded that irrespective of school type and settlement area, it takes a proactive school leader to initiate strategies that involve stakeholders in order to obtain resources for meaningful learning to take place. The study makes recommendations towards the training of head teachers and more awareness creation among stakeholders about their roles towards basic schools in their communities and their wards' learning, in spite of the fee-free policy.

Key words: Basic education, Free education, Meaningful learning, Mixed method, Stakeholder participation

Introduction

Education is widely acknowledged as very important for the development of individuals and nation-states (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, [UNESCO] 2007, 2009a). The human skills and abilities that develop through education, translate into individual social and economic benefits. These come about through employment opportunities and higher incomes, national economic growth and poverty reduction (World Bank, 2002; David, 2009). In middle and low-income countries where enrolment and completion rates are low in primary education, research suggests that the reading and numeracy skills acquired through basic education are fundamental and relevant for learning skills in technical and vocational education and ensure the trainability of youth for employment (Yuki & Kameyama, 2013). Goal 2 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) therefore required all nations to ensure that by 2015, children everywhere would be able to complete a full course of primary schooling (United Nations, 2000). Consequently, national education agendas and international development agencies focused greatly on primary education.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, statistics show that the sub-region had made the greatest progress in primary school enrolment among all developing regions; from 52 percent in 1990 to 78 percent in 2012 (Ghana National Development Commission, 2015). In Ghana, the 2015 report of the MDGs also indicates that the country has attained universal primary education. This success story is the product of the efforts and commitment of successive governments to ensure that all children of school-going age are in school. Strategies that were adopted to improve access to education include the policy of free and compulsory basic education enshrined in the 1992 Constitution from which the Education Act 2008 imposed fines on parents who failed to comply, the capitation grant and the school feeding programme (Ankomah, Koomson, Bosu, & Oduro, 2005; Ampiah, 2010).

Accessing basic education is not only about getting into school but also of accessing meaningful learning, completing successfully and being functional in the society. A UNESCO report of 2017 points out that in 2015, about 387 million children (56%) of primary school age were found not to have reached the minimum proficiency level in reading after many years of primary school education (UNESCO, 2017). In under-served communities particularly, it is noted that

globally, when public systems do not provide good quality education, the poor and marginalized lose out (UNESCO, 2017). This is especially the case in many low-income countries where research shows that access to basic education does not often commensurate with learning outcomes in public basic schools. In Ghana for example, in spite of the overwhelming progress in primary school enrolment, pupils' performance in national standardized examinations such as the National Education Assessment (NEA) and School Education Assessment (SEA) continue to show little progress (MOE, 2014). This seems to suggest that many children are gaining access to school buildings but not to meaningful learning.

The 2015-2030 Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) make it clear that every human being is entitled to a decent education. Target 4.1 of the Goals commits member nations to ensure that 'all girls and boys complete free, equitable and *quality* primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes' by the year 2030 (emphasis mine). Access to good quality education is the right of every child. Quality is at the heart of education, and a fundamental determinant of enrolment, retention and achievement. The target 4.1 of the SDGs therefore places emphasis on good quality education which will culminate into children's learning achievement.

The definition of quality has been expanded to address desirable characteristics of learners, processes, facilities, learning materials, content, governance and management, and learning outcomes (UNESCO, 2015). Certain basic features are known to be critical for producing educational outcomes. These include the quality of the teaching workforce, the availability of adequate educational resources, a supportive learning environment, and suitable access to basic services such as sanitation, clean water and electricity in instructional settings (UIS, 2012). The provision of good quality education is a shared responsibility between various actors (e.g. government, parents, schools, teachers, students, civil society and the private sector) who play different action-oriented or moral roles based on political, moral, and/or legal grounds (UNESCO, 2017). It is well acknowledged that the government, schools and teachers have front-line roles to play in this shared responsibility. The government is expected to provide resources while schools and teachers make children literate and numerate.

Teachers stand in the interface of the transmission of knowledge, values and skills in the learning process in the school and classroom (Akyeampong, Lussier, Pryor & Westbrook, 2013). However, to be able to exhibit competence and professionalism, they need teaching and learning resources such as textbooks and manuals that will facilitate learning (UNESCO, 2015). Studies conducted in Africa show strong positive effects of textbooks on learning achievement (UNESCO, 2005). Yet, in many public primary schools in low-income countries, the supply of reading and mathematics textbooks is not sufficient for pupils, which inevitably leads to sharing of textbooks among children. In Cameroon and the Central African Republic for example, it is reported that there is just one reading textbook for every 13 and 8 pupils respectively, and in some cases, most pupils do not have textbooks of their own (UIS, 2012). Schools that have no textbooks and learning materials cannot do effective work. In a Country Analytic Report of the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) project in Ghana, it was reported that the absence of teaching materials among other factors is likely to result in teacher absenteeism (Akyeampong, Djangmah, Oduro, Seidu & Hunt, 2007).

In the shared responsibility of education delivery, parents and communities also have a critical role to play in providing key educational inputs for the cognitive development of their children (UNESCO, 2017). In countries where the economic slump has led to cuts in government spending, it has become even more imperative for parents and communities to play more active roles. Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) and West (2014) report such a trend in England where as a result, fundraising efforts in schools have become a prominent phenomenon, with Parent and Teacher Associations (PTAs) being the core charitable group (NCVO, 2016). In both high and low-income countries, there is evidence that parents with some level of education are most likely to participate in school-based activities with the view of encouraging their children to excel academically (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Boateng & Wilson, 2019).

Also, in the United States, depleting budgets have led to the adoption of fundraising, which is accepted as part of school life, and as a means of providing needed resources for schools. Philanthropic activity plays a prominent role in this connection, as a way of maintaining quality (Body, 2017). For example, Reich's (2007) study of philanthropic giving to schools in California and Chicago shows that

there is increasing reliance on philanthropy. He notes that parents of children attending schools are the most likely group to volunteer or fundraise for their school. In relation to this, Body (2017) reveals that almost all donations occur as a response to 'an ask'. For her, 'being asked' is the most important factor that makes people donate. She therefore strongly advocates for pro-active fundraising from a wide spectrum of sources, as this is more likely to attract significant philanthropic support to transform the school community.

The foregoing examples of civil society's participation in education in developed countries like the United States and England serve as lessons for developing countries like Ghana. With approximately 83% of the total expenditure accounting for the payment of compensation to employees of the Ghana Education Service, leaving about 17% for goods, services and assets (GES, 2015) for the entire country's education institutions, it is becoming increasingly imperative for Ghanaian schools to seek alternative sources of support rather than depending solely on government supplies which are inadequate and untimely. This is more pressing as in recent times, education delivery has been hampered by delays in the release of funds by the central government for administrative budget, school maintenance and capitation grants. Consequently, materials that are needed for the daily running of schools such as lesson note books, reference materials, manila cards, board markers and chalk are seriously lacking in many public schools. This situation threatens the general processes of teaching and learning, meaningful use of instructional time, and the learning achievement of pupils.

In many basic schools however, it appears community members and parents take almost no responsibility for their children's education. They assume that by the free basic education policy and the government's provision of capitation grant, the government is required to provide all educational resources and inputs. It was therefore important to empirically examine the teaching and learning contexts of basic schools for evidence of patterns of good practice and innovative strategies that could be disseminated and replicated. This constituted the purpose of the study, which was located in the Central Region of Ghana, and guided by these two research questions:

1. How do head teachers, teachers and pupils in selected metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies in the Central

region interpret their experiences of teaching and learning in the event of delayed or irregular government grants?

2. What innovative strategies do teachers and head teachers in the selected metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies in the Central Region adopt to promote teaching and learning in the face of delayed or irregular government grants?

It was expected that the findings of the study would provide contextual and empirical descriptions of innovative strategies for involving different education actors in education provision. It was also intended to showcase good practices, which would serve as exemplars for adaptation or replication. The findings would also be important for relevant stakeholders that are involved in basic education provision in similar contexts in Ghana and elsewhere. The rest of the paper is divided into four sections: methodology, results and discussion, conclusion and recommendations.

Methodology

Research design and sampling

The study adopted the mixed method approach to survey a cross section of schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis, Abura Dunkwa and Komenda-Edina-Eguaafo-Abrem (KEEA) Districts in the Central Region, based on proximity and convenience. A multi-stage sampling method was used to select participants for the study. Firstly, the cluster sampling was used to group the schools in each metropolis, municipality or district into the three levels of settlement status (urban, semi- urban and rural). Secondly, from each of the three settlement groups, the purposive sampling technique was employed to select ten schools (at least three from each metropolis, municipality or district: one each of high, average and low-achieving) from the 2014 Basic Education Certificate Examination results.

In all, a total of 30 schools was sampled for the study, but 28 were used since 2 declined to participate. In each school, the head teacher and all the teachers were automatically recruited for the study. There were 384 teachers and head teachers (161, 118 and 105 from high, average and low performing schools respectively) of which approximately 61% was female (Table 1).

Table 1: Gender distribution of teachers by school category

Gender	High		Average		Low	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Male	56	34.8	46	39.0	46	43.8
Female	105	65.2	72	61.0	59	56.2
Total	161	100	118	100	105	100

With regard to qualification, an average of 60% of the teachers possessed Bachelor's and Master's degrees, with the majority being holders of the Bachelor's degree (Table 2). The highest percentage (54.9%) of teachers with first and second degrees was teaching in high performing schools.

Table 2: Qualification of teachers

Academic Qualification	High		Average		Low	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
SSSCE/WASSCE	36	25.2	20	20.4	24	27.0
GCE O Level	4	2.8	6	6.1	3	3.4
GCE A Level	1	0.7	1	1.0	1	1.1
HND	8	5.6	7	7.1	5	5.6
First Degree	86	60.1	58	59.2	53	59.6
Masters	8	5.6	6	6.1	3	3.4
Total	143	100	98	100	89	100

With regard to the pupils who participated in the study, between 6 and 8 primary 6 pupils were selected in each school type and settlement area with the help of the class teachers for focus group discussions. The teachers purposively sampled pupils who were vocal in class and could provide information about the topic under investigation. Primary 6 was used because the pupils have experienced schooling for six years and were considered capable of describing their experiences.

Instruments

A questionnaire and an interview guide were used to gather data from the teachers, head teachers and pupils of the selected schools to solicit responses concerning their experiences of teaching and learning. The teachers responded to the questionnaire while the head teachers and pupils were interviewed. The questionnaire had 15 items and was divided into two parts. Part One sought information about the teachers' bio data and the Part Two, based on teaching and learning, asked

questions on the materials the teachers perceived to be critical to teaching and learning, how they obtained such materials, the challenges they encountered and their suggestions for improvement.

The interview guide for the head teachers had nine items which also sought information similar to the questionnaire. The pupils' interview guide had 12 questions seeking general information about their experiences of teaching and learning, the adequacy of teaching and learning resources that were placed at their disposal, how they thought they were obtained, and what they wanted to see changed. The questionnaire and interview guide were designed by the researcher, and were validated by a research committee at the College of Education Studies, University of Cape Coast. The questionnaire was pre-tested with 30 teachers in another district in the Central Region with an overall internal consistency (Cronbach alpha) coefficient of 0.78. The interview guide was also pre-tested, producing valid responses which were consistent with most of the responses from the questionnaire.

Data collection procedure

Four trained research assistants constituted two groups (two in each group) to assist the researcher to collect data. The 28 schools selected for the study were shared among the two groups. First, permission was sought from the Education Directors of the three selected metropolis, municipalities or districts to access the schools for the study. In each school, a letter of introduction from the District Office was presented to explain the purpose of the study and to obtain permission to access the teachers, pupils and the head teacher. The research assistants then made appointments with the head teachers for the interviews and questionnaire administration.

On each day, the research assistants interviewed the head teacher and the pupils during break time and gave out copies of the questionnaire to the teachers who were at post on the day of the exercise to be completed and collected on another day. While at the schools, they took the opportunity to observe the classrooms for evidence of availability or otherwise of resources and facilities for teaching and learning. Thus, the research assistants spent about three days in each school. Data were collected between May and July 2015. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using Nvivo while the questionnaire was coded and analysed through the SPSS version 20.0 software and presented in frequencies and percentages.

Results and discussion

This section presents a discussion of the results according to the research questions, beginning with the first.

Head teachers, teachers and pupils' interpretation of their experiences of teaching and learning

Government policies and implementation

Among the school types and respondents, there were some common trends and also differences in experiences regarding availability and adequacy (or otherwise) of teaching and learning resources, and how they impact classroom activities. This is against the backdrop that the government is responsible for providing capitation grant and supplying resources such as textbooks, exercise books, lesson notebooks and chalk. The head teachers of high, average and low performing schools revealed that the capitation grant constituted 35.9%, 34.7% and 34.4% of their school budget respectively. Though insufficient, according to the head teachers of all the sampled schools, there were delays with the provision of the capitation grant and the supplies, and this had a negative effect on teaching:

> *There are delays in the purchasing of TLMs and other materials for the teaching and learning, hence frustrating the teaching and learning process (Head teacher, rural low performing school).*

Since the capitation grant was the main source of funding for running the schools, when it delayed, acquisition of other teaching resources also delayed.

> *We plan, but don't implement. How can we run the school in the absence of government funds? (Head teacher, high performing school).*

All the head teachers talked about their School Performance Improvement Plans (SPIP), which are prepared annually to outline the key actions the school would take to improve management, the environment and teaching and learning practices. It was required that the schools prepared the plans in collaboration with the School Management Committees (SMCs) to correspond with the amount of money to be obtained from the capitation grant.

Since all the head teachers mentioned the SPIP as an important aspect of school management, it was necessary to inspect it for a first-hand information on its content, and how it impacted education

delivery. An examination of the plans revealed some commonalities with regard to the items listed (e.g., Teaching and Learning Materials [TLMs]), teacher professional development and sporting activities). These were to be implemented when the capitation grant was provided. For the head teachers in this study, the delays in the release of the capitation grant hindered the implementation of the SPIP and their school improvement efforts. According to them, they suspend the implementation of the plans in the absence of the funds, as one head teacher from a rural average performing school lamented: 'How can we run the school?' The lamentation of this head teacher depicts the helplessness they encountered in their effort to keep the schools running. It also suggests the absence of pro-activeness on the part of the head teachers in finding innovative ways of running the school. She seems to suggest that until the government provides funds, teaching and learning activities will continue to be derailed. One would have thought that the PTA and SMC would meet to propose ways of obtaining funds (for example from philanthropists, development partners in the locality or institutions that have corporate social responsibilities to the communities) to procure the most needed items.

It was revealing at the time of data collection at the end of June 2015 (which was one week to the end of the academic year), that the third tranche of the capitation grant for the 2013/2014 academic year had just been paid (three academic terms late). Moreover, each school was supplied with three small boxes of chalk at the end of the academic year when teaching and learning had ended, and schools were vacating for the long vacation. This situation gives cause for concern about the kind of teaching and learning that might have taken place in the absence of very critical school supplies.

It was observed in some schools that there was inadequate classroom furniture. Pupils brought their own furniture from home, sat in threes or on the floor because broken down furniture had not been repaired or replaced. This situation seems to be common and observable in many basic schools in Ghana. Basic repair works to maintain school facilities are abandoned, thus further deteriorating broken down facilities and making some schools unattractive. It was not surprising therefore that in these school types, enrolment was low, as is also evident in some developing countries (UNESCO, 2014). In some cases, this led to drop-out or transfers to more attractive schools. In one school for example, the net enrolment figures of primary one, two and three

were 8, 8 and 14 respectively, far below the acceptable average class size of 35.

Managing teaching and learning activities

The teachers also lamented about the lack of teaching and learning resources. Untimely provision of the resources was more of a concern for teachers of average (14.8%) and low (15.1%) performing schools than those of high performing schools (4.8%). In high performing schools, it is possible that parents (through the PTAs) assisted to provide the needed resources. It was evident that in many of the schools, the teachers taught without TLMs. According to one head teacher, in the absence of TLMs, the teachers skipped some topics:

> *It makes teachers forego topics that they do not have teaching and learning materials to teach. Some topics are jumped over. (Head teacher, rural low performing school)*

Some teachers also resorted to abstract teaching, according to another head teacher:

> *It reduces effective teaching because they have to teach some of the practical topics abstract (Head teacher, average-performing urban school).*

Teaching and learning in abstract does not promote understanding of concepts since the pupils have no materials to engage with. This situation is worse in practical-oriented lessons such as ICT. Describing how their ICT lessons were taught, pupils in an average performing peri-urban school reported that the whole class clustered around the teacher's laptop computer, thereby making hands-on activity impossible. In cases where the teachers do not possess laptop computers, pupils would never have the opportunity to handle computers in school. One of the pupils pointed out that although ICT is his favourite subject, the teaching approach and irregular teaching of the subject made him lose interest in it. Therefore, according to him, *the* (termly) *exam is difficult*.

There is enough evidence of a strong positive relationship between provision of foundational inputs in adequate measures, school quality and learning outcomes (USAID, 2008; UIS, 2012; UNESCO, 2015). With regard to textbooks particularly, studies conducted in some African countries show that its availability and use give students greater opportunities to learn, and thus, increase their learning achievement (UNESCO, 2005; USAID, 2008). Nonetheless, a number of public

primary schools in some developing countries lack sufficient textbooks (UIS, 2012). In Cameroon and the Central African Republic for example, a study found that there is just one reading and mathematics textbook for every 13 and 8 pupils respectively (UIS, 2012). In this study, pupils in all the sampled schools reported that in all subjects, there are between one and six copies of the textbooks. In many cases, 3 pupils shared a book. According to them, when there is only one copy, the teacher uses it since the whole class cannot cluster around a single textbook. A head teacher of a peri-urban average performing school concurred with the pupils' report thus:

> *We do not have any Religious and Moral Education textbooks and in subjects like English and Fante, we share the textbooks in the ratio of 4:1 (pupils to textbook).*

The gravity of the situation is captured in the words of a pupil of a peri-urban average performing school as follows:

> *When there is no textbook and chalk, the teacher dictates notes but sometimes some pupils can't write.*

A dictation exercise meant to develop pupils' spelling and writing speed is a worthwhile activity. However, when it is used as a note-taking activity for primary six pupils who neither have sufficient vocabulary nor textbooks to make reference to, it becomes problematic. This is particularly true in cases where pupils are unable to write at all, and therefore sit idle through all the lessons. The most obvious implication of these circumstances is that 'engaged learning time' (USAID, 2008) is reduced, and teacher accountability and performance standards may not be enforced since the needed resources are not supplied.

All the sampled schools adopted the strategy of levying parents. These levies were mostly common among low performing schools (14.6%) which seem to need resources more, as compared to high and average performing schools respectively (9.9% and 11.3%). In many schools, parents were unwilling to pay the levies because they thought that education is free. In addition to the levies, pupils in different classes of a high performing peri-urban school were asked to supply chalk in turns. Again, at the beginning of every term, each pupil supplied items such as chalk board ruler, toilet rolls, soap, cardboards and brown cover-papers.

While the head teachers claimed the levies were used to acquire basic teaching resources for the schools, the pupils said it was used to pay the teachers for extra tuition. Although all school levies were abolished in 2005 when the capitation grant was introduced for all children (MOESS, 2007), the practice has resumed in many schools because the release of the capitation grant experiences long delays. The issues associated with levying were obvious especially in rural schools:

> *Our parents don't have money to pay the fees [levy of 20 pesewas daily] for extra classes. They are farmers. Some of our friends don't come [to school] because they don't have pencils and pens, because some are poor. They don't have school bags, no sandals, no uniforms (pupils, rural low performing school).*

The untimely release of government funds, unavailability and/or inadequate teaching and learning resources endanger the efficiency of the decentralisation policy, school management and effectiveness of instructional processes generally, and the achievement of learning targets specifically.

The pupils in this study also revealed that the teachers' frustration was sometimes evident in their use of the cane, especially when parents and guardians failed to pay the levies. Pupils were either caned or sent home on such grounds. To avoid being caned, some pupils absented themselves from school:

> *There is too much caning in this school so some (pupils) don't come. I always get frightened when I think of coming to school (pupil, low performing rural school).*

These two situations (i.e., levying and caning) show how school regulations are flouted by some school heads and teachers, disregarding the fact that by so doing they push some children out of school. While the government institutes measures such as the capitation grant, the school feeding programme and free school uniforms, among others to sustain access and participation in school, the actions of some school heads and inactions of some education supervisors and directors push children out of school. This appears to demonstrate that there is lack of 'consistency and sustainability in policies and strategies meant to address the problem of dropouts' (MOESS, 2007).

The literature shows that in certain poor communities and traditional cultures with loose family structures, children are often left on their own to care for themselves and also engage in economic activities to support their families' survival strategies (Grimsrud & Stokke, 1997). Data from this study shows that pupils in some communities engage in some minor jobs to get money to support themselves and also pay their school levies:

> *Some (pupils) take care of themselves and when they are not having anything to depend on, it becomes difficult for them so it prevents them from coming to school regularly (head teacher, peri-urban average performing school).*

> *Pupils in upper primary are left to fend for themselves and support their parents financially so the parents don't encourage them to come (head teacher, rural poor performing school).*

School-going children who engage in income-generating activities to support themselves and their parents are most at risk of dropping out of school due to the fact that they have to skip school very often to attend to their jobs. Consequently, they would lack trainable skills, thus leading to lack of proper employment and the reproduction of the cycle of poverty.

In both rich and poor countries, children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are the most at risk of dropping out of school (Nesselrodt & Alger, 2005; Akyeampong, 2009). Especially in developing countries including Ghana, school drop-out is most prevalent in rural areas, and attributable to a series of events and a range of interrelated factors (Hunt, 2008; Ampiah & Adu-Yeboah, 2009). One of such factors is poverty that necessitates occasional absenteeism and thus puts children at risk of eventually dropping out of school. Absenteeism is also likely to affect the academic foundation of the pupils and their progression in later years.

Head teachers are instructional leaders, and are therefore expected to possess mastery over their subject matter and good pedagogical skills in order to support and supervise teachers to demonstrate same. However, in this study, internal supervision by the head teacher was noted to be poor because basic supplies such as chalk, lesson note books and TLMs had not been provided due to the delay of

the capitation grant. This situation was found to be common in all the schools. Consequently, some head teachers claimed they did not find it morally justifiable to inspect lesson notes and observe teaching. Sometimes, the head teacher could not insist on teachers doing the right things in the classroom since head teachers were aware of the unavailability of the teaching resources. Though these claims seem reasonable, they are not justifiable since head teachers are duty-bearers who should ensure that teachers improvise appropriately to facilitate knowledge construction in the classroom.

The section that follows highlights issues emerging from the data in response to research question 2.

Alternative management strategies: Doing things differently

In some high-income countries like England and the United States of America, schools are finding alternative sources of funding to run their activities as a result of cuts in government spending per pupil (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012; West, 2014). In England for example, PTAs have become the core charitable group (NCVO, 2016). Similarly, some pro-active schools in this study adopted a number of strategies to keep their schools running. The major strategies that came to light in this study were (a) asking for donations and (b) head teachers' initiatives.

Donations in response to 'an ask'

Pro-actively focusing on fundraising or asking for donations for education provision is becoming an acceptable and common phenomenon in many contexts (England, Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012; West, 2014; NCVO, 2016; Body, 2017). To attract significant financial support that will increase schools' income, schools in the USA and UK are encouraged to vigorously source for assistance to transform the school community. These are usually from a wide spectrum of sources like philanthropists, PTAs, corporate partners and charitable trusts or foundations (Body, 2017).

In mostly urban areas in this study, some ingenious head teachers approached philanthropists and old students of the schools for assistance in meeting specific itemized needs. This is an innovation which is not common to many basic schools in Ghana. In one urban high-performing school for example, the head teacher had compiled a list of old students in prominent positions, which she consulted from time to time for assistance. Through this, she had obtained a library and organised a speech and prize-giving day where such personalities were

commended. In one peri-urban high performing school, the head teacher had contacted some American immigrants in the community for assistance on the basis of their interest in the school. According to her, the immigrants had linked the school to other philanthropists abroad, thus culminating into regular supply of stationery items and library books.

These philanthropists had also sponsored some high achieving students in tertiary institutions. In that same school, through the assistance of some Non-Governmental Organisations, a number of projects had been undertaken, including the construction of a 3-unit classroom block; furniture for teachers and pupils; construction of an 8-seater toilet, a kindergarten block and provision of pipe-borne water. Faith-based schools also had financial assistance from the churches to which they were affiliated.

Head teachers' initiatives and school- level income generation

One of the initiatives of the schools was to engage in commercial activities, such as operating a small-scale stationery shop. Proceeds from such sales were then used to purchase some materials for the school. Some obtained 'silver collection' during Christian worship services, and others generated income from the rental of school facilities for various activities such as church, and services like canteen.

Another strategy involved giving lunch and/or monetary incentives to teachers from the levies parents paid towards the pupils' extra classes to boost teachers' morale. This way, the schools' high achievement in national examinations helped to increase enrolment and also served as motivation for the parents to support the school in any way they were requested. In urban high achieving schools, there were also annual school durbars and graduation activities where hardworking teachers and students were awarded.

Conclusion

The success stories of attainment of universal basic education in Ghana mask contextual evidence of the actions and inactions of some key players in education that positively or negatively affect meaningful learning. In reference to the first research question that guided this study, it is clear that while some communities are supportive of their children's education, others look to the central government for all educational resources. The findings suggest that in spite of the government policy regarding free and compulsory basic education,

basic education is not totally free. The government alone cannot fund basic education, as this study shows. The examples of support from civil society organisations and prominent persons presented in this study show that there are well-meaning individuals who are keen to provide educational assistance, but such groups must be identified and approached for the needed support.

In relation to the second research question, it is also evident that school management style is one of the critical factors that bring about differences in school types, learning achievement and equal/unequal provision of good quality basic education. The proactive school managers in this study took certain initiatives such as identifying and approaching old students in prominent positions, civil society organisations and philanthropists for assistance. Others organised events such as durbars and open days to involve the community in the activities of the school. Therefore, irrespective of school type and settlement area, it takes a proactive and visionary school leader to initiate strategies that will involve well-meaning individuals and groups in achieving meaningful and successful learning.

Also, irregular school attendance, drop-out and unsuccessful completion are some of the unfinished businesses of the MDGs, as demonstrated in the findings of this study. When schools are unattractive due to lack of resources and good facilities, and pupils are sent home or caned for failing to pay school levies, school attendance and learning achievement are likely to be affected.

Recommendations

Good quality education is the right of every child. It is therefore important that District Directors of Education ensure equity in the provision of quality basic education through equal distribution of basic resources.

The study recommends that district directors of education, SMCs/school heads and PTAs sensitize parents and communities to take ownership of the schools in their communities and support them in any way they may be requested. For example, parents should be made to provide exercise books and certain essential stationery items. Based on the study's finding that parental involvement is an important key to improving schools generally and teaching and learning particularly, parents should be encouraged to visit schools and classrooms regularly, particularly on open days.

In most of the schools in this study, the head teachers pointed out that parents were unwilling to support schools financially because they think that education is free. In the head teachers' opinion, if parents are made aware of their responsibilities towards their children's education, they might be supportive. One way of doing this is for the management of the Ghana Education Service to make School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAM) mandatory for parents and enforce the operationalisation of those meetings. At these meetings, awareness can be created about communities' and parents' roles. Moreover, schools with alternative means of resourcing should be commended and good practices shared with stakeholders.

Particularly revealing in this study is the finding that some head teachers keep record of old students, consult and engage them actively in the schools' activities. This awareness will help to forge strong links with old students' unions so that schools could consult them for assistance. These have implications for the training of head teachers to find innovative strategies for resourcing their schools, and not wait for the government to provide the funds which sometimes never get supplied. Above all, regular school attendance in a safe environment devoid of caning and threats, and successful completion should be prioritized by the education sector in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals.

References

Akyeampong, K., Djangmah, J., Oduro, A., Seidu, A., & Hunt, F. (2007). *Access to basic education in Ghana: The evidence and the issues*. CREATE Country Analytic Report. University of Sussex: UK.

Akyeampong, K. (2009). Revisiting Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education in Ghana. *Comparative Education*, *42*(2), 175-195.

Akyeampong, K., Lussier, K., Pryor, J., & Westbrook, J. (2013). Improving teaching and learning of basic maths and reading in Africa: Does teacher preparation count? *International Journal of Educational Development*, *33*(3), 272-282.

Ampiah, J. G., & Adu-Yeboah, C. (2009). Mapping the incidence of school dropouts: A case study of communities in northern Ghana. *Comparative Education, 45*(2), 219-232.

Ampiah, J. G. (2010). *Quality basic education in Ghana: Prescription, praxis and problems*. Paper delivered at the Experience Sharing Seminar. Accra, Ghana.

Ampiah, J. G., Kwaah, C. Y., Yiboe, K., & Ababio, B. T. (2013). Improving quality of basic education in Ghana: Prospects and challenges of the School Performance Improvement Plan. In K. Yoshida (Ed). *Study on international cooperation in education policy reforms that translate into qualitative improvement* (pp. 229-254). CICE.

Ankomah, Y., Koomson, J., Bosu, R., & Oduro, G. K. (2005). *Implementing quality education in low-income countries*. University of Cape Coast, Ghana: Institute for Educational Planning & Administration (IEPA).

Ball, S., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2012). *How schools do policy*: *Policy enactments in secondary schools.* Routledge.

Boateng, A. S. A., & Wilson, K. N. (2019). Relationship between educational and occupational status of parents and their involvement in adolescents' academic achievements in Agona West Municipality. *Ghana Journal of Education: Issues and Practices*, 5, 1-19.

Body, A. (2017). Fundraising for primary schools in England – Moving beyond the school gates. Accessed on August 11, 2017. https://canterbury.academia.edu/DrAlisonBody.

David, M. E. (2009). Social diversity and democracy in higher education in the 21st century: Towards a feminist critique. *Higher Education Policy*, *22*, 61–79.

Ghana Education Service Council (2015). 2015 Annual Performance Report. Author.

Grimsrud, B., & Stokke, L. J. (1997). *Child labour in Africa: Poverty or institutional failures? Cases of Egypt and Zimbabwe*. FalchHurtingtrvkk.

Hunt, F. (2008). *Dropping out from school: A cross country review of literature*. CREATE Pathways to Access Research Monograph No. 20. University of Sussex.

Lee, J. S., & Bowen, N. K. (2006). Parent involvement, cultural capital, and the achievement gap among elementary school children. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), 193-218.

Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, Ghana (MOESS). (2007). *Education sector annual performance report*. Author.

Ministry of Education, Ghana (2014). *Early grade reading assessment and early grade mathematics assessment: Report of findings*. Author.

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) (2016). The Children and Young People's Voluntary Sector in England 2013/14.

National Development Planning Commission (2015). *Ghana Millennium Development Goals: 2015 Report.* Author.

Nesselrodt, P. S., & Alger, C. L. (2005). Extending opportunity to learn for students placed at risk. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* (JESPAR), *10*(2), 207-224.

Reich, R. (2007). Philanthropy and its uneasy relation to equality, In W. Damon and S. Verducci (Eds.). *Taking philanthropy seriously: Beyond noble intentions to responsible giving* (26-49). Indiana University Press.

UIS (2012). School and teaching resources in Sub-Saharan Africa: Analysis of the 2011 UIS regional data collection on education. UNESCO Institute for Statistics. UIS *Information Bulletin,* No. 9.

UNESCO (2005). *Children out of school: Measuring exclusion from primary education*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

UNESCO. (2007). *Education for all by 2015: Will we make it? Summary.* Author.

UNESCO. (2009a). *World conference on higher education: The new dynamics of higher education and research for societal change and development.* UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2014). *Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all*. UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2015). *Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and challenges*. UNESCO.

UNESCO. (2017). Accountability in education: Meeting our commitments. *Global Education Monitoring Report*. UNESCO.

United Nations. (2000). *United Nations Millennium Declaration. http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml on 4 January 2015.*

USAID. (2008). *Opportunity to learn: A high impact strategy for improving educational outcomes in developing countries*. EQUIP2. Author.

West, A. (2014). Academies in England and independent schools (friståendeskolor) in Sweden: Policy, privatisation, access and segregation. *Research Papers in Education, 29*(3), 330–350.

World Bank (2002). *Constructing knowledge societies.* Author.

Yuki, T., & Kameyama, Y. (2013). *Improving the quality of basic education for the future youth of Yemen Post Arab Spring*. Global Economy and Development Working Paper 59.