

The Oguaa Educator (*TOE*)

Implementation of the School Performance Improvement Plan in Ghana: What lessons can be learned?

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Abstract

This study investigated the implementation of the School Performance Improvement Plan (SPIP) through the Capitation Grant (CG) scheme introduced by the Government of Ghana in the 2004/2005 academic year for basic schools. The scheme was introduced to abolish all forms of fees paid by pupils in basic schools with the aim of improving access and enhancing the quality of education. The study, which was conducted in 2016 used the interpretive qualitative approach to obtain data from 48 teachers and 8 head teachers from 8 basic schools in one of the largest Municipalities in the Central Region of Ghana. The participants for the study were selected by simple random sampling from five circuits in the Municipality. Interviews were held with the head teachers in all the 8 schools while 8 focus group discussions were held with groups of 6 teachers in all the schools. The findings show that head teachers involved all stakeholders such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), School Management Committee (SMC) and teachers in preparing the SPIP to ensure transparency. Furthermore, the SPIP preparation ensured that schools budgeted all items they would need. However, lukewarm attitude on the part of some SMC/PTA members and some teachers towards the preparation of SPIP, the bureaucratic nature of accessing the CG, exorbitant fees charged by the Municipal Education Office and lack of transparency on the part of some head teachers in the disbursement of CG were some of the challenges that emerged. The study also found that delay in disbursing CG to schools affected the purchase of resources for teaching and learning. Recommendations for the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service have been suggested.

Key words: capitation grant, school performance improvement plan, quality education, school management committee, parent teacher association.

Introduction

Many developing countries including Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries have implemented fee-free policies in order to increase access to basic education especially to poor households. These policy interventions were tied to international policies such as the Education for All (EFA) of 1990 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to achieve universal primary education by 2015 (UNESCO, 2010; World Bank, 2009). The School Fee Abolition Initiative (SFAI) by the World Bank further sought to globally enhance progress in achieving basic education quality for all school-age children by supporting initiatives aimed to remove cost barriers which prevented parents from enrolling and maintaining their children in school (World Bank, 2009). Fee-free policies however have resulted in schools having inadequate financial resources to procure teaching and learning materials to improve education quality, hence relying totally on the central government for funding. For example, in Ghana, after the introduction of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy in 1995, many districts were still charging levies as a means of raising funds for school repairs, printing of examination papers, and for supporting cultural and sporting activities. Consequently, this situation prevented many families, particularly the poorest from sending their children to school (Akyeampong, 2011). Governments in these developing countries therefore saw the need to provide grants to schools in order to improve quality education in the implementation of fee-free policy which had reduced schools' funds. Developing countries' response to providing funds to schools in the wake of fee-free policies has been the adoption of strategies for allocating funds to schools within various decentralisation policy frameworks. For instance, schools in Tanzania and Uganda receive capitation grants through local governments while schools in Kenya receive their grants directly from the central government due to the country's less decentralised system (Yuichi & Nishimura, 2009). The Malawian government also introduced Direct Support to Schools (DSS) in 2006 as a grant to enable schools to purchase basic teaching and learning materials to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. In all these countries, regardless of the mode of funds transfer to the schools, School Management Committees (SMCs) and school management in most of the countries administer the grants, monitor and report to community members on

daily basis the implementation of the grants (Gaddah, Munro, & Quartey, 2016; World Bank, 2009; Yuichi & Nishimura, 2009).

In Ghana's bid to achieve universal primary education, Government of Ghana (GOG) identified that one of the main reasons that children do not attend school is that their parents simply cannot afford to pay the levies charged by schools. The Ministry of Education, therefore, set up a Capitation Grant (CG) Scheme through the British Department for International Development (DFID) funding for all public schools in the 2005/2006 academic year. The scheme allocated every basic school an amount of Gh¢ 3.00 (US\$0.67 in 2005) per pupil enrolled, which has been reviewed over the years. At the time of conducting this study in the 2016/2017 academic year, the CG was Gh¢ 4.50 (USD1\$) per pupil.

It was the belief of GoG that this fee-free policy would serve to remove the financial barrier created by levies charged by schools, and more than compensate schools for any loss of revenue they face as a result. The utilisation of the CG was designed to empower the schools to effectively use financial resources to plan and carry out school quality improvement activities under the "School Performance Improvement Plan" (SPIP). The SPIP is a school's road map that sets out the changes a school needs to make to improve the school's performance, especially, the level of pupils' achievement. The SPIP indicates most pressing activities that will help the head teacher, teachers and the SMC to determine the changes that would improve pupils' achievement and monitor the process of improvement in the school (GES, 1999). The SPIP was therefore introduced as a condition for the allocation and utilisation of funds to schools. The plan is prepared by the head teacher and teachers with the approval of the SMC, this is then forwarded to the Metropolitan, Municipal or District Education Directorate for review and final approval. The SMC has the responsibility to oversee the implementation of the SPIP. It was the expectation of the GoG that the process of planning the activities would be participatory (involving head teachers, teachers, SMCs and PTAs) and transparent. The grant is therefore, expected to serve as an opportunity to help build school capacity to effectively implement fiscal decentralisation which is a long-term goal of the GoG. It is also intended to help implement the SPIP to improve the quality of education in schools.

The implementation of the CG in Ghana and other SSA countries is however fraught with challenges such as corruption, poor record keeping, misappropriation of resources among others (World Bank, 2009; MoESS, 2006; GES, 2008). In the Ghanaian context, not much has been done empirically to examine how the schools implement the SPIP to access CG in improving the quality of education. This study therefore investigated the preparation of the SPIP that is linked to the CG scheme for basic schools in improving quality education in Ghana. The study therefore was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do schools prepare their SPIPs?
2. What challenges do schools face in the preparation of the SPIP?
3. How do schools use the SPIP to access the CG?
4. How do schools implement the SPIP and what are the challenges?

Conceptual Framework

This study is premised on decentralisation processes that formulate and govern educational policies for the promotion of education quality. Advocates of decentralisation argue that those closest to the community are in a good position to make decisions about educational processes that best serve the needs of the community (Chikoko, 2009; Gaddah et al., 2016; Osei & Brock, 2006). Within the context of educational decentralisation, increased community involvement in school activities has been a vital vehicle in improving pupils' enrolment and persistence in school as well as school accountability and management. Many developing countries which adopted educational decentralisation policy have seen some improvement in students' achievement and school management (Abadzi, 2013; Gaddah et al., 2016; Mfum-Mensah & Friedson-Ridenour, 2014).

In the decentralised process in the Ghanaian basic education sector, there are three levels of administration: the Ghana Education Service under the Ministry of Education, Regional Directorate of Education and the District/Municipal/Metropolitan Directorate of Education. At the local level, the District/Municipal/Metropolitan Directorate of Education, School Management Committee (SMC) and PTA are the main actors in the implementation of government policies at the basic school level to ensure education quality. The inclusion of communities in Ghana's education decentralisation strategy was

expected to improve efficiency and effectiveness of education through the communities' watchdog role they play in their schools.

School management boards or committees and parent- teacher associations are formed in order to involve communities in decision making processes in the schools. It is therefore expected that in the education decentralisation process, the involvement of the community through bodies such as SMCs, PTAs and the school teacher/head teachers will improve education quality. These decentralised actors (head teachers, teachers and SMCs) at the local level are supposed to prepare the SPIP to access the CG and implement it. It is expected that the preparation of the SPIP will enable schools to provide teaching and learning materials and undertake minor repairs in the school, among others, with the ultimate aim of improving the quality of education. It is important to note that the Ghana Education Act of 1995, espoused that the SMC is mandated to ensure effective community participation in education and mobilisation for efficiency in schools, hence by extension the SMC ensures that SPIP improves schools through school management, contribution to school resources and instructional programme in their various communities. Hence, in the context of this study, the SMC which has a greater role in the education decentralisation process is supposed to hold the school accountable with regards to improving school quality.

Based on this premise, this study finds out how schools prepare the SPIP to access the CG and the challenges they face in implementing the SPIP, with the intention of informing policy and practice of decentralisation generally and school performance improvement processes particularly.

Method

Participants

The participants for this study were teachers and head teachers in selected schools in the Mfantseman Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. All schools in the Municipality were grouped into rural-urban category based on the Municipal Education Directorate criteria. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) suggest that 5% of a given population is good for a study's sample. In this study therefore, 8 out of 89 schools in the Municipality (or 7%) were randomly selected from the rural-urban category. Consequently, 48 teachers in all the selected

schools participated in the study. All eight head teachers in the selected schools automatically participated in the study.

All the teachers were professionally trained except four who had only completed senior high school. Nine of the teachers had first degree, 24 had a diploma and 10 were teacher's Certificate 'A' holders. Most of the teachers had considerable experience ranging from 2 to 18 years. Two of the head teachers had been in their schools for only one year while the others had been in the school between 2 to 6 years. Furthermore, only two of the head teachers had been heads of their respective schools for 5 to 6 years and the rest had been headteachers in other schools before being transferred to their present school. Hence, the assumption was that five out of the eight head teachers had considerable experience in the preparation of SPIP. All the eight schools had SMCs and Parent PTAs. In one school, the PTA and SMC had been in existence for 20 years, the youngest PTA and SMC being 7 years old. All the schools described their SMCs and PTAs as either active or very active.

Instruments

Individual and Focus Group Interview Protocols were used for head teachers and teachers respectively. The Head teachers Interview Protocol was used to seek detailed information on how the CG was used to implement the SPIP. The Focus Group Interview Protocol was designed to discuss issues with regards to the preparation and implementation of the SPIP. To ensure validity, the instruments were pre-tested in the Cape Coast Metropolis. To ensure reliability, we used only teachers and head teachers who had been in the school for at least three years in order to ensure that the preparation of their SPIP was informed by what they had done previously in the school.

Procedure

Data were collected by a team of researchers involved in the study during the months of June and July 2016. In each school, head teachers were interviewed by a researcher. Six teachers in each school were purposively selected to participate in the focus group interviews. It took a maximum of two days in each school for all the data to be collected. The interviews were recorded and later on transcribed by members of the research team.

Data Analysis

We organised the data using the inductive process by categorising and identifying patterns among the categories. These categories and patterns emerged from the data by reading the transcripts on several occasions and listening to the audio tapes many times until we got ourselves immersed into the data collected. Issues drawn from the data were used as themes to structure the data presentation. Furthermore, direct quotations from the respondents were used to enhance the credibility of the data.

Limitation

Limitations arise in that this paper draws primarily on a small data set from eight schools in one district in Ghana rather than the wider project data, but it is precisely in the nuances of the qualitative data that the findings emerge as so interesting. A further limitation is that due to time constraints it was not possible to involve some SMC members to seek their views on their involvement in the preparation of the SPIP, hence further study is needed to involve SMCs so as their investigate their role in the school activities.

Results

Preparation of SPIP by Schools and SMCs

All schools are supposed to prepare SPIP as a requirement to access the CG grant from the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Education offices across all regions. From the head teachers' accounts, the steps used in the preparation of the SPIP were generally as follows:

1. Fixing a date convenient for teachers, SMCs and PTAs to discuss the SPIP;
2. Listing items needed by the school (e.g., teaching and learning materials) and knowing the unit price of each item and on the meeting day, discussing thoroughly the items to be captured on the SPIP and budget projections for the various items;
3. Estimating the total cost of items to be bought and other expenditures;
4. Vetting and signing of the SPIP by the circuit supervisor, SMC, head teacher and staff secretary/all teachers, as the case might be;
5. Submitting the final SPIP to the District Education Office for approval.

The focus group interviews with teachers revealed that the SPIP is prepared every year through the collaborative efforts of the head teachers and teachers in each school. In four out of the eight schools, this took the form of a SPIP committee with one of the teachers acting as the secretary. The head teacher requests inputs from teachers as the starting point in the preparation of the SPIP. In the other four schools, teachers were assigned specific roles to make budget projections for some of the major items to be captured on the SPIP for the academic year. All eight head teachers indicated that they involved SMCs, PTAs and teachers in the preparation of the SPIP. In addition to these three groups of people, two of the head teachers included Circuit Supervisors responsible for their schools in the preparation of the SPIP. After the preparation of the SPIP, the head teacher discussed the final SPIP with the teachers before it was submitted to the Municipal Education Office for approval. Thus, teachers were very familiar with the SPIP and its preparation. This is summed up by what a teacher said during the focus group interview in one of the schools:

We are very familiar with the SPIP because of the individual roles assigned to us by the head teacher before and during preparation of the SPIP. The environment in this school can be described as democratic and each and every teacher is given opportunity to contribute to make projections and do proper budgeting of the major and minor items of the SPIP (Teacher1, School A).

The main components on the SPIP are pre-determined by the Ministry of Education (improving access, provision of teaching and learning materials, school management, examination, INSET, school facilities, transportation, sanitation and minor repairs). Hence, there is very little variation in the way schools allocate funds for the improvement of school performance. The information in Table 1 is an example of a SPIP for school A. The Table illustrates the components of the SPIP and how school A had budgeted to access the CG for one academic year. Schools are however levied 30 and 60 pesewas per pupils/student (USD \$ 0.25) by the district education office every academic year for cultural and sporting activities respectively. The levies are calculated using pupils' enrolment (enrolment*0.90pesewas). The information in Table 1 shows that 72% of the budgeted funds was

going to be spent on items related to school management, improving access, community and school relationship and school facilities other than items having direct bearing on improving quality of teaching and learning. For example, expenditure on school management and community/school relationship took 55.2% of the total budget. The SPIP under the CG seeks to improve quality education at the basic education level (GES, 1999). However, it seems the SPIP and CG are to improve the school in general and not the quality of teaching and learning. Furthermore, the Table reveals that the SMC monitors activities related to improving access, school management and school facilities, which suggests that SMCs are limited in contributing to the monitoring activities related to teaching and learning.

Table 1: Implementation of School Performance Improvement Plan for School 'A' in Mfantseman Municipality for 2015/2016 academic year

Component/Target	Action to be Taken	Who is responsible	Resources Needed	Qty	Freq	Unit Cost £	Total cost £	Time Frame	Who Monitors
Improving Access	To embark upon enrolment drive	Culture teacher	Repair of school band	1 set	1	40	40	16/09/14 - 27/07/15	Head teacher/SMC
Enrolment Drive	Through marching in the community and morning assembly						40		
Provision of teaching and learning materials	To purchase teaching and learning materials to improve learning	Staff secretary	Lesson notes Brown sheet Markers Poster colours Blue pens Registers Assessment record book Footscap sheet Files Chalk Red pens	10 15 6 10 2 boxes 11 9 1 10 30 2 boxes	1 1 1 1 2 1 2 1 1 1 2	15 3 6 5 12 3 3 12 1 1 4 12	140 45 36 50 24 33 27 10 120 24	16/09/14 - 27/07/15	Head teacher
School Management	To make photocopies To organise PTA/SMC meetings	PTA secretary	Photocopies Snacks (minerals and pie)	3 12	3 6	10 4	30 100	16/09/14 - 27/07/15	SMC/head teacher
	School based INSET and cluster meeting		Wiring of one classroom	1	1	170	170		
	Electrical wiring of one classroom in the school	SMC/PTA					300		

Table 1: Continued

Component/Target	Action to be Taken	Who is responsible	Resources Needed	Description	Qty	Freq	Unit Cost	Total cost	Time Frame	Who Monitors
Community and School relationship	To pay circuit affiliation	Head teacher	Circuit sports fee		411	1	42.7	42.7	16/09/14-27/07/15	Circuit Supervisor/Head teacher
	To buy drugs		Paracetamol		1 box	1	6	6		
			Bandage		12	1	1	12		
			Plaster		6	1	2	12		
			Cotton wool		1	1	6	6		
			Glucose		2	1	4	8		
			Linniment		2	1	4	8		
	To participate in circuit sports	Sports secretary	Games, athletics (feeding for teachers & pupils)		1	3		128		
			Canopies		25	3	6	18		
			Plastic chairs		3	3	40	30		
		T & T				chairs	450			
								720.7		
School facilities	To pay headmistress' T & T	Assistant Head teacher								
	To purchase materials to facilitate the work of the school	Assistant Head teacher	Padlocks (big size)		8	1	6	30	16/09/14-27/07/15	Head teacher/SMC
			Padlocks (small size)		8	1	5	47.6		
			T. bolt		15	1	3	45		
			Labour			1	9	27		
			Football		3	1		55		
			Volley ball		3	1		35		
			Tennis ball		8	1	0.40	3.2		
			Weighing scale		1	1	25	25		
								267.8		
							1,849.5			

Number of pupils on roll (411) multiplied by 4.5 $411 * 4.5 = 1,849.5$

Challenges faced by Schools in Preparation of the SPIP

Although, the SPIP has been designed to empower schools to effectively manage the CG, its preparation does not lie solely with the head teacher and other teachers serving under him. The SMCs are supposed to be brought together in the preparation of the SPIP thereby making the process participatory for the stakeholders of the school. In most of the schools, prioritising items could therefore turn into a lengthy debate lasting for hours as teachers recounted. Similar to this was the mismatch between the needs of the schools and the budget. Respondents from School 'C' said school needs outweighed the annual budget approval for the school. Consequently, disagreements with regards to items to buy delayed the process of the preparation of the document. Similar sentiments were echoed by respondents from other schools, and this constituted a major challenge in the preparation of the SPIP.

Another challenge was the difficulty of getting a suitable day and time for all members to meet. Respondents stated that the composition of the team that prepared the SPIP did not consider the preoccupations of members. Some were self-employed while others were salaried workers. Moreover, members were scattered all over the catchment area of the schools. As such, some members of the team attended meetings late or did not turn up at all for scheduled meetings. This challenge was raised in all the schools in the study. For instance, head teachers in Schools 'B' and 'C' complained that it was very difficult to get in touch with their SMC chair persons. This is how a head teacher of a school expressed her frustration:

Some members are less enthusiastic and absented themselves from the preparation. Others also don't turn up for meetings just because sometimes they (SMCs) don't understand the process even though much education has been done for them on SPIP (Head teacher 2, School D)

These situations called for postponements, potential factors that militate against the smooth preparation of the document. Furthermore, the number of items to be captured on the SPIP also posed a challenge. Not only did members have to write down a very long list of items but also they had to break down some of the items into smaller units. According to respondents, the breakdowns were extensive, thus rendering the

process very tedious and energy sapping. They added that this exercise was not carried out easily as members of the group lacked professional competence. Compared with the earlier challenge, it could be inferred that some of the beneficiary schools might not meet their annual budget requirements on time.

Furthermore, the ability to make projections constitute a major challenge in preparing the SPIP. For instance, school heads and teachers could not predict the certainties of future events. It was not possible to foresee emergencies and project towards them. According to respondents, people were sent out to verify the prices of items, but prices for the same items differed from one shop to the other. Projections as required by the SPIP were therefore not easily identified though they constitute a very essential component in preparing the SPIP. This is what a teacher recounted with regards to price fluctuations:

Last term, I projected the prices of certain items during the preparation of the SPIP. However, the prices had gone up when the CG was finally disbursed, hence we could buy only one of the items instead of two (Teacher one, School D)

This remark suggests that the instability of the Ghanaian economy is a crucial element worthy of consideration in estimating prices since any wrong under-estimation may have dire consequences on the needed items for the school. Some teachers in Schools 'C' and 'D' were reluctant in taking decisions with regards to estimates for all items captured under the SPIP. Respondents described this challenge as a thorny issue, a necessary evil that could not be ignored in the preparation of the document. Estimating of items had two dimensions for the beneficiary schools. Firstly, if the estimate was on the high side, the schools would be forced by the District Office to review the entire document. That is, they would have to review almost the whole process which was considered tedious and energy consuming. The review process could constitute an obstacle for early disbursement of the CG which could contribute to the failure of the project. Secondly, when the cost of the items was under-estimated, the schools were forced to make up for the difference. This was not easy for schools which had no other source of financing their needs. This observation is echoed in the following comment by one teacher:

I had to review our SPIP only when the office saw that some of our prices were on the higher side and this prevented us from purchasing some important items needed by the school early enough (head teacher 3, School D)

This remark could mean that some schools lacked skills needed in budgeting for the items in the preparation of SPIP. Respondents from School A suggested they had to seek professional advice in the budget preparation. Those from School D thought it was necessary to seek assistance from skilful colleagues who were not necessarily teachers. Respondents suggested that parents should be asked to pay levies in order to help supplement the budget for projects earmarked in the SPIP. They explained that the grant from the central government was inadequate for the smooth administration and financial management of the schools. However, they catalogued some improvements in the various schools under investigation.

How Schools use the SPIP to Access the CG

The District Education Accountant and the Director give approval to schools' SPIP after a thorough scrutiny. Heads of schools are required to submit a completed Form B (statement of account for the money received for a particular school) to access the CG. This Form B is signed by the head teacher or the assistant, then the SMC chairman and finally by the Circuit Supervisor. The Form B is then sent to an officer at the Municipal Education office who will go through it to make sure the proper procedures have been followed before the Municipal Director signs it. An authority note and a cheque are then issued to the head teacher to obtain the money at the bank.

The interview data from the various heads of the sampled schools expressed serious misgivings in accessing the CG from the Municipal Education office. They recounted the bureaucracy involved in signing the Form B and the issuance of the authority note to the bank. Head teachers sometimes had to make several journeys to and from the District Education office since it is only the District Director of Education who is authorised to issue the authority note. This is how two head teachers expressed their frustration in accessing the CG:

'... due to the persistent absence of the Director of Education to sign the Form B, procedures to cash the

money are too cumbersome' (School B, head teacher X)

'the procedure is so lengthy and it involves a lot of travelling to the office which sometimes means that transportation uses up a sizeable part of the money' (School E, Head teacher Y).

This bureaucratic procedure comes as a result of measures that have been put in place by authorities to check embezzlement and misappropriation of the funds by school heads.

Implementation of the SPIP and its Challenges

This study has identified the procedures followed by schools in implementing the SPIP as well as bottlenecks associated with the implementation. The interview data reveal that schools strictly follow plans outlined in the SPIP document. This is reflected in a remark by one head teacher thus:

We follow what we have in the SPIP and items that are not captured which become emergency are not purchased since you can't account to the authorities (head teacher 4, school H)

The implication of this statement is that the implementation of the SPIP is rigid and makes no room for adjustments to cater for incontinences which could be useful to improving the school. Even though the policy prohibits teachers to pre-finance some activities in the school before the release of the CG, respondents from School C, E, and F indicated that teachers who pre-financed some of the items or projects were reimbursed as soon as monies were released. This was contrary to views expressed by other teachers. This raises doubts as to whether rules were duly followed in the implementation process.

Finally, the implementation process had to deal with accountability. Individuals or spending officers were directly accountable to the head teacher. Despite these implementation regulations, the process is not without shortfalls. Four major shortfalls were identified: Firstly, all the six schools in this study raised the issue of inadequate funds. It should be re-emphasised that the primary aim of the CG was to assist schools to manage their own finances. These covers, among other things, the purchase of teaching and learning

resources, minor repairs and first aid drugs. Though respondents did not explain further, we could deduce that funds released to schools were not sufficient to meet all the financial obligations of the said schools. Since its introduction, inadequate funding has become a major obstacle in implementing the SPIP. The District Education office aggravates this problem by deducting other charges from funds allocated to schools as recounted by this head teacher:

It is not only the undue delay of funds that worries me but also the exorbitant district education office charges such as sports and culture fees reduce the money available to the school (head teacher 6, school F)

These charges were normally not budgeted for in the SPIP, but are demanded by the District Education office. The charges were therefore deducted from the grant and the rest released to schools.

There was also the challenge of the use of the funds. Some teachers recounted incidents where some head teachers were not transparent when it came to disbursing the funds to purchase items captured in the SPIP. This is what a teacher indicated:

Some head teachers do not adhere to what has been captured in the SPIP and do not account to any of us after spending the grant (Teacher 13, School H).

Transparency has been a big issue between teachers and their head teachers when it comes to the implementation of the SPIP after funds have been released to schools. Some head teachers had become single spending officers without accounting to teachers and other members, thus breeding apathy when it comes to SPIP issues.

Discussion

This study has shown that the preparation of the SPIP by head teachers and teachers in the schools has some level of democratic process. However, the head teachers' and teachers' accounts were silent on the role of the SMC members with regards to the SPIP preparation process. This could be due to the low education background of some SMC members which prevented them from contributing meaningfully in the decision making in the schools. Hence, some SMC members show apathy in the process of preparing the SPIP.

The findings further reveal that SMCs were much involved in the monitoring of activities related to access, school management and school facilities with very little contribution to monitoring of teaching and learning activities. This finding is corroborated by the argument that SMCs' role in school governance is restricted to monitoring students' attendance to school, the financing of infrastructure development at the expense of contributing to curriculum programme of the school (Barnett, 2013; Rose, 2003; Yamada, 2014). Taniguchi and Hirakwa (2011) have argued that the success or failure of community participation depends on the stakeholders' capacity. Our data suggest that even some of the teachers and their heads lacked some book keeping skills, let alone SMC members especially in poor communities who are not literate (Essuman & Akyeampong, 2011; Yuichi & Nishimura, 2009) to contribute to the preparation of the SPIP. This situation makes head teachers and teachers the main stakeholders in preparing the SPIP in most cases.

Furthermore, apathy on the part of some SMC members affected meetings to prepare the SPIP. Some SMC members were not motivated to attend meetings concerning the SPIP. The question that emerges from this situation is: 'what will be the effects of late preparation of the SPIP on teaching and learning in the schools?' Teaching and learning could become less effective in view of the fact that teachers are not allowed to pre-finance any basic items such as chalk or whiteboard markers. On the other hand, the financial management of the school could be seriously affected since monies needed in the day-to-day administration of the school could only be received after the SPIP is presented to the authorities.

Estimating the prices of items in the preparation of the SPIP was also a major challenge as the study reveals. The instability of the Ghanaian economy affects any budget estimates that one does since inflation in Ghana has not been stable. Therefore, this may make head teachers and teachers overestimate or underestimate prices on the items. In Ghana, prices of some items differ from one location of a school to the other. As such, schools located in areas where prices of items are low will have the advantage of having more resources than those located in areas where prices are quite high. This will result in some inequalities in resource allocation, coupled with varied SMCs support to schools which may exacerbate existing inequalities in schools (Deacon, Osman, & Buchler, 2010; Essuman & Akyeampong, 2011).

Under these circumstances, there could be disparity in education quality in schools. Nevertheless, some measures had been put in place by schools to limit the negative effects of the above challenges in the preparation of the SPIP.

Some head teachers failed to account to members of staff and the SMC about expenditure made from the CG during implementation of the SPIP. This finding resonates with what the literature described as corruption and misappropriation of funds to schools through other capitation grant schemes in some SSA countries (Nampota & Chiwaula, 2013; Sasaoka & Nishimura, 2010). Another major challenge in the implementation of the SPIP was irregular flow of the CG. Delays in the release of funds from the central government and the cumbersome procedures of accessing the grant worsen the plight of schools with no other source of income. Hence, in the government's attempt of checking embezzlement by some heads of schools, the measures put in place have made the access of the grant more bureaucratic which affects the quality of teaching and learning in schools (Chikoko, 2009; Yuichi & Nishimura, 2009).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Decentralisation of educational administration, finance and management policy shift some of the responsibilities to the districts, communities, schools and parents. The initiative also gives districts, communities, schools and parents powers in the administration of schools. It is envisaged that this will in turn help provide quality education to all Ghanaian children at the basic school level. To a large extent, decentralisation of educational administration, finance and management policy have been implemented by the Ministry of Education through the use of SPIP and the provision of CG funds. This is a laudable achievement by the Ministry of Education. This means that part of the responsibility of ensuring the delivery of quality education has been given to the schools and district education offices, and they are living up to it.

However, this laudable objective faces some serious challenges that could derail its success. These have been highlighted in this study. In spite of implementation regulations, there were major shortfalls such as inadequate funds, lack of knowledge in book keeping, irregular flow of CG and payments of extra monies to the district office. Most SMCs have 'pseudo-participation in school governance where members are

expected to accept decisions made by the school and are committed to supporting with resources for school maintenance and construction, etc. Challenges faced in the preparation of the SPIP if carefully addressed could ease the preparation process. This presupposes that the initial step in accessing the CG would not be characterised by unnecessary obstacles. Thus, the financial management of basic schools would become effective. The fact that pupils can no longer write all the end-of-term examinations in print form due to the inadequate amount of the CG to schools is a drawback to helping pupils get used to answering standard examination questions such as multiple-choice items. This is because teachers cannot write all the items on the chalkboard if the multiple-choice format is used. This is why in some cases parents are made to contribute to end-of-term examinations even though funding for this is captured under the CG scheme.

Finally, the irregular flow of the CG means that funds are not always available to purchase some important items captured in the SPIP for school improvement. The plans of the schools through the SPIP can only be effective if money is available to execute the SPIP. Perhaps the quality of education in some other respects is being achieved by the schools but this is yet to be seen in terms of improved teaching and learning after the introduction of the SPIP and the CG.

Based on the issues raised, we would recommend that the Ghana Education Service and the Ministry of Education must organise periodic workshops to improve the capacity of SMCs, head teachers and teachers to improve the preparation of the SPIP. The Municipal Education Office must ensure that bottlenecks and bureaucracies associated with the approval of SPIP and the delivery of CG to schools are removed. Additionally, Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies must not levy schools for sports, culture and mock examinations as this reduces the amount needed for school improvement. Finally, the government has to ensure regular release of funds to schools in order to achieve the objectives of the policy initiative of improving education quality in basic schools. These study findings from a sample of schools have illuminated issues with regards to the preparation of school plans tied to capitation grant in Ghana. There are some lessons to be learnt in Ghana and other SSA contexts that have implemented similar policies in the wake of school fees abolition. Further research is needed in Ghana to study the good

practices of schools to improve teaching and learning in the absence of non-release of funds to schools.

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