

# Education in Ghana – status and challenges

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The development of education in Ghana is closely tied to the socio-political changes that have taken place from colonial times to the present day. The transformation processes have seen the education system expand from the first castle schools (which only targeted populations linked with the social, economic and religious interests of the early missionaries, colonialists and adventurers) to the spread of formal education across the country, including access to free schooling, the inclusion of technical and vocational education, and improved teacher training.

## Key policy drivers and priority interventions

The key focal areas of education development in Ghana are contained in the *Education Strategic Plan 2010–2020*. The Strategic Plan identifies access, quality and management as the main policy drivers determining priority interventions. In addition, having realised the importance of science and technology over the years, the government has targeted these as priority areas for improvement.

Some important interventions currently being implemented are focused largely on the improvement of basic education in response to internationally agreed development goals, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and the Education for All (EFA) Dakar Principles. These include provision of infrastructure, promoting gender equity, provision of Capitation Grants for primary schools<sup>1</sup>, provision of free textbooks, provision of free school uniforms for children from poor households, and initiating Best Teacher award schemes for teachers in pre-tertiary institutions. In addition, the government has created special teacher motivation packages for teachers working in hard-to-reach and deprived areas, and for teachers of maths and science, as well as those in technical and vocational education.

The introduction of the School Report Card system and School-Based Assessment process is aimed at ensuring effective school attendance and enhanced school-level management at the basic level, while tracking pupil learning achievement trends. The School Report Cards give stakeholders of schools the opportunity to come together to discuss the state of the school. The process also informs the preparation of the School Performance Improvement Plan (SPIP), used to expend funds provided by the government under the Capitation Grant scheme.

## Structure of the education system

The structure and content of education in 1987 resulted in a significant reduction in the number of years of pre-tertiary education offered – from 17 to 12 years. After the 2007 Education Reform

Act, however, two years of early childhood schooling (from age 4) was formally included in the free compulsory basic education, bringing the total number of years for pre-tertiary education to 14. The current structure of education in Ghana is as follows:

- **Basic education level:** eleven years – comprising early childhood education (two years), primary (six years) and junior high school (three years).
- **Second cycle education:** three years – consisting of senior high school grammar and technical education, as well as other post-basic skills-development programmes, including the National Apprenticeship Programme.
- **Tertiary level education:** comprising diploma programmes at teacher training institutions and polytechnics, as well as undergraduate programmes spanning a minimum duration of three years (for diploma programmes) and four years (for undergraduate degree courses).

## Confronting the challenges

The education system is faced with major challenges in access and participation. For example: the low enrolment of girls; low quality in terms of poor pupil learning achievement; inadequate supply of trained and qualified teachers, resulting in extremes of class size; and lack of resources for teaching and learning. The government has introduced a number of measures to mitigate the impact of these challenges.

### Girls' education

On access and participation, girls' participation, which used to be a major constraint in the country's move to attaining gender equity, has seen some improvement. Since introducing a major intervention on girls' education with the intention of removing the barriers that prevent girls' enrolment, school timetables have been made more flexible in areas where girls are expected to carry out domestic chores at home.

The government has reviewed all textbooks to remove aspects of gender stereotyping that discriminate against girls. A Girls' Education Unit has been set up to facilitate support to girls in the learning of science and technology. Furthermore, selective scholarship packages have been introduced to target girls from poor households, with vacation camps organised to encourage girls to continue schooling.

### Learning achievements

Despite the focus on promoting girls' schooling, the performance of boys has not been significantly affected. In the 2009 National



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Education Assessment (NEA), analysis of the performance of boys and girls revealed that in P3 (Grade 3) English, the performance of girls was slightly higher than that of boys. The reverse was the case in P6 (Grade 6) English, however. On minimum competency and proficiency level attainment, more boys attained the minimum competency and proficiency levels in P3 English than did girls. In P6 English, a slightly higher percentage of boys reached the minimum competency than girls. The differences in performance between the boys and girls in English were not significant. However, boys outperformed girls significantly in P3 and P6 maths. The critical issue is still low girls' participation, and the government continues to give priority to achieving parity.

The gender parity index (GPI) has increased since 2009/10 at all levels of basic education and senior high school. Early childhood GPI stands at 0.98, with primary GPI increasing from 0.96 in 2009/2010 to 0.97 in 2010–2011. Junior high school GPI stands at 0.93.

## Teachers

The distribution of teachers continues to disadvantage rural areas. The situation is worse when it comes to the placement of trained professional teachers. The percentage of trained teachers remains very low at the basic level. In early childhood education, only 31 per cent of teachers in kindergartens are trained. Primary level has about 51 per cent of teachers trained, with the junior high school level having about 66 per cent of teachers trained.

To tackle the low number of trained teachers in kindergarten schools, teacher-training programmes for early childhood education have been expanded. The government is also exploring means of developing pre-primary education by setting up partnerships with local communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and religious groups.

For rural, deprived and hard-to-reach parts of the country, the government's response is to introduce special incentive packages for teachers who accept postings in these schools. Currently, the government is on course to introduce an additional 20 per cent to the basic salary allowance for teachers serving in disadvantaged areas.

As part of the government's effort to improve the teaching and learning environment in schools, it has set about tackling the problem of classes held under trees. In a bid to gradually replace all schools under trees, which currently total around 5,000 across the country, the government has already turned 1,500 of these schools into bricks and mortar classroom blocks.

## Rises and falls

### Access

The number of schools at kindergarten, primary and junior high levels has increased substantially over the past few years. For example, the number of kindergarten schools rose from 7,009 in 2004/05 to 17,471 in 2009/10. Total enrolment is also rising strongly, with the number of children attending kindergarten having increased by 6.3 per cent in 2009/10, and by 8 per cent in the previous year.



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## Enrolment rates

Between 2004/05 and 2005/06, the net enrolment rate increased by 10 per cent – from 59.1 per cent to 69.2 per cent. However, between 2006/07 and 2007/08, the percentage increase was only 2.3 per cent. It raises the question whether the Capitation Grant policy is losing its efficacy to normalise the enrolment. A lot more attention should be placed on promoting enrolment at the correct age at the primary education level, which should be a key message in the enrolment drive activities.

## Attendance and completion rates

Similarly, the net attendance rate fell by 1.4 per cent, from 72.1 per cent in 2008/09 to 71.1 per cent in 2009/10. Consequently, the total completion rate fell by 1.6 per cent – from 88.7 per cent in 2008/09 to 87.1 per cent in 2009/10. This reduction was not in the male completion rate, which actually rose by 21.2 per cent from 74 per cent in 2008/09 to 89.7 per cent in 2009/10, but in the female completion rate, which dropped from 85.5 per cent in 2008/09 to 84.3 per cent in 2009/10 – a percentage decrease of 1.4 per cent.

In 2008, the country's rising fiscal deficit coupled with the global economic downturn triggered a crisis in public spending. As a result, the education budget was cut by 30 per cent in 2009. This reduction may be having an effect on the gains made between 2004/05 and 2008/09. However, determined efforts by the government to strengthen revenue collection and increase the share of the budget allocated to education should help maintain, and build on, past achievements. Growth in public expenditure is projected at 4 per cent in the next five years.

## Conclusion

The government is continuing to make solid progress towards improving the country's education system and boosting learning achievement. By striving to increase girls' enrolment and narrow inequalities between schools, expanding teacher training and increasing teacher numbers, the government is making positive steps towards restoring quality education to all in Ghana.

## Endnote

1 Capitation Grants were set up in 2005/06 to finance the withdrawal of formal fees in primary schools, thus reducing the incentive for schools to introduce informal fees of their own. Under the scheme, every public primary school receives an amount of money (4 Ghana cedi and 50 pesewas – GHC4.50) for each pupil enrolled per year. The exchange rate of the cedi to the dollar currently (July 2011) stands at GHC1.50 to US\$1.

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