Dilemma of Access and Provision of Quality Basic Education in Central Region, Ghana

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Abstract

A survey research was conducted to find out if reported improvements in access to education in Ghana are reflected in comparable improvements in delivery of quality education. The study examined theoretical constructs on adequacy and quality assurance in education to ascertain the state of quality provision in education, and whether there is a significant difference in existing quality provisions in education and what the quality provisions should be as perceived by the study respondents. Questionnaire and quality indicators observation check list were used to collect data from the study respondents consisting of heads of basic schools in the Central region of Ghana who were selected by simple random sampling technique. Data collected were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and gap analysis that utilized paired samples t test procedure.Major findings reported in the study showed that reported improvements in access to education do not correspond to improvements in the provision of educational facilities to assure the delivery of quality education. Also, there was statistically significant difference in existing quality provisions in education and what the quality provisions should be.

Keywords: Educational Access, Enrollment, Quality Provisions, Educational Infrastructure

1. Introduction

In the manufacturing sector today, human capital is still essential for most factories to carry out a variety of Target two of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); attaining universal primary education, focuses on access to education. Access to basic education is a key component to a nation's development. Sustained access to education is critical to long term improvements in productivity and the reduction of inter-generational cycles of poverty. Access to education when broadly defined is central to any development strategy that seeks to diminish poverty and enhance well being.The UNICEF states that universal access to quality education is not a privilege, but it is a basic human right. UNICEF is committed to nothing less than full and complete access to free, quality education for every child of school going age.

The UNESCO in 2005 observed that many children do not go to school, simply because there is no school nearby, there are not enough classrooms, or their parents cannot afford to pay school fees. UNESCO further observed that about 30% of children who do not have access to education live in rural areas compared to eighteen percent in urban settings. Access to education is not the only crisis, but poor quality is holding back learning even for those who make it to school.

A study conducted by Akyeampong, Rolleston, Ghartey- Ampiah, and Lewin (2012) for The Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) concludes that access to education suffers from both the supply and demand sides of provision of education. The study observed that from the supply side of provision which concentrated on inputs, infrastructure is weak, buildings and classrooms are inadequate or unavailable, learning materials are in short supply, and teacher qualification is low. Form the demand side, access problems arise in communities where the opportunity costs of school attendance are high and where school quality is low.

The government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service (GES)introduced social interventions to facilitate the attainment of two major dimensions of access to education: affordability and availability. The GES was tasked to make education both affordable and available to Ghanaians. The main interventions included the school feeding programme and the capitation grant. The school feeding programme was an intervention designed to provide pupils with a balanced meal in a day and targets basic schools with enrolment problems and high levels of poverty.

The capitation grant was introduced to bring to an end to the charging of school fees. The capitation grant was the government's commitment to providing free compulsoryuniversal basic education (fCUBE).

The GES also established key performance indicators (i.e., gross enrollment ratio, net enrollment rate, gross admission ratio, survival and completion rates) to measure progress in pursuing target two of the MDGs.The gross enrolment ratio (GER) refers to the total number of pupils in school, irrespective of their age, compared with the relevant school age population in the country. The pupils may be below or above the relevant school age while in school which may sometimes make the proportion to be above 100%. Gross basic school enrolment has increased successively from 74% in 1991/92 to 87.5% in 2005, to 92.1% in 2006, then to 105% in 2008, 110.27%in 2012, and to 110.4% as of 2014/15 (*EMIS, 2015*).

The net enrolment rate (NER)indicates the number of appropriately aged pupils enrolled in schools as proportion of total number of children in the relevant age groups. Since it deals with only age-specific data, the

proportion cannot exceed 100%. The NER at the basic level rose from 45.2% in 1991/92 to 69.2% in 2005/06, then to 77% in 2008, 82.06% in 2012, and 91.0% as of 2014/15 (*EMIS, 2015*).

The survival rate refers to the proportion of pupils who successfully complete the cycle among the cohort of pupils who began the cycle together. An increasing proportion of pupils failed to complete school after enrolment. At the basic level, survival rate decreased from the peak level of 82.6% in 2004/2005 to 75.6% in 2005/2006. However, there has been a significant improvement in the completion rate, increasing from 85.5% in 2007/8 to 91.6% in 2010/11, and then to 99.6% as of 2014/15 (*Education Statistics World Bank, 2014; EMIS, 2015*).

According to Lewin (2009), using school enrolment rates to gauge access is not adequate. He intimated that an expanded vision of access to education should go beyond the narrow indicators of school enrolment rates. Access to education has to include judgments of educational quality and process (what children have access to); and of educational outcomes (what competencies and capabilities are acquired and how they are valued).

The provision of quality education brings to the fore the concept of educational adequacy. Kowalski (2010) observes that schools as adequate institutions address the extent to which the schools meet minimum acceptable standards and provide students with equal opportunities. Adequacy defines the minimum acceptable levels in the provision of resources, such as, facilities, staffing, and materialsdetermined to be necessary for all children to achieve proficiency to attain the goals of education. What facilities must the schools have? What calibre of staff must the school have? What materials must be available for teaching and learning to take place?Adequacy also looks at minimum acceptable educational opportunities for student achievement. In the era of heightened expectations for schools to perform, adequacy provides a guiding principle to stakeholders to work with. Adequacy raises the issue of fairness: It would be fundamentally unfair to create high expectations for schools without providing adequate resources to meet those expectations.

Wise (1983) identifies adequacy with meeting satisfactory minimum offering. He focuses primarily on financing education and poses the question: How much do schools need to education a pupil? Adequacy thus looks at the funding needed for the resources that work in meeting the real needs of students. In other words, adequacy addresses what is needed to enable all students have the opportunities to succeed and how much money is needed to build and maintain these opportunities.

2. Statement of the Problem and Purpose of Study

The indicators from Ghana show that even though, the nation is yet to attain the desired target, efforts to improve access to education are yielding some positive results. This is evidenced in the steady increases in the gross enrolment ratio (GER) and the net enrolment ratio (NER) mentioned above. For example, the GER has experienced a total percentage increase of about 19.8% since 2006. Similarly, the NER has experienced a total percentage increase of 24% since 2006 (Ministry of Education, 2014).

However, as the nation celebrates marginal progress in access to education, quality trends and school outcomes have not improved. Quality trends, such as, the Pupil-Trained Teacher ratio has remained at about 64. The quantity of trained teachers is inadequate. Efficiency in teacher allocation decreased between the 2005/2006 and 2011/2012 and also in 2014/15 school years. Classrooms are more crowded in schools in poor districts. Also, non-teacher inputs have remained fairly poor over the years. For example, majority of schools, especially in the deprived districts have fewer primary textbooks, classrooms, potable water sources, and toilets (Darvas & Balwanz, 2013). School outcomes, especially student performance in national standardized tests, have declined. For example, during the past three years, about 50% of students who took the national standardized test (i.e., Basic Education Certificate Examinations) failed to meet the required passing grades to progress to the next level of education.

Efforts in pursuing access to education seem not to commensurate efforts to assure provision of quality basic education. *Is Ghana pursuing access to education at the expense of quality*? Learning outcomes have been generally low at the basic level and that there has been no significant improvement in quality since 2002. The improvements in access to education need to be reflected incomparable improvements in delivery of quality education.Access to education should include quality provisions in education focusing on educational inputs, processes, and outcomes.

This study sought to examine the assurance of quality in education in Ghana. Specifically, the study was delimited to Central region of Ghana and addressed structures to assure quality in education.The Central region is among the three regions in Ghana who have enrolment rates above the nation's average enrolment rates. The study examined theoretical constructs on adequacy and quality assurance in education. Two research questions guided the study:

1. *What is the state of education facilities in Central region of Ghana as perceived by study respondents?*
2. *Is there a significant difference in the descriptive and prescriptive provision of quality education in the Central region of Ghana as perceived by the study respondents*?

The findings and conclusions reported in this study will provide a blueprint for the Ministry of

Education to conduct a national study on concurrently pursuing access to education and provision of quality education. The findings and conclusions also will provide data to the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service for future policy development and analysis concerning holistic approach to pursuing education for all.

3. Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for the study. It was a valuable tool for assessing opinions and trends in the provision of quality education as it provided information on existing conditions. The study population consisted of school heads of public basic schools (n= 1, 103) in the Central region. The school head is expected to facilitate the attainment of instructional excellence and set the agenda which determine the persons to be involved in making important decisions concerning the school, and the optimum level of stakeholder involvement to actualise the mission of the school.

A simple random sampling technique was adopted to select respondents ($n = 300$) based on suggested sample size of 285 by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) for a population of 1,103. A table of random numbers was used to determine which of the 1,103 school heads should be chosen to be part of the study respondents.

Quality indicator check list and a questionnaire were used to collect data from respondents to address research questions one and two respectively. The quality indicator check list covered four broad areas of academic processes, physical facilities, health and sanitation, and recreational facilities. Respondents selected one of three response choices: Not Meeting Adequacy; Meeting Adequacy; and Excellent. The questionnaire consisted of 30 closed-ended Likert type items that elicited information from respondents with regard to the extent of agreement or disagreement with the descriptive and the prescriptive.

Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts that were converted into percentages to address research question one. Gap analysis that utilized paired sample t test was used to address research question two to ascertain if a significant difference exists between prevailing quality provisions (the descriptive) and quality provisions that should be practiced (the prescriptive)

4. Findings and Discussion

To address research question one, respondents indicated the state of the provision of education facilities in basic schools in the Central region of Ghana. Frequency counts computed to percentages are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 State of facilities (N=300)

Facilities	Not Meeting Adequacy (%)	Meeting Adequacy (%)	Excellent (%)
Academic	42	56	2
Physical	45	55	0
Health & Sanitation	68	26	6
Recreational	40	55	5

The findings show that in general, a small proportion of the respondents indicated that education facilities are in excellent condition. More specifically, a little over half of the school heads noted that academic, physical, and recreational facilities meet adequacy; the minimum acceptable standards. Kowalski (2010) opines that meeting adequacy, that is, meeting the minimum acceptable standards, is really satisfying legal requirements, but not creating the necessary and sufficient conditions for schools to engage in protracted improvements. Earthman (2004) states that the provision of quality education is not about meeting just the legal requirement, but ensuring that the facilities needed to promote teaching and learning are available. Earthman observes that there is plethora of evidence pointing to the significant impact facilities have on student achievement.

The finding that about two-thirds of the school heads indicated that health and sanitation facilities do not meet the minimum acceptable standards suggests that the USAID Water, Sanitation Hygiene (WaSH) project is yet to have significant impact on schools.

The findings on the state of facilities point to the herculean tasks school heads face in assuring the provision of quality education. According to Earthman (2004), students in inadequate facilities perform less well than students in adequate facilities. This assertion of Earthman is corroborated by Monk (2006) who studied the adequacy of educational facilities and their impact on academic achievement and concluded that school facilities have an impact on academic achievement. Excellent school facilities impact positively on achievement. Black (2001) observes that when school facilities do not meet the expectation of teachers, they do not hesitate to leave the school. Similarly, Buckley, Schneider, and Yi (2004) in their research show that adequacy of school facilitates correlates positively with teacher turnover. They posit that the inadequacy of the school facility affects the likelihood that teachers will leave a school. Such a situation does not augur well for the development of long-term relationships in the school to enhance the building of professional learning community that enhances teaching and learning.

To address research question two, a paired sample t test was conducted to test if there is a significant

difference in the descriptive and prescriptive provisions of quality education in the Central region of Ghana as perceived by the study respondents. The results of the paired sample t tests are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2 Paired sample t test

Facility	Pair	M	SD	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Academic Process	Descriptive	2.32	1.04	2.83	298	.008
	Prescriptive	3.81	.85			
Physical	Descriptive	2.15	1.11	2.681	298	.023
	Prescriptive	3.74	.88			
Health and Sanitation	Descriptive	2.11	.65	2.83	295	.016
	Prescriptive	3.71	.73			
Recreational	Descriptive	2.71	1.02	2.99	298	.011
	Prescriptive	3.74	.88			

The findings show that there was a statistically significant difference between the descriptive provisions and the prescriptive provisions for the four major areas of academic process, physical, health and sanitation, and recreational facilities. This finding points to the situation where the operating conditions for schools are different and fall short of what the operating conditions should be. This prevailing situation does not lend itself to creating the enabling environment to improve student achievement and school processes. The works of various researchers (e.g., Earthman, 2004; Mendell and Heath, 2003; Monk, 2006) allude that improved student achievement and other school processes are precipitated by adequacy of educational facilities. According to Hopland (2011), student achievement is a direct correlate of improved educational facilities. When the provision of educational facilities do not meet the prescribed standards, then school performance, that is, student achievement and school processes, will suffer a decline. For example, commenting on the disparity in the performance of students in selected charter schools and regular public schools, Bodine and Fuller et al. (2008) attributed the disparity to the gap in adequacy of educational facilities. They observed that educational facilities in the charter schools fell short of the normative provisions of educational facilities and hence the low performance as compared with that of the regular public school. While acknowledging that the socioeconomic factors clearly affect student academic performance, Schneider (2003) intimates that the condition and the adequacy of educational facilities are more directly under the control of the school district and state and hence the provision of educational facilities is an important policy tool for improving academic performance. This observation suggests that school districts have the ability to turn around low student achievement. The school districts can focus on developing policies to provide facilities to meet what is prescribed by experts.

According to Crampton and Thompson (2002), existing gaps between descriptive educational facilities and prescriptive educational facilities is a direct result of limited financial resources that are earmarked for infrastructure improvement and maintenance in schools. This is where a policy addressing infrastructure improvement and maintenance becomes handy.

5. Conclusion

The effort the Ghana Education Service to improve access to education in the Central region of Ghana is commendable. However, this has not been matched by corresponding increase in the provision of quality education. The educational facilities do not meet adequacy. Also, the existing educational facilities in basic schools in the Central region do not measure up to what is prescribed by educational experts to facilitate improved student achievement. Pursuing access and not concurrently ensuring that provision of educational facilities meet adequacy addresses only partially Ghana's strive to meet access and quality to education. Access cannot be met at the expense of provision of quality and similarly provision of quality education will amount to naught if there are no students to access the education provided. The two must go together to ensure that the enabling conditions are created to embark on sustained improved student achievement and school processes.

This study recommends to the Ghana Education Service that funding education should adopt methods that link adequacy to budget line items. Also, this study was conducted in the Central region and with heads of basic schools. Similar study should be conducted in other regions where circuit supervisors will be included as respondents. The circuit supervisors have responsibility to provide supervision and guidance for a cluster of

schools.

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