Enhancing Access to Education for out-of-school Children in Hard to Reach Communities in Ghana: The ACE experience

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Enhancing Access to Education for out-of-school Children in Hard to Reach Communities in Ghana: The ACE experience

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Abstract

Access to quality Basic Education for all school-age children has been the vision of governments of many developing countries, especially those in sub-Saharan Africa. However, the way to provide access to quality education for all school-age children, especially in the hard-to-reach communities has been a major challenge. This position paper looks at an innovative approach to providing access to quality education in hard-to-reach communities in Northern Ghana by the Alliance for Change in Education (ACE), through the Wing School project. The paper aims to share the good practices of the ACE Wing School model. It highlights the key characteristics of the ACE methodology, approach to access, ACE Wing School approach to quality of learning outcomes, community participation. Challenges of the ACE methodology are highlighted and aspects of the ACE methodology which could be useful for state adoption have been recommended to stakeholders of education in Ghana.

Keywords: Wing school, Hard-to-reach, Community participation, Pupil participation.

Introduction

The delivery of education, particularly basic education in Ghana has come a long way. According to Ghana's Education Sector Performance Reports (ESPR, 2012), access to basic education has doubled in the last decade, with a current primary gross enrolment rate of 96.5%, albeit with a net enrolment rate of 81.7%. Even though the attainment of a full 11-year cycle of basic education for school-age children remains a challenge, according to the World Bank (2011), Ghana is said to have made significant progress in the area of access. There are however,

disparities in access to basic education. Whereas the access rate was 80% or more in the seven endowed regions of Ghana in 2008, the three northern regions of Ghana were still far below the national average with varying access rates, ranging from 77% access in Upper West, 69.1% in Upper East and 55.3% in the Northern region (GDHS, 2008). Thus, in the three regions of the north of Ghana some children have been marginalized and excluded from education in general.

Article 26 of the 1948 UN universal declaration of human rights states that everyone has a right to education and that this education shall be free and compulsory. It points out further that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It is therefore not surprising that in 2000, the United Nations (UN) set as one of the Millennium Development Goals that by 2015 all boys and girls will complete at least a primary education. For more than 10 years, since the Dakar declaration of Education for All (EFA), different stakeholders have partnered with the Ghanaian government to support the development of basic education in the country (Thompson & Casely-Hayford, 2008). For example, following the education reform in 2007, universal basic education (which is meant to be free) now covers 2 years of kindergarten, 6 years of primary and 3 years of junior high school. If education is viewed as a human right, then EFA implies every Ghanaian must have at least eleven years of free universal basic education.

Ghana's dream of EFA by the year 2015 is challenged because several children remain out of school as many communities appear to be beyond the reach of Ghana Education Service (GES) criteria and capacity for opening up new schools. The Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2010-2020 envisages the opening up of new schools within a distance of every 3 km but implementation has been constrained by dispersed settlement patterns in deprived communities coupled with logistical difficulties. Therefore, whereas some reports show that less than a million school-age children are not in school in Ghana, computations and analysis of the latest Population and Housing Census and the Ghana Demographic and Health Survey (GDHS) reports rather show that about 3 million children are not in school. Additionally, there is an average school dropout rate of 4% according to the 2008 GDHS thus exacerbating the phenomenon of out-of-school children in Ghana. It is in response to this challenge towards achieving universal primary education that the Complementary Education Policy has been drafted for implementation by the Basic

Education Unit of GES in collaboration with donor partners, NGOs and civil society.

As access to basic education in Ghana continues to improve, education actors are increasingly focusing attention on the quality of education. The National Education Assessment (NEA) and School Education Assessment (SEA) reports of 2009/2010 show that less than 30% of primary school pupils in predominantly rural districts reached competency levels and the three regions of northern Ghana have been the worst performing in these assessments. Performance in mathematics was even worse, with only 48.05% of P6 pupils reaching the minimum competency level and 14.39% attaining proficiency (Ministry of Education, 2009). Performance at the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE), measured in terms of percentage of pupils who obtain the minimum number of passes that will enable them gain admission to senior high schools (SHS) is at an annual average of 62% (of pupils who often sit the examinations) with enormous disparities of performance below the national average in less endowed schools, particularly in Northern Ghana. Literacy rates of children after completing primary school in Africa revealed that about three years ago, Ghana was one of the worst performing countries, with 19% of pupils achieving basic literacy after P6 compared with 72% for Kenya, 43% for Mali and 40% for Benin among others (Global Partnership for Educational, 2010).

Within the constraints of education delivery in Ghana- teacher supply, medium of instruction at the lower primary level, provision of teaching learning materials, resources to put up elaborate school structures- the Alliance for Change in Education (ACE) project was conceived and designed to deliver education at the doorsteps of children in hard-to-reach and out-of-reach communities in Northern Ghana. The ACE is a Danida-funded project and an initiative of the Danish Teachers' Union and their Ghanaian counterparts-Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT), the Ghana Friendship Groups in Denmark and their Ghanaian counterparts-School for Life and IBIS. The membership of the alliance has been extended to include state mandated educational institutions in Ghana as well as Civil Society. The extended members of the alliance include the Ghana Education Service (Northern Regional Office and District Offices of Gushegu and Karaga), the District Assemblies of Gushegu and Karaga, Bagabaga College of Education, Northern Network for Education Development (NNED), Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC) and two local Community-Based

Organisations-Tisongmitaba Development Association (TIDA) and Songsim Integrated Development Association (SONIDA). IBIS in Ghana is the host organization of the alliance.

The aim of this paper is to share the good practices of the ACE Wing School model for educating out-of-school children in hard-to-reach communities in northern Ghana. The paper highlights key characteristics of the ACE methodology, approach to access, ACE Wing School approach to quality of learning outcomes, community participation and learning outcomes as well as challenges of the ACE methodology. The paper ends with a conclusion highlighting aspects of the ACE methodology which could be useful for state adoption.

In the first section of this paper a brief background of the paper is provided. The subsequent sections provide the theoretical framework, and examination of the ACE Methodology, the Wing School approach to access as well as community participation and governance of the Wing School model, the outcomes of the methodology on students' achievement, challenges of the ACE methodology and what could be useful for state adoption respectively.

The Theoretical Framework

Meaningful access to education in Africa has attracted the attention of education researchers for some time now (Obanya, 2010; Wildeman, n.d.). Obanya (2010) identified five dimensions of access to education as Economic Access, Physical Access, Sociological Access, Psychological Access and Cultural Access. For the purpose of this paper, three of the dimensions, namely Economic Access, Physical Access and Psychological Access were drawn upon to provide the theoretical lenses with which provision of access to quality education by ACE project was evaluated. These three were chosen for two reasons. First they reflect the Ghanaian situation because the other two dimensions of access to education (i.e. Sociological Access and Cultural Access) do not often affect most Ghanaian school children, and the second, they provide comprehensive analysis of the barriers to access to education for all Ghanaian school aged children. It therefore provided the basis for the analysis of how the ACE Project addressed each of three dimensions of barriers to access to education (identified by Obanya, 2010) in the attempt to provide access to education for children in hard to reach communities in Northern Ghana.

Economic access has to do with the impediments in generalizing access to education to all school-age children because of economic

reasons such as extreme poverty and poor economic situations (Obanya, 2010). Difficulty in paying covert or hidden cost of education such as Parent Teacher Association dues and the need to often use children as labour in family business such as farms or petty trading due to lack of money to hire labour. This often denies some children access to education in developing countries. Although, in Ghana basic education (from Kindergarten to grade 9) is supposed to be free and compulsory for all children, it is still common to find some children in many hard to reach communities being denied access to education due to abject poverty in the community in which they live. The state is putting efforts to ensure that school age children have access to education through various programmes, often with the support from development partners (as will be seen later in this paper), but this does not often stop some parents, especially, from very low income bracket from engaging their wards in petty trading on market days, farm work during farming seasons or care takers of other siblings when they parents have to be away for a long time, thus denying children the opportunity to access basic education.

Physical access has to do with geographical barriers to expanding and generalizing access to school-age children due to long distances between home and school. This includes difficult and impenetrable terrains (Obanya, 2010). In many hard to reach communities, especially in the three Northern regions of Ghana, the population density makes it difficult to site a school in each town. However, the distance between towns is often very long therefore pupils who have to attend school in other towns walk very long distance to go to schools. In some hard to reach communities, pupils have to walk three to four miles to school. This makes it very difficult for very young children to go to school because of the ordeal they have to go through walking several miles to schools and the risk involve.

Psychological access has to do with barriers associated with the school not being able to respond appropriately to children's learning needs and learning styles (Obanya, 2010). It is the situation where the children are physically present in school but the school does not provide them the benefits of schooling. Thus the children are physically present but are denied access to the benefits from sufficient learning that schooling has to provide for all children of school going age. For example, the language policy of Ghana where English is used as the medium of instruction from primary four onwards, and all text with the exception of Ghanaian languages are written in the English language do

not provide meaningful access to education for children who have difficulty reading, writing and comprehending the English language.

The ACE project targeted hard to reach communities within districts which are categorized among the poorest in Ghana with high level of illiteracy, no electricity and very poor transport and communication network. Drawing on the three dimensions of access provided a framework to study the effectiveness of ACE approach to access to quality education.

The ACE Methodology

The main objective of the ACE project was to evolve low-cost but high impact approach to ensuring both access and quality education for all pupils, especially those in the hard-to-reach communities. However, the essence of the project was to pilot, learn and document experiences for adoption by the state and other education actors. The ACE methodology encompasses four major areas namely community participation in education, teacher recruitment and retention, language of instruction at the lower primary level and the use of teaching and learning approaches that enhance cognitive development of the learner. The model is thus underpinned by (a) low-cost but high impact approaches, ranging from community initiative and ownership of schools, (b) recruitment of Senior High School leavers to teach, from communities where teachers are required, (c) the practice of mother tongue instruction, (d) the use of learner-centred and participatory teaching approaches in the teaching and learning process (Ampiah, Fletcher, Abreh & Davis, 2012).

In order to enlist community support and commitment, the involvement of the district assembly and other community members in major decision making concerning the school is very important. Decisions such as establishment of schools, building of school blocks and recruitment of teachers are taken in consultation with stakeholders such as district assemblies and Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs). The project also sought to make education relevant to communities by using their local language as the medium of instruction and to make learning easier for learners. The ACE methodology does not only require the use of the local language of the community in which the Wing School is situated as the medium of instruction, but also requires that textbooks at the lower primary level are written in the same language. For instance, the ACE project instructional approach in Wing Schools of the Gushegu and Karaga districts is that all textbooks at the lower primary level - Creative Arts, Literacy, Numeracy and Natural Science be translated into

the Dagbani and Likpakpaaln languages of the communities involved in the project. Furthermore, ACE methodology emphasizes the use of learner-centered and participatory teaching approaches by the teaching and learning process. In surmounting the challenge of teacher supply, the project engages members of the communities to identify their own relations who have completed Senior High School and are trainable, to live and teach in the community. In order to ensure that ACE teachers live up to expectation they are provided with various in-service teacher training programmes to update their content knowledge and pedagogy. One of these in-service programmes leads to the award of diploma in basic education by the University of Cape Coast. This shows how ACE project provided opportunities to surmount both psychological and economic barriers to access to education in the hard to reach communities by preparing teachers to use appropriate methods of teaching children and providing education in the language that afforded pupils meaningful access to education. Involvement of communities also encouraged parents who would have otherwise denied their wards/children access to education for economic reasons to appreciate the need to educate them.

The ACE methodology involves the establishment of Wing Schools which are often developed into fully fledged schools for state takeover. A Wing School is an extension of an existing school where children are enrolled in Kindergarten 1 to primary 3 because their communities are hard-to-reach or are beyond the reach of GES criteria for setting up full-fledged primary schools. Wing Schools are therefore intended to be extensions of existing schools and it is estimated that upon completing primary 3, children will be grown enough to walk the distance to the nearest school to continue from primary 4. The Wing School model is aligned with Ghana's Strategic Plan (ESP) 2010-2020 specifically contributing to achieving access, equity, welfare, quality, efficiency and effectiveness objectives and targets.

The GES and the District Assemblies are actively involved in the ACE Wing School project. The GES offers guidance and support to the implementation of the Wing School approach. The District Directorates are therefore the defacto owners of the Wing Schools and are directly responsible for providing teaching /learning resources for the schools. Also, the District Assembly is responsible for approving the establishment of Wing Schools and see to the upkeep of the school to ensure sustainability of the schools. In the Wing School project in Gushegu and Karaga districts, for example, Bagabaga College of

Education was charged with the training of Wing School teachers. This means that some grounds have been laid for the sustainability of the project in the two districts mentioned above. This shows how the ACE project addressed issues relating to some of the physical barriers to education such as distance from home to the school in hard to reach communities.

It must be said that the Wing School concept of education is not new to Ghana's education system. Within GES circles, there have been isolated cases of schools designated as feeder schools, satellite schools or another stream of an existing school. The ACE project sought to implement an existing concept to serve both as a strategy for providing education at the doorsteps of children in deprived communities and as a package of pedagogical approaches to delivering quality education. Access and quality achievements from ACE project have been consolidated through the absorption of 56 former Wing Schools into the formal system, and adoption of ACE methodologies in selected public schools. The school absorption process means that ACE schools benefit from capitation grant, supervision, in-service training, supply of TLMs, furniture and uniforms from government (Asmussen & Millard, 2012). The ACE project, there, provides opportunity to address the three main dimensions of barriers to access to education identified in the theoretical framework of the paper namely economic access, physical access and psychological access.

ACE Wing School Approach to Access

While progress has been made in increasing the number of children enrolled in schools, about six years ago there were still many more, particularly in Northern Ghana, who were not enrolled or who did not complete the basic education programme (Akyeampong, Djangmah, Oduro, Seidu & Hunt, 2007). There are many reasons for this. According to Akyeampong et al. (2007) studies in Ghana "have shown that access issues tend to be more pronounced in areas that are prone to a range of interlocking socio-economic factors" (p. xviii). These factors include high levels of illiteracy coupled with low levels of economic development. Hashim (cited in Akyeampong, et. al, 2007) found that the issue of access in Northern Ghana was related to the perceived importance of education by households who considered the opportunity cost of formal education before deciding to send a child to school. Children would only be given access to formal education if schooling was considered as capable of providing a better alternative livelihood. In

that case, a child's inability to attend school was not perceived as an opportunity denied.

Child labour is yet another factor which contributes to the problem of access to education in Ghana, especially in the deprived communities. It puts pressure on children not to attend school or drop out of school. Even in the face of the introduction of capitation grants linked to fee-free provision in Ghana to provide opportunity for children from poor households to access basic education, other factors such as lack of basic human needs like food and shelter can compete to deny access.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the ACE Wing School concept looks at schooling problems from different perspectives and in a number of innovative ways. Regarding access, the ACE Wing School approach uses a number of radical means to achieve accelerated access to education. These include the use of innovative strategies for equity and expanded access to education targeting out-of-school children in communities where schools have never existed and ensuring that community people take up the responsibility to deciding to own and support the setting up of a school. Indeed, without radical access to education approaches, Ghana cannot meet Millennium Goal 2 which requires nations to achieve universal primary education. Considering the number of attempts that have been made by various governments in Ghana but have failed to make universal education compulsory, any new approaches that can enhance basic school enrolments deserve to be given some attention.

For example, under the 1961 Education Act, elementary schools (primary and middle) were meant to be free and compulsory. By making primary and middle school education free and compulsory, the government ensured that pupils from poor homes as well as those from rich homes could go to school (McWilliams & Kwamena-Po, 1975). However, because elementary education was free and compulsory, enrolments increased significantly without corresponding increases in educational resources. For example, there were not enough trained teachers to teach in the schools and this affected not only the quality of education in the elementary schools but also access (Foster, 1965). Lack of teachers meant that access had to be curtailed (Graham, 1976)

Again, in 1996, the Ghanaian government introduced the free compulsory universal basic education (FCUBE). Like all the education reforms that had taken place in Ghana before 1996, there were inadequate funds to enable the government to fully implement the

FCUBE. A donor programme known as the Basic Education Sector Improvement Program (BESIP) was designed to support FCUBE. The aim of the BESIP was to help teachers to deliver better lessons so that pupils would learn better. As far as access and equity are concerned, the BESIP also aimed to help children from poor homes and girls gain access to education. BESIP helped to increase enrolment and children learned in better .classrooms (Palmer, 2005). However, as a result of the increase in enrolments, pupil-teacher ratio increased by 2.2 points (from 30.7 to 32.9) for primary school between base-year 1994 and 2001 (Thompson & Casely-Hayford, 2008). Thus increasing enrolment affected the pupil-teacher ratio somehow as teacher numbers were not reviewed to match increased enrolments.

In spite of the significant increases in enrolments that were recorded between 2002/03 and 2009/10 academic years resulting from various initiatives like the capitation grant scheme, the school feeding programme and infrastructural expansion, there is still a lot to be done to ensure the nation attains EFA by 2015 (Christensen & Korboe, 2012).

Currently, not every school-going child in Ghana has access to formal education. Many children are not in school because of their geographic location or social circumstances (ACE, nd-ACE model booklet- "The Wing School Model of Education") The ACE Wing school concept appears to be unique because it takes teacher supply into account by encouraging communities to build teacher capacity through the employment of suitable community members as Wing School teachers. Using the Wing School approach, a lot of children who would not have had access to education provided by the Ghana Education Service have had access to education in two districts in Northern Ghana. In 2006/2007 academic year, for example, Gushegu and Karaga together had a basic school enrolment of 17,081. This figure more than tripled within five years to 52, 589 for public basic schools of the two districts (ACE, n.d.) as a result of the ACE project support for community animation and mobilization efforts in the two target districts.

As mentioned earlier, the ACE Wing School model enhances enrolment through the establishment of community schools, which are initiated and owned by communities. The decision to establish a Wing School is taken by the community where the need for access is identified. When a decision is taken to establish a Wing School, the community provides temporary thatch structures (building) for the school and takes active role in recruiting teachers. Until a school becomes a fully-fledged GES school, the ACE project has provided monthly stipends to the

teachers and members of the community have provided accommodation, feeding and teacher motivation. Also, the School Management Committee (SMC) and the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) are educated on their roles and their responsibilities to the school. This arrangement ensures that every community can own a school and this ultimately enhances access to education. With time, each of the Wing Schools develops into a fully-fledged primary school, which is then taken up by the Ghana Education Service. For example, according to ACE (n.d) using the Wing School model, 56 schools have been established in Gushegu and Karaga districts in Northern Ghana with a total enrolment of about 9, 000 pupils (ACE, n. d). Of these former Wing Schools, 39 have been transformed into fully fledged primary schools and the remaining schools continue to function as Wing Schools within the GES public school system. By the time these Wing Schools become fully fledged primary schools, new community Wing Schools may have been built elsewhere in the districts. That way, children over four years and above can gain access to education without traveling long distances to attend school. As the children get older they are then able to travel to the nearest junior secondary schools run by the Ghana Education Service. The implication is that Wing School pupils can gain access to the education beyond the primary school level.

ACE Wing School Approach to Quality of Learning Outcomes

Wing Schools follow the GES curriculum for lower schools and GES approved textbooks. The texts of lower primary-Creative Arts, Natural Science, Literacy and Numeracy-are translated into the mother tongue of the learners for instruction. Teachers are trained to teach in the mother tongue with the help of teachers' guides in the respective subjects (ACE, n.d.).

The ACE project identified the delivery of quality education to be a function of manageable class sizes of pupil-teacher ratios not exceeding 35:1; adequate requisite teaching learning materials; strict adherence to teachers time-on-task in the classroom, appropriate use of instructional time-contact hours; the practice of learner-centred, gender-sensitive and participatory teaching approaches and annual assessment of learners and teachers. All of the listed enabling inputs for ensuring the quality of learning outcomes have been further underpinned by regular supportive supervision to all schools.

The project ensured that 200 teachers of the 56 former Wing Schools were strictly assigned classes that did not exceed 35 pupils. In

cases where multigrade teaching was required, the teachers were well equipped to handle such classes (ACE, n.d.). Learner-centred, gender-sensitive and participatory teaching methodology means that children are active participants in the teaching and learning process and so are confident about what they learn. Wing School classes are arranged with children seated in groups. Every child has a chance to realize their full potential as they are allowed to express themselves. The teachers are conscious of the environment of the child and as such engage children to explore their environment in the teaching and learning process (Associates for Change, 2011).

The project covers continuing Teachers' Professional Development. After an initial 21-day pre-service training for community teachers, they are offered regular in-service training each school term. In addition, the teachers have been enrolled on the 4-year Untrained Teachers' Diploma in Basic Education (UTDBE) Programme to make them professionally qualified teachers. The rationale is to enhance their professional competence to deliver quality basic education and augment the teacher supply situation in the two districts (ACE, n.d.).

Wing School teachers are further motivated by professional monthly meetings that are organized for learning and sharing of experiences among them. They listen to each other and discuss their challenges and find solutions to them. The teachers receive periodic orientation on their professional code of conduct from GNAT to shape their professional competence and attitude.

Supervision in Wing Schools has been key to the success of the model. A multi-level supervision of Wing Schools has been adopted by GES circuit supervisors and supervisors of the project to ensuring the survival and quality of learning outcomes in Wing Schools. The ACE approach to supervision has sought to deepen GES concept of clinical supervision which is seldom practiced. Supervision in Wing Schools entails collegial support to teachers through lesson observation and feedback, demonstration lessons to strengthen both content and approaches to lesson delivery and overall motivation to the teacher by seeking their welfare in the context of school-community relationship. GES circuit supervisors provide oversight supervision to Wing Schools and provide logistics such as textbooks, furniture, teachers' note books, chalk, capitation grant, school uniform and exercise books for the upkeep of the schools. The project supervisors work closely with GES circuit supervisors for experience sharing and knowledge transfer that has

ultimately benefited the wider public school system of GES in the two districts (Asmussen & Millard, 2012; ACE, n.d.).

Community Participation and Ownership

The community plays an important role in the education of its kinsmen. In other words, the home and community contexts play a significant part in decisions as to whether or not children attend and stay in school and learn. Also, experience has shown that enhanced community involvement has often been a top-down imposition and not a response to demands from communities for greater involvement of the beneficiary communities as Dunne et al (2007) reports. This means that community participation goes beyond informing communities to support the running of schools to include increased political advocacy for greater community 'ownership' and involvement in decision-making (Rose, 2003; Pryor, 2005). The case of inclusiveness in schooling for outlandish and hard to reach communities vis-à-vis increased capacity of infrastructural development in order to achieve both fCUBE and the mandate of the law of Ghana to provide universal primary education becomes paramount.

Literature points to the crucial role communities play in committing resources to schools, supporting school governance and claiming ownership of school (Rose, 2007; Watt, 2001; Pryor, 2005; DeStefano, 1996). However, despite the benefits that come with community support for schooling a number of gaps still remain. For example, to what extent and within what confines should communities own their schools, participate in school affairs, and which limitations are placed on the school governance role? These are critical areas worth examining. How homogenous or otherwise are the communities to determine the degree to which each community could support the school formation and management also remains a puzzle for decentralization of education in Ghana. Regardless of these obvious gaps, support provided by communities is crucial and the community is essential to providing access to schooling especially for rural dwellers.

As mentioned above, the ACE's Wing School provides opportunity to communities to decide whether or not a school is needed in the community. This means communities do not only own the school when it is established, but more importantly have a say in the establishment of the school. In the ACE project the communities are expected to provide structures in the form of temporary thatch structures, teacher accommodation and other support services for the school. The putting up of the building provides indication at first level about the

extent to which the community wishes to own the school. Community ownership and participation has virtually become a good device for the rural communities to initiate and own a school. However, activities geared towards community ownership and participation do not emerge out of the blue but are thoughtfully put together to enable communities access schooling for their children. The use of local voices in advocating for community support through associations like the Songsim Integrated Development Association (SONIDA) in Gushegu and Tisongmitaba Development Association (TIDA) in Karaga was crucial in getting the needed community support for the establishment of the community schools. Furthermore, these groups have served as functional structures to support school governance especially in the areas of formation and running of PTA and SMC activities.

The ACE project has empowered communities to demand their rights and this has led to support for the ACE Wing School project. Districts have been supported to draw-up development plans that reflect community development priorities. Hence, districts officers and the communities have clear expectations and communities know what to expect from the district assembly. The communities contribute funds to the District Assembly in the form of property rates etc, knowing that it is through such contributions that the Assembly is able to support schools in the area. As the owner of a Wing School, the community is represented at partnership meetings to review progress once every three months (Ampiah, Fletcher, Abreh & Davis, 2012).

Outcomes/Achievements of the ACE Project

Annual quality assessment of teaching and learning in Wing Schools using GES approaches-the School Education Assessment and National Education Assessment by teams drawn from School for Life and tutors of some Colleges of Education (Bagabaga College and Tamale Training Colleges), have revealed high proficiency of Wing School pupils in numeracy and literacy (above 75% achievement rates) compared with their counterparts in regular public schools (Mohammed & Kasim, 2012).

Even though evaluation of the ACE Wing School project by Centre for Research into Quality Primary Education in Ghana (CRIQPEG) later revealed lower proficiency levels of Wing School pupils in English Language and mathematics (see Ampiah, Fletcher, Abreh & Davis, 2012), the pedagogical and methodological approaches of the project were found to largely promote interest in learning in schools and ensuring high levels of literacy in the local language among pupils in primary 3 and 4. Assessment of the quality of teaching and

learning outcomes in Wing Schools by CRIQPEG has enabled continuous identification of areas for improvement. It has also enabled the project to fully appreciate what works with the Wing School intervention and what does not.

Findings from the evaluation of the Wing School model also showed that subjects pupils found easiest to understand in primary 3 were the same subjects they found easiest to understand in primary 4. The implication is that the pupils had developed interest in certain subjects because they were delivered in the local language (even though not all teachers could teach very well in the local language). If the use of the local language actually played a role in generating pupils' interest in certain subjects as claimed by all the pupils interviewed during the CRIQPEG evaluation, then the ACE philosophy regarding the use of language has yielded dividends. The evaluation report shows that in almost all cases, the difficulties pupils had in the lower primary had to do with their inability to learn as well as they wanted. This suggests that the pupils appreciated the opportunity given to them to learn and identified anything that prevented them from learning as a hindrance.

Textbooks used in the lower primary are written in the local language and contain contextually relevant illustrations which are gender-sensitive and culturally relevant. Teachers rated their pupils' ability to read, write, understand and speak in the local language much higher than their ability to do same in English. This is an indication that the Wing School model builds pupils' literacy in the local language better than in English.

ACE paid for 200 teachers to undertake the Untrained Teacher's Diploma in Basic Education (UTDBE) programme at Bagabaga College of Education, so that they could become professional teachers and get absorbed into the public education system. This served as motivation for the teachers who would otherwise not have had the opportunity to train as professional teachers and a contribution by the project to almost double the number of professional teachers in the two target districts. In addition, teachers receive support from relevant officers from the GES, ACE Supervisors and the District Assembly to enable them use ACE teaching methodologies. The ACE teachers were also trained to do multi-grade teaching so that three teachers could manage a primary school with a kindergarten.

Challenges of the ACE Methodology

For the ACE Wing School model to provide access to basic education, communities need to play an active role in the establishment of Wing Schools. This calls for dedication on the part of the community since not all adult members of the community may have children of school-going age. Also, parents' and guardians' ability to provide Wing School pupils with meals and clean water on a daily basis can go a long way to ensure that the pupils attend school always and remain in school.

With regard to teaching, it is vital that teachers are recruited locally. The problem with this approach is whether adequate number of Senior High School leavers who can speak and read the language spoken in the community can easily be found in those communities (see Pryor & Ampiah, 2003). A teacher's inability to speak the local language means he/she could not teach using the local language as required by the language policy. Children who do not understand lessons in school will not have meaningful access and are likely to lose interest in school. Another challenge to access to education beyond the lower primary level of wing schools is the use of English language at the upper primary level. If pupils find the sudden changeover too radical, they may drop out from school. In a recent evaluation of the wing schools in the two districts (Ampiah, Fletcher, Abreh, & Davis, 2012), one of the major findings was that the sudden switch from the local language to the English language in primary four appears to be a major problem which pupils' claimed affected their understanding of what was taught. The study reported that circuit supervisors also observed that one of the main challenges the wing school pupils faced understanding lessons conducted in English at the upper primary level was familiarity with instruction in the local language at the lower primary school level. It is interesting to point out, however, that in spite of the difficulties the pupils had with the use of the English language in primary 4 lessons, they still wanted English language to be used as a medium of instruction in primary 4. This makes this challenge even more formidable.

Teachers and pupils in the Wing Schools faced challenges in spite of the positive results of the ACE project. Some teachers found it difficult to teach using only the local language. Others did not have the appropriate teaching/learning materials (TLMs) for teaching the pupils. Pupils who joined the mainstream system in primary 4, because they were used to being instructed in the local language, found it difficult to understand lessons taught in the English language. The evaluation also noted that some of the pupils walk long distances to school and this affected their learning as they missed some of the early morning lessons.

Lower primary and primary 4 teachers identified five main challenges. These were (a) inadequate teaching-learning materials, (b) difficulty in explaining certain terms in some subjects in the local language and therefore making it difficult for some pupils to understand lessons, (c) low rate of learning [using English as the medium of instruction] because of the use of the local language as a medium of instruction from primary 1-3 (d) poor infrastructure in the schools and (e) lack of home support leading to absenteeism of some pupils from school (poor turnout in class during farming periods) and pupils not studying at home (Ampiah, Fletcher, Abreh & Davis., 2012).

Sustainability is perhaps the greatest of all the challenges associated with the ACE project. The cost of running Wing School model such as translating books from English language to the local language and training teachers might be too much for District Assemblies. However, interviews with the Coordinator of the Wing School Project revealed the following:

- Sustainability would be achieved through the absorption of the ACE schools by GES.
- The teachers recruited would remain at post at least until they have gained a Diploma in Basic Education since all of them had the opportunity to pursue the UTDBE programme.
- Teachers absorbed into the GES would continue to use the ACE methodologies to ensure the sustainability of the teaching approaches.
- GES officials are aware of the benefits of the ACE teaching methodologies, they would therefore encourage teachers to use them.
- District Assemblies would continue to look for opportunities to establish Wing Schools in their respective districts when the current phase of the project comes to an end.

Despite some of the challenges identified with the ACE methodology, there are several aspects of the methodology which may be recommended for state adoption. The Wing School project in the Gushegu and Karaga districts has had remarkable effects on neighbouring districts. The Saboba District initiated Wing Schools upon learning of it as a strategy for targeting out of school children in hard-to-reach locations. This initiative resulted in IBIS support to that district to fully replicate the entire package of the Wing School model in some eight initial communities. The East Gonja district has similarly embraced the Wing School model within its most deprived education circuits,

popularly referred to as the "overseas areas". Other districts in the Northern Region of Ghana have reported of similar initiatives to accelerate education access for children in geographically hard-to-reach locations of their districts.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the ACE pedagogical approach and a way to enrol hard to reach children in dispersed communities in two districts in the northern part of Ghana. The use of community profiling - analyses of school-age children in the community, predominant language determination before negotiating entry into a community is a commendable strategy that the ACE Wing School project has used to reach communities.

Communities are persuaded into buying into the Wing School idea through due diligence by means of advocacy strategies employed by IBIS and its partners. However, proponents do offer the opportunity to the rural folks to choose between educating their children and wards with their group/organized support or otherwise lose-out on getting a community school from state and allied agencies for posterity. This advocacy strategy proves right most of the time.

A key lesson learnt from modeling the Wing School approach is that several of the Wing Schools (39 Wing Schools) have grown into full-fledged primary schools within 6 years of the project because the target communities had catchment areas of many more out-of-school children beyond the scope of a Wing School. The Wing School approach has thus become both a strategy for targeting and enrolling out-of-school children in deprived dispersed communities in school and a package of pedagogical approaches for such children.

Wing Schools from all indications may not form part of the development priority of the District Assembly and its district education offices. This indicates that the support of communities and development partners is crucial and thus a positive gain on the part of the ACE Wing School concept. Through the ACE project, communities now have public schools of their own. For example, of the 39 full-fledged schools attempts are advanced by the District Education Office and District Assembly to support some to become full stream basic school i.e. from primary through Junior High Schools (Asmussen, & Millard, 2012).

The ACE approach to access promises to be very effective in enrolling and keeping pupils in school in hard to reach communities. This approach to access may be considered for state adoption in rural

communities which share similar conditions as Gushegu and Karaga districts in Northern Ghana and other sub-Saharan African countries. This is because the ACE project provides total and meaningful access to education, which will eventually reflect in pupils learning outcomes and attitudes. It provides psychological access to education by ensuring that the language of teaching and learning, and the language used in textbooks at the lower primary are pupils' own language. Teachers are trained to deliver quality lessons through the use of appropriate teaching strategies. Establishment of Wing Schools address issues relating to physical access to education in the sense that children get the opportunity to attend school in their own communities while community participation in education reduces (if not solves completely) problems relating to economic barriers to access to education such as engagement of pupils in petty trading during school hours.

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