

Contextualising the Underperformance of Rural Education in northern Ghana: Management Approach

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents a qualitative study on the underperformance of rural education in northern Ghana with emphasis on Junior High Schools. The national curriculum from basic to secondary education run by public and private schools under the watch of the Ministry of Education, Ghana entitles students to sit same national examinations. The national curriculum presents uneven playing field as rural schools that lack quality educational resources are required to compete in same national examinations with colleagues in urban schools who have good educational resources. Pupils' in northern Ghana rural schools in this study are more disadvantaged because of the lack of educational resources needed for quality education as stipulated by the national education policy that establishes schools.

KEYWORDS: rural, education, northern Ghana, and educational resources.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to United Nations Development Planning (UNDP) 2009 report, rural populations in Africa are expected to increase by 147 million and will keep rising until 2040. The report further indicated that by 2050, Africa is expected to have 0.8 billion rural inhabitants while rurality in the developed world (i.e. The four other continents) is reduced as a consequence of urbanization and therefore required to cope is different from Africa's [23].

It can be deduced from the (UNDP) 2009 Africa Rural Population Report that the demand for rural education will increase with the growing rural population. The three northern regions of Ghana have many rural settlements with its attendant problems in education fueled by the poverty of the region and poor educational management.

In this research I consider the condition of rural education in northern Ghana defined geographically and culturally with emphasis on the pass rate of the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). As

Atkin maintains Rurality 'combines elements of geographical and social structures' [2]. Atkin defines Rurality in terms of geographical and social constructs as follows:

A. GEOGRAPHICAL CONSTRUCT

'Small scale – small schools, small villages, small churches, small communities
Isolated – separated from services and amenities (also safer by dislocation from urban settings)
A product of agriculture and its environmental activity
Infrastructure – management and governance of local services e.g., Local Health
Limited employment opportunities'

B. RURAL AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

'Strong community feeling, friendlier than urban communities, tighter knit – the anthropological issues of kinship and literacies
Conservative and traditional values
A slower, less pressurized way of life.'

I deduced from Atkin's (2003) definition of Rurality akin to northern Ghana as follows:

- A space where human settlement and infrastructure occupy only a small share of the landscape;
- Natural environment dominated by pasture, forests, mountains and savanna;
- Settlement of few persons;
- The availability of land at a relatively low cost;
- Education is scarce and seen as a luxury;
- Absence of basic infrastructure like good roads, electricity, portable water, hospitals, etc.

This dissertation will explore ‘contextualising underperformance in rural schools in northern Ghana (a case study)’. Northern Ghana refers to three regions: Upper East, Upper West, and Northern regions respectively. According to the 2010 national population census, the Ghana’s population is now estimated at 24,233,431 [21]. Figure 1 and table 1 shown below shows map and percentage share of population statistics of the ten (10) regions in Ghana.

Figure 1: The ten regions of Ghana



(Source: Town and Country Planning, Ghana, 2012)

Table 1: Regional Population Data

Percentage Share of Population by Regions in Ghana	
Ashanti (19.4%)	
Brong Ahafo (9.4%)	
Central (8.9%)	
Eastern (10.7%)	
Greater Accra (16.3%)	
Northern (10.1%)	
Upper East (4.2%)	
Upper West (2.8%)	
Volta (8.6%)	
Western (9.6%)	

Education remains one of the most promising for many children to attain a fuller, more productive life. Many developing countries especially in Africa have improved access to education, but the quality of education has remained low compared to developed countries.

C. NORTHERN GHANA: CONTEXT AND CHARACTERISTICS

The northern region of Ghana accounts for almost a third of Ghana's land mass and is inhabited by about 10.1% of its population, representing a population density of less than 25 people per square kilometer. The upper west and upper east regions respectively accounts for only 2.8% and 4.2% of the country's population with 17.5% of the upper west population classified as urban [21].

An observational study by this researcher showed that with harsh climate and poor vegetation, the people are dispersed, nomadic and deprived of basic amenities like portable water, good roads, good schools, and the like. Studies on child poverty indicate some children in northern Ghana fend for themselves by engaging in economic activities to support their basic food and nutritional requirements [5]. Also majority of children supplement their family's income activities (e.g. Farming and cattle rearing) which makes participation in school education often a luxury.

National statistics indicate the literacy rate among adults in northern Ghana is lower than 5% and less than 40% of children up to 14 years attend school. This leaves about 60% of children out of school, most of whom are girls. Thus the majority of children does not complete the compulsory nine years of basic schooling and consequently do not attain a basic level of literacy. In some districts more than one-third of the population of school-going age is not attending school [17].

Northern Ghana also suffers from an acute shortage of teachers in rural areas leading to a situation where many schools are simply not productive. Although the challenge facing teachers who teach in rural areas of Ghana are similar in terms of poor school infrastructure and accommodation, the northern regions present a particularly difficult challenge for teachers, especially newly trained teachers [1].

Teachers employed by the Ghana Education Service are posted to the entire country where their services are needed including the rural parts of northern Ghana. Term of teaching service at a post usually takes 4 years but it could be less or more based on teacher requirements in other parts of the country and administrative reshuffle of school management.

My case study explores rural education (concentrating on junior high school pupils aged 11-15years) in northern Ghana namely: Bunkpurugu-

Yunyoo (northern region), Talensi-Nabdam (upper east region), and Lambussie Karni New (upper west region). This research investigates the following questions:

- What is the level of development of physical resources (building, Information Technology, and electricity) available to rural schools in northern Ghana?
- What are the intellectual resources (quality of teachers, and governance) provided for effective rural school system in northern Ghana?
- What is the impact of family and community culture in rural education in northern Ghana?
- What are the interpretations given to regional/national policy documents on education in Ghana?

The Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo district of the northern region of Ghana is constituted by 191 communities with a population estimated at 153,329 with an annual growth rate of 3.1% [7]. 81.9% of the population are in rural settlements in spatial distribution. According to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development Report of the 2004 academic year of Bunkpurugu-Yunyoo district of the northern region of Ghana, 91.6% of junior high schools do not have permanent structures i.e. classrooms under trees. There were 68.2% trained teachers which represented an approximately 1:56 teacher pupil ratio. Out of a total enrollment of 2,970 pupils in junior high schools, 260 pupils passed the national junior high school examination to qualify for senior high schools [11].

The Talensi-Nabdam district of the upper east region of Ghana has a population of 100,879 with an average household size of six persons with 4-5 persons per room occupancy [20]. The total teacher pupil ration is 60:1 of which the ratio for the junior high schools is 23:1. A total number of 442 candidates who sat for the BECE, 281 boys of which 29.6% of them passed and of the 141 girls who sat the examination, only 14.9% passed. From the table of aggregates, it means that only 2% scored marks that could qualify them to progress into senior high schools [9].

The Lambussie Karni New district of the upper west region of Ghana has a population of 35,063 with a population growth rate of 1.7 [20]. They are without basic amenities like electricity. The teaching staff constitutes the following: 74 community teaching

assistants, 35 untrained teachers and 87 volunteer teachers.

This means that there are no trained teachers in the Lambussie Karni New district. All 31 kindergartens in the district operate under trees. Performance of pupils at the BECE in 2009/10 academic year was very disappointing with no pupils achieving the marks required for progression to a senior high school. The pass aggregate for all 1,889 pupils of the 2009/10 academic year was 38.5% which reveals that none of them made a good pass that could qualify them to a good [12].

The underperformance of rural schools in northern Ghana is high. Reasons alluded to includes:

- Low enrollment at the basic level and high rate of dropout
- Lack of teaching and learning materials
- Low budgetary allocation for rural education
- Poor leadership and management by educational policy implementers
- Lack of trained teachers
- Poverty is endemic making education expensive
- Poor water and sanitation facilities in schools
- High level of functional illiteracy among parents
- Lack of office space and equipments for school staff and recreational facilities for pupils
- Lack of residential accommodation for school staff
- Low performance at the basic level
- Inadequate and dilapidated infrastructure
- High pupil teacher ratio
- Inadequate means of transport for monitoring and supervision by educational authorities [13].

II. METHODOLOGY

Educational research that sets out to identify, describe and analyze the nature of events and conditions are said to be descriptive (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011); this research can therefore be characterized as a descriptive study.

Some authors (Creswell, 2007; Cohen et al, 2011) argue that research methodology follows from the nature of the research topic, and the purposes and questions of the research rather than the methodological preferences of the researcher.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

Interviewed / Observed	No. of participants	Position	Geography
Interviewed	1	Executive Director	Upper West
Interviewed	1	Chief Director	Upper East
Interviewed	1	Financial Administrator	Northern
Interviewed	3	Head Teachers	Upper East
Interviewed	4	Teachers	All 3 regions
Observed	Sizable	School activities	All 3 regions

Interviewing; structured and/or unstructured, and observation; participant and/or non-participant approach was used for collecting factual information and data on the underperformance of rural schools in northern Ghana.

A. INSTRUMENTATION

To investigate the underperformance of rural schools in northern Ghana, there was the need for more interpersonal and face-to-face methods of data collection from participants. The interview is a flexible data collection tool that emphasizes the social embeddedness of research data, as it enables researchers and participants co-construct knowledge and discuss their interpretations of the world around them. With respect to this study then, interviews were employed to collect data from participants.

Table 2: Data collection / Participants

Interviewed/Observed	Number of participants
Executive Director	1
Chief Executive	1

Finance Director	1
Head Teachers	3
Teachers	4
School activities	Sizeable

(Source: researcher's fieldwork)

The interview technique to this research allows for the use of multi-sensory information channels: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard [6] to be used in gathering information on individuals' knowledge, values, attitudes and beliefs [22].

B. SAMPLING

Apart from methodology and instrumentation, the quality of a research rests upon the suitability of the sampling strategy that was used; sampling strategies take into account such factors as the research purposes and questions, the research design and methodology, financial implications, timescales of the research and accessibility of the population [10]. 9 participants were selected for the research study.

Table 3: Data collection/ Participants / Geography

(Source: researcher's fieldwork)

C. DATA COLLECTION

The researcher entered into data collection after extensive literature review on the underperformance of Junior High Schools in rural schools in northern Ghana. The researcher also established a good rapport with the research participants by informing them of the purpose, duration, and nature of the study; maintaining a respectful, polite and non-judgmental atmosphere. Care was taken to question and probe for clarity in participants' responses by using a semi-structured flexible interview schedule.

D. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The research questions and findings from the literature review guided the construction of the interview questions. Several questions were constructed to answer each research question; the questions were refined through continuing interaction with participants who were interviewed.

IV. EVALUATION OF FINDING

The multiple analyses of individual responses to the interviews and observations show willingness from

respondents to disclose the conditions prevailing under rural education in northern Ghana though there was initial reluctance from some respondents.

The interviews and observations proved there were serious issues with rural education in northern Ghana than published. A research of such nature brings the educational researcher to the reality of the educational impoverishment of sections of the population who are equal by nationality yet disadvantaged by geography in their access to basic rights.

The introduction of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) which has seen the creation of many rural schools has failed to provide the necessary impetus spelt out by the World Bank, 2004 report. The management system of the policy undermined its proper implementation [10].

The weakness in the management system of the FCUBE [18] has further worsened the plight of rural education in northern Ghana. The policy has only created the schools without the infrastructure and the necessary qualified human resource to run them effectively. The delay in rapid expansions in rural education in Ghana prior to the inception of the FCUBE policy was the concern of quality which was noted under Governor Guggisberg during the British colonial administration [3].

During the 2007/08 academic year, the Lambussie Karni New district registered a total number of 1,387 junior high school pupil out of which 646 were girls and 741 boys making the girls boys difference of 95. The difference in gender enrollment escalated in 2008/09 with a total enrollment of 1,789 out of which girls were 766 and boys 1,023 respectively. What accounted for the huge difference in the gender enrollment between 2007/08 and 2008/09 was not immediately known to this researcher. 2009/10 academic year saw the gender gap closed from the margins of 2007/08 and 2008/09. In 2009/10, the total enrollment was 1,889 which comprised 830 and 1,059 girls and boys respectively making the gender difference of 229 a close margin compared to the previous year [15].

On teacher qualification that promotes good teaching in schools, the national statistics show a deficiency in qualified teacher supply as a percentage of the teaching force for junior high school level. While the country shows a deficit in the supply of qualified teachers in the public schools, my study revealed a continuous increase in the percentage of qualified

teachers since 2002-2003 on the upper east and upper west regions respectively. Please refer to table below:

Table 4: Junior High school qualified teachers as a percentage of the teaching force

Teacher Deployment	2002-2003 Actual	2003-2004 Actual	2004-2005 Actual
% of qualified teachers: National	85.3%	84.2%	83.5%
% of qualified teachers: Northern	86.3%	80.8%	79.7%
% of qualified teachers: Upper East	74.2%	75.6%	77.5%
% of qualified teachers: Upper West	75.6%	81.1%	82.0%

(Source: MOESS, 2006)

The question then arises even though the upper east and upper west have a high number of qualified teachers in their performance at BECE remains the lowest in the country? A rhetoric answer will be that there are other variables besides qualified teachers that make education successful. Also it was the case that the qualified teachers in the upper east and upper west regions were in the district capitals rather than the rural areas. The incessant complaints by qualified teachers in the rural communities have been mainly due to lack of teaching aids like classroom, textbooks, and suitable accommodation.

A parallel strategy for schools with fewer infrastructures will be to run a shift system so as to make judicious use of existing facilities. Rural education in Ghana can be patterned along the Botswana system of the term 'double-session' where different sets of pupils come to school in the morning and afternoon in parallel [4]. Alternatively, the Ghana Education Service could transport pupils from the rural community to the nearest district and/or town where better facilities are provided for teaching and learning. This means that rural pupil will have access to trained teachers, good classrooms and proper sanitation. If done effectively this will help the teaching and learning of rural pupils thereby competing favorably at the BECE with their counterparts in the well-structured urban schools. The move may further help rural pupils appreciate the value of good education and stimulate the desire for higher education.

Notwithstanding the perennial parental differences in education in rural Ghana, my study shows a lot of

community involvement in rural northern Ghana to contributing to better education of their children. Some parents and rural activists attest to the media exposure of their understanding to what a good education can do for their children who in the future can transform the community, parent's lives, the nation, and contribution to globalization.

Rural educational management must further be strengthened with the role of school supervisors being more stringent. The educational managers must be trained in their roles so as to ensure effective supervision. Though a decentralized approach to educational management in Ghana is pursued by the Ghana Education Service under the policy guidance of the Ministry of Education, the decentralization should be enhanced to give enough powers to local authorities to tailor rules and regulations that will best suit the educational environment in which they operate.

The management approach to solving rural education may be different to the management approach to urban education. To this end, a special training in rural education management must be instituted to ensure the qualitative growth of rural schools. Rural education must be approached with a purposive attitude to further developing human resource base of the country. Rural education must not be just another school because of the FCUBE but rather a national interest and human rights and dignity of a nation's rural inhabitants. Only when this is done can rural pupils in northern Ghana compete favorably at the BECE with their counterparts in the urban settlement.

A. SIX POINT MANAGEMENT POLICY PROPOSAL FOR RURAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN GHANA

School feeding must involve all rural schools going children from primary to junior high.

- FCUBE for rural schools must be absolutely free of the following: school fees and other auxiliary charges, text books and exercise books, school uniforms, and footwear.
- Local farming must be incentives to produce to feed the school. This will boost agriculture and its peripheral jobs in rural areas.
- Special talents must be identified, sponsored, and transferred to better schools in the cities where they can be nurtured.
- Special curriculum to be designed and children identified as not good for higher education be trained at those special schools.

They will be awarded a certificate which will make them equally competitive in the job market.

- Instead of scattered little schools, rural schools must be joined and children commuted freely from their locations to school and back.

My six point management policy proposal above is related to this research in ways as to improve rural schools in Ghana. Good rural schools can be possible with policy directives and political will which addresses local needs thereby making access and participation in schools equal for all pupils, teachers, and school managers.

I recommend more research tools and budgetary allocation be employed to conduct many more investigations into the macro and micro causes of underperformance of rural education particularly in the northern regions of Ghana, this when done effectively will unearth the under development and the human rights abuse of a section of the populace through the lack of quality education.

Finally, I further call for an increase in budgetary allocation for education development particularly rural education if we are to make good gains in human capital for national economic growth and human development, and literacy of power that empowers rural people to engage with and/or lobby politicians about the issues that affect them and their communities.

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