

Measuring the Effectiveness of Funding Rural Public Schools in Ghana: Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District

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1 Introduction

In 2007, former president John Agyekum Kufuor implemented reforms to Ghana's education system, calling for eleven years of Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) and four years of Senior High School (SHS) [2]. While the program has only been in effect for 4 school years, the Ghanaian government is hopeful that the changes made will show to be substantially effective in the years to come. There are, however, several issues that may impede on the programs success. Among these issues is the lack of funding provided to public schools, especially in the rural areas furthest away from the few large cities. The Capitation Grant Scheme was introduced as a way to assist schools in paying for some of the necessary supplies that students could not pay for. This paper

will discuss the effectiveness and impact that the Capitation Grant Scheme has had on the public education system, as well as the effectiveness of changes that have been made to the structure of the school system. While improvements have been made, there continue to be problems with the manner in which funding is allocated and how the funding is spent. It is my goal to determine how the allocation of funding to rural public schools in Ghana be improved to better realize their goal of equitable and universal access to basic education.

The research for this paper was conducted in the Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District, most of the schools visited being in the towns of Abakrampa, Asebu, Auansi and Asamdwee, north of Cape Coast. The district is one of the 61 deprived districts in the country, based on enrollment rates, student to teacher ratio, percentage of qualified teachers, and other such factors. There are a total of 135

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districts in the country, meaning that 45% of school districts throughout the country have been deemed deprived.

2 Philosophy of the Ghanaian Education

One of the primary goals in implementing the most recent education reform, according to former president John Agyekum Kufor, was to catalyze Ghana's competitiveness in the global market. He wanted to prepare a disciplined, ethical, and technologically advanced workforce to aid the country's growing economy. However, recent reports from the World Economic Forum Global Competitive Index (GCI) for 2010-2011 show that in the past year Ghana has dropped from the 110th to the 114th position, out of 139 countries [1]. These rankings are based on 12 factors, known as the 12 pillars of economic competitiveness. Ghana is ranked the lowest in the Health and Primary Education and Higher Education and Training categories, falling to 122nd and 108th respectively in the past year. Interestingly enough, they are ranked 67th in Institutions, which measures the efficiency of legal and administrative framework and the accountability of the government's financial practices. Although this is not a relatively high ranking, it is Ghana's second highest ranking, behind Financial Market Development [1]. After examining the allocation of education funding, one might disagree as to the efficiency and effectiveness of their financial practices in this

particular institution.

It is questionable though whether the success of recent education reforms can be measured by their competitiveness in the global market. Perhaps a better measure of success would be to understand how well an education facilitates self-sustainability in the local communities where these students are being educated. It might be worth studying the degree to which educated students are able to find jobs in their communities. It must be determined whether or not any changes being made to improve the quality of education will lead to any opportunities of employment or whether there is any market for educated employees at all. However, if there is to be any measuring of the effectiveness of the education system, there must be some consistency in the system, or it will be impossible to determine which changes correspond to which results.

The inconsistencies in the political system in recent decades have heavily contributed to the lack of improvement in the quality of education. According to the director of the Institute for Education Programming and Development at the University of Cape Coast, many politicians use promises to improve the quality of education as a platform to gain favor in upcoming elections. With these promises come changes in the lengths of varying levels of education, modifications to the curriculum, and countless other possible changes to the education system as a whole. Unfortunately, these changes are often made without an opportunity to determine the effectiveness of whatever system is in place at the time. It was his opinion that without a

solid structure that could go untouched for a minimum of five to eight years, there would be no way of determining whether reforms are proving to be effective. It is certainly true that some areas of education need to remain constant for longer periods. The allocation of funding is one area however that could be examined in its current state to make improvements and more efficiently use the funds that are available for education.

Capitation Grant Scheme In 1996 the Ghanaian government launched a Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) program in accordance with the recommendations of the World Conference on Education for All in 1990. The declaration produced at the conference states that every person- child, youth, and adult shall be able to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs [2]. While the program has been in effect for nearly 15 years, students continue to face financial barriers in their pursuit for high quality education. Schools in many districts charged students levies to cover some of their expenses. These levies alone often prevented students from being able to enroll in school. Eight years after the implementation of FCUBE, a new program to assist students in funding their education and to make education more easily accessible was introduced. The Capitation Grant Scheme was implemented in 2004-2005 in order to alleviate the financial burden on the students, while also assisting schools by covering the losses in revenue that they were incurring by

forgoing student levies [4].

In accordance with the governments attempt to decentralize every sector, the Capitation Grant Scheme encourages the decentralization of the education sector by allowing districts to disperse funds to schools in their districts and allocate certain resources to whomever they see fit to receive them. For example, a district may receive two hundred school uniforms from the Ministry of Education, at which point they are given the task of finding the neediest students in their district to give them to. Districts are also responsible for the supervision of each schools expenditures and ensuring that schools are using the grant funds appropriately. Accountability guidelines are given to local ministries of education and relayed to headmasters through a series of workshops. Schools then fill out — forms that list expenditures per term and submit them for review to their district offices. Schools are currently allocated GH4.5 per student, which they receive in three installments that are scheduled to be paid at the beginning of each term[4]. Since the implementation of the grant scheme, general enrollment has steadily increased nationwide, leading many to believe that the program has been much more successful in increasing accessibility to education and increasing the quality of education than it actually has.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report, Targeting Education Funding to the Poor: Universal Primary Education, Education Decentralization and Local Level Outcomes in Ghana,[3] analyzes the successes and failures of the Capitation Grant Scheme

by examining the net enrollment ratio (NER) and general enrollment ratio (GER) throughout the country. Similarly, the Research Consortium on Educational Outcomes and Poverty (RECOUP), within the Department for International Development at the University of Cambridge, published a report entitled *The Financing and Outcomes of Education in Ghana* that also refers to GER as a measure of progress. The NER measures the enrollment of students that are of the official age group for any particular level of education, as a percentage of the corresponding population. The GER, on the other hand, measures the enrollment of any particular level of education, regardless of age, as a percentage of the eligible student population for that level of education.

While there has been a steady increase in the net enrollment ratio (NER) and gross enrollment ratio (GER) in these districts since the implementation of the Capitation Grant Scheme in 2005-2006, this may not be a very good indicator of success, as the NER for Deprived school districts was less than 50% about ten years ago [3]. The NER measures the enrollment ratio of school children of the official age for any level of education. The GER measures the enrolment ratio for any particular level of education, regardless of age, and is therefore slightly higher. Despite increased enrollment rates, dropout rates continue to be staggeringly high. It is important to find better indicators of the success of the education system. Two teachers at St. Anthony's JHS in Asebu agreed that there have only been slow and slight increases in the quality of education in the past few years.

They attributed this to the lack of resources at both the school and district levels. Developing a strong infrastructure at the district level will be one of the deciding factors as to whether or not the decentralization of the education and other sectors will be successful in the near future.

Decentralization Decentralization is the assignment of fiscal, political, and administrative responsibilities to local government offices in order to facilitate more efficient allocation of funds and delivery of services. Local offices should, theoretically, have a much better understanding of the needs of their own communities, which makes the use of funds and services more effective. The education system in Ghana has specifically attempted to transfer fiscal and administrative responsibilities to their local ministries of education.

Fiscal federalism theory proposes that the central government should control macroeconomic policies, while local agencies manage the allocation of funds that have been distributed to them by the central government [3]. This is thought to be the most effective way to improve the quality of education in any particular district. Having fewer schools to manage and understanding the problems each school faces should allow for individual and efficient solutions to those problems. However, the success of this system heavily relies on the local agencies' abilities to manage such fiscal and administrative responsibilities.

The Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District 71 includes primary schools, junior secondary

schools, and senior secondary schools. After meeting with the districts ministry of education a workshop on the spending of capitation grants was held to instruct headmasters on the proper uses of the grant money, as well as the necessary paperwork that should be submitted to the district office for review. It was at this workshop that perhaps the largest obstacle to the success of the Capitation Grant Scheme was revealed. The minister of education began the workshop by reprimanding the teachers for their inappropriate usage of the capitation grant funds. She explained that she was aware that many headmasters in the district kept some or all of the funds for themselves as a supplement to their salary. Every school has to submit forms that indicate exactly what the money was spent on. Teachers often list the same items multiple times and attempt to cover up whatever amount of money was not spent on children at the school. The minister noted that headmasters and ministers of other districts were under review by the central governments Ministry of Education. Despite her stern tone and the seriousness of the matter, many teachers snickered or outright laughed when the topic was brought up. This is not being discussed to demonize teachers or Ghanaians in any way, but rather to discuss reasons as to why this may be occurring and attempt to find solutions to the problem.

Teachers in some of the poorer districts of Ghana deal with worse teaching conditions than most people could imagine. Buildings are falling apart, students have fallen years behind, their students and their families go hungry on a regular basis, and they are

paid very little. Although they are not supposed to, teachers will sometimes buy food for their students because they are aware of how rarely they receive enough food to eat at home. As the minister said, being a teacher requires sacrificing for your community. After speaking with the Minister of Tertiary Education at the central governments Ministry of Education, it became clear that increasing salaries is not the solution to this problem. As the embezzlement of education funds is rather common, the only solution is to more closely monitor the expenses being reported by schools.

District education offices require schools to fill out forms to record what items are being purchased for schools, broken up by category. The quantity and cost of each item purchased is listed. At the districts workshop however, it was said that many teachers list the same items multiple times or list items that are never purchased. While the forms are detailed in theory, they provide no real obstacle to embezzlement. One way to prevent this would be to have officers at district education offices whose sole responsibility is to monitor school expenditures by reviewing records and verifying that these items have been purchased, by visiting schools, that the items on the list were actually purchased. For example, it would be very easy to verify whether a school recently purchased a chalkboard or if they are using the same one that has been used for years. There also must be a harsh punishment for such conduct. It needs to be clear that the education system will not improve unless the little funding that is available is used efficiently and effectively. No

matter what the reason may be for its occurrence, it is clear that the embezzlement of education funding poses a great obstacle to the successful decentralization of fiscal responsibilities to district education offices. Until it is solved, there cannot be an efficient use of education funding and students will continue to suffer from a lack of resources.

3 Findings

Despite the fact that decentralizing the education system should be more efficient and allow for more improvements to be made, as administrators in each district are the most aware of their schools problems, school district seem to be incapable of dispersing their own funding. Cultural barriers such as the culture surrounding money and the bribery and embezzlement that exist make it nearly impossible for school administrators to disperse and track funding to individual schools around their districts. Capitation Grant funding has found to have been misused and even kept as additional salary by teachers. This is problematic because as it is, students receive inadequate funding to make an impact in the supplies and other expenses that students incur.

If these problems are not corrected, there will cease to be an increase in enrollment rates in schools and students will have no incentive to go to school. With the current quality of the education being provided, families are having difficulty sacrificing help with their familys businesses or on their familys farm. Therefore, improvements must be

made to the quality of education in order to continue to increase the trend of rising enrollment rates. With some stability, consistency, and the continuous monitoring of the allocation of public school funding, Ghanas public education system has the potential to grow and its quality increase.

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