

EDUCATION SPIKE CAMPAIGN

Briefing Paper on Education Privatization in Ghana | October 2021

Introduction

One of the key drivers of privatization of education in Ghana is the low quality of public basic education due to inadequate/inefficient resourcing of basic education, especially along rural-urban lines. To advocate for and participate in actions to remedy this conundrum, Africa Education Watch (Eduwatch) in partnership with the Coalition Against Privatization and Commercialisation of Education (CAPCOE) with the support of OXFAM International, is implementing the Education Spike Project (EduSpike), aimed at promoting investment in public education to improve quality public education as commercialization impacts on access, equity and standards in pre-tertiary education.

As part of the EduSpike Campaign, Eduwatch wishes to gather evidence on the exclusion of pupils, especially girls, from basic education due to the absence of public schools in rural and peri-urban communities. This is necessary to effectively engage policy decision makers and stakeholders in public pre-tertiary education on the need for increased government investment to enhance quality and supply in the sector.



Background

Under Article 38 (2) of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, the government has an obligation to provide free quality basic education for all Ghanaian children, irrespective of gender, geography, religion, socio-economic status or one's disability. Ghana has pursuant, committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 4 which among others enjoins the Republic to work towards achieving Universal Basic Education by 2030 with relevant learning outcomes. The Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2018-2030 prioritizes three policy objectives for realizing the SDG 4 targets for basic education-Improved equitable access to and participation in inclusive quality education at all levels, Improved quality of teaching and learning and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) at all levels, Sustainable and efficient management, Financing, and Accountability of education service delivery.

“ Yet, more than 400,000 children, approximately 1 in 4 pre-primary age children are still not enrolled in kindergarten², with over 147,000 dropping out between kindergarten and Junior High School³. Additionally, the distribution of learning outcomes has been inequitable, with learners in public schools recording lower academic attainments compared to their counterparts in private schools. ”

Ghana has over the past decade made gains in expanding access to Basic Education by increasing primary school enrolment from 3,809,258 in 2010 to 4,511,268 in 2019 and Junior High School (JHS) enrolment from 1,301,940 in 2010 to 1,678,132 in 2019¹. This represents an increase in the Primary School Net Enrolment rate from 83.6% in 2010 to 87.3% in 2019, with JHS rates increasing from 47.5% to 48.4%. This is due to the implementation of a fee-free education policy, a school feeding programme in about 40% of primary schools, the rapid expansion in education infrastructure over the years, and increased deployment of teachers.

Issues

Slow growth of public schools

The high performance of private basic schools and relatively poor performance of public basic schools over the years has led to a rapid increase in the demand and resultantly, the number of private schools over public schools. Over the past decade, Ghana has witnessed a strong growth in the number of private schools due to high demand, with a marginal increase in public schools.

¹Ministry of Education, Education Sector Performance Report, Accra, 2019

²United Nations Children's Fund, A World Ready to Learn: Prioritizing quality early childhood education, UNICEF, New York, April 2019

³Africa Education Watch. Ghana's High School Dropout Rate: Policy and Practice Prognosis, Education Alert Policy Brief Vol. 17 – November 2020

An analysis of the growth of school's data over the past ten years reveals that the number of public schools increased from 36,822 in 2010 to 41,598 in 2018, an increase of about 13%. Over the same period, private schools which numbered 18,380 in 2010 increased to 36,327 in 2018, an increase of about 98% with about 70% of schools in some districts in Greater Accra being private⁴.

High demand for Low Cost Private Schools

Literature on private participation in education shows that private provision has also increased enrollment in rural areas and among low-income households at a substantial cost, in spite of free public basic education⁵. The underlining assumption is that the inability of the government to construct public schools for the population living in some urban and rural communities, especially slums and inner cities has led to the establishment of low fee-paying private schools to serve these areas. In some instances, where parents found themselves underserved by existing poor quality public schools for their children, even within their very low-income levels, they are compelled to turn to LCPS as the only alternative, in spite of the poor quality of learning environment, lack of professional teachers and its cash-and-carry nature.

LCPS owners in Ghana, like any other developing country, are faced with many challenges in their line of work; ranging from inadequate funds, poor infrastructure to poor teacher quality among others, even in normal times (Nsiah-Peprah, 2004).

Evidence shows that in times of crisis private school enrolments decline substantially, with some students leaving private to public schools, and others delaying entry or dropping out. (Alam and Tiwari, 2021).

COVID-19 and Low-Cost Private Schools' Collapse affecting re-enrolment

According to the Ghana National Council of Private Schools (GNACOPS), the recent outbreak of COVID 19 pandemic, which led to the nine-month closure of schools in 2020 drastically disrupted teaching and learning in many LCPS leading to the collapse of about 222 nationwide by January 2021 with over 60,000 students affected.

⁴CDD Ghana, Promoting Responsive and Responsible Manifestos for Inclusive Development CDD-Ghana Research Paper on the Education Sector, 2020.

⁵Alam, A. and Tiwari, P. (2021). Implications of COVID-19 for Low-cost Private Schools. Office of Global Insight and Policy - UNICEF. [https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/media/1581/file/UNICEF_Global_Insight_Implications_covid-19_Low cost_Private_Schools_2021](https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/media/1581/file/UNICEF_Global_Insight_Implications_covid-19_Low_cost_Private_Schools_2021).

This is because these schools, charging an average GHC 200 a term as school fees (with some charging GHC 3-GHC 5 cedis as daily fees) could not have funds to pay their teachers, rent, SSNIT contributions, utilities etc. during the lockdown. The effect of the collapse of LCPS on the owners is malleable as some have converted their properties into residential spaces and guest houses with others renting out to institutions. Sadly, it is the education of children from households at the bottom of the pyramid, who are more likely to attend these low-cost schools that suffer the adverse effect of the collapse of LCPS.

The impact of the collapse on re-enrolment has been adverse, as some students either struggled or could not gain admission into public schools which were already congested by the time of school re-opening in January. Africa Education Watch reports that, some students whose schools collapsed were turned away in schools like Oyibi Primary, Nyanyano A.M.E Zion Basic and Khairiya Islamic Basic because there were no spaces for admission⁶. This was not uncommon in urban public schools which had higher class sizes averaging 60 even prior to COVID-19. Such barriers to re-enrollment of students predisposes them to dropping out of school, as parents may not have the means of enrolling them in regular private schools that are more expensive than the collapsed LCPS.

Lack of JHS in over 4,000 Public Primary Schools affecting transition.

The lack of public JHS in about 25% of primary schools is a major driver of the demand for private education affecting the ability of public primary graduates to transition to public JHS.

“ There are total of 15,391 primary and 11,383 JHS, meaning some 4,008 primary schools do not have access to a JHS⁷. ”



⁶Africa Education Watch 2021 COVID-19 School Re-opening Monitoring Report(Unpublished)

⁷ Ministry of Education. EMIS, 2020.

However, the situation is worse in rural districts like Sene East in the Bono East Region where there are only 17 JHS serving 49 primary schools, meaning 65% of primary schools do not have access to a JHS. This compels parents of primary school children in these communities to pay for private JHS where available, as there may be no immediate option for academic progression within the public space in the community.

School Under Trees and Sheds driving demand for Low-Cost Private Schools.

Equally challenging, fueling the resort to private basic education are issues relating to the poor quality of rural basic school infrastructure, as many schools take place under trees, sheds, and dilapidated structures without adequate desks and ventilation. The infrastructure deficit which has accumulated over the years is partly attributed to the high cost of procuring basic education infrastructure. Presently, it costs government about GHC 500,000 to procure an unfurnished 6-Unit Classroom block which is very expensive compared to alternative school infrastructure technologies in South America.

“ According to the Ministry of Education, there are 5,403 schools under trees, sheds, and dilapidated structures across the country⁸. ”



⁸ https://ges.gov.gh/2021/06/04/valco-trust-fund-launches-project-to-remove-schools-under-trees/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=valco-trust-fund-launches-project-to-remove-schools-under-trees

The existence of such public schools, coupled with the lack of adequate teachers does not make public education attractive, as there is hardly any assurance of quality learning in these environments. Improving public investments in basic education infrastructure and facilities is critical to reducing the demand for private education. The Ghana Education Services and VALCO Trust Fund have launched an initiative requiring GHC 3.5 billion to construct all 5,403 schools over a five-year period⁹. However, only 2% of the funding is presently available.

Poor teaching and learning resources and learning outcomes discouraging demand for public basic education.

The cumulative effects of inadequate inputs in public basic education are responsible for the poor learning outcomes in basic schools, as evidenced in a maximum of 25% national proficiency level for Mathematics and English in Primary 6 in the Education Sector Performance Report of 2019 and worsened by as low as 2% proficiency levels in some rural schools. Since the biggest driver of the ever-increasing demand for private education is the quality of public basic education, it is logical to hypothesize that an improvement in the quality of public basic education should lead to a decline in the demand for private education, thereby reducing the privatizing trend.

Continuous decline in basic education budgetary expenditure.

Ghana's education spending is within international benchmarks, as some 20% of government expenditure is spent on education. However, expenditure on basic education has continually reduced to the advantage of other sub sectors, especially secondary education.

“ For instance, while basic education expenditure as a percentage of total education expenditure reduced from 55.7% in 2008 to 37.8 % in 2018, over the same 10-year period, secondary education's share of the education expenditure increased from 9.8% in 2008 to 25% in 2018¹⁰. ”

The 18% decline in the proportion of education sector expenditure at the basic level continues to affect the ability of the MoE to build adequate schools and deploy resources required to facilitate quality teaching and learning in public basic schools, thereby affecting the quality of learning outcomes and reducing patronage by the citizenry, in favour of private education.

There is the urgent need to redistribute resources within the education sector to reflect the importance of basic education as a fundamental right and the foundation of secondary and tertiary education.

⁹ https://ges.gov.gh/2021/06/04/valco-trust-fund-launches-project-to-remove-schools-under-trees/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=valco-trust-fund-launches-project-to-remove-schools-under-trees

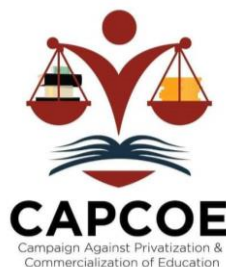
¹⁰ Education Sector Performance Reports 2009 and 2019: Ministry of Education.

The Way Forward

Government must spike up the quality of public basic education through general improvement in its investments by specifically;

- a. Exploring other reliable funding to support the VALCO Trust Fund in constructing 5,403 schools under trees within the projected 5-year period or less.
- b. Exploring cheaper technologies in building schools to improve spending efficiency in the education infrastructure space.
- c. Providing trained teachers in all rural classrooms and strengthen supervision. This should be done by redistributing teachers in over-served schools to under-served ones, and deploying new ones to achieve at least, a maximum of 1:35 Class-Pupil Teacher Ratio in every school.
- d. Securing financial resources to construct about 4,000 JHS in all primary schools without JHS within the next five years.
- e. Providing desks, teaching, and learning materials in all public basic schools, especially those in rural communities.
- f. Ensuring timely disbursement of financial resources required to run these schools.
- g. Exploring the absorption of collapsed private schools into the public stream to enhance access and re-enrolment of students struggling to re-enter school due to their school's collapse because of the COVID-19 closure.
- h. Increasing basic education's share of the education sector expenditure to 50%.


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