

Background

The Institute for Educational Planning & Administration (IEPA), University of Cape Coast, in collaboration with the Institute of Educational Planning, University of Dare Salaam, Tanzania, and the Faculty of Education, University of Bath, has since 2004 been involved in a DfID-funded project that seeks to empower school leadership to successfully implement quality education initiatives in Ghanaian basic schools. The project, *Implementing Quality Education in Low Income Countries* (EdQual), which ends this year (2010), is directed by the University of Bristol.

EdQual-Ghana looked at quality education from the context of primary school headteachers' leadership and management practices, especially among headteachers serving disadvantaged schools in 60 districts drawn from the 10 regions of Ghana. Its main objective was to explore strategies for empowering headteachers to provide leadership for school improvement through multiple data collection sources: (i) meta-analysis, (ii) baseline activities which involved needs analysis workshops at the policy and practitioner levels, (iii) questionnaires, interviews and observations, (iv) action research¹ with specific focus on headteacher diary analysis and facilitators' reports, and (iv) case studies of best leadership practices.

Baseline Findings

The meta-analysis of existing initiatives in the country 2004 shows that Ghana has benefited from many sponsored interventions that sought to improve quality teaching and learning in schools. Notable among these interventions are the Quality Improvement in Primary Schools (QUIPS) Programme, the Whole School Development (WSD) Programme, Performance Monitoring Test (PMT) and School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAM), and the Quality Teacher Education initiative programme. A cross-cutting focus of these programmes has been on improving teacher quality and enhancing management efficiency at the district and school levels.

A National Consultative Workshop organized for policy makers and influencers during the inception phase of the project in 2005 also identified, among others, the need to *improve supervision skills of headteachers, improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools and strengthen headteacher leadership capacity for transforming schools and managing change* as critical policy needs for quality education in the nation.

EdQual RPC and education quality

The Leadership and Management of Change project in Ghana is part of the EdQual Research Programme Consortium. EdQual's research focuses on how to improve the quality of basic education. Education quality is key to attracting and retaining learners in basic education and ensuring education contributes to other areas of development.



Two Needs Analysis workshops involving 240 headteachers drawn from 12 districts in six regions were also held in Tamale and Cape Coast. The headteachers identified critical factors for promoting quality teaching and learning to include *headteachers' level of commitment to duty; teachers' time on task, accountability and effective school based supervision.*



Results of the baseline study, which involved questionnaires, interviews and observations, suggested strongly that the majority of headteachers at the primary school level did not see themselves as leaders who should take the initiative and act as change agents. They saw themselves more as administrators, whose primary responsibility lay in taking custody of school property, attending meetings and implementing directives from Directors and Circuit Supervisors. They lacked the courage to take the initiative at the school level. Those who performed the dual roles of teaching and administering the school concurrently played down their teaching tasks. They saw their involvement in teaching as not commensurate with their position as headteachers and therefore argued that combining

¹The Action Research was conducted in 20 schools drawn from five regions. The regions were categorised into four zones: **Zone 1:** Agona district (Central region); **Zone 2:** Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem (KEEA, Central region) district; **Zone 3:** Wa and Techiman districts (Upper West and Brong Ahafo regions); and **Zone 4:** Bolga and Savelugu Districts (Upper East and Northern regions).

teaching with headship responsibilities in the schools tended to affect the quality of their headship roles. One female headteacher articulated the concerns of the headteachers as follows:

You see, I taught for fifteen years before I became a head but they say I should teach as well ... I teach and I do administration going to district office, attending meetings, doing many things and teaching at the same time but I'm not paid double pay. It's not fair .. We headteachers are cheated ... They should make teachers to help children to learn so we heads do the administration (A rural head)

They were also overwhelmed with responsibilities; yet they were not adequately prepared for their leadership tasks. For example, out of 240 headteachers who took part in the baseline study in Ghana, 60 (25%) had received no pre-headship training prior to their assumption of duty. Of those in this sample who had received pre-headship training, 180 headteachers, the training was ad hoc and lasted for less than one week. As a result, many headteachers depended on learning through experience and through 'trial and error'. This condition affected the effectiveness of the leadership required from headteachers to promote quality teaching and learning in the school.

EdQual's Intervention: Action Research

EdQual utilized an Action Research intervention to empower headteachers towards taking the initiative to address school level challenges that hindered pupil's learning in their schools. It was used to help headteachers to identify their own needs and design strategies for solving school level problems. A major question that guided this activity was: *Can headteachers be empowered through action research?* Our study suggests strongly that headteachers' knowledge of action research and their commitment to its implementation can be a great asset to the school in terms of improvement and quality learning. It requires that the headteacher is given appropriate sustained training, granting him or her some level of autonomy to operate and providing the requisite logistics support.

All 20 headteachers in the action research schools were trained in action research and school self-evaluation strategies. The training and support they received from the project served as a strong motivating factor that empowered them to take the initiative to address quality education challenges such as poor pupil and teacher attendance, lateness and absenteeism, truancy, problems linked to health and nutrition, and parental uncooperativeness. Poor performance of pupils in reading, writing and basic mathematics was also a challenging learning problem that some headteachers addressed through the action research. By the end of the action research cycle, the headteachers had developed a high degree of self-confidence and, as a result, were able to initiate interventions that improved pupil motivation and learning in their schools.

Implications for Policy

A study of the 2009 Education Sector Performance Report (ESAR) is indicative of Government's resolve towards improving quality teaching and learning. In pursuit of this, emphasis has been placed on strengthening management at all levels of education. Prominence is given to the promotion of management efficiency through monitoring and evaluation. In this context, schools are required to be more accountable to stakeholders (District Education Officers, School Management Committees, Communities etc) through a School Report Cards System. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) have also been identified as a vital tool for promoting management efficiency.

While emphasis on management has the capacity for ensuring efficiency at the school level, our research suggests strongly that it takes effective school leadership to achieve effectiveness and improvement in teaching and learning. The leadership of the headteacher can make a positive difference in the implementation of quality education initiatives in Ghana. Once structures are put in place to help headteachers to see themselves primarily as leaders for promoting learning in the classroom rather than the mere custodian of government, the foundation required to achieve management efficiency would be laid. They will be able to establish links between their headship roles and pupil learning and therefore make the 'promotion of learning' the pivot around which all school activities should revolve.

1. Headteachers would be able to provide the required leadership if they are adequately prepared for their leadership tasks. There is the need for the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service to consider making headteacher preparation in leadership for learning a condition for appointing primary school headteachers in the classroom;
2. The contents of the educational administration syllabus in the colleges of education should be reviewed to reflect the learning-focused leadership roles of headteachers;
3. The MOE/GES should encourage headteachers to carry out school-level self-evaluation through action research and support them to institute interventions for improving school-focused conditions for learning. School self-evaluation should be encouraged as part of the overall monitoring and evaluation process;
4. Attention should be given to incentive packages for headteachers as well. With the gradual devolution of leadership and management responsibilities to schools, the role of the basic school headteacher, especially for those in disadvantaged contexts, is becoming very demanding.

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