



# TYOLOGIES OF DROP OUT IN SOUTHERN GHANA POLICY BRIEF 10

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## TYOLOGIES OF DROP OUT IN SOUTHERN GHANA

Initial access to basic education in Ghana has increased substantially over the last decade. However, irregular attendance and dropout from school continues to occur in many rural schools. This has serious implications for achieving the Millennium Development (MDG) and Education for All (EFA) goals on educational access. This policy brief focuses on different types of school dropout in southern Ghana and profiles the characteristics of the children who fall into different locations within the typology of drop out that has been developed. On the basis of the analysis it suggests changes to existing policies and new policies to tackle drop out in Ghana. This policy brief is based on article to be published in the International Journal of Education and Development 'Typology of School Dropout: the Dimensions and Dynamics of Dropout in Ghana' (Ananga, forthcoming).

### Access to Education

Educational access can be defined in different ways. The Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity's (CREATE) definition of access to basic education sees it as including admission and progression at appropriate age in grade, regular attendance in school throughout each year, satisfactory levels of achievement on the national curriculum, and equal opportunities to progress to post-secondary education.

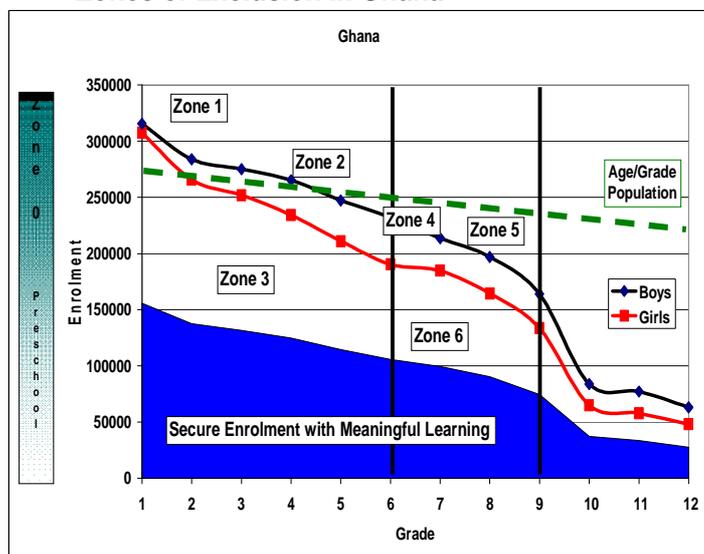
CREATE's conceptual model identifies 7 zones of exclusion. The model illuminates how enrolments decline steeply through the primary grades, and how those attending irregularly and achieving poorly fall into "at risk" zones (see Lewin, 2007 or CREATE Policy Brief No. 1 for more details on CREATE's conceptual model).

### CREATE Zones of exclusion

The graphic on the next page presents an illustration of the 'zones of exclusion' using CREATE data from Ghana. The zones of exclusion are:

- *Zone 0* - children experience little or no pre-school access.
- *Zone 1* - children who never enrol and attend school.
- *Zone 2* - primary dropout children who after initial entry have been excluded. The dropout status of children in Zone 2 may be temporary because of the possibility of returning to school.
- *Zone 3* - over age children, irregular attenders and low-achievers at the primary level who are 'silently excluded'. These children are at risk of dropping out.
- *Zone 4* - primary leavers who are not entering lower secondary; in the Ghanaian context, this is the transition from primary (grade six) to lower secondary school (grade seven).
- *Zone 5* - lower secondary dropouts, these children are also characterised by over age in grade, recurrent intermittent attendance and child labour.
- *Zone 6* - overage children, irregular attenders, low-achievers and those silently excluded at lower secondary level. These children are at risk of dropping out from lower secondary school. They are intermittent attendees and low achievers resulting in the risk of dropping out permanently.

**Zones of Exclusion in Ghana**



**Dropping out of School**

The notion of dropout is a complex issue to define. A child might stop attending school for a brief time before resuming his or her education, intermittently, before never returning. This makes it difficult to develop a simple definition of drop out based on duration of withdrawal. The school dropout phenomenon is often a gradual process rather than a single event that is set in motion by a range of factors (Akyeampong et al., 2007; Hunt, 2008).

In defining dropout, UNESCO (2005) proposes the description “*early school-leaving*,” arguing that this means exiting the formal education system without completing the cycle or programme that was started. However this does not really help identify types of drop out which may have different causes and patterns of attendance before permanent school leaving.

Some definitions only point to ‘quitting’ school or death of the pupil as constituting dropout, failing to take into account other considerations, such as whether withdrawal is temporary or permanent; the phenomenon of dropping in again; cases in which a pupil attends school but is silently excluded either by kinds of social exclusion or simply because they learn little or nothing whilst present in classrooms.

All these issues need to be captured contextually and in detail if the complexities around the phenomenon are to be understood.

In Ghana, Fentiman (1999) has defined a dropout as a child who has not completed nine years of basic

education using the UNESCO definition. According to Akyeampong et al. (2007), a dropout is a child who has enrolled in school but has not attended for a stipulated period of time e.g. three months, and is still of school age. Such a child may re-enter the education system at some stage, especially if the reasons for absence are related to seasonality. So their drop out may be transient, or they may never return.

Children’s definitions of dropout are diverse and correlate with their explanations of why they dropped out of school and the varying lengths of time they spent out of school. For one category of children, the definition of dropout as temporary was founded on the idea of ‘intermittent attendance’ or ‘seasonal withdrawal’ motivated by economic survival needs linked to the cycle of the fishing and calendar.

To another category of children, the definition of dropout as a permanent condition was equally motivated by economic survival needs, but with an additional lack of interest in schooling caused by the perceived diminishing value of education and the opportunity costs of studying rather than working.

**Five Types of Dropout**

Using data from southern Ghana, five types of dropout have been identified. Three are temporary and two are permanent.

**Temporary Dropouts**

**Sporadic Dropout**

For children who have stopped attending school owing to temporary economic needs, dropout is a temporary withdrawal from school in the short term. This can be called ‘sporadic dropout’. In reality, this type of dropout is marked by intermittent non-attendance.

Such temporary dropout cases can include those *at risk* of dropping out permanently and those *silently excluded* and learning little. A low level of attendance, where 25% or more of learning time is lost is a kind of drop out even if the child remains registered and nominally enrolled. If linked to temporary economic needs children will return to school when these ease.

**Event Dropout**

‘Event dropout’ is a response to one or more critical events in children’s lives either at school, at home or both. This type of dropout lasts for about a year. Events outside school that can lead to dropout

include migration of a child's family or the death of one or both parents, or other household shocks including sickness and unemployment. Events in school can include conflict between a child and teachers which can result in temporary dropout. For example children who refused to conform to corporal punishment in some case study schools were given a stern warning not to return to class until the terms of the punishment had been met.

Often dropout is the result of a combination of two or more factors which trigger decisions to stop attending for a period.

**Long-term Dropout**

Some temporary dropout involves prolonged periods out of school for some children. As a result they acquire 'overage' status if they do return to school. Some children who have been out of school for periods lasting between 2 and 4 academic years, are as a result older than 12, the nominal maximum for primary schooling.

These "overage cohorts" have difficulties in completing primary schooling and may be excluded by school registration policies. This kind of falling out of a cohort group can be called 'long-term dropout'. Despite being over age many of those interviewed hoped to return to school and in that sense were not permanent dropouts.

**Permanent Dropouts**

For some children, their dropout status shifts from a temporary to a permanent condition. Some of them feel rejected by the school, others began to earn a living and the rest considered that they were too old to attend the same class as younger children.

This type of dropout appears to be founded on the perceived diminishing value of schooling Children in this category fall into two groups – *unsettled* and *settled* dropouts.

**'Unsettled Dropout'**

'Unsettled dropouts' are generally older children who do not attend school and are unlikely to return to complete the cycle. The doubts these children have about going back to school are sufficient to discourage them. Often they have feelings of embarrassment at being too old for a given grade and of having to attend class with younger children.

They may also have doubts about what benefits they would gain from going back to school especially if they think their chances of graduating are very low

(as indicated in the graphic on this page by the green broken arrow).

**Settled Dropout**

A fifth group of dropouts exist where children are settled in an occupation or livelihood. These children are working directly or learning a trade. Their decision not to go back to school is a reflection of their perception of the value of more education. Children for whom 'dropout' is permanent are frequently overage when they drop out of primary school. They, like unsettled dropouts fall into exclusion zones 2, 4 and 5.

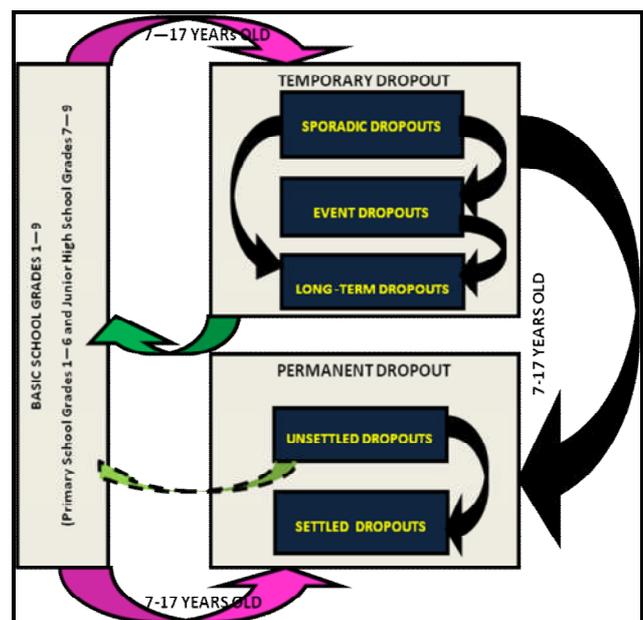
**Profiling Typologies of Dropout**

Dropping out of school ranges from a temporary condition with a high probability of returning to a continuous lack of attendance leading to permanent drop out.

The pink arrows in the graphic below show the movement of children from pupils to school dropouts. The black arrows illustrate how sporadic drop outs may become event and long-term drop outs, and how unsettled drop outs may become settled drop outs. It also shows that different types of temporary drop outs may return to school. Temporary dropouts, for whom the value of school has diminished, may become permanent dropouts (indicated by the big black arrow).

Among the temporary dropout cases—sporadic dropouts cover CREATE exclusion zones 3 and 6, event and long-term dropout cases fall within zones 2, 4 and 5.

**Profile of Typologies of Dropout**



Source: Ananga, forthcoming

### Policy Implications of Types of Dropout

This analysis of five types of dropout provides some implications for policy on drop outs. Policy interventions that focus on bringing all out-of school children to school must differentiate between those who have never enrolled and dropouts after admission to Grade 1. Different policies are needed for different types of drop out at different levels with different needs.

### Supply side policy implications

#### Policy needs to focus on:

- Identifying responsibility for children who attend irregularly and drop out of school. Responsibility could be located within the school with teachers and pupils working together, to follow up on children at risk, support the learning needs of at risk children and work with regular attendees to track irregular attendees. Responsibilities within the community rest with parents, parent teacher association members and other key stakeholders who can work together with teachers to ensure regular attendance.
- Introducing multi-grade teaching and learning in schools where there are many cases of over age enrolments and where long-term drop outs return to school.
- Providing alternative school programmes that can help reintegrate overage children for whom schooling has lost its value and who need to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.
- Introducing flexible school calendars to cater for persistent irregular attendance and temporary dropout caused by seasonality of economic and agricultural activities that encourage sporadic dropout.
- Recognising over age children who migrate seasonally and engage in child labour, and who would benefit from school programmes designed to suit their physical mobility, including mobile schools and flexible timetables designed to make use of periods of time when they are not working.

### Demand side policy implications

#### Policy needs to focus on:

- Strengthening demand at the community level to encourage full enrolment and attendance and provide incentives to promote universal completion of a basic cycle

- Instituting measures that will discourage community members from using children's labour in areas where child labour is common, and ensuring local chiefs and community leaders promote this policy.

- Encouraging parents to get involved in their children's education and support learning and achievement by showing interest and concern in children's learning and progress, and communicate their expectations for success.

- Reducing problems arising from conflict between pupils and teachers, especially those resulting in corporal punishment, through discussions involving children, parents, parent teacher association leaders, teachers and school management committee leaders.

### References

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This policy brief is based on: Ananga, (forthcoming) 'Typologies of Dropout: The Dimensions and Dynamics of Dropout in Ghana', IJED, and has been written by the author.



**CREATE** is a DFID-funded research programme consortia exploring issues of educational access, transitions and equity in South Africa, India, Bangladesh and Ghana. For more information see: [www.create-rpc.org](http://www.create-rpc.org)