



**Consortium for Research on
Educational Access,
Transitions and Equity**

Teachers and Access to Schooling in Ghana

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Vincent Adzahlie-Mensah**

**CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS
Research Monograph No. 43**

September 2010



**University of Sussex
Centre for International Education**



Consortium for Research on
Educational Access, Transitions & Equity

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The Consortium for Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) is a Research Programme Consortium supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Its purpose is to undertake research designed to improve access to basic education in developing countries. It seeks to achieve this through generating new knowledge and encouraging its application through effective communication and dissemination to national and international development agencies, national governments, education and development professionals, non-government organisations and other interested stakeholders.

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List of Acronyms

CREATE	Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and development
CWIQ	Core Welfare Indicators questionnaire
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
GoG	Government of Ghana
MOESS	Ministry of Education, Science and Sports
GES	Ghana Education Service
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
US	United States
UN	United Nations
IRC	International Rescue Committee
UNICEF	United Nations Children Education Fund

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Preface

Teacher attitude and behaviour contribute to pupils' school experience that determines whether they drop out or remain in school to complete. In most countries the numbers that dropout this way are often greater than those who never attend school. In most developing countries where regulatory mechanisms on teachers' attitudes and behaviour are weak or not in place, teachers' attitudes and behaviour advertently or inadvertently affect pupils' access to schooling. This study investigated teacher behaviour that contributes to children's access to schooling in four Ghanaian rural schools in the Winneba Municipality. A qualitative approach using mainly observations and interviews was adopted. The result showed that teacher attitudes and behaviour contributed to access problems though the teachers did not perceive themselves as contributing to the problem of access. Teachers' irregular attendance, lateness and absenteeism as well as misuse of instructional hours and indiscriminate use of corporal punishment were concerns pupils particularly noted as contributing to pupils' irregular attendance and drop out. Head teachers did not see monitoring and controlling school attendance as a key element in achieving school objectives. Pupils and teacher attendance records were haphazardly kept and teachers' attendance records showed no reality with practice. The study found overage pupils in all classes, yet the teachers taught these classes as homogeneous. A retrospective study of pupils' attendance found very high dropout rate. Poor supervision by head teachers was found to contribute to irregular teacher attendance, punctuality and absenteeism and these in turn impacted negatively on pupils' access to schooling. The study therefore recommends that the district education authorities step up supervision of schools with respect to teacher attendance, punctuality and regularity. It is also recommended that over age problem be addressed through sensitization of parents and teachers. Over age children, particularly, the 'adult pupils' who have been rescued from child traffickers be provided separate school. A more detail study of the child trafficked pupils be undertaken to find ways of making them benefit from schooling as a result of their being overage.

Summary

This paper looks at teacher's contributions to access problems. The focus is on qualitative accounts of teacher contributions to access to schooling in four rural schools in the Winneba Municipality in Ghana. The main discussion is around how professional teachers' attitudes and conduct in the classroom impacts on pupils remaining in school rates of completion and drop out.

How do teachers respond to irregular attendance? How do teachers identify the signs of dropping out of school? How do teacher attitudes and responses to drop out impact on children leaving or staying in school to complete? Teacher reactions to these signs are important in determining whether children remain in school to complete or drop out.

The paper focuses on teacher attendance, use of instructional hours and use of corporal punishment. It also focuses on how head teachers monitor and control pupils and teachers' attendance records. It also describes how teacher's classroom work impacts upon access.

The results show that teacher attitudes and behaviour are contributed to access problems. However, teachers did not perceive themselves as contributing to the problem of access. Teachers' irregular attendance, lateness and absenteeism as well as misuse of instructional hours and indiscriminate use of corporal punishment were concerns pupils noted as contributing to irregular attendance and drop out. Poor supervision by head teachers was found to contribute to irregular teacher attendance, punctuality and absenteeism and these in turn impacted negatively on pupils' access to schooling.

Finally, the study identifies gaps in research around teacher contribution to children dropping out of school and suggests how further research could address some of these.

Teachers and Access to Schooling in Ghana

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Purpose

The experience pupils have when they enrol in schooling is important in determining what progress they make and the extent to which they persist until completion. At the heart of this experience is the contribution that teachers make to pupils' learning experience and how they respond to irregular attendance or slow progress with respect to CREATE's Zones of exclusion¹ (2, 3 & 4). Survey analysis repeatedly shows that drop out is often a result of poor learning or negative experiences in schooling (see, for example, Ghana Child Labour Survey 2003).

Who is a dropout? The term dropout is complex and very difficult to pin down. Woods, (2001) defines a school dropout as a pupil who is identified as having left school without an approved excuse or documented transfer and does not return to school by the fall of the following school year, or if he or she completes the school year but fails to re-enrol the following school year.

Woods provides different categories of pupils who can be considered as dropouts:

- Pupils who drop out as defined above
- Pupils who leave school and enter into apprenticeship - before graduation
- Pupils who temporarily leave school and are not in attendance in another school at the time of school data collection on attendance
- Pupils enrolled in school but whose whereabouts are unknown before the end of the year /term

Woods also expounds on categories of pupils who cannot be considered as dropouts:

- pupils who die
- Pupils who are out of school for temporary periods with an approved excuse

¹ CREATE has identified seven zones of exclusion from basic education:

- Zone 0 – children who are excluded from pre-schooling.
- Zone 1 -children who have never been to school, and are unlikely to attend school.
- Zone 2 - children who enter primary schooling, but who drop out before completing the primary cycle.
- Zone 3 - children who enter primary schooling and are enrolled but are 'at risk' of dropping out before completion as a result of irregular attendance, low achievement, and silent exclusion from worthwhile learning.
- Zone 4 – children who fail to make the transition to secondary school grades.
- Zone 5 children who enter secondary schooling but who drop out before completing the cycle.
- Zone 6 children who enter secondary schooling and are enrolled but are 'at risk' of dropping out before completion as a result of irregular attendance, low achievement and silent exclusion from worthwhile learning.

For further information see: www.create-rpc.org.

- Pupils showing regular attendance at a state-approved alternative program
- Pupils known to have transferred to another public or private school, informal or alternative education program, or home schooling
- Pupils who move to another grade level

The term dropout has different conceptions relating to different ways of thinking about the issue. Hunt, (2008) explained drop out in terms of children who have gained access, but fail to complete a basic education cycle, and argued that in many developing countries a major problem associated with the term is that dropping out of school is often obscured within statistical data by the emphasis on initial access to the exclusion of those dropping out in the progression towards completion.

When the yearly dropout rate is compared with that of previous years the term ‘*event rate*’ is used to describe the phenomenon. *Status rate* is the cumulative rate of the proportion of all individuals in the population who have not completed primary school and were not enrolled at a given point in time. *Cohort rate* describes the number of dropouts from a single age group or specific grade (or cohort) of pupils over a period of time. The *primary school completion rate* indicates the percentage of all children aged 5-12 who have completed primary school and have moved on to junior high school/secondary school (Woods, 2001; Hunt, 2008).

Theoretical and empirical literature has established links between teachers, school leadership practices and pupil’s access to schooling. Davis and Dupper (2004) acknowledge this and explained that a body of research has recently begun to examine how school factors contribute to the dropout problem. Mulford (2003) traced school practices that affect pupils’ access to problems with school leaders. Akyeampong et al., (2007) argued that it is perhaps within attitudes to education that demand for schooling can be shaped. Drawing on data from the CWIQ it was identified that one of the most frequent reasons children aged 6-11 years gave for being out of school was school being uninteresting or useless. This study found that a higher proportion of rural children than urban children drop out because they perceived schooling to be unnecessary or uninteresting.

Keane (2001) in a survey report argued that how teachers respond to pupil indiscipline constitutes a significant aspect of their daily experience within their classrooms and within their schools that affect access. Dunne and Leach et al, (2005) establish links between school practices and processes of schooling and their influences on educational access in Ghana.

Lewin, (2006) posits that the amount of learning in schools depends on pupil teacher ratios and workloads and that judgements have to be made about how to progress towards the levels of remuneration necessary for mass enrolment in countries where current salaries are substantially higher. The argument is further expanded that “increased enrolment in inefficient and ineffective schools will serve little purpose” as a result of which school management becomes a key issue in the areas of:

- creating governance and employment structures that improve school/community accountability (improving attendance and learning outcomes)
- discouraging teacher absenteeism
- devise strategies to maximise the learning time and increase time on task

A frequently cited reason why children are no longer in school is that they find it *uninteresting* and *irrelevant* (Pryor & Ampiah, 2003) and Esia-Donkor (2008) explains that all these depend on the performance of teachers. Teacher quality, attrition rates and unwillingness to accept postings to rural areas have also been linked to access issues (Leach et al., 2005). Teacher absenteeism, poor teacher attendance and trained teachers unwilling to accept postings to rural or deprived communities as well as the short stay of those who do, but seek early transfers have all been variously identified in previous research (Akyeampong, 2003; Hedges, 2002; Akyeampong & Asante, 2006; Akyeampong, et al, 2007; Casely-Hayford and Wilson, 2001 in CARE International, 2003; and MOESS, 2005a:53).

A national survey study in some 60 schools found that about 85 percent of teachers arrived late (Fobih, Akyeampong & Koomson, 1999). Although absenteeism and lateness is widespread, it appears that serious instances are more likely to occur in rural schools than in urban schools. Bennell and Akyeampong (2006) noted that both absenteeism and lateness are symptomatic of education systems that have weak teacher management structures, and are unable to provide incentives to motivate teachers to improve their attitudes to work. Penalties and sanctions for lateness and absenteeism have been prescribed by the Ghana Education Service (GES) but head teachers seem unable to enforce them because the professional culture does not promote the necessary authority for enforcement (Akyeampong & Asante, 2006).

This problem of supervision complicates issues because it affects teachers' commitment to work, observable attendance patterns and quality of service delivery in the classrooms and the school as a whole. Therefore, the problem of meaningful access hinges on various teacher related issues including supply, school management, teaching techniques and learning processes and facilities. It is in the context of these perspectives that the findings of our study have been analysed.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This monograph addresses a crucial aspect of dropout: How do professional teachers attitudes and conduct in the classroom context impact on pupils remaining in school to complete or dropping out?

Teachers' professional responsibilities are developed through formal training and practical school experience. Thus, at one level, it is important to understand how teachers' professional learning experiences inform on their attitudes and responses to children who are at risk of dropping out. On another level, understanding how they identify problems and their attitude and response to these problems are important for designing professional learning and development experiences that can make a difference.

The teachers' role is crucial in early schooling experiences and later progression. Yet research on access to education says little about the specific impact teachers' actions and attitudes can have on access to schooling. Teachers' interaction with pupils places them in a better position to understand some of the school level causes of irregular attendance and dropout. A regular feature of a normal school life in the Ghanaian basic education level involves lateness, irregular attendance and dropout. The problem is that teachers have been accused of contributing to lateness, irregular attendance and dropout. Do teachers

really contribute to pupil lack of access to schooling? To what extent do teachers contribute to lateness, irregular attendance and dropout?

1.3 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the study was to investigate the contribution that teachers make to pupils' learning experience and how they respond to irregular attendance or slow progress (CREATE Zones 2, 3, & 4). The intent was to provide an analytical report on the influence of teachers on access to schooling in Winneba Municipality and recommend local institutional arrangements and support mechanisms to improve enrolment, participation, and reduce irregular attendance and school dropout. Specifically, the study set out to study what roles teachers play that negatively impact on the learners to contribute to the children's lateness, irregular attendance and eventual dropout. What covert and overt teacher activities contribute to learners' unpleasant experiences that promote truancy, lateness, irregular attendance and dropout in schools in Winneba? Central to the research is the examination of teacher – pupil interaction and how that impacts on lateness, irregular attendance and dropout. How do teacher practices impact on access and participation in schooling?

1.4 Research Questions:

The following research questions guided the research:

1. How does teachers' classroom interaction with pupils' impact on exclusion or retention after initial access?
2. How do teachers identify children at risk of dropping out and in what ways do they respond to this risk?
3. How do teachers organise teaching and learning in classrooms with over-aged children and children who attend irregularly? – How does this impact on the organisation of teaching and learning?
4. How do teachers' professional roles and responsibilities interact with issues of access to schooling e.g. which aspects of their roles and responsibilities are implicated in their response to problems of attendance and achievement?
5. Is there any evidence that teacher training and continuous professional development (CPD) has prepared teachers to recognise vulnerability to drop out and strategies to intervene constructively?
6. What school management policies and practices relate to problems of access – what works and what is less successful in addressing problems of attendance, achievement and dropout?
7. What are the implications of teachers' attitudes and responses to problems of attendance and dropout for teacher education policy, practice and programming?

1.5 Research Design and Methodology

This study used qualitative research methods and involved the purposive selection of informants. Research participants in the study were teachers, head teachers and pupils. For sampling of schools, the team sought the assistance of the Winneba Municipal Education officials for the selection of three rural public schools and one private school with high rates of irregular attendance and dropout. Schools and school communities with

high dropout rates and irregular attendance were selected to best observe the phenomena we wished to study.

The study explored teachers' awareness and attitudes to over age entry, over age in grade, poor attendance, unsatisfactory achievement and other relevant factors including child labour and domestic chores. Other issues explored were their views about what they see as their primary roles and responsibilities as teachers and what that meant to them in terms of responding to problems of access. The study explored what teachers did to discourage irregular attendance, drop out and encourage re enrolment.

Research with teachers involved observation of teaching for a period of ten days focusing on how teachers interact with their pupils and especially pupils at risk of dropping out. A classroom observation of how they spend time with pupils with different learning needs and backgrounds was carried out. Classroom observation was focused on primary classes one, four and six in each school.

Teachers responsible for these classrooms were interviewed after observing them teach for a ten days. Interviews were conducted to explore with teachers how they judge children to be at risk of dropping out and how they arrived at this judgement.

The remaining teachers in the school were interviewed for their general insight and experiences with children at risk of dropping out. Head teachers were also interviewed on school management issues and what signals and messages they send about school response to problems of access in the school and community.

The case study covered four rural schools (one private and three public). Four head teachers, 24 teachers and 24 pupils. Two pupils per class for primary classes one, four and six were interviewed on school practices that encouraged them to attend irregularly or drop out. A qualitative approach using observations and interviews was used for the research and analysis.

1.6 Limitations

In the use of interpretative approach in exploring the issues in the study, we were not only very much aware of the possibility of our personal biases influencing the study, but we were conscious that these personal biases, values and interests should not be imposed on the views of the participants in order to ensure that a clear picture is portrayed. We were concerned that our personal preconceptions would not be brought to bear on the understanding of the issues. Therefore we kept questioning our position in a process of continuous reflectivity (Griffiths, 1998) to address the possibility of our biases colouring our interpretations (O'Leary, 2005).

Baumann (1997) suggests that the process of understanding children should be considered a task of translation or interpretation, which requires being faithful to the original views. However, the process is more complex as the children's view must be communicated in standard language for a monograph of this calibre. Therefore one limitation of this study might be the extent to which the use of standard language might not convey the verbal views of the children.

2. Findings: Teacher contributions to problems of Access

2.1 School Level Practices and Impact on Access

It is observable that practices in any school including teachers' attitudes and actions affect attendance and completion. As a result, what teachers and school heads do determines the climate created for teaching and learning and pupil's responses to schooling. If a child is ready to learn and teachers are not ready to direct and support learning, the child may lose interest.

Interviews in schools visited revealed that teachers did not consider their practices as contributory to pupils dropping out of school. Only one teacher explained that some pupils drop out of school because school was uninteresting. This teacher outlined various teacher practices such as caning, asking pupils to weed and the misuse of instructional time as teacher related factors which are contributory to pupils' dropping out of school. That admission provided the impetus to understanding teacher related factors which impact on pupils' access to schooling. Pupils will travel the distance and come to school but how the teacher relates with the pupil impacts heavily on the pupils' attendance and interest in school.

2.1.1 Monitoring pupils' attendance

Head teachers did not see monitoring and controlling school attendance as a key element in achieving school objectives. They did not think that rigorous collection and analysis of data about attendance was a key factor which enables schools to check their progress. Brookside Primary School Policy, (2007) argues that monitoring and controlling school attendance and punctuality is a key part of the school objectives.

Observations showed that head teachers did not develop and implement attendance policy and action plans. They did not ensure that teachers kept essential records related to attendance. Head teachers maintain two registers: an admission register for all pupils in the school and an attendance register for each class. The attendance register has columns for the following:

- Pupil's name
- Pupil's date of birth or the age of the pupil
- records of daily attendance
- records of weekly attendance summaries
- monthly attendance summaries
- the overall attendance pattern of the pupil for a term
- the pupil's stage of education and progress.

These records are necessary to monitor attendance and patterns for non-attendance. Observations revealed that head teachers did not ensure those records were accurately kept. As a result many teachers were not aware of the ages of the pupils in their classes. Pupils ages and dates of birth were not recorded in the registers. In some cases few were

recorded but these were found to be guesswork by teachers which did not reflect reality. Interviews with pupils revealed differences between the ages for pupils and those teachers recorded in the register.

2.1.2 Supervision and School based management practices

Head teachers in the schools were not ensuring that teacher conduct was properly managed. It was observed that teacher management practices in the schools were problematic. School heads reported to school later than the staff.

Observations in the schools visited show that the school heads treat the staff as professionals in their own right. While this is not wrong it has created a situation where teachers act independently. One aspect of this independence is that they report to school at will and in most cases very late. Observably, the school records do not show that queries are issued to such teachers even though the practice is endemic. It is interesting to note that other research (Casely-Hayford, 2000) also found that teacher absenteeism was a major issue affecting access to schooling in Ghana. It has also been observed from teachers' attendance records that teacher absenteeism exists in the schools.

A primary reason why school heads do not query teachers was inherent in the records of attendance. A visitor to the school may see in the teachers' attendance register that teachers report early to school but this is a false impression. It was observed that teachers report late to school and record a different time in the attendance book. For example, we found out that by eight am teachers had not reported at school but the next we saw that teachers had signed that they were all in school before eight am that day. Some signed indicating that they had arrived at school at seven thirty am which was not true. Head teachers who were to ensure that teachers recorded the correct times they arrived at school were themselves guilty of arriving at school very late. In another instance the school logbook did not show record of a female teacher's absence though she was on maternity leave. This practice is serious because it does not allow for proper management of schools. It also poses problems for supervision and the development of mechanisms to monitor lateness to schools.

Our research revealed that school records cannot be depended upon for meaningful decisions concerning educational management and administration, and the development of educational policies. Apart from teachers recording the wrong times they arrived in school we found that there was a problem with the way pupils' attendance registers were kept and marked. In some classes children who were absent on the day of our visit had been marked as present. We also found children in school whose names were not in the class attendance register though they had been accounted for in the school admission register.

2.1.3 Monitoring teacher class attendance and classroom practices

A major school management problem was with teacher class attendance and service delivery practices. Most head teachers do not seem to be aware of the fact that teachers do not teach the prescribed number of lessons for a day. They were oblivious of that fact and live under the false impression that the teachers were delivering quality service to the pupils. The school heads simply concluded that the problems with access: irregular attendance and drop out relate to challenges associated with parental and community

attitudes towards education. They believed that these were the primary causes of drop outs and not teacher practices. Reasons heads and teachers gave for poor access, irregular attendance and drop out included parents not attaching value to education, ignorance of the value of education, carelessness, poverty, child trafficking, and seasonal migration.

Additionally, it seemed that school heads are not aware of the number of exercises teachers give to pupils. Checking the number of exercises would ensure that teachers engage pupils in activity oriented tasks. Observations show that most teachers gave no more than two exercises between May and June. However, class continuous assessment records show that teachers had given more than two exercises. Teacher classroom practices were also not being observed. These included classroom management practices including quality of service delivery to pupils.

2.2 Teacher's attitudes towards maintenance of school facilities

The schools' environment is essential in attracting pupils. Pridmore, (2007) opines that 'an unhealthy and unsafe school environment reduces the demand for education from girls. It is a common cause of absenteeism and school dropout among girls in some countries.' It is without doubt that the availability of sanitary facilities in a school contributes to making life in the school easier and healthier. Pridmore noted that poor water and sanitation provision in school may damage the health and nutritional status of school children by exposing them to hazards such as diarrhoeal diseases and reduce girl's access to schooling. It is also well recognised that lack of separate toilet and washing facilities for girls is a major barrier to girls' enrolment and attendance at school especially after puberty (UNICEF/IRC, 2005). Therefore teachers' lack of concern for the maintenance and continuous use of such facilities can cause absenteeism and school dropout among girls.

We observed that there was no playground equipment in the schools. The only facilities available were poorly kept playgrounds. The playgrounds were mostly bushy or weedy. Though in one school, the head claimed that the school had identified that pupils stay in school longer if they had opportunities to play. We noticed that during break time, most children congregated around the classrooms and the few clean spots around the school canteen/markets. Children avoided playing around the bushy areas of the school's playgrounds. On Fridays we sadly observed that pupils in sports wear were forced to play in the bushy fields notwithstanding the risks it poses to the pupils. Right before us the school authorities punished pupils who were not dressed in prescribed sports attire. Certainly, this practice will not make school interesting for pupils. Teacher slack attitude to maintenance of healthy school environment contribute to pushing pupils out of school.

In one school, these health facilities were too remote from the school. The toilet and urinals were shared with the community clinic which was about a kilometre away outside the school. In another school where they had the facilities for both teachers and pupils we wondered whether the facilities were ever used as the surrounding environment was so bushy. Most pupils we observed would rather not risk using the facilities as they urinated around bushes instead of in the facilities provided. In the other schools, where the environment around the sanitary facilities was not bushy, the stench was unbearable. Interviews with pupils revealed that the facilities were cleaned once every week, usually as punishment to a group of pupils. It was also revealed that some pupils stay away from school when they had to endure the punishment of scrubbing latrines and urinals.

Certainly, teacher slack attitude to maintenance of school facilities contribute to pushing pupils out of school.

2.3 Teacher practices and drop out

The school is a social institution in which interactions between teachers and pupils are vital to achieving the objectives. This is further strengthened by teachers' roles as surrogate parents. It was observed that at the superficial level each school has a good social environment. This is however deceptive. When pupils were asked to say one thing they did not like about school, they gave a number of things they disliked which were related to how they were treated by teachers.

Pupils complained about the way teachers cane *basabasa*² (haphazardly). The practice had developed some hatred in some pupils towards teachers. Interviews with pupils revealed that some pupils do not volunteer to contribute to class discussion because of fear of being caned if their contribution does not make sense to the teacher. Some hated particular teachers whose canning extravaganza had caused some pupils to stop schooling.

Pupils also mentioned teacher absenteeism and explained how they detest the practice. A pupil explained it in the following words:

What I don't like is that our teacher does not come to school regularly. Pupils will be disturbing in class and school is not interesting.

The pupils were not happy about this practice, but the most disturbing to one pupil was the fact that teachers present at school refuse to teach. The pupil explained that:

I don't like it when teachers sit together to talk. They would not come to the classroom to teach us. They would talk and talk the whole day. It makes some pupils refuse to come to school. But if you do not come to school the teacher would cane you.

Other pupils explained the same point and noted that teachers do not teach all the lessons on the time table. They teach a few lessons out of the total each day. Another child explained that:

If teachers would teach every day, all pupils would be in school always.

Some other pupils were concerned about teacher's lateness to school. A pupil who was passionate about teacher practices related to lateness complained that:

What I don't like about school is that the teacher would come late and cane you for lateness. So many pupils don't like this at all. So if you are late, you refuse to come to school.

² This is a word in the Akan language in Ghana which indicates that an activity is performed haphazardly. When it is used in the context of caning it implies the teacher did so mercilessly or with a degree of cruelty. That includes caning any part of the body that is within the reach of the cane.

It is obvious that the pupils were observing teachers as models of good behaviour. It is observable that what teachers do and how they do it influences pupils' reactions. As a result of observable teacher misconduct (particularly lateness and absenteeism) some pupils refuse to observe punishments or receive the cane. The resultant conflict in the attempt by teachers to force pupils to accept the punishment leads to dropout.

In one school, the pupils gave various instances in which different pupils stopped school because they did not want to do punishments given by teachers. A school prefect explained that sometimes teachers who come late themselves punish children for lateness because the prefect had written their names as latecomers. The pupils argue that it is unfair for those teachers who report to school late to turn round and punish them for lateness. This is not a healthy development because it shows a total lack of confidence in the teachers and school authorities. It represents a breakdown of discipline fuelled by teachers' own conduct. This kind of practice would not facilitate the enrolment and retention of pupils in schools. The trend may only be reversed if teachers discipline themselves and become more regular and punctual at school. This sense of injustice might be the result of weak regulatory measures on teachers conduct or their total absence.

2.3.1 Administration of discipline

Four main methods (weeding, cleaning of latrines and urinals, carrying stones and caning) are used as punishment in the rural schools visited but caning stands out as the most customary. It is typically used in schools. However, teachers were evasive in accepting the fact that caning is their main method of punishment. Our observations suggest that this might be due to teachers not keeping records of corporal punishment according to the corporal punishment policy for schools. Unannounced visits to the schools confirmed that teachers hold and use the cane even when teaching. In all the schools visited class one teachers particularly hold canes in the hand throughout the period of lesson delivery. One teacher explained that it would be disastrous to stop using the cane because it instils discipline into pupils.

Surprisingly, when teachers were asked whether caning as a method of discipline has been effective the reactions were mixed. They narrated some incidences indicating that it had in some cases produced major negative results. The two incidences reported below were confirmed by both teachers and pupils in the schools in which each occurred. In one school a teacher narrated how a pupil reacted angrily to caning in the following words:

Well, we had an incidence when the child became angry when the teacher caned him. He went back took a stone and threw it at the teacher. Since then, the child never stepped in school.

The following transcript from an interview with a pupil also explained how a teacher had to engage in physical fight with one pupil he was trying to cane.

The teacher tried to hold the boy by force and cane him but the boy also gave him blows. The teacher also caned him again and boy threw another blow and run away and never came to school again.

One teacher also indicated that some pupils fail to come to school because they know they would be caned if they report to school late. Other pupils ran away from school if

they see that teachers intend to cane them for an offence. Interviews with pupils revealed their intense dislike of caning and the fear they feel even when others were being subjected to various degrees of caning. Pupils used various expressions to express their feelings about caning as a method of discipline. The expressions include phrases and words such as:

- I feel very sad,
- It is bad,
- I fear a lot,
- I cannot look at that,
- It is wicked,
- I don't like it at all.

These expressions explain pupils' general feelings about caning; however the problem really was with how the cane is applied. It was observed that the teachers cane any part of the pupils' body mercilessly. Another problem was that the number of strokes pupils received was not related to the offence but the grade level of the pupil. In one school, the pupils explained that they were caned according to the class. A primary four pupil would be caned four times while a primary six pupil would receive six strokes for the same offence. The pupils regard this as a crude and unjust method.

The other punishments were also not popular with pupils. In one school, teachers explained that pupils refuse weeding plots assigned to them for various acts of indiscipline. Those pupils then remain at home for fear of any other disciplinary action that may be taken against them. In one school, the teachers tried to deny that caning was the main method of punishment. However, interviews with pupils contradicted this. Pupils also explained that at other times, teachers asked them to kneel in the sun for a periods ranging between five minutes to thirty minutes. Cruel, unjust and unpopular punishments further compound the problem of drop outs in the school.

2.4 Teachers' Professional Roles and Access

Teacher professionalism impacts variously on educational service delivery. There was therefore a concern to find out if there was any evidence that teacher training and Continuous Professional Development had prepared teachers to recognise vulnerability to dropout and strategies to intervene constructively. However, various teacher practices which were observed did not show any evidence that teacher training makes a difference: lateness, irregular attendance, non preparation of lesson plans, waste of contact hours and very poor output of work were not peculiar to untrained teachers. In addition, trained teachers were as guilty of using the cane as haphazardly as untrained teachers.

2.4.1 Teacher class attendance and absenteeism

Teacher attendance is a major problem in the schools involved in the study. Teachers generally reported to school late. Similarly, school heads were also part of the problem as they too reported late to school. In two unannounced visits to schools in the study it was revealed that the earliest time a teacher reported to school was eight o'clock. The practice was not peculiar to public schools. The same problem was observed in the private school studied. Usually the pupils reported earlier than their teachers to school. Sometimes the school prefect was available to direct his or her colleagues. In one such school the

school's boy's prefect met us and told us that the teachers usually arrived around eight o'clock as they were commuting from Winneba, a distance of about twelve kilometres.

The only significant difference we observed between public and private schools was that in the private school visited, there was a private security personnel who co-ordinated activities in the absence of teachers. Notwithstanding the fact that the security person was not a teacher he had at least some security and confidence for the children who arrived in school very early in the day as the school was isolated from the community. In addition he ensured that the children cleaned the compound before the teachers arrived. The security man also ensured that the children observed the school rules and regulations. For example, while waiting for the arrival of the teachers in the private school we observed the security man asking pupils who reported to school very early but were not in the prescribed black shoe and white socks to go back home and dress properly. When an angry parent came to complain why her daughter was driven home just to change her shoes the head teacher calmly told her that though he sympathised with her the school had rules and regulations which should be adhered to. Though the school head permitted the child to get to class he took time to educate the parent on the need to make the child feel comfortable and belonging to the school, so she should ensure that she gets the prescribed uniform for the daughter. He explained that they sometimes have to take such harsh decisions in order to provoke parents to come to school to discuss the provision of basic necessities to pupils. Those children whose parents were not prepared for confrontation or who did not meet their parents at home to bring them back to school, missed school and their lessons for that day.

2.4.2 Monitoring Pupils' Attendance

With regards to documentation and record keeping, it was observed that teachers were not meticulous about record keeping, particularly so with reference to pupils' class attendance. Observations of pupils' class attendance registers did not reflect actual realities on the ground. For instance, one child admitted that he had been absent on five occasions within the month but the attendance register indicated that the child was only absent four times. A significant observation was that even though schools remained closed on African Union Day (May 25, 2008) the class registers in some classes indicated that pupils were present in school that day. Meanwhile the holiday had been announced earlier and children did not need to go to school before being dispersed. Teachers were careless in record keeping and as such were not aware of dropout rates among their pupils. These are serious issues which affect educational management decisions on pupils' attendance.

2.4.3 Management of pupils during break time

In order to understand how schools organised the break period we observed break times at schools we visited. The Report of the President's Committee on Review of Education Reforms in Ghana (2002) considers the management of break/play time as critical to instructional time. A significant observation was the fact that the break times varied from teacher to teacher. While some teachers allowed the pupils to go out for break promptly when the bell rang others waited until right in the middle of the break before children were allowed to go out.

At the end of break time, some children go back to their classes promptly while others stay on unconcerned for periods ranging from fifteen to thirty minutes. There was, generally, no discipline regarding time for pupils to return from break. In one school pupils go home to eat at break time because there was no canteen in the school. As a result they return usually well over twenty minutes after the break period was over. In yet another school it was observed that even the time keepers either forget the time for the end of break time or do not observe it at all. Sometimes, because of the presence of the researchers the school heads would call the time keeper to ring the bell after about ten minutes had passed after break time was over. The practice greatly affects the use of instructional time and more so, the pupils' perception of the seriousness of school and issues of schooling.

Another dynamic regarding the use of break time was that some teachers continued to teach during that time. This was observed in two schools. In one instance class four pupils were kept in the class until the break period was over. They were later permitted by the teacher to go out for break. The teacher involved was not a trained teacher. Incidentally, the head teacher was in school but did not notice it. In the other school the teacher involved was a trained teacher. She kept class one pupils in class for the entire first break period. Interviews with pupils revealed that almost half of the class had not eaten that morning prior to the lesson.

2.4.4 Management of pupils during physical education periods

The physical education period is supposed to be used to help children engage in healthy physical exercise so that they can enjoy the benefits of healthy habits. The Report of the President's Committee on Review of Education Reforms in Ghana, (2002) states that, 'physical education should be taught as a practical activity with emphasis on physical fitness, recreation and leisure'. During such periods pupils are supposed to go through various drills in general and specific body warm up. The pupils were also expected to engage in games. Unfortunately, the time was not being used for the purpose. Pupils are engaged in labour during school hours. Teachers use the time allotted for physical education for their own personal benefit by engaging the pupils on their farms. In one school, the pupils were taken to the teachers', farm on Friday when it was time for physical education. Interviews with pupils revealed that the practice was a recurrent one. However, the major effect of that practice was that many pupils shy away from school on such days because the parents equally need them to help on the family farm. In response the teachers severely punish absentees and some pupils stop school to protest the punishment.

In one school where the physical education period was used for the purpose, it was observed that the teachers give balls to the pupils and prescribe a game. Pupils were neither engaged in any general warm up activities nor specific exercises. The teachers do not give any rules about the game. In one instance, the teacher gave the ball to the pupils and sat under a tree with a cane. Interestingly, the teacher kept no time to determine the end of the period. Over ten minutes after that period was over, the head teacher came to instruct the pupils to go to class for other lessons. It was at that point that the teacher became conscious of the time. These practices do not promote learning or demonstrate any professionalism in teaching.

2.4.5 Teacher Attitudes to school on a rainy day

Teachers' attitudes to school on rainy days did not encourage pupils' attendance. A school visit on rainy days revealed that teachers do not report to school on rainy days. When it threatened to rain in the morning, school visits revealed that teachers reported very late to school. Morning assembly in the schools started late. One teacher reported to school after 10am, because he thought it would rain. Observations revealed that the pupils also reported very late to school. The teachers explained during interviews that they usually report late on rainy days because pupils normally report late. Conversely, pupils also claimed they report late or absent themselves on rainy days because teachers normally stay away from school on those days.

2.4.6 Management of drop-ins

When the study team asked teachers how they managed drop-ins the response was that they were generally made to repeat the classes in which they dropped. In some cases they were tested and placed in a level appropriate for their ages. Once re admitted, the drop-ins were not given any special care. Additionally, interviews did not reveal that there were 'return processes' in the schools programmes to ensure student's return to school does not escalate the situation or cause humiliation. There were also no 'safety nets' for drop-ins. As a result some such pupils suffer various forms of abuse including social isolation; bullying and harassment from older pupils. The older ones amongst the drop-ins also become bullies. Most drop-ins feel insecure at school and more often than not drop out again.

Teachers gave evidence to suggest that drop-ins usually do not stay to complete their education. For instance, attendance records showed that some of those pupils were attending irregularly. In one case, the pupil returned after two academic terms. She reported to school for two days and had since been absent for more than four weeks as at the day of visit. This kind of situation was not uncommon in all classes in the schools visited. It has therefore been accepted by teachers as a normal occurrence, too perplexing to deal with. The only indication about efforts to tackle the problem was given by teachers interviewed in the private school.

Teachers in the private school have three different strategies for dealing with drop-ins. The first was counselling services. The head teacher explained that the school had a team of counsellors who interact with drop-ins to find out the reasons for dropping out. Pupils were usually educated on the importance of schooling but the team usually develops appropriate counselling services to suit the needs of the pupil. The head teacher explained that following the interactions with pupils, the proprietor and the school management board of the school had decided to introduce a scheme to provide free tuition for 200 pupils every year. The scheme would be supported by the faith organisation sponsoring the school. This was a consequence of the revelation that many parents were unable to provide the basic educational needs that would support pupils' learning.

The second strategy was collaborations with parents. Parents were invited to the school to discuss the pupils' attendance. Parents were educated on the need for pupils to stay and complete school. Teachers also request support from parents for the children to ensure that pupils do not stay away from school.

The third strategy was the respect of pupils' rights. This was mainly in the area of religious rights. That was because of the realisation that children from Islamic communities, who were compelled to worship the Christian way were staying away from school on particular days when Christian religious services were performed. The school has therefore decided to allow Muslims to pray according to their belief anytime Christian services were being performed. The practice has encouraged Muslim pupils to attend regularly. This would suggest that if public schools would adopt these strategies for dealing with drop-ins, more pupils would attend regularly and thereby improve retention rates.

2.5 Dropout Prevention Strategies

Interviews with teachers suggest that teachers do not have any dropout prevention strategies. Teachers refuse to acknowledge that pupils drop out. Any time the question: *what are the main causes of dropouts in this school?* The automatic response was "here the pupils do not really dropout". As a result the teachers could not outline any school strategies for dropout prevention. The teachers involved in the study never considered that their practices or school conditions were contributory factors to pupils dropping out. They believed that the causes of dropout were primarily related to 'pull and push factors' in the home and the community.

2.5.1 School Management Policies and Practices to reduce dropout rates

A major theme in this study was to identify what works and what is less successful in addressing problems of attendance, achievement and dropout. International literature has indicated that teachers need to be sensitive to pupils' needs as a way of identifying and preventing pupils from dropping out. In order for teachers to be more sensitive to the reality of children, many schools have developed relationships with children's families as well as with communities (UNESCO, 2004).

When teachers were asked whether the school does anything to address irregular attendance there were a number of responses. In the interviews it was revealed that some teachers visit the homes of pupils who absent themselves from school without previous excuses. The home visits help to check and encourage pupils who stay away for a week or more to come back to school. It also helps teachers to identify the reasons why pupils were not in school. A teacher related an encounter with a pupil who told stories of financial difficulties facing him. This child takes some time off schooling days to work as a child labourer in the community. Such pupils were encouraged to return and attend regularly so that they can work after school.

Teachers also checked lateness and absenteeism by assigning numbers to pupils who report to school early. Those who report late were punished and teachers claimed the practice promoted discipline. Teachers also stated that as a result of this measure pupils attend more regularly. Also, the pupils usually ask permission if they had to absent themselves from school. Even with this measure examination of the register revealed that 18 out of 27 pupils in the class were attending irregularly.

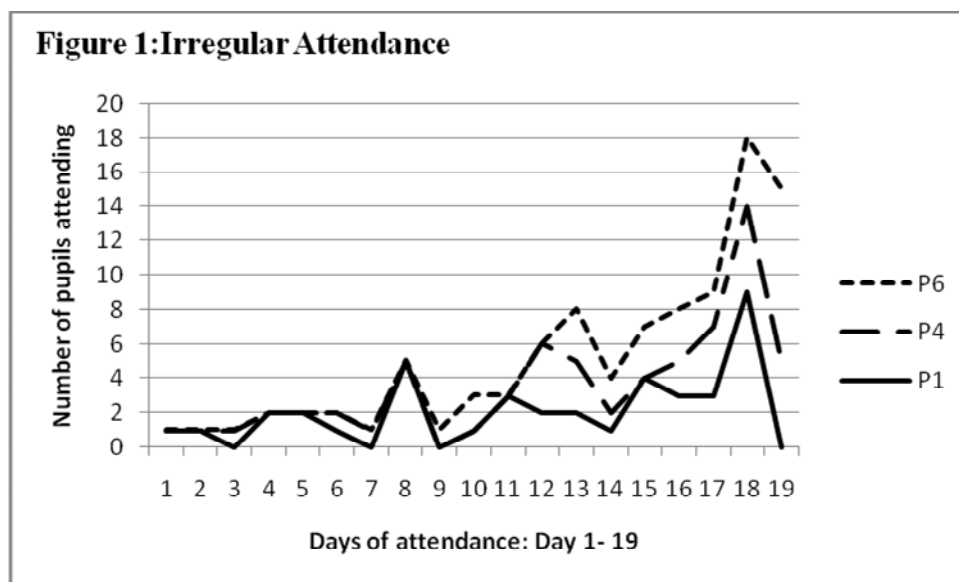
Other teachers in one school explained that absenteeism and lateness were punished through weeding. However, this method was found to have little impact pupils'

attendance and punctuality. The pupils complained because most cannot even weed as a result of hunger.

Interviews in one school revealed that the teachers sometimes mobilise pupils to march through the village as part of community sensitisation and to encourage school enrolment. In this school enrolment was particularly low. It was also observed that attendance during the month of the visit was comparatively stable and better than those observed in the other schools visited. The head teacher of this school explained that the stability in attendance is a consequence of their regular enrolment and retention drive activities.

In another school where the problem of attendance was very acute, the teachers explained that they sometimes organised community forums to draw attention to the importance of schooling. Teachers have also resolved to use Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings to talk to parents about the need to retain pupils at school. The schools leadership organise PTA meetings through the chief³ to ensure that all parents attend. The chief's authority is used to convene the meetings. The members of the school staff living in the community also engage opinion leaders and chiefs in discussions about how to ensure all pupils attend school regularly. The result has been that parents became more responsible in providing basic needs for children and pupils attend more regularly. The teachers explained that whatever was being observed was a dramatic improvement on what used to be the case. In that school attendance records as shown Figure 1 showed that most pupils were attending irregularly. In each class, only a few people were present for all 17 openings of the register for the month.

Figure 1: Irregular Attendance



As we examined the class register we noticed the problem of dropout. It was revealed that in one month one pupil had dropped out in primary one while eight and four pupils had dropped out in primary four and primary six respectively.

³ The chief is the traditional ruler who exercises authority in the community. As the executive head of the traditional administration, chiefs are revered and their influence in the community is unparalleled.

Caning is another measure used by teachers to control absenteeism. However, interviews with both teachers and pupils revealed that this crude method had both lost its value and was rather contributing to dropout. Some pupils intentionally absent themselves because of the fear of being caned at school. Some pupils claimed that because their teachers caned them often they had become used to being caned and they no longer feared the cane. Others who feared the cane simply stop attending school to avoid being caned by teachers. Therefore for some groups of children the cane was enough of a deterrent that encouraged pupils to attend regularly while for others the cane was no longer a deterrent to stop truancy and irregular attendance. For a third group caning was a directly contributing factor to dropping out of school rather than a deterrent.

In one school a teacher claimed that she was punctual to school because she wanted to serve as an example for pupils to emulate, but her attendance during the visit did not confirm her claims. It is important to note that the teacher in question was living in a quarters less than hundred metres away from the school compound. In that school, pupils went to morning assembly at 8:30am on the first day of visit. On the second day pupils were still at morning assembly at 9am when the school time table indicated that classes were supposed to have started at 8am.

2.6 Teaching methods

The methods and techniques used by teachers also constituted a problem. In order to cover for their teachers all but one pupil claimed that they understood lesson their teachers taught. However, all pupils interviewed could not remember one thing they learnt in school during the term. This was more perplexing because not even one pupil could remember a lesson taught even on the day of the interview. This reflects the teaching methods and techniques teachers were using for lesson delivery.

One pupil who complained about the teaching methods and techniques during an interview had the following set of complaints:

I don't understand the lessons because our teacher would not repeat anything. He would not explain again even if we say we don't understand. Teacher would always complain that we are not paying attention when he was teaching.

Previous research has established that schooling and teacher practices "seems to be couched in authoritarian terms" (Pryor & Ampiah, 2003:40). Our observations revealed that teachers only call pupils to answer questions but do not use any other child-centred teaching technique. Teachers do not use class discussions, group work, brainstorming or experimentation. In one class where a teacher was using an experiment to teach measurements, about ten pupils clustered around a bowl of water while the rest of the class sat without any chance of observing anything. One pupil used a broken water bottle to fill a gallon with water. The teacher then asked the whole class to sit at their individual places. She then explained with the following words:

So, you see, that is what we call measurement. How many bottles of water filled the gallon?

One pupil responded 'ten bottles' but another shouted 'eight'. Then another group of pupils burst out with a simultaneous shout of 'seven!' The teacher responded 'correct!'

then dismissed the pupils to go for break. Interviews with some pupils in that class during break time revealed that they did not understand the lesson.

In another class the teacher introduced the mathematics lesson with the words:

We have studied word problems. Therefore we are going to do a few exercises.
Take your books.

The teacher then wrote two exercises on the chalkboard. He went to sit by the teacher's table and asked the pupils to work in their exercise books. Occasionally, the teacher asked the pupils if they had not finished solving the problems. He began marking when some pupils submitted their exercise books. Towards the break time the teacher asked all pupils to ensure they submit their exercise books before it was time for break. All pupils obliged. After break time, the teacher (still sitting by the teacher's table) tried to explain the word problem to the pupils. He called pupils by name and to provide answers. He then concluded the lesson by asking the questions:

How many people got all correct? How many people got one correct? How many people got all wrong?

Interestingly, that was the only lesson the teacher taught for that day. These practices do not make schools appealing to pupils and could adversely affect pupils' attendance.

2.6.1 Chalkboard Management

In all the schools studied teachers were careless with blackboard organisation. In one school the primary one teacher's handwriting on the chalkboard was not legible even for us as adults. The previous work on the board had not been properly cleaned. Therefore the information on the chalkboard was a mixture of what was previously taught in the science lesson and those of the English lesson that was being taught. The teacher did not organise the work on the board. The writing was haphazardly distributed on the board. As a class one teacher one would have expected his writing to be bold, legible and orderly but that was not the case.

2.6.2. Pupils' involvement in lessons

The problem of teaching large classes did not exist in any of the schools studied but observations of classroom interactions during lessons revealed that pupils' engagement during lessons was not appreciable. In all the twelve classes observed, there was not one instance in which a pupil asked a question during lesson delivery. Teachers in primary one occasionally called some pupils to write on the chalkboard. Typically, teachers only called pupils to answer questions. Pupils were not engaged in hands-on activities, group work and class discussions or brainstorming activities that would ensure that they were actively engaged in lessons were all absent. It was therefore not surprising when some pupils explained that school could only become more interesting if classroom lessons were made interesting. Some school heads also agreed to that point and explained one thing contributing to pupils staying away from school was that classroom lessons were not interesting.

2.6.3 Teacher feedbacks to pupils

Teachers' feedback is essential in generating the social climate within which teaching and learning can take place. IRC (2007) notes that teachers can and do create a classroom climate that helps to support children's learning and also communicate life saving messages to children that can protect them from the threats of sexual or economic exploitation and other risks. UNESCO (2004) reported that both teachers and students should have a sense of comfort and belonging within any classroom. Teachers have a key role to play in creating such a welcoming environment for the students. It is their responsibility to value equally each student in the classroom and promote mutual respect amongst the members of the school community, helping them to overcome prejudice and discrimination. When children even come to classrooms without knowing the importance of schooling, teachers are expected to understand that their role is not confined to only content delivery but the education of children to appreciate the importance of education.

Interviews with pupils revealed that most were aware of the importance of schooling and wished to stay and complete education. The pupils were emphatic on the fact that they would prefer schooling to child labour activities and indicated that they were in school because of that preference. One pupil explained that she was aware that schooling "would be more lucrative in future in the near future." Another child explained that:

Learning is more important for future work. There may be demands for certificates for any future employment opportunities.

This was supported by one pupil who also explained that he would prefer schooling to paid work "because it would give a better future". As a result of those responses the concern was about why pupils were dropping out of school. One pupil explained that he would prefer paid work to schooling because of "financial difficulties" and because teachers were not teaching as expected.

In the classrooms studied we observed teachers used both verbal and physical assaults. The verbal assaults included abusive or discouraging words, remarks and phrases. Some of the negative remarks, which invariably incensed the pupils and made them unhappy, were expressions such as:

- Look at you ugly head,
- as for you I don't know what is wrong with you,
- are you normal?

These vulgar remarks did not improve the mood of pupils. Anytime a pupil received such vulgar feedback the class laughed and that further demoralised the child. Sometimes, teachers were so hostile to pupils and used expressions such as:

- I will stop teaching if you continue to talk,
- shut-up,
- sit down you fool

Those remarks did not inspire pupils to develop a positive self-image. Many of the pupils felt disgraced in the presence of their colleagues and friends. The insults made some

pupils timid, quiet and unwilling to make any further attempts at answering the teacher's questions during the lesson.

In one instance, the teacher called pupils by name and commented publicly on what has gone wrong with each pupil's work. In one post exercise discussion the teacher asked a pupil, called Kweku⁴, who was not paying attention and did not hear the instruction to read the word 'ten' on the board. Kweku instead started read the entire sentence. The teacher responded with insults:

Look at the big fool, Look at him. Don't you eat in the house?

Kweku, who had obviously not understood the insult, replied:

Yes sir, I have not eaten.

In response his mates jeered and laughed and Kweku became even more confused, timid and disturbed. The teacher instead of being remorse rather added more insults:

Look at him like a sheep. Sit down!

Kweku sat quietly and disorganised. It is obvious that this teacher was unable to create conducive atmosphere for promoting effective learning.

Some few encouraging remarks from teachers included a range of approval expressions such as:

- Excellent,
- good,
- well done,
- clap for that,
- yes, try again,
- yes, it's okay,
- brilliant.

Those remarks promoted positive self-image among pupils. Pupils were happy any time they received such feedback. Their faces glowed with joy and appreciation. It was observed in one class that the teacher interacted freely with all pupils and the class was very lively. The teacher was cheerful throughout the period of lesson delivery. She interspersed the English grammar lesson with songs that centred on the concept being studied. The lesson was in the form of poems and every concept was dramatised. Pupils were provided with opportunities to willingly contribute to the lesson. Yet the picture was not all fine. The teacher held a cane in her hand throughout the period of lesson delivery and she did not hesitate to use it when pupils got the answer wrong or did not pay attention.

Non-verbal feedback included written remarks in pupils' books and gestures and other forms of non-verbal communication cues. Written remarks were not negative or insulting except that they were scarcely written and summative – they did not clearly indicate what

⁴ Kweku is not the real name of the pupil. A pseudonym has been used to protect the identity of the pupil, school and teacher involved.

was wrong with the answer. For example, the comment: *re-work*, does not provide enough guidance for a pupil to identify what was wrong with the process used in answering a question. The pupil might have to engage in a process of self-tuition and peer tutoring over a period to arrive at the correct procedure or answer to the question.

2.6.4 Teacher attitudes to lessons and the use of instructional time

Observations in the school revealed that a major problem related to dropouts was teachers' attitudes to lessons and the use of instructional time. The misuse of time was a major problem in the schools. This issue has been identified in other research (Pryor & Ampiah, 2003; Quansah, 1997; Fobih, et al. 1999; Akyeampong, et al. 1999) as widespread but the scale we observed was shocking.

In one school it was observed on Tuesday that the lesson taught on the Thursday of the previous week was still on the chalkboard. The pupils explained that that was the only lesson which was taught on that Thursday. The pupils had not been taught any other lesson. As of 10:45am on Tuesday no lesson was taught to the same class. The class teacher reported to school at 10am. It was observed that in each school there was at least a class without a teacher on each day of the visit for the study. Those pupils would not find school interesting since they were left to play most of the time.

Other teachers who were present in the classrooms did not teach the required number of periods a day. Observations revealed that teachers do not teach more than two periods a day. It was observed in one school that all teachers taught only one lesson for that day before the first break after which the school gathered for dance and drama. When the classes resumed after the second break no lessons were taught in any of the classes. This waste of instructional time does not allow pupils to see the need to be in school each day. Interviews with pupils in that school asked the question:

What do you think the school should do to make school more interesting so you always want to come to school?

Pupils' responses to the question indicated that they were concerned about teachers' attitudes to work. Teacher practices that they did not like included:

- Teachers' punctuality
- Teacher absence from the classes
- Teachers not teaching while in class
- Teachers not giving adequate exercises
- Teachers' poor commitment to teaching
- Teachers' chats on the school veranda during instructional hours

Observations of pupils' exercises in the schools studied revealed that teachers do not give enough exercises to pupils. For example, observations of mathematics and English exercise books showed that the pupils did two exercises in the previous month even though those subjects were expected to have been taught each day.

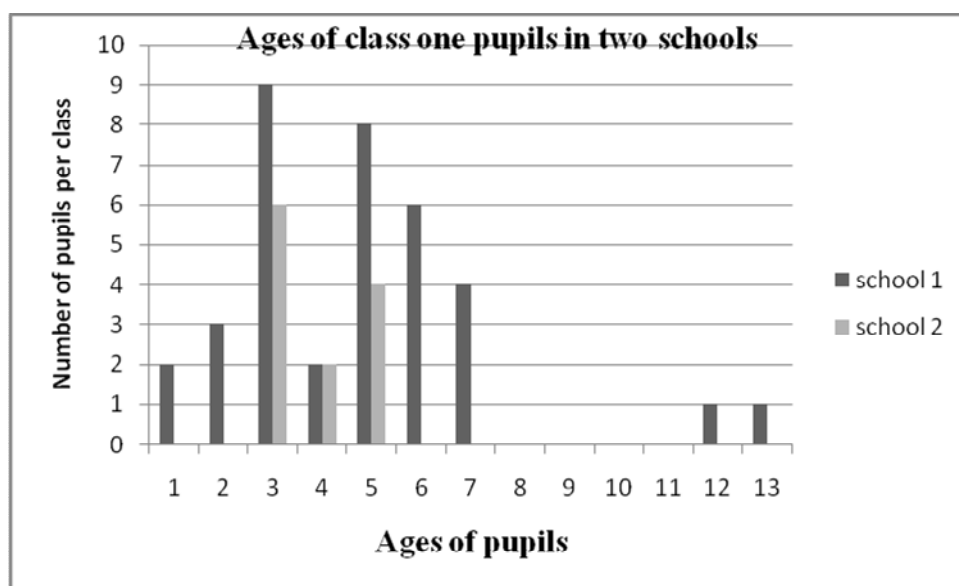
Examination of class registers revealed that in those schools, pupil / teacher ratios were within the acceptable norm of 1:20 for rural schools; even though it has been argued (Akyeampong et al, 2007:48) that the introduction of the capitation grant has created

conditions that might increase drop out, such as crowded classrooms and increased teacher workload as a result of rapid enrolment growth. Average class enrolments were around twenty or below. Therefore large classes were not a problem to the teachers which can affect the number of exercises they may be able to give. This apparent inactivity affects pupils' engagement in the classroom interactions.

2.6.5 Teacher interactions with over-age children

The phenomenon of over age enrolment was prevalent in all the schools visited. While extreme cases were attributable to the enrolment of child trafficking returnees⁵. Some of these children were brought to start schooling at age 25. In one school there were four child trafficking returnees in primary one who were advanced in age. Their ages were 14, 16, 17 and 25 years. However, the issue of over-age enrolment transcends the mere case of child trafficking returnees and also confirms evidence from the 2003 CWIQ survey which suggest that the incidence of late entry still persists and invites research. The analysis in Figure 2 presents the ages of pupils in primary one in two of the schools visited.

Figure 2: Ages of class one pupils in 2 schools



In the first school, out of 36 pupils enrolled in class one, only two pupils were aged six, the appropriate age for the class. Nine of the pupils were aged eight and eight pupils aged ten. In the same class were pupils aged 17 and 18. In the second school the youngest pupils in class one were aged eight while the eldest were aged ten. There was not a single child whose age was appropriate for the class. All twelve pupils in the class were over aged. In yet a third school, not shown in the graph, all the other eleven pupils in class one were aged eleven and above years. Therefore, defining over-age enrolment in such classroom settings, relative to teaching methods was quite problematic, but the acute nature of the problem was a major concern. Additionally, the case of the extremely over-

⁵ Child trafficking returnees refers to pupils who were reclaimed after they had been trafficked from the Winneba area to Yeji in particular. These victims were reclaimed by Non-Governmental Organisations and were enrolled in school mostly through the efforts of the Department of Social Welfare. They were later left to care for themselves after initial access.

aged particularly the child-trafficking-returnees demands that teachers develop special strategies to facilitate adaptation and adjustment. This was however, not the case as the issue of over-age enrolment did not influence organisation of teaching and learning in anyway. Teachers did teach the class as a homogeneous group. They did not design separate methodologies or even assignments for the heterogeneous groups. However, one teacher when asked how he taught the varied groups replied that they were all in the same class and the class had a syllabus which he had to follow so in class he taught them as one group, but after classes he organised extra classes for the over age children who had been rescued from child trafficking. That fact was confirmed through interviews with pupils. The teacher explained that he adopted the strategy out of the realisation that such pupils often felt embarrassed when they could not answer questions in the presence of the younger pupils.

Other teachers explained that they did not develop any special strategies for over-aged pupils because such children were more brilliant than the younger pupils. The practice impacts greatly on such pupils. It was, observed that over-aged pupils were passive during lesson delivery. Teachers did not even call them to answer questions. This social isolation or exclusion provides the basis for some of these pupils to drop out.

In one interview a teacher explained that he uses over-age pupils to maintain discipline during group work. The teacher assigns these pupils leadership roles in groups. When the teacher is out of the classroom, he assigns over-age pupils to supervise the class and to maintain discipline. It was observed that over-age pupils were required to supervise class exercises and assignments while the teacher went out to converse with other teachers who were also out of their various classrooms.

2.6.6 Teaching in multi-grade classes

Multi-grade teaching existed in some of the schools visited. Pupils in two or more different grade levels were combined in one class to be taught by one teacher at the same time. One multi-grade teacher was observed. It was observed that in practice the teacher did not have any strategy to adapt the teaching to the needs of the various grade levels. An interview with the teacher revealed that she used examples from the lower grade level to introduce lessons and progresses to give exercises based the syllabus for the higher grade level. The teacher claimed that the strategy worked because most of the primary five lessons were only building on the same concepts in primary four. The teacher explained that was an innovative way because the examples from the lower grade helped pupils in the higher grade to revise what they had been taught while it introduces new concepts to the lower grade.

However, in two separate lessons when the teacher was observed this innovation was not demonstrated. In both cases the topics for the lessons were selected from the higher grade level (primary five). The teacher's lesson notes did not indicate that the lesson was being taught to a multi-grade class. Similarly, the presentation did not make any distinction between the two grades. In addition the exercises and the summary notes did not show any differentiation. In an integrated science lesson on the topic, "energy" the teacher introduced the topic, and proceeded to teach the content merely by writing notes for pupils to copy. After the teacher had written the notes he read through and made children follow his reading. Then he instructed them to copy the notes into their notebooks. Interestingly, the majority of the children did not even have notebooks. Some were

observed copying into sheets of paper while others simply stared at the board because they had no books. As the teacher went round he merely insulted those children without books:

You see, your foolish parents, instead of buying you books they use their money for funeral clothes and funerals and your fathers drink and buy drinks for friends during funerals but they cannot buy you simple exercise books and pens.

Another facet of the problem of multi-grade teaching was that the teachers taught at most two lessons a day. The two days observation of lessons taught in each of the four schools revealed that teachers in the study taught at most two lessons. It was either English and mathematics or English and integrated science or social studies. Some few teachers combine mathematics and social studies or integrated science. Interviews with pupils confirmed our observations. This observation, no doubt confirms teachers' misuse of instructional hours and low work output, both being potential causes of lateness, irregular attendance and eventual dropout.

2.7 Identification and management of children at risk of dropping out

In response to the question on how teachers identify and manage children at risk of dropping out, teachers explained that the main means of identifying children at risk of dropping out of school is irregular attendance. Children who often absent themselves from school eventually stop attending altogether. While in some schools the pupils' attendance register showed a high level of irregular attendance with some children not attending school for a whole term, teachers still maintained that the problem they face is not one of drop out but seasonal migration⁶.

As a result teachers continue to mark pupils absent for over two months without identifying that these pupils had dropouts or were at risk of dropping out. The teachers explained that the pupils accompany their parents as part of seasonal migrations to farming villages or fishing expeditions and return after the season. When the pupils return, they were made to repeat the classes where they were prior to the seasonal migration. Even when the seasonal migration has become a cyclical and recurrent phenomenon, the teachers believed that those pupils were not at risk of dropping out. As a result teachers do not see any need to develop dropout prevention programmes for such pupils. This had helped to fuel pupils dropping out without the knowledge of teachers.

The second dynamic was the fact that teachers lived under the impression that parents, pupils and pull factors in the community were the causes of dropouts in schools. The teachers gave a lot of reasons ranging from parental neglect, teenage pregnancy, parental inability to provide basic needs (such as clothing, money and food as a result of financial difficulties), through child labour and fostering to child trafficking as the reasons for dropout. Other reasons teachers outlined include single parenting and peer influences. Interviews revealed that some pupils were living with unemployed parents who could hardly provide any of their basic needs. It was also found out that some pupils were engaged in child labour either to fend for themselves or as a way of supporting their

⁶ Seasonal migration is the practice where pupils migrate with parents or guardian to farming or fishing villages for a period of time. They return when the mission is completed only to go back after some time. Some children stay away from school for a whole term through this kind of migration. It was observed in one school that a pupil reported to school for only five times in two school terms.

education and the family's budget. The interesting thing was that those pupils were in the schools. It was therefore difficult to conclude that the factors listed by the teachers were to be taken for granted.

The third dynamic in teacher understandings of drop outs was the claim that it is related to physical conditions within the environment. For example, teachers claimed that the distances pupils have to travel to school each day were a major contributor to drop out rates. In fact, interviews revealed that some pupils travelled over five kilometres to get to school. Indeed, one pupil explained in an interview session that she leaves home at 6:30am in order to get to school by 7:30am.

2.7.1 Teacher awareness of dropout rates among pupils

After an analysis of class six pupils registers from when the pupils were in class one, interviews with teachers revealed that the teachers were not aware of dropout rates among their pupils. In one school it was revealed that only one out of the original 14 pupils who started primary one was present in primary six even though enrolment had increased to 17. In another primary six class, it was noticed that only two of the 19 pupils who had been in primary four were present in primary six. These statistics meant that the class had lost 17 pupils between primary four and primary six alone. The trend is worrying but the teachers were not aware of those developments. They expressed surprise and appeared shocked at the revelation. However, the one girl who was present was able to tell the stories of where those other children were. She gave vivid accounts of when they left school, why they stopped schooling and what they do now.

The examination of the class registers in another school revealed that nine out of 18 girls who enrolled in primary one were not in primary two. It was also observed that only ten out of 28 boys who had enrolled in primary one were present in primary two. Interestingly, the population of boys in that class had increased to thirty pupils. Again, it was observed that only eight of the original 46 pupils who enrolled in primary one were present in primary five at the time of the school visits. This meant that the school had lost 38 pupils between primary one and primary five. The population of the class had also reduced from thirty in primary two to 16 in primary five. This also meant that even between primary two and primary five, the school had lost 14 pupils. Again, the teachers in that school were not aware of these developments but the pupils who originally started class one in that class were aware of the changing patterns of enrolment. This throws doubt on teachers' awareness and commitments regarding social responsibilities to school communities and the pupils they teach.

Interviews and observations in the public schools revealed that some teachers did not even know when some pupils absent themselves. This was largely because the teachers do not even sit in the classrooms to interact with the pupils. In one class the teacher indicated that all pupils were present that day. However, checks from the class using the attendance register revealed that five pupils were absent. This kind of situation is very serious and must be addressed especially when the teacher had already marked the register indicating that all pupils were present.

2.7.2 Teacher awareness of pupils' problems and the cause of absenteeism

Teachers were not aware of particular reasons why those not attending school regularly have that habit. Interviews with pupils and teachers revealed a gap between the reasons pupils gave for absenteeism and dropping out and those given by teachers. Pupils gave two main reasons for absenteeism. The reasons were illness and teacher practices they did not like in the school. All pupils who admitted being absent from school for a number of times cited ill health as one of the reasons why they were absent. The teacher practices pupils cited included teacher absenteeism, caning and refusal to teach even when in school. Caning was particularly unpopular with pupils.

Teachers held the view that pupils do not stay away from school because of what happen in school or teacher practices in the school. Only two teachers agreed that pupils sometimes stay away from school because of the fear of the caning they may receive for reporting late. The teachers interviewed also believed that pupils stay away from school for reasons other than illness. Those reasons include migration and parental inability to provide basic needs such as exercise books, uniforms, food. Teachers believed that some pupils were attending irregularly because it is a custom among their group of friends to do so. The education level of parents is also cited. The teachers claimed that parental education levels were low in the schools' communities and as such the parents did not appreciate the value for education. This lack of appreciation is transferred to the next generation.

Another reason was the failure of schools to respect the religious rights of pupils. In one faith-based school, the head teacher narrated an incidence of dropout involving a pupil from another faith who had stopped school because he thought his religious right were not being respected. This raises questions about religion and human rights in schools.

2.8 Medical Attention for Sick Pupils

It was revealed that pupils usually report sick in and outside school. Pupils who engaged in unauthorised absenteeism because of sickness were usually doubted by their teachers. They were punished anyway unless there was some evidence of convalescence. As a result, the pupils come to school to report sick. In such circumstances, there were designated teachers who administer drugs. These teachers received no professional training in the administration of drugs. The common sicknesses were stomach-ache and headache. Interviews revealed that such problems were usually related to hunger.

Following complaints, some head teachers have directed that the pupils should be observed and allowed to go home for parental attention. In the private school, pupils who report sick were referred to a clinic affiliated to the school which is also a subsidiary of the faith based organisation which established the school. The clinic is about one kilometre away from the school. Alternatively, there were arrangements for a medical officer from the health facility to conduct routine check-ups on pupils. Therefore, pupils who were ill report to school once they were strong and could walk.

3. Conclusions

Teachers' classroom interactions with pupils' have a range of impacts on exclusion or retention after initial access. Teacher absenteeism, lateness and use of corporal punishment and violence against pupils have all contributed to the incidence of dropout in basic schools. Other factors contributing to dropout include misuse of instructional hours, inadequate teaching and poor pedagogy.

Teachers' lack of strategies for identifying the signs of dropping out of school and teaching of heterogeneous age groups as if they were homogeneous have all contributed to making the classroom unpleasant and not interesting for most children to continue to want to remain in school. There was little evidence that teacher training and continuous professional development (CPD) has prepared teachers to recognise vulnerability to drop out and strategies to intervene constructively.

Paucity of record keeping, poor head teacher supervision of teacher attendance and output of work have all contributed to exacerbate school management problems such that the use of school records for decision making is unreliable and ineffective. Teacher attendance records, records of administration of corporal punishment, school log book, and pupils' registers are all poorly and inappropriately kept. Greater priority must be put on ensuring accurate record keeping. This will help teachers, schools and the Ministry of Education conduct research, monitor attainment and implement policy more effectively.

Teacher practices, attitudes and responses to problems of attendance and dropout have implications for teacher education policy and practice. Unacceptable teacher practices such as absenteeism; irregular attendance and lateness; poor record keeping and teacher misuse of instructional hours all reveal gaps and weaknesses in educational monitoring. There is therefore the urgent need for the MOE and the GES to strengthen monitoring of schools and to ensure proper record keeping to provide reliable information for decision making. Teacher attitudes to classroom interactions and the indiscriminate use of corporal punishment are pointers to gaps in teacher training and continuous professional teacher development. Further research is required to understand teacher needs for professional development and behaviour modification techniques.

Lessons from the private school where the rights of Muslim pupils were respected should be emulated by the public schools. Public schools should also adopt the private schools' counselling and collaboration strategies for dealing with drop-ins. Community sensitisation on enrolment and retention drive practices should be encouraged in public schools.

A shift in the burden of responsibility for regular attendance, progression and drop outs from children and families to teachers is required. Teachers need to be held accountable for their actions, they need to show that they are worthy of the salaries and status that their position affords. They must act as examples of good behaviour for children and families to encourage hard work, regular punctual attendance and excellence in education.

4. Policy recommendations

- The Ghana government policy on corporal punishment in public basic schools should be reviewed and more stringent sanctions applied for its abuse.
- There is a need to introduce the teaching of alternative behaviour modification techniques in the curriculum of colleges of education to provide teachers alternative methods of dealing with disciplinary problems.
- The GES should provide teacher training and continuous professional development (CPD) that can prepare teachers to recognise vulnerability to drop out and strategies to intervene constructively.
- For effective planning and implementation of educational programmes, the MOE should strengthen its monitoring mechanisms at all levels to ensure accurate record keeping in schools.
- The Ghana Government White Paper recommendation that guidance and counselling services be introduced in schools should be implemented and enforced.

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Report summary:

This paper provides insights about the specific impact teachers' actions and attitudes can have on access to schooling. The paper reports how teachers' irregular attendance, lateness and absenteeism as well as misuse of instructional hours and indiscriminate use of corporal punishment contribute to pupils' irregular attendance and dropping out. It also reports how poor supervision by head teachers contribute to irregular teacher attendance, punctuality and absenteeism, and how these in turn impacted negatively on pupils' access to schooling. The study also identifies gaps in research around teacher contribution to children dropping out of school and suggests how further research could address some of these.

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