



AFRICA
EDUCATION WATCH

A STUDY INTO THE EFFECTS OF PRIVATIZATION OF EDUCATION ON ACCESS AND EXCLUSION IN RURAL AREAS, SLUMS AND INNER CITIES, AND RESILIENCY OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN EMERGENCIES

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ACRONYMS

COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease of 2019
GNACOPS	Ghana National Council of Private Schools
GSFP	Ghana School Feeding Programme
JHS	Junior High School
LCPS	Low-Cost Private Schools
MMDA	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The right of every child to education is a human right which requires to be promoted. As a consequent, Article 25(1) of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana stipulates that, “all persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities and with a view to achieving the full realization of that right. It is therefore a legal duty for, especially the state and other key-stakeholders to ensure the realization of educational rights through the availability of effective physical infrastructure for quality education for all children irrespective of their geographical location. Parallel to this is the Article 38 (3.a), which further stipulates that all efforts should be made to make education in Ghana gradually universal and progressively free to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Nonetheless, many Ghanaian parents are unable to access free public schools for their children either because they are located out of reach, overcrowded, or fail to deliver an expected level of quality. Studies have shown that 34,123 (i.e. 45.1%) out of the 75,740 schools in the country, during the 2017/2018 academic year were privately owned with, especially “Low cost” ones dotted around rural, slums, and inner-cities. Recent information from the Ghana National Council of Private Schools (GNACOPS), however, reveals that the 10-month closure of schools in 2020 as a result of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic had led to the collapse of over 222 private schools. Drawing on qualitative data from randomly selected ten (10) out of the 222 closed Low Cost Private Schools (LCPS), this study sought to critically assess the effects of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the provision of education to the pupils in these locations and their level of resilience.

The purposive sampling technique was deployed in the selection of the teachers, parents, and pupils in each district linked to the collapsed school for each of the ten (10) selected LCPSs in this study. In all, thirty-three participants were selected for the study based on their willingness to participate in the study. The data collected was then organised thematically to answer the objectives of the study qualitatively.

The study revealed that the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the attendant mandatory closure of schools have caused many of the LCPS to collapse, resulting in a significant number of children in these communities being forced to drop out of school. The study also revealed that many of these LCPS were/are not resilient enough to face any emergency, mainly due to the very low amount of fees they charge, coupled with the late or non-payment of the fees by parents. The study finds that, although these school dropouts and their parents wish to re-enrol in other schools to continue with their education, it has not been possible for them due to the non-availability of viable alternatives, i.e. public basic schools in their communities.

The report therefore recommends that Government should increase investments in the basic education sector, by building more basic schools, especially in rural areas, slums, and inner-cities; there should be kindergartens attached to all public basic schools in the country; a crash programme to be instituted by the government to ensure that students affected by the collapse of LCPS are immediately re-enrolled to continue with their education, and the building of resilience into our education system, through the introduction of remote learning programmes, particularly, for schools located in rural areas, slums and inner-cities in the country.

1.0 INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

Economic growth has conventionally been attributed to the accumulation of capital (both human and physical) and increased productivity arising from technological innovation¹. Education, in this direction, is expected to increase human capital which in turn increases labour productivity and culminate in a higher equilibrium level of output of a country. The neoclassical, as well as endogenous growth theorists, claim that human capital causes a positive effect on the output. Indeed human capital has been recognized to play a major role in explaining differences in productivity and inequality among nations², if effectively harnessed through education. Formal education in Ghana can be traced to the pre-independence era. Since then, formal education in Ghana has undergone a lot of reforms, all aimed at increasing enrolment, retention, and performance among others. Some of these reforms included but not limited to the 1987 Educational Reforms and the 2002 review of the Educational Reforms.

The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana in Article 38 (3.a) stipulates that all efforts should be made to make education in Ghana gradually universal and progressively free. Also, SDG 4 specifically calls for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Various Governments in Ghana since the beginning of the Fourth Republic have shown commitments in ensuring that this provision in the constitution is met both at the basic and secondary levels of education. Despite these commitments, the goal of providing quality education for all children, and thus specifically to meet Targets 4.1 and 4.2 of SDG 4³, remains unachieved. Many Ghanaian parents are unable to access free public schools (despite all the hidden costs) for their children either because they are located out of reach, overcrowded, or fail to deliver an expected level of quality.

The foregoing thus bring the private sector into the equation, by trying to fill the apparent space created and thus bridge the education divide. The role of the private sector in the provision of education therefore cannot be over-emphasized. Private participation in education has increased over the years across the world, serving all types of communities—from high-income to low-income families⁴. Governments in most cases remain the main financier of education (at least of primary and secondary education), though in many countries private agents deliver a sizable share of education. Some governments also partner with the private sector to deliver quality education to its pupils.

Literature on private participation in education shows that private provision has increased enrolment in rural areas and among low-income households at a very low cost⁵. It is, for instance, reported that 34,123 (i.e. 45.1%) out of the 75,740 schools in the country, during the 2017/2018 academic year, were privately owned⁶. The underlining assumption is that the inability of the government to provide educational services (e.g. Basic Education) for the population living in the rural areas, slums, and inner cities has led to the establishment of low-cost private schools (LCPS) to serve these areas. These communities can therefore be termed as educationally deprived or underserved communities. In the circumstances where parents found themselves deprived or underserved by public schools for their children, LCPS have become a relevant and viable alternative, especially where they desire some level of quality education and yet are financially incapable of affording other private schools. LCPS owners in Ghana, like any other developing country, are faced with many challenges in their line of work; ranging from inadequate funds, poor infrastructure to poor teacher quality among others, even in normal times⁷.

¹ Abotsi and Iyavarakul (2015)

² Becker (1964) and Schultz (1981)

³ United Nations (2017)

⁴ Patrinos, Barrera-Orsorio and Guáqueta (2009)

⁵ Andrabi, Das and Khwajaand (2006); Patrinos, Barrera-Orsorio and Guáqueta (2009)

⁶ Ghana Education Sector Annual Review (2018)

⁷ Nsiah-Peprah (2004)

Evidence shows that in times of crisis, private school enrolments decline substantially, with some students leaving private to public schools, and others delaying entry or dropping out⁸. For example, the recent outbreak of COVID 19 pandemic drastically affected the teaching and learning process in especially private schools located within deprived communities⁹. The Government of Ghana, rightly and in response to these global containment efforts, announced an indefinite closure of all schools, which took effect from 16th March, 2020. An estimated 49 percent of private school students worldwide were affected by full school closures exceeding six months compared to 31 percent of public-school students according to UNESCO data¹⁰. This has a likely adverse effect on the education of children from households at the bottom of the pyramid, who are more likely to attend low-cost private schools (LCPS) than high fee-paying private schools.

The switch of students from private to public schools will put enormous strain on public schools in terms of infrastructure and human resources. In Ghana, one of the main drivers of private participation in the provision of education is the low quality of public basic education due to inadequate/inefficient resourcing of basic education, especially along the rural-urban divide. Over the past decade, Ghana has witnessed strong growth in the number of private schools due to high demand, with a marginal increase in public schools. The Ghana National Council of Private Schools (GNACOPS) indicates that the 10-month closure of schools in 2020 led to the collapse of over 222 private schools¹¹. This is likely to have damning consequences on the education of pupils in especially deprived or underserved communities where LCPS mostly exist. This study was therefore undertaken to critically assess the effects of the privatisation of education on access and exclusion in deprived and underserved communities, and the resilience of private schools in emergencies. It specifically focused on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the provision of education to children in deprived and underserved communities and the resiliency of LCPS in these communities.

Mama Felicia Child Care Center - A Collapsed LCPS in Bortianor in the Ga South District.



This school did not charge school fees, but parents had to pay GHC 3.00 for feeding daily. Before the COVID-19 break, about half of the student population were not paying the feeding fee, which made the running of the school difficult. The student population dropped drastically when schools reopened, forcing the school to shutdown.

⁸ Alam and Tiwari (2021)

⁹ Op. cit.

¹⁰ Op. cit.

¹¹ Asala (2021)

The study is intended to gather evidence on the effects of privatization of education on access and exclusion in rural areas, slums, and inner cities to feed into the Education Spike Campaign. This campaign is aimed at engaging the government on innovative policy options to consider in ensuring every Ghanaian child, irrespective of geography, has access to free quality public basic education, especially with the impact of COVID-19 on low-cost private schools and public basic education.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were therefore posed to guide the conduct of the study, as well as to meet its objective:

1. What accounts for the growth of LCPS in the deprived and underserved communities in Ghana?
2. What is the effect of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the provision of education in LCPS?
3. What is the effect of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic on enrolment/re-enrolment of students in LCPS?
4. What is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on access to education for children in deprived and underserved communities where LCPS abounds?
5. How can Government and Stakeholders improve upon the re-enrolment (access), teaching and learning (quality) for affected children in deprived and underserved communities?

2.0 METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was adopted in the data collection and analysis to gain in-depth understanding on the subject matter from individuals with lived experiences. This approach enriched the quality of data collected as it offered the advantage of shedding light on the primary motivations and reasons for attitudes and behaviours and helped to understand how individuals interpret the happenings around them and their experiences. The approach also provided insight into the settings of the problem and helped to generate ideas for the study¹².

2.1 SAMPLING AND SAMPLE SIZE

The study was carried out in the Ga South, Awutu Senya East, Suhum and Akuapem North Districts in Ghana. Using the 222 collapsed LCPSs as sample frame, ten (10) schools were selected within the target districts by employing the purposive sampling technique. The same sampling technique was deployed in the selection of the teachers, parents, and pupils in each district linked to the collapsed school for each of the ten (10) selected LCPS in this study. In all, thirty-three (33) participants, including six (6) school owners, seven (7) teachers of the collapsed schools, ten (10) pupils from the collapsed schools, ten (10) parents of students of the collapsed schools were sampled and interviewed. All the thirty-three participants for the study were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study. Permission was sought from Parents, to use images captured during the research (of them and their children) where necessary in the report. Some owners of LCPS also agreed that the names of their schools could be referred to in the report, where applicable.

2.2 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

For the data collection, a simple interview guide of semi-structured questions with relevant probes was deployed to collect in-depth information from each sample unit. The participants were informed to withdraw at any point in time they feel like doing so during the interview. All the interviews were recorded with permission from the participants, transcribed, and further grouped according to the objectives of the study. The data was then organised thematically to answer the objectives of the study qualitatively.

¹² Bryman (2004)

3.0 FINDINGS

This section presents the key findings of the study, resulting from the analyses of the data collected. The findings are organised under subsections reflecting the research questions that were adopted to guide the conduct of the study. The findings are presented together with the discussions thereof and are followed by specific cases, providing an empirical description of the settings for the findings.

3.1 REASONS FOR THE GROWTH OF LCPS IN DEPRIVED COMMUNITIES IN GHANA

Analysis of the data collected for the study revealed that the major reason for the growth, over time, of LCPS is either the complete absence or an inadequate number of public basic schools in slums and rural settlements in the country. It also became evident from the data analysis that there are both supply and demand sides to the establishment and growth of LCPS in these deprived or underserved communities. From the supply side, many of the owners of the LCPS selected for the study did indicate that the main reason behind their decision to establish their schools was the lack of educational opportunities for children in these areas. Some indicated that they established their schools in order to prevent children from walking/travelling long distances before they get to school. The foregoing is evident by the decision of some of the owners of the LCPS not to charge school fees, but instead charge parents a daily feeding fee of about GHS 2.00 to GHC 5.00.

On the demand side, parents indicated that they chose to send their children to these LCPS mainly because of the absence of any publicly run basic schools in their localities, and also because they do not have the financial wherewithal to send their children to the other private schools around.

These other private schools are relatively well established, but expensive, charging an average of GHC 600/term, an amount well beyond the means of many low income earners. The study also showed that many of the parents chose LCPS for their children because these schools took very good care of the students under their control. They also claimed that the teachers in these schools were better supervised, taught well and had more time for individual students during lessons. They added that the effectiveness of teaching in these schools was evident in the academic attainment and performance of their children. It is clear from the foregoing that parents are not interested in just the establishment of schools in their communities, but schools that will provide quality education for their children and are also affordable.

Analysis of the findings presented above reveals that the common thread that converges the interests of the supply and demand sides is the absence of quality public schools in these communities. The second issue is the affordability of alternative avenues from the demand side, which is being met by the supply side. The LCPS were considered by parents in these underserved communities to be offering relatively quality education at a very affordable cost to them, thus their desire to send their children to such schools. The following case vividly depicts the findings so far presented.

Case 1: One of the parents who participated in the study, apart from stating that LCPS was the only school in the community and seeking enrolment in a public school meant her children would be commuting to school every day over a long distance thus could not afford the cost of transportation involved, stated the following, in support of her decision to send her children to an LCPS:



Four of the children are of school going age, but are home because their mother cannot afford the daily GHC 3.00 feeding fee each day for each child in the LCPS they attended in the area. She says she would have enrolled her children in a public basic school if the community had one.

'...The school was famous for churning out good academic records. The teaching and learning process was well structured, and the teachers were good handlers of the children, which resulted in the positive academic records of pupils. That is why I decided to send them there'.

3.2 EFFECTS OF THE EMERGENCE OF COVID-19 ON THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION IN LCPS

The study revealed that many of the LCPS were unable to reopen after schools were compelled to close down due to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to some owners of the LCPS, their schools recorded very low turnouts after the reopening and thus had to close down after a while. It was evident from the data analysis that many of the LCPS were already facing challenges of a financial kind prior to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, however, these challenges were exacerbated by the pandemic and its attendant closure of schools, therefore leading to the decision being taken to close them down.

All the owners of the closed-down LCPS, who were interviewed during the study, attributed the collapse of their schools to inadequate

funds to run them. Some of the expenditures they could not sustain incurring included payment of teachers' salaries, SSNIT contributions, rent on school buildings, and the provision of teaching and learning materials. The owners also claimed that most of the parents owed the schools at the time of closure, and coupled with the fact that the schools recorded very low turnouts after reopening, they were unable to meet their financial obligations, leading to their eventual close down. The study also showed that some parents were either not paying the fees of their children in the LCPS or were late or irregular in paying, which affected the ability of the owners to also pay their teachers regularly and on time too, especially during the COVID-19 induced school closure. This led to some of the teachers quitting their job to go and look for employment opportunities elsewhere; in many cases out of the communities.

Ebsga Preparatory and JHS – A Collapsed LCPS in Kasoa CP Down in the Awutu Senya East District.



This school collapsed mainly due to COVID-19 induced hardships. The proprietor is repurposing the classrooms into single and chamber and hall rooms for rent.

The following are typical cases to support the findings presented above:

Case 2: An owner of a collapsed LCPS in Nankese Amanfrom (Royal School Complex), near Suhum in the Eastern Region, when interviewed on the above subject, said the following:

‘We had some challenges prior to COVID-19, mostly financial, but during school closures as a result of COVID, we were unable to support our teaching and non-teaching staff in terms of the payment of salaries. Most of them moved out of town to find other jobs to sustain themselves. Some are still not working, but few of them are trying to do something on their own. Due to the lack of support to teachers during the closure of schools, some teachers resorted to sending messages to parents asking them to re-enrol their wards elsewhere when schools reopened, which we found out too late. These messages resonated well with parents, and it reflected in the fewer numbers recorded after reopening. If not for the closure of schools due to COVID-19, students would not have stayed home that long, and parents would not have been overly constrained financially as a result of the lockdown and general harsh conditions emanating from the emergence of COVID. Even before school closures, a lot of parents had not paid the fees of their wards, so situations only got worse’.

Case 3: The following is captured from a female owner of another collapsed LCPS in Akorabo; a rural setting also near Suhum:

'The major constraint leading to the collapse of my school was the payment of teachers' pension contributions. This community lack teachers , and those that come usually do not stay; some leave after just a term, but expect their pension contributions to be paid; which was a huge financial difficulty considering the low-income rate at which fees were charged. In the wake of all these, COVID-19 struck leading to the closure of schools. Sustaining the school and paying teachers with no source of income became very challenging. After reopening, only a handful of students returned, apparently because they realized most of my teachers had left the town during the school closure period. I was left with a close-to-no option than to collapse the school'.

The findings, in respect of the effects of the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic of provision of education by LCPS, especially on the reasons behind the decision of many of the owners to collapse their schools, were corroborated by other stakeholders; particularly teachers and parents. Though the parents interviewed are not sure of the exact reason for the closure of the LCPS, they believed the long break due to the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic could have triggered it. Parents and teachers attributed the low re-enrolment of pupils and high teacher attrition to the worsening financial situation of the school owners, leading to the complete closure of these schools. The teachers were not paid during the 10-month school closure and had to leave in search of other job opportunities elsewhere. The study lends credence to the position of Education Spike that, public schools, by virtue of being financed by the tax payer, are more resilient to financial shocks, and offer a better insurance for the right to basic education and the labour rights of teachers than private schools.

3.3 EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON RE-ENROLMENT OF STUDENTS IN LCPS

Many children have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent collapse of the schools they used to attend. In all, the total population of pupils affected by the closure of the six (6) schools that were sampled to be part of the study is estimated to be 1,026. These were pupils who were previously enrolled in these LCPS and had to seek admission or re-enrol elsewhere, or stay home due to the closure of their schools when schools re-opened after the COVID-19 induced school closure. Considering the fact that about 222 of such schools, nationwide, have collapsed, an extrapolation of the above estimates to the 222 schools means that the education of a significant number of children in the country have been seriously affected by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resultant compulsory closure of schools.

Although many of the owners of the LCPS sampled claimed that most of their former students had managed to re-enrol in other nearby private or public schools, it was also evident that many of them have now become dropouts for various reasons. Some of the parents who participated in the study confirmed that their children dropped out of school due to the closure of the school as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is because, when students were asked to return to school after the long closure, most of them in the LCPS did not return to their former schools, as they had been withdrawn by their parents. Owing to the reduced student population in these LCPS, they had no option than to close down.

Though some of these dropped-out students have been trying to re-enrol in other schools, they have not yet been successful. For instance, some of the parents claimed that they made efforts to re-enrol their children in public schools in other communities, but had to abandon the move due to the cost of transportation involved in such a move.

The parents claimed that due to financial constraints, and their inability to foot the daily transportation bill, they were unable to re-enrol their children in other schools. They claimed that they did not face any challenge re-enrolling their wards in other schools apart from the financial difficulties.

From the data analysis, two reasons were provided by the children, which according to them led to their inability to re-enrol in another school after the closure of their previous schools. The first and common reason was the lack of finance on the part of their parents to re-enrol them in other private schools, which according to them were more expensive than their previous schools. The second reason was the absence of public schools in their communities. It also emerged from the study that more of the students of the collapsed LCPS who re-enrolled in other schools did so in public than private schools. This was attributed to the School Feeding programme in those public basic schools, and the fact that the private schools still operating are relatively expensive and thus beyond the means of the parents.

Four Siblings of an unemployed father and a mother who sells used clothing in a kiosk which doubles as their home.

These siblings are all not enrolled in school at the moment. The eldest is nine (9) and the youngest is three (3) years of age. Due to the family's poor financial situation, parents are considering enrolling them in a public basic school because they cannot afford the private schools in the area. The nearest public school is about eight (8) miles away and the parents cannot afford transportation fare to and from school everyday; and the children are too young to walk for 1:30hrs to the nearest school.



The following cases support the findings presented under this subsection:

Case 4: One of the parents interviewed stated as follows:

YES. I tried to enrol my wards in another school, but I have not been able to due to financial constraints.

Case 5: A child of school-going age, who lives at Kasoa CP and was a participant in the study indicated:

I was a student at Aim High International School but after the COVID lockdown, we didn't go back to school. They stopped operating the school and my mother re-enrolled me in Blue Print Preparatory School but she couldn't pay the fees so I dropped out. I was sent home for school fees and I didn't go back again. My mother said she couldn't pay my fees anymore

3.4 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN DEPRIVED COMMUNITIES IN GHANA

The COVID-19 pandemic and its attendant compulsory closure of schools has impacted negatively on access to education for children in rural, slums, and inner-city communities in the country. Some of these communities have been left with no educational facilities for children to access, resulting in many of them dropping out of school. Other communities have experienced a significant reduction in the number of schools available for children to enrol in. This has led to pressure being mounted on the few schools that are remaining (especially the public basic schools), to absorb all the students thrown out by the collapse of the LCPS. It has for instance led to congestion in these public basic schools. This is evident in an Africa Education Watch Education Spike Documentary¹³ on the collapse of private schools, as a result of the COVID- 19 pandemic, and its impact on school re-entry. The report showed a very congested JHS 2 classroom (86 students in the classroom) in Umraniya Islamic Basic School in Tuba in the Ga South District.

Umraniya Islamic Basic School- Tuba in The Ga South District.



This is the JHS 2 Classroom at the time of reopening this year (i.e., in the first week). There were 86 students in that class alone.

¹³ Africa Education Watch Documentary; October, 2021

Many of the children interviewed claimed that the collapse of schools in their communities have not only impeded their access to education, but also their academic attainments; as they have almost forgotten everything they were taught in school before their schools were closed down. Some of them were not happy about the long period they spent at home without schooling. They lamented that being in the house every day without schooling was affecting their future, as their inability to attend school will prevent them from getting better jobs in the future. This apparently leaves them in a disadvantaged position, relative to their colleagues in other communities who have access to regular and quality education.

Although some parents were able to re-enrol their children, the zeal of these children towards education is not the best now, as it has dropped compared with the pre-COVID-19 pandemic. Some parents indicated that the academic performance of their children have declined since changing schools, while others reported that their children complained about their new schools, claiming that teaching in their new schools is not as good as their previous ones. It is obvious from the foregoing that the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the attendant compulsory closure of schools, leading to the permanent close down of some LCPS in deprived communities have worsened access to education in these communities.

The following cases are presented in support of the findings discussed above:

Case 6: A parent participant in the study did indicate the following in response to her ability to re-enrol her children in school after the collapse of their previous school, which happened to be an LCPS:

I was able to enrol all of them initially, but they stopped attending after a while due to financial constraints... My children have not had access to education since the collapse of their school. Before COVID, their academic performances were good, but the collapse of the school has really affected them, especially the elderly ones. I intend to take them back to school to continue their education, but due to my current financial constraints, I have been unable to, so any support in that regard will be very significant to their future. Unfortunately, there is no public school close by, so if the government provides a school in this community, it will greatly impact the educational lives of children and reduce the financial burden on parents in catering for their children.

Case 7: The following is the response of a young boy, who was a participant in the study:

I was a student at Aim High International School but after the COVID lockdown, we didn't go back to school. They stopped operating the school and my mother re-enrolled me in Blue Print Preparatory School but she couldn't pay the fees so I dropped out... Financial problems; I was sent home for school fees and I didn't go back again. My mother said she couldn't pay my fees anymore. I now spend my days at the Game Centre in my area with other boys who also don't attend school. This has impeded my academic progress. I have forgotten everything I was taught in school. I would love to go back to school.



Her daughter of school going age (middle) has not returned to school since the COVID-19 closure in 2020. This mother hawks in the Kasoa toll-booth traffic and has been saving for the past nine (9) months to try re-enroll her daughter in another Private school as her former school has collapsed. While she saves to re-enroll her, she says if there was a public basic school in the community, her daughter would not have dropped out of school.

3.5 IMPROVING RE-ENROLMENT OF STUDENTS AND THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION DELIVERY FOR STUDENTS IN LCPS AFFECTED BY COVID-19

On the issue of what can be done to improve the re-enrolment of students, who have been affected by the closure of LCPS as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, all the participants in the study called for government intervention. For instance, all the students who participated in the study called on the government to build public schools in their communities to benefit them, especially children whose parents cannot afford to send them to private schools. The following case represents the voices of the students who participated in the study and clearly depict their views on the above subject.

Case 8: The following was stated by a young boy who used to attend a collapsed LCPS in Tuba, in the Ga South District:

The government should come and build a public school in the community so that the children in the area whose parents do not have money can also attend. Some of the private schools here are expensive, and the others too do not teach well. There is no public school here; the nearest is some 5-8 miles away. If the government provides a school in this community, it will greatly impact the educational lives of children and reduce the financial burden on parents in catering for their children.

Parents, on the other hand, were of the view that government should provide financial support for these LCPS to prevent their collapse, especially during periods of disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic. They acknowledged that many factors accounted for the collapse of those LCPS, but believed the effects of the pandemic on them could have been minimised if they were supported financially. They also urged the government to build a public school in each community to reduce the dependence on LCPS in deprived or underserved communities in the country. The following case vividly depicts the view of the parents in this direction.

Case 9: A parent, in response to his views about what should be done to minimise the impact of the pandemic and the subsequent collapse of some LCPS on the education of the affected students and improve on access to education in deprived communities, stated:

I strongly believe that if we get a public basic school in this community, it will reduce the dependence on Low-Cost Private Schools and relieve parents of financial burden with respect to the education of their wards. A lot of parents I know will readily take their wards to public schools if they are set up here, and this will positively impact enrolment in the area.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 CONCLUSIONS

The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana stipulates that all persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities with a view to achieving the full realisation of that right¹⁴... basic education shall be free, compulsory, and available to all¹⁵. Given this constitutional provision, coupled with the country's commitment to SDG 4 of the UN, all governments the country has had since the inception of the 4th Republic have shown the commitment and instituted various policies towards meeting these provisions. Despite all the efforts being made to ensure that every Ghanaian child, living everywhere in the country, has access to quality basic education and is enrolled in a school for such a purpose, much remains to be achieved in this direction. There are many rural, slum, and inner-city communities in Ghana that are either not being provided with public basic educational facilities or underserved with such facilities, as expansion in public basic education infrastructure has not been commensurate with population growth fifteen years after the introduction of free compulsory universal basic education.

This has resulted in the growth of private educational institutions, particularly LCPS (or sometimes referred to as low fee-paying private schools), in many communities around the country, with minimal growth in public schools. Over the past decade, Ghana has witnessed a strong growth in the number of private schools due to high demand, with a marginal increase in public schools. An analysis of the growth of school's data over the past ten years reveals that the number of public schools increased from 36,822 in 2010 to 41,598 in 2018, an increase of about 13%. Over the same period, private schools which numbered 18,380 in 2010 increased to 36,327 in 2018, an increase of about 98% with about 70% of schools in some districts in Greater Accra being private¹⁶. Most of these LCPS, as revealed by the study, were established to fill an obvious gap in the provision of education in the aforementioned communities. The gap was shown to be in terms of the availability of public school infrastructure (access) and instructional delivery (quality) in the few that are available. It is however noted and confirmed by the study that many of these LCPS are facing operational challenges, mostly of a financial dimension. Thus the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to the Government announcing an extended period of closure of schools was bound to exacerbate the challenges and also affect the access to education in deprived and underserved communities.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the attendant mandatory closure of schools have caused many of the LCPS to collapse, resulting in a significant number of children in these communities being forced to drop out of school. Although these school dropouts and their parents wish to re-enrol in other schools to continue with their education, it has not been possible. This is due to the lack of public basic schools and affordable private schools in their communities. LCPS are not resilient enough to face any emergency situation, mainly due to the very low amount of fees they charge, poor investments, coupled with the late or non-payment of fees by parents.

The education of children in rural, slum, and inner-city communities in the country is in a rather precarious situation, as a result of the COVID-19 induced collapse of the LCPS that were serving them. This situation, unfortunately, will continue to exist; thereby derailing the country's drive towards a Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), if efforts are not made by the government to intervene to ensure that public educational provision is brought to the doorsteps of these vulnerable children.

¹⁴ Article 25(1)

¹⁵ Article 25(1)(a)

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

4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

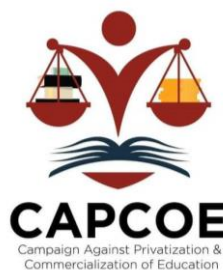
The following recommendations are therefore being made to help address the situation revealed by the study, and as detailed in this report:

1. There should be more focused investments in basic education, particularly in rural, slum and inner city communities by the government. This should result in the building of basic schools, provision of teaching and learning materials and the posting of qualified teachers to these communities. This will curtail the situation where children of a very tender age have to commute long distances before getting to school and also lead to the attainment of the objectives of the FCUBE.
2. Government should, as a matter of a policy directive, ensure that all public basic schools in the country have Kindergartens attached to them; to serve children who are yet to attain primary school age. This will reduce the burden on parents, who would have to send their children to private schools, at a cost, for their kindergarten education. This will also ensure children are first enrolled at the right age.
3. Government must explore cost efficient technologies in building schools to improve spending efficiency in the education infrastructure space.
4. While acknowledging that the government cannot do it alone, in the short to medium term, we recommend that there should be a deliberate policy initiative to encourage LCPS in the deprived and underserved communities to register as charities (non-profit organisations) to enable them obtain support from the government and other institutions. This will enable them continue to operate, even in times of crisis. Registering as charities will also exclude them from paying taxes, which has been the bane of many of them.
5. There is the need for a crash programme, on the part of the government, to help students who have been affected by the collapse of LCPS in the deprived and underserved communities to re-enrol. This will help in resolving the current dropout situation in these communities; resulting from the collapse of the LCPS serving them.
6. District Assemblies under whose jurisdiction the collapsed LCPS fall should, as a matter of urgency, liaise with the owners and partner them to immediately find solutions to the re-enrolment problems faced by students who have dropped out. This could be a stopgap measure while more permanent solutions are found to address the issue of access to quality education for children in such communities.
7. To allow for quicker responses to education disruptions for children in especially LCPS during crises situations, government and other stakeholders should assist in building resilience into the education system in the country. This can be done through the introduction of remote learning programmes in schools located in rural, slum and inner city communities. This should be supported with accessible media resources based on the curriculum, with well-organized delivery systems.
8. The Ghana Education Service should extend its back-to-school programme to cover collapsed LCPS, by tracking the statuses of their students to ensure they re-enrol in available or nearby public schools.
9. The Ghana Education Service should engage collapsed LCPS with infrastructure, on the possibility of taking over their management and adding same to the stock of public basic schools to enable the poor access for free. This should be pursued working in partnership with the Ghana National Council of Private Schools.

NOTES

NOTES

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