

# Teachers in Ghana: Issues of training, remuneration and effectiveness

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## Abstract

This study addresses educational reform in Ghana with reference to one of the most important potential agents of change in any system of schooling—its teachers. The empirical data on secondary teachers and trainee teachers used here is taken from a larger case study of the attitudes and opinions of teachers and parents in the education system of Ghana. Secondary teachers in Ghana are seriously underpaid, but not necessarily undervalued in the community. They take on other jobs to support themselves and their families, yet they do not lack commitment to the professional task of teaching. It is argued that financial pressure on teachers to find other sources of remuneration militates against their capacity to act as agents of change in the rapidly reforming Ghanaian state. Furthermore, teaching is not often seen as a financially rewarding profession by a new generation of secondary-school graduates. The author recommends that teachers' salaries be raised and infrastructure support for schools increased.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past 15 years, the Ghanaian educational system has undergone a significant and ambitious reform process. The educational reforms undertaken in this short period of time—a process without precedent in recent Ghanaian history—have affected all aspects of the educational system, including the curricula and teachers' careers. The Ghanaian education system has

been made to adapt to modern society's needs and demands, including those of the job market.

The 1987 reforms set out to increase access to education at all levels, to improve quality of education, diversify the curriculum by introducing vocational and technical subjects, and shorten the over-extended Ghanaian education ladder by 3 years. These changes were conceived to correct an educational system perceived as elitist, and which downgraded vocational, technical and agricultural education.

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## 2. The Ghanaian education system

Created in accordance with a colonial model inherited from England (Quist, 2003), the Ghanaian education system has been characterised since independence by the nationalist objective of using education to create a pan-Ghanaian identity out of the extraordinary diversity of languages, cultures, religions and histories of Ghana (Nkrumah, 1968).

The public school system consists of a 6-year compulsory primary level; two secondary levels of 3 years each; and a tertiary level of 1–4 years (a first degree takes 4–5 years). Since the extension of the mandatory school attendance age to 15 years, enrolment in junior secondary school has been increasing steadily, but it is not yet universal. Many of the secondary school teachers interviewed in this research had first taken up teaching positions during the phenomenal growth of the early 1980s. In 1987, 951,984 children were attending lower secondary school, but by 1992, there were 1 million. At the upper secondary school level, 341,000 were attending in 1987, but there were 431,000 in 1992 (MOE, 2000). By 1997, gross enrolment in Ghanaian junior secondary schools, was 78% of the age cohort, while gross enrolment in senior secondary school stood at 31% of the 16–18 age group. At JSS level, enrolment rates were stable through the 1990s at around 58%. Over the period from 1988 to 1998 the school age population of 6–14 year olds grew by nearly 4% per annum (MOE, 2000), suggesting the total number of teachers needed was doubling about every 18 years. At JSS level the number of teachers has increased by 16% and the number of students by 24%. Overall pupil–teacher ratios have increased marginally to 20:1 and the pupil per qualified teacher ratio has fallen to 23:1. Interestingly 5100 JSS teachers are untrained (Lewin, 2002). Shifting demographics across the region have meant that governments like Ghana have reduced attention to access and focused more upon raising school quality (Leno, 1999, p. 3).

Accra, although technically belonging to the affluent coastal provinces, resembles Cape Coast fairly closely. In a local economy driven by the tourist dollar, poverty is relatively low. Other

indicators are comparable in magnitude to those found in Cape Coast, where school enrolment is relatively high (UNDP, 2002). The junior secondary level enrolment rates are higher for children from higher-income families. Only about 65% of children from the poorest quintile of households are enrolled, while 94% of children from the wealthiest quintile are enrolled in junior secondary education. The distribution of senior secondary education is even more skewed. The enrolment rate ranges from about 27% for the children of the poor to 77% for young people from wealthy families (UNDP, 2002). It is predicted that the social demand for secondary education will grow further, as larger numbers of students, complete universal primary schooling (UNESCO, 2001b) and the upward credentialing of the labour market proceeds.

## 3. The need for educational reforms

Although the skills and knowledge provided to Ghanaian workers through schooling over the last 40 years were minimally sufficient for the developing economy, currently those skills and that knowledge base are insufficient for continued progress and prosperity. For example, in the late 1980s, among compulsory subjects in the senior secondary curriculum, those receiving the largest timetable allocation were English, Mathematics, Geography and History. Fields of study in Ghana which had (and still have) rates of Social Return (SRR) and Private Return (PRR), however, are technology and economics (Hutchful, 2002). Between 1990 and 1996, the rapid labour market transformation brought a move from informal to formal sectors, from rural to urban sectors and from agricultural to industrial sectors such as construction, manufacturing and services (Aryeetey et al., 2000). A high-school curriculum dominated by citizenship themes, nationalist concerns and moral education became manifestly ever more inappropriate to the skill needs of the work force. Following the model of Vietnam (Lawrence and Thirtle, 2001; Duggan, 2001, p. 193), Ghana needs to reform schooling to create a pool of skilled workers if it wishes to move beyond its

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