

QUALITY CONTROL FOR EFFECTIVE BASIC EDUCATION IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

This study adopted the qualitative research approach with observation and interviewing to examine the policy and practice of school inspection in the Ghanaian school system and its implications for raising standards in basic education. The study revealed that inspection is an integral part of Ghana's educational system yet the system of monitoring schools is governed by an "evolving" policy. It emerged that the Ghana Education Service has inadequate inspection personnel; schools assigned to inspectors are too many; and, transportation problems prevent inspectors from paying regular visits to schools. This has led to a kind of teacher culture where everyone gets by with the minimum; general teaching ineffectiveness; and low pupil learning achievement. Augmenting the numbers and equipping inspectors with the requisite logistics will promote effective monitoring towards quality basic education.

Keywords: Inspection; monitoring; standards; primary education.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching and learning in Ghanaian schools take place within a formal organisational framework, which includes measures to ensure that schools are well supervised and that the quality of what they offer is maintained and continuously improved (Ministry of Education, 2001). Teaching in the schools is significantly affected by a powerful inspectorate that is mandated to ensure and maintain quality in resource allocation, curriculum delivery, and educational standards. The curriculum, which is defined as everything that

takes place in a school, including assessment in all its forms, is central to any policies directed at improving achievement. The curriculum model for Ghanaian schools is centralized and teachers are expected to deliver it in a prescribed manner. It however, permits some school choice and is responsive to local requirements and resource availability.

Monitoring and maintaining quality in primary education is a strategic means of stemming the low completion rates for pupils as a result of high rates of drop out, partly due to poor academic achievement and under-education of primary school completers, a situation where pupils pass out without mastering the basic literacy and

numeracy skills (required by the curriculum) needed to function effectively in their own society (World Bank, 1988). Improving the quality of primary education in Ghana is also crucial to the nation's quest for improved living conditions, increased economic development and hope for a better future, especially for the nation's children (Government of Ghana, 2003). Ensuring quality basic education implies teaching for effectiveness, improved instructional strategies towards attaining the vision of the curriculum, and adoption of quality measures to monitor standards in the education the schools offer. This will enable the Government of Ghana realise its goal of improving access and quality of basic education (Action Aid Ghana, 2003).

The Quality Link

In defining quality, Schonberger and Knod (1997) point to the lack of clear definitions of the term and infer that quality denotes a desirable characteristic in output of goods and services, as well as processes that make and deliver those outputs in ways that please customers. In spite of differences in meaning however, the concept of quality reflects how customers think about quality, and issues that managers at all levels need to address if quality is to happen. In its basic sense, Fry, Stoner and Hattwick (2001) refer to quality as the ability of a product or service to consistently meet or exceed customer expectations. While McShane and von Glinow (2000) define quality as the value that the end user perceives from a product or service, Mondy and Premeaux (1993) describe quality as the degree of excellence of a good or service.

The implication is that a product or service has quality when its features satisfy and anticipate customer needs and expectations, and conforms to a standard. This also implies that people expect the product or service to be consistently good. In this respect, quality is defined in terms of "value" because it is the benefits of the product, or service that the customer assesses against the price at which it is sold. Thus, the concept of

quality depends on the customer being served to the maximum degree possible; implying that the product or service has to meet all the requirements and is just what the customer needs.

Quality is said to be the driving force for competitive advantage as it differentiates a product or service from its competitors. Nonetheless, quality comes from having the best equipment, the best processes, and the best practices. It requires substantial training of the workforce and a major emphasis on empowering individuals and teams to make decisions that improve the quality of a product or service. Fry, Stoner and Hattwick (2001) explain that ensuring quality in products and services is so important that many companies give major attention to managing quality because customers would not tolerate low quality unless low prices are more important to them than the quality of the product. The authors also indicate that managing quality means more than just encouraging quality; it means actively managing processes to make sure that quality permeates everything the company or organisation does.

It can be inferred from the discussion that quality is the degree of excellence of a good or service and it is a significant product evaluation criterion that informs consumer decision making and purchasing of goods and services. Since quality standards are determined by a company's objective, a company or business enterprise that wishes to gain a reputation for high quality products will have high standards, and a rigid quality control programme to help it meet its quality standards.

Quality Control

According to Mondy and Premeaux (1993), quality control is the means by which a firm makes sure that its goods and services will serve the purpose for which they are intended. Quality control is also described by the Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia (2003) as processes that are aimed at ensuring a good or service is of the

standard of quality that the manufacturer or supplier has determined. While Nickels, McHugh and McHugh (1993) define quality control as the measurement of problems and services against set standards, Schonberger and Knod (1997) explain that quality control consists of measuring actual quality performance, comparing it with a standard, and acting on any difference. Quality control can therefore be described as the means by which a firm makes sure that its goods and services will serve the purpose for which they are intended.

In businesses, quality control is the responsibility of a specialised quality control department. Quality control is often done at the end of the production line. The responsibility of the control process is to initially keep waste from getting any worse, and by implication, ensuring defective-free goods. One quality control measure for maintaining product quality is the adoption of 100% inspection of all items manufactured and rejecting all defective products (Mondy and Premaux, 1993). Although increased quality generally results in higher costs, it also allows for higher prices to be charged for quality goods and services. Because inspection is done after production has occurred, Schonberger and Knod (1997) consider inspection the least effective way to control quality. Total quality management (a systematic method for addressing quality issues) is recommended as it extends quality control to every aspect of the way a business operates (Fry *et al.*, 2001). The implication is that active monitoring and supervision of the entire production process of a good or service is a better option for ensuring quality goods and services.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the qualitative research approach involving observation and key informant interviewing to examine the policy and practice of school inspection in Ghana's system of basic education and its implications for quality basic education. This was based on a sample of 25

public and private primary schools in the Kumasi Metropolis - 10 rural; 4 inner city; and, 11 suburban schools; and formal and informal interviewing of 251 teachers, 20 head-teachers and 10 school inspectors. The objective was to understand how national policy on school inspection translates into practice and how this affects primary education in particular. The study was also informed by evidence obtained from official documents and informal anecdotal sources.

QUALITY CONTROL IN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Inspection as a component of the school system is essentially a quality control mechanism for ensuring standards in schools and the education they provide (Dunford, 1993). It is the responsibility of the Inspectorate Division of the Education Service, the key agency for determining school quality and the implementation of national policies on education. The inspectorate's unique position in the educational system gives it a "legal" power to gain access to schools and to organise inspections whenever this is necessary, and render a "state of affairs" report on all aspects of the school; and to make recommendations to teachers, heads, managers and policy-makers on ways to improve the system (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993).

According to Lillis (1990), the main aims for establishing the Inspectorate Division of the Education Service are:

1. Improving the quality of teaching and learning;
2. Monitoring policy implementation and accountability at the lower level of schools; and,
3. Engaging in routine administrative tasks to ensure efficiency in schools.

Traditionally, improving the quality of teaching and learning is the main focus of the inspection process (Ormston and Shaw, 1993) but it is possible for monitoring and administrative duties to overshadow this responsibility. In this regard,

Lillis (1990) notes the assumption that by systematically monitoring and objectively evaluating instructional processes in schools, inspectors guide teachers to adopt good teaching practices that promote learner achievement.

As guardians of educational standards, inspectors serve as the “eyes and ears” of the Ministry of Education and for that matter, play a liaison role between the central administration that enacts policies, and schools that interpret and implement those policies. As agents of the educational administration, inspectors also have responsibility to monitor maintenance and efficiency in the management and use of school supplies. This includes monitoring teachers’ performance in the classroom and their career growth (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993). Since quality teaching and learning also depend on effective use of instructional materials, inspectors should not only respond positively to seeing them used; they must be concerned about quality teaching and learning and expect teachers to use instructional materials in the schools. They should also demonstrate appropriate use and offer constructive ideas to help teachers to find alternate materials to innovate their classroom practice.

Inspectors tell the school what it does well and what it needs to do to improve. Inspectors also judge whether or not the school has improved since the last inspectors evaluate and report on the quality of teaching, how well pupils learn, how well teachers assess pupils’ work, and how they use the assessment of pupils’ work to plan and set targets for meeting the needs of individual pupils and groups (Microsoft Encarta 2003). As indicated by the Ministry of Education’s Policies and Strategic Plans for the Education Sector (2001), Ghana deems inspection a significant factor for improving learning achievement, teacher quality, and increasing school enrolments. The implication is that inspection is essential for sustaining teaching and learning effectiveness, and maintenance of quality standards in the schools.

INSPECTION IN THE GHANAIAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

School inspection has been a regular feature of the educational system in Ghana since the appointment of the first Inspector of Schools for British West Africa in 1853 (McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh, 1975). From 1890 onwards, a regular schedule of school inspections was put in place to supervise teachers’ work as well as educate them in teaching methods suitable for the level of pupils they teach. In 1902, a system of “payment by results” was introduced to ensure that pupils were absorbing the facts taught them and the country was getting adequate value for salaries paid the teachers. The system became the yardstick for determining the amount of government grant a school received (and therefore the number of teachers employed and the size of their salaries in many cases), based on how many pupils passed an annual examination conducted by the inspector.

Under the system, grants were paid per pupil per year for each pass in Arithmetic, Reading and Writing. Additional variable grants calculated with statistics of average pupil attendance to school were also paid per pupil for every pass in all other subjects tested for in the inspector’s examination. Not surprisingly, the dominant image was that of the inspector visiting schools with “an attitude of superiority, omnipotence and condescension, looking into teachers’ work and writing reports on them” (Bame, 1991). School inspection also implied that teachers and therefore the schools were automatically to blame for the failure of pupils. Since teachers’ salaries depended on inspectors’ reports and individual pupils’ examination results, the examinations and inspectors’ visits were not well received by teachers.

McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh (1975) indicate that this created tension between teachers and inspectors and “made them enemies instead of workers in the same field”. The repercussions of inspection at this level were the encouragement of rote learning towards the passing of examina-

tions and the temptation for school managers to introduce more subjects into the timetable in order to get extra grants. Another result was that schools with the greatest need for grants received the lowest assistance while those who could not meet the inspection conditions got no grants at all.

In 1909, a new set of Education Rules that were designed to improve teaching methods and make the primary school course less bookish came into effect. It abolished the system of "payment-by-results", changed inspection procedures and subsequently instituted a new mode for paying government grants. From 1909 therefore, government grants paid to schools were based on the general efficiency of teaching and standard of equipment available on the inspector's visit. Although the new system did not abolish rote learning it gave more professional freedom to the teachers and school managers.

According to the 1960 - 1962 Ministry of Education (MoE) Report, the system of school inspection was re-organised after independence in 1957 into what has since 1961 become the Inspectorate Division of the MoE, and currently, a division of the Ghana Education Service (GES). The responsibility of the Inspectorate Division of GES remains the same: supervision and monitoring of standards (including accommodation, discipline, equipment and administration) in pre-university educational institutions (Antwi, 1992). As the MoE Report indicates, the role of the school inspector has, over the years, developed substantially to that of "evaluator, professional guide and helper". As an "evaluator", the inspector is expected to assess the performance of teachers and pupils to determine the extent to which facilities of the school measure up to the prescribed standards.

As a "professional guide and helper", the inspector is expected to take administrative action to rectify any deficiencies in the school through suggestions, demonstration lessons and refresher courses, to assist classroom teachers to improve

upon their professional performance and thus raise the standards of achievement of both pupils and teachers. It is therefore the duty of school inspectors to help teachers to be resourceful and make the best use of available equipment and facilities in their schools to provide their pupils with the kind of quality teaching that promotes effective learning.

As the President's Committee on Education Reforms (2002) reports, the Inspectorate's responsibility for monitoring and supervision of teaching and learning in the schools is very important for achieving and maintaining standards and quality at the pre-university education level. The quality or effectiveness of school inspection, however, depends upon the objectivity with which it is conducted. It is therefore imperative that the system of school inspection be efficient and of a standard that would ensure quality educational outcomes at the foundation level of Ghanaian education.

DISCUSSION OF MAIN FINDINGS

Selection of inspection personnel

Evidence gathered from interviews with key informants in the school system indicate that Ghanaian school inspectors are generally selected from the head-teacher corps but also from among retired education officials with a record of professional excellence. Inspectors are appointed from professional male and female teachers not below the rank of Principal Superintendent. According to the respondents, selection depends on merit and experience. Inspectors may play the role of general or subject inspectors and operate at headquarters (Accra), regional and district levels. In line with the Government's decentralization policy on governance and decision making, management of pre-university education has been decentralized and the system for the monitoring and evaluation of Ghanaian schools devolved to the districts.

Responsibilities

School inspectors, now designated Circuit Su-

Supervisors, are the officers in charge of educational standards in specific communities (circuits) only. Circuits are the second tier in the current decentralized educational management system. Circuit Supervisors are assigned 20 schools in urban areas, 15 schools in semi-urban areas, and 10 schools in rural communities. The new policy makes inspectors at the circuit levels responsible for assessing the needs of schools in their circuits, deciding what needs to be done and planning in-service training in the subjects in which teachers at specific levels require them. Besides finding solutions to pedagogic and managerial problems in the schools, Circuit Supervisors are required to attend all in-service training workshops in their circuits.

Circuit Supervisors write and submit periodic reports on the progress of activities in their districts of operation to their respective District Directors of Education who pass them on to headquarters through the Regional Directors of Education. As indicated by the respondents and official documents, the idea of appointing inspectors for the districts is to strengthen supervision provided by school heads. Circuit Supervisors are expected to visit each school in their assigned circuits, at least, three times per term to supervise the work of heads of schools and teachers, with the view of helping them to improve upon their professional performance.

All the Supervisors interviewed were unanimous in identifying inadequate inspection personnel as the reason for the large number of schools assigned those currently at post. They also pointed out that their responsibility is limited to basic schools (primary and junior secondary) only. The Supervisors said they are not able to visit the schools regularly because no official vehicles have been purposely allocated to transport inspection personnel to the schools they are expected to supervise. In view of this, they resort to public transportation, which is inconvenient and sometimes unreliable, resulting in late arrival to the schools in most cases. Besides, fuel and commuting allowances due them in lieu of

official transport to the schools are hardly paid to them. These inspectors would be happy if GES would appoint more inspection personnel to lighten their load.

Surprisingly, the 1994 Education Reforms Review Committee Report identified inadequate inspection personnel; too many schools assigned to circuit supervisors for any meaningful supervision to take place; and lack of transport for supervisors to pay regular visits to schools, as problems affecting quality of basic education in Ghana. Incidentally, the President's Committee Report on Education in Ghana (2002) also mentions the quality problems plaguing the system of school inspection in Ghana as: lack of personnel with the requisite academic qualification and/or rank for appointment as Circuit Supervisors; lack of office and/or residential accommodation in many areas; poor conditions of service and working environment; inaccessibility of some schools in some circuits; and, poor supervision. Another related quality problem is the inability of Circuit Supervisors to supervise senior secondary schools in their circuits because they do not have the required academic background qualification and rank for the job.

It can be inferred here that poor supervision of educational processes partly accounts for the perceived fallen standard of Ghanaian education which until the mid-1970s, had the reputation for being one of the most highly developed and efficient educational systems in Sub-Saharan Africa (King, Glewwe and Alberts, 1992). It is also evident that quality control in Ghana's system of educational delivery is both inefficient and ineffective. The evidence suggests that the Ghana Education Service is either not attracting or recruiting the right calibre of inspection personnel or it has not put in place a sustained programme for upgrading its corps of supervisors to effectively monitor educational standards at the regional, district and circuit levels. There also seems to be a gap between the process of inspection, implementation of inspection recommendations and post-inspection supervision.

The Practice of School Inspection

Evidence from the school study and interviews conducted revealed that Circuit Supervisors normally notify head-teachers when they have to observe a teacher in their school, for the purpose of promotion. This observation includes an assessment of effective use of teaching materials and class management. Although inspectors are expected to arrive impromptu at the school, some teachers interviewed said they often get wind of such visits through their head-teachers and friends at the District Education Office. The tip-off, they said, enables the teachers concerned to prepare adequately for the observation lessons. This also enables those teachers to arm themselves with all the teaching materials they can possibly lay hands on and sometimes, rehearse the lessons they intend to teach for the exercise.

The normal practice is for visiting inspectors arriving in a school to call first at the head-teacher's office before being taken to the classroom of the teacher concerned. Since the teacher's performance directly affects the image of the school and the management efficiency of the head-teacher, such teachers are alerted the moment the officers get to the school. The interviews indicated that head-teachers often give those teachers hints of what to expect, especially if they are new, and the inspectors also briefed of the teachers' abilities and capabilities. It also emerged that before the inspectors leave the school, they routinely discuss their findings with the head-teachers. Off-the-record reports gathered from the teacher interviews have it that depending on the relationship between a teacher and the head-teacher and, the head and the inspectors, adverse reports do not go beyond the school gate. Such teachers are always given a second chance to pass the test without having the report put on their file.

Evidence from two case study schools and several others also indicates that even where class teachers complain for lack of instructional materials in their schools, it is possible for them to

unearth "non-existent" charts and other pictorial illustrations to teach such "staged" lessons since their use carries much weighting in inspectors' reports. The implication here is that only inspectors who drop in a school unannounced would observe lessons as they are normally taught. This also implies the need for efficiency on the part of school inspectors and an effective monitoring system at the GES level to ensure that teachers and inspectors provide the quality service required for raising standards in basic education.

An incident where the imminent arrival of an inspector in one school sent the head-teacher and a teacher rummaging through cupboards to retrieve "teaching aids" indicates that inspectors can serve as positive incentives for improving teaching and learning in primary schools. This, perhaps, was an inspector who expects to see illustrations used and is probably known for that stance. Hence the head-teacher was lending a hand in the search for charts. Although teachers are no longer paid by results as in the pre-independence era, the evaluative reports of visiting inspectors continue to determine teachers' pay increases and promotion as in the 1960s.

It also emerged that non-use of instructional materials by teachers reflect on head-teachers' leadership role, management effectiveness and the overall rating of the school. Surprisingly, some inspectors interviewed said they tell teachers to support their lessons with teaching materials but they cannot, in any way, force them to do so in their normal classroom practice. It simply is not enough to tell teachers to use teaching materials in teaching their lessons if this is not backed by any level of expectation and enforcement. What this means is that laxity in the practice of school inspection partly accounts for non-use of innovative teaching in the classroom, ineffective curriculum delivery and pupil learning.

Evidence from the teacher interviews also indicates that some inspectors are more concerned with teacher attendance, preparation of lesson

notes and punctuality to school than with standards in teaching and learning. The implication is that not all inspectors are concerned about the quality of instruction and that examination results suffice as an assessment of school effectiveness. The fact that inspectors' reports actually comment on teacher use and non-use of teaching materials and their impact on pupil learning in the lessons they observe, suggests that inspection can have a significant impact on teachers' professional practice and the instructional process in primary education in particular. This implies recruitment of inspection personnel who are abreast with the changing times and issues in contemporary educational practice, and competent in monitoring curriculum delivery and schooling effectiveness.

The situation raises the problem of how to get inspectors to give priority to their role in effectively and seriously addressing the issue of quality teaching and learning, and ensuring standards in primary schools, and not just take refuge in their administrative duties. This is a major issue involving training for leadership, supervision of schools and incentives for good performance. It is crucial therefore that the Ghana Education Service strengthens its system of monitoring to improve efficiency and accountability for school outcomes. Ensuring teaching effectiveness in schools therefore demands an efficient and effective corps of school inspectors who are poised to provide professional support and, actively monitor teaching standards and ensure quality learning outcomes, particularly in the public school system. By implication, Ghanaian school inspectors are as much to blame for the failure of pupils as teachers and therefore schools.

The study also indicates that lowered expectation of quality teaching and learning, lack of official commitment to actively support teachers to provide quality service, waning responsibility for providing the right kind of motivation needed to sustain good teacher habits with regards to instructional materials usage and inno-

vative teaching, and laxity in the practice of school inspection are significant factors that impinge directly on educational standards. Active monitoring and supervision of the quality of teaching in primary schools in particular, is essential for sustaining teacher effectiveness and maintaining standards in Ghanaian schools.

CONCLUSION

The evidence presented raises questions on the efficiency of the Inspectorate in Ghana's system of school education and how to get inspectors to give priority to their role in improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising standards in primary education. The situation demands a systematic programme of training, appraisal and incentives to upgrade the skills of Circuit Supervisors to enable them meet the challenges of their three core functions of monitoring efficiency in resource allocation, curriculum delivery, and educational standards. This will infuse the system with highly trained supervisors for the regional, district and circuit levels; and also reflect the high priority that government places on supervision in the school system.

The Ghana Education Service should also enhance its salaries, allowances and other conditions of service to attract well-qualified personnel with knowledge and experience in educational management and supervision to take up the schedule. It should also provide the appropriate logistics for their work and implement district level checks to monitor supervisors' performance in ensuring quality standards in all public and private primary schools in the country.

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