



OED REACH

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Based on “Books, Buildings, and Learning Outcomes: An Impact Evaluation of World Bank Support to Basic Education in Ghana.”

Promoting Improvements in Ghana’s Basic Education

- Delivery of hardware inputs to Ghana’s basic education system – building classrooms and supplying textbooks – has had a substantial impact on higher enrollments and better learning outcomes. The Bank’s support for school building has been a major factor behind Ghana being on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of Universal Primary Education.
- The context for these improvements was a government strongly committed to implementing a program of educational reform that refocused government resources away from secondary and tertiary education and onto the basic sector. But the Bank’s support played a critical role in allowing the government to carry out its plans.
- Partly because of increased reliance on community contributions, a gap is opening up between the majority of schools and those in poorer communities, particularly in off-road rural areas. Facilities in schools in poorer areas are usually inferior and teacher absenteeism high, so that little learning can take place. Special attention needs to be paid to these least-privileged schools if Ghana is to remain on track to meet the education MDG.

Background

Bank support to basic education has increased greatly over the last two decades. The Ghanaian experience provides a useful test case of the effectiveness of this support. Since 1986 there have been ten Bank education sector projects in Ghana, of which five have directed support to basic education: the Health and Education Rehabilitation Project, which supplied school learning materials; two education sector adjustment credits in support of the reform program; the Primary School Development Project; and the Basic Education Sector Investment Credit.

The main questions addressed in the OED study are: (1) what has happened to educational outputs (school attendance and learning); (2) what are the main determinants of those outputs; (3) which educational interventions have the largest and most cost effective impact on educational outputs; (4) to what extent have Bank-supported activities promoted interventions that support improved educational outputs; and (5) how do improved educational outputs support better welfare outcomes? These questions were addressed through a variety of means, including a nationwide survey carried out by OED in collaboration with the Ghana Statistical

Service and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The survey followed up on a living standards survey conducted in 1988 that included data on test score outcomes and school quality. The study is thus in a unique position to analyze school-level changes over the 15 year period, 1988-2003.

Findings

A major finding of the study is that both the quantity and quality of schooling have improved over the last 15 years. Enrolments in basic education have increased by over 10 percent compared to 15 years ago. Moreover, 15 years ago nearly two-thirds of primary school graduates were illiterate, as shown by the fact that they scored two or less on a simple eight question multiple choice English test—the same as guessing. Fewer than one in 5 do so badly today. Statistical analysis shows that these improvements in learning outcomes are clearly and strongly linked to better welfare as measured by higher income, better nutrition, and reduced mortality. Analysis of the economic rate of return to education shows that there is no return to simply attending school, but there is a return to learning achievements. The majority of children now benefit from attending school, both educationally and economically, which was not the case 15 years ago.

The data show that gain in educational outputs are directly linked to better school quality, manifested in improved infrastructure and greater availability of school supplies. Today it is the norm to have one textbook per child for math and English, rather than one per class as was common before the advent of reforms. Textbook provision is among the most cost effective means of improving test scores. School building has contributed to higher enrollments. In one area surveyed in which a new school was constructed, enrollments more than tripled. These gains are impressive, but there remains substantial room for improvement. Enrollments lag in some parts of the country, and while test scores are improved they are still weak.

Statistical analysis shows that increased school quality can in turn be linked to the Bank's support, which has financed the construction of 8,000 classroom blocks and

provided 35 million textbooks over the last 15 years. Nationally, the Bank-supported school building and rehabilitation program has increased enrollments by around 4 percent. Moreover, Bank support helped sustain initially unpopular reforms, demonstrating the efficacy of working in partnership with a government committed to a well-defined sectoral strategy.

The downside of this positive story is that increased reliance on community and district financing means that schools in poorer areas get left behind, especially those in off-road rural communities. There are still some schools with very poor facilities in which little learning takes places.

Lessons

The lessons drawn from this study are:

- Increasing the availability and quality of classrooms and instructional materials directly contributes to both educational attainment and achievement.
- Supervision of teachers by the head teacher and circuit supervisor matter, as do the teaching methods adopted by the teacher, including the language used as the medium of instruction, so efforts should also be made to retain trained teachers, to improve teacher morale, and to expand in-service training.
- A class of schools in poorer communities are very poorly resourced, so resources should be directed to the neediest schools to overcome the bias that results from community-based financing.
- The private sector has been neglected, although it is of growing importance; attention needs to be paid to it in both government strategy and Bank support.

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