

“How do I run the office without funds?”

Understanding how districts plan and implement education policy in Ghana

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MOTIVATION

- Need to address the **learning crisis** and align systems of education towards **learning for all**.
- Debates exist about **implementation and delivery structures**, including the appropriate roles and responsibilities of different actors along the education delivery chain to improve the quality of learning.
- We know little about the role of **middle-tier/subnational actors** in LMICs in bringing about improvements in educational outcomes.
- We also don't know what the responsibilities of the middle-tier are in policy and regulations *versus* what their practices look like on the ground.
 - **Management practices** and **stakeholder engagement**
 - **Resources** and **capacity to deliver** (skills, staff, resources, working conditions)

GHANA CONTEXT

- Districts are the key level responsible for policy implementation and school support.
- Decentralized education system: political authority decentralized to district assemblies (incl. education oversight and infrastructure); the Ministry's District Education Directorates are responsible for planning district activities, monitoring school quality, and implementing central policies.
- Large gap between policy and practice of decentralization: Limited fiscal decentralization; district assemblies play minor role in education; district education office autonomy constrained by increasing centralization by national-level.
- Districts in Ghana have been subject to many reform efforts undertaken by the Government and donors aimed at strengthening delivery capacity.
- Little research investigating how district practices in Ghana can support policy implementation and improvements in education quality.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What management practices do District Education Directorates (DEDs) use to plan and implement policy?
2. What factors enable or constrain their ability to plan and implement policy?



Grade 3 classroom in study district (74:1 pupil-teacher ratio)

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

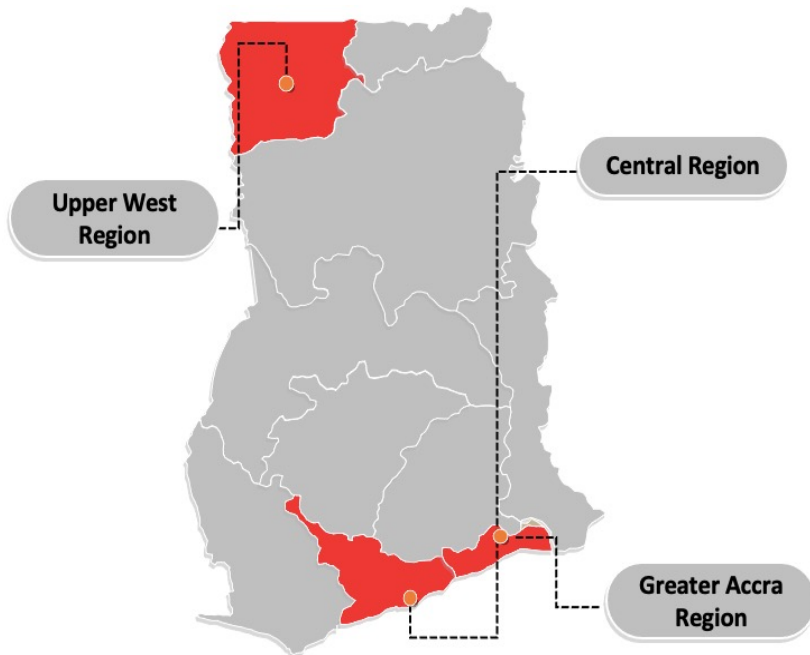
- Education bureaucracies employ a range of management practices to plan and implement policy (Williams et al. 2021):
 - ***Target-setting and prioritization*** captures the routines around determining policy priorities, measurable indicators to track progress towards stated objectives.
 - ***Measurement and monitoring*** comprise the processes around data collection and reporting about performance across the education system, both at the individual and unit level.
 - ***Accountability and incentives*** include the establishment of accountability routines and incentives to guide staff and unit behaviour and performance toward desired goals.
 - ***Problem solving*** describes established routines and processes to facilitate discussion, collaboration and problem-solving across individual staff members within the same department, office, or more broadly with stakeholders.
- ***Political sponsorship*** roles that political actors play to influence the four management functions
- Deviance is therefore understood in light of these ‘ideal-type’ management functions
 - Positive deviant: District which exhibits strong evidence of these management practices
 - Negative deviant: District which exhibits no or opposing evidence of these management practices

METHODOLOGY

Scope: 3 Regions, **5 Districts** & 10 schools

Method: Qualitative; 43 semi-structured in-person interviews using conceptual framework; analysis of reports, plans, meeting minutes.

Interviewees: Regional director and management team, District director and management team, district school inspectors, head teachers, teachers and district assembly.



| | District A | District B | District C | District D | District E |
|---|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Area in Km2 | 200 | 450 | 300 | 600 | 800 |
| Household population | 320,000 | 160,000 | 160,000 | 190,000 | 50,000 |
| Number of schools: KG, primary and secondary | 700 | 400 | 500 | 350 | 150 |
| Population living below the national poverty line (2015) (%) | 10 | 20 | 30 | 35 | 75 |
| Basic education certificate exam pass rate (%) | 90 | 60 | 55 | 60 | 40 |

COMMON DISTRICT PRACTICE AND CHALLENGES

| | District responsibilities | District practice and challenges |
|--|--|--|
| Prioritization and target-setting | District and school annual plans (ADEOP; SPIP) | Use of national templates. Lack of prioritization (100s of annual targets); learning narrowly conceived as BECE pass rate. |
| Measurement and monitoring | Collect routine administrative data; conduct school inspections and classroom observations | Strong input focus. Few indicators of education quality; limited digitization. Infrequent inspections. |
| Accountability and incentives | Quarterly/Annual reporting to regional level, District assembly education meetings (DEOC) | Regular, structured upward reporting. Limited rewards, sanctions for poor performance. |
| Problem solving | Community stakeholder meetings (SPAMs), District assembly education meetings (DEOC) | Infrequent meetings. |

- **Capacity challenges** at the subnational level:
 - Incomplete and delayed allocation of the district and school operational budgets
 - Lack of money for fuel to conduct inspections.
 - Unsafe working environments

DISTRICT CASE OF NEGATIVE DEVIANCE

- “Deprived” district due to contextual challenges
- Frequent district management turnover; director had not seen budget forms in 5 months since starting role
- Director does not have written vision, no clear priorities & targets
- No onboarding: District school inspectors and first-year teachers had not received orientation
- No specific strategy for low-performing schools
 - Basic education exam pass rate: 40%
 - 50% of lower secondary schools have 0% BECE pass rate
- Benefitted from strong donor project support: USAID, UNICEF, etc.
- Centralized teacher deployment: many teachers posted to this district don’t show up or transfer immediately, due to poor working/living conditions and mismatch with regional languages
- Lack of resources: 4 months delay, insufficient district funds.
 - Monitoring and measurement: no fuel for inspector motorbikes, leading to shallow, infrequent visits (checking attendance rather than coaching)
 - Problem-solving: SPAMs held infrequently due to funding constraints



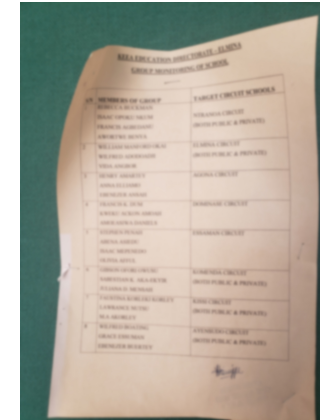
Junior High school (0% BECE pass rate),
staffed by first-year teachers

“We feel demotivated because this kind of monitoring is not really doing anything” (School Inspector)

DISTRICT CASE OF POSITIVE DEVIANCE

- Director leadership and vision to improve BECE performance: director “didn’t sleep” (strong political pressure)
- ‘Achievable’ target-setting with and district office-wide monitoring program for low-performing schools
 - Basic education exam pass rate: 60%
 - Formerly ranked last in regional ranking, improvements over 3 years
- Two-way information-sharing and problem-solving structures within district office, but no SPAMs since UNICEF funding ended in 2018
- Benefitted from donor support: UNICEF, USAID
- Lack of resources:
 - District office funds insufficient and often delayed.
 - District Assembly funds delayed and internally generated funds are “woefully inadequate”

"We do coaching and mentoring for our teachers, especially when we do sit-in observation when they are teaching. After that we do debriefing with them and then discuss what they need to improve upon" (School Inspector)



All professional staff ‘group monitoring’ plan for low performing district schools since 2019



Motivated, supported teachers with active professional learning communities (PLC)

CONCLUSION

- ‘Positive deviance’ management practices exist in some districts despite resource and contextual challenges
- District actors find ways to operate effectively, and perceive these practices as positively impacting their district’s educational performance
- Though not a binding constraint, the irregularity and inadequacy of funds across the districts hampers the efforts of middle-managers (regions and districts) to plan and implement education reforms



Considering working conditions of district and school staff (“death trap” office buildings)

NEXT STEPS

- Qualitative follow-up fieldwork in these 5 districts (May-June 2022)
- PhD research: District case studies of effective district support to teaching and learning (management practices, politics and relational trust)
- The DeliverEd large N survey
 - A nationally representative survey across 154 districts and 924 schools.
 - The objective of the survey is to gain insights into variation in performance of districts and schools and understand gaps in the theory of change for system reform. Focus areas:
 - Management practices (conceptual framework)
 - Capacity and resources
 - Political sponsorship
 - Time use and allocation

THANK YOU

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For more information on the DeliverEd Project: <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-programmes/delivered>

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