

Ghana: Inclusive and Equitable Education: A Policy Framework for Addressing Learning Disparities

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Introduction: The imperative of inclusive and equitable education

Education is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone for Ghana's national development, social cohesion, and economic progress. Inclusive and equitable education is crucial for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which calls for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. This policy brief analyzes learning disparities within Ghana's education system, evaluates the effectiveness of current national policies, identifies key challenges, and proposes a policy framework to foster inclusive and equitable education across the nation, with a particular focus on persons with disabilities (Yusuf, 2024).

Understanding the landscape: Challenges and learning disparities

Ghana's education system faces challenges that hinder its transformative potential (Cross Catholic Outreach, 2022). Ghana has achieved near-universal enrollment at the primary level, with a gross enrollment ratio (GER) of 105 percent as of 2019 (Ghana Investment Promotion Council, 2022). While enrollment rates are high, the quality of education often lags. Regional disparities are significant, with the northern regions experiencing lower enrollment, higher dropout rates, and poorer learning outcomes. Socio-economic background also profoundly impacts educational opportunities: children from wealthier households are significantly more likely to access pre-primary education and complete higher levels of schooling whereas the poorer the household the greater the likelihood of perpetuating a cycle of poverty.

Disparities also exist across demographics such as gender and disability. While the gender gap in primary education enrollment has narrowed, it widens at higher levels (Forsgren et al., 2025). Children with disabilities face substantial exclusion due to inaccessible infrastructure and a lack of adequately trained teachers. According to the 2010 national census, 20 percent of children with physical disabilities were not

attending school. However, the 2021 census reveals that 16.5 percent of children aged 5-15 with difficulty in performing activities have never attended school. This exclusion has adverse economic impacts at the family, community, and national levels.

Policy in action: Evaluating national initiatives

Ghana has implemented several policies aimed at promoting inclusive and equitable education. The Free SHS policy (2017) aimed to remove financial barriers to secondary education, leading to increased enrollment (Kamil, 2024). However, this rapid increase has strained resources and raised concerns about quality (Fuseini, 2024). The Inclusive Education Policy, which was launched in 2015 aims to provide equitable access to quality education for all children, especially those with special educational needs. It emphasizes creating barrier-free and learner-friendly environments (Ministry of Education, 2015). However, implementation is hindered by negative attitudes towards disability, insufficient resources, inadequate teacher training, and inaccessible infrastructure. The policy also lacks sufficient accountability measures. The longstanding Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) initiative aimed to reduce poverty through free basic education. While it increased enrollment, it did not fully address the opportunity costs for the poorest households, and quality improvements were not proportional to enrollment increases. Universality has also not been achieved some 20 years after FCUBE implementation, with over 1.2 million children still out of school.

Navigating the hurdles: Key challenges and barriers

Inequitable resource allocation within the education sector is a significant challenge. Rural and disadvantaged areas often receive fewer resources. A large portion of the education budget is allocated to employee compensation, while funds for infrastructure and materials are limited. This uneven distribution exacerbates disparities, particularly for students with disabilities who require additional support and resources (Buabeng & Amo-Darko, 2024).

Teacher training and distribution also pose major challenges. Many teachers lack adequate training in inclusive education practices and the skills to address diverse learning needs, including those of students with disabilities. Rural schools often face severe teacher shortages, impacting the quality of education for students in these communities, including children with disabilities. The northern regions of Ghana show lower literacy and numeracy scores compared with southern regions. Infrastructure limitations are another critical barrier. Many schools, especially in rural areas, lack adequate classrooms, sanitation facilities, and teaching materials (Ermolaev, 2024). This is particularly detrimental for children with disabilities who require accessible and safe learning environments. Cultural factors also hinder progress. Gender norms can limit girls' education, and societal stigma often leads to the exclusion of children with disabilities. Negative perceptions and a lack of awareness about disability contribute to marginalization within the education system.

Lessons from the continent: Successful African case studies

Several African countries offer valuable lessons for Ghana. Ethiopia's Inclusive Education Resource Centers provide specialized support to mainstream schools for students with disabilities (Siška et al., 2019; World Bank, 2018). The Gambia focused on teacher training in inclusive education and community engagement (Global Partnership for Education, 2023). Senegal improved data collection on children with disabilities (Sightsavers, 2024). Zambia enhanced teachers' skills and built the capacity of education managers to support inclusive education (World Bank, 2025; Sightsavers, 2017). These initiatives demonstrate the importance of targeted support and capacity building for the successful inclusion of students with disabilities.

Mobile learning initiatives in Kenya (Gamewatchers Safaris, 2025; Africanian, 2025) and Tanzania (Policy Forum, 2025; Ministry of Education and Sports, 2025) improved access to education in remote areas. Uganda's Universal Primary Education policy increased enrollment through strong political will and funding (Monitor, 2025; World Bank, 2025). South Africa utilized the Universal Design for Learning framework to empower teachers to differentiate instruction for diverse learners (ResearchGate, 2025; CAST, n.d.). These examples highlight the effectiveness of leveraging technology, community involvement, and adaptable teaching methods to address learning disparities, including those faced by students with disabilities.

Global perspectives: Trends and best practices

SDG 4 provides a global framework for inclusive and equitable quality education. Key targets include ensuring free, equitable, and quality education, equal access to pre-primary and vocational education, eliminating discrimination, achieving universal literacy, and building inclusive schools. Global trends emphasize holistic strategies, tailoring efforts to local contexts, prioritizing inclusive curricula and teaching, and actively engaging teachers. Whole-school transformation, flexible curricula, personalized learning, and inclusive classrooms with accessible materials and targeted support for students with disabilities are recognized best practices. The 2008 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities also emphasizes the right to inclusive education.

Power of partnerships: Technology, community, and parental engagement

Technology can enhance inclusive education by improving access and providing accessible learning materials for all students, including those with disabilities. However, persistent challenges include the digital divide and the widespread need for teacher training in ICT. A disability-inclusive and gender-responsive approach to ICT development is essential (Ermolaev, 2024). Community involvement fosters ownership and accountability, improving education quality. Engaging communities in school management and resource mobilization can lead to better outcomes. The Community School Alliances Project in Ghana, which ran between 1997 and 2004, demonstrated the positive impact of community participation. Active parental engagement significantly enhances students' academic performance and motivation. Strategies that have proven effective in fostering this engagement include flexible scheduling, leveraging technology for communication, establishing parent resource centers, and offering parental education programs. For instance, the Community School Alliances Project in Ghana successfully demonstrated how active parental involvement, facilitated through these strategies, leads to improved education quality. Addressing informational and social barriers, gender bias, and economic constraints remains crucial for sustaining effective parental involvement across Ghana.

Policy recommendations

To strengthen the existing framework and more effectively address learning disparities in Ghana, particularly for persons with disabilities, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

1. **Resource allocation:** Implement a transparent, needs-based funding model prioritizing disadvantaged regions, schools, and students, including those with disabilities who require additional support and assistive technologies. Increase overall public expenditure on education to meet international benchmarks.
2. **Teacher development:** Strengthen pre-service and in-service teacher training with a strong emphasis on inclusive education pedagogies, differentiated instruction, and assistive technologies to support students with diverse learning needs effectively. Develop strategies to attract, retain, and equitably distribute qualified teachers across all regions, especially rural areas, through incentives and professional development opportunities focused on inclusive practices.
3. **Infrastructure improvement:** Launch a national initiative to upgrade and expand school infrastructure, ensuring safe, inclusive, and accessible learning environments for all learners, including those with disabilities. Prioritize the elimination of “schools under trees” and provide adequate sanitation and well-equipped classrooms with the necessary accessibility features.
4. **Technology integration:** Develop and implement a national strategy for the effective integration of technology in education, focusing on bridging the digital divide and providing accessible digital resources and assistive technologies for all learners, including those with disabilities. Equip teachers with the necessary skills and training to utilize technology effectively for inclusive teaching and learning.
5. **Community and parental engagement:** Implement programs to foster stronger partnerships between schools, communities, and parents, including awareness campaigns promoting inclusivity and the importance of education for all children, including those with disabilities. Offer workshops that educate parents on supporting their children’s learning journey and establish mechanisms for community and parental feedback and involvement in school governance.
6. **Data collection and monitoring:** Strengthen the national education management information system to systematically collect comprehensive and disaggregated data on student enrollment, attendance, completion rates, and learning outcomes across all relevant dimensions, including disability. These data are crucial for informing policy development and monitoring the effectiveness of inclusive education interventions.
7. **Policy coherence and implementation:** Strengthen coordination between national education policies to ensure a cohesive approach to addressing learning disparities, including those faced by persons with disabilities. Strengthen policy implementation mechanisms at all levels with clear roles and accountability for all stakeholders.

Conclusion

Addressing learning disparities and fostering inclusive and equitable education in Ghana requires a sustained effort from all stakeholders. By implementing these policy recommendations, Ghana can make significant progress towards ensuring that every child, including those with disabilities, has the opportunity to reach their full potential and contribute to the nation’s development.

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