

Universal Basic Education Policy: Impact on Enrolment and Retention

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Abstract

The universal basic education policy enshrined in the constitution of Ghana is aimed at making education accessible and affordable for all Ghanaian citizens. This paper sought to assess whether the universal basic education policy really have an impact on access at the basic level. The study was carried out on the premise that the universal basic education policy has no impact on enrolment and retention. The study used enrolment data from randomly selected public basic schools. Ten(10) each as treatment and control schools. Descriptive statistics were used in the presentation of the data. The data was enrolment figures taken from the registers of the various schools under study. The study found out that enrolment and retention are on the increase. It again found out that girl's dropout rate was higher in control schools than boys. The study concluded that girl's enrolment and retention is largely determined by the universal basic education policy. It is therefore necessary for the provision of incentives for girls and better facilities to meet the increasing demand of enrolment and retention.

Keywords: Universal Basic Education, Enrolment, Retention, Policy, Access

1. Introduction

The objective of the millennium development goals (MDGs) is to eradicate poverty, hunger, achieve universal basic education and promote gender equality. MDGs emphasizes on access to basic education as the driving force of all economies (Osei-Assibey & Grey 2013). It is for this reason many countries try to enroll every citizen in school. This is done to equip the human resource for socio- economic development (Afful-broni & Sekyi 2014). Education is considered as an expenditure which is an investment that yields returns reasonably quickly after individuals leave school and also later throughout their working lives. It also facilitate the movement of labour from underutilized industries to high production industries (Britain & West 1992). This helps in industrialization and increase earnings and participation in the growth process. The resultant effect is good health which can be linked to integrated programmes and policies (Nhlapo et al. 2015; Sidaner et al. 2013). This also will bring about reduction in fertility and a reduction in the nations spending on health.

Efforts have been made by many governments aimed at achieving universal access to basic education. Some have raised the question of legislation as the ultimate for achieving universal basic education. Mehrotra, (1998) in his work done in India, held the view that compulsory legislation is not a pre-condition for achieving universal basic education. But in the view of others compulsory basic education is considered an essential part of basic public services (Eckstein & Zilcha 1994).

The government of Ghana aimed at achieving universal basic education initiated programmes and strategies towards achieving this policy (Okujagu 2013). Some of them include capitation grant, free school uniforms, free exercise books and free lunch or breakfast for school children who come to school (Osei-Fosu 2011). In the work of Galloway et al., (2009) on the real cost of school feeding per head. They found out a high average cost on every child under the programme. In another research, it was found out that developing countries still need support from development partners to continue investments in these programmes (Bundy et al. 2011). Upon the heavy investments made, there still exist challenges in achieving universal basic education (Enos & Francis 2016).

Research so far cited emphasized on the impact of basic education policy on educational outcomes. Much also is done on the impact of the policy on enrolment but little is done on how the policy impact on retention. The contribution of this paper is to highlight on the areas which are not deeply touch in much of the literature. The main purpose of this paper is to assess whether the universal basic education policy really have an impact on expanding access at the basic level. That is increasing enrolment and retention in Ghana. The study was carried out on the premise that the universal basic education policy has no impact on enrolment and retention. It concludes by looking at whether there is a relationship between basic education policy on gender enrolment and retention. It also makes recommendations which will help in shaping the policy direction in basic education.

2. Research Methodology

The study was done in selected public schools in the Tamale Metropolis. This is because private schools pay tuition fees, they also pay for their text books and salary of their teachers. The policy therefore cannot effectively be implemented in these schools. Twenty (20) public basic schools were selected for the study. Ten(10) each as treatment and control schools. Treatment schools as per the study are schools which do not charge admission fee,

examination fees and also do not conduct entrance exams. Control schools under the study are schools which charge admission fees, examination fees and also conduct entrance examination.

The study considered the following variables as the main hindrance to access basic education by many children from poor families. Examination fees are monies charge by some schools at the end of every term to conduct examination. Children who are unable to pay are not allowed to write the examination denying them access to basic education. Entrance examination is a kind of text conducted before children are given admission to school. Many schools deny children admission because children are unable to pass this examination. These schools were selected randomly without consideration to their location within the Tamale Metropolis. The study was based on the assumption that universal basic education policy does not have any impact on school enrolment and retention.

The study covered the period between 2008/2009 to 2015/2016 academic year. This period was chosen because 2015 was set as the year estimated to achieve the objective of the policy of universal basic education. The study used descriptive statistics in the presentation of its results. The data for this study was enrolment figures taken from the registers of various schools under study. These included gross enrolment and retention figures. Gross enrolment from the register is the total number of children registered at the beginning of the term. Retention on the other hand is the number of children available at the end of the term.

3. Relevant Literature

Universal basic education or universal primary education is part of the millennium development goals (MDGs). It aims to achieve universal basic education by 2015. These goals emanate from the millennium declaration signed in September, 2000. It was aimed at creating an environment conducive for development and the eradication of poverty. The signing of this declaration set the tone for governments to put in place legislations to achieve the aims and objectives or targets set in the declaration. In sub-Saharan Africa, children out of school is about 30 million between 2007 and 2012 (UNESCO 2014). This leaves sub-Saharan Africa with more than half of the global total children out of school. Whether universal basic education policy formulation is the solution to reducing the high number of out of school children still remains a challenge. Using Brazil as an example Sawyer & Joyce, (1993) found out how successful the policy has been in getting children to school. The policy in effect dramatically increases enrolment (Deiningner 2003). The policy also helps in decreasing delayed enrolment and also imparted positively on girls in poor households (Nishimura et al. 2008). The question of quality still remains a challenge in the desire to increasing enrolment. Achieving universal basic education also depends on availability of basic infrastructure (Ikoya & Onoyase 2008). This is due to the increasing high numbers and the demand for increasing basic infrastructure.

In Ghana, the universal basic education policy was launched in September 1995. This was to satisfy the constitutional provision of chapter 6, section 38 and sub-section 2:

“The government shall within two years after parliament first meet after the coming into force of this constitution draw up the programme for implementation within the following ten years for the provision of free compulsory universal basic education”. (Constitution 1992)

This was designed to improve upon the inefficiencies of the educational reforms. The objectives of the policy are:

- to expand access to good quality basic education
- promote efficient teaching and learning
- to improve teacher community relations

The goal of the policy aimed at not only increasing enrolment (access) but taking away fees at the basic level in order to make it free. In Ghana, the capitation grant was introduced to take away the basic fees. In the work of Akyeampong, (2009) indicated that the policy did not take away the cost burden of schooling for the poorest households. This is because other fees still exist. There is also irregular release of the capitation grants which makes it difficult for the running of these schools (Sulemana et al. 2013). Achieving the objective of the policy is a political problem reflecting inequalities of power. The policy therefore is achievable only if politics is done away with (Rosser & Joshi 2013).

Ghana over the years has done so much in achieving universal basic education. The government committed itself by the formulation of the Universal basic education policy in 1995. It also set 2015 as the timeline for the achievement of the policy. In order to achieve this policy, the government introduced the capitation grant programme and the school feeding programme. The capitation grant which is the abolishment of fees at the basic level and the school feeding is the provision of free lunch to school children. This paper concentrates on the policy issue of free access to basic education in Ghana. The question which still unanswered is, are children really been enrolled and retained?

3.1. Theoretical Framework

The study was based on the incremental model of policy formulation. The model's emphasis is on continuation

of government policies and programmes with an improvement of previous policies and programmes. Incrementalists believe that for complex problem solving it usually means practicing incrementalism more skillfully (Lindblom 1979). Incrementalism is conservative in that existing policies and programmes are considered as a base, where as attention is on new policies or programmes or modifications of existing policies or programmes (Lindblom 1959).

The universal basic education policy happened to be a policy emanating from previous policies in the educational sector which also sort to address the issue of accessibility and participation especially through schemes that encouraged girls' participation at basic level. From 1951 before Ghana gained independence, there was the accelerated development plan which increased enrolment at the basic level and the Education Act of 1961. This Act made primary and middle schools free and compulsory for all children. In 1966, cost sharing in the use of text books and stationary was introduced. When the 1992 constitution came in to being, it introduced free and compulsory basic education again as a constitutional requirement. This was done due to the demand of the time.

Many have criticized the model on the bases that it does not explain dramatic policy change. But incremental decision making is remedial and geared towards the amelioration of present social imperfections than to the promotions of future social goals. Also decision makers accept the legitimacy of previous policies and programmes.

4. Results and Findings

4.1. Findings on Enrolment:

The data collected from the treatment and control schools are presented bellow based on the enrolment figures.

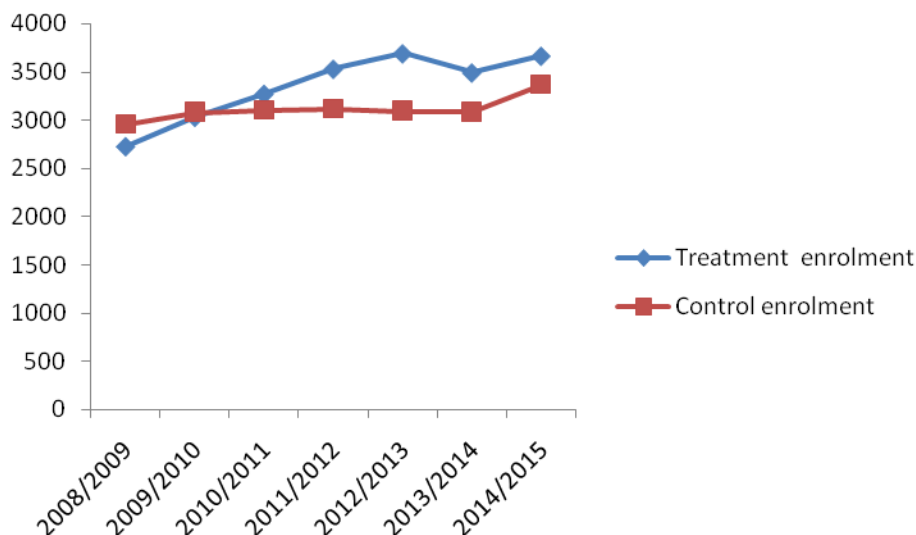


Figure 1: Enrolment Trend within Treatment and Control Schools

From figure 1, enrolment for 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 academic year saw control schools with a 7.7% and 1.6% higher in enrolment than treatment schools respectively. That changed from 2010/2011 academic year with treatment schools of 5.3% higher in enrolment than control schools. The increase in enrolment of treatment schools over control schools continued till 2013/2014 when it recorded the highest increase of 16.2%. The enrolment of the control schools had a negative increase of -0.7% from 2011/2012 to 2012/2013 and -0.3% from 2012/2013 to 2013/2014 academic years. It rather increased by 8.4% from 2013/2014 to 2014/2015 academic year. The changed in enrolment trend brought pressure on the school infrastructure.

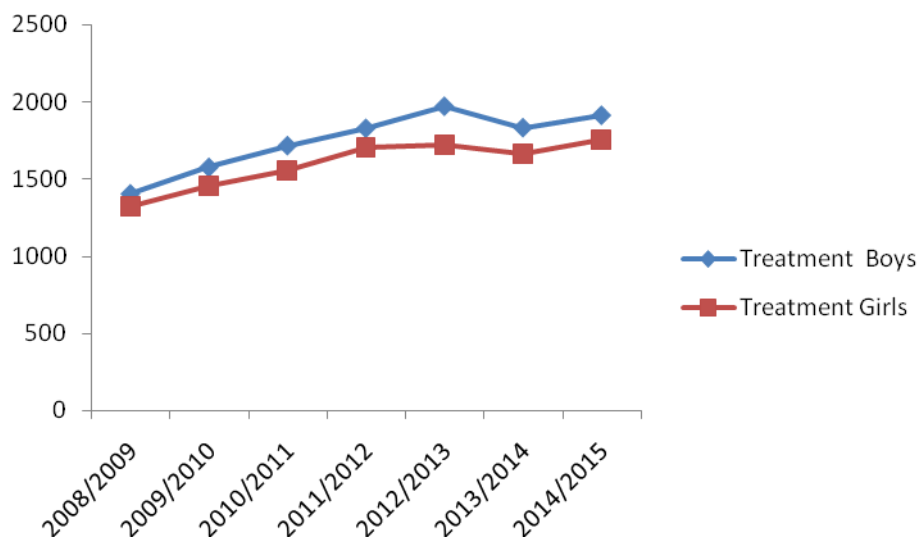


Figure 2: Boys and Girls Enrolment Trend under Treatment Group

Figure 2, represent the enrolment of boys and girls for treatment schools. The figure clearly indicates a high enrolment for boys than girls. The highest enrolment recorded for boys in the academic year 2012/2013 with an increase of 7.2%. The lowest recorded in 2008/2009 academic year. This group consist of schools which have an effective implementation of no admission fees, no examination fees and no entrance examination.

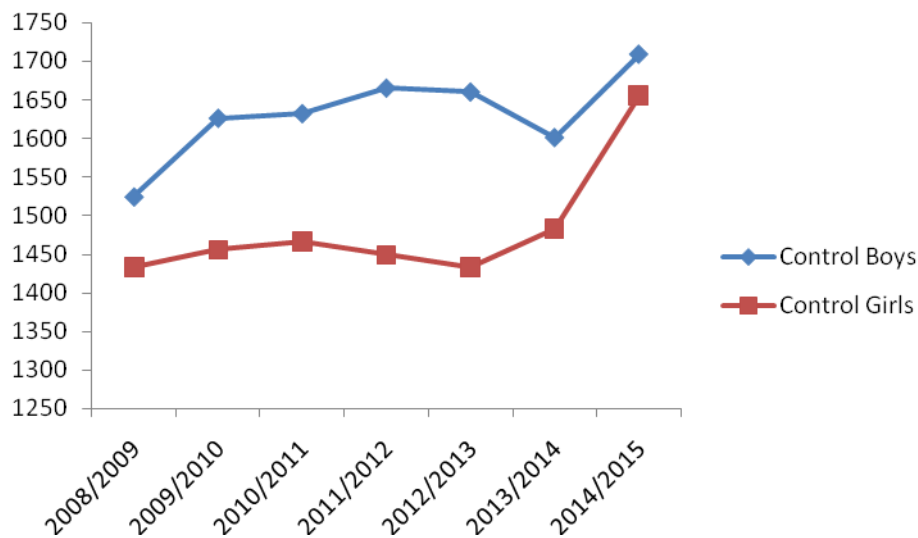


Figure3: Boys and Girls Enrolment Trend under Control Group

Enrolment of boys and girls under control schools displayed in figure three(3). In this category there is a higher difference between enrolment of boys and girls. There exists a much lower enrolment rate for girls as compared to their boys' counterpart. Girl's enrolment for the academic year 2008/2009 and 2012/2013 recorded the same figures of 1433 of 0% increase. Enrolment has been steady in the control schools from 2008/2009 to 2012/2013. In contrast, 2014/2015 academic year recorded a 10.4% increase with a figure of 1656 from 1483.

4.2. Findings on Retention:

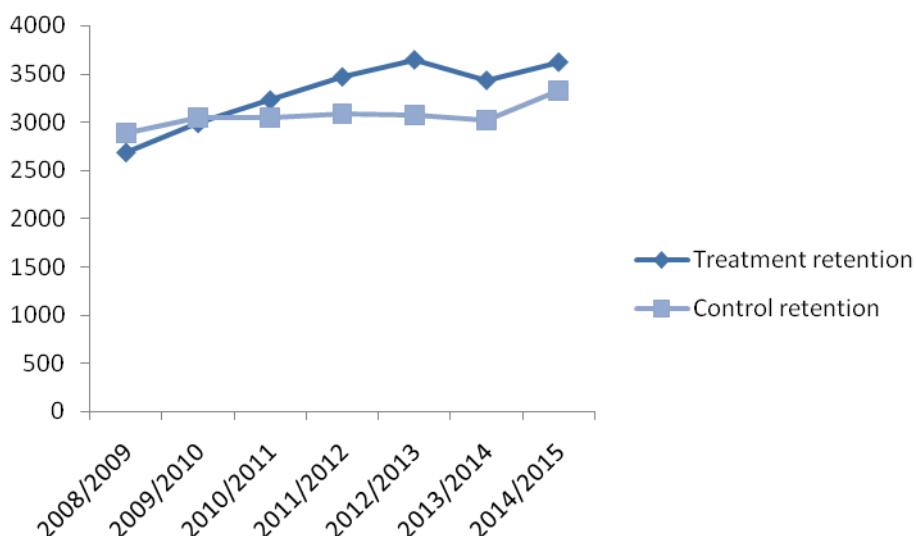


Figure 4: Treatment and Control Schools Retention Trend

The rate at which children stay at school till the end of the academic year which is termed as retention was also recorded. From the graph, retention trend reflects that of the enrolment. But the figures show that not all children complete basic education. The study found out that 2008/2009 academic year saw a 1.6%, 2.4% rate of drop out for treatment and control schools respectively. It stayed at 1.6% in 2009/2010 and dropped to 1.3% in 2010/2011 for treatment schools. The rate went up to 1.8% in 2011/2012 and 2013/2014 academic year for treatment schools. It was the highest during the study for treatment schools. One of the lowest dropout rates for treatment schools of 1.3% was recorded in the 2014/2015 academic year. Control schools on the other hand had its dropout rate of 2.4% in 2008/2009. This was the highest under control schools. It stayed at 1.3%, 1.7%, 1.1% for 2009/2010, 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 respectively. The second highest of 2.0% was recorded in 2013/2014 academic year. The lowest dropout rate for control group of 0.7% was in 2013/2014 academic year.

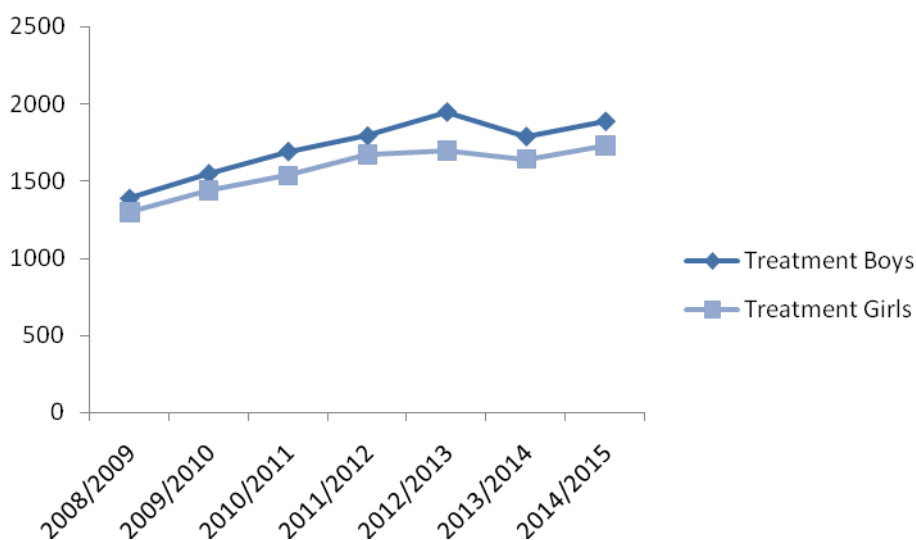


Figure 5: Retention of Boys and Girls under Treatment Group

The study reveals from figure 4 that 2008/2009 academic year recorded a 6.6% more of boys completed basic school in the Tamale Metropolis than girls. 7.2%, 8.3%, 9.3 was recorded for 2009/2010, 2014/2015 and 2010/2011 respectively. The higher rate of boys completing basic school than girls was recorded in 2012/2013 at a rate of 13%. School under the treatment group saw an increase in girl's retention rate. There was an increment of 9.7% from 2008/2009 to 2009/2010, 8.2% from 2010/2011 to 2011/2012 and 5.2 from 2013/2014 to 2014/2015. There was a negative retention rate of -3.2% recorded from 2012/2013 to 2013/2014 academic year.

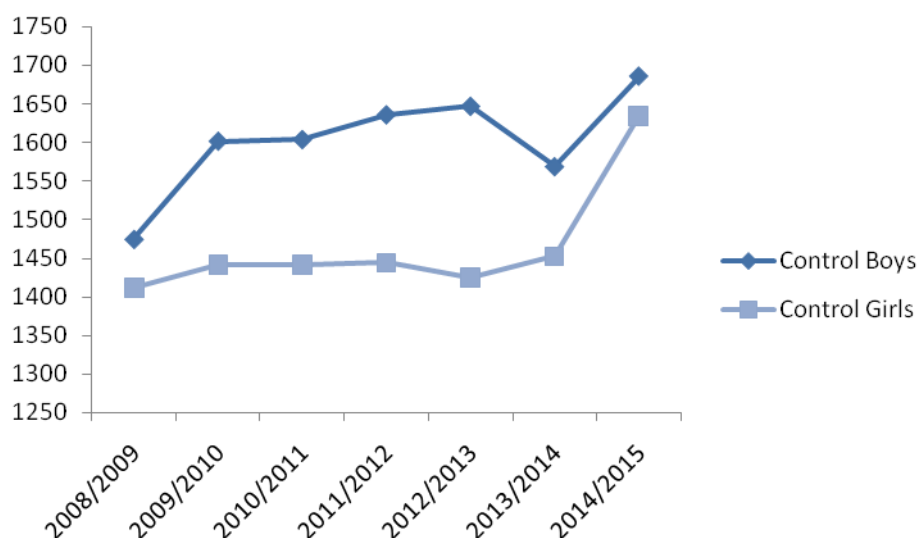


Figure 6: Boys and Girls Retention Trend under Control Group

Figure 6, presents retention figures for boys and girls under control schools. Girl's retention rate from 2009/2010 to 2010/2011 recorded a 0% rate whilst from 2013/2014 to 2014/2015 academic year recorded a negative rate of -1.3%. There was an increase in retention rate for girls from 2013/2014 to 2014/2015 at 11.2%. Boys retention relative to the girls retention recorded 7.5%, 10.2%, 11.7% for the academic years 2013/2014, 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 respectively. The academic years 2012/2013 had a rate of 13.5% and 2014/2015 had 3%.

5. Discussion and Implications

In 2008/2009 and 2009/2010, control schools had higher enrolment than treatment schools. Findings from the study clearly indicate that enrolment is on the increase. Treatment schools recorded higher enrolment than control schools starting from 2010/2011 academic year. The reason for the rise in enrolment of treatment schools was the strict adherence to the policy by eliminating the three variables under study. That is admission fees, examination fees and entrance examination fees. The study made the following observations:

- These three variables affected girls the most in terms of enrolment and retention. Schools which effectively implemented the policy by eliminating these three variables had high girl's enrolment and retention.
- The study found that parents were not ready to pay more for their girl's education. This resulted in the low girl's enrolment in control schools.
- Girls were found to be dropping out from school than boys. This was because of the preference of boy's education to girls.
- In treatment schools, the completion rates of girls were higher. This was attributed to the free education they receive.
- As enrolments begin to rise, infrastructure was found to be limited in many of the treatment schools.
- There was the issue of quality. As enrolment increased in treatment schools, student to teacher ratio was very low. In Manhalia Islamic school, the study found the ratio of teacher to student at 1:75. With the best of skills of a teacher, this ratio cannot be possible for effective teaching.

The study found an increase in enrolment and retention for girls from 2014/2015 academic year both for treatment and control schools. From the study, the inspectorate division of the ministry of education from that academic year step up their monitoring role. Many control schools could not openly charge those fees and to conduct their entrance examination. It was also revealing to find out that many schools take opportunity of the approved parent teacher association (PTA) dues to charge higher fees. These were mostly done in the schools classified as control schools. It was also noted that many schools who charge the examination fees do not conduct the examination after payment. Children who are able to pay are given instant admission dependent on their ability to pay their admission fees.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Universal basic education policy has come to stay and is being considered as a social safety net for poor families. The universal basic education policy aims at increasing access to uplift the plight of the poor in the area of education. It is evident from the literature that educating the poor will in the long run enhance the development

of the country's human resource and promote economy growth.

The study therefore came out with the following suggestions to help shape basic education policy direction of the country. To better achieve the objective of the millennium development goal of increase access to basic education, the study therefore suggests the following:

- The educational authorities should step up their monitoring role to these control schools to curtail the charging of illegal fees.
- There should be an incentive for the girl child to motivate parents to send their girls to school. These girls can be given a daily stipend only when they attend school. The girl child provides labor at home and the stipend provided will supplement for the lost labor.
- The government should also implement the compulsory aspect of the law on basic education. Punishments should be handed down to parents who do not send their girl child to school.
- An oversight committee can be form to oversee the activities of parents during the time of schooling. This committee can be made to monitor households on school days to ensure all girls of school going age are sent to school.
- The Tamale Metropolitan education directorate should establish more public girls' schools to attract more girls. The study revealed that there is only one public girls' junior high school which is one of the best in the region. There is no public girls' senior high school in the Tamale Metropolis. To encourage parents who do not have faith in mixed systems: where boys and girls attend the same school, the authorities should put in place these girls schools to assure these parents to send their girl child to school.
- The educational authorities should institute awards for best performing schools in the metropolis at the end of every academic year. This will create competition among the various schools in the metropolis. To enhance performance in the basic schools, a competition should be created among these schools. This will motivate teachers as well as students.
- Teachers should also be place on performance contract. This will motivates teachers to give out their best in order to achieve more at the end of the year. Some teachers are found to be regularly absent from school. The reason being that their salary is not dependent on their presence or output in the school. Many who do not come to school get their friends to write their names on the attendance register. Placing teachers on performance contract will make teachers give out their best and to justify the salary they take.
- Facilities at the various schools should be improved. In a visit to one treatment school it was found out that the classes where so crowded that the teacher had no space to stand in order to deliver his lesson. For this reason, more infrastructures are needed to cater for the growing number of children in basic schools. The provision of these facilities should not be just for the purpose of number but the quality should be considered.

Due to enhanced awareness of the benefits of education, many parents see the need to send their children to school. It is therefore the responsibility of authorities concern to provide the needed infrastructure and the human resource to man these facilities. The study concludes that universal basic education policy implemented in Ghana in 2005 brought a tremendous change to the issue of access to the poor. The study concludes that girl's enrolment and retention is largely determined by the universal basic education policy. It is therefore necessary for the provision of better facilities to meet the demand of increasing enrolment and retention. The policy will bridge the enrolment gap between boys and girls if effectively implemented and monitored.

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