

# Assessing the Impact and Challenges of Early Grade Education in Ghana since its Implementation

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the influence of Early Grade Education (EGE) policies on children's developmental outcomes in Ghana's Upper East Region, in addition to examining the association between policies and children's outcomes. It takes into account both the availability, standards, and efficacy of EGE policies, whether EGE policies can support cognitive, emotional, and social development and where they are manifested in real-life situations as they pertain to routines of everyday life.

Using a mixed-methods approach, parents, teachers, and policymakers provided information regarding whether there were consistent practices which followed the early education international models. Challenges identified by the study include inadequate infrastructure, insufficient numbers of trained workers, and limited community understanding of early-grade education. EGE policies, though correlated with greater enrollment and community participation, have major implementation gaps and limit the impact of these initiatives. This paper proposes policy, pedagogical, and resource-focused approaches to increasing the quality of early childhood education and improving educator engagement. Practical implications for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders interested in the prevention and enhancement of early childhood development in Ghana and similar settings have been found.

**Keywords:** Early Grade Education, Policies, Assessing, Cognitive, Emotional, Physical and Social Development.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Early Grade Education (EGE) refers to this concept whereby, in any specific setting, there is a range of services and programs that help children to develop properly from birth on up until about eight years. It combines educational programs in care with health, nutrition, and parenting support services, so that the essential elements underpin cognitive, emotional, physical, and social development in children. Research consistently demonstrates that quality early education is critical for long-term academic success, closing the gaps in achievement and well-being for children. As a result, EGE policies in many countries intend to increase availability, raise the quality of programming, and prepare families to care for children in these formative years.

The educational scene of Ghana's Upper East Region has changed over the past 10 years ago, influenced by a variety of sector interventions. The government's successive EGE expansion and strengthening efforts are in response to nationwide reforms aimed at enhancing the quality and reach

of education, as important initiatives due to the realization of the vital role the early age of education has in the development of urban and rural areas. Despite these changes in policy, the lack of implementation, distribution of funding, and the societal conceptions of early grade education remain barriers to achievement.

## II. PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

This paper aims to assess the impact of EGE policies on education and educational attainment of children that have existed in Ghana's Upper East Region with a focus on the policy effectiveness and broader impact of EGE policy in children's development. More specifically, it studies whether or not such policies have increased participation in early childhood education, the quality of early education, teacher professional development, and parental/community involvement in the life course of young children. The study is a significant study because it reveals strengths and weaknesses in contemporary EGE systems and policy and contributes to

the national knowledge of EGE in the country. Results are expected to provide some guidance on future development and interventions geared towards better learning and more fulfilling lifelong growth for children growing up in the region and around the country.

### III. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. *Global Best Practice in ECCE*

The significance of early grades education (EGE) to child development and society is broadly acknowledged worldwide. Best performing EGE settings are usually characterized by diversity and inclusion, robust curricula, well-trained and supported teachers, and parental and community involvement. Models from Nordic countries such as Finland, New Zealand, Canada, and others emphasize play-based pedagogies, positive teacher-student ratios, and the recognition of social and emotional learning. There is evidence of positive cognitive, emotional, physical, and social consequences of high-quality programs that are followed by higher academic performance in adulthood. Policies that ensure equitable access especially for low-income and marginalized groups have been a key part of closing achievement gaps and closing inequality.

#### B. *EGE Policies in Ghana*

Ghana has successfully expanded early grade education substantially over the past twenty years. Nationally, the major documents are the 2004 ECCD Policy—the first time to focus on children and services in the early years from birth to eight, establishing links between childcare and education; the 2007 policy requiring two years of foundation education to occur in kindergarten to align early years' activities with all primary school learning; and the Education Strategic Plan (2018–2030) along with the ECE Policy Framework (circa 2020).

However, poor EGE programs are affected by weak infrastructure, the low levels of participation in the EGE program (in particular in rural areas), and shortage of qualified experts. At a community level, local hindrances encompass constrained resources, inadequate teacher training, cultural tendencies that see early education as less valuable than formal schooling. So again, despite policy adoption, the Upper East Region's successes remain tentative given limited funding, low community awareness, and uneven program quality.

### IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This investigation is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) and highlights the role of multiple interrelated systems in a child's development. From this vantage point, there are a multitude of nested environments around a child:

- The micro-system (family, school, peers)

- The meso-system (connections among elements of the microsystem)
- The exo-system (community and policy)
- The macro-system (broader cultural values)

In this instance, family, community, education, and state programs all impact the way children grow up in the Upper East Region or the country at large.

Vygotsky's Socio-cultural Theory (1978) strengthens this, focusing on the societal and cultural context as a vehicle for learning, giving the educator a holistic perspective on children's early experience of learning. Viewed in isolation, these theories help orient the relationship of EGE policy and developmental outcomes in the geographical context.

### V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### A. *Research Design*

With mixed-methodological designs, based on both quantitative and qualitative factors, such a study has been adopted in offering a comprehensive assessment of EGE policy impacts in the Upper East Region. The quantitative component quantitatively gauges measurable outcomes, including enrollment, learner achievement, and teacher qualifications while the qualitative component elicits insights into stakeholders' perceptions and lived experiences: parents, teachers, and policymakers. By triangulating data from various sources, the reliability, credibility, and validity of the findings are improved.

#### B. *Data Collection*

Surveys, interviews, and document analysis will be used to collect data. Surveys: Questionnaires with structured questions will be asked of parents and teachers to get the views on the quality of the program and the access, and perceived benefits of said program within children's development. Surveys will consist of closed and open-ended items to obtain data on quantitative and qualitative aspects. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with key informants, including local policymakers, head teachers from schools, and representatives of education organizations will be included, to gain in-depth views on what challenges and successes were faced at local implementation and what went well. Document review: The alignment of national policy with local practice program reports and instructional materials and gaps in policy provision and policy implementation as seen through policy documents is examined in policy texts, program reports, and instructional materials.

#### C. *Sampling Method*

Purposive sampling will be used to recruit participants with immediate contact with EGE programs in the area. Parents & Educators: The study will recruit 200 parents and 100 educators from a number of early childhood centres in the area; participants will be selected solely based on personal

experience with EGE services. Policymakers and Administrators: 20–25 policymakers, school administrators, and community leaders who have influenced regional EGE policy will be invited for interviews. Schools and Centers: A cross-section of both public and private EGE centres will be sampled in the survey design for diversity of service providers.

#### D. Data Analysis

Data will be analyzed using a mix of quantitative and qualitative strategies:

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and measures of central tendency such as mean, median, and mode) will be reported to extract responses from survey data to detect themes concerning access, quality, and perceived impacts.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** We will use qualitative analysis to interpret interview transcripts following inductive thematic coding to illuminate both those that can be analyzed to reveal common issues and themes related to problems and barriers to and responses to policy impact. The codes will be inductively constructed to explore stakeholder experiences.
- **Triangulation:** Surveys, in particular, will be triangulated together with interviews and documents to enhance the generalizability of findings and to create a comprehensive account of the effects of EGE policy in the Upper East Region. Integrating these approaches should enable the analysis of EGE policies in the Upper East Region as an integrated evaluation, which will not only complement numerical measures but also contain rich qualitative data.

## VI. ECCE POLICY ANALYSIS IN THE ENTIRETY OF THE UPPER EAST REGION OF GHANA

### A. Policy Overview

On a regional level, we implemented various initiatives to expand EGE reach, improve teacher education, and incorporate health and nutrition into early educational services in the country. These efforts are in line with national plans to ensure inclusivity and equality in Early Grades EGE education despite socio-economic backgrounds national goals. Regional implementation of such policies, however, has been limited by local conditions with regard to provision of limited resources and inconsistent levels of support for policy action.

### B. Stakeholder Involvement

To fully implement the EGE policy, multiple actors must engage, including government departments, teachers, parents, and communities.

Key actors in the Upper East Region are:

- **Local Government and Local Authorities:** District education offices are the main places for implementing the EGE policy for monitoring compliance and resourcing. However, budgetary scarcity and bureaucratic hurdles limit their ability to render effective delivery. EGE centre educators and caregivers: Teachers and caregivers are crucial to program delivery and oversee instruction, child development and parent involvement. And yet the region seems to lack trained EGE practitioners, which weakens program quality.
- **Parents and Communities:** Parents and community advocates help with children's learning as they are active partners for the EGE. Still, the lack of awareness among parents in the Upper East Region about EGE benefits hinders their engagement.
- **Non-governmental organizations:** Non-governmental organizations help fill gaps through funding, training, and resources, supporting outreach to vulnerable children.

### C. Barriers to Effective Implementation

These are barriers to the effective implementation of EGE policies in the region.

Such blockades encompass:

- **Limited Financial Resources:** Financial limitations in local budgets have deprived EGE of infrastructure, as well as avenues for teacher training and educational materials. Many EGE centres lack basic facilities such as proper classrooms, instructional resources, particularly books and sanitation facilities, which compromise the quality of education produced. **Inadequate Teacher Training:** The problem that the area has is a shortage of appropriately trained and qualified EGE teachers. Most teachers in early childhood programs have limited formal training in early grade education and there is a mismatch between the skills needed for effective teaching and the available workforce. The quality of early education suffers as a result of the professional development void.
- **Culture and Society:** The value of EGE does not exist in some rural communities. "Traditional beliefs and priorities," which prioritize household or livelihood tasks in preference for early formal education make parents less likely to sign their children up for programs, he argued.
- **Infrastructure Concern:** Most of the centres boast crowded classrooms and few things children can do with them. There are many facilities without playgrounds, poor sanitation or a great number of facilities that do not provide necessities that contribute to child care.
- **Policy Gaps and Inconsistent Implementation:** Although the national policy underlines the need for extensive and integrated access-level EGE services, implementation, on-the-ground service is quite inconsistent. Local agencies resist applying the national recommendations in

operational ways, and unevenness in service quality and reach is felt in the region.

#### D. Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

M&E is essential to track progress and impact; however, local M&E systems remain underdeveloped and irregular. Key points include:

- Enrollment & basic service data: Local education offices also collect statistics on enrolment, attendance, and facility services where centres exist, but this information is rarely systematically analyzed or used as policy. Long-term Effects: There is still limited evidence on the long-term developmental effects of children who participate in EGE programmes.
- Teacher and Program Evaluation: Teaching quality and curriculum delivery are evaluated by some; however, systematic, repeated assessment of pedagogical practice is neglected. Such systems only monitor classroom practices and curricular implementation discretely.
- Community Involvement in M&E: Parent and local stakeholder involvement in monitoring increases transparency and accountability, but the involvement of local stakeholders in M&E is still quite limited. More community engagement could help to identify local barriers and increase the effectiveness of programs.
- Policy updates/ Feedback loops: Refinements based on evaluation are infrequent and typically reactive rather than part of an iterative learning approach. Robust local-level feedback mechanisms need to be set up for continuous learning, adaptation, and local implementation of EGE policies.

Overall, while the positive impacts of EGE policies have been observed, stubborn obstacles, especially around stakeholder involvement, access to funds, infrastructure, teacher support, and M&E, remain to make them difficult to implement. Combating these obstacles entails focused investment and better governance at the local level, so the policy intentions lead to better lives for young children. Children who participate in EGE programs exhibit significant gains across areas like cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development. Early exposure to structured learning supports language, numeracy, and problem-solving skills. Children from poor families may respond better to EGE and reduce developmental delay in school readiness. Attendees may exhibit better social skills, teamwork, and cooperation among themselves and about other adults in their social circles. But the overall picture is much more divided: well-resourced centers in which teachers are trained bring the most progress, while underfunded programs produce modest increases for some people.

## VII. IMPACT OF ECCE POLICIES

### A. Effects on Child Development

Early Grade Education (EGE) as a regional system has significantly enhanced the growth of children, but its impact differs dramatically among groups. Good news: In early grade education programs, children demonstrate significant improvement in cognitive, social, physical and emotional development. Early exposure to structured learning settings nurtures linguistic, numeracy, and problem-solving skills. Even more significantly, children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from EGE as it lays the groundwork for overcoming early developmental delays and better school readiness of young children. Socially, EGE programs develop better social interaction, cooperation and self-regulation skills in children. But the outcomes are mixed, because it's unevenly implemented and has inconsistent care throughout centers due to differences in methods of implementation and available resources. Students in well-resourced centres with skilled instructors will achieve the best developmental outcomes; pupils in underfunded or inadequately staffed programs can only marginally improve.

### B. Effects On Educational Outcomes

A lot has been done, albeit under the guise of reforming EGE to promote education indicators. Within the Upper East Region, reforms have made an initial impact on the indicators of the state of educational life. Enrollment has soared, and children attending EGE are more likely to do better later on in school — in areas like essential skills like literacy, numeracy, and critical reasoning — and will settle more seamlessly into primary school with lower repetition rates. However, the inequitable quality of instruction, availability of accessible materials, and classroom conditions have led to uneven results. To reap benefits in academics that last, increased investments in teacher training, infrastructure, and curriculum cohesion are required. III. Impact on Families & Communities.

### C. Impact on Families and Communities

EGE policies have made the home better educated and supported children as well as families and communities, by increasing resources for learning and educating parents on child-rearing practices. In some jurisdictions, EGE programs result in greater parental engagement and more supportive home learning environments. In some territories, the EGE programmes have also spurred overall changes in society, leading to a higher level of engagement of communities in education and social activities. But in numerous rural areas, old practices and economic priorities inhibit parent involvement and in areas where awareness is low, the impact of EGE is weak.

#### *D. Consequences on Teachers and Trainees*

A series of training and professional development initiatives has sharpened some educators' skills for organizing classrooms, planning activities, creating nurturing environments, and promoting job satisfaction for people who see concrete progress in the growth of children. However, for many early years' educators, the literature and professional qualifications available for EGE are limited and resources for such pedagogy are limited, especially in resource-poor centres. Poor pay and heavy workloads are the main causes of burnout and high levels of staff turnover (especially in rural areas) that are undermining sustainment efforts to provide high-quality teaching environments for a wide variety of learners. Overall, although EGE policies have resulted in measurable advances in child development, educational performance, community participation, and education level, large discrepancies in performance across the district exist. Ongoing investments in teacher education, facilities, and community-based staff and social outreach are required to expand and promote the benefits of EGE as well as equity in the benefits to cover the board across the region.

### **VIII. DISCUSSION**

#### *A. Key Findings*

The study of EGE policies in the Upper East Region uncovered several important findings:

- **Enhanced Child Development Benefits:** EGE policies have positively impacted children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Studies on quality EGE show that people in quality EGE programs made improvements in language, numeracy, and social skills during the childhood phase, which also resulted in improved school readiness.
- **Uneven Quality of Experience:** Although programs have increased student numbers and facilitated entry into elementary school, their quality has not been uniform. "Centres that have a better-resourced and more-trained teaching staff are more effective, whereas they are able to provide services of a higher quality than they were before," he wrote.
- **Low Involvement of Stakeholders:** When teachers and parents become the actors of the implementation processes, such is the case, but when they do, they rarely exert their own meaningful impact. Low parental awareness among teachers and parents discourages involvement and limits policy effectiveness, especially in rural contexts.
- **Challenges to Effectiveness of Implementation:** There were limitations on the successful implementation of policies, such as a lack of funding, teacher training, and infrastructure. These barriers impede the quality of EGE programs, thus limiting the children's attainment of the developmentally appropriate target outcomes.
- **Challenges for teachers and educators:** While new teacher training opportunities have been introduced,

many educators still lack formal qualifications in early grade education. A shortage of trained personnel and inadequate pay for EGE teachers in the classroom lead to job dissatisfaction and a high staff turnover rate that only worsens program quality.

### **IX. COMPARISON WITH OTHER REGIONS, NATIONS OR REGIONS**

In these circumstances, the situation in Upper East Region is symptomatic of broader trends in Ghana as far as across the African continent: access has improved, but there are large and persistent deficiencies in the provision of quality and coverage. Ghana's infrastructure is better supported to operate systems with less money, fewer qualified teachers, and local involvement with communities than top-performing EGE systems (e.g., Finland or Canada); while Ghana's funding is lower, it has fewer qualified teachers and community involvement. In Finland, early-education programs are widely funded and employed by well-educated teachers with programs that cater to both academic and emotional development at the same time. Unlike the main funding that Ghana follows, which is sometimes not enough of a factor in the country's reliance on centralized mechanisms, resulting in unevenness in service delivery. Nations including Kenya and Uganda (and several others) have similar restrictions but similar approaches of responding to infrastructure/training gaps through the community and NGO partnerships, which provide pathways to filling in infrastructure and training gaps—some of which are of benefit to Ghanaian interventions.

### **X. GAPS IN POLICIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Despite Ghana's policy orientation that supports EGE, there are constraints of coverage, which result in a number of gaps for effectiveness. To this end, important recommendations are presented:

- **Expanded funding opportunities** should be identified (e.g., in need areas), to cover centres' basic needs; learning materials used in centres; infrastructures such as schools and caravans; and competitive (with all schools offering different rates of return) salaries for teachers.
- **A broadening of Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Employ ongoing, continuous and systematic training focusing on child-centered pedagogy, social emotional learning, and inclusive practices. Formal certification pathways for EGE educators should be offered through the collaboration between higher education institutions and teacher colleges.
- **Enhance Community and Parental Participation:** Spread the message about the need for early education especially in rural areas through community forums, parenting classes, community campaigns, and parents' workshops. Community's input into monitoring and development is conducive to accountability and responsiveness.

- Develop a strong M&E system: One capable of tracking the quality of program and teacher delivery and on child outcomes, incorporating feedback, both by the community and the officials in relation to data of the policy decisions about them, so that it is to be developed which could be adjusted in response to local necessity.
- Resolve Infrastructural Issues: Make better EGE services from local authorities, be in a clean, secure classroom, in appropriate play area and sanitation. NGO and private sector partnerships can fill funding gaps.
- Develop A More Inclusive Curriculum: Revise curricula to be more applicable to the different areas, so that children of all abilities, and from all marginalized groups are not missed.

Achieving these recommendations can make such a significant contribution towards advancing the quality and reach of early grade education in the region as well as nationally, resulting in better outcomes for children, families, and communities.

## XI. CONCLUSION

### A. Summary of Findings

This report assessed EGE policy effectiveness in the Upper East Region through a three-pronged approach that includes: child growth, educational success, and effects on families and educators. Principal conclusions include:

- Benefits for Children: Participants in EGE demonstrated gains in cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development as well as in school readiness.
- Differentiated Educational Outcomes: EGE policies increased enrollment and smoothed transition to early primary school, but quality of program varies; facilities that are well resourced perform better than those that lack funds.
- Implementation Barriers: Major challenges include an insufficient funding structure, a shortage of relevant teacher training, weak infrastructure, and intermittent stakeholder involvement—especially in rural communities.
- Educator and Teacher Concerns: Although training has increased, many educators have no formal EGE qualifications; low pay and heavy workloads are making them burnout prone and reducing the quality of programs they can implement.
- Implications for Families and Communities: EGE initiatives have helped address the issues of raising awareness and parental engagement in urban contexts, yet lack of awareness and recognition of EGE benefits remains common in rural communities.

## XII. POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ECE

The study provides directions for future EGE initiatives and policy for the Upper East Region and others:

- Policy Implications: Investments in EGE particularly in such underserved locations must be made through concerted investments in teacher training, programming, and delivery mechanisms to ensure equitable access to quality early education.
- Stakeholder Engagement: Parent, educator, and community agency engagement must be enhanced in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of EGE and it needs to be meaningful.
- Quality: Access expansion cannot stand alone: commitment to quality is the bedrock of EGE; its value depends not just on what it provides for children, but on promoting their holistic development.

## XIII. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The study highlights several avenues for future study:

- Outcome tracking of children-oriented study longitudinal: Longitudinal studies of academic, social, and labor market outcomes for preschool students would identify that it is the long term implications of childhood experiences which emerge from the EGE approach.
- Comparative studies with other parts of Ghana: Cross-regional comparisons could shed light on how local settings shape the implementation of policies and discover best practice that is transferable across other areas in Ghana.
- Technology and EGE: Look at the place of digital tools and resources in early education, how technology might play a role or support EGE implementation in under-resourced contexts.
- Policy implementation and governance: Investigate governance arrangements that enhance local implementation and coordination between national plans and local activities.
- Inclusive Education Practices: Explore ways EGE can be inclusive to children with disabilities and underrepresented people, challenges, and methods to overcome them.
- By and large the results indicate that EGE policy should be comprehensive (access along with quality and inclusiveness) with sustained funding. Tackling the obstacles and following these recommendations may assist the region to develop our early grade services and our youngest citizens' quality of life.

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