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Determinants of Access and Participation in Primary Education in Ghana

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Abstract

The purpose of study was to investigate the factors influencing access and participation in primary education in the Bongo District. The study employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 82 headteachers and 12804 parents of children in primary education. The simple random sampling technique was used to select 68 headteachers and 340 parents to participate in the study. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data for analysis. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviations were used to analyse the data. The findings revealed that factors such as child labour, parents' level of education, school facilities, teaching and learning materials, distance to school and teacher quality were rated high by respondents as factors that influence access to and participation in primary education in the district. Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that school-related and home-related factors have a significant influence on access to and participation of school-age children in primary education.

Keywords: *Access, Participation, School-Related Factors, Home-Related Factors.*

Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a cornerstone of nation-building, playing a pivotal role in human development (Appiah & Esia-Donkoh, 2018; Moses & Kingsley, 2013). It is crucial to acknowledge the importance of education as a vital mechanism for social, economic, and political mobility (Amutabi & Oketch, 2003). Globally, education is esteemed as a key driver of social transformation and sustainable development (Tinab, 2014). In response to this essential need, numerous educational reforms and programs have been initiated both locally and internationally. Notably, in 1948, the United Nations declared education a basic human right in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, emphasizing the right to free and compulsory elementary education, and ensuring equitable access to higher education based on merit (United Nations, 1949).

In September 2000, the United Nations introduced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with Goal 2 focusing on achieving universal primary education by 2015, and Goal 3 aiming to promote gender equality and empower women, with a specific target to eliminate gender disparities in education by 2005 and at all levels by 2015 (MDG report, 2009). Building on the MDGs' progress, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were established in 2016, with Goal 4 dedicated to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Despite significant advances in expanding global access to education, particularly in low-income countries, universal primary education remains an unfulfilled goal. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), approximately 59 million children worldwide remain out of school at the primary level, with over half (54%) of these children residing in Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, about 10 million children in this region drop out of primary school each year (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019). These figures underscore the persistent challenges to achieving Universal Primary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa, raising concerns about the future human resource potential of the region. As a signatory to the UN charter, Ghana is committed to establishing the necessary frameworks to fulfil these educational goals, including ensuring the right to education for all.

Ghana has implemented various educational initiatives both before and after independence to advance educational development (Okujagu, 2013). The Accelerated Development Plan (ADP) for education, introduced in 1951, was a significant step toward providing fee-free primary education to all school-age children, regardless of socio-economic background or location. The Education Act of 1961 further reinforced this commitment by making fee-free primary and middle school education a constitutional right. These initiatives laid the foundation for rapid educational expansion and helped to reduce disparities in access to education. The Ghanaian Constitution, particularly Article 25 Clause 1, guarantees equal educational opportunities and mandates free, compulsory, and accessible basic education for all. Article 38 of the 1992 Constitution also requires the government to provide Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) and, resources permitting, extend access to senior secondary, technical, and tertiary education, as well as lifelong learning opportunities. The introduction of capitation grants and school feeding programs has led to a significant increase in basic education enrolment across Ghana (MOE, 2008).

Despite the government's strong commitment to free, high-quality basic education and the importance placed on education by parents, primary school enrolment rates remain below universal levels in areas like the Bongo District of the Upper East Region. This district, like many rural areas across Ghana, has a high number of out-of-school children. Researchers observed that school-age children in this district are often engaged in street vending, market work, farming, and other activities during school hours, with child-motherhood and teenage pregnancies also prevalent. These circumstances raise critical questions about the factors preventing children in the Bongo District from accessing their fundamental right to education as guaranteed by the Ghanaian Constitution.

Determinants of Access and Participation

Previous studies have identified various factors affecting school attendance and participation in primary education across Ghana (Adam et al., 2016; Amagnya, 2020; Asamoah et al., 2019; Derkong-Dery, 2018; Fentiman et al., 2001). For example, Adam et al. (2016) examined the primary causes of school dropouts in rural Ghana, focusing on the Asunafo South District in the Brong Ahafo Region. Amagnya (2020) investigated the factors influencing education in the Builsa District of Northern Ghana, while Asamoah et al. (2019) explored the impact of school-related factors on girls' access to basic education in the Tarkwa-Nsuaem Municipality. Derkong-Dery (2018) assessed the factors influencing the quality of education in basic schools in the Nandom District of the Upper West Region. Fentiman et al. (2001) explored the health and cultural factors affecting basic education enrolment in rural Ghana. However, none of these studies systematically examined the factors influencing access to and participation in primary education specifically in the Bongo District. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the home and school-related factors affecting primary education access and participation in the Bongo District.

Literature Review

This study is grounded in John Rawls' Theory of Justice (1971), which provides a foundational theoretical framework based on the social contract approach to address fairness in society. The principles of this theory help in identifying essential equalities and emphasize the need to treat all individuals equitably in all areas of life (Meuret, 2002; Rawls, 1999). Rawls outlines two principles of justice that are particularly relevant to this study, especially concerning the right of every individual to access and participate in education. The first principle asserts that "each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others." The second principle states that "social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage and attached to positions and offices open to all" (Rawls, 1999, p.53). Additionally, Rawls argues that all social values, including liberty, opportunity, income, wealth, and the social bases of self-respect, should be distributed equally among society's members, ensuring that any inequalities benefit everyone (p.54).

In the context of education, the principles of social justice are closely tied to fairness and equality in terms of access, opportunities, and academic achievement. This implies that the education system has a responsibility to ensure that all children have equal opportunities to learn, achieve, and develop their potential according to the curriculum and policy directives. Moreover, these principles underscore the importance of equitably distributing educational resources to reduce disparities and promote fundamental liberties. Research by García and Weiss (2017) and Suárez-Orozco et al. (2015) highlights the persistent disparities in global education systems, which adversely affect children's access to education, enrollment rates, learning, and outcomes. These inequalities often stem from socioeconomic status, parental education levels, poverty, and sociocultural factors (Anangisye, 2020; García & Weiss, 2017; Humble & Dixon, 2017; Kapinga, 2014). According to Rawls (1999), such inequalities should be addressed by prioritizing the needs of disadvantaged or vulnerable groups to ensure genuine equality of opportunity for all.

Based on these theoretical assumptions, it is clear that access to and participation in primary education is a fundamental human right that must be upheld for everyone. As Anangisye (2020) emphasizes, "school-age children, irrespective of their physical and mental status, race, colour, culture, political affiliation, religious ideology, gender, or socio-economic status, have the right to basic education." Therefore, all children should have equal opportunities to attend school, learn, and develop their potential, regardless of their background. Denial of this right can leave children vulnerable to neglect, violence, and exploitation. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the government to ensure that schools provide equitable learning conditions for all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status or geographical location. This study, grounded in the principles of justice that advocate for equal basic rights and opportunities, seeks to examine the home and school-related factors affecting access to and participation in primary education in the Bongo district. The objective is to contribute significantly to the existing body of knowledge in Ghana

Determinants of Access and Participation

and support the global effort to realize universal access to education as a fundamental human right for all children.

Research consistently shows that a child's health status significantly impacts their school attendance, grade retention, and overall academic performance (Cohee et al., 2021; Fentiman et al., 2001). Malnourished and hungry students struggle with concentration and learning, leading to higher rates of absenteeism and dropout (Matingwina, 2018). Health issues such as hunger, malaria, headaches, and poor eyesight disproportionately affect children's educational experiences, with adolescent girls facing additional challenges due to the lack of sanitary facilities and menstruation-related issues (Lengha, 2014).

Socioeconomic status and parental education levels are also key barriers to educational attainment, access, and participation (Matingwina, 2018). Financial constraints related to school fees and educational resources can adversely affect a student's mental and emotional well-being, often resulting in poor academic performance and an increased risk of dropping out (Conger & Donnellan, 2007; Boateng et al., 2021). Moreover, there is a clear link between socioeconomic status and family size; families with higher socioeconomic status can often provide better educational opportunities for all their children, while those with limited resources may need to prioritize the education of certain children over others (Abenawe, 2022; Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010).

Parents are generally expected to enrol their children in school and ensure regular attendance (Education Act, 2008). However, household decisions and family size can further contribute to educational disparities. The costs associated with education, including fees, uniforms, and transportation, pose significant challenges for low-income households, influencing their decisions to enrol or withdraw their children from school (Kainuwa et al., 2013; Zhao & Glewwe, 2010). Larger families often struggle to support each child's education adequately, leading to lower participation rates, frequent absenteeism, and higher dropout rates. Gender disparities in education are also perpetuated by household decisions, with boys often being favored over girls due to cultural and religious beliefs, which limits girls' access to education in Sub-Saharan African countries, including Ghana (John & Emily, 2013).

The educational level of parents is another critical factor influencing children's academic outcomes. Studies consistently show that children of parents with higher educational backgrounds tend to perform better academically (Boonk et al., 2018; Driessen et al., 2005). Parental involvement in schoolwork, monitoring academic progress, and providing support significantly contribute to children's educational success, a trend observed across all educational levels, from primary to tertiary education. Conversely, children of parents with lower educational achievement often struggle academically, leading to higher dropout rates (Onzima, 2010; Bol, 2020).

Child labour, defined as the engagement in economic activities that are hazardous, harmful, and exploitative to a child's health and development, poses a significant threat to educational access and participation (ILO, 2002). Studies demonstrate a strong positive correlation between child labour and reduced commitment to education, resulting in higher dropout rates (He, 2016; Putnick & Bornstein, 2015). Poverty often forces children into labour, with detrimental effects on their physical and mental well-being (Hamenoo et al., 2018). While child labour may provide economic support for schooling, the associated stress and time constraints can negatively impact academic achievement (Akyeampong et al., 2007). Moreover, child labour exposes children to health risks and accidents, hindering their overall development (Hamenoo et al., 2018). In Sub-Saharan Africa, the opportunity cost of sending a child to school often includes a loss of labour and resources, leading to a reliance on child labour for various household tasks (UNICEF, 2022; Nyamubi, 2015; Bezerra et al., 2009).

Inadequate school facilities present a significant barrier to educational access and participation. UNESCO defines school infrastructure as the essential physical components of the educational environment, including classrooms, libraries, laboratories, toilets, and playgrounds (UNESCO-IIEP, 2017). The lack or insufficiency of these facilities severely impacts the quality of education, students' academic performance,

Determinants of Access and Participation

and overall access to education (Kapinga, 2017; Souck & Nji, 2017). A particular concern is the lack of proper sanitation facilities, which hinders girls' attendance and participation, especially in relation to menstrual hygiene education (Rueckert, 2019). Studies from Nigeria and India highlight how inadequate infrastructure, such as the absence of toilets, leads to higher absenteeism and dropout rates among girls (Owoeye & Olatunde Yara, 2011). Similarly, in Ghana, a study by Amagnya (2020) found that many students, particularly at the basic level, lacked essential school materials such as textbooks, uniforms, tables, and chairs, with state-provided resources being insufficient. The study also revealed that many students in remote areas are forced to learn under trees, causing schools to close whenever it rains or threatens to rain. Hanushek (1995) emphasizes that infrastructure and learning materials are critical for effective teaching and learning, and their absence results in poor educational outcomes and higher dropout rates, particularly in developing countries. Globally, the situation is concerning, with many schools lacking basic sanitation and clean drinking water facilities, further exacerbating educational inequalities (UNESCO-IIEP, 2017; Kumar et al., 2019; UNESCO, UNICEF, & WFP, 2023).

Teacher supply, qualifications, and attendance are also crucial factors affecting educational access. UNESCO reports a global shortage of 69 million teachers, with the most severe deficits in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (UNESCO, 2022). In response to these shortages, some countries employ unqualified teachers, which diminishes the quality of education (UNESCO, 2022). The equitable distribution of teachers across regions is vital, as high student-teacher ratios can lead to lower learning outcomes (World Bank, 2018). In Ghana, challenges such as high teacher-student ratios, absenteeism, and irregular school attendance complicate teaching and learning, contributing to high dropout rates (Amagnya, 2020). A World Bank report indicated that Ghana ranks first among sub-Saharan African countries for teacher absenteeism, with an average of 43 days of absenteeism per teacher per year, compared to 11.6 days in Tunisia and 13.4 days in Morocco. Factors such as inadequate monitoring, illness, long commutes, religious obligations, and insufficient facilities contribute to these high absenteeism rates (Peace fm, 2011). Addressing teacher shortages requires decentralized placement, improved motivation, and local recruitment. Teacher absenteeism is a pervasive issue, significantly impacting learning outcomes and eroding trust in the education system (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2018; UNESCO, 2014; Peacefm, 2011; Akseer & Játiva, 2021).

Road infrastructure and the distance to schools disproportionately affect educational access, particularly in rural areas of Ghana (Akyeampong et al., 2007). In these regions, challenges such as inadequate school supply and schools that can only be reached by canoe contribute to non-attendance, late enrollment, absenteeism, and dropout rates (Fentiman et al., 2001). Studies, including one by Filmer (2007), highlight the importance of reducing the distance between schools and students, showing a positive correlation with higher enrollment and retention rates. Safety concerns, especially for young girls, are a critical factor, affecting girls' enrollment more than boys'. Inadequate transportation and long distances, particularly in rural areas, are major obstacles to educational participation, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to improve accessibility (Casely-Hayford et al., 2003; Filmer, 2007; Smits & Huisman, 2013).

Research design

The descriptive survey design was used for the study. This is because descriptive survey is commonly utilized for gathering information on individuals' attitudes, opinions, behaviours, or various aspects related to education or social science issues (Brooking, 2013).

Participants

The target population for the study was 12,886 participants consisting of 82 headteachers and 12804 parents. Out of the targeted population, Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size formula was used to sample 68 headteachers and 340 parents to participate in the study. The simple random sampling technique was then used to select both the headteachers and parents for the study.

Determinants of Access and Participation

The Moazzam (2014) formula was used to obtain the sample size for both headteachers and parents.

$$n = \frac{N * X}{X + N - 1} \dots \dots \dots (1) \quad \text{where,}$$

$$X = Z^2 pq / d^2 \dots \dots \dots (2)$$

n : the desired sample size

z : the standard normal deviate usually set at 1.96 (which corresponds to 95% confidence level)

p : the proportion in the target population to have a specific characteristic. If no estimate is available set it at 50% (or 0.50)

q : 1- p

d : absolute precision or accuracy, normally set at 0.05.

The sample size of the headteachers in this study was calculated as follows:

Where $N=82$

$$X = (1.96)^2 * (0.5) * (0.5) / (0.05)^2 = 384$$

$$n = \frac{82(384)}{(384 + 82 - 1)}$$

$$= 10496 / 155$$

$$= 67.7 \text{ approximately to } 68$$

Therefore, a sample of 68 schools was the target for the selection of 68 headteachers to be used for the study.

The sample size of the parents in this study was calculated as follows:

Where $N=12804$.

$$X = (1.96)^2 * (0.5) * (0.5) / (0.05)^2 = 384$$

$$n = \frac{12804(384)}{(384 + 12804 - 1)}$$

$$= 4916736 / 13187$$

$$= 372.8 \text{ approximately to } 373$$

Therefore, a sample of 373 parents was the target to be used for the study, however 340 parents were used for the data analysis since that was the completed questionnaires received from the parents.

Data collection

A structured questionnaire was used in the collection of data from the participants. The questionnaire addressed participants' demographics, home-related and school-related factors influencing access to and participation in primary education in the Bongo District respectively. The questionnaire was designed on a five-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Uncertain (U), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Expert recommendations led to adjustments in some items of the instrument focused on clarity, wording, and relevance and adequacy of the items in addressing the variables of interest. Moreover, a pilot study was conducted involving six headteachers and adequacy of the items in addressing the variables of interest. Moreover, a pilot study was conducted involving six headteachers and 37 parents to establish the reliability of the instrument. Using Cronbach's Alpha of 0.7 (George & Mallery, 2019; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Determinants of Access and Participation

Data analysis

The selected factors that influence access to and participation in primary school education were categorized into school-related and home-related factors. To ascertain the degree to which the factors affect school-age children's access and participation in primary education, descriptive statistics were applied. Precisely, frequency, percentages, means and standard deviations were generated.

Results and Discussion

Access to and participation in quality primary education is a fundamental right that lays the foundation for a child's academic journey. In Ghana, primary education is a 6-year education cycle after two years of kindergarten. It is universal, free, and compulsory for all school-age children between the ages of 6 and 11 years in Ghana (Pre-Tertiary Education Act, of 2020). This suggests that every child should have the liberty to access and participate fully to complete that level of education. Thus, expanding access to and participation in primary education has been one of Ghana's important goals of eliminating poverty, achieving both the Education for All (EFA) and the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) to eliminate gender disparities which UNESCO reports that Sub-Saharan Africa lags behind, with more girls likely to stay out of school compared to boys. However, efforts to improve access to and participation in primary education have been thwarted by diverse factors including variables within the school and home environment (Orodho, 2013).

What home-related factors affect access to and participation in primary education?

The home-related factors that headteachers and parents responded to were socio-economic status, parent's level of education, poverty, cultural beliefs and child labour. The respondents were required to respond to each item by indicating strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree as shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Determinants of Access and Participation

Table 1

Headteachers' Responses on Home-Related Factors that Affect Access and Participation in Primary Education

STATEMENTS	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	$\bar{x}$ (Std)
School enrolment, attendance, retention, and completion are determined by the socio-economic status of parent/family	2 (2.9)	0 (0.0)	7 (10.3)	15 (22.1)	44 (64.7)	4.46 (0.90)
Parents' level of education and involvement in their children's education determines the access and participation of their children in primary education.	0 (0.0)	8 (11.8)	9 (13.2)	10 (14.7)	41 (60.3)	4.24 (1.08)
Parental lack of awareness or interest in the children's education allows them not to enrol them in schools.	0 (0.0)	5 (7.4)	2 (2.9)	14 (20.6)	47 (69.1)	4.51 (0.87)
The number of school-going-age children in the home affects their enrolments and participation in primary education.	0 (0.0)	17 (25.0)	11 (16.2)	13 (19.1)	27 (39.7)	3.74 (1.23)
Poverty of parents/guardians influences children's access and participation in primary education	0 (0.0)	4 (5.9)	6 (8.8)	21 (30.9)	37 (54.4)	4.34 (0.87)
The health and nutrition status of a child affects their enrolment, attendance, retention, and completion.	0 (0.0)	1 (1.5)	8 (11.8)	14 (20.6)	45 (66.6)	4.51 (0.76)
The sex of the child influences whether he/she gets enrolled or participates in primary education	33 (48.5)	19 (27.9)	3 (4.4)	9 (13.2)	4 (5.9)	2.00 (1.27)
Cultural beliefs affect the access and participation of a child in primary education.	19 (27.9)	16 (23.5)	9 (13.2)	20 (29.4)	4 (5.9)	2.62 (1.33)
Initiation rites for boys prepare them for marriage instead of schooling.	20 (29.4)	15 (22.1)	12 (17.6)	10 (14.7)	11 (16.2)	2.66 (1.45)
Initiation rites for girls prepare them for marriage instead of schooling	22 (32.4)	15 (22.1)	10 (14.7)	10 (14.7)	11 (16.2)	2.60 (1.48)
Child labour whether in support of personal education or education of other siblings affects the attendance and retention of the victims	3 (4.4)	7 (10.3)	0 (0.0)	29 (42.6)	29 (42.6)	4.09 (1.12)
Domestic responsibilities of the male child affect their enrolment, attendance, and retention in primary education	1 (1.5)	24 (35.3)	3 (4.4)	35 (51.5)	5 (7.4)	3.28 (1.08)
Domestic responsibilities of the female child affect their enrolment, attendance, and retention in primary education	1 (1.5)	28 (41.2)	8 (11.8)	26 (38.2)	5 (7.4)	3.09 (1.08)
Disability or special need of the boy child influences her enrolment, attendance, retention, and completion of primary education.	6 (8.8)	15 (22.1)	12 (17.6)	25 (36.8)	10 (14.7)	3.26 (1.22)
Disability or special need of the girl child influences his enrolment, attendance, retention, and completion of primary education.	6 (8.8)	14 (20.6)	11 (16.2)	26 (38.2)	11 (16.2)	3.32 (1.23)
<i>Overall Mean</i>						<i>3.51</i>
<i>Overall Standard Deviation</i>						<i>(0.81)</i>

Source: Field Data (2024)

Determinants of Access and Participation

Table 1 presents headteachers' perceptions of home-related factors affecting access to and participation in primary education in the Bongo district. The overall mean score of 3.51 and a standard deviation of 0.81 indicate a strong consensus among headteachers regarding the influence of these factors. Headteachers particularly emphasized the significance of parental awareness (mean = 4.51), children's health and nutrition status (mean = 4.51), socio-economic status (mean = 4.46), parents' education levels (mean = 4.24), the number of school-age children in the household (mean = 3.74), poverty (mean = 4.34), and child labour (mean = 4.09) on access to and participation in primary education. These findings align with the study by Hamenoo et al. (2018), which found that child labour negatively impacts children's education, leading to issues such as truancy, absenteeism, and dropout. Similarly, Cohee et al. (2021) found that a child's health status significantly affects school attendance, grade retention, and the likelihood of dropping out.

Table 1 also highlights that headteachers acknowledged the moderate impact of cultural beliefs (mean = 2.62), initiation rites (means = 2.66 and 2.60), domestic responsibilities (means = 3.28 and 3.09), and special needs (means = 3.26 and 3.32) on access to and participation in primary education. These findings support Omari (2006) research, which found that some mothers and aunts discourage their daughters from pursuing education, instead urging them to marry, manage households, and raise children. Traditional gender roles often compel girls to prioritize household duties over schooling.

Furthermore, Table 1 reveals a low level of agreement among headteachers regarding the idea that a child's gender influences enrolment or participation in primary education (mean = 2.00), indicating general disagreement with this notion in the Bongo district. This contradicts Pike (2020) findings, which suggest that in some societies, the education of one gender, either boys or girls, is valued more highly than the other.

Determinants of Access and Participation

Table 2

Parents' Responses on Home-Related Factors that Affect Access and Participation in Primary Education

STATEMENTS	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	$\bar{x}$ (Std)
School enrolment, attendance, retention, and completion are determined by the socio-economic status of parent/family	10 (2.9)	0 (0.0)	25 (7.4)	90 (26.5)	215 (63.2)	4.47 (0.87)
Parents' level of education and involvement in their children's education determines the access and participation of their children in primary education.	0 (0.0)	15 (4.4)	20 (5.9)	80 (23.5)	225 (66.2)	4.51 (0.80)
Parental lack of awareness or interest in the children's education allows them not to enrol them in schools.	0 (0.0)	15 (4.4)	10 (2.9)	85 (25.0)	230 (67.6)	4.56 (0.76)
The number of school-going-age children in the home affects their enrolments and participation in primary education.	0 (0.0)	45 (13.2)	45 (13.2)	95 (27.9)	155 (45.6)	4.06 (1.06)
Poverty of parents/guardians influences children's access and participation in primary education	0 (0.0)	15 (4.4)	20 (5.9)	110 (32.4)	195 (57.4)	4.43 (0.79)
The health and nutrition status of a child affects their enrolment, attendance, retention, and completion.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	25 (7.4)	75 (22.1)	240 (70.6)	4.63 (0.62)
The sex of the child influences whether he/she gets enrolled or participates in primary education	110 (32.4)	100 (29.4)	45 (13.2)	65 (19.1)	20 (5.9)	2.37 (1.27)
Cultural beliefs affect the access and participation of a child in primary education.	60 (17.6)	105 (30.9)	55 (16.2)	90 (26.5)	30 (8.8)	2.78 (1.26)
Initiation rites for boys prepare them for marriage instead of schooling	85 (25.0)	100 (29.4)	45 (13.2)	80 (23.5)	30 (8.8)	2.62 (1.32)
Initiation rites for girls prepare them for marriage instead of schooling	85 (25.0)	85 (25.0)	60 (17.6)	75 (22.1)	35 (10.3)	2.68 (1.34)
Child labour whether in support of personal education or education of other siblings affects the attendance and retention of the victims	5 (1.5)	65 (19.1)	20 (5.9)	165 (48.5)	85 (25.0)	3.76 (1.07)
Domestic responsibilities of the male child affect their enrolment, attendance, and retention in primary education	25 (7.4)	105 (30.9)	80 (23.5)	105 (30.9)	25 (7.4)	3.00 (1.10)
Domestic responsibilities of the female child affect their enrolment attendance and retention in primary education	15 (4.4)	115 (33.8)	75 (22.1)	110 (32.4)	25 (7.4)	3.04 (1.06)
Disability or special need of the boy child influences his enrolment, attendance, retention, and completion of primary education.	20 (5.8)	55 (16.2)	80 (23.5)	155 (45.6)	30 (8.8)	3.35 (1.04)
Disability or special need of the girl child influences his enrolment, attendance, retention, and completion of primary education	20 (5.9)	55 (16.2)	80 (23.5)	165 (48.5)	20 (5.9)	3.32 (1.01)
Overall Mean						3.57
Overall Standard Deviation						(0.94)

Source: Field Data (2024)

Determinants of Access and Participation

Table 2 depicts Parents' perceptions of home-related factors influencing access and participation in primary education. The overall mean of 3.57 and a standard deviation of 0.94 suggest a high level of agreement among parents regarding the influence of these factors on access and participation in primary education. Notably, the Table showed that parents expressed strong agreement on the significance of factors such as parents' level of education (4.51), parental awareness (4.56), and the health and nutrition status of a child (4.63), as indicated by high mean scores and low standard deviations. These findings are in line with Boateng et al. (2021), who stressed the importance of parental involvement and the overall well-being of the child in educational outcomes.

Home factors such as socio-economic status of parents (4.47), poverty (4.43), the number of school-going age children (4.06), and child labour (3.76) received high mean scores, reflecting broad consensus among parents on their impact on access and participation. These findings corroborate the findings of Broer et al. (2019), who argued that the economic capital of parents determines how far they can offer the needed financial assistance to their children in pursuit of education. However, Table 2 revealed some variability in parents' responses regarding the influence of cultural beliefs (2.78), initiation rites (2.62; 2.68), domestic responsibilities (3.00; 3.04), and special needs on education (3.35; 3.32), with mean scores of moderate levels of agreement and standard deviations indicating diverse opinions on their impact on access and participation in primary education. These findings do not support Mallole and Mwakalinga (2022) who indicated that some parents regard initiation rites among other cultural practices to prepare the female child to learn motherhood roles to be responsible mothers of their families when they get into marriages rather than focusing on their education.

Surprisingly, parents express a low level of agreement with the statement that the sex of the child influences participation in primary education (2.37), indicating a disagreement among parents in the Bongo district. This finding, however, contradicts the findings of the studies that consider the education of a particular sex either the boy child or the girl child more important than the other as upheld in some societies (Ndivo et al., 2021). These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of home-related factors shaping access and participation in primary education and reflect the varied perspectives within the parent community.

What school-related factors affect access to and participation in primary education?

The school-related factors that headteachers and parents responded to include the location of the school and its accessibility, inadequate teachers, absenteeism of teachers, school facilities, teaching and learning materials, safety and security in schools and cost of schooling. The respondents were required to respond to each item by indicating strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree as shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Determinants of Access and Participation

Table 3

Headteachers' Responses on School-Related Factors that Affect Access and Participation in Primary Education

STATEMENTS	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	$\bar{x}$ (Std)
The availability of primary schools in the community encourages enrolment and attendance of children to go to school.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (4.4)	35 (51.5)	30 (44.1)	4.40 (0.58)
The location of a school and its accessibility can impact enrolment, attendance, and retention.	0 (0.0)	2 (2.9)	3 (4.4)	29 (42.6)	34 (50.0)	4.40 (0.72)
The distance from home to school plays a role in having children in primary school.	0 (0.0)	6 (8.8)	4 (5.9)	23 (33.8)	35 (51.5)	4.28 (0.93)
The inadequate number of teachers in the school to teach pupils affects the enrolment and attendance of children in the school.	1 (1.5)	16 (23.5)	7 (10.3)	19 (27.9)	25 (36.8)	3.75 (1.23)
Absenteeism/irregular attendance of teachers affects attendance and retention of pupils.	2 (2.9)	3 (4.4)	5 (7.4)	29 (42.6)	29 (42.6)	4.18 (0.96)
Inadequate school facilities in school affect the enrolment of children in the school.	0 (0.0)	4 (5.9)	11 (16.2)	24 (35.3)	29 (42.6)	4.15 (0.90)
The availability of TLMs in the school influences the decision of parents to enrol their children	0 (0.0)	3 (4.4)	5 (7.4)	22 (32.4)	38 (55.9)	4.40 (0.81)
School safety and security affect the enrolment, attendance, and retention of pupils in schools.	3 (4.4)	8 (11.8)	12 (17.6)	22 (32.4)	23 (33.8)	3.79 (1.17)
Cost of schooling affects children's access to and participation in primary education.	6 (8.8)	19 (27.9)	5 (7.4)	30 (44.1)	8 (11.8)	3.22 (1.23)
<i>Overall Mean</i>						4.06
<i>Overall Standard Deviation</i>						(0.70)

Source: Field Data (2024)

Table 3 presents the perceptions of headteachers regarding various school-related factors that influence access to and participation in primary education within the district. The overall mean score of 4.06 reflects a strong consensus among headteachers on the significance of these factors.

The low standard deviation of 0.70 further indicates a high level of consistency in responses, suggesting general agreement among headteachers regarding the impact of these school-related factors on access and participation in primary education.

The data reveal that statements concerning the availability of schools in the community and the influence of school location on enrolment received high mean scores (4.40) with low standard deviations, indicating unanimous agreement among headteachers. These findings align with Shehu (2018) assertion that building more schools closer to communities, particularly in rural areas, reduces the distance pupils must travel, thereby improving retention rates and promoting regular school attendance.

Determinants of Access and Participation

Similarly, headteachers expressed positive perceptions about issues related to teacher absenteeism (mean = 4.18), school safety (mean = 3.79), and the inadequate number of teachers (mean = 3.75). These findings are consistent with Amagnya (2020) study, which concluded that high student-teacher ratios can diminish learning outcomes, leading to educational wastage through absenteeism and dropout rates. Amagnya (2020) further emphasized that teacher absenteeism can erode trust in the education system, discourage parents from sending their children to school, and hinder students from attending regularly.

The significance of school facilities (mean = 4.15) and teaching materials (mean = 4.40) in influencing access to and participation in primary education was also recognized by headteachers. These findings are in line with UNESCO (2018) conclusions that adequate facilities and learning materials are essential for fostering a positive learning environment and attracting pupils to school. Moreover, these results support the provisions of Act 778 of the Education Act 2008, which mandates that District Assemblies provide the necessary infrastructure and other facilities for the education of the population within their jurisdiction (Education Act, 2008).

However, a moderate level of agreement was observed regarding the impact of the cost of schooling on access and participation in primary education, with a mean score of 3.22 and a higher standard deviation of 1.23. This suggests diverse perceptions among headteachers, possibly influenced by the existence of free compulsory universal primary education. The moderate agreement on the cost of schooling echoes the findings of Kainuwa et al. (2013), who noted that expenses such as admission and registration fees, Parent Teacher Association (PTA) dues, examination fees, uniforms, stationery, daily transportation, and other monetary demands can be significant factors in household decisions to either not enrol their children in school or withdraw them after enrolment.

Determinants of Access and Participation

Table 4

Parents' Responses on School-Related Factors that Affect Access and Participation in Primary Education

STATEMENTS	SD	D	N	A	SA	$\bar{x}$
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(Std)
The availability of primary schools in the community encourages enrolment and attendance of children to go to school.	0 (0.0)	20 (5.9)	30 (8.8)	165 (48.5)	100 (36.8)	4.16 (0.82)
The location of a school and its accessibility can impact enrolment, attendance, and retention.	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	10 (2.9)	215 (63.2)	115 (33.8)	4.34 (0.53)
The distance from home to school plays a role in having children in primary school.	0 (0.0)	5 (1.5)	30 (8.8)	160 (47.1)	180 (42.6)	4.31 (0.69)
The inadequate number of teachers in the school to teach pupils affects the enrolment and attendance of children in the school.	0 (0.0)	30 (8.8)	10 (2.9)	170 (50.0)	130 (38.2)	4.18 (0.86)
Absenteeism/irregular attendance of teachers affects attendance and retention of pupils.	5 (1.5)	0 (0.0)	40 (13.2)	160 (47.1)	130 (38.2)	4.25 (0.78)
Inadequate school facilities in school affect the enrolment of children in the school.	0 (0.0)	5 (1.5)	55 (16.2)	190 (55.9)	90 (26.5)	4.07 (0.69)
The availability of TLMs in the school influences the decision of parents to enrol their children	0 (0.0)	10 (2.9)	40 (11.8)	145 (42.6)	145 (42.6)	4.25 (0.78)
School safety and security affect the enrolment, attendance, and retention of pupils in schools.	20 (5.9)	20 (5.9)	75 (22.1)	155 (45.6)	70 (20.6)	3.69 (1.05)
Cost of schooling affects children's access to and participation in primary education.	15 (4.4)	115 (33.8)	35 (10.3)	115 (33.8)	60 (17.6)	3.26 (1.22)
<i>Overall Mean</i>						<i>4.06</i>
<i>Overall Standard Deviation</i>						<i>(0.80)</i>

Source: Field Data (2024)

Determinants of Access and Participation

Table 4 presents the perceptions of parents regarding school-related factors that influence access to and participation in primary education. The findings indicate a high level of agreement among parents, as reflected by an overall mean score of 4.06 and a standard deviation of 0.80, suggesting a strong consensus on the impact of these factors. Notably, parents expressed strong agreement with statements such as the availability of primary schools encouraging enrolment (mean = 4.16), the influence of school location on attendance (mean = 4.34), and the effect of the distance from home on children's school attendance (mean = 4.31). These factors received high mean scores and low standard deviations, indicating consistent responses across the sample. These results align with UNESCO (2019) findings, which emphasize the importance of school availability and accessibility in increasing enrolment rates, particularly in rural and underserved areas, by reducing barriers like long distances and enhancing convenience for families.

Additionally, parents positively perceived the impact of teaching and learning materials (mean = 4.25), inadequate school facilities (mean = 4.07), and the insufficient number of teachers (mean = 4.25) on children's access to and participation in primary education. These findings support the World Bank (2018) assertion that high student-teacher ratios can negatively affect learning outcomes and contribute to educational inefficiencies. Addressing these teacher-related challenges is essential for improving educational quality and building parental confidence in the education system. Furthermore, these results echo UNESCO (2018) findings that inadequate facilities can discourage school attendance, particularly

among female students. Investing in school infrastructure is thus crucial for creating a conducive learning environment and enhancing educational access, as emphasized by earlier research (Hanushek, 1995).

However, a more moderate level of agreement was observed regarding the impact of the cost of schooling on access and participation, with a mean score of 3.26 and a higher standard deviation of 1.22. This reflects diverse parental perceptions, possibly influenced by the existence of free compulsory universal primary education. This finding highlights the need for policymakers to consider the broader financial implications of education for families, including both direct and indirect costs, which can influence household decisions about enrolling or withdrawing children from school, particularly in low-income settings (UNESCO, 2020).

Overall, these findings align with the perspectives of headteachers and underscore a shared belief among parents and school leaders regarding the significance of school-related factors in shaping access to and participation in primary education in the district.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that school-related and home-related factors have a significant influence on access to and participation of school-age children in primary education. Home factors such as socio-economic status, child labour, parents' level of education, health and nutrition status, and parental awareness or interest in education were rated high by respondents on the influence of these factors on access to and participation in primary education in the district. However, there was disagreement between headteachers and parents regarding the notion that a child's gender does not impact access to and participation in primary education, with low mean values recorded for both groups (M=2.00 and 2.37). Also, school factors such as school facilities, teaching and learning materials, location of school, and distance to school and teacher quality were highly agreed upon by respondents regarding their influence on access to and participation in primary education.

Therefore, based on the findings and for children of school-going age to have access to and participate in primary education, this study calls for deliberate and concerted efforts and interventions by the Bongo District Assembly to provide the necessary infrastructural needs and any other facilities for the education of the population in the area of its authority as enshrined in the Education Act, 2008. The study further recommends the assistance of NGOs in the provision of school supplies such as TLMS, school uniforms, sandals, bicycles, and any other educational materials that will alleviate some cost of parents to enhance

Determinants of Access and Participation

the access and participation in primary education of school-age children Finally, the Ministry of Education embarks on community outreach programmes to address factors in the school or home environment which adversely affect the access and participation of children in primary education in the Bongo District.

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