

Research Article

Challenges in the Implementation of Free Quality Education (FQE) on Teaching and Learning in Junior Secondary Schools in Bonthe Municipality

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to unearth the challenges in the implementation of the Free Quality Education (FQE) on teaching and learning in junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality. This study targets an estimated number of hundred (100) principals and teachers drawn from five (5) junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality; and hundred (100) parents whose children are attending the aforementioned schools. A purposive sampling technique was used to examine the total population of head teachers and principals whilst a simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents from the hundred (100) parents in the survey. The findings of the study shows that lack of sitting accommodation due to increase in the enrolment rate, lack of accurate, timely and reliable data and the lack of trained and qualified teachers to meet the current influx of teacher pupil ratio of 1:45 are all challenges that has the tendency to contribute to the poor performance of pupils in both internal and public examination. The study recommends that the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and the Bonthe municipal council, provide additional sitting accommodation to junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality. Government through its institutions responsible for education and interested partners should raise awareness on the importance of data for radical transformation in the education sector. Recruit measurement and evaluation officers, promote training and support for the use and sharing of reliable data in schools and also, recruit and deploy more trained and qualified teachers, encourage remittent training, retention and professional development of teachers.

Keywords: Challenges, Implementation, Free Quality School Education, Junior Secondary School, Teaching and Learning, Sierra Leone.

Introduction

Overcoming the challenges in the free quality education programme is critical to Sierra Leone's aspiration to promoting human capital development which are at the heart of the country's transformation and national development and economic growth strides. The government of the Republic of Sierra Leone views the concept of Free Quality Education (FQE) as a human right requirement that ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. Globally, education is viewed as the impregnable rock upon which economic, social and political development of nations thrive. With the introduction of the radical inclusion policy, and the increasing advancement in technology and innovation, countries worldwide are under pressure to allow their national budgets to accommodate cost for the promotion of accessible and inclusive education as a basic human right and for human capital Investment for all.

The universal declaration of human rights adopted in 1948, declared that every child has a right to education. As such, there are so many international forums that are on the rise following on the right to education across the globe. These include the World Conference on Education for All (EFA), held at Jomtien, Thailand 1990 and world forum held in Dakar and Senegal 2000.

The importance of education and its multifaceted nature is demonstrated by the fact that states commit to it in a number of ways and for a number of purposes. In addition to states' legal commitment to the right to

education, states have also politically committed to education as an integral part of achieving sustainable development through the newly adopted vision 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ('2030 Agenda'). Many studies are conducted on the challenges accompanying free education system. Various scholars found that, removal of fees in schools leads to challenges linked to issues of sustainability, perseverance of inequalities, equity and equality, informal collection of school and other related fees, issues related to availability and quality of teachers, and compromises in expanding access and improving the quality of education (Kattan, 2006). For instance, there was a challenge to maintain the quality of education with the increase of enrolment, repetition and dropout rates. The question of continued disparity creates gender and equity gaps between remote and urban populations.

Lauder (2009) argue that, the largest survey of Australia teachers and school principal reverted that teacher shortage was so bad that 43 per cent of secondary school principals had to ask teachers to take classes that they were not qualified to teach. Many countries attempted to implement the education policy of fee free basic education faced the shortage of teachers. They had problems of recruiting new staff, and running in-service training. Furthermore, it was found from prior study that the school fees were the major obstacle for millions of children to be enrolled and complete primary education globally (Kattan, 2006). It is reported that, caution for countries intending to abolish school fees needs serious planning to avoid the overwhelming impact to the system of education.

Kattan observed that the limited knowledge about the link between education and industry among parents, the walking distance to and from school as well as to the exposure to job opportunities contribute to the children not to enroll in schools. UNESCO institute for statistics UNESCO (2006) indicated the South West Africa is facing a looming teacher's shortage in the drive to provide every child with free in primary and secondary education by 2015 in order to meet universal primary education and to replace existing teachers. The push to achieve Education for All (EFA) will certainly never succeed without substantial investment in the teacher. Remittent training retention and professional development, the seemed recommendation reputed to the large numbers of unqualified teachers in schools and the difficulty of attracting new recruitment.

The purpose of school development can be achieved when teachers and school leaders use data to determine how the school and stakeholders should function in light of the current emphasis for educational quality. Education infrastructure is one of the most basic elements necessary to ensure access to education and include suitable spaces to learn, the school buildings, classroom accommodation, playgrounds, libraries, toilets, furniture, and size of classroom, sitting position and arrangement, availability of tables, chairs, chalkboards, shelves on which instruments for practical demonstrations were arranged (Farrant, 1991; Farombi, 1998). School classrooms are the most common place in which structured learning takes place with groups of children.

While learning also takes place in a variety of different types of spaces but people expect formal education to take place in classrooms that have been designed for safety and comfort. The availability, relevance and adequacy of infrastructure contribute to academic achievement of students as UNESCO (2005) supports that, school infrastructure is the key to the delivery of quality services to the students. There is no doubt that education stakeholders' world over agree that a good learning environment is essential in achieving teaching and learning goals. There is also abundant research which shows that instructional materials are vital components of learning and no program can be easily implemented without them as instructional materials provide information for consumption and practice for the pupils.

The 2005 UNESCO survey observed that 'the average pupil-teacher ratio of 70:1 in most public primary has serious implication on learning and teaching'. Because of the increased workload, teachers now issue little assignment to avoid huge marking loads. The increase in the number of pupils that have to share a textbook has also compromised the quality of learning. 'Pupils are not able to efficiently use the textbooks as reference sources because they do not keep the books for long as they have to share them (Sifuna, 2004). A study by KENPRO in 2010 shows that some classrooms are congested to an extent that teachers and pupils have no ample space to move around during lessons.

Further, most teachers have been de-motivated by the increased responsibilities without an equivalent raise in their remuneration (Kenya, 2008). We have so far established that the introduction of free learning in Kenya came with large class sizes that resulted to high pupil-teacher ratio which affected the teacher-pupil interaction. Before proceeding to secondary schools, primary school pupils in Kenya sit for the Kenya

Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) after 8 years of primary learning. The rise in student enrollment in most public primary schools without the corresponding increase in capacity was expected to affect the quality of learning and hence the KCPE results. Moreover, a study on the impact of class size on student test scores carried out by Angrist and Lavy in 1999 has established that students in larger classes perform poorly. However, observations by Case and Deaton (1999) that used class size as a surrogate for quality of overall school inputs, found that there is a negative relationship between class size and student achievement. Equally, Hanushek (2003) established that school inputs, including small class sizes, have little effect on student academic achievement.

Sri Lanka's free education system, though it has pushed the country forward into a leading position in the South Asian region in terms of literacy rate, school enrollment rate, gender parity in education, human quality index, etc., has been criticized for not being progressively improved and developed for a long time to cope with the changing world. While some scholars criticize the policies and policy makers in this regard, some scholars emphasize the weakness of the policy implementation. The absence of strong and clear-cut policy framework of state education which is consistently implemented irrespective of which ruling party governs the country has been a critical issue that needs close attention. According to Jayewardene (2013) the government has failed to create an effective regulatory framework in a timely manner, thus leaving room in adding another layer to the existing "well known" hierarchical schooling system.

The absence of such national regulatory framework is highly regrettable and dilutes the impetus for education. It seems that political executives (cabinet ministers) seek to change and implement new education policies on an ad hoc basis as and when the ruling party gets changed in the country. This creates a critical threat to the national education system of the country since it hinders implementing a long-term national education policy in a consistent manner. Further, it is apparent that there are many instances of conflicts between the professional executives (state employees) and the political executives when it comes to implement education policies. It is recommended to give more freedom and autonomy to the professional executives who possess required competency and the expertise for developing and implementing consistent and long-lasting policies that best fit for the changing world.

The world has witnessed an increase in enrolment in primary level of schooling, whereby according to UNESCO report 2015, the primary school had adjusted net enrolment ratios improved significantly rising at 20 percentage point from 1999 to 2012 in 17 countries, 11 of which were from sub-Saharan Africa. The improvements in access to education at primary school are one of the leading successes of the EFA movement. However, other authors have reported that student enrolment can be influenced by many factors. Abolition of school fees in primary schools because of the implementation of Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) resulted in a significant increase in enrolment in primary schools. It is therefore against this backdrop that, I am examining the challenges in the implementation of Free Quality Education (FQE) on teaching and learning in junior secondary schools in Bontho municipality.

Methodology

The study employed a case study research design. This type of design was chosen, as it is easy to collect the detailed data. The case study design is also less expensive compared to experimental or survey design, the participation of researcher in the study can be easily done and data collection methods like interview, observation, questionnaire and focus group discussion can be done easily (Patton and Cochran, 2002). Through case study design, the researcher collects both primary data from education stakeholders and some secondary data from previous conducted research reports, documents and library.

The study was carried out in 5 junior secondary schools in the Bontho municipality with a total population of about 200 teachers and 1000 pupils. The choice for the selection of junior secondary schools in Bontho municipality for this study is consequent on the remoteness of Bontho municipality and its challenges to access basic educational support and other social amenities regardless of the existence of a local council in the area. Also, the researcher is quite familiar with the terrain and has the flexibility to interact with the locals and thus, invariably generate a quick report from the research population.

The Bontho municipality according to the Annual School Census (ASC) report (MBSSE 2022), has five (5) Junior Secondary Schools (JSS). This study basically targets an estimated number of hundred (100) principals and teachers drawn from the five (5) junior secondary schools (Bontho Secondary School, Saint Joseph's Vocational Junior Secondary School, Minnie Mull Memorial Junior Secondary School, Dramani Memorial Junior Secondary School and Sengbe Pieh Memorial Junior Secondary School) in the Bontho

municipality and hundred (100) parents whose children are attending the five junior secondary schools in the Bonthe municipality.

Purposive sampling technique was used to examine the total population of head teachers and principals in all the five (5) junior secondary schools used in the survey. Also, simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents from the hundred (100) parents whose children are attending junior secondary schools in the Bonthe municipality. In this case, every respondent selected from the sampling frame had an equal chance of being selected. The researcher considered the use of quantitative research approach to capture large amount of data for the study whilst at the same time used desk study to capture other information. Structured questionnaires were also administered for the study. Desk study which is also known as desk research involves the summary, collation and synthesis of existing research that includes published reports and statistics. As such, data was drawn from libraries which includes: journals, newspapers, reports, government statistics, EU statistics, dictionaries, books and other published research work on the internet that relates to the study.

Structured survey questionnaires were administered to hundred (100) principals and teachers drawn from the five (5) junior secondary schools (Bonthe Secondary School, Saint Joseph's Vocational Junior Secondary School, Minnie Mull Memorial Junior Secondary School, Dramani Memorial Junior Secondary School and Sengbe Pieh Memorial Junior Secondary School) in the Bonthe municipality and hundred (100) parents whose children are attending Junior secondary schools in the Bonthe municipality. Data was organized and findings reported in the ensuing section. Recommendations are made based on the study findings.

Structured questionnaires that contained close ended and descriptive research questions were used as a major instrument for collecting mainly straight forward information that could be easily quantified. These instruments were used because; it is an effective way of getting data from people by asking them directly. Another reason for using a structured questionnaire was its simplicity to convert information giving by respondents into numerical codes. They also require low cognitive load on the respondents and thus, reduce the time of thinking that a respondent needed to complete the task. This generally led to the responses and more accurate data that was generated; and as reflective in this study.

As mentioned in the above, desk study and structured questionnaires were used as the main instrument for collecting and collating data for this study. Primary data from the field is filtered to eliminate errors made by the respondents. Coding was done to translate response to questions into specific categories and to further organize and reduce research data into manageable summaries. The qualitative data collected by the study was eventually coded and data analysis carryout in accordance with specific themes using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. As a result, descriptive statistics were produced in the form of figures, aiding the study to make summaries and to further discuss the findings of the study. As in the analysis, the Likert categories of strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree and strongly disagree were also used.

Results

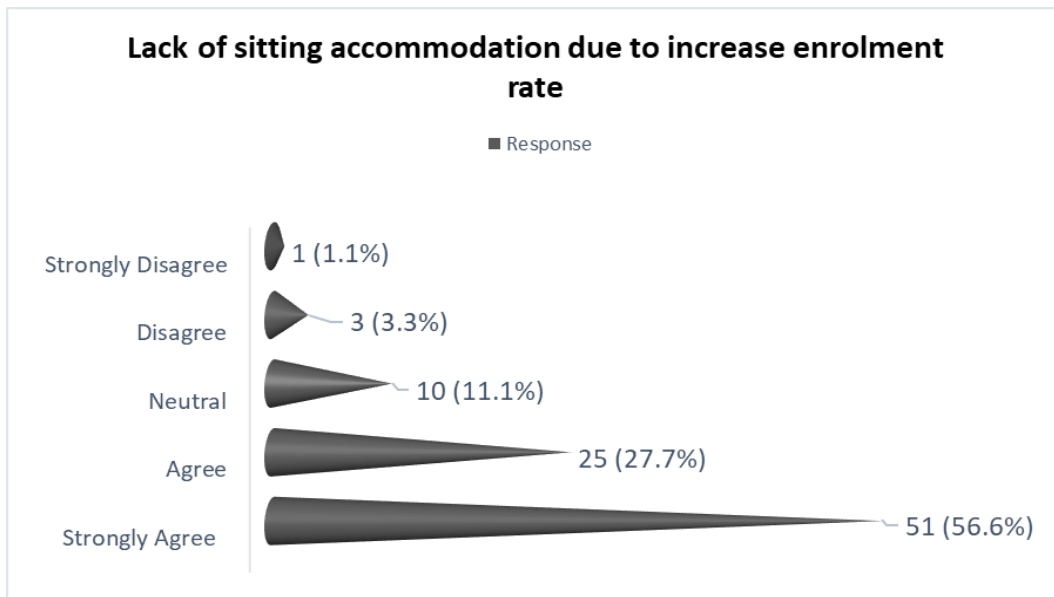
This study focuses on data presentation, analysis and discussion of findings. Data was gathered through two sets of questionnaires: The first set of questionnaire was developed for principals and teachers of junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality whilst the second set of questionnaire was also developed for parents whose children are attending junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality.

Both classes of respondents were presented juxtaposing questions that correlated with the existence, usefulness and practical efficacy to examining the challenges of free quality school education on teaching and learning in junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality. As such, the sample population was divided into 100 principals and teachers, and 100 parents whose children are attending junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality.

The presentation of findings is in the form of figures to increase data validity. Qualitative techniques such as proportionate confidence level of sample size and its correlated margin of error, were applied which made the research findings to be reliable in making the conclusion of the study. This also ensured that the findings presented contributed towards achieving the main objective of the study which was challenges of Free Quality School Education (FQSE) on teaching and learning in junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23

software. This tool was suitable for this kind of analysis since it is used for social science research. The following are statistical data obtained:

Lack of Sitting Accommodation Due to Increase Enrolment Rate Undermine Effective Teaching and Learning

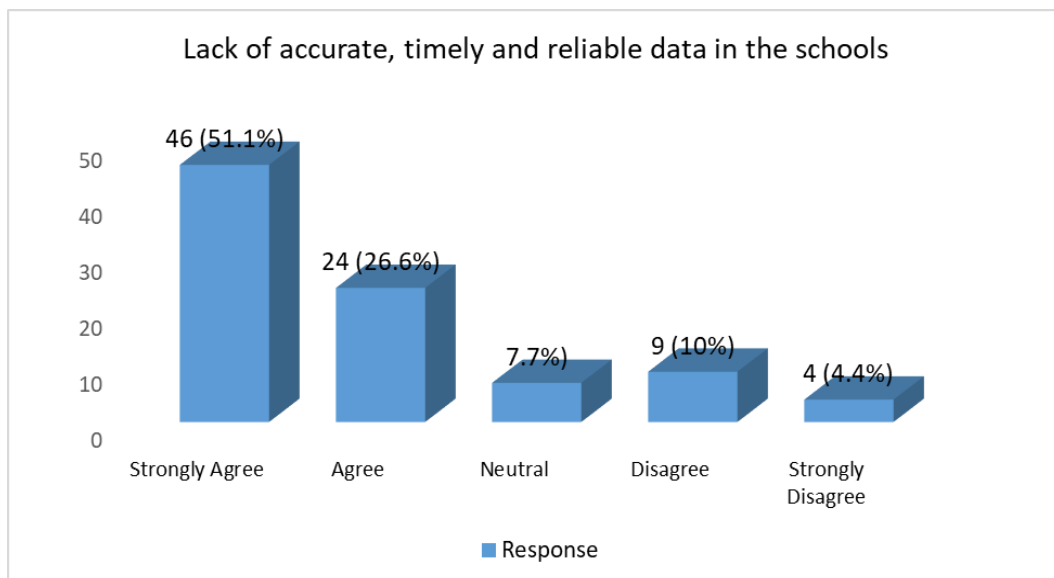


Source: Field survey 2023.

Figure 1. Lack of sitting accommodation due to increase enrolment rate undermines effective teaching and learning.

Figure 1 shows that 51(56.6%) of respondents strongly agreed that lack of sitting accommodation due to increase in the enrollment rate undermine effective teaching and learning; 25(27.7%) agree that lack of sitting accommodation due to increase in the enrollment rate undermine effective teaching and learning; 10(11.1%) remained neutral that lack of sitting accommodation due to increase in the enrollment rate undermine effective teaching and learning; 3(3.3%) disagree that lack of sitting accommodation due to increase in the enrollment rate undermine effective teaching and learning whilst 1(1.1%) strongly disagree that lack of sitting accommodation due to increase in the enrollment rate undermine effective teaching and learning.

Lack of Accurate, Timely and Reliable Data in the Schools

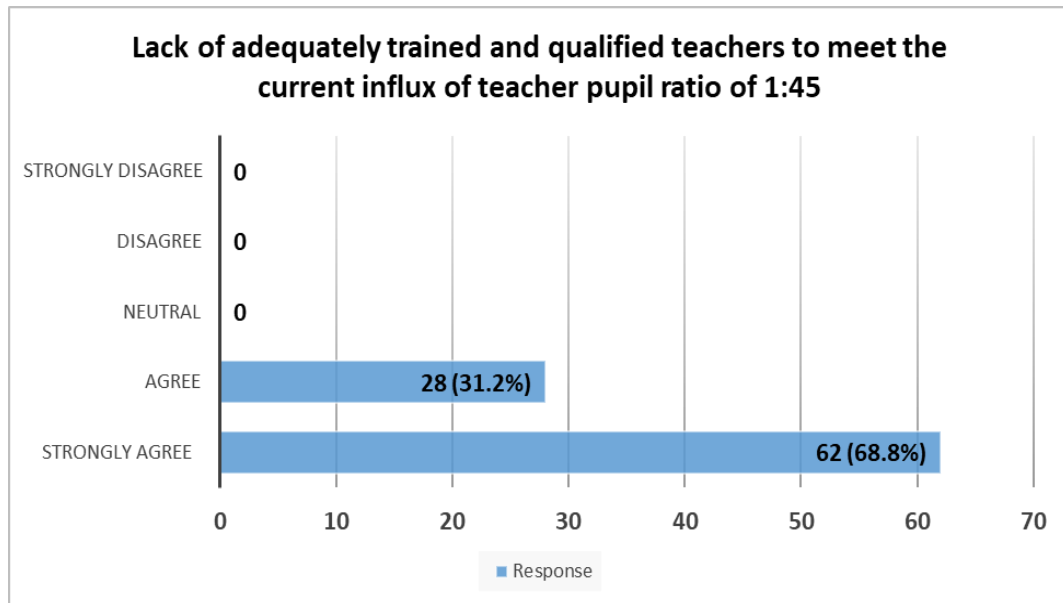


Source: Field survey 2023.

Figure 2. Lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools.

According to Figure 2, 46(51.1%) of the respondents strongly agree that lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools is a challenge in the implementation of the FQSE programme; 24(26.6%) agree that lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools is a challenge in the implementation of the FQSE programme; 7(7.7%) remained neutral that lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools is a challenge in the implementation of the FQSE programme; 9(10%) disagree that lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools is a challenge in the implementation of the FQSE programme whilst 4(4.4%) strongly disagree that lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools is a challenge in the implementation of the FQSE programme.

Lack of Adequately Trained and Qualified Teachers to Meet the Current Influx of Teacher Pupil Ratio of 1:45



Source: Field survey 2023.

Figure 3. Lack of adequately trained and qualified teachers to meet the current influx of teacher pupil ratio of 1:45.

Figure 3 shows that 62(68.8%) of the respondents strongly agree that lack of adequately trained and qualified teachers to meet the current influx of teacher pupil ratio of 1:45; 28(31.2%) agree that lack of adequately trained and qualified teachers to meet the current influx of teacher pupil ratio of 1:45; no respondent was neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed that lack of adequately trained and qualified teachers to meet the current influx of teacher pupil ratio of 1:45.

Discussion

The research objective further sought to unearth the challenges in the implementation of the free quality school education on teaching and learning in junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality. The result in Figure 1 of the study shows that 51(56.6%) of respondents strongly agreed that lack of sitting accommodation due to increase in the enrollment rate undermines effective teaching and learning in junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality. This shows that the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and the Bonthe municipal council need to provide more sitting accommodation to junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality due to increase in pupils enrollment.

Figure 2 reveals that 46(51.1%) of the respondents strongly agree that lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools is a challenge in the implementation of the FQSE programme. The purpose of school development can be achieved when teachers and school leaders use data to determine how the school and stakeholders should function in light of the current emphasis for educational quality. Student achievement data for example can be used for different purposes such as monitoring how well the school is functioning, making curricular decisions (Young, 2006), initiating conversation and discussion with students, teachers, parents, and administrators (Breiter and Light, 2006), shaping professional development through differential strategies (Timperley and Phillips, 2003; Breiter and Light, 2006), reflecting on one’s own functioning such as evaluating teachers’ performances (Breiter and Light, 2006; Young, 2006), developing and planning of school policy (Breiter and Light, 2006), and so on.

Figure 3 shows that 62(68.8%) of the respondents strongly agree that lack of adequately trained and qualified teachers to meet the current influx of teacher pupil ratio of 1:45. On that note, the study reveals that lack of adequately trained and qualified teachers to meet the current influx of teacher pupil ratio of 1:45. The findings of this study is in concurrence to a study done by the UNESCO institute for statistics UNESCO (2006) which indicated that the South-West Africa is facing a looming teacher's shortage in the drive to provide every child with find in primary and secondary education by 2015 in order to meet universal primary education and to replace existing teachers. The push to achieve Education for All (EFA) will certainly never succeed without substantial investment in teacher. Remittent training retention and professional development, the seemed recommendation reputed to the large numbers of unqualified teachers in schools and the difficulty of attracting new recruitment. Lauder (2009) argue that, the largest survey of Australia teachers and school principal reverted that teacher shortage was so bad that 43 percent of secondary school principals had to asks teacher to take classes that they were not qualified to teach.

Conclusions

The forth objective sought to unearth the challenges in the implementation of the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) in junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality. The study shows that the lack of sitting accommodation due to increase in enrolment rate as a result of the FQSE programme has led to serious challenges for school authorities and thus, negatively impacting on effective teaching and learning in the junior secondary schools. Also, the study revealed that lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the junior secondary schools is a perineal challenge in the implementation of the FQSE programme. It is crystal clear that the purpose of school development can only be achieved when teachers and school leaders use reliable and verified data to determine how the school and stakeholders should function in light of the current emphasis for educational quality.

Finally, the study revealed that the lack of trained and qualified teachers to meet the current influx of teacher pupil ratio of 1:45 is a serious that has the tendency to contribute to the poor performance of pupils in both internal and public examinations.

Recommendations

Cognisant of the challenges identified in this study, it is crystal clear that the research undertaken can be of immense help to education sector planners and policy makers, partners and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the education sector and fellow researchers who may want to do more studies on the subject matter. Results from the findings indicate that lack of sitting accommodation due to increase in the enrollment rate undermines effective teaching and learning in junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality. As such, there is an urgent need for the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and the Bonthe municipal council to provide more sitting accommodation to junior secondary schools in Bonthe municipality due to increase in pupils enrollment.

It is quite revealing in the study that lack of accurate, timely and reliable data in the schools is a challenge in the implementation of the FQSE programme. There is a general concern which hold to the fact that learning outcomes have not kept in pace with the expansion of education, most especially when there are no sustainable measures or instruments that are used to determine learning deficit in a bid to proper prudent recommendations on who is learning or not; and what can be done to tackle the problem locally and globally. Government through its institutions responsible for education and interested partners should raise awareness on the importance of data for radical transformation in the education sector, recruit measurement and evaluation officers in schools promote training and support for the use and sharing of reliable data in schools.

Results further revealed that lack of adequately trained and qualified teachers to meet the current influx of teacher pupil ratio of 1:45 is of a grave concern. The push to achieve Education for All (EFA) will certainly never succeed without substantial investment in the teacher. Government through its line ministries should recruit and deploy more trained and qualified teachers, encourage remittent training, retention and professional development.

Declarations

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