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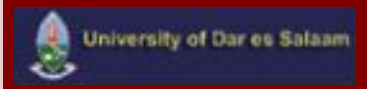
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: EVIDENCE FROM GHANA AND TANZANIA

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ABSTRACT

Headteachers working under conditions of severe hardship in Africa face tremendous challenges, often exacerbated by a sense of hopelessness and lack of agency to effect improvements within their school. This paper focuses on notions of 'social justice' within an African educational context and reports on a small-scale research project involving primary headteachers in Ghana and Tanzania engaging with Action Research in order to bring about changes which they feel will benefit pupil learning. The study presents some positive impacts generated by the headteachers' actions and indicates ways in which these actions illustrate developments in areas of 'social justice' related to fairness, equity, recognition, and redistribution. The findings suggest that empowering headteachers through the use of Action Research can enable them to act creatively and positively for the benefit of pupils within their schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Discussions about the nature of 'social justice' have formed a crucial backdrop to the development of social democratic politics in recent decades. Social welfare policies, which have to varying degrees emerged within capitalist economies over the last two or three generations, have stimulated debate about the relationship between the state and the individual in areas such as education and health. Whether this is in relation to Roosevelt's New Deal policies in the 1930s or the emergence of a Welfare State framework in the United Kingdom after 1945, the balance between state activity and individual responsibilities has been fought over within the political realm. Indeed, the increasing welfare retrenchment seen in the United States under Reagan and in the United Kingdom under Thatcher in the 1980s did nothing if not exacerbate the intense furore surrounding these central issues.

The role of schools in seeking to alleviate the social tensions and hardships emanating from these intense economic pressures is a central one. The locus operandi of schools is such that it impacts directly upon the ways in which individuals respond to these pressures and relate to each other within increasingly demanding environments. This is especially the case when looking at schools located within challenging contexts in Africa. Here, schools are often charged with roles which extend through, and beyond, classroom achievement in key curriculum areas to concerns for the integration of school leavers into the economic context in which they find themselves upon school phase completion. Schools are seen as key drivers in the move towards poverty reduction (Barder, 2009; Chibba, 2009; King, 2009; Ravaillion, 2009) and, as a result, the role of school leaders becomes increasingly vital. Actions undertaken in order to reach Millennium Development Goals can be seen as being overlain by issues related to 'social justice', and this paper will seek to examine the work of a group of headteachers in Ghana and Tanzania who are working within this overall milieu.

1. SOCIAL JUSTICE

In seeking to reach a clear definition of 'social justice' one enters a veritable minefield. Barry (1991) has suggested that 'the central issue in any theory of justice is the defensibility of unequal relations between people' (p3) and this has been the underlying focus of political science debate in this area. Such concerns have been further strengthened by the impact of the global economic crisis emerging as a result of the 'credit crunch', thus reinforcing the view that ' …the central problem for twenty-first century societies (is) that of constructing harmony from diversity (Bates, 2006, p150). The focus is upon the way(s) in which members of society interact with each other and the implications that these interactions have for social cohesion or social implosion. A central concern within the 'social justice' arena is the notion of moral behaviour in social interaction. Schrag (1979) talks of individuals as 'moral agents' (p208) who should act as exemplars by seeking as much information about situations as they can obtain before they take action and who should also 'consider the welfare and interests of all who stand to be affected by his/her decision or action' (p 209). The need here is to be thoughtful and empathetic to other members of society and, more especially, towards those who are most directly affected by an individual's actions.

Given the implications these central ideas have for the ways in which individuals live with others within communities and society more widely, it is unsurprising that much 'social justice' thinking has impacted upon wider societal and political concerns (Barry, 2008; Barry, 2005; Bogotch, 2002; Choules, 2007; Clark, 2006; Cribb & Gewirtz, 2003; Furman & Shields, 2003; Gewirtz, 1998; Johnson, 2008; Martin, 1999). Much of this thinking relates to an examination of the foundational core of human behaviour within a 'social justice' framework. Barry (2005), for example, has argued that 'a theory of social justice can provide a systematic critique and a programme that follows from it' (p ix), and this notion reinforces the view that this is an approach essentially related to action within a social, and a political, sphere. The notion of 'challenge' embedded in thinking about social justice is identified by writers such as Choules (2007), who takes an overtly political stance by arguing that social justice 'looks to challenging and changing of structural and systemic injustice in which certain groups are singled out for less favourable treatment and others are privileged' (p 463). A further twist to the political thread of this notion is found in the view that addressing this 'injustice' is not something that

relies upon the desire of those in positions of power to act in an almost patronising manner to bring about change. Instead this 'becomes something demanded by the equality of all human beings' (p 469, original emphasis).

There is a significant degree of consensus around the view that such action needs to be driven by 'values' and that these need to be of a particular nature. Thus, Bogotch (2002) reinforces Schrag's concerns and talks of 'deliberate interventions that require the moral use of power' (p 140, emphasis added). This notion of 'moral purpose' (Furman & Shields, 2003, p 18) brings with it a focus upon the value basis upon which such 'moral' behaviour is premised. A significant concern is one that centres on notions of 'fairness' and 'equality', with Martin (1999) arguing that 'theories of social justice suggest appropriate mechanisms for regulating our social arrangements in the fairest way for the benefit of all' (p 48). This echoes the view expressed by Rawls (1971, p 77) who argued that people possessed both a 'capacity for a sense of justice', and the 'capacity for a conception of the good', and that these moral dimensions of the persona would act as underpinning (and, sometime, unspoken) criteria to explain how people with many diverse interests would be able to reach agreement over issues concerning 'justice'. Rawls further clarified this concept by suggesting that:

> The capacity for a sense of justice is the capacity to understand, to apply and normally to be moved by an effective desire to act from (and not merely in accordance with) the principles of justice as the fair terms of social cooperation. The capacity for a conception of the good is the capacity to form, revise, and rationally to pursue such a conception, that is, a conception of what we regard for us as a worthwhile human life. (Rawls, 1993, p 302)

Such support for generic values that cut across humanity relates to what Johnson (2008) has called 'the modernist challenge', that of 'discovering, defining and applying that which is assumed to be universal' (p 308). This essentially universalist approach to 'justice' reflects a commitment in the thinking of political scientists such as Rawls (1971) to the underlying values and assumptions of 'liberal democracy', and is part of a central debate about the relationship between the 'universal' and the 'particular' in which notions of cultural diversity play a key role. Thus, Clark (2006) talks of 'a fundamental tension, by no means easily resolved, between communal and individual interests' (p 280) and highlights one of the keys emanating from Fraser's notion of 'recognition' (1997; 2006): to what extent should the desire to act in a way which recognises the positive existence and claims, for example, of historically marginalised, and often minority, groups be balanced by a concern for, and an awareness of, the views and situations of those who have traditionally been prominent within a community? 'Recognition', seen as 'the central problem of justice' (Fraser, 1997, p 2) is one of three dimensions of social justice developed by Fraser, the others being 'redistribution', which is concerned with resource allocation, and 'participatory justice', which focuses upon the need for opportunities to be provided for individuals and groups to be consulted and to be actively involved in discussions which relate to their social welfare (Tikly & Dachi, 2009).

The key focus on a 'desire to act' connects directly with the emphasis placed on action within an expressly political sphere by writers such as Barry (1991), and has clear implications for the behaviour of those who have some authority within their own day-to day experiences to enact changes that get nearer to the notion of justice developed by Rawls (1971). This article will look specifically at the work of school leaders within a context of disadvantaged communities in Africa in this connection, seeking to explore the sense in which their actions play out and bring about a closer relationship with social justice.

In a similar vein to concerns about fairness and justice, Clark (2006) places an emphasis upon the centrality of 'equality', which is seen to be 'important for its role as a regulatory principle' (p 278). Here, an individual's concept of equality is seen to act as a key criterion against which they, and others, ought to judge their behaviour or, as Clark (ibid) puts it '...a standard against which policy and practice are to be judged' (p 281). Thus, actions that can be seen as centred on 'social justice' concerns are ones that can occur within an individual's own personal and private space, as well as within more social or political space.

In her early critique of 'social justice', Young (1990) argued that the boundaries and the spheres of concern of social justice activity go beyond issues related to the distribution of goods

in society (Rawls, 1971) towards 'all aspects of institutional rules and relations insofar as they are subject to potential collective action' (Young, 1990, p 16). This view has been elaborated by Gewirtz (1998), who has argued that the concept of 'social justice' can be seen to contain two distinct dimensions, distributional and relational. The former bears a close relationship to the notion of 'distributional justice' presented by Rawls (1971), and is concerned with access to resources and the principles around which goods are distributed within society (Fraser, 2006; Peter, 2009). Here, Gewirtz sees 'goods' in the broadest sense of going beyond possessions and linked to notions of 'social capital' (Coleman, 1990; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). The relational dimension, by contrast, seeks to shed light upon the 'nature of relationships which structure society' (Gewirtz, 1998, p 470), and here there is a focus upon power relationships, and the manner with which individuals relate to each other. Gewirtz's thinking is mindful of the social and community nature of much of human behaviour, and so there is a strong recognition of the 'micro face-to-face interactions and…macro social and economic relations which are mediated by institutions such as the state and the market' (ibid, pp 470-471). This attempt to shed light on the everyday implicit and explicit processes that affect both group and one-to-one relationships builds on the work of Young (1990) and has especial implications for those social institutions, such as schools, in which individuals come together and congregate within an organisational umbrella. The aim here is to look at the ways in which forms of 'social cooperation' (Gewirtz, 1998, p 471) are initiated and develop over time.

2. SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION

The 'social justice' focus on value-driven action within spheres of social interaction is likely to be manifested especially strongly within the sphere of education (North, 2006; Williamson et al, 2008; Zajda et al, 2006). Through education, and the medium of the school, social values are put on public display with the aim of inculcating particular attitudes and values amongst the young within any community. A key element of this process is the modelling of values-based behaviour by adults as exemplars for young people, whether that be in the manner in which classroom practitioners relate to pupils or the ethical decision-making of school leaders (Robbins & Trabichet, 2009). A 'social justice' perspective provides an explicit commitment to acting in socially just ways related to concepts of fairness and equity (Adams et al, 2007; Rawls, 1993; Martin, 1999; Vincent, 2003). What might be seen as a 'radical turn' within educational activity defines social justice education 'as the conscious and reflexive blend of content and process intended to enhance equity across multiple social identity groups (eg race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability), foster critical perspectives, and promote social action' (Carlisle et al, 2006, p 57). As such, this provides a strong challenge to the 'status quo', particularly in relation to those individuals and groups which have traditionally been hidden from view within the educational spectrum.

Fraser's notion of 'redistribution' (1995) plays a key role here since, as Daniel has noted, '…the social justice as fairness framework that had traditionally informed education policies…education is perceived to be a primary social good, the distributive principle is fairness, and the major social effect is redistribution of benefits (Daniel, 2007, p 15). It is clear, though, that the idea of 'recognition' also plays a prominent part in any debate about the link between education and social justice. Many aspects of education policy across the globe, whether that be the Millennium Development Goal of increased girl access to education or the *No Child Left Behind* policy in the United States after 2001, contain either overt or covert elements related to the recognition of hitherto marginalised groups. This trend has been identified by Bell (2007) who has argued that 'the goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs' (p 1). This can be seen as a laudable 'universalist' principle upon which to base policy pronouncements, though it does beg questions about the balancing of differential 'group' demands upon, for example, the education sphere and also throws into perspective the question of the basis upon which these demands are to be addressed. These issues are further explored within the case studies of leadership practice within disadvantaged contexts in Africa.

This also has explicit implications for educational policy and work within the realm of, for example, the Millennium Development Goals, which include the pronouncement of 'a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level'

(United Nations, 2000, Section I para 2). Such a modernist and universalist approach (Johnson, 2008) can be seen as seeking to override concerns about those local contexts which could contain values systems that are inherently at odds with generic concepts and, hence, might present practical day-to-day tensions for those, such as school leaders, seeking to put social justice values into practice. Thus, whilst it may be easy to agree with Kraft's view that 'fundamentally, teaching for social justice encourages students to embrace a sense of hope and belief that they can change their own lives and the world (Kraft, 2007, p 85), the concomitant concern that this should involve 'socially just teaching, and (the) fostering (of) a socially just school community' (ibid, p 79) might be more difficult for school leaders to achieve.

Carlisle et al (2006) have produced a succinct set of arguments in favour of taking a clear 'social justice' stance in education. They have suggested a set of key principles against which school action, which aims to address social justice, should be judged. Here concerns about inclusion and equity, high expectations, reciprocal community relationships, adopting a system-wide approach and a focus on direct social justice education and interventions are seen as central (ibid, pp 57-61). The connections here with the triple dimensions approach presented by Fraser (1997) are evident, as are the modernist assumptions which underpin these criteria. They provide a thought-provoking set of lenses against which the actions of educational practitioners can be viewed, whether they be in the United Kingdom, the United States or Ghana. As noted elsewhere in this article, such an approach presents with it clear signs of tension between a judgement process that relies upon generic, all-embracing universalist criteria and an approach which seeks to tailor actions to the specific concerns and values of members of local communities. It is not hard, for example, to tease out the kind of conundrum facing educational practitioners that might result from a social justice focus that both 'seeks to counter social inequalities by creating an environment that challenges oppressive attitudes and behaviours, values multiple perspectives, and fosters community-building across social identity groups' (Carlisle et al, 2006, p 57) while also providing a curriculum which 'teaches an understanding of the nature and manifestations of all forms of social oppression; provides strategies for intervening in oppressive situations; and seeks to facilitate a living and learning environment for the development of liberatory thinking and action' (ibid, p 61). The authors do then argue against a 'rigid set of criteria' (ibid, p 62), but the difficulties of striking a balance between what can appear to be competing social interests often fall fairly and squarely upon the shoulders of school leaders.

School leaders find themselves at the fulcrum point of educational practice, located between what can often be an inward-focused school on the one hand, and the community and environment in which the school is located on the other (Brown, 2004). As such, the piercing light of scrutiny from both within and outside the school is often shed on their actions. Indeed, many writers have seen 'the leadership relationship (as) an essential moral consideration: leading and teaching to what ends and by what means?' (Greenfield, 2004, p 174).

3. METHODOLOGY

The authors are involved in the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DfID)-funded EdQual Project, which is a Research Programme Consortium (RPC) on Implementing Education Quality in Low Income Countries (EdQual, 2009a). The overall objectives of the RPC are:

> 'to develop an understanding of education quality in low income countries by:
> developing quality indicators that are relevant to the needs of disadvantaged learners in difficult delivery contexts;
> designing, piloting and evaluating the impact of new, practical initiatives in the area of education quality;
> identifying examples of effective practice in implementing education quality by evaluating existing initiatives; and,
> determining effective practice in mainstreaming education quality policies and initiatives' (EdQual, 2009b).

Five 'large-scale projects' are embedded within the overarching EdQual RPC. The authors are working within one of these, that related to the 'leadership and management of change for quality improvement'. The aim of this large-scale project is to examine the capacity that school leaders have for bringing about changes which are likely to improve educational quality within located in disadvantaged circumstances through using a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach (James et al, 2007; McIntyre, 2007). The schools within the project are located in Ghana and Tanzania and, with one exception (an all-through school for the deaf in Ghana), are all primary schools. The clear focus is upon equity and the ways in which the actions of school leadership are able to operate in areas of social justice.

Such a notion of equity is at the heart of the approach found within the large-scale project and embodies what Oxenham (2005) has called 'reasonableness and impartiality in providing the opportunity to learn' (p.70). This view of equity is very similar to that embodied, for example, in Article 25(1) of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. Here, and also in Tanzania, it is recognised that government has a prime responsibility to ensure the equitable provision of education. Yet, inequities abound in educational systems, especially in developing countries (Fairbain, 2009). The reason for this state of affairs may not necessarily be that the government is not interested in addressing problems of inequity, but probably because local initiatives are often not forthcoming to help the over-burdened governments to solve such problems. The work done within the project schools is an attempt to develop ways of working that will enable school leaders to have a higher degree of agency with regard to the energies they expend in developing their schools.

The initial phase of the project in both countries encompassed a baseline survey of a representative sample of schools, which focused on school leadership practices, together with a systematic literature review centred on effective educational leadership practice within an African context. Following this phase, a small group of headteachers were chosen to become involved in the project. The selection of these two groups was in the hands of university faculty from within the two countries and reflected local networks that had been established over a number of years. In this sense, the project school leaders were not seen as a representative sample of headteachers across the two countries but were chosen to represent the large range of school leaders in both Ghana and Tanzania operating in extremely challenging urban and rural contexts.

In Ghana, a group of twenty-one school leaders attended a workshop in February 2008 where they were introduced into the use of Participatory Action Research techniques by facilitators from the United Kingdom and from Ghana. They were then guided to identify problems that they would like to try and solve using these techniques, with support from facilitators drawn from staff of the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Similarly, in Tanzania a group of twelve headteachers was invited to attend a training workshop on Participatory Action Research which was organized by the Faculty of Education, University of Dar es Salaam. This was facilitated by colleagues from the Universities of Dar es Salaam and Bristol and an Associate Partner from the Agha Khan University, Institute of Education Development, Dar es Salaam. The aim of the workshops was to enable empower the head teachers to use these techniques so that their practice of leadership would enhance their capacity to improve pupil achievement. The intention was to seek to identify good practices from the head teachers' Action Research interventions that could provide insights into leading and managing change to enrich educational quality within their schools. In this sense, the headteachers were encouraged to focus on issues or concerns that directly impacted upon the quality of pupil achievement within their schools.

During the workshops, headteachers were introduced to the following stages of PAR:

- identifying an issue or a concern (for example, low pupil or teacher attendance, low performance, high drop-out rates);

- deciding on what they wanted to find out (for instance, how to increase pupil attendance at the school);

• describing the current situation or practice;

• reviewing the information that was available about the issue or concern;

• identifying any gaps between the current situation and the desired set of outcomes;

• deciding on the best way(s) to narrow the gap between what currently exists and the desired outcome;

• analysing data in relation to the changed practices related to the issue or concern;

• reviewing the action that had been taken surrounding the issue or concern; and,

• deciding what needs to be done next in relation to the specific issue or concern (James et al, 2007; McIntyre, 2007).

By the conclusion of the initial workshops in February 2008, all of the participating headteachers had identified their specific issue of concern and had started to build up a picture of their approach. A key element in both countries was the direct and ongoing support offered by facilitators and critical friends located in the two higher education institutions. The network of close relationships and social capital built up over many years was seen as a vital ingredient in both maintaining research momentum and in emphasising the South-South nature of the research collaboration. All headteachers were encouraged to keep a log of their actions in relation to their chosen issue or concern and, also, to develop data gathering instruments that would provide them with evidence of any resultant changes emerging from their actions. Regular contact was maintained between project school leaders and their respective facilitators, occasionally through face-to-face meetings. But, because of distance, locations in difficult terrain and poor transport infrastructures, this contact was often through cellular phone.

In March 2009, follow-up workshops took place in Ghana and Tanzania and project headteachers were invited to attend with the purpose of reporting back on what had been achieved after the first twelve months or so of the Action Research phase of the project. School leaders were asked to present a written report on their activities and also to provide evidence from the data gathering related to their chosen topic. The focus on issues related to 'social justice' was evident in the presentations, which ranged from concerns about teacher attendance to pupils' literacy progress. These reports form the basis of the data analysis, which forms much of the rest of this paper.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Ghana

Education policy in Ghana is guided by the Education Sector Plan (ESP) (2003-2015) which was developed in 2003. This Plan provides a framework within which Ghana seeks to achieve Millennium Development Goals related to reaching gender parity in primary education by 2005 and universal primary completion by 2015. The latest statistics from UNICEF indicate that gender parity at primary level (and, also, at junior secondary levels) has been achieved (UNICEF, 2009).

The Ministry of Education, Science and Sports (MoESS) has overall responsibility for policy development, whilst the delivery of policy has been delegated to a range of agencies at national, regional and district level. In this connection, responsibility for the implementation of both basic and secondary education has been devolved to the Ghana Education Service (GES), which has control of approximately 80% of the country's annual expenditure on education. Following significant education reform in 2007, two years of kindergarten were added to the period of 'basic education', which also comprises six years of primary education and three years of junior high school. All 'basic education' is free and compulsory (Cobbold et al, 2009).

A key theme of recent education policy has been an emphasis upon decentralisation, with the role of the GES focused primarily upon the establishment and scrutiny of national educational standards, linked to the promotion of quality education. The oversight and management of work done at the school level has been devolved to the district level, with the district education office having responsibility for issues such as the provision and performance of teaching staff. Schools are obliged to have a School Management Committee which includes representatives from local community stakeholders, whose role in practice often centres upon the provision of resources in one form or another. Despite this apparent devolution of powers from the centre to the periphery, key aspects of educational activity still remain outside of the direct control of the school. These include staffing arrangements, with the civil-servant nature of teachers resulting in teaching staff being allocated to schools by officials at the regional and district levels, and headteachers often not getting knowledge of staff being transferred out from or into their school until shortly before the start of a new school year. In addition, the role of the headteacher is strictly prescribed by the Headteachers' Handbook (Ghana Education Service, 1994), which provides detailed information about the requirements of the role and the essentially accountability-driven nature of the headteacher's work.

In one sense, the approach which underpins the Handbook resonates with the improvement and action focus of the PAR projects. Hence, we see clear and laudable statements such as:

> Your school is a place for children to learn. If they do not learn much, you have not fulfilled your first priority. How can you, as headteacher, make sure that the children in your school are learning something new every day? You need to make sure that:
>
> - the children are in school;
> - the teachers are in school;
> - the teachers are teaching;
> - the children are learning (ibid, p ix).

The remainder of the Handbook, running to almost 300 pages, seeks to act as both an individual training manual and a reservoir of key documents that headteachers will need to utilise in their day-to-day activities. In reality, the Handbook provides a strong accountability tool for district and regional offices in their attempts to manage educational provision. Headteachers spend large amounts of time and energy in completing bureaucratic tasks that are then forwarded on to the district or regional level, with little sign of either evaluation or action resulting from this information. Such an emphasis upon bureaucratic compliance results in a stifling of individual headteacher agency, and was one of the issues that the PAR project was seeking to tackle. It also reflects the view presented by an anonymous contributor to the Ghana Review International who suggested that:

> some of our old ways contradict the principles of equity, liberty, and change. They promote ideals which make us timid in the face of authority, and risk and change averse…More often than not, common sense gives way to tradition. I've lost count of the number of times I've been told "that's just the way things are" when I've dared to suggest improving some process or practice! This helps sustain and perpetuate the unsuitable and unaccountable leadership models of old. (Ghana Review International, 2009)

Three of the schools whose head teachers were involved in the Action Research are the cases being reported in this paper. One of these schools is located in the Komenda-Eguafo-Edina-Abrem (KEEA) District in the Central Region, one in the Techiman District in the Brong-Ahafo Region and the third in the Savelugu-Nanton District in the Northern Region. All three schools are in deprived communities, lacking basic amenities such as regular supply of potable water, electricity, and in some cases, adequate classrooms and teachers.

The three cases were chosen to show how the head teachers were trying to address issues of social justice related to gender, disability and poverty. Of particular interest were:

- the role head teachers are playing in helping the communities to fight poverty;
- the role educational leaders are playing in ensuring equity; and,
- the roles being played by head teachers in the pursuit of quality teaching and learning.

Two of the schools were addressing gender related problems while the third school was addressing the issue of disability. Attempts to solve these problems are all directed at improving pupil learning.

4.1.1 School A

School A is the only public basic school in its area, and serves three communities. These communities have one other private primary school but it has classes only up to basic three, after which the pupils are transferred to the public school to join basic four. This leads to an increase in enrolment in the upper primary classes in School A. The literacy rate of the communities is generally low and most of the people have low incomes.

This school comprises classes from kindergarten (KG) to Junior High School (JHS) 3 which are single-grade. Teaching sessions have an average class size of about 40. Presently, the largest class (P4) has 56 pupils and the smallest class (P3) has 39 pupils. There are nearly twice as many boys than girls in the school. The total enrolment of the school is 517, made up of 333 boys and 184 girls. The majority of the pupils come to school from the nearest of the three communities and therefore do not have to travel long distances to school. The school has a total of 20 teachers, including the head teacher, giving a pupil teacher ratio of 27: 1. Fifteen of the teachers are trained and, in addition, one is a graduate teacher. The physical structures in the school are fairly adequate with eight uncompleted classrooms for the KG and primary and three completed classrooms for the JHS. There is an office for the head teacher and a storeroom, as well as separate toilet facilities for the girls and boys in the school. A key issue of concern for the head teacher was the high incidence of teenage pregnancy that caused girls to drop out of school before completing the cycle. As girls are generally less likely obtain a higher level of education due to social and cultural issues it is critical that girls that are in school are encouraged and assisted to go as far as they can. Girls who are educated tend to marry later, raise fewer children who are healthier, and support education for their all of their children-all of which contribute to alleviating extreme poverty (Akyeampong, 2009; Annin, 2009; Chimombo, 2009; Tembon & Fort, 2008).

The head teacher of the school focused attention on the importance of sending the girl-child to school and was looking to address the problem of pregnancy that hinders girls' education, as they are unable to go back to school after child birth. The head teacher was also concerned about the impact that this was having upon the reading skills of girls in the lower primary classes.

In the case of teenage pregnancy, the head teacher's strategy was to use the cooperation of the parents and the community to address the problem. First, a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meeting was organised to discuss the problem and to come up with possible solutions. At the meeting, it was agreed that the parents should monitor their children closely. Also they were to meet the chief and elders of the community to set up bye-laws to serve as a deterrent. The laws put in place were more stringent measures/punishment given to men in the community that impregnated teenage girls. Teenagers were also banned from going to night clubs and drinking 'spots'. The second strategy was to periodically invite counselors and women who can serve as role models to the school to give talks to the pupils on issues such as the importance of education, adverse effects of teenage pregnancies and sex education.

In relation to poor reading skills, the head teacher adopted a strategy of organizing in-service training for lower primary teachers and preparing teaching aids that could be used to improve the reading skills of the pupils. An hour a day (at the end of the week after classes) was used for the in-service training activities. The head teacher was the facilitator for the lower primary teachers. During the term the head teacher stepped up supervision to monitor the teachers use of skills learnt.

The counseling of pupils and the involvement of the parents and community appear to have improved the situation of teenage pregnancy. The headteacher reported that in the 2007/2008 academic year there were five cases of pregnancies in the JHS. However, no pregnancy has

been reported in 2008-2009. The headteacher attributes this to the stringent rules made by the chief and the continuous counseling that was carried on in the school. This shows that the community and the school can work together under the direction of the headteacher to solve problems in the school.

The in-service training and increased frequency of supervision has had some impact on the academic performance of the pupils in lower primary. Overall, the boys performed better than the girls in reading and core subjects in all three classes before the intervention. After the intervention, the girls generally performed slightly better than the boys, especially in the reading skills. Table 1 presents the data collected by the school head on class enrolment, reading skills and academic performance for two terms, that is, the term before the intervention (third term, 2007-2008) and the term after the intervention (first term, 2008-2009). The scores in the table are average percentages.

Table 1 : Enrolment, Reading Skills and Academic Performance of Lower Primary Pupils of School A, 2007 – 2009

2007-2008 THIRD TERM										
Class enrolment			**Reading Skills**		**English**		**Maths**		**Integrated Science**	
CLASS	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
1	30	22	38%	42%	48%	46%	35%	29%	35%	30%
2	25	15	42%	40%	40%	32%	33%	28%	39%	43%
3	22	20	40%	36%	48%	39%	41%	42%	53%	45%
2008-2009 FIRST TERM										
1	30	20	58%	66%	78%	62%	50%	53%	59%	60%
2	22	18	63%	77%	80%	75%	63%	69%	65%	70%
3	24	26	59%	71%	68%	70%	61%	62%	63%	59%

4.1.2 School B

School B is one of Ghana's largest schools for hearing impaired children and has been established for over 30 years. The school aims to provide formal basic education from Kindergarten to Junior High School 3 for hearing impaired children within the Northern and Upper East region of Ghana. The establishment of the school in itself sought to ensure social justice in the sense of recognizing that the disability, over children of which they have no control, should not be a hindrance to obtaining access to basic education (Fraser, 1995). Since basic schools in Ghana do not have facilities to cater for children with disabilities such as hearing impairment, School B provides the only opportunity that children in the Northern Region with hearing impairment have to access basic education.

The school comprises a staff of 29 teachers, 8 of whom have training in special education, 4 are teaching assistants, 2 have diplomas in basic education, and 4 are post-secondary trained. In addition, there are 2 nursery attendants and 6 pupil teachers. Twenty of the teachers are male. Pupil enrolment is 184 boys and 106 girls. All pupils are boarders. The school follows the same curriculum as in other basic schools in the country and pupils take the same national exam at the end of the cycle as pupils at other basic schools.

The key focus of the headteacher's concerns at School B was the inability of many of the pupils to communicate effectively in writing, largely due to their limited vocabulary and poor language

development. The headteacher's observations indicated that many of the children did not interact effectively with other people. This was especially felt to be the case with regard to the parents of the pupils, a problem accentuated by the boarding nature of the school as well as parents' limited skills in signing. In addition, it appeared that many of these children were kept to themselves and away from other children when they were at home with their parents, for fear of stigmatization. This reflected the view that disability in Africa was often regarded as a taboo subject (Fairbairn, 2009). This general lack of engagement by parents at School B mirrored the findings of Dixon (2009), whose study of the education of the deaf in Africa concluded that, overall, the involvement and interest of parents in their deaf child's education was problematic.

The Action Research strategy pursued by the headteacher aimed at setting measurable targets for language acquisition for the various class levels, with an emphasis being placed on the sign language. In order to achieve this, the following steps were taken:

- class achievement data forms were filled by all teachers to get baseline information to help monitor progress;

- each teacher was asked to set a measurable target for language acquisition;

- all teachers were asked to give their pupils a regular weekly class test, so as to be able to monitor pupil progress;

- teachers were encouraged to prepare lessons that covered a range of different aspects of language development, which were checked on a weekly basis by the headteacher;

- the headteacher introduced self-appraisal forms for all teachers so as to motivate them to improve their classroom performance;

- the headteacher monitored teacher attendance on a systematic basis;

- a decision was taken by the headteacher that sign language was to be the first language (L1);

- sign language classes were organised for teachers once a week to improve their teaching skills;

- an extra hour of library time per week was provided for pupils from P1 to P6, with the headteacher negotiating time with staff and offering support;

- the headteacher carried out a series of interviews with a small representative sample of pupils in order to gauge their feelings as to the ways in which their education was progressing; and,

- there was increased communication with parents, especially during Parent Teacher Association meetings, about the importance of communicating with their children and showing interest in their education.

The Action Research strategy at School B is ongoing but already the headteacher's observations and focus on 'instructional leadership' have provided signs of positive improvements in pupils' language development. Pupils have developed more interest in reading and were making use of the time allocated to library reading. Sign language was increasingly being used by both teachers and pupils. Reading tool kits had been distributed to class teachers and their use was making the language lessons enjoyable to the pupils. The headteacher has also been able to work with the School Management Committee and the Parent-Teacher Association to provide a small range of incentives for teachers whose class performance has improved.

4.1.3 School C

School C is in the Techiman District of the Brong-Ahafo Region. It is managed by the Roman Catholic Educational Unit but the District Director of Education has oversight responsibility for the school. In the current academic year (2008/2009) there are altogether 496 pupils, an increase of approximately 30% over the enrolment for 2007-2008. Table 2 shows the enrolment for the academic year 2008-2009 by level and gender.

Table 2: School C Enrolment, 2008-2009

Level	Boys	Girls	TOTAL
Kindergarten	56	78	134
Basic 1	36	38	74
Basic 2	30	48	78
Basic 3	34	29	63
Basic 4	24	26	50
Basic 5	42	22	64
Basic 6	17	16	33
Total	239	257	496

One feature about the enrolment figures is the decline in the number of girls found in the Senior Basic classes. Similarly, the sharp decline in the number of boys found between Basic Level 5 to Basic Level 6 is striking. The large enrolment in Basic 5 in 2008-2009 was due to repeaters and new pupils from nearby schools.

Another striking feature of the enrolment figures was the number of children in the kindergarten classes. During the 2007-2008 academic year, KG1 had an average class size of 55. Their class rooms were so overcrowded that the teacher had to position herself outside the room, on the veranda and peep in to speak to the children. She could not enter the class to supervise any activity. This academic year, the school even does not have access to this tiny room that they were using as their classroom. All the KG classes now sit under trees and the children are sent home any time that the weather is inclement.

Given this range of options for intervention, the headteacher decided to focus on the issues raised within the 2007-2008 Basic Level 6 class, as that coincided with the timeline of the Action Research project. In that academic year, this class had 28 boys and 12 girls on the register.

The school was located only a few kilometres from Techiman, the district capital, which has a large market, and is patronised by traders from all over Ghana and others from nearby Burkina Faso and Cote d'Ivoire. This market usually takes place from Wednesday through to Friday, both night and day, and the headteacher had observed that many school children, especially boys, were known to play truant on these market days in order to carry goods for traders and earn some money. Some of the girl pupils also helped their mothers to sell their wares on such days. For some poor families such activities augmented the family income and attendance at school on market days and therefore had a huge opportunity cost (Annin, 2009).

In terms of gathering baseline data, the head teacher of the school checked the class attendance registers on a specific day in February 2008 and the data indicated that 10 particular boys out of the 28 were almost always absent from school from Wednesday to Friday, and only attended regularly on Mondays and Tuesdays. Scrutiny by the headteacher of the exercise books of this group of male pupils found that their output of work in both quality and quantity was very low. They had done less than one-third of the number of assignments and class exercises completed by the rest of the class, and there were errors in about 80% of their work. In English and Mathematics, which were taught almost every day of the school week,

these pupils had completed no more than two exercises a week. After discussing the boys' output of work with the class teachers, the head teacher felt she had some basis to conclude that the boys' poor academic performance could be attributed to their poor attendance.

The headteacher therefore decided to make use of an Action Research approach to try and solve the problem of absenteeism and also to seek to improve the academic achievement of these ten male pupils. As such, this intervention deliberately moved away from the 'traditional' emphasis upon the achievement of the girl-child (Tanye, 2008) and sought to shed light upon the often neglected area of boys' achievement.

The objectives of the headteacher's intervention were to:

- find out why these male pupils were often absent on market days by exploring whether they did so on their own volition or were acted on the wishes of their parents or guardians;
- educate parents on the importance of education and regular attendance of their sons at school;
- identify the problems these pupils faced in class as a result of their frequent absence from school; and,
- design and implement an appropriate intervention that would improve both the attendance and academic achievement of this group of pupils.

Based on the information that the headteacher had gathered concerning the attendance and academic achievement of this group of male pupils, she met with the teacher in charge of Basic Level 6 and, together, they decided on an intervention that included interviewing the 10 boys individually and then as a group to try to obtain a clear understanding of the nature of the problem. This was to be followed by a meeting with parents to educate them about investing in their children's education. The headteacher also decided on the need to organise remedial classes for the boys concerned to help them catch up with the rest of the class. It is clear that there are elements here of both the notion of 'recognition' (Fraser, 1995) and of 'distributional justice' (Gewirtz, 1998).

Additionally, there was a range of pre-intervention and post-intervention data gathering for this male group and for the Basic Level 6 class as a whole. The aim was for the headteacher to ascertain the level of attendance and achievement of these boys relative to the class average for both these areas. Over a period of four months, the headteacher monitored both the attendance and achievements of this group and noted any improvements made. At the end of this period, she was able to compare the progress made by these boys with class averages for weekly attendance and academic achievement.

There were two further aspects to the Action Research intervention: interviews with pupils and a meeting with parents. The head teacher conducted a focus group interview with the whole group, and then spoke to three of the boys individually. The headteacher identified these three boys as those who were most at risk, as their parents appeared to have no interest in their school attendance, and left the boys to fend for themselves. This reflects an increasing problem with 'street children' in some parts of Ghana (The Chronicle, 2009) with, for example, stories of 'close to 4,000 street children who are going through all forms of abuse and difficulties' (p 1) in the Tamale Metropolis.

After reviewing the results of the interview, the headteacher called a general meeting of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) to discuss the attendance and achievement of the pupils in the school. As a result, parents undertook to ensure that their wards would be in school, especially on market days.

Before the intervention, in the month of March 2008, the average attendance per week of the boys targeted was 0.8 out of a maximum of 5. From the beginning of April, 2008, the targeted pupils' attendance was monitored by checking the attendance register every Friday and noting the number of times each of the pupils targeted had attended school. The average attendance per week was then recorded. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3: Average Attendance of Ten Boys Per Week, March - July

Month	Average Attendance Per Week
March	0.8
April	2.8
May	3
June	4
July	5

Maximum attendance per week = 5

As shown in Table 3, the problem of absenteeism was effectively solved by July. Even as efforts were being made to keep these 10 boys in school, remedial support was being provided. The head teacher and the class teacher stayed back with the 10 boys after the official school work to give the pupils concerned remedial work in mathematics and English. They were given assistance to do outstanding class exercises and homework in addition to the new assignments that were given to the rest of the class. The pupils' progress was monitored and by the close of July, 2008 some improvement was noticed. Table 4 shows the average monthly scores of the 10 boys, expressed as percentages.

Table 4: Average Monthly Scores of Ten Boys, March - July

Month and Year	Mathematics Score %	English Score %
March 2008	20	15
April 2008	35	30
May 2008	46	50
June 2008	50	60
July 2008	58	75

As can be seen in Table 4, the performance of the 10 boys in mathematics improved from 20% in March, 2008 to 58% in July, 2008. All of the 10 boys successfully completed the six-year cycle and were promoted to Junior High School. Six of them are in the Junior High division on the same compound as the primary school. The others had chosen to attend Junior High Schools elsewhere.

The head teacher continued her monitoring of these six pupils to make sure that they did not relapse into their former unhelpful ways. In the sixth week of the first term of the 2008-2009 academic year, she asked permission from the Form Master of Junior High Form 1 to check the attendance and achievement of the six boys who had moved on to that school. They were all always present during school hours and their average scores in mathematics and English were 55% and 68%, respectively, so it appeared that the progress made as a result of the headteacher's intervention had been sustained once the boys moved school.

4.2 Tanzania

The delivery of primary education in Tanzania is governed by the 1995 Education and Training Policy (United Republic of Tanzania [URT], 1995). Passage through primary education takes seven years (Standards I-VII) and is free, with enrolment and attendance being compulsory. In 2005, the public primary sector in Tanzania had a total enrolment of 7,476,650 pupils, which accounted for 99.1% of the primary age group. The remaining 0.9% attended privately funded primary schools (URT, 2005). In the same year, there was a total of 14,257 schools across the country (ibid, 2005). Significant developments have taken place with regard to teacher numbers, with a total of 154,895 being employed in 2008, an increase of 27.4% over the

numbers for 2004 (Ministry of Education & Culture, 2009). Despite this development, the increase in overall enrolment at primary level has meant that the pupil-teacher ratio has only slightly improved, from 1:58 in 2004 to 1:54 in 2008 (ibid).

In a positive connection, the period 2000-2006 saw significant improvements taking place in the numbers of pupils completing the primary phase of schooling, taking the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) and, also, in the numbers passing (Table 5).

Table 5: % of Pupils Passing Standard VII Exams, 2000-2006

Year	Number of pupils passing	% of Total
2000	85,576	22.0
2001	127,351	28.6
2002	133,674	27.4
2003	196,291	40.1
2004	243,043	48.6
2005	305,062	61.8
2006	468,279	70.5

(Mbelle, 2008, p 11)

Also of significance within the wider Millennium Development Goal context is the improvement in the performance of Tanzanian girls in the Standard VII PSLE examinations in the early years of the 21st century. Thus, a situation where only one in five (20.11%) female PSLE candidates were successful in 2002 had changed to one where over half (54.6%) of the females taking the PSLE in 2005 was successful (Mbelle, 2008, p 11).

4.2.1 School D

Data from one of the pilot schools in Tanzania is presented and analysed. School D is a primary school located in the Tanga District of the country. Looking at the Primary School Leaving Examination (PLSE) results data on the transition to secondary education as indicators of performance, the school is doing well. Between 2003 and 2006, 155 (78%) of the 199 pupils who sat for the PLSE were selected to join secondary education, and this reflects the improving trend in national performance at PSLE. By October 2008, the school had a total of 561 pupils (266 boys and 295 girls), out of which 24 (10 boys and 14 girls) were in the pre-primary class and 24 were in class of pupils with disabilities (11 boys and 13 girls). In 2008 the school had a total of 15 teachers (3 males and 12 females) and its 2008 Pupil Teacher Ratio (PTR) of 43:1 compares favourably with the national average PTR of 53:1. The headteacher of the school has been in post for six years prior to involvement in the project and, before being transferred to School D, had served as headteacher of a nearby school for six years.

Unlike the case study schools in Ghana, the headteacher of School D decided to focus attention on issues related to poverty within the community, with a particular emphasis upon children coming from difficult home environments and extremely poor households. Many of these children were being denied their right to access primary education, and where children were attending, difficult home environments exacerbated by poverty adversely affected their ability to sustain engagement with school. The intervention was aimed at taking actions that could mitigate the impact of difficult home environments and poverty on children's access to schooling, classroom achievement, and completion of the primary education cycle. The headteacher sought to answer a number of questions related to the problem, including the following:

- how many pupils are living in difficult home environments and coming from extremely poor households?
- what kind of support do such pupils get from the school and the community in general?
- how difficult is the home environment that they are living in?

• how poor is the household that they are coming from?
• what is the trend in the school attendance of such pupils, and what are the possibilities for enhancing the levels of pupil attendance?
• how do such pupils cooperate with their peers, teachers, parents and the community around them?
In order to identify and collect other relevant data/information about pupils in difficult home environments and coming from extremely poor households, the headteacher sought information from teachers within the school. Other data collected and analysed included daily attendance records, class assignments, homework, and test and examination results. On the basis of this range of information a sample group of fifteen pupils was identified (Table 6).

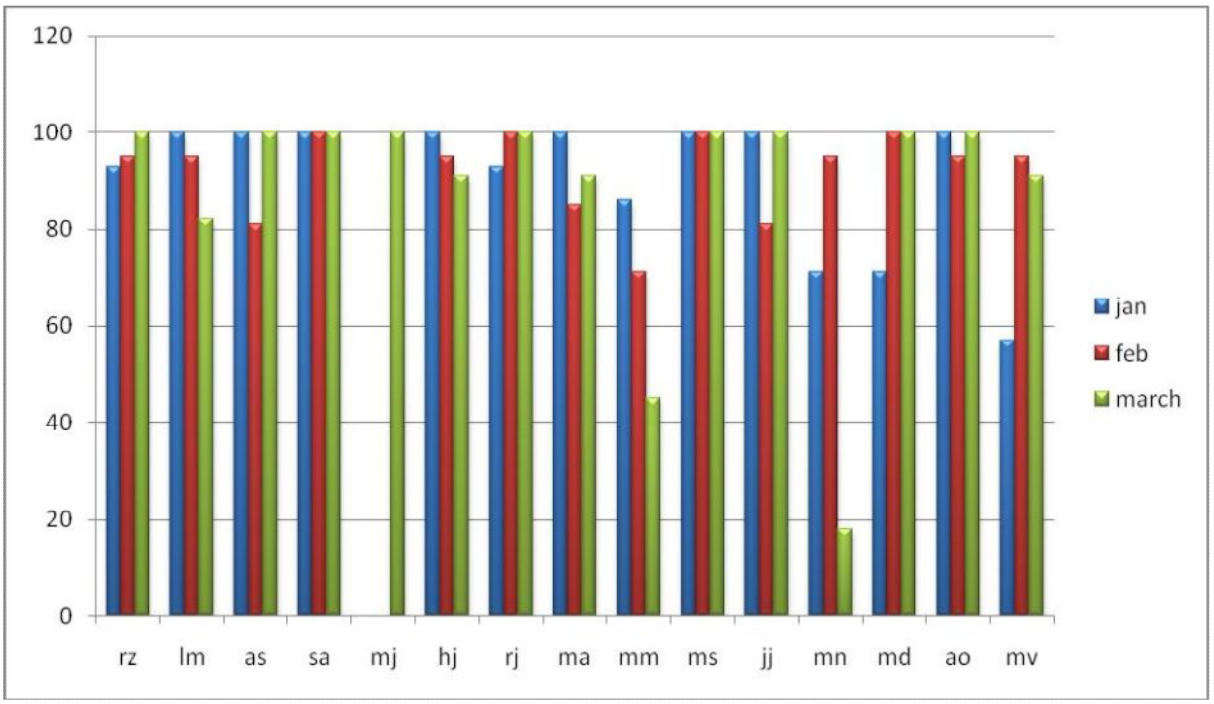
Table 6: School D Target Group

(girls are identified with an asterisk *)

S/N	Initials	CLASSES			
		III	IV	V	VI
1.	LM*	√			
2.	RZ	√			
3.	SA		√		
4.	AS*		√		
5.	MJ*		√		
6.	HJ			√	
7.	RJ			√	
8.	MA*				√
9.	MM				√
10.	MS*				√
11.	JJ				√
12.	MN*				√
13.	MD				√
14.	AO*				√
15.	MV*				√
	Total	**2**	**3**	**2**	**8**

The sampled pupils' school attendance trends for the months of January-March 2008, before the start of the PAR intervention were examined and are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Sampled Pupils' Attendance before the PAR



This indicates an inconsistent pattern, with three pupils showing a gradual improvement in attendance(rz, rj, and md), fluctuating attendance for five pupils (as, ma, jj, ao and mo), and a decline of attendance amongst four pupils (lm,hj,mm and mn). Two pupils had a stable 100% attendance (sa and ms), and one pupil (mj) did not attend school for the whole of January and February. This does seem to suggest that poor living conditions alone do not account for the attendance patterns of this sample group of pupils at the school, and that wider issues related to availability of 'social capital' might be at play here (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Additionally, this attendance patterning reflects some connection with the wider national picture regarding the relationship between school attendance, truancy and primary school drop-out in Tanzania over recent years. So, whilst there has been some improvement in the proportion of primary school drop-outs who fail to complete because of truancy (from 77.6% of the total in 2004 to 66.6% in 2007), this still remains by far the largest cause of non-completion of basic education in the country (Ministry of Education & Culture, 2009).

A series of interviews was carried out with pupils in the sample with the aim of determining their attitudes towards schooling. All interviewed pupils indicated that they liked being at school because not only did they find it a place which offered them security but they also felt that they could freely express their problems to teachers who were relatively more caring and considerate than many of their parents and guardians. Despite this positive attitude towards the school, many of them admitted to being constrained by difficult home environments, compounded by poverty, in their struggle to attain academic progress.

Pupils in the sample also declared that they are in great need of being assisted to get a positive and supportive environment for learning, especially in relation to school learning materials and food. For the majority, a good school was one that had enough teachers, textbooks, exercise books, sports and recreational facilities as well as a school feeding programme. This reflects the views emerging from studies of attitudes towards schools within a range of African contexts (eg Annin, 2009; HakiElimu, 2003).

In an attempt to find out possible solutions for assisting the pupils' problems, the headteacher made the following efforts:

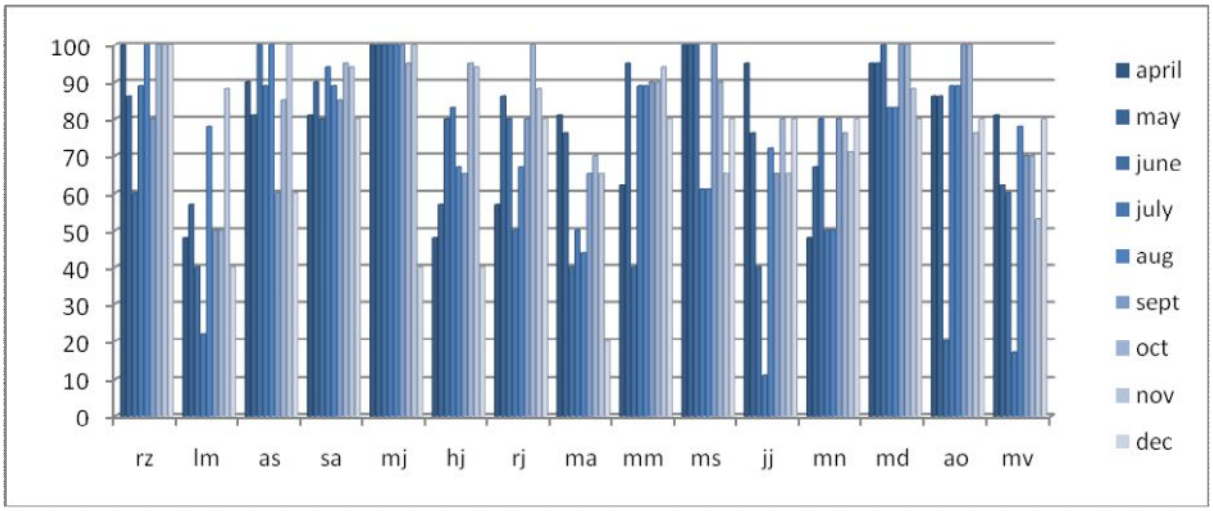
• a Staff Meeting was convened with the purpose of designing and agreeing on the realistic and creative strategies to support those pupils who are coming from difficult home environments and extremely poor households so that their school attendance could improve and that their chances of completing the primary education cycle could be enhanced. The headteacher and eight of the fifteen teachers at the school attended, and at the headteacher's initiative, it was agreed that class teachers should systematically monitor attendance and supervise the pupils' classroom and homework assignments. The 15 pupils were also divided into three groups, with each allocated a special plot in the school garden, so as to encourage them to cultivate vegetables which could be used both to supplement their diet at home and to sell for cash to buy food. It was also recommended that part of the proceeds from the school's income generation projects should be used to purchase uniforms, school materials and food for these pupils and others coming from extremely poor households. Money generated from these activities was put into an 'Education for Self-Reliance Fund' which was used to provide a meal for pupils at school. Those pupils who came from extremely poor households, and those with disabilities or who were HIV positive, were provided with a free meal by the school. This latter group was also given free vegetables twice a week. It is clear here that the actions initiated by the headteacher can be seen as clear evidence of the kind of *distributional justice* identified by Gewirtz (1998):

• a meeting of the School Committee was also called with a similar purpose. The Committee supported the recommendation that the school should use part of the proceeds from the income generation projects to support pupils coming from extremely poor households; and,

• visits to the pupils' homes were carried out in an attempt to capture a real picture of their living conditions and to talk to parents/guardians on how to help alleviate the problems facing those pupils. Here we can see an approach which focuses upon Fraser's notion of 'recognition' (1995) and which also opens up the perspective of 'relational justice' adumbrated by Gewirtz (1998).

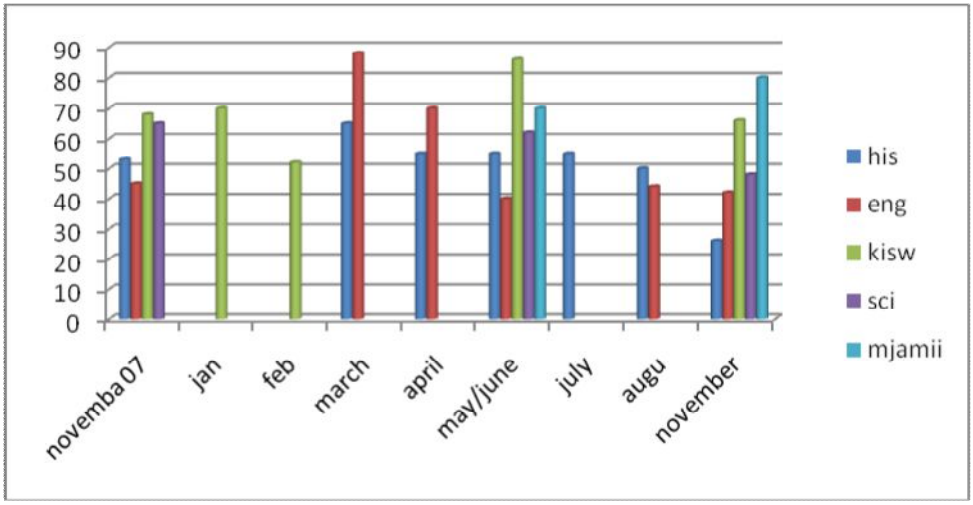
Attendance statistics for the PAR period between April and December 2008 are presented in Figure 2. The picture that emerged is that, for most of the pupils, attendance has continued to fluctuate across these months. Some pupils (eg mm, mn and mv) have maintained the same attendance pattern both in the pre-intervention period and also during the Action Research phase. Many pupils experienced a decline in attendance in the middle months of the year and this could be explained by the fact that the school had a feeding programme which unfortunately could not be sustained during this period. Interestingly, pupil mj, whose attendance in the early months had been extremely erratic, had the best attendance amongst the sample group during the April-December 2008 period. This can be explained by the headteacher's decision to provide food for this pupil from the head's personal finances and illustrates the significance of feeding programmes for pupils coming from environments of extreme poverty (HakiElimu, 2003). Overall, the resultant erratic attendance patterns across the sample group of pupils impacted upon classroom practice, with many of the group failing to attend for regular monthly class tests.

Figure 2: Sampled Pupils' Attendance in the PAR Period between April-Dec 2008.



This rather negative result in relation to school attendance should not obscure the impact of the headteacher's activities on pupil mj. Monthly performance data for this pupil is presented in Figure 3 and, though there are some signs of erratic achievement by this pupil, performance in Kiswahili is worthy of note. Here, we see a pattern of strong achievement in the monthly tests, with achievement remaining solid at over 50% in each of the tests taken by this pupil. Such evidence, though small in quantity, provides a valuable insight into the impact of the Action Research approach used by the headteacher.

Figure 3: Academic Performance of Pupil MJ



His=Hisabati; Engli= English; Kiswa= Kiwahili; Saya= Sayansi; Mjamii= Maarifa ya Jamii.

The varied degree of success that the range of interventions attracted contrasts with developments within the case study schools in Ghana and indicates some of the difficulties facing school leaders operating in challenging contexts of poverty and deprivation. Data gathered through the pupil interviews illustrates the significant opportunity costs that surround decisions about schooling for many pupils and their families and reflects the problems encountered in seeking to fulfil the 'Education for All' policy agenda (HakiElimu, 2007; Mbelle, 2008). Despite this caveat, the sense of empowerment and agency felt by the headteacher of School D should not be underemphasised, especially given an accountability and economic context which could generate a sense of helplessness.

5. CONCLUSION

It can be seen that, in their day-to-day struggles to deal creatively with the difficult contexts in which they work, these school leaders have sought to engage within a 'social justice' paradigm (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006). Whilst they have not always expressed this approach consciously, the Action Research process has enabled them to address issues of 'recognition' (Fraser, 1995) in a concrete manner. Their activities have been close to notions of 'social justice leadership' within the United States expressed by Theoharis (2007), who:

> defined social justice leadership to mean that these principals make issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalized conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision. This definition centers on addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools (p 223).

By their actions, the case study school leaders have displayed a clear alignment with the notion of a socially engaged member of a school community. As such, they have shown a strong connection with the view that 'a socially just education requires educational leaders to practice moral outrage at the persistence, if not worsening, of homelessness, hunger, and poverty (Blackmore, 2002, p 218). The strength of the Action Research approach has been that it has enabled school leaders to exercise a degree of agency so as to provide them with some space in which to operate, despite an over-arching atmosphere of accountability. This holds out real

hope that school leaders working in extremely challenging contexts might still be able to work creatively to bring forward a 'social justice' agenda that can bring about positive benefits for the children within their schools.

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