



## Financial governance and education quality in decentralised basic education systems: Evidence from Gomoa West District, Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

This study examined the functionality of the financial governance system of basic education in the Gomoa West District of Ghana, with the aim of identifying evidence-based strategies for improving the quality of education. The study employed a qualitative research design grounded in a constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology, guided by the effectiveness and efficiency theories. The target population comprised head teachers of public junior high schools and district education officers of the Gomoa West District Education Directorate. Three district education officers and nine head teachers were selected using expert purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and supplemented by documentary analysis of the School Performance Improvement Plan (SPIP) and the Capitation Grant guidelines. Data were analyzed thematically. The results reveal that the district operates a formalized, policy-oriented financial governance system anchored in the SPIP, with well-developed structures for budgeting, stakeholder participation, and accountability. However, despite this structural progress, financial governance of basic schools in the district continues to be constrained by several challenges that impede the improvement of educational quality. These include inadequate, late, and irregular disbursement of the capitation grant; limited financial governance literacy among school leaders; and weak community involvement in accountability processes. Furthermore, the rigid implementation of financial regulations risks stifling local innovation in resource mobilization. It is recommended that the Ghana Education Service and District Education Directorate start intensive, sustained capacity-building programming for school leaders and district officers with an emphasis on flexible, context-sensitive budgeting within the SPIP structure. Furthermore, the Ghana Education Service (GES) in partnership with the Ministry of Education must institutionalize periodic mandatory training on financial management, resource mobilization, and compliance with financial accountability standards for all district education officers and head teachers.

**Keywords:** Basic Education, Decentralisation, Educational Quality, Financial Governance, School Performance Improvement Plan

### I. INTRODUCTION

Finance governance has developed as a significant indicator in achieving quality education, especially in decentralised contexts where local bodies are responsible for budgeting, fund allocation and accountability (Ampomah, 2025). The successful implementation of good governance principles such as transparency, accountability, participation and fairness in these decentralised settings is considered by many as a prerequisite for quality education worldwide (Sette & Ismanto, 2024; Yaqin & Shaleh, 2024). Musah et al. (2024) suggest that public financing of education can only improve the quality of education in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) when strong institutional frameworks are present. However, the region's progress towards equitable and quality education is still hindered by a combination of dwindling external aid, rising poverty and persistent inefficiencies in the internal allocation of resources (Chikoko & Mthembu, 2020).

In Ghana, the provision of basic education is dependent on robust systems of governance that can ensure that limited public resources translate into improved learning outcomes and equitable access, thus providing the basis for lifelong learning and human capital development (Buabeng & Amo-Darko, 2024). However, despite the increase in budgetary allocations and successive reforms, the effective utilisation of education funds has continued to be a challenge, constrained by governance weaknesses and systemic inefficiencies (Nyarkoh & Owusu, 2025). Ghana adopted reforms on decentralisation to enhance local decision-making and accountability in the provision of public services including education (Kyeremeh & Kor, 2022). However, there are still structural and operational problems that lead to variations in the quality of education between districts and lower incentives for reform at the local level (Ampratwum et al., 2018).

In 2015, the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) member states, adopted the Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action which sets a benchmark of 4-6% of GDP and 15-

20% of total public expenditure to be spent on public education (UNESCO, 2015). In 2021, Ghana spent 12.17% of total government expenditure on public education, 13.18% in 2022, 10.9% in 2023 and about 14% in 2024 (MacroTrends, 2025). The consistent underperformance of the Incheon benchmark and economic volatility lead to the deterioration of the quality of education. The funding gap is exacerbated by the ineffectiveness, inefficiency and lack of transparency in the management of funds (Ampomah, 2025). Inusah et al. (2021) has further noted that resources for education in Ghana are not used effectively and efficiently with educational outcomes not often prioritised in district level activities. Similarly, Kwadwo and Konadu (2020) argue that the greatest challenge of Ghana is not actually the lack of resources, but the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of resource allocation in the quest of Sustainable Development Goal 4.

The Gomoa West District provides a contextualised case for investigation in this situation. The district's 2022-2025 Medium-Term Development Plan identified a range of deficiencies in educational infrastructure such as poor furniture, dilapidated classroom blocks, inadequate teaching and learning materials, limited teacher accommodation, and high teacher attrition rates (Gomoa West District Assembly [GWDA], 2021). The pass rate of the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) also fell from 69.8% in 2020/2021 to 60% in 2021/2022 (GWDA, 2021) and this attrition rate was partly blamed on the systemic resource challenges. The findings raise some pertinent questions on the effectiveness of the system of financial governance and its impact on the quality of education.

There is very little empirical literature on district level education finance governance in Ghana, particularly from the perspective of the district education officers and school administrators. This study addresses that gap by exploring the financial governance system of basic education in the Gomoa West District. Functionality, in the context of this study, refers to four operationalised dimensions: compliance with financial regulations, timeliness of fund disbursement, stakeholder participation in budgeting, and audit trail completeness.

### 1.1 Research Questions

- i. How functional is the financial governance system in basic education in the Gomoa West District?
- ii. In what ways can the financial governance system be enhanced to become more effective in improving the quality of basic education in the Gomoa West District?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### 2.1.1 Effectiveness and Efficiency Theories

The study is directed by two complementary theories, namely efficiency theory and effectiveness theory. Together, these theories provide an integrated analytical framework to examine the extent to which education finance governance enables or constrains the delivery of quality basic education.

Effectiveness theory is the logic goal-setting (Mardiasmo, 2009). It assesses governance mechanisms not only in terms of whether financial resources were spent but whether that spending achieved its stated policy objectives, such as enrolment targets, learning achievement benchmarks, and completion rates. In the research of education finance governance, the basic question of this theory is whether the funds allocated are converted into the expected educational achievements. Effectiveness is complemented by efficiency theory (Leibenstein, 1966; Witte & López-Torres, 2017) which introduces an input-output logic. It looks at whether education systems are making the best of the resources they have: whether the process of allocating resources is open, whether money reaches the people it is supposed to reach without loss, and whether the cost per learner provides good educational results for the money. Practical indicators of efficiency include unit costs, repetition rates, class sizes, expenditure leakages and teacher absenteeism.

The two theories merge into one evaluative lens at the level of governance. Good governance means that decisions about resource allocation are aimed at clearly defined quality outcomes. Efficient governance means that those resources are used productively and without waste. The qualities of good education finance governance, which include transparency, accountability, and fiscal responsibility, are precisely the conditions that both theories require at the same time. The convergence outcome is quality basic education: governance mechanisms are effective when enrolment, learning, completion and equity goals are achieved, and efficient when waste, redundancy and misallocation are minimised. But neither goal-attainment without resource optimisation nor resource optimisation without goal-attainment is sound governance. Both dimensions should be present and complement each other. This dual-theory framework therefore guides the identification, categorisation and assessment of financial governance practices in the Gomoa West District in this study.

## 2.2 Empirical Review

### 2.2.1 Functionality of Financial Governance Systems

There is a growing global awareness of how crucial strong financial governance is for improving educational outcomes, promoting equity, and ensuring accountability within institutions. The World Bank (2018) stresses the significance of credible and transparent public financial management (PFM) systems in education. Spending and performance controls are important to obtain better learning results. Similarly, the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development [OECD] (2017) advocates that education funding should be adapted to the needs of schools and the wider objectives of education, rather than being distributed through administrative channels. In high- and middle-income countries, reforms have generally centred on decentralisation, participatory governance, results-based accountability and improved audit mechanisms (Bruns et al., 2011). There is a large debate in this field as to whether simply throwing money at the problem will improve educational outcomes. It is clear that sufficient funding is important, but how funding is managed often is more important than the total amount spent (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2015). Even large sums of money can be ineffective if oversight is poor, disbursement is irregular, and there is little community participation. Therefore, the current research considers financial governance as a complex system that connects accountability, transparency, participation and performance rather than only a means of resource allocation (Lewis & Pettersson, 2009). Other challenges, such as limited institutional capacity, dwindling public finances and continuing changes in decentralisation, also impact the financial governance of basic education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Challenges include slow disbursement of capitation grants, weak financial controls at district and school level and lack of community oversight (Bold et al., 2018; World Bank, 2021).

However, decentralisation policies often do not work as well in promoting local responsiveness and accountability because of implementation gaps. District officials and school leaders often find it difficult to deal with budgeting, reporting, and regulatory compliance (Andrews et al., 2017). On the other side of the coin, there is evidence to show that under certain conditions improvements in governance can lead to real positive outcomes. For example, improved use of resources and reduced financial leakage have been associated with better audit systems, more transparent reporting and community-based monitoring (Reinikka & Svensson, 2004).

In Ghana, the pattern of financial management in basic education has changed in line with wider decentralisation reforms. Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) have been given more financial responsibilities and the introduction of the capitation grant and school-based management structures is supposed to improve transparency and community participation (Ampratwum et al., 2018). However, delayed fund releases, weak oversight and poor coordination between district assemblies and education directorates remain a problem (Oduro et al., 2008). Ampratwum et al. (2018) also highlight that political and institutional factors are critical in determining how accountability operates in decentralised education systems. Weak audit enforcement and limited stakeholder oversight can erode confidence in the system, and the effectiveness of resources. Similarly, Inusah et al. (2021), posit that the resource allocation decisions of the various districts and municipalities do not necessarily favour educational outcomes. The challenge of financial governance in Ghanaian basic education is not only a matter of scarcity of resources but systemic weaknesses (Kwadwo & Konadu, 2020; Johnes et al., 2017).

### 2.2.2 Enhancing Financial Governance for Quality Education

Several interconnected strategies are suggested in the literature to improve financial governance for better educational outcomes. Sound financial management practices (budgeting, revenue diversification, cost control, investment planning) are critical for the long-term sustainability of educational institutions (Mamburao & Manubag, 2023). Good governance is achieved when sound financial policies and practices promote the development of systematic accountability frameworks, which in turn reduces the likelihood of financial mismanagement and promotes the responsible use of resources (Chokaa et al., 2023).

Another important lever for improving governance is stakeholder participation. School management teams and governing bodies' collaboration enhances communication, creates trust within the school, and encourages collective responsibility in school finance governance (Basson & Mestry, 2019). Participatory budgeting processes that integrate input from teachers, parents, and community representatives result in more precise resource allocation since the various stakeholders are better equipped to identify the actual needs of the different school units and departments (Cuenca, 2019; Crouch & Winkler, 2008). The latter also indicate that stakeholder participation in financial decision-making enhances the responsiveness of planning and bolsters accountability, particularly in resource-strained settings.

The ability of local leaders to coordinate multiple sources of funding and meet financial accountability obligations makes governance reforms more likely to benefit decentralised education systems. United Nations Environmental, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (2022) found out that local people in charge are better able to manage finances as they are better able to handle their financial commitments. Suwandi and Soewito (2015) also found that school administrators who have been trained in finance management are able to use resources efficiently, cut waste and better support teachers and students. Deductively, the extent to which money leads to real results such as

student performance, graduation rates and equity of access to learning opportunities, is a function of how well education finance is governed.

Systems of monitoring and performance evaluation are needed to track the performance of those in charge (OECD, 2020; Evans & Yuan, 2022). As Fiszbein and Stanton (2022) further highlight, monitoring and evaluation systems are crucial to assess whether the governance mechanisms are delivering these outcomes. Efficiency, on the other hand, is about optimisation of resource use, i.e. channelling scarce funds to those interventions that are most likely to give rise to educational returns, while at the same time minimising waste and redundancy (Johnes et al., 2017; Witte & López-Torres, 2017). Real-time expenditure tracking using digital systems can enhance the responsiveness and transparency of financial management (Amanati et al., 2024). This is relevant because Lewis and Pettersson (2009) report that money needs to be accountable and transparent for good financial governance to take place. When money is spent for the right reasons, there is a greater chance of realizing educational goals, and the stakeholders will be more confident in the system. Conversely, funding uncertainties or delays can lead to inefficiencies and devalue resources (Amanati et al., 2024). Strategic budgeting and performance tracking were also highlighted by Amos et al. (2021) as crucial for achieving specific learning objectives. All these findings indicate a clear relationship between the quality of education and the quality of financial management especially in places like the Gomoa West District where decisions are made locally.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

This study is grounded in a constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology. Constructivist believe that social realities are not fixed but constructed through human interaction and the process of making meaning. Interpretivism Knowledge is constructed through the subjective experiences and interpretations of the participants in the specific social context. Together, these philosophical commitments orient the study toward understanding how district education officers and head teachers construct, interpret, and experience financial governance in basic education. A qualitative research approach with a case study design was adopted, which is well suited to the exploration of governance practices in a specific local setting and to the generation of contextually rich, participant-centred data.

#### 3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in the Gomoa West District, located in Ghana's Central Region. The district occupies an area of about 514.2 square kilometres and is home to 129,512 residents, drawn from both rural and semi-urban communities (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). This demographic and geographic profile makes the district a productive setting for studying financial governance in basic education: its decentralised administrative structure, mixed rural-urban educational landscape, and documented resource challenges create conditions in which the tensions between governance policy and local implementation practice are visible and analytically tractable.

#### 3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised district education officers and head teachers of public Junior High Schools in the Gomoa West District. These groups were selected because of their direct and complementary roles in managing financial resources at the district and school levels respectively. The Gomoa West District Education Directorate has six principal education officers, while there are seventy-two public Junior High Schools in the district, each headed by a designated head teacher.

#### 3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

The participants were selected by expert purposive sampling in order to have the relevant knowledge and direct experience in the governance of educational finance. The sample comprised three district education officers responsible for financial administration and nine head teachers whose schools directly and indirectly benefited from the Capitation Grant and the Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project (GALOP). This sample size is consistent with the logic of purposive sampling in qualitative inquiry, where the goal is depth and information richness, not numerical representativeness. Thematic saturation, the point at which no new substantive codes or categories are found in additional data, was evident in this sample, giving confidence that the data were sufficient (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### 3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were the main data collection tool but also supplemented with documentary analysis. The interview format allowed the researcher to probe participants' responses in depth while maintaining thematic focus on the study's research questions. All twelve participants were individually interviewed. Documentary analysis was conducted on the School Performance Improvement Plan (SPIP) and the Capitation Grant Guidelines, which provided

official data on the planning, allocation, and utilisation of school funds, and served as a triangulation source for the interview data.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Interview data were analysed using thematic analysis following the six-phase process described by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation with the data; generation of initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report. Policy and operational documents were subjected to content analysis to identify formal governance structures, procedural requirements, and their alignment with or divergence from participant accounts. Themes were developed inductively from the data and subsequently interrogated through the lens of the effectiveness and efficiency theoretical framework.

### 3.7 Ethical Consideration

The study followed the ethical protocol for qualitative research with human participants. Before fieldwork, ethical approval was obtained and negotiated institutional access with the relevant district education authorities. All participants were informed in details about the aim, scope and expected contributions of the study prior to consenting for participation. Participation was voluntary and participants were explicitly assured their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. To protect confidentiality and anonymity, all data records were stripped of personal identifiers such as names and the location of schools. Participants were assigned numerical codes, which are used exclusively throughout this report.

## IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Functionality of the Financial Governance System of Basic Education in Gomoa West District

This section presents findings in response to the first research question: How functional is the financial governance system of basic education in the Gomoa West District? The analysis draws on interview data from district education officers and head teachers, focusing on the governance practices that structure financial decision-making across both levels of the system. The data generated four interrelated sub-themes; annual budget planning, SPIP adherence and enforcement, policy-driven spending and stakeholder's participation and collaboration. The fifth sub-theme, accountability and compliance mechanisms, encompasses the documentary and audit infrastructure that supports the system. The themes together suggest a structurally formalised and policy-centred system of financial governance, organised around the School Performance Improvement Plan (SPIP) as its primary organising framework.

#### 4.1.1 Annual Budget Planning

The data show that financial planning in Gomoa West District is structured in a well-defined hierarchal cycle, connecting school-level budgeting with the district and regional oversight structures. At the district level, the directorate of education prepares an annual budget guided by the Ghana Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS), which is submitted to the regional directorate for approval. Participants described this process as institutionalised and routinely observed:

*“Yes, we have our budgets for the year, for every year and for the term. So, we call on the head teachers to give us the things that they need in their school.”* (Participant #11, 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

*“We prepare a budget which is presented to the regional education office for approval at the beginning of every financial year.”* (Participant #12, 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

At the school level, budget preparation is anchored in the SPIP which is both a planning tool, a financial guide and an accountability document. Participants described the role of the SPIP in structuring school level financial governance with clarity:

*“The SPIP is a budget plan that guides the teacher to run the school well for a specified period, usually a year. It is always required by the district office before it gets sent to the regional directorate of education.”* (Participant #1, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2025)

*“The SPIP states the specific areas we are allowed to spend money on. It is our budget plan; it is explicit on how funds should be spent. 'Once we prepare it according to those guidelines, we send it to the district education directorate for approval. It basically contains all the planned expenditures for the school.’”* (Participant #4, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

These accounts established that budget planning in Gomoa West was neither ad hoc nor discretionary. It is part of a formalised governance architecture that connects financial decisions at the school level with district and regional oversight. Having to develop, submit and get budgets approved at each tier engenders procedural discipline, a positive sign of governance functionality because it ensures that resource allocation is deliberate, traceable and in line with approved policy parameters.

This approach is consistent with Mestry (2004) who posits that finance policies and clear separation of roles are needed to ensure compliance with budgetary allocations and to reduce the risk of financial misappropriation. This also echoes the study of Mamburao and Manubag (2023) which found out that effective financial management such as budgeting, cost control, and investment planning are the foundation for the long-term sustainability of the educational institutions.

From an effectiveness theory perspective (Mardiasmo, 2009), the hierarchical budget planning cycle provides the institutional architecture through which policy objectives such as equitable resource distribution and improved learning outcomes are operationalised and monitored. The structured budgetary practices observed in Gomoa West District therefore reflect key strengths in the functionality of the basic education financial governance system, and their sustained development is essential to continued progress in educational quality.

#### 4.1.2 SPIP Adherence and Enforcement

Beyond its function as a budgeting instrument, the SPIP operates as the primary compliance mechanism governing how school funds are utilised. The data show that SPIP compliance is both a legal requirement and a protection against financial misuse. Participants described a system where the SPIP defines the permissible boundaries of expenditure, and deviations, even when motivated by urgent institutional needs, have formal accountability consequences:

*“We follow the budget that is outlined in the SPIP, which is an officially accepted document. Copies are held by the school, the School Management Committee (SMC), the Parent Association (PA) and the district office. We rank the activities according to the SPIP and then allocate the limited funds accordingly. Sometimes funds may be needed for other urgent purposes, but this is not permitted by policy. If such deviations occur, we are held accountable during audits.”* (Participant #9, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

*“We follow the SPIP very strictly because we are financially accountable to it. After using the funds, we prepare and submit all the required financial records like the cash book, payment vouchers and cash analysis reports. These documents are very important for justifying the use of money as per the SPIP.”* (Participant #6, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

These responses show that the SPIP is a rule-based financial control device: it stipulates the way in which funds are to be used and it sets the evidentiary standard by which expenditures are tested in audits. The multi-copy distribution of the SPIP to the school, SMC, PA and district office further institutionalises transparency by positioning multiple stakeholders to simultaneously monitor compliance. This aligns with the claim by Chokaa et al. (2023) that a well-implemented policy framework supports financial governance by providing clear, structured pathways for accountability, the compliance culture participants describe is a direct institutional manifestation of this principle.

But the data also highlight a major limitation in the way compliance is pursued. Participants said that enforcement was primarily punitive: audit findings penalise deviations rather than building corrective capacity to address them. This method is useful in avoiding financial abuses but does not develop the skills of school leaders to respond to complex or unforeseen financial circumstances. The GES (2018) guidelines present capacity-building in record-keeping and financial management as a prerequisite for accessing school grants, suggesting that the policy framework does include a developmental dimension, but one that seems to be front-loaded rather than sustained in practice. The challenge is to bridge the gap between punitive enforcement and continuous developmental support to operationalise the compliance architecture of the SPIP to bring about real improvements in financial governance capacity.

#### 4.1.3 Policy Driving Spending

A comparable feature of financial governance in Gomoa West is the degree to which the decision to spend is driven by policy frameworks and not locally determined priorities. The data indicate that school leaders operate in a tightly controlled environment of expenditure, with the SPIP functioning as both expenditure authorisation and a benchmark for performance monitoring:

*“We have limited discretion in how we use these funds because the SPIP is strictly enforced. There is a formal policy in place, and during monitoring visits I am evaluated based on how closely I adhere to the plan outlined in the SPIP. This document is my spending guide, but I cannot access any allocated funds until the SPIP has first been submitted to the District Office for approval.”* (Participant #1, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2025)

*“The SPIP is provided to us as a guiding document. We use it to prepare our budget, and once that budget is built around the SPIP, deviation is not permitted. It states the specific categories of allowable expenditure and we are to strictly observe those parameters”* (Participant #7, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

The accounts reveal that the financial decision-making in Gomoa West schools is largely influenced by pre-determined policy frameworks. This is consistent with the argument of Vegas and Coffin (2015) that the allocation and

spending of funds is more important for educational outcomes than the total amount disbursed. The SPIP-guided system allocates resources guided by structured guidelines to avoid mismanagement and ensure that spending is linked to the needs of the institution and the learner. Guthrie (2001) further elaborates on spending as a policy tool for equity, stressing its role in aligning education systems with equity and efficiency principles. The SPIP's budgetary system, based on needs and pre-defined budgets, is in principle compatible with this objective.

At the same time the data raise legitimate concerns about the governance costs of excessive policy rigidity. Wong (1999) points out that the fragmentation of education finance policies into uncoordinated components or the rigidity of rules to permit local variation often results in systemic inefficiency. Schools and districts lose the ability to allocate resources in ways that best meet their specific circumstances, which reduces the overall effectiveness of the system. The Gomoa West data do not fully support this concern, the SPIP system appears relatively cohesive, but the tendency to enforce strict procedural compliance at the expense of adaptive, locally responsive decision-making is evident. From an efficiency theory perspective, the strict application of the SPIP might, paradoxically, reduce system efficiency by not allowing schools to react in real time to new educational needs. This tension between regulatory compliance and contextual flexibility will need to be addressed deliberately in future policy refinement.

#### 4.1.4 Stakeholders' Participation and Collaboration

The interviews reveal that financial governance in Gomoa West is participatory, with multiple actors involved in the budgeting and allocation of resources. The School Management Committee (SMC), the Parent Association (PA) and the district education directorate all have specific roles in planning and approval of school funds:

*“The School Management Committee is very much involved in the budget process. We take their inputs before finalizing the budget to be submitted to the District Education Office so that their viewpoint is incorporated. We also involve the Parent Association by conducting a meeting with the leadership of both SMC and PA at the beginning of each academic year. In this meeting, we deliberate on the management of the school and seek their suggestions on the resources required, which are taken into consideration while preparing the budget”.* (Participant #3, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2025)

*“Teachers also contribute to the budgeting process. “They have staff meetings where they discuss their resource needs and views on how funds should be used. Then there is another meeting involving school management and representatives from different units where needs are discussed and prioritized before the final budget is prepared.”* (Participant #6, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

*“Before the budget can be implemented, it has to be submitted to the District Education Office for approval. The District Education Office will check it against the SPIP to see if it is in line with policy guidelines. Sometimes the budget is sent back with recommendations for revisions based on the feedback from the district officials.”* (Participant #2, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2025)

The accounts describe a shared governance structure in which the budget is the outcome of a purposeful consultative process prior to submission for external approval. The more people who are involved in preparing the budget, the more likely the allocation of resources will reflect the real and diverse needs of the school community. Basson and Mestry (2019) posit that collaboration between school management and governing bodies fosters communication, institutional trust and shared ownership of financial governance decisions. The iterative review process between the schools and the district directorate including the return of budgets for revision reflects a dynamic rather than a passive oversight relationship. This is consistent with Crouch and Winkler's (2008) argument that stakeholder engagement strengthens the responsiveness and accountability of financial planning in resource-constrained settings.

However, the data concern formal participation structures, not the substantive quality of engagement. There is an important analytical distinction between participatory mechanisms and meaningful participation (Bruns et al., 2011). Structural involvement of SMCs, PTAs and teachers is apparent in Gomoa West but this study did not investigate the degree to which these actors have a meaningful influence on budget priorities vis-a-vis endorsing decisions that are more shaped by administrative and policy constraints. Future research should examine the quality and depth of stakeholder participation, as formal inclusion does not translate into meaningful influence over resource allocation decisions.

#### 4.1.5 Accountability and Compliance Mechanisms

Accountability is a core requirement for the effective governance of education finance. It guarantees that each actor in the system can be held accountable for the financial decisions made in his/her area of responsibility. The data confirm that the financial governance system in Gomoa West District is underpinned by clearly defined accountability mechanisms, based on documentary evidence and audit compliance:

*“Every expense must be accompanied by receipts to account for the money spent. As a head teacher it is my duty to ensure that all receipts are correctly attached to the relevant expenditure documents. These are*

*needed during audits, so we make every effort to ensure they are in order. Misapplication is when money is used for something else than what it was supposed to be used for.*” (Participant #7, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

*“We are required to provide evidence for every expenditure but it is difficult to get receipts for some purchases in my community. Sometimes honour certificates are accepted as proof but they are not valid for all categories of expenditure.”* (Participant #4, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

*“We have a cash book and a cash analysis book and all financial entries are recorded in the books with the required supporting documents. It is not easy; it takes a lot of time to ensure accuracy and to get all the documentation together. It is very difficult when the auditors are coming, because everything has to be in order”* (Participant #2 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2025).

These descriptions confirm the existence of a working accountability infrastructure in Gomoa West Schools based on the routine practice of record-keeping, receipt documentation, and audit readiness. This is consistent with Lewis and Pettersson’s (2009) stance that transparency and accountability are the foundation for sound use of funds, realization of educational objectives and preservation of stakeholder trust. In effectiveness theory, these are the evidentiary infrastructure through which the system is able to confirm that the resources are being used for their intended purposes.

However, the data simultaneously reveal the limitations of an exclusively manual, paper-based accountability system. The challenge of formal receipt collection in informal community economies exposes a structural disconnect between the assumptions of the accountability framework and the operational realities of many schools in Gomoa West. The use of honour certificates as partial substitutes illustrates an adaptive response that is nonetheless restricted by policy. More significantly, the substantial time demands of documentation and audit preparation impose a meaningful cost on school leaders: as participants indicate, the administrative burden of financial compliance diverts head teachers from their primary responsibility of instructional leadership. This trade-off between financial accountability and pedagogical leadership is a structural governance challenge that the current system does not adequately resolve. Digital financial management tools can significantly alleviate this burden by allowing real-time tracking of expenditures, while improving transparency and system-wide responsiveness (Amanati et al. 2024). Investment in such digital infrastructure for schools in Gomoa West represents a priority area for governance reform.

## 4.2 Enhancing Financial Governance for Quality Basic Education

The second research question sought to identify how the financial governance system can be enhanced to improve the quality of basic education in the Gomoa West District. Analysis of the interview data generated six inter-related sub-themes: capacity building, accountability, resource redistribution, community and stakeholder involvement, flexibility in financial management, and transparency and efficiency. These are discussed in turn below.

### 4.2.1 Capacity Building

A prominent theme across the interviews was the need for sustained, deliberate capacity-building among district education officers and head teachers in the area of financial governance, and particularly in resource mobilisation. Participants described limited financial literacy as a structural constraint that inhibits their ability to identify and access alternative funding sources beyond statutory government allocations:

*“There must be regular training for district officers and head teachers on how to mobilise funds — train us on how to access them. This would reduce the stress and burden associated with insufficient funding and delays in its release.”* (Participant #10, 11<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

*“We need to build capacity in financial management for schools, especially in resource mobilisation to complement government allocations. We are very limited and restricted in what we can do.”* (Participant #9, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

These statements reflect a structural governance deficit: local educational actors face increasing financial responsibilities in a context where statutory funding is both inadequate and unreliable, yet they lack the competencies to engage with alternative funding sources, including donor agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or public-private partnerships. As a result, schools remain excessively dependent on central government disbursements that are neither timely nor sufficient to meet operational needs.

This finding resonates with UNESCO (2022), who argued that a decentralised education system performs better when local leaders are empowered to manage diverse funding streams. Suwandi and Soewito (2015) also noted that providing financial management training allows school administrators to better utilize resources, reduce waste, and improve the quality of teaching and learning. From an efficiency theory perspective, capacity-building in resource mobilisation directly addresses the input-output relationship at the heart of the framework: better-equipped leaders are more likely to extract maximum educational value from limited resources and to access additional inputs that can supplement constrained government funding.

#### 4.2.2 Accountability

Participants emphasised that enhanced accountability mechanisms are essential to making financial governance more effective across all administrative levels:

*“There should be proper auditing at all levels of education, regional, national, and local. Effective mechanisms must be in place to ensure accountability and to keep everyone responsible and committed to their duties.”* (Participant #1, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2025)

*“First the government should increase the funds and then the head teachers should be made to give proper accountability of how the funds are used.”* (Participant #2, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2025)

These views reflect a sophisticated grasp of the connection between adequate resources and real accountability. In particular, the comment of Participant #2 draws attention to an important interdependency: the likelihood that accountability mechanisms will lead to the desired governance outcomes increases when the funds for which accountability is claimed are sufficient and reliably disbursed. To call for rigorous accountability for manifestly inadequate resources is to risk turning accountability into a performative exercise rather than a substantive tool of governance. This conclusion is in line with wider discourse in the literature on education finance that effective accountability involves not only institutional arrangements, but also the conditions, including adequate, predictable funding, that make these arrangements meaningful (Lewis & Pettersson, 2009; Amos et al., 2021).

#### 4.2.3 Resource Redistribution

Participants highlighted intra-district redistribution of resources as a practical and actionable strategy to address resource gaps across schools:

*“Some schools in the district have more teaching and learning materials – such as furniture – than they currently need. These schools can support others, particularly basic schools, by sharing their surplus resources.”* (Participant #4, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

*“Although all schools in the district face challenges, some are better resourced than others. Some schools might have excess items such as furniture, teaching and learning materials that are not urgently needed. These could be reallocated to schools where the need is greater.”* (Participant #8, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

This proposed strategy reflects grassroots understanding of the efficiency principle which is central to the theoretical framework of this study. Rather than awaiting additional external resources, participants envision a redistribution mechanism that optimises the use of existing district assets. Johnes et al. (2017) argue that educational efficiency entails extracting maximum outcomes from available inputs, and intra-district redistribution of surplus resources directly serves this objective. This approach also has an equity dimension consistent with Guthrie's (2001) argument for policy-driven resource allocation that corrects for disparities in institutional endowment. A formalised, transparent framework for identifying, inventorying, and redistributing surplus district resources would give operational force to this participant-endorsed strategy.

#### 4.2.4 Community and Stakeholder Involvement

Participants consistently identified deepened community and stakeholder engagement as a strategic priority for enhancing financial governance and bridging resource gaps created by unreliable statutory disbursements:

*“We can also seek support from philanthropists and NGOs. For example, we held a meeting with the Parent Association and the School Management Committee, and they willingly agreed to provide assistance.”* (Participant #6, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

*“The involvement of the community is essential to securing additional financial support for managing basic education. Their contributions can help supplement limited government funding and improve school operations.”* (Participant #9, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

These narratives conceptualize community engagement as both a strategy for resource mobilization and a mechanism for accountability. When communities contribute to school finances, they develop a vested interest in how those funds are used, creating inherent pressure for transparency and results-oriented expenditure. As Crouch and Winkler (2008) explain, the inclusion of stakeholders in financial decision-making enhances planning responsiveness and strengthens accountability in resource-limited contexts. The participants' articulation of a grassroots strategy for financial support, drawing on philanthropists, NGOs, parent associations and SMCs, directly addresses the gaps created by irregular and insufficient statutory disbursements, and is consistent with the efficiency-oriented principle of maximising educational value from all available resource streams (Johnes et al., 2017; Vicente et al., 2023).

Critically, however, community mobilisation of resources must be pursued within regulated and transparent frameworks to ensure equity and prevent the undue burden on already financially stretched communities. Schools and districts should develop clear governance protocols for engaging and reporting on community contributions, so that this participatory model reinforces rather than substitutes for systemic accountability.

#### 4.2.5 Flexibility in Financial Management

Participants identified excessive regulatory rigidity as a constraint on local financial innovation, and called for greater flexibility in how school finances are managed:

*"We need more flexibility in the way we manage school finances so that we can explore other means of raising funds to support school operations effectively."* (Participant #3, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2025)

*"Schools should be encouraged to establish school farms which can serve as a sustainable source of food to support government initiatives like the school feeding programme."* (Participant #7, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

These demands for flexibility draw attention to a significant conflict in the governance framework: although the SPIP is crucial for accountability, school administrators may find it prohibitive to try out novel approaches to mobilising resources that are appropriate for their particular setting. Increased budgetary autonomy has been consistently evidenced to enable schools to allocate resources in a more needs-sensitive and community-supported manner (Surendar & Sarma, 2018; Vicente et al., 2023). Another important factor for strengthening institutional resilience and operational efficiency is financial decentralisation that allows individual schools to make timely decisions about resources (Gunherani, 2023; Bislimi & Buleshkaj, 2022) in the educational finance literature. Especially the school-farming notion is a practical local invention that can provide efficiency gains. It can lower the cost of feeding, enhance the nutritional support for students

#### 4.2.6 Transparency and Efficiency

Participants underscored the centrality of transparency and efficiency as foundational governance conditions for improving educational quality:

*"The government must ensure that funds are strictly used for their intended purposes. To promote accountability, effective checks and balances should be put in place and consistently enforced."* (Participant #1, 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2025)

*"If the government claims to be providing capitation grants, then the amounts should be substantial and released on time. Proper accountability can only then be carried out. We have not received any disbursement for the past year and yet we are still expected to meet responsibilities such as transporting pupils without adequate financial support."* (Participant #5, 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2025)

Participant #5's account is particularly significant as an indicator of systemic governance failure. A full year's delay in capitation grant disbursement is not merely an operational inconvenience; it represents a fundamental breakdown in the state's fiscal relationship with the school, one that simultaneously undermines operational planning, erodes institutional trust, and makes accountability for fund use an empty administrative exercise. Fiteriadi et al. (2024) underscore the slow and opaque disbursement of funds as a systemic inefficiency that diminishes the ultimate educational effect of the allocated resources, a pattern directly instantiated in the Gomoa West context.

According to Lewis and Pettersson (2009), transparency in the management of funds is a necessary condition for achieving educational goals and for keeping the confidence of stakeholders in the system. From the perspective of efficiency theory, timely and predictable disbursement is a pre-requisite to the rational, strategic deployment of resources. It is very difficult for schools to plan if they do not know when the money is going to be released. Digital financial management tools that allow real-time tracking of expenditures could significantly reduce these inefficiencies and thus improve transparency and system responsiveness (Amanati et al., 2024).

Consequently, strengthening these governance conditions through more reliable disbursement mechanisms, digital financial management infrastructure, stakeholder oversight and strategic planning frameworks aligned with educational objectives (Amos et al., 2021), is not peripheral to the improvement of educational quality but central to it.

## V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the functionality of the financial governance system of basic education in the Gomoa West District of Ghana, and to identify evidence-based strategies for enhancing its effectiveness in improving educational quality. Two principal contributions emerge from the findings. With respect to the first research question, the study finds that Gomoa West District operates a structurally sound and policy-oriented financial governance system, anchored in the School Performance Improvement Plan (SPIP) and guided by the Ghana Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS). The system exhibits a formalised budgetary planning cycle that connects school-level financial decision-making to district and regional oversight. Bringing together multiple stakeholders in the budget preparation process, including teachers, parent associations, and school management committees. This lays the groundwork for collaborative resource allocation. Accountability mechanisms, especially in terms of documentary compliance and regular auditing, make sure that the use of the funds is formally traceable. These structural strengths are a reflection of the principles of effectiveness and efficiency that guided the theoretical framework of the study.

However, the study also finds that structural challenges remain and limit the system's ability to fulfil its governance mandate. The strict enforcement of the SPIP, although protective of financial misuse, limits the adaptive capacity of school leaders to respond to local and emergent educational needs. The accountability infrastructure, which relies on manual, paper-based documentation, places a considerable administrative burden on head teachers, which detracts from their instructional leadership roles. Most importantly, the irregular and delayed disbursement of the capitation grant, with some schools reporting a full year without any disbursement, is a systemic failure that undermines operational planning and stakeholder trust. These findings are consistent with, and extend, the existing literature on financial governance in decentralised basic education systems in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The study's original contribution lies in its dual-level empirical lens: by centring the perspectives of both district education officers and head teachers within a single qualitative inquiry, it reveals the governance system as experienced at the critical interface between policy design and institutional implementation. This perspective, which remains underrepresented in Ghana's education finance literature, surfaces tensions and capacities that aggregate or national-level analyses are unlikely to detect.

With respect to the second research question, the study identifies six strategic priorities for strengthening financial governance: sustained capacity-building in financial literacy and resource mobilisation; strengthened and comprehensive accountability mechanisms; formalised intra-district resource redistribution; deepened and regulated community and stakeholder engagement; greater flexibility in school-level financial management, within appropriate governance safeguards; and improved transparency and efficiency through timely disbursements and digital financial management tools. These strategies are mutually reinforcing: none is sufficient on its own, and the most effective governance reforms will address multiple dimensions simultaneously.

## 5.2 Recommendations

On the basis of the study's findings, the following recommendations are addressed to relevant policy actors: The Ghana Education Service (GES) and District Education Directorates should design and implement targeted, sustained capacity-building programmes for head teachers and district education officers. These programmes should encompass financial management, resource mobilisation, donor engagement, proposal writing, and context-sensitive budgeting within the SPIP framework. Capacity-building should be treated as an ongoing governance investment rather than a one-off prerequisite for grant access, as the current front-loaded training model does not sustain the competencies required for effective financial governance.

The Ministry of Finance should work with the Ministry of Education and the GES to emphasise the regularity and adequacy of capitation grant disbursements. The persistent gap between statutory disbursement commitments and actual fund release, as experienced in Gomoa West, represents a fundamental governance failure that cannot be compensated for by school-level accountability mechanisms. Institutionalise clear and enforceable timelines for disbursement of grants with escalation procedures for non-compliance. GES should develop a structured framework for redistribution of resources within districts which will enable identification, inventory and re-allocation of surplus teaching and learning materials to under-resourced schools within the same district. This mechanism would put the efficiency principle into operation at the district level and would involve minimal additional expenditure.

The GES and District Education Directorates should develop regulated frameworks for community resource mobilisation including clear governance protocols for school level engagement with philanthropists, NGOs and community partners. Such frameworks should enhance transparency, not involve inequitable burden-sharing, and supplement (not supplant) adequate statutory funding. The GES should consider investments in digital financial management tools for use at the district and school level, including real-time expenditure tracking and reporting platforms. Such tools would significantly reduce the documentation burden on head teachers, improve the accuracy and timeliness of financial reporting and increase transparency across the system. The national GALOP accountability dashboard is a model that could be scaled to district and school levels.

Future research should examine the depth and quality of stakeholder participation in budgetary processes across a wider sample of Ghanaian districts, in order to determine whether formal participation structures translate into substantive influence over resource allocation decisions. Comparative studies across districts with varying governance profiles would also help to identify the specific institutional conditions under which the SPIP framework operates most effectively.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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