# Why Girls' Education Matters More: A Student Survey in Ho, Ghana

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# Abstract

Fifteen students and three faculty members from The Ohio State University-Agricultural Technical Institute (Ohio State-ATI) in collaboration with 10 more students from The Ohio State University-Columbus, Kenyon College, and The College of Wooster traveled to Ho, Ghana to investigate what obstacles impede girls' primary education. The group constructed a survey in a pre-travel class and interviewed over 130 women and 60 girls. The researchers discovered that 98.0% of respondents agree that Ghana needs to put more emphasis on girls' education and that moving forward in development will require both societal support and personal development. The biggest impediments to educating girls is the cost (54.4%), even in so-called public schools, followed by the recognition that large families make it difficult for parents to have money to invest in their girls (11.4%) and, hence, girls must work at home, in the market, or in the field (11.4%). Changing this reality will require public support (16.4%) and forward thinking on the part of the community (6.6%). Additionally, a key factor in this survey process was the benefits to our students. They reported that this study offered them a means to discuss substantive issues with local women in scripted conversations, to develop self-confidence, and to learn the effect of different life opportunities.

# Introduction

When Jawaharlal Nehru stated, "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women," he was alluding to the fact that women and girls throughout the world work many more hours than their male counterparts and, as their reward, have less access to healthcare, food, and education. It took until the 1980's for the world to get serious about addressing this inequity in any meaningful way. "Experts believe educating girls is the most important investment in the world [because of] how much they give back to their families," says Gene Sperling, top economic advisor to both Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton (Alter, 2008). Development specialists discovered that, when programs emphasized girls' education, declines in women's fertility,

infant, child and maternal mortality, and HIV infection rates followed. Educated mothers improve their farming techniques resulting in improved nutrition for their children. Educated women pay for well-baby care and have money for doctors when their children are sick. Moreover, girls' education accounted for increases in both women's earnings, which were 20% higher for girls who completed primary school, and the likelihood that their children would persist in school (Levine, 2006). The World Bank decided to encourage African governments to invest in improving the educational status of girls so that when they reach womanhood they may have the opportunity to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty and Ghana's government resolved to take this step (World Bank, 2000).

In 2000 a team from the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) studying girls' primary education sought to determine why girls' enrollment stubbornly remained well below the 50% mark. Ruby Avotri et al. (2000) cited as contributing factors: the cost of schooling, the frequent incidence of child labor, low nutrition and health status, few role models, low aspirations, large family size, distance to school, low parental educational attainment and employment opportunities, inadequate educational materials and facilities, and nonsupportive attitudes and behaviors of teachers. Researchers frequently heard the same story, that teachers mistreated girls. "The added problems of sexual harassment, early pregnancy, and the lack of female teachers to act as role models in junior secondary school were major obstacles to female education" (Fentiman et al., 1999). Girls' embarrassment at not having toilet facilities during menstruation or proper clothing like shoes added to the likelihood of their dropping out. The lack of ability to protect themselves from predatory teachers or village men as they walked to school convinced parents to keep their daughters home where they were also available to help with household chores or petty trading alongside their mothers.

The FAWE report proposed changes, such as improving girl-centered learning materials, increasing school health and feeding, subsidizing school-

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related expenses for girls or allowing parents to make monthly rather than annual payments, providing separate toileting facilities,

and shifting resources by increasing class size at the tertiary level. The study noted that, without intervention and with an annual population growth rate of 3.6%, Ghana's educational problems would get worse.

In the decade since that report, girls' education in developing countries has remained a priority. Worldwide, the studies show that girls' enrolled in school has increased from 38% in 1980 to 48% in 2008. Unfortunately and unaccountably, during the same period, boys enrollment has decreased from 62% to a mere 52%; and 28% of all primary school aged children are still not attending (SASI Group, 2009). In Ghana, on the other hand, real improvement in completion rates show that currently 87% of children complete fifth grade (See Table 1). These statistics address neither the quality of the education nor the government's investment. While the United States spends 28% of education dollars worldwide, Ghana spends 5% on their GDP on education. Ghana allots 1.8% of the GDP for elementary education, which totals approximately \$87 per pupil (SASI Group, 2009).

Readings and discussion revealed these realities to students in the fifth annual The Arts in Ghana with Service Learning, a two-part course that begins in Wooster with a three credit hour class in spring quarter and moves to Ghana for a five credit hour, three week residency in Ho and a few days each in Cape Coast and Accra in the summer (Figure 1). In the pre-travel course students study Ghana's history and culture with an emphasis on various art forms, such as drumming, dancing and singing, fantasy coffins, drum making and creating batik cloth. The coursework also keys in on social issues and solutions, like microfinance programs, health, agriculture and extension, and traditional governance (Elder, 2008). After studying the importance of girls' education to expand a country's development capacity, the faculty leaders proposed adding a collaborative research component to this tour and offered girls' education as the research area. Students agreed to develop questionnaires, to participate in conducting research as part of their in-country commitment, and to contribute to a final paper and presentation upon their return to the United States.

Through this project faculty and students collaborated to explore issues of girls' educational opportunities and life outcomes in order to determine the effect an emphasis on girls' education has had in Ho. (Note: This paper refers to "girls" as the Ghanaians educators and politicians generally do, meaning children and young women up to age eighteen.) In addition, students evaluated the impact of this research project on their experiences and

ke understandings through group discussion, ng journalingand term paper writing.

T	Table 1. Ghana Educational Statistics (World Bank 2009)				
		2000	2005	2007	
	Primary Completion Rate	82%	86%	87%	
	Ratio of girls to boys in primary school	92%	95%	95%	
-				-	



#### Methods

Reading Ruth Levine's "Educating Girls, Unlocking Development" (2006) inspired students to find and discuss articles about education and girls' chances in developing countries. Then, they proceeded to develop a research design. They reviewed the FAWE surveys and found that those had isolated multiple factors, which mitigate against girls attending primary school (Table 2). They also ascertained that the effect of girls' education is great, leading to girls' marrying later, and having fewer and healthier children. It was encouraging to find that primary school-educated women are three times less likely to contract HIV/AIDS (Alter, 2008).

In small groups students listed the questions they most wanted answered based on those they had read in the FAWE survey. Fortunately, the one student who had traveled to Ho with previous study tours was available to guide each group as the groups compiled, reviewed and perfected questionnaires (Figure 2). Each student agreed to interview five Ghanaian women or girls, so that the group might collect a significant number of responses for analysis.

Students planned to interview secondary school girls and women from post-high school on. The

faculty team conferred with faculty in Ho to ask their help in identifying willing interviewees. Our hosts recruited women from the Akatsi Women's Microfinance Cooperative, women's bible study groups of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, women members of the Dela church choir, Mawuko Girls' Secondary School girls, and women and girls working or living at Kekeli Hotel, our in-country residence.

Upon reaching Ho in June 2008, the group organized numerous occasions to conduct interviews. In Akatsi, four students attended a meeting of the Akatsi Women's Microfinance Cooperative where

they spent one hour to onehalf hour interviewing fifty rural women in four groups with one interpreter for each. Exchanges continued over lunch. The group accompanied some Akats women to their stores and factories: a hardware shop a 6' x 6' shack on one of the main roads, where the proprietor sold nails, paint and hammers, a soap factory just outside town where four workers were stirring up a batch of lye coconut, and other ingredients into a bubbling brew and the market where all viewed the skeleton of booths the traders staffed on market days.

Another afternoon Divine Gbagbo, the choin director at Dela cathedral asked the women to meet for interviews after choir practice. The group interviewed several English speakers first; then, enlisted their help as translators for those who did not. The 28 students each interviewed one woman and gave each a plastic bag filled with donated toothbrushes tubes of toothpaste, nail clippers, pens, and pencils which students had collected at home. One man insisted on being interviewed so that he could take his wife a gift.

On the day the group was scheduled to interview bible study members, the women appeared reticent. Students interviewed the first five bravest women. When they returned to their group meeting outside under a spreading tree, the other women saw the thank-you gifts and rushed to get in line to participate. Again, several translators helped with communication needs.

On Saturday afternoon the group walked to Mawuko Girls' Secondary School for the final interview event. Each student interviewed two or three girls. The students found that the girls wanted to continue the conversations well past the interview format. Throughout the rest of the residency in Ho, workers at the hotel and their relatives volunteered

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7	2008 OHIO STATE ATI GIRLS' EDUCATION QUE STIONNAIRE					
s	Informant's age range: 15-24 25-39 40-50 over 50					
r	Key: Baseline Ed. Level: (Some primary SP, complete CP, some secondary SS, complete CS, some tertiary ST, Bachelor's degree					
1		/MS, Doctorate PhD/MD/D		,,,		
5		Family Member	Education Level	Occupation		
i		Father's mother				
- I		Father's father Mother's mother				
1		Mother's father				
,		Mother's				
εl		Father's				
e		Interviewee				
~		Daughter's (s')				
,		Son's (s') Granddaughter's (s')				
5		Grandson's (s')				
1		Other:				
-	Your opportunities			· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		
	Current:	Missed:	Future			
,	Current.	Witsbed.	i duite.			
-	Questions					
,	•	mbers' educations financed				
1	3. Will you be able to	and become whatever you w	ant, what would that be?			
f	<ol> <li>Where will your ed</li> </ol>					
il		nk you will be able to go in				
ן ג		ation influenced your family		2		
	8. What have been the	a's emphasis on girls' educa e effects?	uon nas been successiui	2		
,		a should put even more emp	hasis on girls' education	?		
ŕľ	10. What type of educ	cation do you recommend? N	lost beneficial?			
<u>۱</u>	11. What else do girls/women need to be successful?					
,	<ol> <li>To your knowledge what percentage of college educated people remain in Ghana?</li> <li>Would you remain in Ghana if you finished college?</li> </ol>					
r	If yes, where would you live?					
r	If no, where would you live?					
-	14. If there anything more important than education?					
	<ul><li>15. What is the quality of girls' education in Ghana? Strengths/Weaknesses?</li><li>16. Does the government do enough for girls' education?</li></ul>					
1	17. What else should girls study?					
£	18. How does your family rate the importance of education?					
r	19. Do you feel you have to choose between education and family?					
5	<ol> <li>Will your education help your children? Community? How?</li> <li>Why do people pursue an education?</li> </ol>					
i	22. What obstacles do					
I	23. Is education more important for boys or girls? Why?					
a	<ul><li>24. Does girls' education help your community?</li><li>25. Do you come from a rural or urban background?</li></ul>					
1	26. Have you had any		u?			
,		nale teacher inspire you or h	elp in any way?			
í l		d towards girls' needs ("girl				
		es do you hope for girls/wom efits for girls' education do y				
,		its for girls' education do yo				
-	32. Are girls' sincerel	y interested in school?				
1		with more education delay ha				
-		an to have children? If yes, I on eliminate poverty? How?				
I		s that might retard girls' edu		2 (1 is biggest roadblock)		
e		osts too much		Too many children in family		
	Girl must			School is too far away		
5	Not enou No acces	gh food s to he alth care		Parents not interested in educat Poor facilities, without toilets	1011	
v		en role models		No books		
· 1		int to go to school		Books do not relate to girls' ne	eds	
e	Figure 2 Ohio	State ATI Cirls'	Education Sur	vev (2008)		

primary school (Table 3), 90.4% of the interviewees had attended or completed secondary school and 14% had attended or completed tertiary education. Our interview pool included one registered nurse who had recently retired, several secondary schoolteachers,

Table 2 Impediments to Civic' Education (EAWE 2000)				
Table 2. Impediments to Girls' Education (FAWE, 2000)           SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS				
traditional, accepted roles, including religious discouragement of education (Islam and				
trokosi)				
• gender stereotyping in courses offered to girls				
• parents' negative attitude, especially if illiterate themselves				
• parents' fear of intimacy with opposite sex				
• parents' fear educated girl will challenge and criticize				
• educated girls adopt husband's name				
• poor self-esteem among girls				
early marriage and pre-marital pregnancy				
• separated parents can't control children				
SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS				
uneducated parents				
household size and poverty				
• low nutrition and health status				
• direct cost of education, including higher cost of girls' uniforms				
poor families rely on family members to contribute to survival				
SCHOOL FACTORS				
<ul> <li>fewer schools in rural areas, less access to preferred single-sex schools</li> </ul>				
transportation or boarding costs				
• poor facilities				
inadequate instructional materials				
• teachers' low expectations for girls				
extremely poor teaching methods				
• few female teachers and sexual harassment				
classes often not in local languages				
POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS				
country's economic conditions				
employment prospects				
national policy on girls' education				

to be interviewed. Students conducted interviews before breakfast and at the end of televised football (soccer) games. Students found the responses they received to be more nuanced. A great deal of humor accompanied these interviews, which opened up avenues to friendships.

# **Results and Discussion**

This survey of more than 200 women and girls and one man in Ho yielded 175 completed surveys. All the information was entered into Microsoft Excel 2007. The Excel tables were then imported into SAS software (SAS Inst. Inc. Cary, NC). Data were treated as categorical data. We used PROC FREQ model, and significance was analyzed

using the chi-square test. The interaction between responses and age were analyzed; however, this interaction proved insignificant. Therefore, we compiled all the girls' and women's responses.

The study found that, while quite a few of the interviewees' parents and grandparents only had the opportunity to attend some the lone male interviewee who had attended the University of Legon, and three teachers' college graduates. Respondents noted that parents increasingly emphasize school and more girls are attending school.

emphasize school and more girls are attending school. Nearly all interviewees, 98.0%, agreed that Ghana should put even more emphasis on girls' education. They stated that the greatest obstacle to educating girls is the cost (Table 4). Parents must provide special clothes, pay annual textbook fees and miscellaneous school fees, such as money for a new roof, utility

bills, and teachers' paper supplies, and lose the wages and help of their girls while they are in school and studying.

One in three interviewees went so far as to say that education for girls is more important than for boys. While 80.0% confirmed that having a female teacher inspired and helped girls, 82.0% described schools in Ho as already "girl-friendly." When asked

Table 3. Educational Attainment (Ohio State-ATI Survey 2008)					
Family Member of Interviewee	Percent with NO education				
My Grandmother	48				
My Grandfather	39				
My Mother	23				
My Father	14				
Interviewee	3				

Table 4. Obstacles to Girls' Education in Ho (Ohio State-ATI Survey 2008)

	•		
PRIMARY OBSTACLE	Percent of respondents		
School too costly	54		
Girls must work	15		
Too many children	12		
Girls don't want it	6		
Parents don't emphasize	6		
Parents prioritize boys	4		
Poor school facilities	1		
Noanswer	1		
P=0.39			

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the open-ended question, "What else do girls need to be successful?" some longed for more support for girls (16.4%) and a few for forward thinking (6.6%).

Women and girls in Ho believed that girls' education brings better jobs (31.9%), access to higher education (19.5%) and a woman president in the future (12.4%). For themselves, these interviewees expected their educations to lead to a satisfying career (37.7%), a better position (14.8%), an opportunity to get a university education (16.4%), or a chance to travel (11.5%).

But their overwhelming hope for the future points to education as a key factor in eliminating poverty (91.2%).

#### **Benefits to Student Learning**

Educators stress lifelong learning for students and seek to model that imperative. At Ohio State-ATI faculty members engage in research to inform and enrich their teaching. Since Ohio State-ATI only grants associate degrees, faculty members teach only first-year and sophomore undergraduates. They have neither teaching assistants nor research assistants. Working side-by-side with undergraduates to investigate the effects of national and international policy on the minds and lives of local people in Ho proved to be an enjoyable and reinvigorating experience.

In self-reports, students indicated that this research experience helped them to build self-confidence and self-awareness. One mentioned, "I *learned that I like doing interviews*." They grew from their opportunities to discuss substantive issue with interviewees, even in our scripted conversation, and in some cases the interview process initiated a lasting bond.

For nearly all the students, this was their first experience conversing through a translator. They discovered firsthand what "lost in translation" means when they had to discourage translators from answering for the interviewee. Understanding and interpreting different life chances helped them to see hope through Ghana's increased emphasis on education, especially girls' education.

# Summary

Throughout this project, faculty and students collaborated to explore issues of girls' educational opportunities and life outcomes in order to determine the effect an emphasis on girls' education has had in Ho. Girls' education's role as an agent of social change is well documented. Ohio State-ATI students' survey sessions with rural girls and women in Ho about the effect education has had on their lives and those of their families showed that nearly all respondents (90.4%) had completed or were in the process of completing secondary school whereas a generation before approximately 50% of women and 40% of men had no education at all. Interviewees see a positive change in the emphasis on girls' education but agree that there is more to do. They showed a nuanced understanding of educational benefits when 54% rated family as more important than education (43.0%) but stressed that education will also improve their families.

Additionally, students learned how to conduct oral history and interviews, work collaboratively, construct a questionnaire, work with a translator, negotiate the importance of education in two cultures, and appreciate the relative difference in educational opportunities in the USA and Ghana. At the same time, the students learned that these countries' educational processes are far from complete. Through group discussion, journaling and term paper writing, students expressed that this research experience allowed them see how the social sciences can improve people's lives by assessing local needs to give leaders the information to help them make appropriate changes.

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