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Between Commerce and Education: A Phenomenological Study of Planned Intervention Classes in Selected Schools of Akuapem North Municipality, Ghana

William Otu^{1*}

Accra College of Education, Accra-Greater Accra Region, Ghana
corresponding Author: w.otu@acce.edu.gh

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Article info	Abstract
Keywords <i>Planned Intervention Classes, phenomenology, Ghanaian education, commercialization, educational support</i>	Background: Planned Intervention Classes (PICs) in Ghanaian primary schools have been established as extracurricular programs designed to improve academic performance. However, their growing expansion has sparked debate about whether their primary purpose is educational or economic. Objective: To explore the dual nature of PICs in Ghanaian schools, identifying whether they function primarily as educational support mechanisms or as commercial ventures. Method: A descriptive phenomenological study based on Husserl's methodology was conducted. In-depth interviews were conducted with 24 participants (teachers, principals, parents, and students) from six selected schools in the Akuapem North municipality. Results: The findings show that, although PICs fill real educational gaps, their implementation tends to blur the lines between academic support and income generation. Conclusions: PICs are a hybrid phenomenon in which educational and commercial interests coexist. Policy reform is needed to ensure educational integrity, without ignoring the economic realities of Ghanaian schools.

1. Introduction

The landscape of Ghanaian basic education has witnessed significant transformation over the past two decades, particularly with the introduction of various educational interventions aimed at improving academic outcomes. Among these interventions, Planned Intervention Classes (PICs) have emerged as a contentious yet prevalent practice across many schools in Ghana. These additional classes, typically conducted after regular school hours or during weekends, ostensibly aim to provide supplementary academic support to students. However, their implementation has raised critical questions about the underlying motivations driving their adoption.

The phenomenon of PICs sits at the intersection of educational necessity and commercial opportunity, creating a complex dynamic that warrants careful examination. While proponents argue that these classes address curriculum coverage challenges and provide essential academic support, critics contend that they represent a commercialization of education that places undue financial burdens on parents and potentially compromises the integrity of regular classroom instruction.

This study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of various stakeholders involved in PICs within the Akuapem North Municipality of Ghana. By examining the perspectives of teachers, head teachers, parents, and students, this research seeks to understand the essence of PICs as experienced by those directly involved, moving beyond surface-level debates to uncover the deeper meanings and motivations underlying this educational practice.

This phenomenological study is guided by one central research question and three specific research questions:

Central Research Question: What are the lived experiences of stakeholders regarding Planned Intervention Classes in selected schools of Akuapem North Municipality, Ghana?. Specific Research Questions: How do teachers and head teachers experience and understand the implementation of Planned Intervention Classes in their schools. What are parents' and students lived experiences of participating in Planned Intervention Classes? How do stakeholders perceive the balance between educational objectives and commercial interests in Planned Intervention Classes?



2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Commercialization of Education

The commercialization of education refers to the process by which educational institutions and practices become increasingly market-oriented, prioritizing financial considerations alongside or sometimes above educational objectives [1]. This phenomenon has been observed globally, manifesting in various forms including private tutoring, fee-based supplementary programs, and the marketization of educational services.

Recent scholarship has highlighted how commercialization in education creates tensions between public service ideals and market-driven practices [2]. The growing commercialization and privatization in and of the sector is identified as "the greatest threat to the universal right to education" by education advocates worldwide.

Contemporary research by Adejuwon and Okafor [3] reveals that educational commercialization in sub-Saharan Africa has intensified post-COVID-19, with schools increasingly relying on fee-generating activities to maintain financial sustainability. Their study of 150 schools across West Africa found that 78% had introduced some form of paid supplementary services by 2023, representing a 45% increase from 2019 levels.

Similarly, Nyong and Asante [4] argue that the commodification of educational support services in Ghana has created what they term "stratified learning environments" where access to quality education becomes increasingly dependent on economic capacity. Their mixed-methods study of 12 districts found that schools with higher PIC participation rates showed improved examination performance but also increased dropout rates among lower-income students.

In the African context, commercialization of teaching and learning has been identified alongside scarcity of qualified faculty, inadequate resources for research, and ineffective leadership as major challenges facing higher education systems [5]. This perspective is particularly relevant to understanding PICs in Ghana, where resource constraints in public education may necessitate alternative funding mechanisms.

2.2 Shadow Education and Supplementary Learning

Research on supplementary education, commonly referred to as "shadow education," has documented its prevalence across developing nations [6]. Across the African continent, households are devoting increasing expenditures to private supplementary tutoring, which is widely called shadow education because it mimics school systems.

The phenomenon is called shadow education because to a large extent its content mimics that in schooling: as the curriculum changes in the schools, so it changes in the shadow. This mimetic quality of shadow education systems raises important questions about their relationship to formal schooling and their impact on educational equity.

Recent research by Amponsah and Darkwa [7] provides compelling evidence of shadow education's expansion in West Africa, with their longitudinal study of 8,400 households across Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal revealing that expenditure on supplementary education increased by 127% between 2020 and 2023. Their findings indicate that shadow education has evolved from an urban middle-class phenomenon to a widespread practice affecting rural and urban communities alike.

Bray and Zhang [8] offer a comprehensive analysis of shadow education's post-pandemic transformation, noting that digital platforms and hybrid delivery models have made supplementary education more accessible but also more commercialized. Their global survey of 45 countries found that Ghana ranks among the top 10 nations for shadow education participation rates, with 67% of basic education students receiving some form of supplementary instruction.

The digital transformation of shadow education has been particularly pronounced in Africa. Kwarteng et al. [9] document how mobile learning platforms and WhatsApp-based tutoring services have proliferated across Ghana, with over 40% of schools now offering some form of technology-enhanced supplementary instruction. This digital shift has implications for PICs, as schools increasingly integrate technological solutions to enhance their supplementary offerings.

Bray and Kwo [10] identify several driving factors for shadow education including competitive educational environments, perceived inadequacies in mainstream schooling, and parental aspirations for children's academic success. In Ghana's context, these factors are compounded by examination-oriented educational systems that prioritize high-stakes testing outcomes.

2.3 Educational Policy and Practice in Ghana



Ghana's educational reforms, particularly the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), have created new challenges for schools in terms of curriculum coverage and resource allocation [11]. These challenges may contribute to the perceived necessity for supplementary educational interventions such as PICs.

The post-COVID educational landscape in Ghana has further complicated these challenges. Asante and Boateng [12] conducted a comprehensive evaluation of Ghana's educational recovery efforts, finding that learning losses during the pandemic necessitated intensified supplementary support. Their study of 240 schools revealed that 89% had expanded their supplementary programming by 2024, with PICs becoming increasingly structured and formalized.

Recent policy analysis by Opoku-Mensah et al. [13] highlights the tension between Ghana's Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy and the proliferation of fee-based supplementary services. Their research suggests that while public education remains officially free, the practical costs of accessing quality education have increased substantially through supplementary fees, transportation, and materials costs.

The implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum has presented particular challenges for teachers and schools. Agyei and Voogt [14] found that 73% of teachers reported feeling inadequately prepared to deliver the CBC effectively within regular school hours, leading many to use supplementary classes as opportunities for curriculum reinforcement and skill development.

The expansion of education in Africa has been dramatic, with the median proportion of children completing primary school across countries rising from 27% to 67% between 1971 and 2015. However, this quantitative expansion has often outpaced qualitative improvements, creating pressure for additional educational services.

Contemporary research by Danso et al. [15] provides critical insights into Ghana's educational quality challenges, revealing persistent gaps between policy intentions and classroom realities. Their ethnographic study of 15 schools found that resource shortages, large class sizes, and insufficient instructional time continue to drive demand for supplementary educational services, despite significant investments in educational infrastructure.

Akyeampong et al. [16] highlight the tension between educational ideals and practical realities in Ghanaian schools, noting that financial constraints often force institutions to adopt pragmatic solutions that may not align perfectly with educational best practices. This tension is particularly evident in the proliferation of supplementary educational services like PICs.

2.4 Phenomenological Approach to Educational Research

Phenomenology, developed by Edmund Husserl and further refined by scholars such as Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, offers a valuable lens for understanding educational phenomena by focusing on the lived experiences of participants [17]. Recent scholarship has emphasized the growing importance of phenomenological approaches in educational research.

Contemporary methodological developments in phenomenological research have enhanced its applicability to complex educational contexts. Taherdoost and Madanchian [18] provide a comprehensive framework for conducting phenomenological research in educational settings, emphasizing the importance of bracketing, intentionality, and inter-subjective understanding in exploring stakeholder experiences.

The application of phenomenology to African educational contexts has gained significant traction in recent years. Owusu-Mensah and Adjei [19] argue that phenomenological approaches are particularly suited to understanding educational phenomena in Ghana because they honour indigenous ways of knowing and meaning-making while maintaining methodological rigor. Their study of teacher experiences with curriculum reform demonstrates how phenomenological inquiry can reveal cultural and contextual factors often overlooked in positive research approaches.

In recent years there has been a notable increase in the use of phenomenology as a research method, particularly in educational research. This methodological approach is particularly suitable for exploring complex educational practices where multiple perspectives and interpretations coexist.

Phenomenology is fundamentally about understanding the lived experience of others, making it an appropriate methodology for investigating stakeholder experiences with PICs. Farrell [20] argues that phenomenological research in education offers opportunities to understand experiences that might otherwise be overlooked or misunderstood.

The methodological sophistication of phenomenological research has advanced considerably. Chen and Rodriguez [21] present a refined approach to phenomenological data analysis that incorporates



digital tools while maintaining fidelity to traditional phenomenological principles. Their framework, applied across 12 educational studies, demonstrates improved reliability and depth in phenomenological findings.

Recent developments in cross-cultural phenomenological research have particular relevance for this study. Kumar and Asiedu [22] explore how phenomenological inquiry can be adapted for multicultural educational contexts, providing guidelines for conducting research that respects diverse cultural perspectives while maintaining methodological consistency.

Giorgi's [23] descriptive phenomenological method provides a structured approach to analysing lived experiences while maintaining fidelity to participants' perspectives. This methodological framework guides the current study's exploration of PICs as experienced by various stakeholders.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative phenomenological research design, specifically utilizing Giorgi's [23] descriptive phenomenological method. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences with PICs while maintaining methodological rigor through systematic analysis procedures.

The phenomenological approach was selected because it enables researchers to understand phenomena as they are experienced by participants, without imposing predetermined theoretical frameworks [24]. This is particularly important for investigating PICs, where multiple stakeholder perspectives may reveal different aspects of the same phenomenon.

3.1 Study Setting

The research was conducted in Akuapem North Municipality, located in the Eastern Region of Ghana. This municipality was selected due to its diverse educational landscape, including both urban and rural schools, and the documented prevalence of PICs in the area. The municipality comprises 87 basic schools, providing a representative sample of Ghanaian educational contexts.

The selection of this municipality was informed by preliminary investigations that revealed widespread implementation of PICs across different school types and socio-economic contexts, making it an ideal setting for phenomenological exploration of the phenomenon.

3.2 Participant Selection

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of key stakeholder groups involved in PICs. The final sample consisted of 24 participants distributed as shown in Table 1. Selection criteria included direct involvement with PICs for at least one academic year, willingness to participate in in-depth interviews, and ability to provide informed consent. For student participants, additional considerations included maturity level and parental consent.

3.3 Data Collection

Data collection occurred over a four-month period (January-April 2024) using semi-structured interviews as the primary method. Interview guides were developed for each participant category, focusing on their experiences, perceptions, and understanding of PICs. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was conducted in either English or Twi, based on participant preference.

The interview approach followed phenomenological principles by focusing on participants' lived experiences rather than their opinions or theoretical knowledge about PICs. Questions were designed to elicit rich descriptions of experiences and meanings attributed to those experiences.

3.4 Data Analysis

Following Giorgi's phenomenological method, data analysis proceeded through four stages:

1. Holistic Reading: Complete transcripts were read multiple times to gain overall familiarity with participants' experiences
2. Meaning Unit Identification: Natural meaning units were identified within each transcript, focusing on shifts in meaning rather than grammatical structures
3. Transformation: Meaning units were transformed into psychological language relevant to the phenomenon under investigation
4. Synthesis: Essential structures of the phenomenon were synthesized across all participants to identify common themes



This analytical approach ensured that findings remained grounded in participants lived experiences while revealing the essential structures of the PIC phenomenon as shown in Table 3.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ghana Education Service and individual school authorities. All participants provided informed consent, and pseudonyms are used throughout the findings to ensure anonymity. Special consideration was given to student participants, with parental consent obtained prior to interviews.

The research adhered to principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, autonomy, and justice throughout the data collection and analysis processes. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

4. Results

The phenomenological analysis revealed three essential themes that capture the lived experience of PICs among participants: Educational Necessity and Curriculum Pressures, Financial Sustainability and Commercial Motivations, and Parental Expectations and Student Outcomes. Table 4 provides an overview of theme emergence across participant groups.

4.1 Theme 1: Educational Necessity and Curriculum Pressures

Participants consistently described PICs as arising from genuine educational needs, particularly related to curriculum coverage challenges and examination preparation pressures.

4.1.1 Curriculum Coverage Challenges

Head teacher Margaret (pseudonym) explained: "The curriculum is so packed, and we have limited time during regular school hours. Sometimes we cannot finish the syllabus before BECE, so we need these extra classes to help our students. It's not about making money; it's about ensuring our children succeed."

Teacher Paul echoed this sentiment: "In mathematics, students struggle with certain concepts. The regular class time is not enough to ensure all students understand. The intervention classes give us opportunity to go deeper and use different teaching methods that we cannot employ in the crowded regular classes."

4.1.2 Examination Pressure

The pressure to achieve good examination results emerged as a significant driver of PICs. Student participant Akosua shared: "My parents enrolled me because they want me to pass well and get into a good senior high school. The extra classes help me understand topics that are difficult in normal classes. Sometimes our teachers rush through topics because of time."

Parent participant Mr Asante noted: "In this community, schools are judged by their BECE results. If a school doesn't offer extra classes, parents will move their children to schools that do. We have seen the difference these classes make in examination performance."

4.1.3 Resource Constraints

Several participants highlighted how resource limitations in regular classes necessitated alternative approaches. Teacher Grace observed: "In our regular classes, we have 50 students, but in intervention classes, we have only 15-20. This allows us to give individual attention and use teaching materials more effectively."

4.2 Theme 2: Financial Sustainability and Commercial Motivations

While educational necessity was widely acknowledged, participants also revealed significant financial considerations underlying PIC implementation.

4.2.1 School Revenue Generation

Head teacher John candidly discussed the financial dimensions: "We cannot pretend that money is not part of it. The government capitation grant is not enough. These classes help us generate income for school maintenance, buying teaching materials, and teacher motivation. Without this income, many of our programs would collapse."

Teacher Grace revealed: "Some of us rely on the income from these classes. Our government salaries are not adequate, so the extra classes help us make ends meet. This also motivates us to put in extra effort with students."

4.2.2 Economic Pressures on Schools



The economic realities facing schools emerged as a significant factor. Head teacher Sarah explained: "We use income from intervention classes to repair classrooms, buy chalk, and maintain our facilities. The government support doesn't cover everything we need to provide quality education."

4.2.3 Commercialization Concerns

However, some participants expressed concerns about the commercial aspects. Teacher Emmanuel reflected: "Sometimes I worry, we are creating a two-tier system where students who cannot afford extra classes are left behind. This troubles me because education should be equal for all children."

Parent Mrs. Osei shared her frustration: "It feels like we are paying twice for the same education. First through taxes for public education, then again for these classes. But we have no choice if we want our children to succeed."

4.3 Theme 3: Parental Expectations and Student Outcomes

The phenomenon of PICs is significantly shaped by parental expectations and perceptions of educational quality and outcomes.

4.3.1 Educational Investment Mind-set

Parent participant Mr Kwame explained: "Education is the best investment I can make for my child. If paying for extra classes gives him an advantage over other children, I will sacrifice to pay. This is how we break the cycle of poverty in our families."

4.3.2 Quality Assurance Expectations

Parents often viewed PICs as indicators of school quality and teacher dedication. Mrs Ama stated: "A school that offers extra classes shows they care about student success. It gives me confidence in the school. When I see teachers staying after hours to teach our children, I know they are committed."

4.3.3 Competitive Academic Environment

The competitive nature of Ghana's educational system influenced parental decisions. Mr Mensah noted: "All the top-performing schools offer these classes. If my child's school doesn't provide them, he will be at a disadvantage when competing for admission to good senior high schools."

4.3.4 Student Perspectives on Benefits

Students generally viewed PICs positively, though with some reservations. Student participant Kofi shared: "The classes help me understand difficult topics, especially in science and mathematics. The teachers explain things more slowly and answer all our questions. But sometimes I feel tired because of the long hours."

Student participant Ama added: "I like the smaller classes because I'm not afraid to ask questions. In the regular classes, some of us are shy because there are too many students."

4.3.5 Academic Performance Outcomes

Participants reported observable improvements in student performance. Teacher Michael noted: "Students who attend intervention classes consistently perform better in examinations. Their understanding of concepts is deeper, and they approach problems more confidently." (Refer to Table 5)

5. Discussions

5.1 The Hybrid Nature of PICs: Beyond Binary Classifications

The findings demonstrate that PICs operate as hybrid educational-commercial entities, challenging simplistic categorizations. However, this hybridity differs significantly from patterns observed elsewhere in Africa. While Adejuwon and Okafor [3] documented a 45% increase in paid supplementary services across West Africa, their study emphasized urban, middle-class contexts. The present research reveals that PICs in Akuapem North Municipality penetrate rural schools serving lower-income populations, suggesting deeper systemic integration than previously recognized.

This diverges from Nyong and Asante's [4] "stratified learning environments" model. Rather than creating parallel systems for different socioeconomic groups, PICs in this study appear to function as normalized extensions of regular schooling across economic strata. The difference may stem from Ghana's stronger tradition of community-based education financing compared to other West African nations where private tutoring remains more clearly delineated from public schooling.

Interestingly, the commercialization trajectory observed here contradicts Bray and Zhang's [8] global findings that shadow education becomes less integrated with formal schooling as markets mature. In Akuapem North, PICs show increasing institutional embedding rather than market separation, suggesting



that resource-constrained contexts may follow alternative development pathways not captured in global models derived primarily from Asian and European cases.

5.2 Structural Pressures: Systemic Failures or Adaptive Innovations?

Participants consistently attributed PICs to curriculum coverage challenges and resource constraints. However, this explanation warrants critical examination. Agyei and Voogt [14] reported that 73% of Ghanaian teachers felt unprepared for the Competency-Based Curriculum, yet their study also noted that preparation gaps existed before CBC implementation. This raises questions about whether PICs address curriculum-specific challenges or mask chronic pedagogical weaknesses.

The curriculum coverage justification contrasts sharply with evidence from Kenya and Tanzania, where similar examination pressures exist without equivalent proliferation of school-based supplementary classes [25, 26]. In these contexts, private tutoring remains largely external to schools. The Ghanaian pattern of institutionalizing supplementary instruction within schools may reflect weaker regulatory frameworks or different political economies of education.

Danso et al.'s [15] ethnographic work provides crucial context, revealing that resource shortages often result from governance failures rather than absolute funding limitations. This suggests that PICs may inadvertently enable systemic dysfunction by providing temporary solutions that reduce pressure for fundamental reforms. Unlike South Africa's structured homework support programs integrated into the school day [27], Ghana's PICs operate as add-ons requiring additional fees, potentially entrenching rather than resolving inequities.

The participant claim that 50-student regular classes necessitate 15-20 student intervention classes reveals a troubling logic: schools create artificially constrained learning environments in supplementary classes while accepting overcrowding in regular instruction. This contradicts the educational necessity narrative and suggests commercial motivations may drive smaller class configurations in PICs.

5.3 Financial Dimensions: Survival Strategy or Market Exploitation?

The financial sustainability theme requires contextualization within broader African educational financing patterns. Head teacher John's acknowledgment that "money is part of it" aligns with Opoku-Mensah et al.'s [13] documentation of hidden costs in ostensibly free Ghanaian education. However, the present findings reveal more explicit commercialization than their policy analysis suggested, with teachers directly acknowledging income dependence on PICs.

This differs markedly from Uganda's approach, where supplementary education funding channels through community-managed school grants rather than direct parent payments [28]. The Ugandan model maintains some public oversight and equity provisions absent in the Ghanaian PIC system. Similarly, Rwanda's fee-free education policy has largely suppressed within-school commercialization, though external tutoring persists [29].

Teacher Grace's statement about relying on PIC income to "make ends meet" exposes potential conflicts of interest absent from previous research. Amponsah and Darkwa's [7] expenditure study documented household spending on shadow education but didn't capture how teacher income dependency might affect regular classroom instruction quality. This represents a critical gap in existing literature.

The claim that government capitation grants are insufficient merits scrutiny. Ghana's per-pupil educational expenditure, while modest, exceeds that of several comparable African nations where within-school supplementary classes are less prevalent [30]. This suggests that financial pressures alone cannot fully explain PIC proliferation, pointing toward cultural factors and institutional norms as additional drivers.

5.4 Parental Agency and Educational Marketization

Parents' positioning of education as investment—exemplified by Mr. Kwame's statement about "breaking the cycle of poverty"—reflects widespread African educational aspirations [31]. However, the translation of these aspirations into PIC participation creates unintended consequences not fully acknowledged in previous research.

Contrary to Bray's [6] characterization of shadow education as parental choice, the present findings suggest parents experience PICs as quasi-mandatory rather than optional. Mrs. Osei's frustration about "paying twice" indicates constrained agency, contradicting market-choice frameworks dominant in shadow education literature. This resonates more closely with Tooley and Dixon's [32] findings on low-income communities in sub-Saharan Africa, where "choice" often means choosing between inadequate options.

The competitive dynamics described by Mr. Mensah—that top schools offer PICs and others must follow—reveals market pressures operating at institutional rather than individual levels. This differs from



East Asian contexts where inter-student competition drives shadow education demand [33]. In Akuapem North, inter-school competition appears primary, suggesting that institutional reputation management, not just student performance, drives PIC provision.

Student perspectives reveal tensions absent from much shadow education literature. Kofi's acknowledgment of both benefits and fatigue challenges assumptions about unambiguous student support for supplementary instruction. Recent Nigerian research found similar ambivalence, with students appreciating academic support while resenting lost leisure time [34]. This suggests that stakeholder alignment on PICs may be more fragile than schools assume.

5.5 Equity Implications: Diverging from Regional Patterns

The equity concerns raised by Teacher Emmanuel and parents warrant comparison with broader African evidence. While participants expressed awareness of potential inequities, schools had implemented minimal mitigation measures. This contrasts with Ethiopian supplementary programs where sliding-scale fees and need-based waivers are institutionalized [35], suggesting greater equity consciousness in some African contexts.

The finding that students who cannot afford PICs may be "left behind" aligns with Nyong and Asante's [4] stratification concept but reveals more complex mechanisms. Rather than creating parallel systems for different income groups, Akuapem North PICs appear to create within-school stratification where students in the same classroom receive differentiated instruction based on PIC participation. This represents a more insidious form of inequity than between-school stratification because it's less visible to policy oversight.

Notably absent from participant accounts was discussion of gender dimensions in PIC access and participation. Research from Malawi and Zambia indicates that supplementary education costs disproportionately affect girls when families face resource constraints [36]. The silence on gender issues in this study may indicate either genuine gender participation in PIC participation or insufficient probing of this dimension.

5.6 Phenomenological Contributions and Methodological Insights

The phenomenological approach revealed experiential dimensions missed in previous quantitative studies. Amponsah and Darkwa's [7] expenditure data showed what families pay for shadow education but couldn't capture the experiential burden of "paying twice" articulated by Mrs. Osei. This demonstrates phenomenology's value for understanding the lived reality of educational marketization beyond financial metrics.

However, the method's limitations also became apparent. While rich in experiential detail, phenomenological inquiry struggled to address systemic questions about causation and comparative effectiveness. The gap between participant perception that PICs improve performance and lack of rigorous outcome measurement exemplifies this limitation. Mixed methods approaches combining phenomenological depth with statistical rigor may better serve policy development.

The cross-stakeholder phenomenological design proved valuable for revealing divergent experiential realities. Teachers emphasized educational necessity while parents foregrounded financial burden—a tension obscured when single-stakeholder studies dominate. This suggests that educational policy research in African contexts should routinely incorporate multiple stakeholder phenomenologies rather than privileging administrative or technical perspectives.

5.7 Policy Implications: Learning from Comparative African Experiences

The policy implications extend beyond Ghana. Several African nations face similar pressures toward educational commercialization, yet responses vary significantly. Botswana's strict regulation of school-based supplementary services has largely contained within-school commercialization [37], while Nigeria's laissez-faire approach has enabled proliferation like Ghana's [38].

The Rwandan experience offers instructive contrast. Following post-genocide reconstruction, Rwanda implemented comprehensive education reforms including explicit prohibition of school-based supplementary fees [39]. While external tutoring exists, schools face significant penalties for requiring supplementary payments. Rwanda's approach demonstrates that political will and enforcement can contain educational commercialization even in resource-constrained contexts.

However, Rwanda's authoritarian governance model may not transfer to Ghana's more pluralistic political environment. Senegal's experience with community-negotiated supplementary education funding may offer more applicable lessons [40]. There, parent associations collectively negotiate supplementary service provision, maintaining some democratic control over commercialization processes.



The findings also suggest that addressing PICs requires confronting uncomfortable realities about teacher compensation. Unlike Asian contexts where teachers typically cannot tutor their own students [41], Ghana lacks such restrictions. Without addressing teacher income adequacy, PIC regulations may simply displace supplementary instruction to informal channels, as occurred in Cambodia after attempted crackdowns [42].

5.8 Theoretical Reconsiderations

The research challenges the analytical utility of the "shadow education" framework for understanding PICs in contexts like Ghana. Bray's [6] shadow metaphor implies that supplementary education follows and mimics formal schooling's contours. However, Akuapem North PICs aren't shadowing regular instruction—they're institutionally integrated components managed by the same actors using the same facilities. This suggests that "shadow education" may be geographically and culturally specific, applying better to East Asian contexts than African ones.

Ball and Youdell's [2] privatization framework offers limited explanatory power here. PICs don't represent clear privatization since they remain within public school structures under government-employed teachers. They might better be understood through concepts like "informal commercialization" or "survival entrepreneurship" that capture how public institutions adopt market practices under resource constraints without formal privatization.

The phenomenon might also be examined through institutional theory lenses. DiMaggio and Powell's [43] concept of "mimetic isomorphism" helps explain why schools adopt PICs even without clear evidence of effectiveness—they observe peer institutions offering PICs and adopt similar practices to maintain legitimacy. This perspective shifts focus from rational decision-making to institutional conformity pressures

6. Conclusions

This phenomenological study reveals that PICs in Ghanaian schools represent a complex phenomenon that defies simple categorization as either educational intervention or commercial enterprise. Instead, they embody characteristics of both, creating a hybrid practice that responds to genuine educational needs while simultaneously serving commercial interests.

The lived experiences of stakeholders demonstrate that PICs arise from the intersection of systemic educational challenges, resource constraints, examination pressures, and parental expectations. While they provide real educational benefits for participating students, they also raise significant concerns about educational equity and the gradual commercialization of public education.

The phenomenological approach has been instrumental in revealing the multifaceted nature of PICs, moving beyond surface-level policy debates to understand the deeper meanings and experiences of those directly involved. This understanding is crucial for developing appropriate responses that address both the educational benefits and equity concerns associated with PICs.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the phenomenological findings and comparative African evidence, the following recommendations are proposed for different stakeholder groups:

For Policy Makers:

1. Curriculum Review: Conduct a comprehensive review of the basic education curriculum to ensure it is realistic and achievable within allocated time frames, reducing the pressure for supplementary instruction. Learn from Kenya's curriculum rationalization efforts that successfully reduced content overload.
2. Resource Allocation: Increase funding for basic education to address infrastructure, learning materials, and teacher support needs that currently drive schools toward commercial solutions. Consider Rwanda's model of comprehensive public investment that eliminated fee-based supplementary services.
3. Regulatory Framework: Develop clear guidelines for supplementary educational services to ensure transparency, quality control, and protection of student interests while acknowledging their potential benefits. Botswana's regulatory approach offers useful templates.
4. Equity Provisions: Establish mechanisms to ensure that supplementary educational support is available to all students regardless of economic status, possibly through subsidized programs for disadvantaged students, following Ethiopia's sliding-scale model.



5. Teacher Compensation: Address teacher salary adequacy to reduce income dependency on PICs, potentially eliminating conflicts of interest that compromise regular instruction quality.

For School Administrators:

1. Transparency: Maintain clear communication with parents about the objectives, costs, and outcomes of PICs, ensuring that commercial aspects do not overshadow educational purposes.

2. Equity Measures: Implement scholarship or sliding scale fee structures to ensure PICs do not exclude economically disadvantaged students from educational opportunities.

3. Quality Assurance: Establish monitoring mechanisms to ensure PICs complement rather than substitute for quality regular instruction, maintaining the integrity of both regular and supplementary programs.

4. Teacher Development: Invest in professional development programs that help teachers maximize effectiveness during regular school hours, reducing reliance on supplementary classes.

For Teachers:

1. Professional Development: Participate in training programs to enhance classroom efficiency and curriculum delivery within regular school hours, improving the quality of mainstream instruction.

2. Ethical Practice: Maintain focus on educational objectives in PIC delivery, avoiding practices that might compromise regular classroom instruction or create undue pressure on students and parents.

3. Inclusive Approaches: Consider the diverse economic circumstances of students when implementing PICs, ensuring that supplementary support does not inadvertently create educational disadvantages.

For Parents:

1. Critical Evaluation: Assess the genuine educational value of PICs rather than viewing them merely as status symbols or competitive advantages, making informed decisions based on children's actual needs.

2. Advocacy: Engage with school authorities and policy makers to address systemic issues that necessitate supplementary education, working toward systemic improvements rather than individual solutions.

3. Collaborative Approaches: Work with other parents and community members to explore collective solutions that ensure equitable access to educational support for all children, following Senegal's community negotiation model.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research

This study's phenomenological approach, while providing rich insights into stakeholder experiences, is limited in its ability to measure quantitative outcomes or establish causal relationships between PICs and academic achievement. Future research could employ mixed-methods approaches to examine the academic impact of PICs and their long-term effects on educational equity.

Additionally, comparative studies across different regions of Ghana or other African countries could provide broader insights into the phenomenon of supplementary education in resource-constrained contexts. Such studies would help determine whether the findings from Akuapem North Municipality are representative of broader patterns.

The study's focus on one municipality, while providing depth, limits generalizability to other contexts. Future research could explore PICs in different socio-economic and geographic settings to better understand how context influences their implementation and impact.

Longitudinal studies tracking students who have and have not participated in PICs could provide valuable insights into their long-term educational outcomes and career trajectories. Such research would help inform policy decisions about the appropriate role of supplementary education in Ghana's educational system.

The absence of gender analysis in this study represents a significant limitation. Future research should explicitly investigate whether PIC participation patterns and outcomes differ by gender, particularly given evidence from other African contexts that supplementary education costs disproportionately affect girls.

Finally, economic analyses of the costs and benefits of PICs from both individual and societal perspectives could inform discussions about resource allocation and the sustainability of current practices.



Cost-effectiveness studies comparing PICs to alternative interventions (such as smaller regular class sizes or extended school days) would provide valuable policy guidance.

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