Literacy in Ghana

OVERVIEW

Literacy attainment in Ghana is varied across regions, from the more literate, urban south of the country to the less-literate, rural north.

The national average for literacy in Ghana is 58%; more than 4 out of every 10 Ghanaians cannot read in any language. Part of this is due to the lack of access to schools for many children. With only 60% of the population having ever been in school, there have been some improvements with access to free basic education, which has boosted enrollment among pre-school aged children to 77%.

During Worldreader’s iREAD study in the Eastern Region, 68% of students in lower primary entered the intervention program without being able to read a single word in their mother tongue, Twi. After using the Worldreader program, that rate plummeted to less than 7%.

Worldreader continues to invest in raising literacy rates in Ghana through our e-reader program for schools and libraries and through Worldreader Mobile, a suite of free reading apps and pages that can be accessed on most feature and smart phones endemic in Ghana.

UPPER WEST AND UPPER EAST REGIONS

Rural with significant Hausa (Muslim) population

The Upper West and Upper East regions of Ghana have some of the lowest rates of literacy in the entire nation, and are furthest from the central capital, Accra. Running along the northern border with Burkina Faso, the Upper Regions also contain a significant Muslim Hausa population.

With some of the highest rates of illiteracy in Ghana, these regions fare significantly worse than their southern neighbours. Only 27% of the population can read here, and that number drops in several of the districts.
NORTHERN REGION
Lowest literacy rates in Ghana

Comprising a large portion of the country, the linguistically diverse Northern Region has the lowest rates of literacy in Ghana. This region has been plagued by the migration of its young people moving to the more economically vibrant cities in the south of the country. Due largely to limited agriculture options, available, the region does not have strong job prospects, driving youth out of the region in droves.

The literacy rate is as low as 12% in Gushiegu-Karaga, with the highest region of literacy in the capital of Tamale, at 43%. This is still 15% lower than the average for the entire country. Additionally, literacy is 12% higher among males than females.

EASTERN AND VOLTA REGIONS
Fast growing and increasingly dense

Located in the growing central and southern parts of the country, the Eastern and Volta Regions are significantly denser than their northern neighbours. There are still dramatic differences in terms of literacy levels, despite this population and density boon.

While two-thirds of the population is literate, less than half are literate in both English and a Ghanaian language. Some areas in the region far considerably better, such as the Juaben municipality where literacy reaches nearly 90%. A gender disparity, however, is still prevalent, with men 35% more likely to be literate than women in these areas.

WESTERN REGION
Stark gender divide

The rainiest area in Ghana, the Western Region is an exception to the North-South split in the country in terms of education access in that it is more similar to the three northern regions than the surrounding ones.

While the literacy rate is much higher than in the northern regions, the gender divide in literacy is starkly felt here. Males are 42% more likely to be literate than females due to the low secondary school enrollment among girls. In the Western Region, less than half the girls finish primary school, while the same number of boys at least finish secondary school.
BRONG AHAFO AND ASHANTI REGIONS

*Low functional literacy*

The resource rich regions of Brong Ahafo and Ashanti are home to Ghana’s cocoa and gold mining industries, alongside rural farming.

Many people in these regions are not literate in English, the primary language for written transmission of information in Ghana. As such, its literacy rate is more similar to the northern regions than the southern ones. This places the functional literacy rate at just below 50%, slightly lower than the national average, but still significantly higher than the rates in the northern regions. Like other regions, there is a marked difference in literacy between the sexes.

CENTRAL AND GREATER ACCRA REGIONS

*Bi-lingual population centers*

In the southernmost and most urban regions in Ghana, the Central and Greater Accra regions are home to the capital, Accra. With a quarter of the entire population in the country, this is an especially populated area.

The literacy rate is average for the country in these regions, hovering just below 60%. Additionally, the Cape Coast district of the Central Region has the highest rate of bi-lingual literacy in the country. Educational access is more diverse here than elsewhere in the country, and many of the nation’s best universities are located here.

ACCRA AND SURROUNDING AREAS

*High literacy, but unequal access*

The capital of Ghana, Accra, has the highest literacy rate in the country, at 86%. This is significantly higher than the average, but obscures disparities in access to education for many of Accra’s children.

While there is greater access to schools and libraries in Accra and the surrounding areas compared to the rest of the country, they are not always affordable because of the high cost of living in the capital. Additionally, with so many emigrants looking for work, the unemployment rate is higher than elsewhere in the country. In the suburbs and slums surrounding the city, children are required to work in order to support their families, taking them out of school.