

AN INVESTIGATION INTO PARENTS' SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND ITS INFLUENCE ON
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL PUPILS IN THE AOWIN
MUNICIPALITY IN GHANA.

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Abstract

This study was conducted in Aowin municipality. It investigated the socio-economic background of parents in relation to the academic performance of pupils. A descriptive survey design using mixed-methods sequential explanatory approach was employed for this study. Simple random and convenience sampling methods were used to select 126 participants for the study. Questionnaire and structured interview guide were the main instruments used for the collect data. The quantitative data were analysed and presented in tables as frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation while the qualitative data was analysed thematically. Inferential statistics was computed using Spearman's rho correlation test via Statistical Product for Services Solution (SPSS) software at a significance level of $p \leq .05$ using a confidence interval (C.I) of 95%. The study revealed that of public basic school pupils in the Aowin municipality were average and below average academic achievers who came from poor socio-economic background. Poor attitudes of parents towards the education of their wards significantly contributed to poor or low academic performance of the pupils. It was recommended, among others, that parents should adequately provide for the basic and school needs of their wards. They should also motivate and encourage pupils to always attend school.

Keywords- Parents, Socio-Economic, Status, Influence, Academic Performance, Junior High School, Pupils, Aowin Municipality, Ghana.

1. Introduction and Background

Education has adequately been described as key to development. No matter how often we hear this can never diminish its truth. In this direction the type of education a nation provides is

critical to the quality of its development. The right to education is guaranteed in the United Nations` Declaration on Human Right (Article 26) which states that; “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit”. The fact that the UN should be interested in Education to the extent of creating UNESCO, an organ of the UN dedicated among, other related social concerns that include culture and science demonstrates how matters of education issues are a priority for public policy, and likely to become even more so in the future years. Other organizations, including the former OAU, the current AU, NEPAD and regional ones such as ECOWAS have varying leanings on education. In Ghana education has been a top priority to successive governments. District Assemblies have been pursuing various interventions to create an enabling environment to improve education delivery. Some of such actions are infrastructure provisions such as construction of school blocks, provision of furniture, sponsorship of teacher trainees, best teacher award, a school feeding programme and provision of teaching and learning materials. The impacts of these actions have been an increase in enrolment.

At the centre of every school environment is the Pupil. Pupils learning is influenced by many factors including pupils’ skills, expectations, motivation and behavior; family resources, attitudes and support; peer group skills, attitude and behavior; school organization, resources and climate; and teacher skills, knowledge, attitudes and practices. Schools and classrooms are complex, dynamic environments, and identifying the effects of these varied factors, and how

they influence and relate with each other has been, and continues to be, a major focus of educational research. Three broad conclusions emerge from research on pupils learning. The first and most solidly based finding is that the largest source of variation in student is attributable to differences in what pupils bring to school – their abilities and attitudes, and family and community background. The second broad conclusion is that of those variables which deal with teacher and teaching. The third is about those variables which deal with school and infrastructure available to support learning. The above preposition therefore places huge responsibility on parents as far as the education of their pupils is concerned.

According to Peek and Fothergill (2009), it is necessary to build a strong foundation during a child's elementary years of education. Parents are said to be the first teachers of their pupils. It is at home that pupils first learn about their culture, values and language. As a result of these reasons, parents are expected to take on the challenge and provide their pupils tools they will need in order to be successful in school and life. Education does not only involve acquiring academic qualifications, it also involves how to be a productive member of society, and also, how to behave in social settings. By talking to their pupils for instance, parents can help them increase their vocabulary; they help their pupils in their receptive and expressive language. Such pupils also feel empowered and are able to build lasting positive and strong relationships. Another basic role of parents is to provide physically secured environment for their pupils. Properly ventilated sleeping room, intellectually stimulating environment to facilitate studying at home, provision of nutritive food and prompt medical attention when there is the need are components of physical security.

In the report submitted by the education review committee (Anamuah-Mensah Committee, 2004), set up by the then government of the New Patriotic Party to study the entire educational system and make recommendations for review, it was mentioned among other things that the high incidence of poverty in the country makes it difficult for majority of parents to contribute meaningfully to the education of their pupils (Anamuah-Mensah, 2004). The report therefore suggested a remedy that improves access and participation in community schools, district assemblies should continue to play an active role in the financing of pre-tertiary education. The district assemblies, by this recommendation, were urged to play the part of the central government at that level to facilitate a successful implementation of the f-CUBE as provided by the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana. In a country like Ghana where there is high poverty rate as underscored by the Anamuah-Mensah's Educational Reform Committee, if the socio-economic background of parents has a significant negative effects on the success or excellence of their pupils in education then the nation stands to lose a great deal. The reason is that the full benefits accrued to education as the engine of growth and development for every nation would elude the nation since only a few socio-economically advantaged in society can make it to the top of the educational ladder. For instance, research has shown that certain parent and family background characteristics like, socioeconomic status, education level of parents, genetic factors, single parent household, home ownership, and unemployment among others are some of the home factors influencing absenteeism among pupils. The family's socioeconomic status weirs a significant influence on the individual and the likelihood that they will attend school regularly (Crowder & South, 2003; Henry, 2007). It is against this

background that this research is being undertaken in the Aowin municipality of the Western Region of Ghana to ascertain the extent to which the socio-economic background of parents' affects the academic performance of their pupils.

Parent-child relationship is a psychological development, due to the different ways that parents train their pupils at home. The style of parenting adopted by a couple may be influenced by such factors as their culture and religious backgrounds. The parents are responsible for such key decisions as whether or not the child would attend school or he/she would get more play time. It is worthy of note that parent's child- nurturing choices affects the emotional well-being, intellectual growth and social competences of their pupils.

The initial socialization psychological traits, behavioral patterns and cognitive training that pupils receive from home reflect on their academic performance at school. Inappropriate mode of parenting styles affects the academic performance of the pupils. According to Epstein (2001), the type of home climate either negatively or positively affects the emotional functioning and academic performance of pupils. In other words, for pupils to be able to realize their full academic potentials at the school, it will be necessary to obtain full parental support. Obviously government and other stakeholders in the country need to institute measures geared towards increasing the role of parents in the academic attainments of their wards. In other words, parents are expected to play a major role not only in their pupils' achievements, but broadly in the school improvement and the democratization of school governance.

Parents who play integral roles in their pupils' schooling are likely to experience more academic

and social success. Showing interest in progress at school, helping with homework, discussing the value of good education and career options, staying in touch with teachers are reflections of parent's expectations and dreams for their pupils' academic achievement. Some parents in the Aowin municipality find it very difficult to provide the needs of their pupils both in school and at home. Pupils from such homes are normally deprived of vital learning resources such as textbooks, drawing equipment's and materials as well as other basic necessities such as food, and clothing. As a result of this, such pupils find it very difficult to cope with the learning process as they lack the essential resources needed to assist them to practice and gain much understanding of what they are taught in school. It is common to find these pupils on the streets of towns and villages in the district selling various items in their bid to raise funds to support the provision of their educational and other basic needs. The alarming rate at which pupils leave the classroom to undertake various forms of difficult works in an attempt to provide for themselves what their parents could not provide, has become the concern of many people in the study area. This phenomenon, if it should remain unchecked, could widen the disparity between the rich and the poor, leading to polarization of societies, high crime rate, suspicion and fears amongst natives in their own communities. It is in view of this that the researcher decided to study the extent to which the socio-economic backgrounds of parents affect the academic performance of basic school pupils in the Aowin municipality.

Despite the government effort to improve the infrastructure and to provide free school uniforms, parental involvement in their pupils' education seems not to be encouraging. Parental monitoring of pupils to learn at home and creating a book friendly environment which

contributes to the development of the pupils' positive attitudes towards learning is also lacking in many homes in the Aowin municipality. In spite of parent's approaches to their pupils' academic work, parenting or ways by which parents nurture their offspring differ from homes. Pupils whose parents show a little concern by visiting their pupils at school, monitoring their home works and communicating with teachers tend to do better. Parents also differed in the quality of communicate on, decision making and in helping their pupils to learn at home. These differences in the family culture affect the pupils' academic performance. The purpose of the study is to investigate the socio-economic background of parents in relation to the academic performance of public basic school pupils in the Aowin municipality. The study sought to answer the research question- How does parents' socio-economic (occupational or employment and income) status (SES) influence the academic performance of basic school pupils in the Aowin municipality?

2. Review of the literature

Parental education is also an important aspect of the socioeconomic status of school Pupils because it is expected that parental and student education is significantly correlated. Peters and Mullis (1997) concluded that parental education had a significant effect on academic achievement of the pupils. The mother's education level had a 20% higher affect than the father's education level on the academic achievement of adolescents. According to Eamon

(2005), mother education affects the academic achievement of the pupils. The pupils of highly educated mothers obtain higher test scores. Caldas and Bankston (1997) found that parental educational background and occupational status had significant effects on academic achievement than family income alone. A number of studies have recommended that parents of higher socioeconomic status are more engaged in their pupils' education as compared to the parents of lower socioeconomic status and that greater parental participation and involvement promotes more positive attitudes toward school, improves homework habits, reduces absenteeism and dropping out, and enhances academic achievement (Muller, 1993; Stevenson & Baker, 1987). An earlier study by James (2008) also showed that parental education levels exposed the clearest patterns of variation in Pupil attitudes towards school and post school options. In the same way, Western (1998) found that pupils whose parents had high educational levels had access to a variety of resources which assisted and facilitated to participate in university studies. Ahmed (1991) arrived at the result that out of 56 candidates who had qualified the competitive examination for public sector jobs at the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Public Commission Pakistan, 30 of the candidates had pupils with Bachelor and above educational qualifications. Krashen (2005) found that pupils whose parents are educated score higher on standardized tests as compared to those whose parents were not educated.

Again, many parents encounter barriers to participatory in their child's education which may include their own poor experience of education. Chang and Romero (2008) elaborated that

choosing not to attend school on regular bases begins early in a child's formal education when some parents do not yet see the importance of their child being in school every day.

In a home where education is not seen as the only source of wealth or becoming rich, the pupils from such homes are likely to exhibit truancy or absence and for others; it takes a while to establish a family routine that enables regular school attendance. Where families do not see education, and learning as a priority or as part of their family values, school attendance for pupils in such homes is a problem.

Variation in level of education, occupation, income and wealth amongst populates of a nation has the effect of creating social classes amongst nationals of different countries, both developed and underdeveloped. Shepard (1999) identified three main social classes in the American context. These are the upper, middle and lower classes. The upper class is composed mainly of higher educated professionals and executives like university professors, members of the jury, top government officials, Ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps. Members of the upper class constitute only a small section of the population. The middle class is, professionals and skilled labourers. Most of them have had post-secondary education and are decently employed. People within this social bracket lead decent lives but nowhere near that of the upper class. Professionals like teachers, nurses, district heads of departments, police, army, traders as well as skilled artisans are examples of the constituents of this category. The lower class is made up of the poor, deprived, the vulnerable and the disadvantaged in society. They are mainly characterized by semi-illiterates and semi-skilled labour force, the

unskilled are under employed and live in abject poverty. Many of them indulge in alcoholism, quarrels and violence, divorce unplanned family size and lack of interest in national and international issues. Shepard (1999) stated that there are many routes into the lower class - birth, physical and mental disability, age, abandonment, occupational failure and alcoholism. There are, however, very few paths out.

The socio-economic stratification in Ghana is slightly different from that pertaining to the advanced industrialized countries. According to Nukunya (2003), stratification of society has started to take shape, in Ghana, resembling the hierarchical structure found in the advanced countries. On top of the hierarchy lie people such as politicians, senior government officials, lawyers, doctors, university lecturers, architects and professionals of similar standing whose taste and lifestyles could be likened to those of the upper class in the industrialized countries. Below the top lie a category of professionals like nurses, teachers, the police and other people in the public and civil service who could also be compared with that of the middle class of the industrial countries.

At the bottom of the social structure lie a wide range of people from the very low salaried workers like office cleaners, manual labourers, petty traders and peasant farmers to the vulnerable in society. Though we have categories of groups with differential access to political and socio-economic resources, these have not been institutionalized into social structure of well-knit interest groups like that existing in the advanced countries. With time, however, it is expected that the elite characteristics would be transformed into class characteristics, in the

sense that whilst it is very difficult to dislodge the elite, they are rather easy to be perpetuated (Nukunya, 2003).

All things being equal, the ability of parents to cater for the needs of their pupils is a function of their socio-economic background. Whilst parents with sound socio-economic background find it very easy to provide the needs of their pupils, poor parents normally have to strive to cater for the basic needs of their pupils. According to Sadker and Sadker (2000), pupils in this nation facing severe problems like malnutrition, inadequate housing or accommodation, family instability, large family size and poverty would have lower average score and eventually affect the pupils and the nation. The hallmark of poor homes is poor accommodation, hunger, malnutrition and disease. The numerous problems and challenges facing pupils from homes of poor socio-economic background tend to weigh too heavily on them and tend- to de-motivate them to learn. As a result, they normally get low scores in class exercises and examinations. To this effect, Avoke (2008) asserted that malnutrition is one of the causes of learning disability. They explained that, when the mother lacks vital nutrients needed for proper growth and development of the human body, the development of the child's brain becomes adversely affected. The diet of the mother, therefore, is of paramount importance to the development of the foetus. Gadagbui (2012) stated that good balanced diet is the number one necessity for the development and growth of the brain at the pre-natal foetal stage till birth and at least to the 7th if we want to reduce learning difficulty or disability, slow learning emotional and behaviour problems in schools, families and government must see to planning birth and size of families.

The size of families who are disadvantaged as far as 'the sharing of the national cake is concerned, are normally larger. At any time or the other parents from such families are grappling with how to feed themselves as well as their numerous pupils. Eventually, food served in such homes lack the essential nutrients needed for the proper growth, development and healthy living of their pupils. Pupils from such homes are likely to have low intelligent quotients and thus perform abysmally in school. This implies that pupils from the Aowin District would put up very good academic performance if their parents are able to provide good food for the members of their families and vice versa.

Amissah and Sam-Tagoe (2002) said that people forget because they fail to practice and use what they have learned. Learning provides the opportunity for pupils to practice what they are taught in school. This enables pupils to commit what they are taught into memory, apply or use it and eventually become part of them. This implies that if pupils in the study area learn regularly at home, they would do well academically. According to Anang (2006), pupils from rich families have more motivation to learn than their counterparts from poor homes. Ammissah and Sam-Tagoe (2002), again, buttressed this assertion and stated that pupils can be motivated by prizes, tokens and other concrete incentives to learn hard. Pupils from poor and large homes find it very difficult to get their basic needs such as three square meals let alone being motivated by prizes, tokens and the like, just to boost their morale for studies. On the other hand, pupils from rich homes who live in healthier home environments, nourished and are not overcrowded, have little or no family problems to get worried about. Also, rich and educated

parents who understand the need to provide their pupils with the best of education and have the means to do it well would always motivate their pupils to learn hard. Pupils who are motivated to learn normally do better than their counterparts who are not motivated.

Nukunya (2003) asserted that the elites know what is required to make a child successful at school, the need to provide all the requirements and even go beyond these to get additional assistance in the form of extra books, equipment and private tuition. Some actually help in teaching their pupils at home. Nor should we forget the other conditions at home: more space, better lights to work with and perhaps a room to each child. He will also learn a lot from his video, radio and television.

Apart from their ability to motivate their pupils to learn, parents with sound socio-economic background are better informed and are conscious of the step-by-step decisions or choices needed to be made at any point in time in the upbringing of their pupils. With this, pupils from affluent homes do the right thing at the right time and excel academically. For example, as the elite deliberately limit the size of their families, teach their pupils and maintain a serene environment at home, all in their bid to give their pupils the best for better future, illiterates rather give birth to more pupils only to have their problems compounded at the expense of the education of their pupils.

3. Methodology

This study was descriptive in nature. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used for the study. Population for the study included all Junior High School pupils and parents in the

Aowin municipality. One hundred and twenty (120) pupils and six (6) parents were randomly and Conveniently sampled for the data collection. Data were collected using structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide. The collected data was fed into the SPSS version 20 software and they were analyzed. Frequency, percentage and mean distributions as well as standard deviation of responses were generated according to each research question raised, and this was presented in a table. The researcher also used the SPSS to run correlation and Spearman correlation tests to determine the relationships between the independent variables or predictors (parent socio-economic background variables) and the dependent or outcome variable (academic performance). This was done at a significance level of $p \leq .05$ using a confidence interval (C.I) of 95%. The interpretation of the statistical test results made it possible to make appropriate inferences. For the questionnaire and interview guide data, responses by the respondents were related to the research question.

4. Findings and Discussions

The close-ended items, the structured questionnaire and interview guide based on the research question -How does parents' socioeconomic (occupational or employment and income) status (SES) influence the academic performance of basic school pupils in the Aowin municipality? contains a five-point close-ended Likert-type items: strongly agree (SA) = 5), Agree (A) = 4), Neutral (N) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The items were built to reflect on the key themes raised in the research question. The data were obtained from the responses in the questionnaire and interview guide, and the results are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1: Cross tabulation of the relationship between socioeconomic status and academic performance

Variable	Variable category	(n = 120) Socioeconomic status			
		High	Moderate	Low	Total
Level of academic performance	High	4	13	1	18
	Moderate	0	0	41	41
	Low	0	0	61	61
Total		4	13	103	120

Source: Fieldwork data (2017)

The data in Table 1 shows cross tabulation of the link between socioeconomic status of the pupils and their academic performance. Out of a total number of 18 pupils who were high academic achievers, four (4) came from high socioeconomic background; 13 were from average or moderate socioeconomic background, while only 1 was from low background. Forty-one (41) pupils who were average academic achievers came from low socioeconomic background, whereas 61 low academic performing pupils came from low socioeconomic background.

In response to the interview question which sought to find out the influence of socioeconomic status of the parents on the academic performance of pupils, several parents had these to say:

“Having large family is one my biggest problem. I am a petty trader and I do not get enough money that will make me do all the things for my child. Look teacher! I do not have anything; I mean I do not have money to provide the things he needs for school”.
(Parent # 1)

My family is large making it difficult for me to do my very best. Sometimes, I do not have enough time to visit his school. This is because I always try to work hard and this does not give me much time to spend with him. As a single parent with an aged mum, I find it difficult to perform my duties. I go to sell every day to raise money for the family and this does not give time to take part in school activities. (Parent # 2)

Hmmm! I have large family so it is a problem to me. I do not have enough money to buy all the learning materials for my children. I do not have enough money that will help me give all that are needed for the education of my children. (Parent # 3)

I always go to market and come late. This does not allow me enough time to take part in P.T.A. meetings and contribute to decisions that affect my child. Finance is a major challenge. My inability to financially support my wards really affects their academic achievement. (Parent # 4)

Hmmm! We do not have money to take good care of our children. It is difficult to provide all the educational items needed by our children because we do not have enough money. (Parent # 5)

Poverty is a challenge. I mean we have financial constraints. So, we cannot adequately meet the needs of our wards. This affects the education of our wards. Ignorance and low level of parental education are other factors which retard students' academic achievement. I do not get enough time, because I am a trader. I move from one market to another buying and selling. This does not allow me time to effectively play my role as a parent. (Parent # 6)

It could be concluded from this result that between 50% and 85% were average and below average academic performing pupils who come from poor socioeconomic background. The

interview data yielded similar responses. It is likely that the majority of the pupils from low socioeconomic background had parents who obtained low levels of education, and they were relatively low income earners. If the majority of the children came from poor socio-economic background, then their parents would not be able to adequately provide for their needs and cater for them. These children would be poorly and inadequately fed before or after school. Again, these children would find it extremely difficult to get materials for learning. They would virtually not be able to concentrate in class and this could eventually lead to disinterest in school, poor school attendance, and poor academic performance. This observation confirms Reid's (2005) assertion that family factors can negatively influence students' attendance. The socioeconomic status and education level of parents are likely factors which influence school attendance, including absenteeism among students. This is because family or parental socioeconomic status has a significant influence on an individual and the likelihood that he or she will attend school regularly as affirmed by Crowder and South (2003), and Henry (2007). Also, children in poor families are more likely to be chronic absentees than their counterparts from highest income families. Moreover, pupils whose families may be suffering economically are at an increased risk to have poor attendance (Henry, 2007; Zhang, 2003).

Also, this result suggests that low academic performance is linked to poor socioeconomic background of a child. This implies that poor socioeconomic background of a child adversely or negative influences his/her academic performance. The conjecture is that the educational, occupational and income status of parents could significantly influence whether a child will enroll in school or not, the frequency of school attendance, and the likelihood of the absence of

dropping out from school. The implication is that if parents are employed and in a position to earn income or wage, they will be able to finance their children's education. However, children's learning will be affected when families are constraint by fewer resources. This is because income shocks do not only affect investment in children's education, but also in their performance. These findings corroborate the views of Hunt (2008) posits that the income status of parents could significantly influence whether a child will enroll in school or not, the frequency of school attendance, and the likelihood of the absence of dropping out from school.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The evidence is so clear that majority of public basic school pupils in the Aowin municipality were average and below average academic achievers who came from poor socio-economic background.

The study recommended that participation in Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings is essential in affording parents the opportunity to interact with teachers and also help contribute to providing guidance and directions for students. Through such meetings schools may be able to point out areas of concern to parents that need addressing, and parents may also provide teachers with information on problem areas about their children's learning behaviour that needs a look at. This will help to create an enabling and thriving environment both at home and in school.

It is also recommended that teachers in the Aowin District should transcend beyond teaching and imparting knowledge to offering counseling, encouragement and sharing personal experiences that will go a long way to motivate them to excel. Since the teachers are closest to the students and know them personally, they should be able to identify students whose performances are poor due to the socio-economic situation at home and encourage them to improve upon their academic performances.

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