RESEARCH ARTICLE

IN SEARCH OF UNDERSTANDING INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL VARIABLES ON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN GOMOA-WEST DISTRICT

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The research contributes to the school characteristics that influence academic performance of Junior High School students in Gomoa-West District. The descriptive research approach was employed. Data were gathered from 302 students and 65 teachers using questionnaires. The participants for the quantitative research were randomly selected from six schools within the district. The data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The study revealed that lateness and absenteeism of students were the major characteristics that influenced the academic performance of the students. It was also evident that there is a positive relationship between study hours and student academic performance. It was recommended among others that teachers and parents should do their best to provide the appropriate environments for students to enhance and promote their academic performance

INTRODUCTION

Individual children from all walks of life have the capacity to learn and harness their potentials. However, many young children tend not to achieve the academic prospect because of the limitation in their cognitive endowments. Nonetheless, learners who are gifted are likely to do well in every facet in their academic journey and are not susceptible to failure. This suggests that the under achievement of intellectually gifted children is an issue major concern to stakeholders such as parents, teachers and a host of others. However, the question that arises is why children who are academically sound failed to harness their inherent potentials and excel academically. Several studies (Huges and Kwol, 2016; Kotok, 2016; Ritchotte *et al.,* 2016) have explored this issue, but it was limited to only one key issue in this topic so there is still limited understanding regarding this phenomenon. Moreover, previous studies regarding the academic achievement of gifted children, employed qualitative research (Wigan, 2008; McGee, 2013) which is quite different in terms of research design from the current study. Nonetheless, there is further to evidence (Gonzalez and Padilla, 1997) to suggests that previous researchers used quantitative research approach with large sample sizes to explore this phenomenon in question,

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using large sample sizes as it is in the case of the current study, is a common element that runs the studies. But the context differed in many respects from the current one. Moreover, the study was conducted in a different sociocultural context so there is limited understanding with respect to what pertains in Ghana about the phenomenon. This is significant because the question that remains unanswered is whether gifted children's achievement is as expected of them. Much evidence regarding the issue in question is anecdotal, so there is the need for an empirical study to be conducted within the Ghanaian socio-cultural,80to ascertain the strides gifted children are making in the world of education.

Conceptual Framework: The study is framed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) ecological theory. The theory emphasizes that multiplicity of factors which are complex in nature tend to influence a child's development within a particular sociocultural context. These mediating factors include peers, schools, family and other social structures. This theory is also used for explaining students learning outcomes such as achievement of children from diverse backgrounds(Johnson,1990; Stewart,2008).The application of this theoretical framework to students of higher achievement background help us to establish the role of three key inter related factors (Students-family background, student-school experiences and school-level factors) which tends to influence academic achievement of children in basic schools in Gomoa-West district as they process from one level to the other. This is not surprising because these factors contribute in no small

measure in children academic achievement. Even though children might have similar achievement levels, they also come from unique communities and attend schools with varieties of demographics, peer influence and different teacher identities. Moreover, diverse features of schooling such as peer influence tend to shape their habits which in turn, influence their culture of learning which might be positive or negative. One significance closely linked to the ecological theory is that it gives us insight into the interplay between factors such as family, peers, school and society and how these elements impinge on children learning which in turn, influence their academic achievement in diverse ways. This presupposes that these elements in many ways reflect the sociocultural context within which children learn which invariably, tend to influenced their academic achievement. It can therefore be discerned from the discussions so far that the ecological theoretical framework is applicable for accessing complex processes within a learning environment where there is multiplicity of factors which shape the learning culture of individual children. This significant because it helps us understand reasons children within a particular classroom certain in terms of their academic achievements.

Participants: The study was conducted in six (6) Junior High Schools in the Central Region of Ghana, with a sample of three hundred and two (302) students, sixty-five (65) teachers with six of them being head teachers. The background information regarding participants included enrolment, distance covered by students to school and their ages. The selection of the high achieving students was largely influenced by the 2008 and 2009 BECE and the 2001 Performance Monitoring Tests (PMT). research design for this study is both descriptive and diagnostic research simply because it is concerned with describing the characteristics of a particular individual, or of a group, whereas diagnostic research studies determine the frequency with which something occurs or its association with something else. The design helped the researcher to get relevant data to achieve the objectives of the study.

Instrument: The instrument that was used in the study was the questionnaire. The questions dichotomous type, multiple-choice and the Likert type of scales. These closed type questions will be used because it has added advantage over the open-ended type of questions (Novikov and Novikov, 2013; Amedahe, 2000). A student questionnaire was used to collect data to answer both the research question and hypothesis.

Procedure: The instruments were administered to participants within two days after a brief introduction and assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents. This enabled the researcher to establish the needed rapport with the prospective respondents and as well sought their cooperation. Respondents were given ample time to respond to the questionnaire and then collected.

RESULTS

In particular, the study's results are reported as follows: the study's findings emanating from the research question and the hypothesis that framed the study. Data on research question was analysed using Chi-square test of association and descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation) whiles the hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance, independent sample t-test. The students' behaviours considered in the study were incidence of lateness,

incidence of absenteeism, regularity in school, language use, understanding of lessons, help with studies at home, eating habit, time with books and homework at home. Students characteristics considered in this study included lateness, punctuality, language use time spent to study, absenteeism and understanding of lessons at school. Teachers were asked to indicate whether lateness to school was a common problem exhibited by students in the schools. A total of 40 teachers form low-achieving schools and 25 teachers from high-achieving schools responded. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Lateness among Students

Type of school	Lateness is a problem	Lateness is not a problem
LA	32(80.0%)	8(20.0 %)
HA	6(24.0 %)	19(76.0 %)

As shown in Table 1, 80% of the teachers from the low-achieving schools and 76% of the teachers from high-achieving schools reported that lateness was a problem. A chi-square test of association= 0.005, p< 0.05, did showed a significant relationship between lateness to school and school type. The result shows that lateness was a common phenomenon in the LA type of schools and did significantly contribute to the difference in performance between the students in low and high-achieving schools. Teachers were asked to indicate whether absenteeism was a problem exhibited by students in the schools. A total number of 40 teachers from low-achieving and 25 teachers from high-achieving schools responded. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Incidence of Absenteeism among Students

Type of school	Absenteeism is a problem	Absenteeism is not a problem
LA	33(82.5%)	7(17.5%)
HA	3(12.0 %)	22(88.0 %)

As shown in Table 2, 82.5% of teachers from the low-achieving schools and 44% of the high-achieving schools responded that absenteeism was a problem. A chi-square test of association, X = 10.427, p<0.05, showed a significant relationship between absenteeism and type of school. The results showed that students from the low-achieving schools absented themselves from school more than the students in high-achieving schools. Students were asked to indicate how regular they go to school. A total of 302 students responded. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Students' Punctuality to School

Level of regularity	Rarely	Occasionally	Often	Very often
LA	21(10.8%)	36(18.6%)	24(12.4%)	113(58.2%)*
HA	16(14.8%)	4(3.7%)	8(7.4%)	80(74.1%)*

Table 3 shows that 58.2% of the students from the low-achieving and 74% of the students in the high-achieving schools reported that they went to school every day. A chi-square test of association, X=16.709, p<0.005, showed significant relationship between regularity in school and type of school. The results show that the students in high-achieving schools were more likely to be regular in school than the students in the low-achieving schools. Teachers were asked to indicate what language students' use mostly in class among themselves. A total of 40 teachers from the low- students' schools and 25 teachers from high-achieving schools responded. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Language Use among Students

Language used	Local	English	Both	Total
LA	11(27.5%)	3(7.5%)	26(65.0%)	40(100.0%)
HA	0(0.0%)	6(24.0%)	19(76.0%)	25(100.0%)

As shown in Table 4, about 28% of the teachers from low-achieving schools and none from the high-achieving schools reported that the students used local language among themselves in the classroom. On the other hand, 65% of the teachers from the low-achieving schools and 76% of the teachers from the high-achieving schools reported that the students used both English and local languages. A chi-square test of association, X= 16.574, p< 0.05, showed a significant relationship between language use and type of school. The results showed that the students from low-achieving schools used the local language among themselves in the classroom while students in the high-achieving schools used the English Language. Students were asked whether they understood their teachers' lessons. A total of 194 students from low-achieving schools and 108 students from high-achieving schools provided responses. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Students Understanding of Teachers' Lessons in Local Language

	Type of school		Responses		Total
	Rarely	occasionally	often	very often	
LA	17(8.8%)	6(3.1%)	44(22.7%)	127(65.5%)	194(100%)
HA	19(17.6%)	6(5.6%)	21(19.4%)	62(57.4%)	108(100%)

From Table 5, about 66% of the students in the low-achieving students' schools and 57% of the students in high achieving schools reported that they did understand teachers' lessons very often when they were thought in the local language. A chi-square test of association showed significant relationship since the p-value is less than 0.05.

Table 6. Students Understanding of Teachers' Lessons in English Language

	Type of school		Responses		Total
	Rarely	occasionally	often	very often	
LA	20(10.3%)	13(6.7%)	64(33.0%)	97(50.0%)	194(100%)
HA	23(21.3%)	5(4.6%)	11(10.2%)	69 (63.9%)	108(100%)

Table 7. Time with Books and Homework at Home

Response	Type of school	
	LA	HA
None	8.8% (17)	2.8% (3)
Less than 1 hr	30.9% (60)	5.6% (6)
1 hour	20.6% (40)	24.1% (26)
2 hours	25.8% (50)	26.9% (29)
3 hours and more	13.9% (27)	40.7% (44)
Total	100% (194)	100% (108)

Table 6 shows that 50% of the students from the low-achieving schools and about 64% of the students from the high-achieving schools reported that they understood their teachers' lesson in English language. A chi-square test of association, X= 23.344, p< 0.05, showed a significant relationship between understanding of teachers' lesson and school type.

The results showed that the in high-achieving students understood teachers' lessons more than those in the low-achieving schools in English language. Students were asked if they had enough time at home to do their studies. A total of 302 students responded. The results are shown in Table 7. As shown in Table 7, about 41% of the students of high-achieving schools and 14% of the students form the low-achieving schools reported they had 3 hours and more to study at home. A chi-square test of association = 45.831, p<0.05 showed a statistically significant association between time with books and homework at home and type of school. The results showed that students in high-achieving schools had more time to study at home than their counter-parts in the low-achieving schools. With regards to the significant difference between low and high achieving students in terms of the time spent with books by students. The difference was investigated using independent sample t-test and it produced significance level of p=.023, which is less than 0.05, therefore, making the result statistically significant. Thus, significant difference in the students' time with their books at home among students in low and high achieving schools.

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