

The Major Factors That Influence Basic School Dropout in Rural Ghana: The Case of Asunafo South District in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana

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Abstract

Education is a key to the realization of most of the goals and targets of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Education as a development tool is upheld by most development theorist as essential in the progression of every society. However, in recent times school dropout has become a serious canker in Ghanaian societies, especially in the rural areas. Based on this backdrop, the study sought to ascertain the major influencing factors affecting basic school dropout in rural Ghana, Asunafo South District of Ghana, a critical study of the Asunafo South District in the Brong Ahafo Region. This study employed both qualitative and quantitative research strategies in analyzing the findings of the study. The design of the study was a cross-sectional research design which involves the retrieving of data from study participants, mostly from multiple groups, thus; dropouts, their parents, head teachers, head of Educational Management Information System (EMIS) department and the District Education Director. Data was gathered through questionnaires, focus group discussions, interviews and participant observation. The data collected were analysed through both quantitative and qualitative means. The study found that poverty, child labour, teenage pregnancy and distance to school are the major causes of dropout in the Asunafo South District. It was also found that teacher's attitude, corporal punishment, death and sickness of parents lead to dropouts in schools. It is therefore recommended that, there should be poverty reduction strategies in the development of appropriate policies and intervention strategies to help poor people improve their livelihood. The paper also recommends that education campaigns should be intensified throughout the country. Public sensitization about the value and importance of education should be strengthened. The study again recommends that, the government should treat the school dropout issue seriously and make national education plans to assist the poor continue with their studies. Interventions by educational policy makers, the Government, NGOs, etc. to reduce dropout rate should not be focused on only female pupils but also on male pupils as well.

Keywords: Dropout, Education, Basic School, Rural Ghana, Asunafo South

1. Introduction

Education is a human right as guaranteed under the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child. This Convention is the most commonly ratified international agreement in the world today. Education is not simply a human right in itself, but it is also an indispensable means of realizing other human rights (UN, 2001). In this regard, the World Conference on Education for All held in March 1990 in Jomtien, Thailand, marked a new begin in the worldwide journey to universalize basic education and wipe out illiteracy (Haddad et al. 1990). Similarly, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set a target of achieving universal primary education by the year 2015. Again, it is captured in the global Sustainable Development Goals which aim at achieving universal primary education for children everywhere able to complete a full course of primary schooling. It is also particularly well reflected in Ghana's 1992 Constitution which provides for education to be free, compulsory, and available to all (Government of Ghana, 1992). Nonetheless, according to (UNESCO, 2007) hundreds of millions of children tend to drop out of school each school passing year.

Though the world has made considerable progress on MDG 2, between 2000 and 2012, the total number of out-of-school children worldwide declined from 100 million to 58 million, and the overall primary completion rate increased from 81% to 92% (World Bank, 2015). Notwithstanding gaining critical ground, there is still an approach to go before this goal is reached. For instance, in the 2008 Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (GMR), the enquiry was raised: "Education for all by 2015: will we make it?" Although it is a very simple and clear enquiry, the answers are very mind boggling. Ensuring that children enlist in school is one thing, but whether they will complete their schooling is another issue altogether. For example, in 2011 there were still 61million children of grade school who were not in school (UNICEF, 2012).

Dropping out of children from school has turned into a difficult issue in many places around the world (Young & Chavez, 2002). Over the world, there are high rates of students leaving school, particularly professed in the developing world. World Bank (2015) states that those 58 million children who are still out of school, a dominant part of these dropouts are found in developing nations with more than half are in Africa. In many

African countries, the opportunity cost of investment in the educational sector is exacerbated by continual school dropout particularly at the basic level (Imoro, 2009). Also, according to UNESCO (2012), Africa reported the highest dropout rate in the world with approximately 42%. Though Sub-Saharan African nations are experiencing a steady improvement in education, at standstill children leave school frequently without being able to read and write. Dropout is endemic in much of Sub-Saharan Africa countries. Within the sub-region alone, about 10million boys and girls also dropped out of school (GNA, 2013). Dropout rates are even most elevated in Chad (72%), Uganda (68%) and Angola (68%) where more than two out of three youngsters beginning elementary school are required to leave before achieving the last grade (UNESCO, 2012).

In Ghana, the number of children accessing basic education continues to rise over the years, the Gross Enrolment Rates for primary has increased from 2013/2014 from 107.3% to 110.4%. Enrollment increased by 7.4%, 5.5% and 8.0% for kindergarten, primary and JHS respectively. With a global average of around 5%, Ghana spends more than 6% of GDP on education. Total spending on education in the year 2014 was nearly GHC 6.3 billion, marking a substantial increase from 2013 of 10.4% with primary schooling accounting for the largest proportion of spending 22.3%, with Ghana being the first country in the sub-region in achieving the MDG 2; universal primary education (MoE, 2015). More so, basic education (class 1-9) is compulsory in Ghana's education system, and the mandatory age for basic education is 6-15 years (UNESCO, 2012). The government of Ghana's effort on increasing access to basic education led to removal of school fees, introduction of capitation grants, school feeding and free school uniforms. Again, the annual ritual of anxiety demonstrated by parents and their wards in the quest for admissions into Senior High Schools (SHS), Collages, Polytechnics and Universities across the length and breadth of the country may be regarded as a clear manifestation of the degree of awareness of the value and acceptance of formal education in Ghana.

However, while basic school enrollment in Ghana has improved significantly in recent years, one major challenge facing it has been high levels of dropouts. In 2012, UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) launched a Global Initiative for out-of-school children, and Ghana was chosen as one of the 25 contextual analysis Nations (UNICEF, 2012). Though, enrollment rates at various levels of education vary widely and drop sharply as one ascends the education ladder. At the primary school level, the country is accomplishing around 95% of enrolment. At the Junior High School (JHS) level, the rate drops to around 78% and at the Tertiary level, just 12% of the population of tertiary age is enlisted (MoE, 2013).

Further, according to the 2015 statistics of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Ghana, in the year 2013/14 academic year, the national enrollment for the primary level stood as 4, 117, 152, for JHS 1,473,921, for SHS 750,706 and 313, 843 for tertiary school enrollment. Again, for 2014/15 academic year the national enrollment for primary school stood as 4,342,315, for JHS 1, 591,279 and SHS 804, 974. The high dropout rate at the primary level partly accounts for the lower enrollment rate at the JHS level. Children begin elementary school in more noteworthy numbers than any time in recent memory however dropout rates are enormous and lead to low levels of primary school completion and hence reduced students' progression to the S.H.S and Tertiary levels.

The situation is even more pervasive in the rural communities of Ghana. This high rate of basic school dropouts in Ghana, especially in the countryside, is a matter of grave concern, and it means that social and public policy must adjust to resolve this important social canker. As indicated by Ghana's Vision 2030 on education, "Education is main component of economic growth since it is specifically worried with employability, entrepreneurship, women empowerment and productivity, because it makes possible the youth with improved capacity, imaginative and efficiently gifted to race with the quick modifying worldwide inclination" (MoE, 2015).

The goal of this paper is to assess the major factors that influence basic school dropout in rural Ghana; the critical examination of the Asunafo South district in the Brong Ahafo Region of Ghana. The study covers basic school dropouts, their parents, head teachers and administrators of the Ghana education Service more importantly the Asunafo South Education Directorate. Thirteen schools were selected randomly from a list of 185 schools in eight educational circuits in the Asunafo South District for the collection of detailed data on school dropouts including their numbers and whereabouts, and reasons for dropping out. The total number of dropouts for each class in the selected schools was used together with the enrollments to determine the dropout rate for each class. In so doing the major hindrance to this study was the on-availability of data distinguishing children who had actually dropped out of school from those that had transferred to other schools. This was due to the fact that majority of the parents do not go to schools to collect their wards' cumulative records books when they are transferring their children to different schools. As a consequence of this, the lessening in enrollments that have been considered as dropouts could incorporate transfer to different schools.

Undoubtedly, this study is of critical policy implication for the country since it brings to light the major factors that influence basic school dropout in the Asunafo South District in Ghana, and to make recommendations as to how the problem could be reduced. The discoveries and recommendations of the study would likewise help Government, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other development partners to

create and actualize strategies and projects that can lessen the high rate of basic school dropouts. The study, would therefore, be beneficial to education administrators, teachers, parents and all other stakeholders in education as it would guide them in their field of work.

While there is a range of literature which covers the subject dropout, few have dropout as a central theme. Usually, the concept of dropout is embedded within studies, with issues around dropout set alongside others on access more generally. Few empirical studies account for the dynamics nature of the major factors which may contribute to dropout of children in basic schools of rural Ghana (Hunt, 2008). The purpose of this study is to fill this knowledge gap.

2. Methodology

This study employed the mixed method research strategy in analyzing the findings of the study. The study also employed a cross-sectional research design which involves the retrieving of data from study participants mostly from multiple groups at a defined point in time or relatively brief period (Olsen & George, 2004). It is considered the most appropriate design because it leads to achievements of the intended purposes of this study. This is analysed by both quantitative and qualitative methods. Relevant quantitative data that was obtained from the field were organized, coded and descriptively analyzed using percentages, frequency charts, and cross-tabulation with the use of the Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS). For the trend analysis and comparison between boys and girls dropouts, Excel software was used to establish trends and patterns of basic school dropouts in the district with the help of line graph. While for the qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions was analysed manually which includes transcribing the data, using content and text analysis, categorising the data under specific themes and using them to support discussions in the study where appropriate. Photographs were taken to support the observations and focus group discussions that were made in the field.

The population in this study refers to the aggregation of people for which the researcher wishes to investigate. The basic school dropouts and their parents, the head teachers/administrators of the schools and the officials of the District Education Directorate of the Asunafo South District constitute the total population for the study. However, some of them were selected to form the sample for the study. The entire district is divided into eight (8) circuits: Kukuom, Noberkaw, Kwapong, Sankore North, Sankore South, Asarekrom, Abuom and Naketey. A sample size of 176 of respondents was used to get the information for the study. 130 school dropouts, 31 parents of school dropouts, 13 head teachers/school administrators, the District Education Director and the head of EMIS of the District Education Service. The snowball sampling technique was used to select One hundred and thirty (130) students who have dropped out of school and thirty-one (31) parents of the dropout students in the District. Also, purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of key informants; the District Education Director and the head of EMIS in the District because they are those who gave this study the necessary information on the ground. The instruments used are questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion and observation.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Background, Location and Size of the Asunafo South District

The Asunafo South District is the focus of the study, and there is the need also to provide background information on the District. The Asunafo South District (ASD) was carved out from the Asunafo District after it was split into Asunafo North and South. The District was established by a Legislative Instrument (LI 1773) in 2004. It is one of the twenty-eight district assemblies created nationwide in 2004 in line with government's objective of deepening decentralization and grassroots participation and development by bringing larger districts to manageable sizes. Kukuom is the district capital (ASDA, 2014). The district is located in the southern part of the Brong Ahafo region with the eastern frontier forming the geographical and administrative boundary separating the Brong Ahafo Region from the Ashanti Region. The District has an expected area size of around 3737 km² (1442.8 square miles) with 88 km² covered by forest reserves (ASDA, 2014).

3.1.1 Population Characteristics of the District

The projected total population of the district as at 2013 was around 102,328 from the 2010 figure of 95,580. The district's population is growing at 2.6% per annum, and this compares favourably with the regional and national growth rates of 2.5% and 2.7% percent respectively. Kukuom, the district capital, has the biggest populace of 8,742. Just Kukuom and Sankore have populace above 5000. All other settlements have a population below 5000. This shows that the district is rural in nature with scattered settlements (ASDA, 2014).

3.1.2 Education characteristics of the district

The district has a total of about 230 educational institutions. These are made up of 87 Nurseries/Kindergarten, 87 Primary schools, 53 JHS, and 2 SHS. This is an improvement over the 2012 figure of 117 schools. At least, about 113 more schools had been added to the total number of schools over the last four years. Apart from the dominance of public schools in the educational sector of the district, the involvement of religious bodies in

providing the educational needs of the people is low. Of the 87 pre-schools (nursery/kindergarten), only 26 are owned and managed by the various religious bodies. The same applies to primary schools. Of the 53 JHS, 18 were established by the religious denominations. More participation of the religious bodies in educational provision is similarly needed and must be encouraged through the offer of incentives such as free access to land and special dispensation to obtain timber from the nearby forest resources (ASDA, 2014).

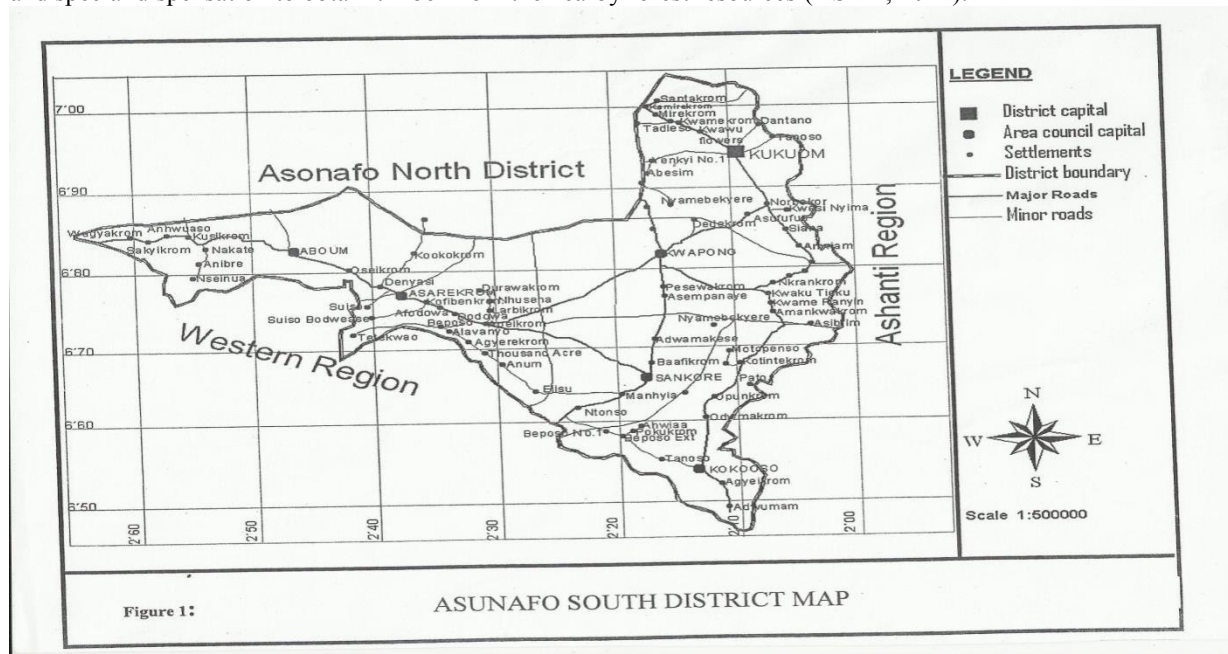


Fig 1: Map of the Asunafo South District
Source: Asunafo South District Assembly, 2015

3.2 Trend Analysis of Enrolment and Dropout in the Asunafo South District

The purpose of the trend analysis is to identify the geographic locations, class level (s) and years most acutely by dropout. The analysis was conducted by identifying and examining secondary data collected in schools and the District Education Directorate to assess dropout trends. To do this, enrolment and dropout figures in basic schools were extracted from schools and the Education Management Information System (EMIS) in the district. The trend of basic school dropouts in the district were however determined using enrolment data from 2010/2011 to 2014/2015 academic years because of non-availability of data distinguishing children who had actually dropped out of school from those that had transferred to other schools. This was due to the fact that, the majority of the parents does not go to schools to collect their ward's cumulative records book when they are transferring their children to other schools.

As a result of this, the reduction in enrollments that have been considered as dropouts could include transfer to different schools. Despite the fact that this was a constraint to the study, the impact was negligible since transfer within the district would reflect in other schools as increased enrolment. Figure 2 shows the trend of basic school dropout in the district using enrolment figures for the past five academic years (2010/2011 to 2014/2015).

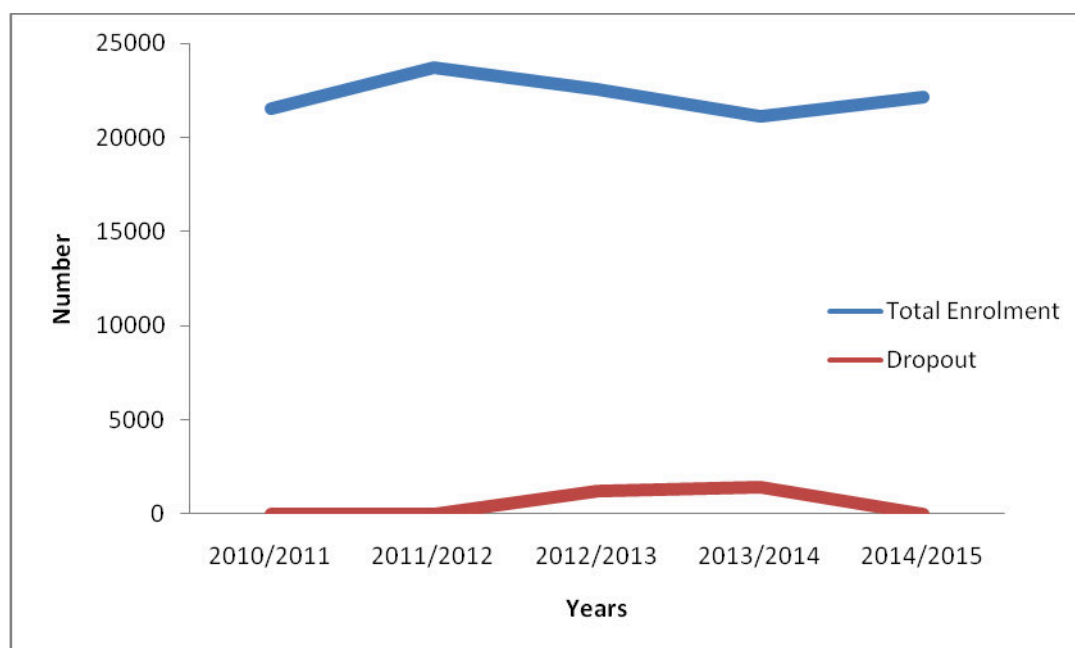


Fig 2: Analysis of trends of dropouts in the Asunafo South District
 Source: Author's Field Survey, September 2016

Table1: Enrollment and Dropout figures (2010-2015) for Asunafo South District

Year	Category	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	JHS1	JHS2	JHS3	Total Enrolment	Total Dropout
2010/2011	Boys	1,928	1,399	1,349	1,327	1,267	1,170	1,084	1,059	848	11,431	-
	Girls	1,865	1,425	1,344	1,222	1,141	975	842	787	489	10,090	-
	Total	3,793	2,824	2,693	2,549	2,408	2,145	1,926	1,846	1,337	21,521	-
2011/2012	Boys	1,767	1,646	1,538	1,511	1,480	1,363	1,162	1,075	935	12,477	-
	Girls	1,754	1,545	1,516	1,460	1,276	1,195	975	836	681	11,238	-
	Total	3,521	3,191	3,054	2,971	2,756	2,558	2,137	1,911	1,616	23,715	-
2012/2013	Boys	1,671	1,561	1,516	1,486	1,386	1,322	1,124	1,120	900	12,086	391
	Girls	1,594	1,401	1,405	1,345	1,109	1,088	1,008	877	622	10,449	789
	Total	3,265	3,062	2,921	2,831	2,495	2,410	2,132	1,997	1,522	22,535	1180
2013/2014	Boys	1,546	1,494	1,511	1,323	1,304	1,177	1,088	1,011	892	11,346	740
	Girls	1,469	1,396	1,293	1,167	1,048	1,003	961	803	652	9,792	757
	Total	3,015	2,890	2,804	2,490	2,352	2,180	2,049	1,814	1,544	21,138	1497
2014/2015	Boys	1,617	1,500	1,505	1,544	1,360	1,225	1,137	1,031	927	11,846	-
	Girls	1,486	1,401	1,368	1,347	1,196	1,069	929	856	664	10,316	-
	Total	3,103	2,901	2,873	2,891	2,556	2,294	2,066	1,887	1,591	22,162	-

Source: Authors computation using data extracted from Ghana Education Service-Asunafo South, 2014

Table 1: shows enrollment and dropout figures from 2010-2015 for Asunafo South District. The data indicates that basic school enrollment for 2010/2011 academic year stood at 21, 521 for both boys and girls, with 11,431 for boys and 10,090 for girls constituting 53% and 47% for boys and girls respectively taken 2010/2011 as the base year for the study. Thus, in 2011/12 academic year enrollment increased by 4.4% for both boys and 4.8% for girls. In the same year, enrollment for boys stood at 12,477 and girls stood at 11, 238 totaling 23,715 enrolments. Obviously, there is an improvement in enrolment and no case of dropout is recorded considering the enrolment figures, in any case, contrasted and national normal figures, is not encouraging considering the way

that the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) system was visualizing a monstrous increment in school enrolment. In general, for all classes or years, the enrolment of boys surpassed that of girls except for class 2.

Further analysis of data indeed indicates that there was a substantial dropout for 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 academic years. Basic school gross enrollment dropped from 23,715 in 2011/2012 academic year to 22,535 in 2012/2013 academic year the following year with 1,180 dropouts representing 5.2%. Particularly, the rate at which the 2011/2012 batch of children in basic school depreciated as they move to the next grades in 2012/2013 academic year is presented in table 1. This batch started the 2011/2012 academic year with a total of 23,715 pupils comprising of 12,477 boys and 11,238 girls. This trend reversed the following year with many as 1,180 dropping out of school with 1.7% of boys dropped out, and 3.5% of girls dropped out. In all, 5.2% children dropped out by the time they reached the next academic year.

The same analysis was done for 2012/2013 batch of children as they moved to the 2013/2014 academic year. The 2013/2014 academic year registered the highest number of dropouts (i.e. 1,497) within the period under consideration. The total enrollment for the year stood at 21,138. As shown in table 1 the dropout rate rose sharply as they moved from 2012/2013 to 2013/2014 academic year. As many as 740 boys and 757 girls dropped from school. However, the following year, enrollment picked up in 2014/2015 academic year and increased gradually to 22,162 with 11,846 for boys and 10,316 for girls.

It is therefore, worthy of notice that, about improvement in enrolment for the year 2014/2015, through personal interview with the District Director of Education, Mr. Osei Kwadwo Hayford, he gave further explanation for the 2014/2015 improvement in enrollment and retention of students in the district as:

“This indicates that the educational campaigns organized by the district authorities have gone down well with the people and as such their perception about the importance of education was changing and also the overall increase in enrollment was largely due to the general increase in the number of children of school-going age”.

Generally, from table 1, it clearly shows that the enrollment trend in all the years and all grades do not show any consistent pattern over the five-year period, the same to the dropout figures and trend. The dropout rates were on the top at the JHS than the basic level, furthermore the rates for young ladies were more than that for young men. As indicated in table 1, the highest dropout occurred in JHS two and sometimes in class 4 especially among girl child. This is somewhat very disturbing on the grounds that subsequent to figuring out how to experience elementary school numerous kids particularly young lady kids tend to drop out of school at the JHS level.

3.5. Major Factors that Influence Basic School Dropout in Rural Ghana

Key factors that influence dropping out from school vary, but generally there are two categories of factors keeping children out of school or for them to drop out according to this study. These are out-of-school factors and school-related factors. However, in view of the fact that the factors influencing basic school dropouts are complex and interrelated, they have been presented here along broad thematic areas.

3.5.1 Out of School Factors

The main factor out of the factors influencing basic school dropout in the study district is poverty. According to the Asunafo South District Assembly (2013), the district economy is predominantly agrarian and like many deprived districts in Ghana, dominant part of the general population are laborer agriculturists who still rely on upon simple strategies for creation bringing about low yield. Consequently, household income is very low and poverty is widespread. With this background about the district, it was not surprising that many respondents identified poverty as the main cause of basic school dropouts. About 32.3% of the dropout's contacted claimed poverty was the main reason why they abandoned school. During the field work, a girl aged 10, who was dropped out at class 4, said that daily income to sustain the family is important for the mother (as father died five years ago). She lamented:

“My family has lots of problems; our biggest problem is money and the regular income of my family. I had to leave school because of money problem. I miss my father, before I used to go to school when my dad was alive. He used to take care of everything, but now I cannot think that my only mother can help me buy every education materials like exercise books, pencils and other few school expenses. My mom works as a petty trader and does not own any farm land. We only have a small hut to live in and sometimes I plant crops in the landlord's house to make some little money and give to my mother”.

However, in an interview with the District Director of Education, he did not agree with the rest that poverty was the main reason for dropout. He claimed that the dropout phenomenon was more prevalent among the people because their priority was not the education of their children. According to the District Director, some

of these families spend lavishly on funerals, expensive clothing and other social events while neglecting the education of their children.

Again, from the study, child labour has been cited as a major factor influencing school dropout in the district. It is claimed that some students, especially those at the JHS level leave school to engage in farming activities so as to get quick money. Some of the dropouts interviewed gave the impression that it was better to engage in agriculture to earn some income than wasting three years at JHS especially if you know you would not get any support to continue to SHS and also if you are academically weak. More so, Teenage pregnancy was also cited as one of the major factors influencing basic school dropouts in the Asunafo South district. According to the records of the Asunafo South District Education Office, in 2015 last year, seventeen (17) girls from the district failed to write the BECE after they have been successfully registered because they were pregnant.

Furthermore, during the field work, through focus group discussion made up of seven (7) respondents, it was uncovered that girls are encouraged to marry as they reach puberty or sexually mature. It was also realized that girls did not hesitate to go to school due to menstruation, rather they get mentally pressurized that they have to get married which compels them to go to their future husband's house at an early age. It was further unveiled through the discussions that in some cases groom's family determines whether a girl should continue schooling or not. On the out of school factors that influence basic school dropouts, sickness and death of parents was also cited. Although school dropout as a result of sickness and death of parent did not feature significantly in the district, however, there were few reported cases in the district. Only 3 cases of dropouts were encountered as a result of sickness and death of parents in the survey. When such isolated incidence occurs in a poor family the children left behind tend to drop out of school. These are victims that desperately need the support of benevolent organizations such as the Global Partnership for Education Grant (GPEG), Girls Pass scholarship, Otumfuo Education Fund among others.

3.5.2 School Related Factors

There are several factors responsible for children dropping out which has direct or indirect relation with school and its environment. During the field work, respondents revealed different school related factors responsible for children dropping out of school. The major ones were low academic performance, distance to school and sometimes school environment, punishment by teachers, and cited the minor factors as children dislike of school, dilapidated school block among others. This is supported by Chugh (2011) that states teachers' attitude, school environment and infrastructure, students' interest or disinterest influence school dropout.

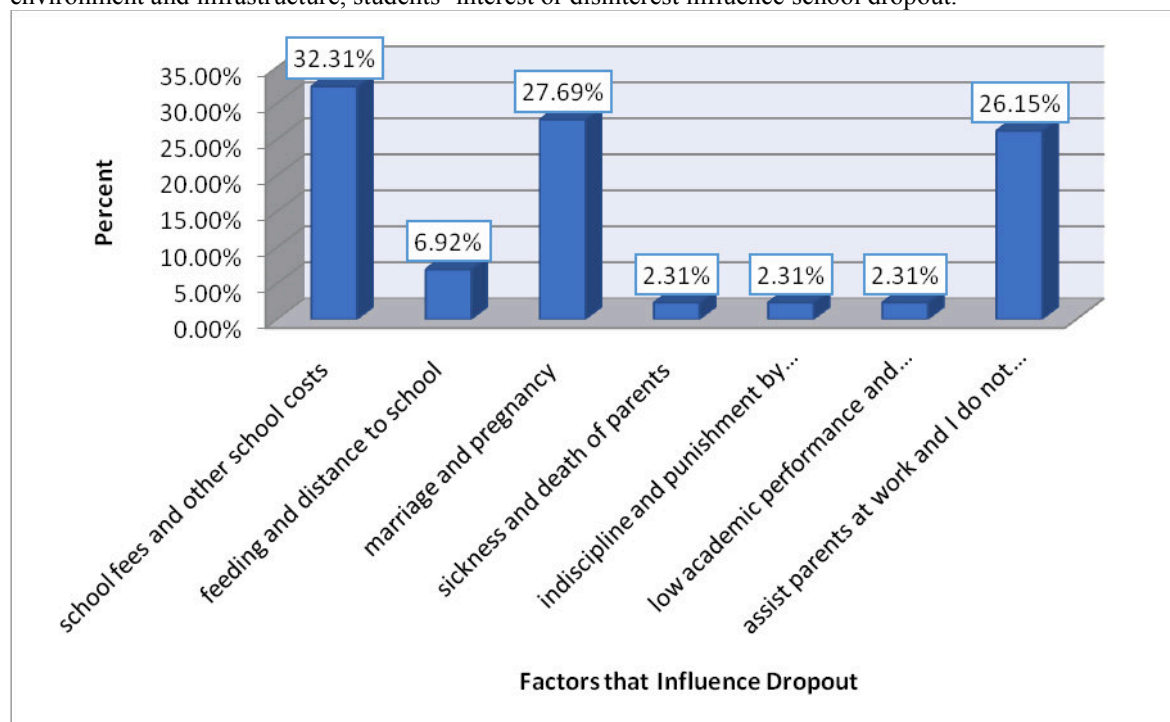


Fig 3: Factors that influence dropout
 Source: Author's Field Survey, September 2016

5. Conclusion

The study has made significant contributions with regard to the methodology for the study of dropouts in basic schools and factors that influence it, particularly in the rural areas of Ghana relevant for the achievement of the

Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and now global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). First, it has provided a framework for further research into dropout and factors that influence it. The study applied both quantitative and qualitative tools such as cross tabulation, frequencies, percentages, line graph, tables for the quantitative data with the used of SPSS and EXCEL and for the qualitative tools such as transcribing and content analysis were used in analyzing data on the major factors that influence basic school dropout in rural Ghana.

The views of dropouts, their parents, head teachers and education administrators were solicited to find out possible major factors that influence early school dropout among children of school-going age. However, the risk of early school dropout is much higher in families with a low standard of living, which have to deal with poverty and lack of motivation. The conclusion drawn from the study also revealed that teenage pregnancy and child labour as the major out of school factors influencing dropouts with marriage, sickness and death of parents as minor factors. For school related factors, distance, unattractive school environment, low academic performance account for reasons for dropout from school among children of school-going age.

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