An Investigation into the Poor Academic Performance of Students at Selected Public Basic Schools in Obuasi Municipality

Robert Andrews Ghanney[1*]   Doris Frempoma Aniagyei[2]

1. Department of Basic Education, University of Education, Winneba, P. O. Box 25, Winneba, Ghana

2. University of Education, Winneba, P. O. Box 25, Winneba, Ghana

*E-mail of corresponding author: ghanney66@yahoo.com

Abstract

The study investigated the poor academic performance of students at three selected junior high schools in Obuasi Municipality, seeking to determine the inputs and processes that contributed to such an outcome. Based on the study's research questions and aims, the researchers chose an exploratory design that combined both qualitative and quantitative methods for collecting and analysing the data. The target population for the study comprised students, teachers and parents in respect of all basic schools in Obuasi Municipality. However, the accessible population was limited to students, parents and teachers in Obuasi West Circuit. The study employed both simple random and stratified sampling techniques. Questionnaires and past records were used as data sources. Cross tabulation was adopted for analysis of the relationship between inputs and processes, and performance outputs. The study found that most respondents accepted that all inputs and processes contributed moderately to very significantly to poor academic performance. It is therefore concluded that there is a need for all stakeholders- government departments, teachers, parents and students,etc- to play their respective parts in addressing the factors that contribute to poor student performance in the schools under study if it is to be improved.

1. Introduction

The UN Convention on the Rights of the child states that' no person shall deprive a child of access to education; immunization, adequate diet, clothing, shelter, medical attention or any other thing required for his or her development'. In Ghana, the value of education is given more weight through the introduction and implementation of Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE). This policy has been given a further boost with the introduction of a capitation grant and the attendant school feeding programme (SFP).

Education is accepted all over the world as the bed- rock of national development and a major factor in the maximisation of human resources. Globally, governments spend huge amounts of their income on education. This funding cannot be made in vain and it is then necessary to determine the extent to which it is purposively deployed. One such benchmark is student performance in school. According to Mankoe (2002), performance refers to the extent to which a worker or student contributes to achieving the goals of his or her institution, and an individual with weak motivation might perform well owing to some chance factor that boosts performance.

High quality basic education is of great concern to many Ghanaians these days; and. parents select schools for their children based on track records in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (B.E.C.E). All things being equal, each parent will strive for a school with a good academic standing.

Obuasi is a town in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Principal occupations are mining, farming and trading. There are one hundred and two junior high schools in the Obuasi, consisting of 37 public and 65 private institutions (EMIS, NOV. 2011)

Although Obuasi Municipality has enjoyed the highest BECE results in recent years (The Statesman, 2011), some of its schools perform comparatively poorly (GES-OM, 2011).

Table 1. BECE performance of selected schools by failure percentage

	2009 failure (%)	2010 failure (%)	2011 failure (%)	Average (%)
Diawuoso	70	67	0	46
Awurade Basa	42	20	27	30
New Nsuta	10	14	17	14

Source: Obuasi Municipal Education office, 2011

The aim of the Ghana Education Service (G.E.S) - and, for that matter, other education's stakeholders such as parents- is that all schools should enjoy a zero per cent failure rate. However, as Table 1 shows, for institutions such as for Diawuoso, Awurade Basa and New Nsuta, this is far from the case. Therefore, the causes of such poor performance are worth investigating.

2. Statement of the Problem

Hoyle (1986) argues that schools are established with the aim of imparting knowledge and skills to those who attend them. According to Ankomah et al., (2005), high academic performance, as measured by the examination results, is one of the major goals of a school. Behind all this is the idea of enhancing good academic performance (Mankoe, 2002).

Even though, Ghanaian public schools are equipped with professional teachers, available statistics shows that 36 percent of such JHSs in the Ashanti Region scored zero in the 2010 BECE. This situation has raised eyebrows and exposed schools to public criticisms, as evidenced by negative comments from the Ashanti Regional Minister (GNA, 2011).

As indicated in Table1, for some time now, New Nsuta , Diawuoso and Awurade Basa have suffered substantial average BECE failure rates. Indeed, their performance compared to other public JHSs, in the region is poor meaning that enrolments have steadily declined, as parents seek better performing alternatives.

Clearly, there are many possible reasons for poor academic performance, but, according to Ankomah et al., (2005), the causes of such a state of affairs in Obuasi Municipality are precisely not known.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is therefore to determine the factors that are responsible for the poor academic performance of some Obuasi JHSs.

4. Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the performance of selected JHSs.
2. To investigate the inputs (e.g. human and material resources) that contributes to poor academic performance.
3. To determine the processes (e.g. supervision, students' preparedness, parental attitude) that contributes to poor academic performance.
4. To determine the impact of the inputs and processes on output (performance)

5. Research Questions

1. What are the performances rates of selected JHSs?
2. What inputs contribute to poor academic performance?
3. How do processes contribute to poor academic performance?
4. What impact do inputs and processes have on output (performance)?

6. Significance of the Study

The results of this study will provide the selected JHSs, the Government of Ghana, and other stakeholders with relevant information for their efforts to improve the performance of these schools. More broadly, the study will help the GES in seeking a solution to the low performance trend affecting other schools nationwide. The research will also extend knowledge on academic performance in this context.

This report will contribute to the literature of academic institutions such as the University of Education, Winneba and other bodies worldwide by serving as a reference source.
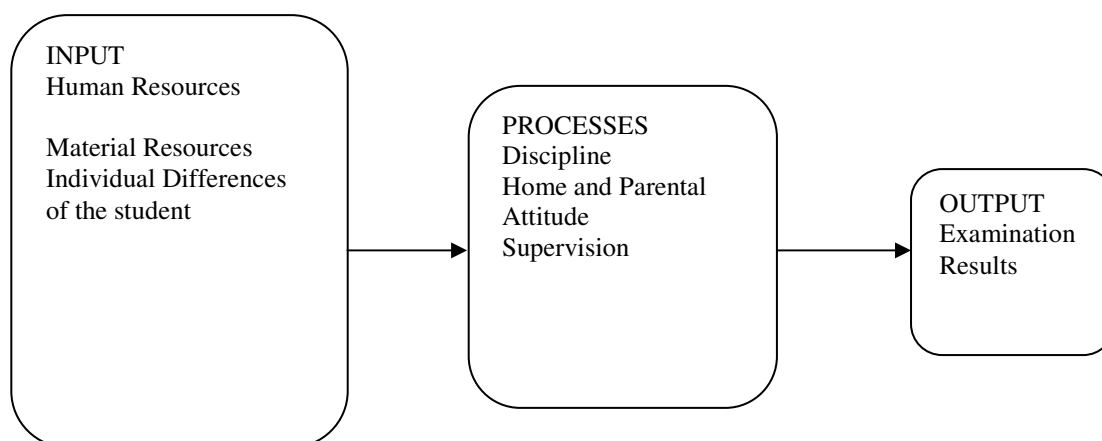
7. Related Literature

7.1 The Concept of Academic Performance

According to Otu-Danquah (2000) cited in Otoo, (2007) academic performance constitutes what a student is capable of achieving when he or she is tested on what he or she has been taught. It is further stated that academic performance is related to intellectual capacity (Otu-Danquah, 2000 cited in Otoo, 2007).

7.2 Trends of Education Performance

Statistics show evidence of a remarkable drop in the academic performance of Ghanaian public schools over the last decade (Etsey et al., 2005; USAID, 2000). For example, over 34 public schools (4 within the Okere Constituency, 5 in the Jomoro District, 10 in Agona West District Assembly, and 15 in Hohoe Municipality) recorded zero per cent pass rate in the 2008 and 2010 BECEs (GNA, 2009 & 2010). This implies that no student from these schools was able to gain admission to senior high schools (SHSs). This BECE trend has been evident for several years, especially in rural Ghana. Should it continue; the country may not be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of universal education.

8. Conceptual Framework

INPUT
Human Resources

Material Resources
Individual Differences
of the student

PROCESSES
Discipline
Home and Parental
Attitude
Supervision

OUTPUT
Examination
Results

Source: The Authors

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

As Figure 1 shows, the first element of this study's conceptual framework is inputs which comprise human resources, material resources, and individual student differences. Together, these inputs pass through the processes of discipline, home and parental attitude and supervision. Finally, the manner in which processes are managed determines the output that is the performance.

8.1 Inputs

8.1.1 Human Resources

Boateng (2003) noted that the success or failure of curriculum delivery depends on the teacher. The teacher is the pivot of the education system as he or she makes or breaks the education programmes, delivers the objectives of education reforms, and is engine of everything that is planned and implemented in school.

Looking at human resources, teachers, supervisors, heads and deputy heads form the pivot around which the wheel of education moves. However, in Ghana, teacher absenteeism, especially in rural areas is a persistent concern. Lack of professional standard, lack of support and control by education authorities, and cultural demands on teacher are major issues in this context (Oduro & MacBeath, 2003).

8.1.2 Individual Student Differences

How people learn - and how quickly – is strongly influenced by intellectual capacity and experience. Such variation in learner characteristics often requires special responses if quality is to be improved.

8.1.3 Material Resources

According to the Ministry of Education (MOE: (1994), material resources such as books, stationery, furniture, equipment and recreational facilities are vital to effective education. Students perform better when they have such resources at their disposal since they are aids that foster learning.

8.2 Academic Processes

8.2.1 Discipline

According to Awulugutu (2006), discipline is the master of one's hopes and aspirations without which, one cannot make any significant progress in life. Awulugutu (2006) goes on to observe that discipline is the key that unlocks the door to wealth, happiness, and success, and turns one's dream into reality. In school, if teachers and students allow discipline to rule their lives, they will become what they want to become in future. It is also noted that in every aspect of life, discipline is the facilitator that helps break down barriers between the individual and his or her goals (Awulugutu, 2006).

8.2.2 Supervision

According to Mankoe (2002), supervision focuses on, six areas of education namely administration, curriculum, instruction, human relations, management and leadership. It is therefore a major function of the school's operation. Thus, effective supervision improves the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Fiaveh et al., (2011) notes that the attitude of some public school teachers and authorities does not promote an effective learning process for students. Some teachers even leave the classroom at will because there is insufficient supervision by circuit supervisors (Fiaveh et al., 2011).

8.2.3 The Home and Parental Attitudes

Okyerefo et al., (2011) observe that home plays diverse roles in the facilitation of academic performance of students at school. The main role is played by parents, with supporting staff going to other significant household members such as siblings, uncles, aunts, etc. Different parenting styles lead to various means of interaction with children, each of which forms an important component in shaping the child's worldviews. For example, some studies have shown that parents spend less time with their children between the ages of six and ten years because they are then normally at school.

Another critical aspect of home life, socio-economic status, is most commonly determined by a combination of parents' education level, occupation and income level (Jeynes, 2002, McMillan & Western, 2000). Unsurprisingly, in most studies on the academic performance of students, socio- economic status is identified as a major indicator of academic performance.

8.3 Output

According to Ankomah et al., (2005), the output that most readily provides the immediate evidence of education quality is students examination performance. For many, including parents, a child's performance in national or other standardised examination is a sufficient indication of the quality of education provided.

8.4 Enabling Inputs

The success of teaching and learning is likely to be strongly influenced by resources made available to support the process and the direct ways in which these resources are managed. Clearly, schools that lack teachers, textbooks or learning materials will not be able to do an effective job. In this sense, resources are vital to education quality-although how and to what extent this is so have not yet been fully determined. The main input variables are material resources (textbooks, classrooms, libraries, school facilities and other non-human resources) and (human resources (managers, head teachers, teachers, supervisors, and support staff) with the management of both groups of resources being an important additional dimension.

9. Research Design and Methodology

The study sought to investigate the academic performance of selected JHSs in Obuasi. Based on the questions and objectives of this study, the research method selected was one of exploratory design. With exploratory research, one may initially be uncertain about some major aspects and therefore need to investigate these issues. The research is exploratory, aimed at investigating or evaluating the case of academic performance based on the research questions.

9.1 Population

The target population for the study comprised students, parents and teachers in respect of all basic schools in Obuasi Municipality. However, the accessible population was limited to students, parents and teachers in Obuasi West Circuit. There were 20 basic schools in this circuit and of these, 3 were randomly selected for study.

9.2 Sample size

A sample of 90 was taken from the total list of students, teachers, and parents. It was out of this number that a sample of 60 student respondents was selected. The remaining 30 respondents comprised teachers and parents, making a total of 90. This was evenly distributed between the 3 schools, 30 respondents being selected from each in order to avoid bias.

9.3 Sampling Technique

Simple random sampling was employed to select 20 students from each school, together with a total of 15 parents and 15 teachers from across all 3 schools. The process used for selection was a straw lottery. Stratified random sampling was used in terms of the student sample to separate boys from girls in order to avoid gender bias.

9.4 Data Collection Instruments

To elicit data from parents and teachers, a semi-structured interview format was designed to engage respondents in a dialogue and allow them express themselves beyond 'yes' and 'no' answers to closed questions. The researchers used an interview guide, comprising a list of questions on the specific topics to be covered. The main data collection instrument employed for student respondents to enable the gathering of additional information necessary to answer the research questions was a structured questionnaire. The format consisted of both open and closed items to allow respondents to express themselves on a broad range of issues affecting students' performance.

9.5 Pilot Testing for Reliability and Validity

The interview data collection instrument was pilot tested on a few teachers and parents to determine its reliability in achieving the aims of the study. The pilot gave a fair idea of the responses likely to be obtained from each question and helped in the removal of irrelevant ones.

9.6 Data Collection Procedure

Primary data were collected through interviews and a self- administered questionnaire. The questionnaires were administered with the assistance of the deputy head of each school. In each school visited, the head introduced the researchers to the deputy head who scheduled meetings with teachers and the students. The interviews were held on the premises of the selected JHSs and lasted for one and half hours. The interviews were audio-recorded.

8.7 Data Analysis

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were used. To analyse the qualitative data collected, a ranking scale was adopted to scrutinize the inputs that contributed to poor academic performance at the selected schools. Quantitative analysis was employed to determine the impact of inputs and processes on output performances.

10. Performance of JHSs

The selected school performance was measured using two different indicators; one was by using the actual school results from 2009 to 2011 according to the percentage failure as indicated in Table 2 and the other by the evaluations of the respondents by assessing the selected school results as shown in figure 2.

Table 2. Performance of selected schools under study according to percentage failure

School/Year	2009 failure (%)	2010 failure (%)	2011 failure (%)	Average (%)
Diawuoso	70	67	0	46
Awurade Basa	42	20	27	30
New Nsuta	10	14	17	14

Source: Obuasi Municipal Education Office, 2011

As Table 2 shows, in 2009, 2010 and 2011, Diawuoso experienced- failure rates of 70, 67 and 0 per cent respectively. The average rate was 46 per cent, which was on the higher side. The failure rate of Awurade Basa was 42, 20, and 27 per cent representing an average of 30 per cent. This was also high; New Nsuta's failure rate was 10, 14 and 17 per cent: an average of 14 per cent and one that represented a gradual deterioration.

Such a wide range of failure rates may be due to inputs variations, for example, different students' ability levels across schools and from year to years within a given school. It could be due to the processes involved in teaching and learning or an increase or decrease in the number of students entered for the examination. Student attitude towards teaching and learning and/or teachers' inability to handle a subject well in class could also be contributory factors.

10.1 Performance in 2009 BECE

Eighty-nine per cent of respondents thought that Awurade Basa's results had been poor; 96 per cent thought Diawuoso had performed poorly; 17 per cent expressed the same opinion in respect of New Nsuta, rising to 76 per cent in terms of those who believed that the performance of the latter had been average to poor.

10.2 Performance in 2010 BECE

Eleven per cent of the respondents thought that the result of Awurade Basa's results had been poor, rising to 65 per cent who classified them as average to poor; 79 per cent thought that Diawuoso had performed poorly; and 32 per cent expressed the same opinion in respect of New Nsuta, rising to 82 per cent who believed that the performance of the latter had been average to poor.

10.3 Performance in 2011 BECE

Thirty- two per cent of respondents thought that Awurade Basa's results had been poor rising to 100 per cent who classified them as average to poor; none of the respondents thought that Diawuoso had performed poorly; and 46 percent expressed the opinion that New Nsuta's results had been poor, rising to 92 per cent who believed that the performance of the latter had been average to poor.

10.4. Inputs that Contribute to Poor Performance

Table 3: Percentage distribution of inputs that contribute to poor academic performance

	Not significant	Moderately significant	Significant	Very significant
Inadequate teaching	46%	14%	24%	16%
Lack of- in service- training	19%	17%	27%	37%
Unfavourable working conditions	1%	23%	38%	37%
Inability to show unconditional love, affection and security	23%	20%	30%	27%
Inadequate qualifications	20%	20%	29%	31%
Unavailability of teaching and learning materials	3%	15%	21%	60%
Lack of school facilities	1%	3%	17%	78%
Irregular attendance of teachers	8%	15%	29%	48%
Inadequate number of exercises	12%	19%	31%	38%
Eye sight problems	17%	8%	21%	53%
Hearing problems	12%	2%	23%	63%
Lack of student motivation	12%	9%	33%	47%
Problems at home	4%	1%	20%	75%

Source: The authors

Most of the inputs factors listed in Table 3 are very significant since they elicited greater than the median score of 50%. The first ranking in terms of highly (very) significant appears to be lack of school facilities with a ranking rate of 78 per cent.

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10.5 Processes that Contribute to Poor Academic Performance

Table 4: Percentage distribution of processes that contribute to poor academic performance

	Not Relevant	Moderately Relevant	Relevant	Very Relevant
Unruly student behaviour	5%	12%	23%	60%
Irregular student attendance	7%	4%	16%	73%
Disrespect for teachers	11%	13%	26%	50%
Non-compliance with instructional demands	9%	17%	27%	43%
Ineffective supervision	2%	16%	38%	44%
Insufficient supervision by circuit supervisors	10%	16%	31%	43%
Irregular supervision	7%	21%	41%	30%
Unfavourable home environment	5%	6%	37%	52%
Inability to provide wards' essential	1%	2%	16%	80%
Parents not helping wards with their homework	5%	11%	26%	59%
Low parents education level	5%	9%	37%	50%
Low socio-economic status	5%	0%	29%	66%

Source: The authors

Table 5**:** Chi-square tests of unavailability of teaching learning materials

Respondents	Value	df	Assump 2009	Sig 2010	(2-sided) 2011
Teacher	20.493[a]	6	0.002	0.624	0.393
Parent	19.911[b]	6	0.003	0.888	0.659
Student	9.490[c]	6	0.148	0.012	0.075

Source: The authors

Table 5 shows that there is a significant association between inputs and school performance. Teachers and parents' responses in respect of the 2009 BECE results indicate there is a strong correlation between availability of learning materials and academic performance since the significant values of 0.002 and 0.003 are less than 0.05. Moreover, students' responses in terms of the 2010 BECE results show the significance of the availability of learning materials on academic performance. This means that students thought that shortcoming in this regard had a significant correlation with their performance and this impacted on the poor performance of the schools as a whole.

Table 4 shows that most respondents accepted that all the listed processes at least contributed moderately to very (highly) significant to the poor academic performance. The most significant process contributing to the poor academic performance of schools is inability of parents to provide children's essential needs which shows a highly relevant rating of 80 per cent.

10.6 Impact of the Input and Processes on the Output (performance)

Table 6: Chi-square tests of irregular supervision

Respondents	Value	Pearson df	Chi-square test assymp 2009	Sig 2010	(2-sided) 2011
Teacher	11.448[a]	6	.075	.024	.020
Parent	12.701[b]	6	.048	.189	.279
Student	23.667[c]	6	.001	.064	.008

Source: The authors

Table 5 shows that there is a significant association between processes and school performance. Teachers and the parents' responses in respect of the 2009 BECE results indicate there is a strong correlation between irregular supervision and academic performance since the significant values of 0.075, 0.048 and 0.001 are << less than 0.05. Moreover, teachers' responses in terms of the 2010 BECE results show the significance of irregular supervision on academic performance. This means that teachers and parents all thought that irregular supervision had a significant correlation with performance and this impacted on the poor performance of the schools as a whole.

Such findings supports Fiaveh et al.,'s (2011) contention that the attitude of some public school teachers and authorities to their duties does not enhance student learning process. This conclusion also corroborates Boateng's (2003) argument that the success or failure of the curriculum depends on the teacher.

11. Conclusion

It emerged that most identified inputs and processes e.g. lack of school facilities, unruly behavior of students, parents' inability to provide children's needs, and teachers' inability to teach a subject well, to mention but a few contributed markedly to poor student performance during the period 2009-11. Accordingly, there is a need for all stakeholders e.g. the government, non-governmental organisations, teachers and parents -and students to play their respective parts in addressing the factors that contribute to poor performance if improvements are to be made and image of such schools raised.

On strength of the foregoing findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are made

- The government should form partnerships with more education stakeholders to improve the school conditions and ensure that infrastructural developments are made to improve teaching and learning
- The government should seek to renovate dilapidated school buildings given that educationists maintain that where a child is taught, what the child is taught and what the child learns all matter.
- There is a need for parents to advise their children appropriately on undesirable behavior such as alcoholism, stealing, assault, etc. Workshops and forums should be organized by stakeholders that sensitise parents in this regard.
- Parents should endeavour to help physically disabled children and those who otherwise have learning difficulties by consulting specialists for advice on the best approach to the education of such children.
- The GES should organize talks, symposia, plays and films on the benefits of education in cooperation with each school's PTA.
- In- service training programmes should be organised for all teachers on the need to show love, care and concern to the students they teach so that they feel at home.

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