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Research Article

Dilemma of Basic School Pupils in Northern Ghana with respect to Their Learning Context

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Lately, basic school pupils have performed poorly in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) as well as in their end of term examinations and this necessitated an enquiry into the phenomenon. The study used the cross-sectional study design. The sample size was 195. The study collected data using a questionnaire. Data analysis involved using descriptive statistics. The study found that largely pupils from academically performing and nonacademically performing schools have similar perceptions about causes of poor academic performance. Again, the combined effect of home and school environmental factors emerged as the major contributor to poor academic performance. The study recommends that providing a conducive home environment for the pupils, tackling pupil and teacher related factors, would help to ensure that poor academic performance is a thing of the past.

1. Introduction

For students to achieve high academic laurels, they need to believe that they can learn and that what they are learning is useful, relevant, and meaningful for them and for the society at large [1]. The learning environment must therefore be conducive for students to be able to achieve this goal. The learning environment is twofold, home and school. The parents or guardians of these pupils are responsible for providing the right home environment that will facilitate effective learning for their wards [2], so are the school authorities. This, however, might not continue as most pupils are unable to pass their exams with distinction. This is attributable to certain hindrances they meet as they learn.

In this regard, in Nigeria, both parents and government are in total agreement that their huge investment in education is not yielding the desired results as the Senior Secondary Certificate Examination results have continuously shown that students are performing poorly [3]. For example, the pass rate between 2004 and 2007 has not gone beyond 47% for both Mathematics and English [3]. Similarly, the pupils' performance at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) in the Northern Region of Ghana is erratic and has not exceeded 50% pass rate since 2007 to date. For instance, in 2007, the pass rate was 47.6% which declined to 40.1% in 2008 and further to 39.8% in 2009 [4]. The pass rate for the BECE in 2010, however, experienced a slight increase to 46.4%, but the figure consistently dropped to 41.1% in 2012 [4]. The critical issue is what is causing this phenomenon in spite of the efforts put in by the government and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to boost performance at the BECE in the Northern Region. Some of the NGOs working in this regard include the Federation of African Women in Education, the Campaign for Female Education, and Regional Advisory and Information Network [5]. Similarly, the poor academic performance in BECE at the regional level is replicated at the study locations. In the central Gonja district, in 2008, the pass rate for the BECE was 36.5% which dipped to 34.2% in 2010 and further to 29.8% in 2013 [4] and the same is reflected in pupils' end of term examinations. Similarly, in the Karaga district, in 2010, the pass rate for the BECE was 46.3% which dropped to 39.3% in 2012 and further to 29.4% in 2013 [4].

The issue is what could be accounting for this decline in academic performance.

This phenomenon of poor academic performance of pupils has sparked off series of research to find out the learning environmental factors that might trigger this situation in order to develop strategies to arrest the canker. Many of those studies have considered the learning factors from the perspective either of the home environment or of the school environment. The variables in the home learning environment usually investigated include family structure, parental involvement, socioeconomic status of parents, and level of education of parents [6–10]. Studies on school environmental factors usually centred on teacher qualification, teacher availability, class size, availability of teaching and learning materials, monitoring, contact hours, school ownership (i.e., private or public), motivation of teachers, and teachers absenteeism/commitment to duty [11–15] neglecting the home based factors. Nonetheless, these variables are not independent of one another as they all complement one another to influence effective learning, which triggers the phenomenon of poor academic performance. This creates a knowledge gap which this study seeks to fill. Equally important is that the pupils are in a dilemma because they are at a loss as both fronts that they can rely on to achieve academic excellence are rather those that do not support effective learning, thereby causing their academic downfall.

Also, most of the studies on the learning environmental factors influencing academic success have focused on the universities and secondary schools [3, 11, 16–19] neglecting the basic schools. Only few studies [10, 20, 21] have centred on basic schools pupils' academic performance. For example, a study looked at academic performance at the basic school, but in that study only factors from the home environment were a matter of concern [10]. Similarly, a study was conducted on junior high school pupils' residential needs and their academic performance [20]. This study also focused basically on the home based factors of academic performance. This necessitates examining pupils' learning from the joint perspective of the home and school environments at the basic school level.

2. Literature Review

This section provides a discourse on learning, home learning environment, school learning environment, combined effect of home and school environmental factors on learning of pupils and conceptual framework.

2.1. Learning. The environment in which learning occurs must be conducive. Such learning environments include the home and school.

2.2. Home Learning Environment. Home learning environment refers to conditions that prevail in the home or community of a pupil that may hinder or promote learning. The discourse on home environmental factors that influence learning primarily focuses on family structure, parental involvement in pupils' academic work, income level of family, and parental level of education. The empirical lines of evidence of the above areas are below.

Family structure is an important variable that influences the learning of pupils at home [6, 10, 18] but some studies found contrary evidence in that regard [22]. With respect to family as a factor, in a study in the Wa Municipality of Ghana, it was discovered that pupils who come from two-parent homes performed academically better than those that are from single-parent homes [10]. This was because the two-parent families provided better learning environment for their children. Likewise, other researchers examined the effects of family structure and parenthood on the academic performance of Nigerian university students [6]. The results showed that significant differences existed between the academic performance of students from single-parent family and those from two-parent family structures. Furthermore, the impact of family structure on the academic performance of university students was studied and significant differences in academic performance of male and female students compared on the two types of family structures were found [18]. On the contrary, a discovery was made that there is no significant difference between the academic performance of students from single-parent families and those from two-parent families [22]. This literature suggest that findings on the family as one of the causes of poor academic performance is not yet conclusive.

Research has indicated that high level of parental involvement in children's education positively affects their learning potentials [7–10, 23]. For example, it was discovered that parents that are very much involved in the educational activities (i.e., engagement in homework and attending parent-teacher association meetings) of their children enable them to have good academic performance [10]. In this regard, it is pointed out that the poor academic performance of children emanates from parents lack of proper supervision of their wards' homework [7]. Nonetheless, in a study in Nigeria, it was found that parents were not involved in any meaningful way in the literacy development of beginning readers [24]. This situation at home spells doom for the child since parental involvement is critical to academic performance.

Another home environmental factor that influences educational performance is income level of the family [25–28]. For instance, it was discovered that students' academic performance correlates with locality of residence and household income [25]. Similar studies found that parents' education and household income are moderate to strong predictors of academic achievement [26]. Again, a positive relationship between family income and academic achievement of high school students was found [27]. Likewise, parental economic status was yet discovered as a significant factor that influences a child's academic performance [28]. This implies that pupils whose parents were poor had poor academic performance as they are unable to create a good learning environment for their wards. However, it is not always the case that lower parental income is associated with negative learning environment for pupils as some pupils rise above the odds to succeed.

Also, parental education is considered a major determinant of a child's academic performance as it influences

the pupils' learning attitude [2, 28]. In the case of some studies, they found that parents' education can affect the achievement drive of their children in their academic endeavours [2]. More so, in a study of primary five pupils in Nigeria, it came to light that parental level of education influenced academic performance [28]. This means that parents with less or no education are likely to have their wards performing poorly academically. Nonetheless, some people with illiterate parents have excelled academically which challenges these empirical findings.

2.3. School Learning Environment. School learning environment encompasses the factors within the school that may or may not provide suitable conditions for the promotion of effective teaching and learning. Researchers on this theme have had different focuses as illustrated in the empirical lines of evidence presented below.

First and foremost, teacher qualification has been consistently found to impact the academic performance of pupils [13]. A teacher who lacks the professional skill will be unable to deliver in class, which will induce poor student's performance. A teacher who does not have both the academic and the professional qualifications would undoubtedly have a negative influence on the teaching and learning of a given subject [13]. It is further argued that a teacher who is academically and professionally qualified, but works under unfavourable conditions of service, would be less dedicated to his work and thus be less productive than a teacher who is unqualified but works under favourable conditions of service. In a particular study, it was discovered that teachers and students blame each other for poor academic performance [3]. In that study, while the teachers noted their qualification did not account for poor academic performance of students, the students, however, noted that it accounted for the poor academic performance.

Furthermore, available literature on school environmental factors that cause poor academic performance has found teachers' drive as a significant variable [15, 29]. In a particular study, it was argued that drive is a critical factor that influences a teacher's work attitude and that a highly motivated person puts in the greatest effort into his or her job [15]. The effect of such efforts is that the students will benefit from effective teaching which has the likelihood of making them improve their academic performance. Similarly, another study revealed that lack of drive and professional commitment produces poor attendance and unprofessional attitudes towards students, which, in turn, affects pupils' performance academically [30]. This kind of unprofessional attitudes may lead to loss of many instructional hours which cannot be regained.

Teaching methods adopted by teachers during instructions in classes have been found to greatly influence the learning of students [3, 27]. In a study in Nigeria, it was found that teachers indicated that method of teaching may cause poor academic performance while the students held a contrary opinion [3]. However, the studies in Benue, Nasarawa, and Plateau states in Nigeria provided definite results [24]. The study revealed that teachers did not have essential literacy skills and so do not use research-proven and result-oriented strategies in executing the work. This situation implies that the understanding of pupils in the lesson is hampered. The end effect is that it will lead to poor performance in literacy.

Moreover, teaching and learning materials availability influences the level of academic performance. Where these materials (i.e., textbooks, laboratory equipment, carpentry tools, etc.) are not available, it can cause low academic performance as teaching and learning becomes ineffective. It is noted that the availability and use of teaching and learning materials affect the effectiveness of a teacher's lessons [15]. This is because the use of teaching and learning materials will influence pupils' comprehension of lessons. The creative use of a variety of media was found to increase the chance that the students would learn more, keep better what they learn, and improve their performance on the skills that they are to develop [31]. Furthermore, it is reported that children are capable of understanding abstract ideas if they are provided with enough materials and concrete experience with the phenomenon they are to understand [32]. Nonetheless, a contrary discovery was made in a particular study [3]. In that study, the writer found that learning materials did not influence poor academic performance. This challenges the generally held view that teaching and learning materials are fundamental causes of poor academic performance.

Numerous studies have indicated that large classes are usually associated with challenges such as crowding of class, poor sitting arrangements, and students feeling isolated and less motivated [33–35]. Other studies examined the effects of class size and found that students in the smaller classes performed better academically than those from larger class sizes [15, 36–40]. For instance, it was discovered that students in the smaller classes achieved test scores that were 0.45 and 0.56 standard deviations higher than their peers in the larger classes, on the mathematics and reading tests, respectively [40]. Similarly, in a study in Nigeria, the results showed that large class size negatively affects students' academic performance [41]. In the case of [15], the author found that class size is an important determinant of academic performance and that studies have indicated that schools with smaller class sizes do better academically than schools with larger class sizes. Likewise, in a study in Ghana, it was concluded that a class size above 40 has negative effects on students' achievement [42]. In support of the effect of class size on academic performance, another researcher added that, since children have differences in drive, interests, and abilities and that they also differ in health, personal and social adjustment, and creativity, generally good teaching is best done in classes with smaller numbers that allow for personal attention [31]. The school's physical structure has been found to influence pupils' academic performance. In this regard, the entire unattractive physical structure of the school building could demotivate learners to achieve less academically. This is what is referred to as learner's environment mismatch [43]. According to the author, this promotes poor academic performance.

Another important variable that influences learning is effective monitoring and supervision of teachers' activities

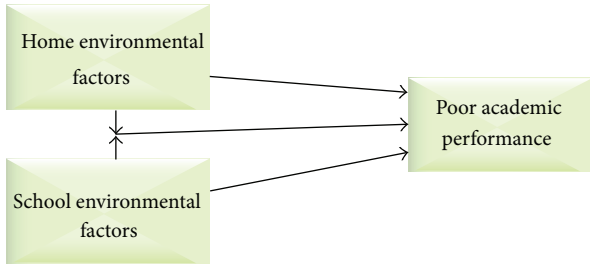

Figure 1: Conceptual framework on causes of poor academic performance. Source: authors' construct (2014).

[12, 14]. Accordingly, it is argued that effective supervision of instruction can improve teaching and learning quality in the classroom [12]. This denotes that if teaching is not supervised effectively, teachers may not do their duties diligently and this might lead to pupils performing poorly academically. In addition, it is concluded in another study that academic performance was better in private schools than in public schools because of more effective supervision of work [14]. This illustrates that inadequate supervision triggers poor academic performance of pupils since teachers may relax in the performance of their responsibilities.

2.4. Combined Effect of Home and School Environmental Factors on Learning of Pupils. Most of the studies on factors influencing learning have focused either only on home learning environment [7, 8, 10] or on school learning environment [11, 40], but not both. Nonetheless, these factors combine in some form to stimulate effective learning of pupils. The pupils actually find themselves in a state of dilemma as they are between dicey situations. That is, at home, their learning environment is not right for them to conduct their learning effectively and neither is the school learning environment. In examining pupils' academic performance which shows that they are in a state of dilemma, it is critical at this juncture to make sure that the right measures are in place to arrest the poor academic performance of pupils. In relation to the above, it is intimated that home-school partnership is critical in helping children to become fluent readers [44, 45]. This clearly illustrates that pupils are in a dilemma as they will fail to perform academically if their learning environments both at home and at school are not right for academic work.

2.5. Conceptual Framework. The conceptual framework of this study is in Figure 1. From the figure, the key components are *home environmental factors, school environmental factors, and poor academic performance*. On the issue of home environmental factors (See Section 2.2 for details) as causes of poor academic performance, two arrows radiate from it ending up at poor academic performance. The first arrow leads directly to poor academic performance. This arrow depicts that only home environmental factors can trigger poor academic performance of pupils (i.e., the one-dimensional cause of the phenomenon-the earlier perspective). That is, when certain conditions in the house do not enhance a child's ability to learn at home, this can lead to the child not performing academically. In terms of the school environmental factors (See Section 2.3 for details), the arrows are also twofold. These two arrows both lead to poor academic performance but from different perspectives. One of the arrows leads directly to poor academic performance. This illustrates that only school environmental factors account for poor academic performance which is the old perspective of causes of poor academic performance. The second arrow for both home and school environmental factors demonstrate that none of the factors act alone in accounting for poor academic performance. The arrows radiate from both home and school environmental factors converging at a point and then leading to poor academic performance. This shows that the combined effect of both the conditions at home and those at school is what engineers the phenomenon of poor academic performance of pupils at the basic school level. This is the new perspective that this paper propagates. This situation creates a dilemma for the pupils as they face daunting challenges towards their academic path.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Design. This study used the cross-sectional study design. A cross-sectional study design is the kind of study design that is best suited to finding out the prevalence of a phenomenon or problem by taking a cross-section of the population [46]. This research design was right for this study because it involved collecting data from pupils and teachers at only one time.

3.2. Sampling Design. Purposive sampling method aided in selecting the central Gonja and Karaga districts from the 26 districts in the Northern Region of Ghana as the sample sites. The basis for the use of purposive sampling was to select districts with some schools consistently recording low performance in the BECE and, at the same time, while others are having good performance in the same exam (see Table 1 for details). The schools in the central Gonja and Karaga districts were stratified into academically performing junior high schools (JHS) and nonacademically performing schools. In all, there were 13 academically performing and 19 nonacademically performing schools constituting a sampling frame of 32 schools which were obtained from the central Gonja and Karaga districts education offices. Then simple random sampling was applied in the selection of eight schools from each of the stratum on proportional basis to constitute the sample schools. Three of the sampled JHS were from academically performing schools and the remaining five from nonacademically performing schools. Simple random sampling was used in selecting JHS two pupils (i.e., grade 8 pupils) who are performing poorly from both school categories to form part of the sample. This was possible through the data obtained from pupils' report cards from the selected schools after permission was granted by the head teachers. The teachers in each of the study schools were also selected using simple random sampling. The sample size for the study was 195 respondents (see Table 2 for details of the sample), which was determined based on the judgement of the researchers.

Table 1: Performance of Basic Schools in 2012 BECE in some Selected Districts in Northern Region of Ghana.

Number	Central Gonja district		Karaga district		Bunkpurugu/Yunyoo district	
	Name of school	2012 BECE % Pass		2012 BECE % Pass	Name of school	2012 BECE % Pass
1	Chama D/A JHS	100.0	Karaga L/A	84.6	Nasuan J.H.S	100.0
2	Yapei Presby JHS	100.0	Ishadia	60.5	Kpanlori J.H.S	100.0
3	Miracle Days Inst. JHS	80.0	Pishigu	50.0	Temmaa J.H.S	100.0
4	Kusawgu D/A JHS	89.5	Sung	3.7	Konchian-Gberuk J.H.S	100.0
5	Buipe Academy JHS	73.2	Tamaligu	13.2	Nabopelik	100.0
6	Yapei D/A JHS	72.6	Bagurugu	62.2	Salimbouku "A" J.H.S	98.8
7	Fufulso Presby JHS	84.4	Tonzg	29.7	Nakpanduri A/G J.H.S	97.5
8	Sankpalat. JHS	61.9	Yemokaraga	26.7	Nakpanduri Presby J.H.S	95.6
9	SHARI D/A JHS	34.1	Shellilanyili	46.2	Kambagu J.H.S	95.0
10	Mpaha D/A JHS	29.1	Nuri-Islam	21.7	Boaterigu J.H.S	92.0
11	Buipe S.D.A. JHS	29.1	Binduli	10.0	Bunkpurugu D/A J.H.S	89.1
12	Buipe D/A JHS	7.0	Gunayili	0.0	Bimbagu J.H.S	88.1
13	Kpabuso D/A JHS	16.7	Nyong	61.0	Gbingbanmon J.H.S	80.0
14	Kabilpe JHS	0.0	Namburugu	0.0	Nakpanduri D/A J.H.S	77.4
15	Kpasera D/A JHS	0.0	Nakundugu	16.7	Salimbouku "B" J.H.S	71.8
16	Buipe Bridge JHS	22.7			Jimbale J.H.S	67.7
17	Mpaha T.I. JHS	18.3			Guangbiang J.H.S	62.5
18					Kinkangu J.H.S	60.5
19					Pagnatik J.H.S	51.9
20					Bunkpurugu Zongo J.H.S	50.0
21					Gbankurugu J.H.S	45.8
22					Jilig J.H.S	44.4
23					Binde J.H.S	43.2
24					Najong number 1 "A"	39.4
25					Najong number 2	26.8
26					Yunyoo J.H.S	24.1
27					Gbankoni J.H.S	15.6
28					Kambatiak J.H.S	10.5
29					Najong number 1 "B"	4.5
30					Bagamsa J.H.S	0.0
31	Academically performing schools totals	**8**		**5**		
32	Nonacademically performing schools totals	**9**		**10**		

Source: Central Gonja and Karaga district education directorates (2014).
*A school with less than 50% pass rate is considered a nonacademically performing school.
*A school with 50% or more pass rate is considered an academically performing school.

Table 2: Sample size distribution.

Respondent category	School category			
	Academically performing schools		Nonacademically performing schools	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Teachers	20	10	20	15
Pupils	40	20	30	40
Total	**195**			

3.3. Tools for Data Collection. The study obtained primary data from the respondents using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was in two categories; one was for the teachers and the other for the pupils. The questionnaire for the teachers was divided into two sections. The first section was made up of the background data. The second section comprised school factors based on causes of poor academic performance, which were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). In the case of the questionnaire for the pupils, it also has two parts. The first part concentrates on the background data of the pupils. The second, but last section, make up items on causes of poor academic performance from both the home and school environments which were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Permission was sought from Ghana Education Service directorate of the central Gonja and Karaga

Table 3: Background characteristics of Respondents.

Respondent category	School category		Sex		Total
			Male	Female	
Pupils	Academically performing schools	f	40	19	**59**
		%	67.8	32.2	**100**
	Nonacademically performing schools	f	28	38	**66**
		%	42.4	57.6	**100**
Teachers	Academically performing schools	f	19	7	**26**
		%	73.1	26.9	**100**
	Nonacademically performing schools	f	20	15	**35**
		%	57.1	42.9	**100**

Source: field survey (2014).
f = frequency; % = percent.

districts to administer the questionnaires. After permission was granted, the researchers then moved to the field. The researchers sent 65 questionnaires to teachers and 130 to pupils, which were left with them for a period of one week as they were to be self-administered. After the one-week period, the questionnaires were retrieved. In all, 186 questionnaires were retrieved yielding a response rate of 95.4%. The response rate was not bad considering the fact that the questionnaires were administered at the time when the schools were taking their third term examination for the 2013/2014 academic year.

3.4. Data Analysis. The data were entered into statistical package for social sciences and then descriptive statistics (i.e., cross tabulation, frequencies, percentages, and means) were used to do the analyses. The analyses involve cross tabulating causes of poor academic performance against respondent (i.e., pupils from academically performing schools as opposed to those from nonacademically performing schools, teachers from academically performing schools as opposed to those from nonacademically performing schools) categories and then applying frequencies and percentages to determine whether the respondents have similarities in opinions about the factors or not. The mean is used to arrange the factors accounting for poor academic performance according to their order of importance per the ratings of the pupils and teachers. Percentages were also employed in determining which categories of factors (i.e., home environmental factors, school environmental factors, or a blend of home and school environmental factors) constitute the major contributor to poor academic performance.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Background Data of Respondents. This part dilates on the respondent category, school category, and sex. The details of the results of the background characteristics of the respondents are in Table 3. With respect to the pupils from academically performing schools, the results show that 67.8% of them are males while the remaining 32.2% are females. For the pupils from nonacademically performing schools, 42.4% of them are males and 57.6% are females. In the case of the teachers, those teaching in academically performing schools are 73.1% males whereas the remaining 26.9% are females. Concerning the teachers from nonacademically performing schools, the results denote that 57.1% of them are males and 42.9% are females.

4.2. Pupils' Perceptions about Causes of Poor Academic Performance. This section focuses primarily on the home and school learning environmental factors that trigger poor academic performance. This is viewed from the perspective of the pupils. The details of home based factors that cause poor academic performance are in Table 4 while those from the school environment are in Table 5. The factors have been arranged in a descending order of their significance in the tables. Similarities in perceptions are first discussed then the dissimilarities followed and ending with a discussion on the top five causes of poor academic performance.

In terms of similarities in opinions of both the pupils from academically performing schools and those from nonacademically performing schools, the results reveal that eight out of the 13 home based learning environmental factors were endorsed by both respondent categories. This implies that most of these pupils *agreed or strongly agreed* on those statements. The following factors negative peer influence (i.e., engaging in drug abuse) at home, engaging in economic activities at home, devoting all one's time watching videos or TV, heavy chores at home, attendance of social functions to the neglect of studying, lack of interest to learn at home, lack of encouragement of children to learn by parents, and poverty of parents were supported as the home environmental factors accounting for poor academic performance in the central Gonja and Karaga districts. The endorsement of these home based factors ranges from 45.8% to 100.0%. The present findings corroborate with some previous studies' discoveries [10, 26, 29].

Again, the results from Table 4 show that the pupils from both school categories are uncertain about three of the home based factors' capability to either result in poor academic performance or not. Those factors that the respondents were *uncertain* about are single parenting, lack of parental involvement at home in one's studies, and lack of role models at home. This means that there is a fifty-fifty chance that each of these factors may or may not trigger

Table 4: Comparative analysis of pupils' perception about home based factors causing poor academic performance.

Home based factors accounting for poor academic performance		Pupils								Mean of Importance
		Academically performing schools				Nonacademically performing schools				
		D/SD	U	A/SA	T	D/SD	U	A/SA	T	
Negative peer influence (i.e., engaging in drug abuse) at home is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	0	0	59	59	0	0	66	66	**3.0000**
	%	0	0	100.0	100.0	0	0	100.0	100.0	
Engaging in economic activities at home is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	0	1	58	59	0	0	66	66	**2.9920**
	%	0	1.7	98.3	100.0	0	0	100.0	100.0	
Devoting all one's time watching videos or TV is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	0	0	59	59	0	1	65	66	**2.9920**
	%	0	0	100.0	100.0	0	1.5	98.5	100.0	
Heavy chores at home contribute to one's poor academic performance.	*f*	1	1	57	59	0	1	65	66	**2.9680**
	%	1.7	1.7	96.6	100.0	0	1.5	98.5	100.0	
Attendance of social functions to the neglect of studying is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	0	0	59	59	2	1	63	66	**2.9600**
	%	0	0	100.0	100.0	3.0	1.5	95.5	100.0	
Lack of interest in learning at home is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	1	0	58	59	2	0	64	66	**2.9520**
	%	1.7	0	98.3	100.0	3.0	0	97.0	100.0	
Lack of encouragement of children to learn by parents is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	2	4	53	59	0	4	62	66	**2.9040**
	%	3.4	6.8	89.8	100.0	0	6.1	93.9	100.0	
Poverty of parents is a cause of one's poor academic performance.	*f*	13	19	27	59	5	16	45	66	**2.4320**
	%	22.0	32.2	45.8	100.0	7.6	24.2	68.2	100.0	
Single parenting is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	20	25	14	59	12	33	21	66	**2.0240**
	%	33.9	42.4	23.7	100.0	18.2	50.0	31.8	100.0	
Lack of parental involvement at home in one's studies is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	22	26	11	59	15	49	2	66	**1.8080**
	%	37.3	44.1	18.6	100.0	22.7	74.2	3.0	100.0	
Low level of parental education is a cause of poor academic performance of their children.	*f*	19	33	7	59	36	27	3	66	**1.6400**
	%	32.2	55.9	11.9	100.0	54.5	40.9	4.5	100.0	
Lack of role models at home is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	22	34	3	59	30	33	3	66	**1.6320**
	%	37.3	57.6	5.1	100.0	45.5	50.0	4.5	100.0	
Lack of involvement in extra classes at home is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	21	33	5	59	40	25	1	66	**1.5600**
	%	35.6	55.9	8.5	100.0	60.6	37.9	1.5	100.0	

Source: field survey (2014).

T = total; *f* = frequency; % = percent; D/SD = *disagree/strongly disagree;* U = *uncertain;* and A/SA = *agree/strongly agree.*

Table 5: comparative analysis of pupils' perception about school based factors causing poor academic performance.

School based factors accounting for poor academic performance		Teachers								Mean of Importance
		Academically performing schools				Nonacademically performing schools				
		D/SD	U	A/SA	T	D/SD	U	A/SA	T	
A teacher rushing to complete topics is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	0	0	59	59	0	0	66	66	**3.0000**
	%	0	0	100.0	100	0	0	100.0	100	
Lack of adequate preparation of teachers before coming to teach is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	0	0	59	59	0	0	66	66	**3.0000**
	%	0	0	100.0	100	0	0	100.0	100	
Lack of commitment of teachers to their work is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	0	0	59	59	0	0	66	66	**3.0000**
	%	0	0	100.0	100	0	0	100.0	100	
Teacher absenteeism contributes to poor academic performance.	*f*	1	1	57	59	0	0	66	66	**2.9760**
	%	1.7	1.7	96.6	100	0	0	100.0	100	
Lack of competent teachers is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	1	0	58	59	0	1	65	66	**2.9760**
	%	1.7	0	98.3	100	0	1.5	98.5	100	
Students' absenteeism is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	2	0	57	59	0	0	66	66	2.9680
	%	3.4	0	96.6	100	0	0	100.0	100	
Lack of teaching and learning materials is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	1	2	56	59	0	2	64	66	**2.9520**
	%	1.7	3.4	94.9	100	0	3.0	97.0	100	
Lack of seriousness of the pupil in class is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	1	3	55	59	0	1	65	66	**2.9520**
	%	1.7	5.1	93.2	100	0	1.5	98.5	100	
Poor motivation of teachers is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	1	2	56	59	2	0	64	66	**2.9360**
	%	1.7	3.4	94.9	100	3.0	0	97.0	100	
Inadequate supervision of teachers is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	4	2	53	59	1	0	65	66	**2.9040**
	%	6.8	3.4	89.8	100	1.5	0	98.5	100	
Overengagement in extracurricular activities neglecting academic work is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	6	3	50	59	2	0	64	66	**2.8480**
	%	10.2	5.1	84.7	100	3.0	0	97.0	100	
Schools closing earlier than the appropriate closing time are a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	1	4	54	59	2	11	53	66	**2.8320**
	%	1.7	6.8	91.5	100	3.0	16.7	80.3	100	
Large class size is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	6	9	44	59	5	24	37	66	**2.5600**
	%	10.2	15.3	74.6	100	7.6	36.4	56.1	100	
Teachers having many periods to teach are a cause of poor academic performance of pupils.	*f*	13	22	24	59	9	32	25	66	**2.2160**
	%	22.0	37.3	40.7	100	13.6	48.5	37.9	100	
Inadequate teachers are a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	24	14	21	59	3	42	21	66	**2.1200**
	%	40.7	23.7	35.6	100	4.5	63.6	31.8	100	
Regular changing of schools by pupils is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	16	35	8	59	18	45	3	66	**1.8160**
	%	27.1	59.3	13.6	100	27.3	68.2	4.5	100	
Regular transfers of teachers out of a school and replacing them cause poor academic performance.	*f*	34	17	8	59	40	18	8	66	**1.5360**
	%	57.6	28.8	13.6	100	60.6	27.3	12.1	100	
Lack of extra classes in school is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	29	21	9	59	45	17	4	66	**1.5120**
	%	49.2	35.6	15.3	100	68.2	25.8	6.1	100	

Source: field survey (2014).

T = total; *f* = frequency; % = percent; D/SD = *disagree/strongly disagree;* U = *uncertain;* and A/SA = *agree/strongly agree.*

poor academic performance. It signifies that these factors complement other factors to cause the phenomenon. This discovery seems to support the findings that single parenting was not a significant determinant of a person's academic performance [23]. Nonetheless, some studies have found that these factors account for poor academic performance in some jurisdictions [10, 22]. These differences in opinion could have resulted from the study population and the location of the study.

In the case of differences in perceptions of the pupils on the home learning environmental factors, the results illustrate that two of the factors fall within this category. Those factors are, namely, low level of parental education and lack of involvement in extra classes at home. With respect to both of these factors, pupils from academically performing schools are mostly *uncertain* about their effect on academic performance. On the contrary, for those pupils from nonacademically performing schools, they did not consider them as causes of poor academic performance. This is because most of them *disagreed or strongly disagreed* on these issues. These differences in pupils' perceptions could have resulted from other home based factors.

Despite the differences and similarities, the top five home learning environmental factors that account for poor academic performance have been identified. From the results shown in Table 4, it is found that negative peer influence (i.e., engaging in drug abuse) at home, engaging in economic activities at home, devoting all one's time watching videos or TV, heavy chores at home, and attendance of social functions to the neglect of studying surfaced as the major home environmental factors causing poor academic performance of pupils in the central Gonja and Karaga Districts. The mean of importance of the factors enumerated ranges from 2.9600 to 3.0000. This signifies that, in any school in the districts where there is poor academic performance, all or a combination of these factors may be the underlying cause of the phenomenon.

With regard to similarities in pupils' perceptions about school based factors accounting for poor academic performance, the results from Table 5 show that, out of 18 school based factors, 13 were endorsed by both respondent categories. This signifies that most of these pupils *agreed or strongly agreed* on those statements. The following factors, a teacher rushing to complete topics, lack of adequate preparation of teachers before coming to teach, lack of commitment of teachers to their work, teacher absenteeism, lack of competent teachers, students' absenteeism, lack of teaching and learning materials, lack of seriousness of the pupil in class, poor motivation of teachers, inadequate supervision of teachers, overengagement in extracurricular activities neglecting academic work, schools closing earlier than the appropriate closing time, and large class size, were backed as the school environmental factors accounting for poor academic performance in the central Gonja and Karaga districts. The endorsement of these school based factors ranges from 40.7% to 100.0%. Similar discoveries were made by earlier studies [14, 15, 30, 40].

Also, the results from Table 5 show that the pupils from both school categories are uncertain about one school based factor's capability to either result in poor academic performance or not. The said factor is regular changing of schools by pupils being a cause of poor academic performance. With respect to this item, 59.3% of the pupils from academically performing schools said they were *uncertain* about the factor's impact. In the case of those from academically nonperforming schools, 63.6% of them indicated that they were *uncertain* about the effect of the current item. The above evidence suggest that, the respondents who were uncertain in both category were higher than those who either *agreed or strongly agreed*. A similar trend was observed in respect to those who *disagreed or strongly disagreed*. This clearly confirms the issue of uncertainty in respect of which factor(s) impacts more on academic performance of pupils in schools. This means that there is a fifty-fifty chance that this factor may or may not account for poor academic performance.

The results further showed that differences exist in pupils' perception on the school based factors accounting for poor academic performance. The pupils had different views on teachers having many periods to teach and inadequate teachers as causes of poor academic performance. In the case of the pupils from academically performing schools, most of them *agreed or strongly agreed* that teachers having to teach for many periods are a cause of poor academic performance while those from nonacademically performing schools are *uncertain* on the issue. Concerning inadequate teachers as a cause of poor academic performance, the results show that most pupils from academically performing schools *disagreed or strongly disagreed* on it whereas pupils from nonacademically performing schools are *uncertain* about the ability of this factor to cause poor academic performance.

In terms of the top five school learning environmental factors that account for poor academic performance, the results show that teachers rushing to complete topics, lack of adequate preparation of teachers before coming to teach, lack of commitment of teachers to their work, teacher absenteeism, and lack of competent teachers fall within that category. The mean of importance of these factors enumerated ranges from 2.9760 to 3.0000. It is important to note that all of these major school based factors that the pupils consider as causing poor academic performance are linked to the teacher related factors. This suggests that the pupils blame the teachers for their poor academic performance.

4.3. Teachers' Perceptions about Factors Accounting for Poor Academic Performance. As teachers are the ones who facilitate the learning process in schools, it is necessary that their side of the story about the causes of poor academic performance is obtained. This involves comparing the views of teachers from both academically performing and nonacademically performing schools about the school learning environmental factors contributing to poor academic performance. The details of this comparison, which is in Table 6, have been arranged in a descending order of rank in terms of their magnitude of causing poor academic performance. From the table, the results show that, out of the 18 items, three of the items were rejected as causes of poor academic performance by both respondent groups; on one of the items,

Table 6: Comparative analysis of teachers' perception about school based factors causing poor academic performance.

School based factors accounting for poor academic performance		Teachers								Mean of Importance
		Academically performing schools				Nonacademically performing schools				
		D/SD	U	A/SA	T	D/SD	U	A/SA	T	
Students' absenteeism is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	1	0	25	**26**	0	0	35	**35**	**2.9683**
	%	3.8	0	96.2	**100.0**	0	0	100.0	**100.0**	
Lack of seriousness of the pupil in class is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	0	1	25	**26**	1	0	34	**35**	**2.9524**
	%	0	3.8	96.2	**100.0**	2.9	0	97.1	**100.0**	
Lack of commitment of teachers to their work is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	1	2	23	**26**	1	2	32	**35**	**2.8730**
	%	3.8	7.7	88.5	**100.0**	2.9	5.7	91.4	**100.0**	
Poor motivation of teachers is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	3	1	22	**26**	0	2	33	**35**	**2.8571**
	%	11.5	3.8	84.6	**100.0**	0	5.7	94.3	**100.0**	
Lack of teaching and learning materials is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	2	4	20	**26**	0	5	30	**35**	**2.7937**
	%	7.7	15.4	76.9	**100.0**	0	14.3	85.7	**100.0**	
Teacher absenteeism contributes to poor academic performance.	*f*	4	3	19	**26**	0	2	33	**35**	**2.7937**
	%	15.4	11.5	73.1	**100.0**	0	5.7	94.3	**100.0**	
Lack of adequate preparation of teachers before coming to teach is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	4	3	19	**26**	1	1	33	**35**	**2.7778**
	%	15.4	11.5	73.1	**100.0**	2.9	2.9	94.3	**100.0**	
Inadequate supervision of teachers is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	7	4	15	**26**	0	3	32	**35**	**2.6667**
	%	26.9	15.4	57.7	**100.0**	0	8.6	91.4	**100.0**	
Overengagement in extracurricular activities neglecting academic work is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	5	4	17	**26**	2	6	27	**35**	**2.6190**
	%	19.2	15.4	65.4	**100.0**	5.7	17.1	77.1	**100.0**	
Lack of competent teachers is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	10	4	12	**26**	0	1	34	**35**	**2.6032**
	%	38.5	15.4	46.2	**100.0**	0	2.9	97.1	**100.0**	
A teacher rushing to complete topics is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	8	4	14	**26**	2	1	32	**35**	**2.6032**
	%	30.8	15.4	53.8	**100.0**	5.7	2.9	91.4	**100.0**	
Large class size is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	5	3	18	**26**	3	10	22	**35**	**2.5079**
	%	19.2	11.5	69.2	**100.0**	8.6	28.6	62.9	**100.0**	
Teachers having many periods to teach are a cause of poor academic performance of pupils.	*f*	6	5	15	**26**	3	10	22	**35**	**2.4603**
	%	23.1	19.2	57.7	**100.0**	8.6	28.6	62.9	**100.0**	
Schools closing earlier than the appropriate closing time are a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	12	2	12	**26**	4	9	22	**35**	**2.3175**
	%	46.2	7.7	46.2	**100.0**	11.4	25.7	62.9	**100.0**	
Inadequate teachers are a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	8	3	15	**26**	7	11	17	**35**	**2.2698**
	%	30.8	11.5	57.7	**100.0**	20.0	31.4	48.6	**100.0**	
Regular transfers of teachers out of a school and replacing them cause poor academic performance.	*f*	11	7	8	**26**	17	14	4	**35**	**1.7143**
	%	42.3	26.9	30.8%	**100**	48.6	40.0	11.4	**100.0**	
Regular changing of schools by pupils is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	12	6	8	**26**	24	6	5	**35**	**1.6190**
	%	46.2	23.1	30.8	**100.0**	68.6	17.1	14.3	**100.0**	
Lack of extra classes in school is a cause of poor academic performance.	*f*	14	7	5	**26**	22	11	2	**35**	**1.5238**
	%	53.8	26.9	19.2	**100.0**	62.9	31.4	5.7	**100.0**	

Source: field survey (2014).

T = total; *f* = frequency; % = percent; D/SD = *disagree/strongly disagree;* U = *uncertain;* and A/SA = *agree/strongly agree.*

the respondents had different opinions and 14 were endorsed by teachers from both school categories.

With regard to the 14 items that were endorsed, it meant that most of teachers from both academically performing and nonacademically performing schools *agreed or strongly agreed* on those school based factors. In all, inadequate teachers, lack of competent teachers, lack of commitment of teachers to their work, teacher absenteeism, poor motivation of teachers, lack of adequate preparation of teachers before coming to teach, teachers rushing to complete topics, lack of teaching and learning materials, large class size, inadequate supervision of teachers, overengagement in extracurricular activities neglecting academic work, lack of seriousness of the pupil in class, students' absenteeism, and teachers having many periods to teach were perceived as causes of poor academic performance. The endorsement of these factors ranges from 46.2% to 100.0% with that of the teachers from nonacademically performing schools being higher with respect to each of the items. This shows that the teachers from both academically performing and nonacademically performing schools have similar views about the causes of poor academic performance. The current discoveries are in line with some previous findings [3, 13–15, 40].

Concerning schools closing earlier than the appropriate closing time as a cause of poor academic performance, the results show that the teachers have different opinions on this factor. In terms of the perception of teachers from academically performing schools, 46.2% of them *agreed or strongly agreed* on the item while the same percentage *disagreed or strongly disagreed*. This shows that there is a split in the teachers' opinion. With respect to the teachers from the nonacademically performing schools, the results show that about 62.9% of them *agreed or strongly agreed* that schools closing earlier than the appropriate closing time cause poor academic performance. These results show that most of the teachers in the nonperforming schools endorsed the current factor as a cause of poor academic performance, which is in line with half of the teachers from the academically performing schools, but contrary to the other half's opinion.

In terms of the top five school learning environmental factors that contribute to poor academic performance, the results show that students' absenteeism, lack of seriousness of the pupil in class, lack of commitment of teachers to their work, poor motivation of teachers, and lack of teaching and learning materials emerged as the most significant causes of poor academic performance of pupils. The mean of importance of the factors named ranges from 2.7937 to 2.9683. It is interesting to note that most of the top school based factors causing poor academic performance of pupils have been tied by the teachers to both student related factors and teacher related factors with the student related factors carrying more weight. This shows that the teachers blame the pupils for their poor academic performance.

4.4. Major Contributor to Poor Academic Performance. This section concentrates on the pupils' opinion as to the factors that contribute most to poor academic performance, that is, whether the home or school factors or both of them combine to contribute to the phenomenon. Figure 2 provides details of respondents' perception about the causes of poor academic performance. From the figure, the results show that 13.6% of the pupils consider home environmental factors as the major cause of poor academic performance and this supports the old thinking shown in Figure 1. A further 28.8% of the pupils perceived school environmental factors as the major contributor to poor academic performance, which also toes the line of the old thinking. The results again show that 57.6% of the respondents perceived combined effect of home and school environmental factors as the major cause of poor academic performance. The results depict that most of the pupils consider a combination of home and school environmental factors as the major force behind poor academic performance and not those factors acting independently of one another. This is the new line of thinking propagated in Figure 1, which most studies have been silent on.

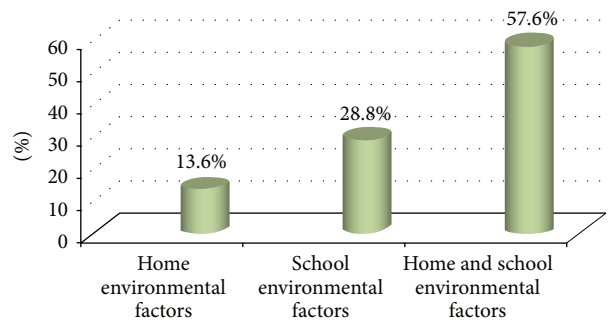

Figure 2: Contribution of learning environmental factors to poor academic performance. Source: field survey (2014).

5. Conclusions

On a whole, pupils from both academically performing and nonacademically performing schools have similar perceptions about causes of poor academic performance. In the same manner, the teachers teaching in academically performing schools and those in nonacademically performing schools both largely endorsed most of the causes of poor academic performance. Also, while the pupils mostly indicated that teacher related factors were the major drivers of poor academic performance, the teachers rather thought that pupil related factors are what accounts for the situation. This implies that pupils and teachers blame one another for the current predicament. Finally, home and school environmental factors appeared as the major driver of poor academic performance.

6. Recommendations

Congenial home environment for children is what is needed to address the canker of poor academic performance. By this, it implies that parents and guardians should not allow their children to engage in economic activities that will not permit them time to study. They should provide their children with all that they need for school. The parents or guardians

should also ensure that children are not overburdened with household chores. The parents can help by doing some of the household chores themselves or hire maids to do the chores to create room for the children to learn. Also, parents should encourage their children to make friends with people who want to learn. Finally, the parents should ensure that they limit their children's engagement in entertainment which sways them away from studying. If all these are in place, the children would have the opportunity at home to learn.

Addressing teacher related factors is the key to preventing and eliminating poor academic performance. This signifies that, for a person to be qualified to teach, he/she should be well trained. As the person has the appropriate training, he or she will invariably prepare adequately before coming to teach. With good professional ethics, the person will not rush to finish topics but would rather take time to go through them one after the other. The purpose is to ensure that whatever is taught is understood. Also, if the teachers are motivated through higher salaries and other gift packages, they would tend to be committed to their work. As they are committed to their work they would usually not absent themselves from work which will inure to the benefit of the pupils.

Tackling student related factors will help to prevent poor academic performance. This could be carried out by ensuring that lessons are made interesting by teachers always to capture the attention of the pupils from beginning to end. This can be done through making learning pupil-centred. When this happens, the pupils would be serious in class. As they enjoy the lessons, they would not like to miss classes for anything. The end results would be that they would be able to retain what they learn and apply it during examinations.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

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