

Teachers and Students Perception of Factors Influencing Girls Performance in WASSCE; The Case of a Girl Senior High School



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ABSTRACT: There has been persistent reports of low performance of girls in final examination of Senior High School especially in Northern Ghana. Academic achievement at the Senior High School is a critical milestone in every Ghanaian student's educational path and a critical step toward transition to higher levels of education. However, the rate of girls making the necessary grades in the final examination to enable them progress lags behind particularly in Northern Ghana. Far more attention has been paid to ensuring that girls enroll in school. This study investigate the determinants of girls' performance in the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination using the case of a girl Senior High School. Participants were purposively selected from teachers who had experience in teaching final year students and past students of the school. Data was collected from fifteen (15) sampled teachers, and fifteen (15) past students of the school through interviews.

The study finds school related and individual student factors accounting for girls' success. The key factors that enhances girls' success in WASSCE were individual ambition and efforts, self- discipline and determination, quantity and quality of teaching, encouragement from teachers, conducive environment, and school discipline. Several other factors including school related, individual factors, peer influence, social media use and sexual relationship explains the low pass rate of girls in WASSCE. The findings point to the need for school authorities, parents and other stakeholders to pay critical attention to the factors limiting girls' success and work a way out to address them. This should be a priority area for all actors concern with girls' education and women empowerment.

KEY WORDS: *Determinants, Girls' WASSCE performance, Girls schools, Senior High Schools, Ghana*

INTRODUCTION

Girl's education has been at the forefront of national governments, development partners and donor agencies agenda in developing countries, with attention being focused on promoting girls' educational attainment with emphasis on access, retention and completion particularly at primary school level. The focus on educational attainment has been attributed to set international and agreed targets like the Education for All Agenda, Millennium Development Goals/Sustainable Development Goals (MDGs/SDGs) (Lloyd, 2013). These policy concerns are geared towards ensuring girls' access to school so that they can achieve parity with boys. Although gender parity has been the focus of policy, attention is turned towards gender parity of educational attainment, measured through examination scores and years of schooling completed (Aikman & Roa, 2012). In Ghana, educational attainment in terms of enrolment, retention, completion rates and years of schooling are important measures, however, these are not used to determine placement in higher education or job. For job placement or progress to higher levels of education, achievement credentials are used. It is the passing of examination which is used to determine students' eligibility. For an individual to progress to post-secondary or tertiary level of education, it is mandatory to obtain the necessary grade point at the end of secondary schooling. The emphasis on examination credentials points to the need to realign educational discourse, so that emphasis is not placed solely on gender parity of access alone but also performance as well. In line with the need to refocus on education, Blimpo, Gajiga and Pugateh (2015) suggest that education policies should promote both opportunity and achievement, and the need for it to take a center place in national agenda. This implies that academic performance should be central in policy discourse as well as the promotion of educational opportunity. Promotion of

Teachers and Students Perception of Factors Influencing Girls Performance in WASSCE; The Case of a Girl Senior High School

education opportunity is necessary but that alone does not lead to the realization of educational goal of empowering people for healthy, productive and meaningful life.

For girls, secondary education is acknowledged to have potentially transformative economic and social impacts (Rihani, 2006; Tembon & Fort, 2008; UNICEF, 2014). Although, earlier research acknowledged primary education provides much benefits to the individual, however some studies have demonstrated that returns to secondary education is much higher than was initially speculated for girls. For instance, findings from a global study of developed and developing economies, which includes Ghana, showed that the average rate of return to secondary schooling is 8.7% for females compared to 7.1% for males (Montenegro & Patrinos, 2014). Girls' secondary education is acknowledge to have positive benefits like increased earnings, reduction in fertility , elimination of poverty inter alia, with the returns being more for developing countries, which mostly exceed those observed in developed countries and for boys (UNICEF, 2014). This suggest secondary education has the potential of bringing more benefits to females if it is meaningfully attained.

Promotion of girls' educational attainment has seen several efforts being made by national and international agencies and other organizations to ensure girls educational attainment is at par with boys. In Ghana some of these efforts include the establishment of the girl child educational unit within the Ghana Education Service, the promulgation of some recent educational policy like the free senior high school policy which aim to ensure educational access to secondary education for both boys and girls. Despite these efforts girls' performance in national examinations have not match up to the gender parity of access. For example, the Ghana education sector analysis report in 2018, showed gender parity of access as of 2016/17 at the SHS level had reached 0.96, however the same report showed a general pass rate of girls being 20% against boys with 26% with indication of a wide gender and regional disparity in the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (Ministry of Education, 2018).

The general poor performance in WASSCE is reechoed in the Education Strategic Plan (2018-2030) indicating that learning outcomes in terms of results from the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) has been poor for both core and elective science and mathematics subjects. This points out that a large proportions of students are completing secondary school without attaining functional literacy (McCarthy et al, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2018). In spite of these evidence of low performance of girls in the final examination there is a dearth of research on factors that account for the performance. Some studies have examined determinants of poor performance of students in WASSCE with respect to selected subjects like social studies (Angbing, 2014), science and mathematics (Abreh et al, 2019). This paper explored the determinants of girls' performance in WASSCE.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Academic success or passing of examination is central in educational development, since it is the main yardstick for progressing to higher levels of learning and reaping the benefits there off. Girls' education has been hailed as one of the best investment based on the potential benefits it has for girls, the family and the entire society. It has been reported that the benefits of girls education is more at the secondary school level comparative to the primary school level. However much focus has been at the primary level with emphasis on parity of access to boys. Girl's education has being a priority area in both education and development arena with a lot of intervention/efforts directed towards promoting the educational attainment of girls. This basically has been propel by international development goals. Current trends however requires obtaining the necessary credentials to progress or be able to obtain the benefits of secondary education.

For individual students to progress particularly from the secondary school level to higher levels of education one needs to obtain the necessary passes in the final examination. The ability of students to successfully pass their examinations has been the concern of schools, parents and students. In Ghana, the eligibility for entry into tertiary education or post-secondary education is the ability of a candidate to obtain the qualifying grade (Grade A1 to C6) in six subjects (three core subjects namely English, mathematics and science or social studies and any three elective subjects) in the West African Examination Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). The extent to which students' progress from the senior high school to tertiary or post-secondary education depends on their ability to get the minimum required grades in the relevant areas. On the eligibility of students, reports of the education sector have pointed to the performance of girls in WASSCE to be on the low side coupled with some studies highlighting the issue (Associate for Change, 2011; CAMFED, 2012; MOE, 2018)

Studies on determinants of academic performance is widely researched with some examining it in specific subjects, and others looking at various factors in general. Looking on studies on girls education in Ghana, the trend has centered on

Teachers and Students Perception of Factors Influencing Girls Performance in WASSCE; The Case of a Girl Senior High School

challenges/barriers to girls education (Lambert et al, 2012; Atta, 2015; Yindol, 2015). Research on girls education particularly at the Senior High School level in Ghana have mainly concentrated on promotion of girl child education, factors leading to drop out, factors affecting educational attainment and barriers to female education (Lambert et al, 2012; Atta, 2015; Yindol, 2015; Rubio, 2018). Yindol (2015) assessed the factors influencing Girl-Child participation in Senior High School Education in the Bolgatanga Municipality of Ghana. The study revealed that Girl-Child access and participation in Senior High School Education is influenced by bad cultural practices such as exchange marriage, betrothal, early marriages, and poverty coupled with parental attitude and perceptions of educating the Girl-Child (Yindol, 2015).

Studies focusing on girls academic performance at secondary schools and determinants have been carried out in mixed and day schools in some African countries showing home background variables and school related factors playing key roles in girls learning outcome (Makewa, et al 2014; Akinyi & Musani, 2015). However, scanty research has specifically looked at the determinants of girls' performance in the final examination of Senior High Schools particularly in Northern Ghana. Associate for Change in a mapping exercise on girls' education in Ghana and the Ghana Education Sector 2018 report analysis, did identify the general low performance of girls relative to boys in the West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (Associate for Change, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2018). Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED, 2012) did express concerns about gender disparities in learning outcomes with high failure or low scores (based on national pass rate) which is observed to be more pronounced in economically marginalized regions of Ghana. The pass rate is an indicator showing the proportion of students who qualify to higher level of education in the country. Indicators from the West African Examination Council for the case study (Bolgatanga Girls SHS) showed 20.83%, 24.09%, 5.45% and 28.70% of candidates qualify for higher education for 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 respectively. This trend suggest that the school since 2016 have not had any single year where up to 30% of candidates who sat for WASSCE qualify for higher education. This pattern suggest a worrying considering the number of girls coming out year each without the necessary passes to progress.

This further gives an indication that good number of girls who are turn out from the school are unable to qualify for higher education and hence the chances of reaping the benefits of formal education at this level might be minimal for most of these girls. Therefore, there is need to explore the determinants of girls' performance in the final examination in the school with a view of suggesting possible intervention strategies to improve girls learning outcomes. The study did investigate perceive factors that enhance and diminished the success of girls in WASSCE.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the main factors accounting for girls' performance in WASSCE using the case of a girl school. The specific objectives are:

1. To examine the factors that enhances girls' success in WASSCE in the school.
2. To investigate the major factors contributing to the low performance level of girls in WASSCE.

The study address the following questions:

1. What major factors are perceived to be accounting for girls' success in WASSCE?
2. What factors are perceive to be contributing to the low performance level of girls in WASSCE?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Determinants of Girls Academic Performance

It is unusual in education to find only one factor influencing/determining student educational achievement. It is rather the case that several, or even many factors from outside and inside the school influence how well or poorly students achieve/perform in school (Hirsch, 2007). Bole and Tesha (2006) drew conclusion that researchers need to consider many different factors that influence the performance and participation of girls and boys, with suggestions that capturing issues like sexism, home background environment, subject distortion and cognitive preferences while neglecting critical variables like the teaching environment play a part in explaining low performance and participation. In general, student learning and achievement has been directly related to a number of factors which can broadly be categorized into: family background/home environment, institutional, school and personal factors (Yussif, Yussif & Noor, 2011; Chowa et al, 2013; Angbing, 2014; Balcazar, Narayan & Tiwari, 2015).

Teachers and Students Perception of Factors Influencing Girls Performance in WASSCE; The Case of a Girl Senior High School

Family Background Factors and Girls Academic Performance

Family background factors play a major role in determining the academic success or failure of girls in examinations and their educational attainment (enrolment, attendance and progression). Family background factors identified in literature tends to have influence on girls' academic performance which includes socio-economic status, parental education background, income and family structure (Egunsola, 2014; Muandu, Parsitau and Wambugu, 2015). These factors can also lead to many girls absenting themselves from class, recording poor performance in examinations and eventually dropping out of school. Muandu, Parsitau and Wambugu (2015) finds parents' economic status to significantly correlate with girls' academic performance, suggesting that girls whose parents have higher economic status tend to perform better academically than those with low economic status. The influence of parental socio-economic status is reflected in the support parents give girls in terms of providing their physical and educational needs.

Parental education has also been pinpointed as one of the home background variables that play a key role in determining the success level of children in school. It is reported that high level of parental education has the potential of increasing the success level of students. Parental education enhances academic success of girls through interest shown in girls' education. It is established that educated parents perceive the need of girls' education in a better way than those who are not educated. In most cases, educated parents often seek to facilitate girls' learning at home and school, by given encouragement to their girls and making continuous follow up to schools where possible, provision of material support to girls which encourages them to perform better academically. On parental education influence on girls, Mohammed (2015) finds a strong correlation between educational background and income level of the parents on performance of girls at secondary schools in Somalia. Rwegarisa (2017) also identified poor academic performance of girls to be attributed to lack of effective parental support for girls' education.

Rwegarisa (2017) study on home and school based factors that determines poor academic performance of girls in community secondary schools in Tanzania, found poor performance of girls emanating from poor participation of girls in classroom activities, excessive domestic activities for girls at home, lack of effective assistance from parents relating to their schooling, lack of food supply at school, lack of stationary services in schools, and long traveling distance from home to school. Kimondo (2013) equally examined factors affecting girls' academic performance in secondary school in Embakasi District in Kenya and results shows family background factors, cultural factors, availability of mentors, and sexuality influencing the academic performance of girls.

Individual Factors as Determinants of Girls Academic Performance

Several individual personal factors have been identified as strong correlates of academic achievement. Among such individual factors identified with strong influence on girls performance in examination includes attitudes of girls towards learning, expectation of girls about their schooling, learning styles, approaches to teaching and girls sexuality (Kyei et al, 2011; Mubeen et al, 2013; Mohammed, 2015; Amusala, 2019). One key individual factor of girls that influence the performance is attitudes towards studies. Attitudes towards subjects of study is identified as an important determinant of academic success and achievement. In order to succeed in a subject or school, positive attitude towards a subject or studies in general is very important. This has been found to apply in the case of mathematics performance between girls and boys in a study at secondary school level in Paskistan (Mubeen et al, 2013). The study found boys demonstrating a better attitude towards the subject which reflected in higher achievement for boys than the girls (Mubeen et al, 2013). Similarly, Kyei, Apam and Nokoe (2011) finds lack of self-confidence reflecting in negative attitude girls' causing difference in performances between girls and boys in mathematics. Kyei and colleagues also points out that, students' interest in mathematics is greatly influenced by personal interests and teaching methods. The demonstration of girls' attitude as evidence in the case of mathematics performance could possibly manifest in their general disposition towards learning.

Future expectation of girls is found to contribute to girls' academic performance. Expectation drives action and behavior of individuals since people tend to behave positively when they are hopeful of obtaining some benefits. Mohamed (2015) assess girls 'attitude towards education by measuring performance at certificate of secondary school education in Somalia. The study found girls 'expectations of their school performance and career prospects playing a significant role in their persistence at school and in their performance. The findings showed that about 30 percent of the girls did not aim at pursuing their education up to university level (Mohamed, 2015). Mohamed (2015) findings are in line with Ampofo and Osei-Owusu (2015) who contend that student's academic ambition and effort are the main determinants of academic performance. When students are not poised for higher academic achievement, they turn not to devote much time and effort in their studies. This can reflect in poor learning or paying less attention in the learning process.

Teachers and Students Perception of Factors Influencing Girls Performance in WASSCE; The Case of a Girl Senior High School

Mohamed (2015) also sees the mind set of girls to have the tendency to contribute to poor academic performance, since they perceived themselves as academically weak and therefore do not believe that they can make it academically. When girls perceived themselves as academically weak, they tend to believe that they cannot make it in school. This believe could have a negative impact on their studies which could manifest in girls developing a lackadaisical attitude towards their studies leading to poor academic performance.

Amusala (2019) examine the influence of adolescences crisis on academic performance of girls in high school in Kenya. The study revealed that at adolescence stage, the influence of sexuality is very intense and conflicting in some ways for high school girls which often leads to poor performance. Poor performance of girls has been attributed to levels of intelligence or patterns of thought at adolescence. At adolescence, girls attention is focused on the opposite sex and concern with physical appearance, which propel them to engage in intimate relationship with boys/men. Amusala also found that some girls in high school have their academic performance affected by the personal fable. Personal fable is explained as the belief or myths that one is unique and has a personal mission in life (Amusala 2019). According to Amusala (2019) these girls have the feeling that they are un-destroyable, immortal, and incorruptible and have the belief that nothing can harm them. These beliefs make adolescents to engage in many strange behaviours like pre-marital sex, alcoholism and drug abuse. However engaging in these acts have a potential to affect their learning and learning output since the mind is divided between concentrations on studies and engaging in the behaviours identified. Thus the adolescence crisis could have likely impact on girl's achievement if proper education through guidance and counselling is not offered to girls in this transitional period of life.

School characteristics as Determinants of Girls Academic Performance

At the school level, some school characteristics work together to lower or enhance the performance of girls in schools. Among such factors identified in literature are the attitudes/behaviour of teachers in promoting girls learning, quantity and quality of teachers, discipline, school and academic emphasis of the school, sexual harassment in schools and the general school environment (Akinsola, 2010; Nisar, Mahmood and Dogar, 2017).

On the quality of teachers as a school variable, Akinsola (2010) finds a positive and significant relationship among quantity and quality of teachers and students' academic performance. This results shows that teachers competency and adequacy is a panacea for attainment of educational goals and objectives. Ajayi (2014) avers that both school quality and match quality determine student outcomes. Ajayi (2014) used a selection on observables approach and regression discontinuity design in a study on whether school quality improve student performance with evidence from Ghana, and found students admitted to more selective schools (high quality) are more likely to stay in the same school and complete on time, but demonstrate only marginal improvements in overall completion rates and examination performance. However, the performance of girl's is mostly affected when quality of teaching is compromised.

Mohammed (2015) finds teachers attitudes towards girls to have a negative effect on their learning outcomes. Cultural beliefs that position women/girls as restricted in roles and expectations in the household are sometimes reflected in the school system through teachers' belief and treatment of girls in the school. Some teacher's belief boys are more capable of engaging in certain field of study and these tend to manifest in their teaching practice. Some of these teacher attitudes and belief about the girl child have cultural bearing as there are beliefs that girls have less thinking and intelligence capacities which some teachers translate into the classroom making girls to be passive participants. Effective learning requires teachers to engage learners as active participants and not spectators or passive participants.

The gender composition of teaching staff is found to have influence on girl performance (Mohammed, 2015). The presence of female teaching staff in a school have the potential to inspire girls to learn and aim high as they serve as role models to the girls. The availability of female mentors and role models influences performance of girls (Mohammed, 2015). The author assessed that most of the schools were dominated by male teachers and the students lacked role models in schools and even at home leading to low self-esteem and reflecting low grades in examinations.

School climate is also a significant predictor of academic achievement of students (Azigwe, 2015; Nisar, Mahmood and Dogar, 2017). Azigwe (2015) finds good school climate leading to better study habits of students and hence better academic achievement of students, while poor school climate cause poor study habits of students and low academic achievement of students. A related factor to school climate which affect academic performance of girls is sexual harassment within the school environment. This factor creates a hostile environment for girls' effective learning. Some research have identified sexual harassment as major factor that affects girls learning and learning outcomes (Kimondo, 2013; Rwegarisa, 2017). Kimondo (2013) for instance report of girls in secondary schools

Teachers and Students Perception of Factors Influencing Girls Performance in WASSCE; The Case of a Girl Senior High School

suffering sexual abuse from the male teachers, colleagues and male members of the society. These acts of males in the school tend to affect girls schooling and performance as some drop out or are not motivated to learn.

In general several factors have been identified as determinates of girls success or failure rate in examination particularly at the secondary school level. These are broadly categorized into home background related, student attributes or personal characteristics, and school related factors.

METHODOLOGY

The study adapted a qualitative research approach using the case of a school. This study used the descriptive case study based on outcomes by providing narratives of the case (Yin, 2009 cited in Cohen et al, 2018). Since the current study seeks to examine the factors perceived by teachers and past students to be accounting for the performance of girls in final examination of SHS, the researchers find this approach appropriate. The choice of the research design is basically informed by the nature of the research issue. Accordingly, interviews were administered to teachers who have taught final year students and have had experience in preparing candidate group for the final examination. Past students who pass through the school with experience of the school and the final examination are also included in the study.

The study purposively selected fifteen (15) teachers who have taught final year students due to their experience in handling final year students and fifteen (15) past students. The past students (old girls) are former students of the school who completed the school between 2017 and 2019. The data was collected by means of face to face interviews with the teachers. However, the past (students) girls were interviewed through telephone calls using snow balling where one or two old girls were contacted and they in turn identified and gave contact numbers of their colleagues to be interviewed. The old students based on their experience in the school final examination, had a clear idea of what contributed to their success or inability to succeed.

The perceived factors accounting for the performance level were analyze descriptively using themes that emerged from the responses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the study are presented and discussed according to the research questions. The first research question sort to examine the perceived factors that contribute to girls' success in WASCE. This question was addressed with teachers, and past students' responses. The question asked participants to state three major factors that accounted for students' success in the final examination. The response ranged from varied school related factors to student background factors, students characteristics and other contextual factors.

Students Factors Accounting for Success in WASSCE

Individual issues were the most common explanatory factors among all other factors identified. Factors that enhance success of girls in WASSCE involve students own efforts in learning, attitudes towards studies, self-discipline and determination. Among all the past girls interviewed, the general consensus was that student's own effort in learning played a leading role in their passing of WASSCE. Out of the fifteen (15) past students interviewed, ten (10) had their needed passes (qualifying grades of A1-C6 in three cores and three electives subjects) of their choice of programme of study in one siting of the school examinations, while the other five (5) had some challenges in qualifying for higher education using the school final examination. All the old girls interviewed attributed level of success to the effort put in learning towards the examination. In other words the effort put in place by the candidate while preparing for the examination enhances the individual girls' success. This gives the implication that, those girls who did their best in terms of putting maximum effort in learning, were mostly successful while those who 'lazy' about often struggle to get the necessary grade point. In line with this, one old student respondent had this to say; *'I did not learn much that is why I could not make my grades in the school final examination'*.

Teacher responses also identified positive attitude of girls towards studies, self-discipline and determination as key factors determining success in the final examination. The explanation given indicates that those students who took their studies serious and put in the best effort in studying in most instances are able to obtain the necessary grades in WASSCE. The opposite is the contrary. In effect, teacher's responses on the key students' factor influencing the success level in WASSCE centered on self-discipline and determination to succeed. Thus the teacher responses on individual student factors correspond with the old students responds. This findings is affirmed by Ampofo and Osei-Owusu (2015) that student's academic ambition and effort are the main determinants of academic performance.

Teachers and Students Perception of Factors Influencing Girls Performance in WASSCE; The Case of a Girl Senior High School

Equally, group studies were identified as one practice that helped some of the girls to make their grades. A good number of old students pointed to encouragement from some teachers to engage in group studies that helped a lot in their learning efforts. In relation to this, one old student had this to say.

“Learning from my colleagues help me a lot to obtain some of the passes. I had difficulty in understanding what is taught in class, but my friend was good and she help to make things clearer for me. If it had not be her and other colleagues the passes I got would not have been possible”

Teacher Factors enhancing Girls Success

All past students interviewed, identified the role of teaching in their passing of WASSCE. These were of the view that the teaching in the school was generally good except some few teachers who did not play their roles effectively in helping them to learn and pass their examination. Even those who did not make their results at once acknowledge the teachers did their best but it was left for the individual students to do their part.

The past students indicated that some teachers helped a lot by providing guidance to them on how to effectively learn, encourage them to do group learning as well as the use of pass questions to help them understand the nature of the final examination and the best ways of answering questions in their respective subjects. Words of encouragement coupled with effective teaching by teachers, were identified as helpful to girls success in the final examination. Respondents (teachers and past students) identified quality and quantity of teaching, teacher dedication and teacher guidance were relevant for students' success. The school is acknowledged as having qualified and dedicated teachers. The teacher quality and quantity was collaborated with background information gathered from the school. For teacher qualification the data showed that out of the total teaching staff strength of 101 teachers as of 2019/2020 academic calendar, 25 of the teachers were professionally trained with master's degree, and 74 were professional trained teachers with first degree and only 2 were nonprofessionals. Going by this data, it means the school is well staffed with qualified teachers and it is expected that their output should be good enough to reflect the staff qualification.

The teacher quality was further supported by teachers' responses totaling 10 teachers (70%) emphasize the availability of qualified and dedicated staff as school related factor that enhanced the passing of the students in the final examination. This findings are supported by Akinsola (2010) and Ajayi (2014) that quality and quantity of teaching are important variables that enhances students learning and achievement. For girls in particular quality of teaching is a key factor in enhancing their learning outcomes whereby Ajayi (2014) opines that girls suffer most and may drop out of school when quality of teaching is poor or compromised. Therefore, the quality of teaching when is at its best offers the chances for girls to learn and achieve better.

School Factors Enhancing Girls Success in WASSCE

For the school factors that accounted for success of girls in WASSCE, the old students' responses captured issues such as good teachers in the school, school discipline, scheduling of routine school activities and conducive environment. These factors were identified as relevant in enhancing girls' success in WASSCE. Scheduling of school activities according to them created an orderly environment that helped them to order their lives and learn. The indication is that guidelines for students' daily activities like timing for classes, preps, waking up time inter alia, provided definite direction for individual engagement in school activities that ensures effective use of time which actually help them to effectively learn and further reflect in better learning outcomes.

The school discipline was equally identified by past students as helpful to them to put up the right behaviour in the school. Some respondent indicated that many of them were compelled to do what is right due to the fear of the sanctions for misbehavior and that really helped them to be better and attain the purpose for coming to the school.

Among other major factors identified by both teachers and past students were conducive school environment for learning, availability of teaching-learning materials and provision of career counselling to students. However on a low side, school vision for academic excellence, good management of school were acknowledged as contributory factors. The findings in this study are confirmed by Akinsola (2010); Nisar, Mahmood and Dogar (2017) studies. These other studies identifies school discipline, academic emphasis of the school, and the school environment as key in promoting learning of students.

For background factors and other external factors only a few participants (past students) mentioned parental support and encouragement, but the teachers did not point to this factor as having an influence on girls passing of WASSCE. This means the success of students depends much on individual factors and school related factors.

Teachers and Students Perception of Factors Influencing Girls Performance in WASSCE; The Case of a Girl Senior High School

The second research question sought to identify factors that account for girls' inability to perform well in WASSCE.

In addressing this research questions the issues that emanated from the respondents in the school related to students' attitudes/behaviour, teacher and teaching related issues, school factors, media use, family background factors, peer influence and others. Most of the girls when asked about their year group performance did admit most of their colleagues could make the qualifying grades in the first WASSCE sitting at the school level and some had to re-write the papers through remedial classes and studies. But they could not give any definite answer as to how well they performed as a group except on individual accounts on how they fared in the examinations.

Student Attitudes and behaviour

From the interviews with both teachers and old students, most of the accounts given on the factors limiting girls from excelling in WASSCE were related to the individual factors. Negative attitudes towards learning was identified as a key factor accounting for most girl's inability to obtain the needed grades in the school examinations. These negative attitudes borders around laziness, misuse of time, procrastination and unpreparedness of girls to learn. In one past student narration, she admitted that she did not learn hard and that caused her failure. This particular past student could not make the needed grades when she sat for the final examination at the school level but had to do remedial classes for some few years before getting the required grades to enter University. The respondents acknowledged that most of their colleagues at the time, engaged less in effective studies as they rather preferred entertainment to learning. They also indicated that some students procrastinate a lot. The argument is that many of such students think of the availability of time and so they do not learn adequately before the examination, and so majority are caught in the situation where they enter for the final examination and realized that they have limited knowledge to address the questions put before them.

Laziness on the part of students and some teachers do affect the level of success. This was identified as a major factor by the teachers, as well as the past students. Accordingly, most students are described as being simply lazy and are not ready to put in the minimum best in learning which tend to affect their chances of passing. On the attitudes of girls influencing performance in examination, studies by Mubeen et al, (2013) and Kyei, Apam and Nokoe (2011) attest to this with indication of negative attitudes being demonstrated by girls resulting in lower performance against boys who had a better attitudes towards learning.

Responses from majority of the teachers' interviewed, pointed out that the major issue lies with the quality of the students admitted. Here the reference is made in relation to the prior level of student's achievement before Senior High School. Respondents highlighted that most of the students admitted, had weak foundations from the junior high schools with a situation where some are not able to cope with academic work at the senior high school level. Thus, the quality of students admitted were many of such students who had weak grades in the basic school certificate examination which happens to be a major factor affecting the school performance. The respondents showed some of these students are unable to read nor write effectively, coupled with the policy of no repetition and withdrawal on poor academic performance, the school is forced to produce wholesale students and that is a major contributory factor for the poor academic performance.

School Factors

Other factors emanating from the school covered several issues which includes sexual harassment from male teachers, the school not compelling students to learn, inability of some teachers to teach effectively for students to understand and negative attitudes of some teachers towards work.

The school not compelling students to learn is seen as a major issue affecting girl's performance, since a lot of them idle around or engage colleagues in conversation and noise making during preps which disrupt a lot of them from learning effectively. This factor borders on strict adherence to study time and its effective use in enhancing students learning. Even though the time is created for students to have personal studies, the respondents indicated that many of them do not use it properly. Three past students lamented that some teachers even facilitate this by engaging students in conversation during that time which disrupt others from learning.

On sexual engagement with teachers' four (4) of the past girls expressed worry about how some male teachers interfere with the prep time for individual studies and learning. The narration given indicates that some male teachers do come in the night to classes and engage with some students in conversation distracting other students from learning. A male teacher's response collaborated the students' accounts, where the teacher stated that one of the factors accounting for girls' inability to pass WASSCE is the harassment of student girls by some 'unscrupulous teachers'.

Teachers and Students Perception of Factors Influencing Girls Performance in WASSCE; The Case of a Girl Senior High School

Parental/Family Background Factors

The old students' responses indicated that family background factors like poverty, parental inability to support girls schooling/neglect affect them most in their learning. Many accounts were given where girls mindset are distracted from studies due to lack of basic needs. One past girl said, *I did not have basic textbooks to help me learn and even things like gari-(a locally produced staple food) and other provisions that most students come to school with, were difficult for me to come by.* The home background factors identified usually reflect in girls' school performance through parental neglect, inadequate provision of support for girls' education due to low socio-economic status or cultural values like not valuing girls education as necessary and lack of involvement of parents in monitoring or supporting the school to guide girls in their learning and development. Parental neglect or lack of support from parents affects their learning and the outcome. The parental neglect affects them mostly through lack of educational materials like textbooks, being able to afford the basic necessities of life like sanitary pads, soap. These were said to affect their concentration and hence the output of learning. The findings here are supported by (Chinyoko, 2013; Chinyoka & Naidu, 2014) who shows that poverty and material deprivation affects girls learning and learning outcomes.

Societal expectation of girls was also identified as a factor that contribute to girl's level of performance. According to the narration from the former students, they explained that some girls had mindset that education to a higher level is not their portion especially most girls from Islamic background tend to tune their minds to marriage and eagerly anticipate to complete school and marry, and some of them actually marry immediately after completing their secondary education. In another narration, it was captured that the societal expectation of girls also come from families where some families think girls do not need to obtain higher education and subsequently, such families rather pressurize girls at this level to marry and when the girls disobey parental orders their parents tend to neglect them. This is largely backed by cultural practice of encouraging early marriage from families. Some girls are said to suffer parental neglect based on this if they defy family pressure for marriage and continue to advance in education. This assertion align with a teachers response who think that the girls are not determined to pass the examination as they are content with any grade that they attain. These findings are further corroborated by Yindol (2015) study that assessed the factors influencing Girl Child participation in Senior High School Education in the Bolgatanga Municipality of Ghana. With findings indicating girl child access and participation in Senior High School Education is influenced by bad cultural practices such as exchange marriage, betrothal, early marriages, and poverty coupled with parental attitude and perceptions of educating the Girl Child. The family background factors identified in this study are seen as major barriers not only to girls educational attainment as evidence from Yindal (2015) study but they equally manifest in performance in examination limiting the chances of these girls social mobility out of poverty. The students in this part of the country are mostly from poverty stricken areas, however the findings of this study suggest that less chances of advancing in education which is hailed as panacea to poverty.

Other Contextual Factors

Other factors that are seen as major factors influencing the low performance are peer influence, overreliance on external help during examination, use of social media and engagement in sexual relationship with boys/men.

Peer influence was identified by both teachers and past students. Six (7) of the old girls and eight (8) teachers interviewed identified the peer influence as the critical factor limiting girls inability to acquire the necessary grades in the schools examination. The past students indicted that majority of the girls were being influenced by their peers to engage in bad conduct like not studying, lazing/idling about, engaging in sexual activities, playing truancy in school without parental and teachers knowledge. Some of the respondents indicated that some girls who fall victims in most cases will report to school very late by going to stay with men friends for some time before reporting to school or finding ways and means to always stay away from school without the knowledge of the school authorities and parents. Due to these engagements, some of such students who fall prey to peer pressure end up coming out with poor grades even though some might have been very good students.

Engagement in boy/girl sexual relation and peer influence were identified to be closely linked. These two factors were on the high side. Engagement in sexual relationship with boys has been pointed out by Amusala (2019) as being intense at adolescence and mostly tend to conflict in some ways for high school girls which often leads to poor academic performance. Amusala (2019) attributes levels of intelligence or patterns of thought to be greatly influenced at adolescence, and girls' attention mostly turn to focused on the opposite sex and concern with physical appearance. The challenges of adolescence crisis propel some girls to engage in intimate relationship with boys/males. Responses from the past students confirm this assertion as eight (8) of the respondents indicated the adolescence stage affects them most. They explain that engagement in these kind of relationship often compromise the attention on

Teachers and Students Perception of Factors Influencing Girls Performance in WASSCE; The Case of a Girl Senior High School

studies as girls tend to concentrate on the boys rather than their studies. This they said is exacerbated by peer influence, parental neglect and lack of guidance on their conduct at this stage of their live.

Social media used is one other major factor that came from girls as well as the teachers. Respondents indicated the use of mobile phones were not helpful to students in their studies as most of them used these phones to chat and converse with their boyfriends particularly in the night to the detriment of their studies.

An equally important happening in relation to the examination is the overreliance on external help known as “apoo”-the leakage of examination questions. This factor was captured by teachers and the past students. In one narration an old girl had this to say;

“At the time of the examinations some of my colleagues suffered because they relied on ‘apoo’ from a certain guy who promised to give questions that were sure banker to land in the exams, which they contributed money and paid for. But when they entered for the exams they were swift as none of those questions came and they struggled to write as they had learn nothing besides what was given in the ‘apoo’. This should have accounted for some of my colleagues not getting their papers”.

In summary, varied factors diminished the ability of girls to excel in the final examination of senior high school which is a critical stage of girls at this level. The outcome of this level of education determine to a greater extend the progress of girls to higher levels of education and even job placed to a limited scale.

Conclusion

This study is a descriptive narrative of factors influencing the success and failure of girls in their final examination of secondary schooling using the case of a single school. The study explored the perception of past students who went through the school and completed with the experience of the school and examination alongside sample teachers who had experience of handling students to write the WASSCE.

The findings showed factors that determine the success of girls in the final examination were varied. The study finds school related and individual student factors accounting for girls success, while several factors including school related, individual factors, peer influence, social media usage and sexual relationship explains the low pass rate of girls in WASSCE. In all, the study finds individual ambition and efforts, self- discipline and determination on the part of the students defining success level together with the quantity and quality of teaching coupled with encouragement from teachers, conducive environment, and school discipline.

However, major factors identified to be limiting the ability of girls in acquiring the necessary grades in WASSCE ranging from school, individual, family background, peer and social media influence. The findings point to the need for school authorities, parents and other stakeholders to pay critical attention to these factors and work a way out to address them. This should be a priority area for all actors concerned with girls’ education and women empowerment to design strategies that will enhance learning and learning outcomes instead of concentrating all efforts on only educational attainment.

Conclusions should however, be interpreted cautiously since they refer to a particular context and time and may not be generalized to all situations, their implications are very relevant for the design of educational-policy measures and school practices.

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Teachers and Students Perception of Factors Influencing Girls Performance in WASSCE; The Case of a Girl Senior High School

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