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The Influence of Parental Involvement on the Academic Work of Pupils: A Study of Three Selected Junior High Schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of parental involvement on the academic work of Junior High School pupils. The descriptive research design was employed for the study. A sample size of 90 was used from three selected JHS in the OLA circuit of the Cape Coast District in the Central Region of Ghana namely OLA Presbyterian, Imam Khomeini and Apewosika Junior High Schools. The purposive, stratified and simple random sampling procedures were used. The research instrument used was questionnaire. The study revealed that majority of the respondents' parents were involved in their academic work. The involvement included encouraging their children to do well in school, making sure that they go to school, and attending PTA meetings. Again, it was discovered that when parents showed interest in their children's education, it made them (children) feel very happy and confident. The findings also indicated that parental involvement in children's education had a positive impact on the academic work and even the emotional state of pupils. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that parents be educated more on the need to visit their children in school. This will help them to monitor their children's progress and provide an avenue for interaction with teachers on ways to improve the academic performance of pupils. Pupils should be motivated as much as possible by their parents and teachers. Finally, parents should take more interest in the educational activities of their children.

Introduction

Students' perception of parental involvement can be seen as an internalization of the parents' values (Marchant, Paulson, & Rothlisberg, 2001). Students internalize their parents' educational values and incorporate them into their own set of values. A positive parent-child relationship is believed to influence the degree of a student's motivation and the extent to which the child internalizes the parents' values (Spera, 2005). From the above, it is clear that children try to fuse their parents' values into their own, therefore when parents have positive educational values, it may reflect in the children's attitudes to academic work.

According to Ngeow (1999), three major factors of parental involvement in the education of their children are parents' beliefs about what is important and permissible for them to do with and on behalf of their children, the extent to which parents believe that they can have a positive influence on their children's education and parents' perceptions of how their children and school want them to be involved. Parental involvement is multidimensional

in nature. Multiple dimensions, including parental expectations, parent-child communication, as well as parent participation in school activities, all fall within the scope of parental involvement.

Parents' active involvement with their child's education at home and in school brings great rewards and can have a significant impact on children's lives. According to a research by Kohl, Lengua and McMahon (2000), children of parents who are involved in their academic work are absent less frequently, behave better, do better academically from pre-school through high school, go farther in school and go to better schools. A research by Marcon (1999) showed that a home environment that encourages learning is even more important than parents' income, education level, or cultural background. By actively participating in their children's education at home and in school, parents send some critical messages to their children; they demonstrate their interest in their activities and reinforce the idea that school is important.

Davis-Kean (2005) recommended some specific ways for parents to become more involved in their child's education. For instance, at home, parents are to read to their children, help them to organize their time, limit television viewing on school nights, and check homework every night. At school, parents should meet with a teacher or other school staff member to determine where, when and how help is needed and where their interests fit in. When parents contribute effort and time, they have the opportunity to interact with teachers, administrators, and other parents. They can learn first-hand about the daily activities and the social culture of the school, both of which help them understand what their child's life is like.

Parents often become involved in their children's education through homework. Whether children do homework at home or work on it during the school day, homework can be a powerful tool for letting parents and other adults know what the child is learning; giving children and parents a reason to talk about what is going on at school; and giving teachers an opportunity to hear from parents about children's learning (Davis-Kean, 2005). According to research by Hoover-Dempse et al (2001), parents choose to become involved in homework because they believe they should be involved and because they perceive that their involvement is invited, expected, and valued by school personnel. The more specific and knowledgeable parents can be in offering feedback and reinforcement, the stronger their impact on learning and student self-efficacy will be.

A consistent predictor of children's academic achievement and social adjustment is parent expectations of the child's academic attainment and satisfaction with their child's education at school (Williams & Chavkin, 1989). Parents of high-achieving students set higher standards for their children's educational activities than parents of low-achieving students. According to McLoyd (1998), studies show that a sensitive, warm, and responsive type of parenting and engaging in play activities with young children boost their social and emotional development, communication skills, and ability to focus. McLoyd (1989) noted that doing arts and crafts with children, reading to them, showing them how to write words, and using a more complicated vocabulary around them also aid their literacy and language development.

Statement of the Problem

Academic performance of children is affected by a multitude of factors. Some of these factors are intrinsic such as the intelligence level while others are extrinsic such as the home

and school environment. These dimensions and their factors are not only very large in number but also their influence is complex in nature. The role of parents in their children's education has long been recognized as a significant factor in educational success and school improvement (Epstien, 1996). Specifically, children whose parents are more involved in their education have higher levels of academic performance than children whose parents are involved to a lesser degree. When children receive support from the family at home, it helps them in their ability to acquire academic skills (Jones & Farah, 1995).

Achievement is not only about what goes on once students get into the classroom. It is also about what happens to them before and after school. Parents have crucial roles to play to make sure that every child becomes a higher achiever. Parental involvement is defined in this study as expectations for performance, verbal encouragement or interactions regarding homework, direct reinforcement and general academic guidance or support. Today, it can be observed that some parents seem so engrossed in a lot of economic activities that they do not seem to have enough time for their children. The situation according to the researchers could have a negative effect on the academic success of students.

According to Hill and Craft (2003), while parental involvement has been found to be related to increased academic performance, the specific mechanisms through which parental involvement exerts its influence on a child's academic performance are not yet fully understood. It is therefore necessary to examine various mechanisms by which parents can be or are involved in their children's learning. These mechanisms include the nature of parental involvement and how parents' level of education affects their involvement in their children's academic work.

Research Questions

1. What is the nature of parental involvement in academic work of pupils?
2. How often do parents involve themselves in their children's academic work?
3. Do parents' levels of education influence their involvement in the academic work of pupils?
4. What is the impact of parental involvement on academic work of pupils?

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive research design. Ninety pupils were selected for the study through the purposive and simple random sampling techniques. The respondents were selected from three JHS in the OLA circuit of the Cape Coast District namely OLA Presbyterian, Imam Khomeini and Apewosika Junior High Schools. Thirty pupils from only JHS Three were selected from each school. This was because they had spent a longer time in school than the pupils in JHS One and Two and therefore their responses would represent a better view of the influence of parental involvement on their academic work.

The research instrument used was a questionnaire purposefully designed for this study. The overall reliability co-efficient after the pilot testing was 0.80 using the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient. The questionnaires were hand-delivered to the respondents in the three selected schools. The respondents were briefed on how to respond to the items and also given the opportunity to ask questions to clarify issues they did not understand. The questionnaires were collected after they were duly completed.

Results and Discussions

The research questions were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. The number of respondents was 90; 45 (50%) were males while 45 (50%) were females.

Research Question One: What is the nature of parental involvement in academic work of pupils?

Table 1 displays the results.

Table 1: Nature of Parental Involvement

Statement	True	%	Not True	%	Don't Know	%
My parents always say 'well done' when I do well in school	82	91.1	7	7.8	1	1.1
My parents have been coming to my school to look at my work	52	57.8	38	42.2	0	0
My parents believe that my education is important	89	98.9	1	1.1	0	0
My parents tell me I can make it in life	80	88.9	9	10.0	1	1.1
My parents tell me I am brilliant	77	85.6	7	7.8	6	5.6
My parents always make sure that I go to school	88	97.8	1	1.1	1	1.1
My parents have been encouraging me to study hard	88	97.8	2	2.2	0	0
My parents want me to top my class	84	91.3	6	6.5	2	2.2
My parents want me to go farther in school	83	92.2	6	6.7	1	1.1
My parents are interested in my activities in school	72	80.0	8	8.9	10	11.1
My parents buy me gifts when I do well in my school work	58	64.4	29	32.2	3	3.3
My parents help me in my readings	39	43.3	45	50.0	6	6.7
My parents discuss the books and stories I read with me	38	42.2	47	52.2	5	5.6
My parents help me to organize my time well	66	73.3	20	22.2	4	4.4
My parents limit me on watching television after school	41	45.6	46	51.1	3	3.3
My parents check homework every day after school	60	66.7	27	30.0	3	3.3
My parents often talk to me about what goes on in school	59	65.6	29	32.2	2	2.2
My parents always attend Parent Teacher Association meetings	79	87.8	11	12.2	0	0

From Table 1, it can be observed that on some of the items, majority of the respondents agreed to the statements (that is, over 55 respondents out of 90). These statements include parents always saying 'well done' when respondents did well in school,

parents' belief that education is important and telling respondents that they could make it in life' and also that 'you am a brilliant child.' Also majority of the respondents agreed that their parents always made sure that they went to school, parents encourage them to study hard, help them to organize their time well, check their homework every day after school, often discuss what goes on in school and always attend Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. In relation with these findings, research by Marcon (1999) shows that a home environment that encourages learning is even more important than parents' income, education level, or cultural background. By actively participating in children's education at home and in school, parents send some critical messages to their children; demonstrate their interest in their children's activities and reinforce the idea that school is important. It is obvious from the above findings that some parents show interest in their children's academic work. This is good because according to Marcon, when parents show interest in their children's academic work, they send strong positive signals to them that education is a priority and therefore must be taken seriously.

The researchers considered it important to note that on the issue of parents going to their wards' school to look at their children's work and parents buying gifts when their children do well in school work, 52 and 58 of the respondents representing 57.8% and 64.4% respectively agreed that it was true while 38 and 29 respondents representing 42.2 and 32.2% respectively said it was not true. This finding shows that although some parents go to their wards' school to monitor their children's progress, a good number (38 out of 90) of the respondents' parents do not show enough commitment to pupils' school work. Also although some parents buy gifts for their children when they do well in school work, a good number (29 out of 90) of the respondents' parents do not buy them gifts when they do well in school work. The researchers considered this unfortunate because buying gifts for children when they do well in school is a way of motivating them. According to Cassidy and Lynn (1991) motivation and parents' influence has a crucial role on the educational attainment of students. Eccles, Wigfield and Schiefele (1998) noted that students' motivation for learning is generally regarded as one of the most critical elements in which they can improve their performance and can put the students in the way of better learning.

Also from Table 1, on the issues of parents helping in pupils' readings, discussing books and stories read and limiting them on watching television after school, a relative majority (50.0%, 52.2%, 51.1% respectively) of the respondents disagreed to experiencing parental involvement. In relation with this finding, Davis-Kean (2005) recommended some specific ways for parents to become more involved in their children's education by reading to children to help increase children's chances of reading success, discussing books and stories read by children, helping children to organize their time and limiting television viewing after school. Probably some of the parents did not show much parental involvement because they did not consider it important. In relation with this finding, Ngeow (1999), noted that there are three major factors of parental involvement in the education of their children. These are: parents' beliefs about what is important, necessary and permissible for them to do with and on behalf of their children; the extent to which parents believe that they can have a positive influence on their children's education; and parents' perceptions of how their children and school want them to be involved.

Research Question Two: How often do parents involve themselves in their children’s academic work?

Table 2 displays the results.

Table 2: Regularity of Parents Involvement in Pupils’ Work

Statement	Very Often	%	Sometimes	%	Never	%
How often do your parents visit you in school?	15	16.7	55	61.1	20	22.2
How often do your parents encourage you in school work?	43	47.8	38	42.2	9	10.0
How often do your parents encourage you to study hard?	71	78.9	19	21.1	0	0
Do your parents tell you they want you to be top in your class?	59	65.6	26	28.9	5	5.6
How often do your parents come to school to look at your work?	15	16.7	55	61.1	20	22.2
Do your parents show interest in your activities in school?	47	52.2	31	34.4	12	13.3
Do your parents give you gifts when you do well in school?	36	40.0	30	33.3	24	22.2
How often do your parents help you in doing your homework?	28	31.1	28	31.1	34	37.8
How often do parents discuss the books you read with you?	19	21.1	28	31.1	43	47.8
Do your parents help you to organize your time for studies?	44	48.9	32	35.6	14	15.6
When you have not finished with your homework, do your parents prevent you from watching television?	52	57.8	20	22.2	18	20.0
How often do your parents check your homework after school?	33	36.7	32	35.6	25	27.8
How often do your parents discuss what goes on in school with you?	31	34.4	37	41.1	22	24.4
When you have not finished with your homework, do your parents allow you to watch television after school?	23	25.6	25	27.8	42	46.7
How often do your parents attend PTA meetings?	56	62.2	30	33.3	4	3.7
Do your parents tell you they do not care if you fail in school?	10	11.1	12	13.3	68	75.6
Do your parents allow you to do anything you want after school?	21	23.3	16	17.8	53	58.9
How often do your parents encourage you to learn at home?	58	64.4	28	31.1	4	4.4

A careful look at Table 2 shows that parents showed a lot of interest in their children’s academic life on some of the items. For example, majority (more than 57%) of the respondents responded ‘very often’ on the issues of how often parents encourage them to

study hard, parents' encouragement to be top in class, learning at home, attending PTA meetings and their parents preventing pupils from watching television when they have not finished with their homework. Only a few of them responded 'never' on these items. Also on the issue of how often parents go to visit pupils in school and to look at their work, majority (61.1%) of the respondents answered 'sometimes'. In addition, majority (75.6% & 58.9% respectively) of the respondents answered 'never' to issues on whether parents tell pupils they do not care if they fail in school and whether parents allow them to do anything they want to do after school.

With some of the items, the respondents expressed very varying ideas as none of the options seemed to represent the majority. For example on the issue of whether parents give pupils gifts when they do well in school, 36 (40.0%) answered 'very often', 30 (33.3%) responded 'sometimes' and 24 (22.2%) answered 'never'. More of such cases were the items on how often parents help pupils in doing their homework, whether parents help to organize pupils' study time, how often parents check homework after school, and how often parents discuss what goes on in school with pupils. This probably means that some parents make efforts to get involved or assist their children in their academic work while others act unconcerned.

In relation with the findings, Hammer (2003) opined that parents' involvement is as important as what goes on in the school. Other important factors include parental check in their children's education, how much parents read to young children, how much television children were allowed to watch and how often students changed schools. Accordingly if children tend to watch the television more during their study time, then relatively the academic achievement will be less. If parents observe each and every activity of the children, appreciate the educational activities and remove the other 'useless' activities then they can improve the academic achievement of students. This shows that there must be a balance in all the factors that affect the academic work of students.

Research Question Three: Do parents' levels of education influence their involvement in the academic work of pupils?

To answer this research question, the researchers found out from the respondents' what their parents' educational levels were. Table 3 displays the results.

Table 3: Educational Background of Parents

Level of Education	Father		Mother	
	No.	%	No.	%
None	14	15.6	25	27.8
JHS	30	33.3	42	46.7
SHS	16	17.8	9	10.0
Tertiary	30	33.3	14	15.6
Total	90	100	90	100

From Table 3, 14 (15.6%) of the respondents' fathers had no formal education while 25 (27.8%) of the respondents said their mothers had no formal education. Thirty of the fathers of respondents were JHS graduates or graduates of tertiary institutions. On the other hand, with the mothers, 42 (46.7%) of the respondents reported their mothers were JHS graduates while 14 (15.6%) said their mothers were graduates of tertiary institutions. With regard to

SHS, 16 (17.8%) of the respondents said their fathers' level of education was SHS while 9 (10.0%) of their mothers had received secondary education.

Comparing the educational background of the fathers and mothers of the respondents, it can be concluded that most of the fathers were JHS and Tertiary graduates. Majority of the mothers were JHS graduates. In relation with these findings, several researchers (Davis-Kean, 2005; Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2002; Nagin & Tremblay, 2001) have mentioned parental educational level as an important predictor of children's educational and behavioural outcomes. Davis-Kean (2005) noted that there are positive relations between parents' levels of education and parents' expectations for their children's success. He suggested that the more highly educated parents were the more actively they encouraged their children to develop high expectations of their own. Also Phillips (1998) indicated that parental education, parental involvement, parental interest and social economic status have an impact on student achievement.

It can therefore be concluded that in reference to research question three, majority of the fathers of respondents were JHS graduates or graduates of tertiary institutions. On the other hand, with the mothers, the majority were JHS graduates. It must be noted that the results from research question two on the regularity of parents' involvement in their children's academic work showed that most of the parents in the sample showed a lot of interest in their children's academic performance. Perhaps this was because most of the respondents' parents had some formal education.

Research Question Four: What is the impact of parental involvement on academic achievement of pupils?

Table 4 displays the results.

Table 4: Impact of Parental Involvement on Academic Achievement of Pupils

Statement	True	%	Not True	%	Don't know	%
When my parents show interest in my education I feel very happy	89	98.9	1	1.1	-	-
I do well in school because my parents are very supportive.	79	87.8	7	7.8	4	4.4
My marks have improved because my parents help me in my studies	56	62.9	25	28.1	8	9.0
I am always at school because my parents will not allow me to stay at home	79	87.8	9	10.0	2	2.2
I do not do well in school because my parents are not supportive	17	18.9	63	70.0	10	11.1
My parents motivate me so I do well in school	80	88.9	6	6.7	4	3.7
My marks have improved though my parents do not help me in my studies	35	38.9	45	50.0	10	11.1
I feel confident in myself	74	82.2	11	12.2	5	5.6

because of my parents' support							
I learn better because my parents encourage me	74	82.2	15	16.7	1	1.1	
My parents do not encourage me and this makes me sad	22	24.4	60	66.7	8	8.9	
I want to do well in school to make my parents proud	82	91.1	5	5.6	3	3.3	
I want to be a great person like my mother or father	71	78.9	17	18.9	2	2.2	

From Table 4 it can be seen that parental involvement in children's education, has an impact on academic work and even the emotional state of pupils. This is because, 89 (98.9%) of the respondents answered 'true' to the statement, 'when my parents show interest in my education I feel very happy'; only one respondent answered 'not true' to that. Seventy-nine (87.8%) of the respondents noted that they do well in school because their parents are very supportive, 7 (7.8%) of the respondents said it was not true that they did well because their parents were supportive. Majority of the respondents (74 representing 82.2%) said it was true that they felt confident in themselves because of their parents' support and also learnt better because of their parents' encouragement. A few of the respondents responded 'not true' to feeling confident in themselves or learning better because of their parents' support (12.2% and 16.7% respectively). Again majority of the respondents (79 representing 87.8%) said they were always in school because their parents would not allow them to stay at home. The researchers considered this to be a good indicator of the positive impact of parental involvement on academic work of pupils.

Again a careful look at Table 4 shows that pupils' marks improved when their parents helped them in their studies. This is because majority of them (that is 56) responded true to the statement. Again 50% of them responded 'not true' to the statement "my marks have improved though my parents do not help me in my studies". Notably a good number of respondents (35 out of 90) said it was true that their marks had improved though their parents did not help in their studies. A few of them could not tell whether their marks had improved because of their parents' help in their studies. In relation with the findings in Table 4, Rose, Gallup and Elam (1997) reported that decades of research show that when parents are involved, students have higher grades, test scores, and graduation rates. They also have better school attendance, increased motivation and better self-esteem.

On the issue of parental involvement improving the emotional well being of pupils, majority of the respondents (82 representing 91.1%) said they would want to do well in school to make their parents proud. Also majority of the respondents considered their parents as role models. This is because 71 respondents representing 78.9% said they would want to be great persons like their mothers or fathers. This is probably an indicator that pupils were happy with the care they received from their parents and so may want to be great parents too in future.

In relation with the finding that majority of the respondents (74 out of 90) responded that they learn better because of their parents' encouragement, Gottfried (1990) noted that there is a positive correlation between motivation and achievement. Specifically young students with higher academic intrinsic motivation had significantly higher achievement and intellectual performance.

Also, 80 (88.9%) responded 'true', 6 (6.7%) answered 'not true' while 4 (3.7%) responded 'don't know' on the issue of parents motivating pupils and thus resulting in good performance. Majority of the respondents (89 representing 98.9%) said their parents showed interest in their education and that made them feel very happy. In relation with this finding, Williams and Chavkin (1989) noted that the more intensely parents are involved, the more beneficial the achievement effects. The more parents participate in schooling, in a sustained way, at every level - in advocacy, decision-making and oversight roles, as fund-raisers and boosters, as volunteers and para-professionals, and as home teachers -- the better for student achievement. It can be concluded that with reference to research question four, there is a positive impact of parental involvement on the academic work of pupils.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that academic work of pupils is enhanced if parents take interest in curricular and co-curricular activities of their children. When parents take interest in the educational activities of their children, the children show the best academic achievement and if parents take less interest in the educational activities of their children, the children may show poor academic achievement. Parents' active involvement with their child's education at home and in school brings great rewards and can have a significant impact on their children's lives.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. It is important for parents to be educated more on the need to visit their children in school. This will help them to monitor their children's progress and provide an avenue for interaction with teachers on ways to improve the academic performance of pupils.
2. Pupils should be motivated as much as possible by their parents and teachers. This can boost the self esteem of pupils and provide help in increasing the educational attainment of the students.
3. Again, it is important for parents to help their children in planning and prioritizing their time. This can be done by parents monitoring the usage of their wards activities after school. For example, if children tend to watch the television more during their study time, then relatively the academic achievement will be less. If parents observe each and every activity of their children, appreciate the educational activities and remove the other 'useless' activities then they can improve the academic achievement of students. Hence, there must be a balance in all the parental factors that affect the academic work of students.
4. PTA meetings should be continually organized in the schools. At such meetings, parents should be given reports on their children's school work and suggestions for improvement should be given to parents.

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