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Barriers to Child Success in School: A Critical Focus on Child Neglect and Academic Performance of Pupils in the Bantama Community in Kumasi, Ghana

ABSTRACT: The child neglect seems to increase students suffering and substantially affect their academic performance. This study aimed to investigate the effect of child neglect on academic performance of JHS (Junior High School) pupil in the Bantama community in Kumasi, Ghana. A cross sectional survey with quantitative methods was conducted with pupils within the Bantama community. A purposive sampling was used to select four community schools: Kookoase JHS, Presbyterian JHS, Bantama Methodist, and Roman Catholic JHS. A simple random sampling was used to select 200 pupils. The common child neglect experienced by pupils was lack of parental supervision, encouragement, and basic necessities. The study found that most pupils lacked educational materials, including books, funds for extra classes, and school uniforms. The study found a significant association between child neglect and academic performance of pupils, such that child neglect positively correlated with poor academic performance ($r = 0.77$; $p = 0.02$). The study findings suggest that pupils experienced child neglect which affects their ability to perform in school. It is recommended that parental contribution in resourcing students with the necessary provisions will improve their academic performance.

KEY WORD: Education; Child Neglect; Junior High School; Academic Performance; Parental Supervision.

RINGKASAN: “Hambatan untuk Sukses Anak di Sekolah: Sorotan Kritis tentang Pengabaian Anak dan Prestasi Akademik Siswa pada Masyarakat Bantama di Kumasi, Ghana”. Mengabaikan anak tampaknya meningkatkan penderitaan para siswa dan secara substansial mempengaruhi prestasi akademik mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pengaruh mengabaikan anak terhadap prestasi akademik siswa SMP (Sekolah Menengah Pertama) pada masyarakat Bantama di Kumasi, Ghana. Sebuah survei silang dengan metode kuantitatif dilakukan terhadap para siswa dalam masyarakat Bantama. Sampel bertujuan digunakan untuk memilih empat sekolah, yakni: SMP Kookoase, SMP Presbyterian, SMP Methodist Bantama, dan SMP Katolik Roma. Sampel acak sederhana digunakan untuk memilih 200 siswa. Pengabaian anak secara umum yang dialami oleh murid adalah kurangnya pengawasan orangtua, dorongan semangat, dan pemenuhan kebutuhan dasar. Studi ini menemukan bahwa sebagian besar siswa tidak memiliki bahan pendidikan, termasuk buku, dana untuk kelas tambahan, dan seragam sekolah. Studi ini menemukan hubungan yang signifikan antara mengabaikan anak dan prestasi akademik siswa, sehingga mengabaikan anak berkorelasi positif dengan prestasi akademik yang buruk ($r = 0.77$; $p = 0.02$). Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa yang mengalami pengabaian mempengaruhi kemampuan mereka dalam unjuk kinerja di sekolah. Disarankan bahwa kontribusi orangtua dalam melengkapi para siswa dengan ketentuan yang diperlukan akan meningkatkan prestasi akademik mereka.

KATA KUNCI: Pendidikan; Mengabaikan Anak; Sekolah Menengah Pertama; Prestasi Akademik; Pengawasan Orangtua.

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INTRODUCTION

Development of a country depends largely on the quality of education available to its citizens (Chimombo, 2005). It is perceived that the building blocks for any true development must accompany the development of capacity and skills of citizen. Hence, formal education remains the vehicle for social-economic development in any society (Lawson, 2005; Akanle, 2007; and Yinusa & Basil, 2008). Formal education is vital in skill formation and development of human capital. Education also plays a role in both technical and attitudinal skill molding. These skills are vital in promoting economic growth at the societal level through increased productivity (Gakusi, 2010).

In this context, L. Wash (2013) also observed that the major aim of education is human capital development, which by extension translates into functional resources in the national development equation (Wash, 2013). Consequently, the prospects for education to impact positively on the lives of individuals as well as enhancing national development cannot be overemphasized. Broad opportunities coupled with improved standard of living, shown by educated people in communities motivate parents and family members to invest in the education of their wards (Anamuah-Mensah, Asabere-Ameyaw & Dennis, 2007; and Maclean & Wilson, 2009).

Hence, it is the hope of every government that every child obtains education so as to have access to paid job and enjoy good standard of living. In view of this, education has been captured in both national and international regulation as a right for every child irrespective of ability (Adejobi *et al.*, 2013). For instance, Ghana has ratified international, regional, and domestic conventions to formally and publicly accept to be bound and commit to promote, protect, and fulfill its obligations in making education accessing to all (Akyeampong, 2010). These frameworks have been adopted with the aim of getting all children the best quality of life and providing them the necessary protections guaranteed within the laws.

Therefore, in Ghanaian societies, education is cherished particularly at basic level, where the child obtains the basic knowledge towards achieving academic success (Abdallah *et al.*,

2014). Societies offer high respect and status to individuals who attained higher education and ensure that such person contribute in diverse ways to the society (Chimombo, 2005). Similarly, education plays an important role in preparing one for adult life as a professional training and mechanism of socialization (Tight, 2002; and Colby, 2003).

Education is central in making vulnerable people productive, assisting them to engage in entrepreneurial activity, and supporting them to respond to market demands. Education can be an agent of change that presents a solid vehicle for transformation and empowerment; and also expand the life prospects of persons with disabilities (Little, 2006; Akyeampong *et al.*, 2007; and Anamuah-Mensah, Asabere-Ameyaw & Dennis, 2007).

Performance of pupils is considered a vital indicator of good schooling. In education, performance is often presented as synonymous with academic achievement or attainment, in carrying out of a task, course, or assignment (DeVooght, McCoy-Roth & Freundlich, 2011). However, the poor performance of pupils at the basic level of education do not only attracted the interest of the general public, but major stakeholders in an attempt to identify factors that influence pupils' performance especially at the basic level (Fallon *et al.*, 2010; and Kemboi, 2013).

In order to overcome challenges in education, government, communities, and other stakeholders express great interest in education through provision of resources, such as human capital and infrastructure. These efforts are engineered to encourage the rate of enrolment and daily attendance in basic schools across the country, so as to realize the objective of the *FCUBE or Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education* (Akyeampong *et al.*, 2007; and Akyeampong, 2009) and *Education for All* (Little, 2006).

Rather, these measures seem not to have improved pupils academic performance in Ghana. Other studies have mentioned that neglected children are visible everywhere, especially in Africa and Asia (Giardino *et al.*, 2011). Neglected children around the world are among the most disadvantaged groups, when analyzing the academic success of group of

individuals in society (Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Barrett *et al.*, 2006; and Berridge, 2007).

In addition, neglected children experience poverty and low socio-economic status, which impact negatively on their education (Lloyd & Blanc, 1996; and Heady, 2003). This is could probably be the case in Ghana, due to the rate of poverty. For instance, parents no longer provide adequately good education for their children as clothing, shelter, and all other educational related needs of the child are rarely provided (DeVooght, McCoy-Roth & Freundlich, 2011; and Kemboi, 2013).

It is obvious that being neglected as a child could have awful consequences for individuals, because one could face challenges in academic life (Gakusi, 2010). Pupils experiencing these situations are prone to drop out of school to engage in trade in order to support academic pursuit (Heady, 2003). In view of this, most of these pupils experiences low school attendance as they engage in other activities for survival.

Challenges of child neglect that could affect pupils' academic performance are characterized by absenteeism from school, low school engagement, inadequate funds to support the child education, poor family background, drop out, or abandonments of education (Giardino *et al.*, 2011; and Wash, 2013). Negative social vices, such as smoking, alcoholism, and robbery of all kinds, could also emerge from child neglect and substantially influence the academic performance of the child (Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002; and Slack *et al.*, 2004). This, however, possess huge treat to parents, government, and all other stakeholders concern with the education and social life of pupils.

Overcoming these challenges would improve pupils' academic performance to enhance academic achievements. However, not much study has been conducted on the child neglect and academic achievement within Ghana. There is inadequate information on the subject to inform policy planners and all stakeholders in curbing this menace. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the effect of child neglect on academic performance of JHS (Junior High School) pupil in the Bantema community in Ghana;

and propose appropriate measures for policy action.

METHODS

Study Design and Population. This study employed a descriptive design with quantitative methods in examining the effect of child neglect on the academic performance of JHS (Junior High School) pupils in the Bantema community in Ghana. The study comprised of students in selected JHS institutions in the Bantema community. The study selected JHS pupils for the reason that this is the stage where most teenagers develop self-esteem, which will impact on their adult lives. Four JHS in the Bantema community are Kookoase JHS, Presbyterian JHS, Bantama Methodist, and Roman Catholic JHS.

Sampling. The study used purposive sampling to select four JHS (Junior High School) in the Bantema community: Kookoase JHS, Presbyterian JHS, Bantama Methodist, and Roman Catholic JHS. In each of the schools, 50 students were randomly selected to obtain a total sample of 200 students.

The research assistants had a piece of paper written on them "Yes" or "No". All prospective study participants were made to pick from these pieces of papers. All the pupils who picked "Yes" and consented to participate in the study were enrolled. This approach was repeated in almost all the classes until the required sample size was obtain.

Data Collection. Structured questionnaires were administered to JHS (Junior High School) pupils to find out their experiences in areas the feel being neglected and how it affects their academic performance. The study first asked questions on the background of students, such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and educational background of guardian.

The study, then, asked questions on the common child neglect experienced by pupils and their performances in their recent examination. The questions particularly related to areas pupils feel being neglected. Two research assistants were train to administer the questions to the pupils. The pupils were guided by the research assistant to clearly explain the questions where necessary.

Data Analysis. The study presented results

Table 1:
Background Information of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age:		
13 - 14	65	35.1
15 - 16	97	52.4
> 16	23	12.4
Mean (SD); Min/Max	15 (1.57); 11/20	
Gender:		
Male	122	61.0
Female	78	39.0
Place of Resident:		
Zongo	30	15.0
Slum	20	10.0
Old town	68	34.0
New site	38	19.0
Estate	44	22.0
Person Taking Care of Respondents' Education:		
Father	99	49.5
Mother	73	36.5
Guardian	23	11.0
Self	5	2.5
Education Background of Sponsor:		
None	13	6.5
Primary	27	13.5
JHS (Junior High School)	45	22.5
SHS (Senior High School)	27	13.5
Vocational/Technical	28	14.0
Degree	33	16.5
Other	27	13.5
Number of Siblings:		
1 - 3	79	43.4
4 - 6	72	39.6
≤ 7	31	17.0
Elderly Siblings:		
1 - 3	144	83.2
4 - 6	23	13.3
≤ 7	6	3.5
Religion:		
Christianity	161	80.5
Islam	39	19.5
Ethnicity:		
Asante	145	72.5
Other	55	27.5

into descriptive and inferential statistics. Firstly, descriptive statistics was explored to present the background information of pupils and percentage distribution of common child neglect experienced. The study, further, used influential statistics like correlation to determine how the common child neglect influences the academic performance of the pupils. The data analysis was performed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 20. All significant level was set at 95% confidence interval.

RESULTS

Background Information. Table 1 presents the background information of pupils involved in the study. The results indicate that more than half of the pupils were between 15 – 16 years with an average age of 15 years. Males' dominated in the study than females. On the person taking care of the pupils' education: 49.5% disclose father, while 36.5% said mother. The highest education level among people responsible for sponsoring pupils was at the tertiary level, while the lowest was the primary;

Table 2:
Percentage Distribution of the Situation of Child Neglect among JHS (Junior High School) Pupils

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Pupils attend school regularly:		
Yes	134	72.0
No	52	28.0
Close friends attend school regularly:		
Yes	133	71.5
No	53	28.5
Frequency that parents insist pupils do their homework:		
Very often	66	33.0
Quite often	40	20.0
Often	25	12.5
Not often	69	34.5
Perceived to lack educational materials:		
Yes	148	74.0
No	52	26.0
Educational materials lacking:		
School uniforms	29	17.2
Books	71	42.0
Extra classes	62	36.7
Other	7	4.1
Common child neglects experience by pupils:		
Basic necessities (food and clothing)	17	8.6
Encouragement/emotional	77	38.9
Parental supervision	81	40.9
Poor	18	9.1
Very poor	5	2.5

Table 3:
Relationships between Child Neglect and Academic Performance

		Common Child Neglects	Poor	Average	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Common child neglects	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N	200					
Academic performance	Pearson Correlation	.772*	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.023					
	N	200	200				
Poor	Pearson Correlation	.042	-.085	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.572	.253				
	N	185	185	185			
Average	Pearson Correlation	-.163*	-.076	.000	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.026	.304	.996			
	N	185	185	184	185		
Good	Pearson Correlation	-.248**	-.069	-.051	.308**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.347	.489	.000		
	N	185	185	184	185	185	
Very Good	Pearson Correlation	-.157*	.076	-.143	.137	.401**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.029	.295	.052	.063	.000	
	N	193	193	185	185	185	193

Note: *. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
 **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

however, 22.5% had JHS (Junior High School) qualification.

Also, only 6.5% constituting the lowest disclosed their sponsors had no formal education. The results indicated that 43.4% of pupils had 1 – 3 siblings, while 39.6% had 4 – 6 siblings. Similarly, most pupils had 1 – 3 elderly siblings. The study revealed that 80.5% and 72.5% each of the pupils had Christianity and Akan ethnic background.

Child Neglect among Pupils. The study presents results on factors that influence child neglect among pupils within the Bantema community in Ghana. The results found that more than one third of the students had their school fees paid by their Father (42.0%) and Mother (36.5%), while few paid from their personal income (14.5%). Other 7.0% had their payment from social capitals in the community. On the source of payment among pupils who paid from their personal income, the majority (44.8%) engaged in hawking, 34.5% engaged in personal business, and 20.7% had funds from donors.

On the socio-economic status of parents, the majority (45.0%) of the pupils perceived their parents as moderately rich, while 22.0% disclosed their parents or guardians as being rich. On the contrary, nearly 20% perceived their parents as poor. Most (33.1%) pupils who pay from their personal income disclosed they often pay their school fees, 23.1% each opined quite often and often. However, 19.6% said they do not often pay their fees. Similar trend was observed among payment by parents.

The common child neglect experienced by pupils within the Bantema communities was explored in table 2. The results indicated that most (72.0%) pupils attend school regularly, while 28.0% do not attend school regularly. This same trend was observed on how often respondents' close friends attend school, when the majority (71.5%) said their close friends attend school regularly. On the common child neglect experienced, more than one third of the pupils experienced lack of parental supervision, 38.9% disclosed they lacked encouragement/emotional support, and 8.6% indicated the lack of basic necessities. The study further indicated that most pupils lacked educational materials, which were

mostly related to Books (42.0%), Extra classes (36.7%), School uniforms (17.2%) and other 4.1% mentioned living expenses.

Relationships between Child Neglect and Academic Performance. In table 3, the Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between common child neglect experienced by students and academic performance measure on a 5 point Likert scale: Poor, Average, Good, Very Good, and Excellent. The result indeed confirms the significant association between child neglect and academic performance of pupils. Child neglect had positive correlations' with the poor academic performance among pupils ($r = 0.77$; $p = 0.02$).

The study again disclosed that the common child neglect experienced by pupils had negative correlation with the performance of pupils as Good ($r = -0.163$; $p = 0.026$), Very Good ($r = 0.248$; $p = 0.001$), and Excellent ($r = 0.157$; $p = 0.02$). However, there was no significant correlation between common child neglect and average performance of pupils ($r = 0.042$; $p = 0.57$).

DISCUSSIONS

The study was conducted to examine the effect of child neglect on the academic performance of pupils in the Bantema community, Ghana. Findings demonstrated that more than half of the pupils were between 15 – 16 years with an average age of 15 years. Males' dominated in the study than females. This might suggest the numerical strengths of males in educational institutions in most African countries. It again buttress the finding from the Ghana Statistical Services, where males dominate in education (GSS, 2012).

The study also indicated that most of the pupils had Christianity and Akan ethnic background. This finding buttress the fact that the study was conducted in the Akan and Christianity dominated setting. It further corroborates the numerical strength of Christianity in the Ghanaian society. Again, it supports the report by the Ghana Statistical Services, where Christianity was the dominant religious sect; while Akan ethnic group dominates in communities in the Ashanti Region (GSS, 2012).

The study found that most pupils and their close friends attend school regularly. Also, the common child neglect experienced by pupils were lack of parental supervision, lack of encouragement/emotional support, and basic necessities. This common neglect experienced by pupils suggests a lack of support in most areas of their lives. The realization that pupils lack parental supervision may influence them freely to engage in certain social vices, which might have negative effect on their lives. The finding corroborates with previous studies, which described child neglect as failure for parents to perform parental supervision and substantially affects most areas of children lives (Goldman *et al.*, 2003).

The finding might have implication on dangers including death, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse, or exploitation as reported by J. Goldman *et al.* (2003). Consistently, previous study have suggested that children with no parental supervision are likely to be neglected and exposed to child labour, hawking, domestic violence (Gager & Sanchez, 2003). The finding that students lacked encouragement or emotion support suggest that the pupils may experience psychological or emotional neglect was as previous study found (Finkelhor, Ormrod & Turner, 2007).

The study, further, found that most pupils lacked educational materials, which were mostly related to books, extra classes, school uniforms, and living expenses. This finding suggests that most pupils experienced neglect in their educational provisions. The limited educational provisions might have strong inclination on students' interest in education. Despite limited educational provisions, it was important that pupils and their close friends attended school regularly.

The findings suggest that although students attend school regularly, but with limited educational provisions, students might not succeed in achieving their education success. This finding collaborate with studies by H. Abdallah *et al.* (2014), who found that the academic performance of children in basic schools have been on a downward in Ghana (Abdallah *et al.*, 2014). For instance, between 2004 and 2014 the pass rate of pupils has

always been below 50% in most regions.

Furthermore, the study found that there is significant association between child neglect and academic performance of pupils. Child neglect had positive correlations with the poor academic performance among pupils ($r = 0.77$; $p = 0.02$). This finding suggests that as the magnitude of child neglect increase, the level that pupils perform poor in their academic work increase. This might be influenced by the experiences that pupil goes through. This finding corroborates with previous studies, where child neglect was a determining factor of poor academic performance among pupils (Heady, 2003).

The finding suggests that such pupils might not have all the provisions and support from the family to assist in their education. It further reinforces that being neglected as a child could have awful consequences, because such person might have low academic interest (cf Dass-Brailsford, 2005; Barrett *et al.*, 2006; and Berridge, 2007). Other studies by A.E. Gakusi (2010); K. Akyeampong (2010); and L. Wash (2013) corroborate with this findings.

The study further found that the common child neglect experienced by pupils had negative correlation with the performance of pupils as Good, Very Good, and Excellent. This finding has the implication that as the magnitude of child neglect increase, the pupils are not able to score Good and Excellent grades in their academic works. The finding reinforce earlier observation that neglected child have poor academic pursuit as suggested by previous studies (Fallon *et al.*, 2010; and Adejobi *et al.*, 2013).

In these studies, pupils do not score Good grades as a result of absenteeism from school, low school engagement, inadequate funds to support the child education, drop out or abandonments of education. The study again found that there was no significant correlation between common child neglect and average performance of pupils ($p = 0.57$).

CONCLUSION

The study examined the barriers to child success in schools in Ghana with Bantama being the study area. The study demonstrated that pupils within the Bantama community

experienced lack of parental supervision, emotional support, and some basic necessities essential for their success in schools. Also, the study found that pupils have limited access to basic educational needs, which were mostly related to books, fees for extra classes, school uniforms, and living expenses. These areas where the pupils perceived as neglected had significant association with their academic performance. The common child neglect had positive correlation with poor performance and had negative correlation with Good and Excellent performance of pupils.

The study findings suggest the need for measures to be put in place in order to guarantee the success of pupils in schools. Therefore, the study suggests the following policy actions so as to improve academic performance. The government of Ghana should adopt prudent policies, which will focus on clearing most children from the streets and catering for their needs in schools. Although the government have been providing free education at the basic level for all children, but other measures such as free distribution of books, pens, and other social interventions that will motivate the children to be in school as well as giving their best.

Parents of such pupils should ensure the provision of adequate supervision for their children. This could be achieved in the event the State put in place regulatory frameworks, which will put parents to task in the event they fail to perform their responsibilities. These efforts should not be limited to educational needs, but providing emotional supports. Also, the Department of Social Welfare should also institute measures that will educate parents within such communities on the need to provide parental supervision and educational needs to their wards.

Again, teachers should sensitize parents during PTA (Parents Teachers Association) meetings on the need to provide parental supervision and emotional support to their children. Again, NGO (Non Governmental Organization)'s focusing on child neglect and educational issues should support such education for parents.

In conclusion, there is the need for researchers to roll-out similar studies in other

regions in order to come out with rationale behind the poor academic performance among children in basic schools.¹

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Junior High School Pupils in Ghana

(Source: <http://www.educationnews.org/international-uk/ghana>, 9/10/2015)

The study examined the barriers to child success in schools in Ghana with Bantama being the study area. The study demonstrated that pupils within the Bantama community experienced lack of parental supervision, emotional support, and some basic necessities essential for their success in schools. Also, the study found that pupils have limited access to basic educational needs, which were mostly related to books, fees for extra classes, school uniforms, and living expenses. These areas where the pupils perceived as neglected had significant association with their academic performance. The common child neglect had positive correlation with poor performance and had negative correlation with Good and Excellent performance of pupils.