

Impact of Socio-Economic Factors on Students' Achievement in English Language in the Senior High Schools in West Akim Municipality of Ghana

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Abstract

The main focus of the study is to investigate the influence of students' socio-economic background, parental involvement and teacher's attitude on their achievement in English in the senior high schools in West Akim Municipality. The study also investigated the cumulative effect of the three factors on students' achievement in the English language. Three research questions guided the study. Ex-post factor research design was adopted for the study. A total of 100 students were selected by means of simple random sampling technique while four schools in the municipal were selected via stratified sampling technique. Questionnaire was the major instrument data collection. Quantitative paradigm was employed for data analysis which involved the use of descriptive (percentages and frequencies) and inferential statistics of which tables were used to highlight the objectives of the study. Based on the investigative study conducted, it was discovered that Findings of the study revealed that socio-economic background, parental involvement and teachers' attitude are very important factors in determining students' achievement in core subjects such as the English language. Additionally, findings reveal that teachers' attitude is one most important factor instrumental to students' achievement in the English language. This means students' academic issues are not the only factors predictive of students' achievement in the English language.

Keywords: *Socio-economic, achievement, background, municipality, influence.*

Introduction

In recent times, due to globalization and technological revolution, education is considered as a first step for every human activity. It occupies a vital role in the development of human capital and is intertwined with an individual's well-being and opportunities for better living (Battle & Lewis, 2002). It fosters the acquisition of knowledge and skills that qualifies individuals to increase their productivity and improve their quality of life. The increase in productivity also leads towards new sources of earning which enhances economic growth of a country (Saxton, 2000).

Achieving the main objective of education requires that serious attention should be paid to English language education. An area of English education that should be looked into is students' achievement in English. Students' achievement in English is the result of their learning English. It is the measure of the extent to which the

students have mastered communicative skills and knowledge in English. This is commonly obtained through standardized achievement tests such as Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) or non-standardized achievement tests such as teacher-made tests. The students' achievements in English at the senior high school have an influential effect on their performance in college and their future careers.

Having a solid background in the English language facilitates students' development of sophisticated perspectives and offers more career options. Being a core subject, English language has been seen by seasoned educators and politicians as an important cog in the wheel of an individual progress (Wilkins & Ma, 2002). Both teachers and parents have been paying attention to students' performance in English and their progress every year. Politicians have

also been calling for improving students' overall performances and closing students' achievement gaps. However, any progress in this regard require cognition of factors influencing students' achievement the English language and how it can be improved so as to enable them make substantial academic progress.

In their study, Farooq, Chaudhry, Shafia, and Berhanu (2011), asserted that the quality of students' performance remains at top priority for educators. Educators, trainers, and researchers both locally and internationally have long been interested in exploring variables contributing effectively to quality performance of learners. These variables, according to Crosnoe, Johnson & Elder (2004), are inside and outside school that affect students' quality of academic achievement. These factors may be termed as student factors, family factors, school factors and peer factors.

Generally, these factors include age, gender, geographical belongingness, ethnicity, marital status, socioeconomic status (SES), parents' education level, parental profession, language, income and religious affiliations. These are usually discussed under the umbrella or demography (Ballatine, 1993). In a broader context demography is referred to as a way to explore the nature and effects or demographic variables in the biological and social context. Unfortunately, defining and measuring the quality of education is not a simple issue and the complexity of this process increases due to the changing values or quality attributes associated with the different stakeholders view point (Blevins, 2009, Parri 2006)

Despite the efforts of the government and private sector to improve access to education, Acquaye (2010) indicated that the same cannot be said about the quality performance of students in West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) especially in core subjects such as the English language. For example, Ghana's percentage of students passing (grades A1-C6) in (WASSCE) the English language in 2015 was 50.29 percent (Doozie, 2015). The situation was even worse in West Akim Municipal, because, according to the Municipal office (2015), out of 398 candidates presented by one of the schools for 2015 WASSCE for English, 28.4 percent had passing grade (grades A1-C6), the rest 71.6 performed

poorly.

A number of factors, according to Saad and Usman (2014) and Doozie (2015), might have been identified as contributors to this problem nationwide, some of which may include the school, students, curriculum related, instructional and socio-economic background of the students and parental involvement. Recent studies conducted in establishing the relationship between these factors and students' achievement in core subjects were often based on the duration of the course and the entry behaviour of the products from the senior high schools. However, with the perennial nature students' poor performance in the English language, Saad and Usman and Doozie asserted that there is need for further studies, hence, the objective of the present study is to adequately investigate the relationship between students' achievement in English and their socio-economic background, parental involvement and teachers' attitude towards the teaching and learning process in the West Akim Municipality.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between students' socio-economic background, parents' involvement, teachers' attitude and their achievement in the English language in the senior high school in West Akim Municipality. The specific objectives of the study are as follows

1. Ascertain the general socio-economic background of students in senior high schools in West Akim Municipality.
2. Investigate whether students' socio-economic background, parents' involvement and teachers' attitude strongly predict their achievement in English in the Municipality.

Research questions

The following research questions were set to guide the study.

1. What is the general socio-economic background of students in senior high schools in West Akim Municipality?
2. Do the students' socio-economic background, parents' involvement and teachers' attitude strongly predict their achievement in English in the Municipality?

Significance of the study

Stakeholders and teachers in education have been making necessary efforts to ensure that conducive environment is created through provision of ample logistics to facilitate the teaching and learning of English. However, the consistent poor performance of the students is becoming the biggest headache to them. These findings of this study will help in the following areas

1. Parents will take keen interest in their children education and make the necessary sacrifices by providing their educational needs.
2. Parents will constantly discuss with their children their academic progress and provide congenial atmosphere for them to learn.
3. Understanding the socio-economic background of the students will enable the teachers plan their lessons to cater for the needs of every student.
4. Teachers' will employ positive and friendly attitude to motivate students
5. School authorities and parents will come to terms with how to handle issues affecting the students' academic performance.

Delimitation of the study

The study was confined to the third-year students of all the public senior high schools in West Akim Municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. A total of 315 students was sampled for the study. The study would use three consecutive ends of term examination scores of the sampled students in English to determine their achievement in the English language. Both internal and external factors that influence students' academic achievement are examined. These include teachers' attitude, socio-economic factors like parental education, their occupation and places of residence and parental involvement. However, the concern of this study is family socio-economic circumstances and teachers' attitude in relation to its connectedness to students' achievement in English. For this reason, the variables that are considered for this study are socio-economic factors (parental level of education, occupation and places of residence), parental involvement and teachers' attitude as independent variables. Students' achievement in English forms the dependent variable for the study.

Literature review

Defined as the socio-economic position of an individual's family of origin rather than their present occupational or family circumstances, socio-economic background often exerts much influence on the life of an individual (Marks, McMillan, Jones & Ainley, 2000). Dependent children have yet to establish their own socio-economic characteristics. Rather, their socio-economic position is derived by the socio-economic climate of their family home, or more narrowly by the socio-economic characteristics of their parents. (Marks et al, 2000). Socio-economic indicators according to Ghana Statistical Service (2008), includes demographic characteristics of the population and all aspects of living conditions such as health, education, housing, household income, consumption and expenditure, credits, assets and saving, prices, employment and migration.

The present study gave consideration to the socio-economic status indicators such parents' education, occupation, marital status and their place of residence and parental supports and the contribution of these factors to the success of their children's education in English.

Socio-economic status

Socio-economic status refers to as a finely graded hierarchy of social positions which can be used to describe a person's overall social position or standing (Marks et al, 2000). It can be indicated by a number of sub-concepts such as employment status, occupational status, educational attainment and income and wealth (Graetz, 1995).

Mayer and Jencks, (1989) also described socio-economic status (SES) as the term used by sociologists to denote an individual or family 's overall rank in the social and economic hierarchy. In most research, including national studies, socio-economic status (SES) has been measured as a combination of parent's education, parent's occupational prestige, and family income (Mayer & Jencks; White, 1989).

Socio-economic status and academic achievement

Researchers have been exploring a number of mechanisms through which socio-economic status (SES) exert influence on academic performance of the students. One of such mechanisms is undoubtedly, role modeling

students from high or middle SES families constantly see their parents and neighbours' social and economic payoffs that good education could provide. Whilst many minority children in high poverty areas have few if any role model who succeeded in education or who have translated school success into economic gain (Lippmann, Burns, McArthur, Burton, Smith, & Kaufman, (1996).). These claims suggest the direct relationship between SES background and students' educational aspirations. Socio-economic status is determined to be a predictor of English achievement. Studies repeatedly discovered that the parents' annual level of income is correlated with students' math achievement scores (Eamon, 2005; Jeynes, 2002; Hochschild, 2003; McNeal, 2001). Socio-economic status was found significant in primary English and Mathematics achievement scores (Ma & Klinger, 2000). Another study found poor academic achievement of Canadian students to be attributable to their low socio-economic status (Hull, 1990).

Parental involvement and educational outcomes

Epstein (cited in Richardson, 2009) indicated that parental involvement is exerts powerful influence in a child's education. It can have various effects on students, both academically and behaviourally. Initially, research on family involvement generally did not aim at differentiating between the effects of specific types of involvement on definite student outcomes (Sheldon, 2009). But rather, the connections between general measures of parental involvement with students' test scores and grades were analyzed. However, recently, researchers started studying how different types of involvement connect to specific student outcomes.

According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (Obeidat and Al-Hassan, 2009; 124-125), successful parental involvement may be defined as "the active, ongoing participation of a parent or primary caregiver in the education of his or her child". At home, parents can demonstrate their involvement in different ways; such as by reading for their child, assisting with homework, and having regular discussions about school or school work with their child. In addition, it is

important for parents to convey their expectations to their child's education.

Lareau (1987) found that investment income and inherited income explained more variance in children's academic performance test scores than did total family income. These studies have focused on investigating direct effects of parental income on children academic performance. For example, studies also reported that children were more likely to graduate from high schools if they lived in households where parents' income levels were high.

Agyemang (1986) contended that poverty of parents as reflected in the socio-economic status of the family, affected the child's chances of success in school. For example, hungry children from low socio-economic background would not be able to concentrate on their lessons in class. Children whose parents could not provide them with writing materials or school uniform would feel embarrassed among their peers. Again, middle- and upper-class socio-economic parents constantly provided congenial learning atmosphere for their children at home. This gave children in this situation an edge over those from lower class socio-economic families.

Opare (1999) studied the relationship between socio-economic factors and students' educational aspirations. The study was designed to find out if socio-economic variables equally explained students' academic aspirations. The variables were parents' income, parents' education, parents' occupational status and parents' relation with their children regarding the latter's education. Opare used Coleman's social capital theory as the conceptual framework for the study. The theory was founded on the proposition that family background was a simple key factor that determines the level of education attained by children and youth.

Teachers' attitude and educational outcomes

In his observational theory, Bandura (1971) demonstrated that behaviours are acquired by watching another (teacher, parent, mentor, friend) that performs the behaviour. The model (teacher, parent, mentor, friend) displays it and the learner observes and tries to imitate it. Teachers are, invariably, role models whose behaviours are easily copied by students. What teachers like or dislike, appreciate and how they

feel about their learning or studies could have a significant effect on their students. Unfortunately, however, many teachers seldom realize that how they teach (Abimbade, 1999) how they behave and how they interact with students can be more paramount than what they teach. In a nutshell, teachers' attitudes directly affect students' attitudes. Teachers' attitudes are in turn, influenced by their culture and belief system (Yara, 2009 p. 64)

When the learner exhibits the expected behaviour or response, the value attached determines very significantly the effectiveness of the learning processes in any aspect of education. Gangoli cited in Igwe (2002) stipulates that for teaching and learning of core courses such as English to be interesting and stimulating, there has to be motivation on the part of both the teacher and the learner so as to ensure the development of positive attitude and subsequently maximum academic achievement. It has been observed that teachers teach most core courses including English, in a way that merely requires the pupils to listen, read and regurgitate (Yara, 2009 p. 365). This depicts negative attitude to teaching. Ogunniyi (1982) found that students' positive attitude towards English could be enhanced by the following teacher-related factors

1. Teachers' enthusiasm,
2. Teachers' resourcefulness and helpful behaviour,
3. Teachers' thorough knowledge of the subject-matter and their making English despite its numerous concept and principles quite interesting.

The aforementioned clearly shows that the role of the teacher as facilitator of learning and the contributions to students' achievement is enormous. Bajah (1999) was of the opinion that the success of the English language curriculum depends greatly on the classroom teacher as he is the one that translates all our thoughts into action. Several research findings as enumerated below confirmed the hypothesis that teachers' attitude either towards English or towards English language teaching affect their students' achievement in the English language and their overall attitude towards English (Yara, 2009).

Extant literature revealed that socio-economic background, parental involvement and teachers' attitude plays significant role in students'

achievement, however, as indicated in the review, some researcher contended that the level of influence exerted by each of these variables differs, hence the need for further studies.

Methodology

The study adopted ex-post facto research design for the study. Ex-post facto research design helps the researcher determine and compare the relationships, causes, effects or reasons for existing differences in the behavior or status of individuals (Gay, 1996; Best & Kahn, 1998; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) also indicated that ex-post factor helps the researcher identify the major factors that have led to these differences which makes it a fitting methodology for the study.

The target population for the study comprises students in the senior high schools of the West Akim Municipal in the Central Region of Ghana. Using simple random sampling technique, the researcher selected a total of 315 respondents from the six senior high schools in the West Akim Municipality. The main instrument for the study was a questionnaire which was termed Socio-Economic Background and Teacher's Attitude Questionnaire (SETABQ) was used to collect data on the students.

The SETABQ comprises four parts, the first part consists of bio data of the students; age, gender, school and class. The second part included level of parents' educational, occupation of parents, marital status and place of residence, number of siblings and others. The third part comprises information on teachers' attitude while the final part dwelled on with questions on parental educational involvement. Data analysis was done via descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, charts and tables and inferential statistics (linear regression) so as to underscore the objectives of the study.

Results and discussions

Gender is an important social, cultural and psychological construct, seen as a process, stratification system and structure, which describe the expected attitudes and behaviours a society associates with sex (Kaur, 2012). Items in Table 2 described the gender distribution of respondents, since gender role is related to

cognitive perception which can greatly influence students' achievement in English, ascertaining gender implication.

Table 1. Sex distribution of respondents

Sex	Frequency	Percent (%)
Males	140	44.4
Girls	175	55.6
Total	315	100.00

n=315

Source: Fieldwork 2017.

Study would reveal the social, cultural and psychological construct, which describes the expected attitudes and behaviours a society associates with sex and age. Depicted in Table 2 is the demographic data of the respondents involved in the study. Results revealed that out of the 315 participants, there were 140 (44.4%) males and 175 (55.6%) females. Thus, majority of the respondents were girls (55.6%) compared to boys (44.4%). This information is presented in Table 2. This finding tally with the notable study conducted by Voyer and Voyer (2014) that both male and female are interested in core subjects such as Mathematics and English and girls performed quite well in both subjects. This clearly went contrary to the prevailing stereotypes in the Ghanaian society. Several individuals within the Ghanaian society, according to Alhassan (2011) and Amaoteng (2013) refrain from sending females into school because they felt that women are only meant to be in the Kitchen and cannot do well in school.

Table 2. Age distribution of respondents

Age	Frequency	Percent (%)
13-15 years	29	9.2
16-17years	94	29.8
18-20years	158	50.2
21-23years	28	8.9
24 and above	6	1.9
Total	315	100.00

n=315

Source: Fieldwork 2017.

As a result, according to Szalavitz (2013), women are underrepresented in formal education in several levels including senior high

schools. Finding from Table 3 clearly demonstrated that out of the 315 respondents drawn for the study, majority 158 (50.2%) of the respondents were 18-20 years of age, while 94 (29.8%) were 16-17 years of age. The table also revealed that few 29 (9.2%) of the respondents were 13-15 years of age while fewer 6 (1.9%) of the participants were 24 years and above. These computations implied that majority of the respondents were within the statutory age for an adult in Ghanaian context. This means, responses from these groups of participants is reliable and rationale because it was given based on mature reasoning faculty.

A. Analyses of research questions

Research Question 1. What is the general socio-economic background of students in senior high schools in assin north municipality?

The essence of this question is to elicit relevant information regarding each of the items constituting socio-economic condition of the parent/guardian of the respondents. Items constituting socio-economic background characteristics included parents' occupation, marital status and place of residence. In line with previous studies on household income (Filmer & Pritchett, 2001, Gwatkin, Rustin, Johnson, Pande & Wagstaff, 2000), analyzing household income can be difficult, hence, the present study employed composite index, often called wealth index, as a proxy indicator of family economic status. The wealth index scores were calculated on the basis of easy-to-collect data on a household's ownership of selected assets, such as television, refrigerator, car, and so on and occupation using Principal component analysis (PCA). This PCA searches for the linear combination of the variables considered for the maximum possible variance in the data. In this study, the wealth index scores were divided into three equal parts. Thus, students with lower 33%, middle 33% and upper 33% of the wealth scores was designated as having low, medium or high economic or wealth status. Descriptive statistics of socio-economic background, parental involvement and teachers' attitude are presented on an item-by-item basis below.

Table 3. Analysis of students' socio-economic background

Socio-Economic Background	Level	N	%
Parental Education			
Less or up to primary school	Low	109	34.6
Secondary education	Middle	178.5	56.7
University education	High	27.5	8.7
Parental Occupation			
Artisan/Farmer	Low	88	27.9
Driver/Trading	Middle	155.5	49.4
Teaching/Civil Servant/Health/Fin. Serv	High	71.5	22.7
Wealth Index*			
	Low	89.3	28.3
	Middle	147.4	46.8
	High	78.3	24.9
Overall rating for socio-economic background of students			
	Low	95.4	30.3
	Middle	160.5	51.0
	High	59.1	18.7

n=315*p<0.001

Source: Fieldwork, 2016.

Findings from Table 18 revealed that 34.6% of the respondents are from parents who had less or up to primary school education while majority 56.7% of the respondents' parents have secondary education. It was also shown in Table 18 that few 27.5% of the respondents' parents have university education. This means most of the respondents' parent occupies the 2nd quartile in terms of educational status.

Results in connection with parental occupation in Table 18 shows that 27.9% of respondents' parents are mostly artisans or farmers while most 49.4% of the respondents' parent are traders. It is also noteworthy that 22.7% of the respondents' parent are either teachers or gainfully employed as civil servants, health workers or financial service provider. Table 18 also revealed that 28.3% of the respondents' family had low wealth index while majority 46.8% of the respondents' family had middle wealth index. It is also noteworthy that 24.9% of the respondents' parents attended higher education. Result of the study tally with the findings of several studies (Okorodudu,

2010; Baffour-Awuah, 2011; Opoku, 2014; Igbo, Okafor, Rita & Eze, 2014) that socio-economic background of students has tremendous effect on their academic achievement especially in the English language. Essentially, findings from Table 3 coupled with demographic data revealed that majority of the students are from parents with average education, occupation and means of livelihood, in other words, the general socio-economic background of the participants for the study is neither low nor high; rather it is middle socio-economic background.

Research Objective 3. Do the students' socio-economic background, parental' involvement and teachers' attitude strongly predict their achievement in English in the municipality?

In a bid to ascertain the extent to which socio-economic background of students, their parents/guardian's involvement and teachers attitude influences achievement in English and whether such influence or impact is statistically significant, the researcher carried out multiple regression. The model the researcher employed was as follows:

Achievement in English

$$exmsavg (trm1+trm2+term3) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Socioconsavg(ped+pao+wi) + \beta_2 Parentalinvolveavg(actu+psc+pch) + \beta_3 Teacherattavg(attdc+assmt+involv)$$

Where

exmsavg = Exam scores average

trm = School Term

socioconsavg = Socio-economics averages

ped = Parental education

pao = parental

wi = Wealth index calculated via factor analysis

actu = Accommodated and tuition

psc = Parent and School

pch = Parent and Children

attdc= Teachers' regularity at classroom

assmt=How often teacher assess students' knowledge

invol=how often teacher involve students in teaching and learning process

the researcher as certain the influence and interrelatedness of the dependent variable and

dependent variable via the above stated formulae and the following result was obtained:

Table 4a. Summary of regression analysis results

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	120 ^a	0.42	008	2.04309
a. Predictors: (Constant), Parental involve, Socioecons, Teacheratti				

Table 4b. ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	19.018	2	9.509	2.478	.041 ^a
Residual	1302.360	31	4.174		
Total	1321.378	31			
a. Predictors: (Constant), Parental involve, Socioecons					
b. Dependent Variable: Average of three terms' scores					

Table 4c. Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
(Constant)	2.447	367		6.660	.000
Socioecons	-.050	286	.017	-.173	.863
Parental involve	.306	228	.134	1.341	.181
Teacheratti	.338	246	.145	1.532	.201
a. Dependent Variable: Average of three terms' scores					

n=315 p<0.05

Source: Fieldwork, 2017.

Depicted in Table 4a is the summary of regression results. The results are revealing because the combined effect of socio-economic background of students and parental involvement is significant because as shown in Table 4b (R Square = 0.042), it shows a prediction of 42% of higher achievement in English. This means that 48% of variations in

higher achievement in English are attributable to other variables not considered in the present study.

Additionally, statistics in Table 4c showed that probability value associated with the overall calculated value of F (2.478) for the influence of socio-economic background of students, parental involvement and teacher attitude is 0.04. The statistics above shows that the p-value (0.04) is lesser than the 0.05 level of significance. This means respondents' socio-economic background, parental involvement and teacher's attitude is statistically significant on respondents' achievement in English.

Moreover, the unstandardized beta values in Table 4c, which represent the co-efficient of the independent variables entered in the model. It could be stated that students' teachers' attitude has the highest beta value (0.338), while socio-economic background follows with a beta value of 0.306. These statistics also shows that teachers' attitude is largely predictive of high academic achievement in the English language than socio-economic background and parental involvement.

In effect, findings in Table 4a, b, and c, shows that teachers' attitude to teaching English (beta value 0.338) is largely predictive of high academic achievement in the English language than parental involvement and socio-economic background of students. However, the three has a statistically significant influence on ($R^2 = 42\%$) on students' achievement in English.

The result of the present study tally with the findings of Jeynes (2005) that socio-economic background, parental involvement and teachers' attitude are very important factors in determining students' achievement in core subjects such as the English language.

Additionally, the findings of Yara (2009) clearly demonstrate that teachers' attitude is one most important factor instrumental to students' achievement in the English language. This means students' academic issues are not the only factors predictive of students' achievement in the English language, there are other numerous factors that could affect students' outcomes which are not often considered due to the narrow focus of several studies on issues pertaining to students' academic achievement especially in core subjects including English language.

Conclusion

Findings of the study revealed that socio-economic background, parental involvement and teachers' attitude are very important factors in determining students' achievement in core subjects such as the English language. Additionally, findings reveal that teachers' attitude is one most important factor instrumental to students' achievement in the English language. This means students' academic issues are not the only factors predictive of students' achievement in the English language. The study revealed that the three variables considered in this study are not the only factors responsible for students' achievement, hence further studies on the same issue is recommended so as to facilitate stakeholders' effort in ameliorating the perennial poor performance of senior high school students in the English language in WASSCE. It is also recommended that teachers should improve their attitude towards teaching English by actively involving students in discussions and giving individualized attention to each of the students.

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