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Causes of low academic performance of primary school pupils in the Shama Sub-Metro of Shama Ahanta East Metropolitan Assembly (SAEMA) in Ghana

by

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INTRODUCTION

Shama Ahanta East Metropolitan Assembly (SAEMA) is one of the district assemblies in the Western Region of Ghana. It is one of the three metropolitan assemblies in the country. The other two are Accra-Tema and Kumasi. SAEMA is located about 210 kilometres along the coast, west of Accra and is divided into three sub-metro district councils which are Shama, Sekondi and Takoradi. The twin city of Sekondi-Takoradi is both the district capital and the regional capital. The Shama sub-metro is made up of Shama and Inchaban circuits.

The poor academic performance of pupils in the Shama sub-metro of the Shama Ahanta Metropolis has been a concern for the metropolitan assembly over the past few years. The schools have shown poor performances in all public examinations and as one director puts it, 'their BECE results have been appalling'. The schools in the sub-metro have been performing poorly in the national performance monitoring tests administered by the Ghana Education Service and they have also performed consistently poorly in the Metro mock Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE). Daramanu (2004) reported that:

> A study of the 2003 BECE results gives the following appalling picture. The Shama Circuit presented 427 candidates, i. e. 226 boys and 201 girls. Out of this number only 5 had aggregate 7-15. Another 135 obtained an aggregate from 16-30, whilst the remaining 287 scored aggregate 31 and over. In the Inchaban Circuit there were 593 candidates altogether. Only 7 candidates scored aggregate 7-15, 215 scored aggregate 16-30, whilst 371 had aggregate 31 and above. No candidate scored aggregate 6 in the whole Sub-Metro. So out of the total of 1020 candidates presented by both Shama and Inchaban Circuits, 658 failed; only 12 did well to gain admission to the well-endowed Senior Secondary Schools. This situation is indeed pathetic.

The situation as described above is a great problem since the Ghana Government has initiated programmes such as the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE) with the view to improving the quality of the educational system. Through the fCUBE program the Ghana Government seeks to ensure that all citizens are equipped with the fundamental knowledge and skills that will enable them to be full stakeholders in and beneficiaries of development.

The pathetic situation in the Shama sub-metro has alarmed the metropolitan assembly and the assembly has been seeking ways to research into the causes of the poor academic performance in the Shama sub-metro.

Several factors have generally been identified as causes of poor academic performance. Agyeman (1993) reported that a teacher who does not have both the academic and the professional teacher qualification would undoubtedly have a negative influence on the teaching and learning of his/her subject. However, he further stated that a teacher who is academically and professionally qualified, but works under unfavorable conditions of service would be less dedicated to his work and thus be less productive than a teacher who is unqualified but works under favorable conditions of service.

Neagley and Evans (1970) were of the view that effective supervision of instruction can improve the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom. Etsey, Amedahe and Edjah (2004) in a study of 60 schools from peri-urban (29 schools) and rural (31 schools) areas in Ghana found that academic performance was better in private schools than public schools because of more effective supervision of work.

Another factor is motivation. A highly motivated person puts in the maximum effort in his or her job. Several factors produce motivation and job satisfaction. Young (1988) examined the job satisfaction of Californian public school teachers in the USA and found that one of the overall job predictors was the salary one earned from it. Studies by Lockheed et al. (1991) indicated that lack of motivation and professional commitment produce poor attendance and unprofessional attitudes towards students which in turn affect the performance of students academically.

The availability and use of teaching and learning materials affect the effectiveness of a teacher's lessons. According to Broom (1973), the creative use of a variety of media increases the probability that the student would learn more, retain better what they learn and improve their performance on the skills that they are expected to develop. Ausubel (1973) also stated that young children are capable of understanding abstract ideas if they are provided with sufficient materials and concrete experiences with the phenomenon that they are to understand.

Class sizes have also been identified as determinants of academic performance. Studies have indicated that schools with smaller class sizes perform better academically than schools with larger class sizes. Kraft (1994) in his study of the ideal class size and its effects on effective teaching and learning in Ghana concluded that class sizes above 40 have negative effects on students' achievement. Asiedu-Akrofi (1978) indicated that since children have differences in motivation, interests and abilities and that they also differ in health, personal and social adjustment and creativity generally good teaching is best done in classes with smaller numbers that allow for individual attention.

Butler (1987 has also found homework to be a correlate of academic performance. He stated that homework bore a positive relationship with learning outcomes when it is relevant to learning objectives, assigned regularly in reasonable amounts, well explained, motivational and collected and reviewed during class time and used as an occasion for feedback to students. Churchill (1965) found a positive relationship between the location of a school and the student and teacher performance.

The presence of all or some of the factors identified above may have resulted in the poor academic performance of pupils in the Shama sub-metro. However, evidence of the availability of these factors as well as other factors need to be obtained. The purpose of this study therefore is to obtain evidence of the factors that are responsible for the poor academic performance of pupils in the Shama sub-metro. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions?

1. What school environment factors are the causes of poor academic performance in the Shama sub-metro?
2. What teacher factors contribute to the low academic performance of the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools?
3. What pupil characteristics are responsible for their poor performances in the Shama sub-metro?
4. What parental support variables cause pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools to perform poorly academically?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The basic design used in this study was causal-comparative (ex post facto). In the causal-comparative or ex post facto research, the researcher attempts to determine the cause, or reason for existing differences in the behaviour or status of groups of individuals (Gay, 1996). When it is observed that groups differ on some variable, the researcher attempts to identify the major factor that has led to this difference. Causal-comparative studies are important in education because several educational variables cannot be manipulated and be used for experimental research.

The main concern in this study was to identify the differences between the SAEMA high achieving schools and the Shama sub-metro low achieving schools in terms of school environment, teacher, pupil and parental variables. These variables include availability of textbooks, regularity in school, teacher professional qualification, payment of school fees,

and provision of infrastructure, teaching and learning materials and children's basic needs as well as language use. To achieve the purpose of the study, questionnaires were administered and interviews conducted between 28th June and 2nd July 2004.

Confidentiality of responses

Efforts were made to maintain confidentiality of the responses. Participants were told that their responses would be kept confidential and that no one known to them would have access to the information provided and no one can link the data to their names.

Sample

A sample of 25 primary schools was used in the study. This was made up of 15 Shama sub-metro schools and 10 SAEMA high achieving schools. The high achieving schools were selected by the results of the 2003 BECE examinations and the 2001 Performance Monitoring Tests (PMT). The 15 Shama schools were randomly selected from the list of 35 primary schools. Table 1 provides a summary of the sample distribution.

Table 1

Distribution of study participants

Participants	School Type		Total
	Shama sub-metro	High achieving	
Headteachers	15	10	25
Teachers	78	55	133
Pupils	295	200	495
Parents	295	223	518
Total	683	488	1171

Twenty-five head teachers and 133 teachers were part of the study. In the selected schools, 10 Primary 3 pupils and 10 Primary 6 pupils were randomly selected to participate in the study. A total of 495 pupils participated in the study. In addition, each pupil was to have one of the parents interviewed and a total of 518 parents were interviewed.

Background Information

The background information on the pupils included are enrolment, distance traveled to school and age.

School enrolment

The mean enrolment per class in the schools studied is presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Mean enrolment in the schools

Type of school	Classes					
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Shama sub-metro	54.67	55.93	53.47	52.60	47.33	49.00
High achieving	62.78	59.56	69.89	72.67	66.22	65.67

Table 2 shows that on the average, enrolment is higher in the high-achieving schools than the Shama sub-metro schools.

Distance to school

Table 3 shows how near the pupils are to their schools.

Table 3

Distance covered to school

Distance	School Type	
	Shama sub-metro	High achieving
Very Near (Less than 1 km)	64.7% (189)*	34.5% (69)
Near (Between 1km and 2km)	20.9% (61)	46.0% (92)
Far (Between 3 and 5km)	12.0% (35)	13.5% (27)
Very Far (More than 5km)	2.4% (7)	6.0% (12)

* Actual numbers of responses are in brackets

As shown in Table 3, majority (about 65%) of the pupils in the Shama sub-metro live within a kilometer of the school whereas the majority (46%) of the pupils in the high-achieving schools live between one and two kilometers away from the school. On the whole,

pupils from the Shama sub-metro schools live closer to the school than the pupils in the high-achieving schools.

Age

The descriptive statistics of the ages of the pupils from the schools is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Descriptive statistics of the age of the pupils

Type of school	Classes					
	Primary 3			Primary 6		
	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Shama sub-metro	135	11.25	2.018	142	13.92	1.657
High achieving	99	10.02	1.134	70	12.67	1.164

Table 4 shows that pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools were, on the average, a year older than pupils in the high-achieving schools in Primary 3 and 6.

RESULTS

Research question 1

What school environment factors are the causes of poor academic performance in the Shama sub-metro?

The school factors considered are teaching and learning materials, textbooks, availability of professional teachers, payment of school fees, in-service training, regular staff meetings, preparation and vetting of lesson notes, and availability of infrastructure and materials.

Adequacy of teaching and learning materials (TLMs)

A total of 74 teachers from the Shama sub-metro and 55 teachers from the high-achieving schools from the primary schools provided responses for the item. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Adequacy of teaching-learning materials in English and Mathematics

Adequacy	Subject			
	English		Mathematics	
	Shama	High Achieving	Shama	High Achieving
Adequate	17.6% (13)*	55.6% (30)	24.7% (18)	60.0% (33)
Not adequate	77.0% (57)	44.4% (24)	71.2% (52)	40.0% (22)
None available	5.4% (4)	0.0% (0)	4.1% (3)	0.0% (0)
Total	100% (74)	100% (54)	100% (73)	100% (55)

* Actual numbers of responses are in brackets

As shown in Table 5, in the high-achieving schools, 55.6% and 60.0% of the English and Mathematics teachers respectively reported that teaching-learning materials were adequate. On the other hand, 17.6% and 24.7% of the teachers in the Shama sub-metro schools reported that teaching and learning materials were not adequate. A chi-square test of association, $X_2^2 = 21.56$, $p < 0.05$, for English and $X_2^2 = 17.39$, $p < 0.05$ for Mathematics showed a significant relationship between adequacy of teaching-learning materials and type of school. The results show that the high-achieving schools have more teaching-learning materials than the Shama sub-metro schools.

Availability of textbooks

A total of 284 pupils from the Shama sub-metro and 196 pupils from the high-achieving schools from the primary schools provided responses for the item. The results are shown in Tables 6.

Table 6

Availability of textbooks in English and Mathematics

Availability	English		Mathematics	
	Shama	High Achieving	Shama	High Achieving
Available	31.7% (88)*	61.9% (117)	31.3% (89)	54.6% (107)
Not available	68.3% (190)	38.1% (72)	68.7 (195)	45.4% (89)
Total	100% (287)	100% (189)	100% (284)	100% (196)

* Actual numbers of responses are in brackets.

As shown in Table 6, in the high-achieving schools, 61.9% and 54.6% of the pupils reported that English and Mathematics textbooks were available. On the other hand, 31.7% and 31.3% of the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools reported that English and Mathematics textbooks were available. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 41.80$, $p < 0.05$, for English and, $X_1^2 = 25.96$, $p < 0.05$ for Mathematics showed a significant relationship between availability of textbooks and type of school. The results show that the high-achieving schools have more textbooks to use than the Shama sub-metro schools.

Availability of professional teachers

The mean number of professional teachers in the schools and an independent samples t-test are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Independent samples t-test for availability of professional teachers

Type of school	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df*	t	p-value
Shama sub-metro	15	5.20	3.234	22	-4.936	0.000
High-achieving	9	11.89	3.180			

As shown in Table 7, the mean number of professional teachers in the high-achieving schools was 11.89 whereas 5.20 was obtained in the Shama sub-metro schools. Table 7 further shows that a statistically significant difference existed in the mean number of professional teachers at the 0.05 level of significance between the sub-metro and high-achieving schools, $t(22) = -4.936$, $p < 0.05$. Results therefore show that there were more professional teachers in the high-achieving schools than in the Shama sub-metro schools.

Payment of school fees

The headteachers of all the 24 schools reported that pupils do not pay their school fees promptly and the major reason given by parents was that there was no money. Payment of school fees is therefore not a reason for the difference in academic performance between the Shama sub-metro pupils and those in the high-achieving schools.

Organization of in-service training

The head teachers of all the 24 schools reported that they organized in-service training for their teacher. When asked further how often they organized the in-service training, 66.7% of the head teachers in the two groups reported that they organized it once a month. The organization of in-service training to equip teachers for improved teaching and learning is therefore not a reason for the difference in performance between the Shama sub-metro pupils and those in the high-achieving schools.

Organization of regular staff meetings

About 73% of the headteachers in the Shama sub-metro and 67% of the headteachers in the high-achieving schools reported organizing regular staff meetings. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 4.022$, $p > 0.05$, did not produce a statistically significant result. The organization of regular staff meetings was therefore not a reason for the difference in performance between the Shama sub-metro pupils and those in the high-achieving schools.

Lesson note preparation and vetting

About 97% of the teachers in the Shama sub-metro schools and 96% of the teachers in the high-achieving schools reported that they wrote complete lesson notes weekly. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 0.043$, $p > 0.05$, did not produce a significant result. In addition, 98.7%, and 96.4% of the teachers from the Shama sub-metro and high-achieving schools respectively also reported that their headteachers vetted the lesson notes regularly. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 0.747$, $p > 0.05$, did not produce any significant result.

Availability of infrastructure and materials.

Infrastructure and materials considered for this study were school building, headteachers' office, school store, school library, toilet, water and electricity. Both groups have the school buildings in poor condition. About 64% of the schools in the Shama sub-metro and 56% of the high achieving schools had school buildings in poor conditions. A chi-square test of association, $X_2^2 = 1.108$, $p > 0.05$, did not produce any significant results.

With regard to headteachers office, 77.8% of the headteachers in high-achieving schools reported good condition while only 33.3% of the headteachers in the Shama sub-metro schools reported good condition.

School stores were available and in better condition in the high-achieving schools than in the Shama sub-metro schools. About 56% of the high-achieving schools and 33.3% of the Shama sub-metro schools had the school stores in good condition.

School libraries were either not available or in poor condition in both groups. About 93% of the schools in the Shama sub-metro and 88.9% of the high-achieving schools did not have school libraries. A chi-square test of association, $X_2^2 = 0.320$, $p > 0.05$, did not produce any significant results.

School toilets were either not available or in poor condition in both groups. About 60% of the schools in the Shama sub-metro and 62.5% of the high-achieving schools did not have toilets or had them in poor condition. A chi-square test of association, $X_4^2 = 5.901$, $p > 0.05$, did not produce any significant result.

Water was either not available or in poor condition in both groups. About 79% of the schools in the Shama sub-metro and 75% of the high-achieving schools did not have water or had it in a poor condition. A chi-square test of association, $X_2^2 = 2.710$, $p > 0.05$ did not yield any significant result.

Electricity supply was more available in the high-achieving schools. Sixty-seven per cent of the high achieving schools had electricity while 6.7% of the Shama sub-metro schools had electricity. A chi-square test of association, $X_2^2 = 9.943$, $p < 0.05$, produced a statistically significant result.

On the whole, in terms of infrastructure, significant differences were found in respect of headteachers' office, school stores and electricity supply.

Research question 2

What teacher factors contribute to the low academic performance of the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools?

The teacher factors considered are incidence of lateness to school, incidence of absenteeism, use of language in teaching, completion of syllabi, interest in children's understanding of lesson, and teacher work habit.

<u>Incidence of lateness to school.</u>

A total of 491 pupils were asked if their teachers came to school before morning assembly. The results are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Incidence of early presence in school among teachers

Response	Type of school	
	Shama	High achieving
All the time	48.6% (142)*	70.4% (140)
Sometimes	47.6% (139)	29.6% (59)
Never	3.8% (11)	0.0% (0)
Total	100% (292)	100% (199)

* Actual numbers of responses are in the brackets

As shown in Table 8, 48.6% of the pupils from the Shama sub-metro schools and 70.4% of the pupils from the high-achieving schools reported that their teachers came to school before morning assembly all the time. A chi-square test of association, $X_2^2 = 27.103$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between teacher presence in school before morning assembly and type of school. The results show that the teachers in high-achieving schools were more likely to be present and not be late to school than the teachers in the Shama sub-metro schools. This implies that at the start of classes majority of the teachers from the Shama sub-metro schools would be late while majority of the teachers from the high-achieving schools would be present.

Incidence of absenteeism

A total of 476 pupils were asked how often their teachers came to school. The results are shown in Table 9.

Table 9 shows that 59.9% of the pupils from the Shama sub-metro and 80.7% of the pupils from the high-achieving schools reported that their teachers came to school everyday. A chi-square test of association, $X_5^2 = 27.239$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between teacher presence in school and type of school. The results show that the teachers in high-achieving schools were more likely to be present and not be absent from school than the teachers in the Shama sub-metro schools.

Table 9

Incidence of regular attendance among teachers

Response	Type of school	
	Shama	High achieving
Comes everyday	59.9% (170)*	80.7% (155)
On average, misses once every two weeks	29.6% (84)	16.7% (32)
On average, comes three times a week.	3.9% (11)	0.0% (0)
On average, comes two times a week.	0.7% (2)	0.0% (0)
On average, comes once a week.	0.7% (2)	0.0% (0)
Other	5.3% (15)	2.6% (5)
Total	100% (284)	100% (192)

* Actual numbers of responses are in the brackets

Use of language in teaching

A total of 73 teachers from the Shama sub-metro and 53 teachers from the high-achieving schools from the primary schools provided responses for the item. The results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Teachers' language use in teaching

Language	Type of school	
	Shama	High Achieving
Local	8.2% (6)*	0.0%(0)
English	91.8% (67)	100% (53)
Total	100% (73)	100% (53)

* Actual numbers of responses are in the brackets

As shown in Table 10, in the high-achieving schools, all the teachers (100%) reported using the English language in teaching while 91.8% of the teachers in the Shama sub-metro schools used English. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 4.574$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between use of language and type of school. The results show that

teachers in the high-achieving schools used more English Language more regularly in teaching than the teachers in the Shama sub-metro schools.

Completion of syllabuses

Teachers were asked to indicate whether they completed the English Language and the Mathematics syllabuses for the classes they taught the previous academic year. A total of 73 teachers from the Shama sub-metro schools and 52 teachers from the high-achieving schools from the primary schools provided responses for the item. The results are shown in Tables 11.

Table 11

Teachers' completion of English and Mathematics syllabuses

Status	Subjects			
	English		Mathematics	
	Shama	High achieving	Shama	High achieving
Completed	30.1% (22)*	84.3% (43)	49.3% (36)	78.8% (41)
Not completed	69.9% (51)	15.7% (8)	50.7% (37)	21.2% (11)
Total	100% (73)	100% (51)	100% (73)	100% (52)

* Actual numbers of responses are in the brackets

As shown in Table 11, in the high-achieving schools, 84.3% and 78.8% of the teachers reported that English and Mathematics syllabuses were completed. On the other hand, 30.1% (for English) and 49.3% (for Mathematics) of the teachers in the Shama sub-metro schools reported completing the syllabuses. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 35.33$, $p < 0.05$, for English and, $X_1^2 = 11.20$, $p < 0.05$ for Mathematics showed a significant relationship between the completion of syllabuses and type of school. The results show that more teachers in the high-achieving schools completed the English Language and Mathematics syllabuses than the teachers in the Shama sub-metro schools.

Interest in children's understanding of lesson

A total of 350 pupils were asked what their teachers did to encourage them to study. The results are shown in Table 12.

Table 12.

Teachers' interest in children's understanding of lesson

Teacher Action	Type of school	
	Shama	High achieving
Makes sure I understand each lesson	32.7% (73)*	65.4% (83)
Help me with extra time	6.7% (15)	2.4% (3)
Explains what I can do with my education	17.5% (39)	11.0% (14)
Encourages me to study hard	30.5% (68)	12.6% (16)
Praises me when I do good	10.8% (24)	6.3% (8)
Nothing. Does not care about me	1.8% (4)	2.4% (3)
Total	100% (223)	100% (127)

* Actual number of responses in bracket

As shown in Table 12, 32.7% of the pupils from the Shama sub-metro and 65.4% of the pupils from the high-achieving schools reported that their teachers made sure they understood each lesson. A chi-square test of association, $X_5^2 = 37.24$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between teacher encouragement and type of school. The results show that the teachers in the high-achieving schools showed more concern about the pupils' understanding of the lessons than the teachers in the Shama sub-metro schools.

Teachers' work habit

Pupils were asked to describe their teachers work habit in school. A total of 458 pupils responded and the results are presented in Table 13.

Table 13 shows that 25.2% of the pupils from the Shama sub-metro schools and 58.6% of the pupils from the high-achieving schools reported that their teachers were very hard working. A chi-square test of association, $X_4^2 = 54.30$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between teacher work habit and type of school. The results show that the teachers in high-achieving schools worked harder and showed more commitment than the teachers in the Shama sub-metro schools.

Table 13

Teachers' work habit in schools

Response	Type of school	
	Shama	High achieving
Very hardworking	25.2% (68)*	58.6% (112)
Hardworking	62.9% (168)	36.1% (69)
Works normally	11.2% (30)	4.7% (9)
Lazy	0.0% (0)	0.5% (1)
Does not care about teaching	0.4% (1)	0.0% (0)
Total	100% (267)	100% (191)

* Actual number of responses in bracket

Research question 3

What pupil characteristics are responsible for their performances in the Shama sub-metro schools?

The pupil characteristics considered in the study were incidence of lateness, incidence of absenteeism, regularity in school, language use, enjoyment of teachers' lessons, help with studies at home, time with books and homework at home.

Incidence of lateness

Teachers were asked to indicate whether lateness to school was a common problem exhibited by pupils in the schools. A total of 78 teachers from the Shama sub-metro schools and 55 from the high-achieving schools responded. The results are shown in Table 14.

Table 14

Incidence of lateness among pupils

Issue	Type of school	
	Shama	High Achieving
Lateness is a problem	64.1% (50)*	56.4% (31)
Lateness is not a problem	35.9% (28)	43.6% (24)
Total	100% (78)	100% (55)

* Actual number of responses in bracket

As shown in Table 14, 64.1% of the teachers from the Shama sub-metro and 56.4% of the teachers from the high-achieving schools reported that lateness was a problem. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 0.811$, $p > 0.05$, did not show a significant relationship between lateness to school and type of school. The results show that lateness was a common phenomenon in both types of schools and did not significantly contribute to the difference in performance between Shama sub-metro schools and the high-achieving schools.

Incidence of absenteeism

Teachers were asked to indicate whether absenteeism was a common problem exhibited by pupils in the schools. A total of 78 teachers from the Shama sub-metro schools and 55 from the high-achieving schools responded. The results are shown in Table 15.

Table 15

Incidence of absenteeism among pupils

Issue	Type of school	
	Shama	High achieving
Absenteeism is a problem	65.4% (51)*	34.5% (19)
Absenteeism is not a problem	34.6% (27)	65.5% (36)
Total	100% (78)	100% (55)

* Actual number of responses in bracket

As shown in Table 15, 65.4% of the teachers from the Shama sub-metro and 34.5% of the teachers from the high-achieving schools reported that absenteeism was a problem. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 12.305$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between absenteeism and type of school. The results show that pupils from the Shama sub-metro schools absented themselves from school more than the pupils in the high-achieving schools.

Regularity in school

Pupils were asked to indicate how regular they go to school. A total of 492 pupils. The results are shown in Table 16.

Table 16

Pupils' regularity in school

Level of regularity	Type of school	
	Shama	High achieving
I come to school everyday	59.2% (174)*	83.8% (166)
Every week I miss 1 day	11.9% (35)	1.5% (3)
Every week I miss 2 days	1.7% (5)	0.5% (1)
Every week I miss 3 days	0.7% (2)	0.0% (0)
Sometimes I come, sometimes I don't.	24.8% (73)	12.1% (24)
Other	1.7% (5)	2.0% (4)
Total	100% (294)	100% (198)

* Actual number of responses in brackets

Table 16 shows that 59.2% of the pupils from the Shama sub-metro and 83.8% of the pupils from the high-achieving schools reported that they go to school everyday. A chi-square test of association, $X_5^2 = 39.44$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between regularity in school and type of school. The results show that the pupils in high-achieving schools were more likely to be regular in school than the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools.

Language use

Teachers were asked to indicate what language pupils use mostly in class among themselves. A total of 75 teachers from the Shama sub-metro schools and 49 from the high-achieving schools responded. The results are shown in Table 17.

Table 17

Language use among pupils

Language used	Type of school	
	Shama	High achieving
Local language	88.0% (66)*	44.9% (22)
English language	12.0% (27)	55.1% (27)
Total	100% (75)	100% (49)

* Actual numbers of responses in brackets

As shown in Table 17, 88.0% of the teachers from the Shama sub-metro schools and 44.9% of the teachers from the high-achieving schools reported that the pupils used local language among themselves in the classroom. On the other hand, 12.0% of the teachers from the Shama sub-metro schools and 55.1% of the teachers from the high-achieving schools reported that the pupils used the English language. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 26.72$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between language use and type of school. The results show that pupils from the Shama sub metro schools used the local language among themselves in the classroom while pupils in the high achieving schools used the English language.

Enjoyment of teachers' lessons,

Pupils were asked whether they enjoyed their teachers' lessons. A total of 288 pupils from the Shama sub-metro and 196 pupils from the high-achieving schools provided responses. The results are shown in Table 18.

Table 18

Pupils' enjoyment of teachers' lessons

Response	Type of school	
	Shama	High achieving
Almost always	60.8% (175)*	91.8% (180)
Usually	16.3% (47)	1.0% (2)
Sometimes	22.9% (66)	7.1% (14)
Total	100% (288)	100% (196)

* Actual number of responses in brackets

Table 18 shows that 60.8% of the pupils from the Shama sub-metro schools and 91.8% of the pupils from the high-achieving schools reported that they enjoyed their teachers' lessons. A chi-square test of association, $X_2^2 = 59.87$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between enjoyment of teachers' lessons and type of school. The results show that the pupils in high-achieving schools enjoyed their teachers' lessons more than those in the Shama sub-metro schools.

Help with studies at home,

Pupils were asked if anybody helps them at home with their studies or homework. A total of 480 pupils provided responses. The results are shown in Table 19.

Table 19

Help with studies at home

Response	Type of school	
	Shama	High achieving
Yes	59.5% (173)*	79.9% (151)
No	40.5% (118)	20.1% (38)
Total	100% (223)	100% (127)

* Actual numbers of responses are in the brackets

As shown in Table 19, 59.5% of the pupils from the Shama sub-metro schools and 79.9% of the pupils from the high-achieving schools reported that they received help at home with their studies and homework. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 21.83$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between help with studies/homework at home and type of school. The results show that the pupils in high-achieving schools received more help with their studies and homework at home than the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools.

Time with books and homework at home.

Parents were asked if their children had enough time at home to do their homework. About 96% of the parents of pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools and 98% of the parents of pupils in the high-achieving schools reported that their children had enough time. $X_1^2 = 1.501$, $p > 0.05$. There was no statistically significant association between time with books at home and type of school. The results show that pupils from both groups had adequate time at home to do their studies and homework.

Research question 4

What parental support variables cause pupils in the Shama Sub-Metro schools to perform poorly academically?

The parental support variables that were considered were, provision of breakfast for pupils, provision of textbooks and basic school needs, interaction with children's teachers, and involvement in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

Parents provision of breakfast for pupils

Parents were asked if their children had breakfast before going to school. A total of 515 parents provided responses to the item. The results are shown in Table 20.

Table 20

Parents on the provision of breakfast

Response	Type of school	
	Shama	High achieving
Always	25.4% (75)*	40.5% (89)
Sometimes	51.2% (151)	38.6% (85)
Never	23.4% (69)	20.9 (46)
Total	100% (295)	100% (220)

* Actual numbers of responses are in the brackets

As shown in Table 20, 25.4% of the parents from the Shama sub-metro schools and 40.5% of the parents of pupils from the high-achieving schools reported that their children always had breakfast before going to school. On the other hand, 51.2% of the parents of the pupils from the Shama sub-metro and 38.6% of the parents of the pupils from the high-achieving schools reported that their children sometimes had breakfast before going to school. A chi-square test of association, $X_2^2 = 13.61$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between eating breakfast at home and type of school. The results show that more parents of pupils in high-achieving schools provided breakfast always before the children went to school than the parents of pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools.

Parents' provision of textbooks

Parents were asked if they provided English Language and Mathematics textbooks for their children. A total of 491 parents provided responses to the item. The results are shown in Table 21.

Table 21

Parents' provision of textbooks

Response	Subjects			
	Mathematics		English Language	
	Shama	High achieving	Shama	High achieving
Yes	32.5% (91)*	60.7% (128)	40.9% (112)	72.2% (153)
No	67.5% (189)	39.3% (83)	59.1% (162)	27.8% (59)
Total	100% (280)	100% (211)	100% (274)	100% (212)

* Actual numbers of responses are in the brackets

Table 21 shows that in Mathematics, 32.5% of the parents of pupils from the Shama sub-metro schools and 60.7% of the parents of pupils from the high-achieving schools reported that their children were provided with the textbook. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 38.63$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between provision of Mathematics textbooks and type of school. The results show that more parents of the pupils in high-achieving schools provided the Mathematics textbook than the parents of the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools.

In English Language, 40.9% of the parents of the pupils from the Shama sub-metro schools and 72.2% of the parents of the pupils from the high-achieving schools reported that their children were provided with the textbook. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 47.21$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between provision of English Language textbooks and type of school. The results show that more parents of the pupils in high-achieving schools provided the English Language textbook than the parents of the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools.

Provision of basic school needs (school uniform, school bag, exercise books, pencils, ruler, and pens)

It is the responsibility of the parents to provide the basic school needs of their children. Teachers were therefore asked to indicate what percentage of the pupils in their class was provided with all the basic school needs. A total of 133 teachers provided the responses. The responses are shown in Table 22.

Table 22

Provision of basic school needs by parents

Response	Type of school	
	Shama	High achieving
50% and above of the class	30.8% (24)*	60.0% (33)
Less than 50% of the class	69.2% (54)	40.0% (22)
Total	100% (78)	100% (55)

* Actual numbers of responses are in brackets

As shown in Table 22, 30.8% of the teachers from the Shama sub-metro schools and 60.0% of the teachers from the high-achieving schools reported that 50% and above of the class were provided with all their basic needs. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 11.254$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between provision of basic school needs and type of school. The results show that 50% and more of the pupils in high-achieving schools had all their basic school needs provided while less than 50% of the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools had all their basic school needs provided.

Interaction with children's teachers

Parents were asked if they had ever inquired from their children's teacher about their children. A total of 511 parents provided responses to the item. The results are shown in Table 23.

Table 23 shows that 43.1% of the parents of pupils from the Shama sub-metro schools and 60.7% of the parents of pupils from the high-achieving schools reported that they interacted with their children's teachers. A chi-square test of association, $X_1^2 = 13.83$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between provision of parents interaction with teachers

and type of school. The results show that parents of the pupils in high-achieving schools interacted with the teachers more than parents of the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools.

Table 23

Parents' interaction with their children's teachers

Response	Type of school	
	Shama	High achieving
Yes	43.1% (124)*	59.6% (133)
No	56.9% (164)	40.4% (90)
Total	100% (288)	100% (223)

* Actual numbers of responses are in brackets

Involvement in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

Parents were asked if they attended the last two Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. A total of 492 parents provided responses to the item. The results are shown in Table 24.

Table 24

Involvement of parents in the PTA

Response	Type of school	
	Shama	High achieving
Yes	54.8% (153)*	67.6% (144)
No	43.7% (122)	30.5% (65)
Don't know what it is	1.4% (4)	1.9% (4)
Total	100% (279)	100% (213)

* Actual numbers of responses are in brackets

As shown in Table 24, 54.8% of the parents of pupils from the Shama sub-metro schools and 67.6% of the parents of pupils from the high-achieving schools reported that they attended the last two Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings. A chi-square test of association, $X_2^2 = 8.96$, $p < 0.05$, showed a significant relationship between attendance at PTA meetings and type of school. The results show that parents of the pupils in high-

achieving schools were more involved in attending PTA meetings than parents of the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

A number of significant differences were found between the Shama sub-metro schools and the high achieving schools surveyed in this study. These differences were found within the school and teacher factors, pupil characteristics and parental support variables. The differences accounted for the low academic performance in the Shama sub-metro.

The school factors identified were limited teaching materials, inadequate textbooks and less professionally trained teachers. The teacher factors that were found to contribute to the low academic performance were incidence of lateness to school, incidence of absenteeism, use of the local language in teaching, inability to complete the syllabi, less interest in children's understanding of lesson and not hardworking.

The pupil characteristics found significant were absenteeism and regularity in school, truancy, use of local language in the classroom, lack of interest and joy in the teachers lessons and little help with studies at home. The parental support variables causing pupils to perform poorly academically were their inability to provide breakfast, textbooks and basic school needs, less interaction with children's teachers and less involvement in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA).

School factors

Adequacy of teaching and learning materials (TLMs).

Teaching and learning materials have been found to be less adequate in the Shama sub-metro schools than in the high achieving schools. The materials are mostly visual and these include wall pictures, chalk and chalkboards, maps, atlases, charts and magazines. The TLMs aid teaching and learning because pupils are able to see and often feel what the teacher teaches. They stimulate ideas, demand an active response from the learners and provide enjoyment. The lesson becomes more alive and understanding and grasping of the major concepts become easier. Since there were less TLMs in the Shama sub-metro schools, the situation made it difficult for the pupils to understand the lessons and this led to lower performance because lack of suitable teaching materials and accommodation tends to reduce the effectiveness of teaching. As Broom (1973) pointed out, the availability and creative use

of media makes pupils to learn more and retain better what they learn. This in turn improves their performance. However, this situation was limited in the Shama sub-metro schools.

Availability of textbooks

The study considered the availability of Mathematics and English Language textbooks. The results show that the Shama sub-metro schools had fewer textbooks to use than the high-achieving schools. The Mathematics and the English Language textbooks are the basic textbooks which are used in the schools. They provide a common resource for widening general and specialist vocabulary. Exercises are often given and pupils use the textbooks to do their exercises and assignments. This enables the pupils to understand the lessons better and to check from their own performances if they have grasped what has been taught. Personal copies of set texts can be taken home by students for common homework tasks. This facilitates parental involvement in teaching and learning. The lack of textbooks in the Shama sub-metro schools implied that the pupils were not be able to do a lot of exercises which in turn made them receive little or no attention and feedback to enhance their gained knowledge and improve their academic performance.

Professional qualification of teachers

Shama sub-metro schools had fewer professionally trained teachers than the high achieving schools. Professional qualifications are important in education. The professional skill of the teacher 'establishes a productive classroom atmosphere from the start by means of good organization and carefully planned teaching structures' (Farrant, 1980, p. 169). Professional competence often transforms into high quality of teaching with the expectation that this would influence the learning of pupils.

However in the Shama sub-metro schools the limited number of professional teachers showed that they were not able to use their teaching skills (feedback, questioning, explaining things clearly to pupils, exercises good class control and discipline, deals with problems effectively, creates specific kinds of climate settings for different lessons) to explain lessons making sure that the pupils understood and coped with the amount of knowledge given to them. The outcome was that the pupils in these schools performed poorly.

Teacher factors

Incidence of lateness and absenteeism.

The study shows that teachers in the Shama sub-metro schools got to school late and were often absent from school. When teachers get to school late, they do not take part in the morning assembly and start classes on time. Lateness and absenteeism reduce the amount of instructional time and this results in the syllabi not being completed. Teachers from the Shama sub-metro schools therefore were not able to cover a lot more of the syllabus before the end of the year resulting in a lower output of work by the pupils.

Use of language in teaching

In the high-achieving schools, English Language was used as a medium of instruction while in the Shama sub-metro schools, the local language was used together with English as the medium of instruction. In Ghana, the language policy states that English should be used as a medium of instruction from Primary Four upwards. The use of English is important because most Ghanaian textbooks are in the English Language and English is the official language in Ghana. All tests and examinations are conducted in English therefore a working knowledge of the language is necessary. The use of the local language by the teachers created a deficiency in the pupils which made them unable to understand the textbooks they needed to use and this ultimately resulted in the low academic performance of the pupils.

Completion of syllabuses

English Language and Mathematics syllabuses were the focus of the study. The results showed that fewer teachers in the Shama sub-metro completed the syllabuses than the teachers in the high-achieving schools. The completion of the syllabus for each subject in each class provides the foundation for the next class to be built upon. When the syllabus is not completed, content that should be taught in the next class which is based on the previous class could not be taught. As this continued, there would be a backlog of content not taught and this would affect the performance of the pupils. Since the subject matter syllabuses tend to be spiral, the non-completion of a syllabus tends to have a cumulative effect on the pupils such that as they move from grade to grade, they encounter materials they do not have the foundation to study. In the final analysis, poor performance is the result.

Interest in children's understanding of lesson

The study showed that teachers in the Shama sub-metro schools showed less concern about the children's understanding of the lessons when compared with the teachers of the high-achieving schools. Understanding of the lesson is linked with output and outcome. The greater the understanding of the lesson, the higher the output of the pupils from exercises, assignments and tests. Since teachers in the Shama sub-metro showed less concern about children's understanding of the lessons, the outcome was that their output in terms of academic performance was low. As Aggarwal (1994) pointed out, "best learning takes place when the teacher is successful in arousing the interest of the students. The guidance of the teacher is mainly a matter of giving the right kind of stimulus to help them to learn" (p. 191)

Teacher work habit

Teachers in the Shama sub-metro showed less commitment to work in the schools than the teachers in the high-achieving schools. Teacher commitment and work habits were low. The teachers lacked enthusiasm and were unable to teach effectively. This attitude made the pupils not to be able to learn well and acquire much classroom content and knowledge resulting in the low performance. This supports Lockheed et. al. (1991) assertion that lack of motivation and professional commitment produce poor attendance and unprofessional attitudes towards students which in turn affect the performance of the students academically.

Pupil characteristics

Incidence of lateness, absenteeism and regularity in school

Lateness and absenteeism came out as two of the major problems in the Shama sub-metro schools. Pupils in these schools were often late and absent from school when compared with the high-achieving schools. The effect of lateness and absenteeism and irregular school attendance is that material that is taught was difficult to understand when studied on one's own. Continued missing of classes also results in loss of content and knowledge. They lost in terms of what was taught. The result is that assignments and exercises were not be properly and correctly done. The consequence was the low academic performance.

Language use

Pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools used the local language (Ahanta) among themselves in the classroom while the pupils in the high-achieving schools used English

Language mostly among themselves. The prevalence of the use of the local language means that they would lack a lot of vocabulary in English, which would be needed to understand teachers' lessons and textbooks they read. It affected their assignments and exercises which were often in the English Language. These ultimately affected their academic performance.

Enjoyment of teachers' lessons

Pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools did not enjoy their teachers lessons while the pupils in the high-achieving schools enjoyed their teachers lessons. A number of factors would be responsible for this. Teachers in the Shama sub-metro schools showed less commitment to teaching, there was inadequate teaching and learning materials and the teachers were less professional. Since the pupils did not enjoy the lessons, understanding of the lessons and the desire to learn or study were reduced and this resulted in low academic performance.

Help with studies at home

Pupils from the high-achieving schools received more help with their studies and homework at home than the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools. Help with studies and homework is a supplement of schoolwork and those who receive additional help usually would do better in school. Since pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools could not receive much help at home, their academic performance tended to be low.

Parental support variables

Provision of breakfast

Most parents from the Shama sub-metro schools did not provide breakfast for the pupils as in the high-achieving schools. Breakfast plays a very important part in the teaching and learning process in the morning. It makes the pupils alert in class and helps them to concentrate on the lessons being taught. However, when pupils are hungry they would not be active in class and would not concentrate on the lessons. This was the case of the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools. The lack of breakfast meant that they were not too active in class and could not concentrate and this affected their academic performance. They needed stable frame of mind to enable them concentrate on learning and improve their output.

Provision of textbooks

Important to pupil learning is availability of relevant textbooks and supplementary readers. These materials are the tools for children's learning. It was found that many parents of the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools did not purchase English and Mathematics textbooks for their wards as the Government supply was woefully inadequate. Textbooks enable the pupils to follow the teacher's sequence of presentation and aids in understanding of lessons. The lack of textbooks meant pupils were handicapped with respect to grasping the content taught and competing class exercises and assignments and acquisition of vocabulary. The result was the low academic performance.

Provision of basic needs

The study showed that less than 50% of the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools had all their school basic needs such as school uniform, school bag, exercise books, pencils, ruler and pens provided. This meant that the majority of the pupils did not have their basic school needs provided for by the parents. The lack of basic school needs could not provide a stable mind and conducive environment for the pupils to study. They were not be able to concentrate on the classroom learning process and perform creditably. Lack of exercise books and writing materials result in the situation where the pupils could not do any assignments in the class but became onlookers or bystanders. This in essence led to low academic performance.

Interaction with children's teachers

Parents from the high-achieving schools interacted more with their children's teachers than the parents of pupils from the Shama sub-metro schools. Interactions with teachers enables the parents to know what problems their children are encountering in school and what could be done to deal with the problems. It would also put the pupils on the alert and then study in school because they would know that their parents would come and inquire about their performances in school. In the Shama sub-metro, since interactions were limited, parents were not able to know about what was happening in the schools regarding their children. As such they could not provide much guidance and help to make their children's performance improve.

Involvement in the Parent Teacher Association (PTA)

The study showed that parents from the Shama sub-metro schools had little involvement in the PTA in the schools compared with the parents from pupils in the high-achieving schools. Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) discuss the welfare of the school, the teachers and the pupils. When parents are not involved, some of the problems facing the school are not attended to and this does not create a conducive environment for teaching and learning in the school. This affects both the teachers and the pupils' output. This was the situation in the Shama sub-metro schools. The lack of parents involvement in the PTAs meant that teachers and pupils in a way were not motivated enough to study since the school's problems such as lateness, absenteeism and inadequate infrastructure, which parents would be able to solve, were not attended to. The consequence was the low academic performance.

Recommendations

Regular sensitization meetings and community non-formal education classes should be organized within the Shama sub-metro communities to inform parents about the value of education to children, the community and the nation. This would be a way of encouraging them to be active in the Parent Teacher Associations as well as the activities in the schools. This would also make them see the value of education to an individual. Their involvement would make them aware of the problems and issues affecting the pupils, teachers and the school in general. In this way, they would be able to provide solutions that would lead to the provision of a better teaching and learning environment to improve upon the academic performance in the sub-metro. They would also see the need to provide the basic needs of their pupils and provide help for them at home with their studies. Parents should be encouraged to consider the school as their own and not for the assembly or the government since 92% believed that the schools do not belong to them but to the Government or other groups like churches.

The Shama-Ahanta East Metropolitan Assembly (SAEMA) has access to a Common Fund from the Government for development in the metropolitan area. It is recommended that part of the Fund be invested in employment-generating activities for parents, especially those who could not afford breakfast for their children, in the sub-metro. This would increase their income levels so that they can provide food, especially breakfast for the pupils. The pupils would then be more active and alert in class. Part of the Common Fund could be allocated to the purchase of English Language and Mathematics textbooks for the classes to be used by pupils whose parents could not afford.

The Shama Ahanta East Metropolitan Assembly (SAEMA) could also engage in micro-credit schemes to encourage parents to earn income to meet the needs of their children.

Accommodation needs to be provided for the teachers since about 60% of them live three kilometres or more from their schools. Communities should be assisted by the Assembly to put up decent teachers' houses so that teachers live within the communities and thus reduce lateness and absenteeism.

Supervision should be strengthened and circuit supervisors should be more regular in the sub-metro schools. Regular visits to the schools would motivate the teachers to be more regular and early in school. When pupils realize that supervisors are regular in visiting the schools and teachers are also present always, they would be challenged to change their attitude towards school.

Pupils need sensitization and past students from the community who have made progress in their fields need to be invited regularly to talk to the pupils. Pupils who made it to the senior secondary schools could be used for the same purpose. They would serve as role models and motivators.

Guidance and counselling should be encouraged in the schools to meet pupils' needs. Pupils need someone to talk to since parents do not have time for their wards at home and teachers do not show much interest in the pupils.

SAEMA should work out incentive packages to increase teachers' motivation to teach in the sub-metro. The Shama sub-metro is a mix of peri-urban and rural areas and teachers often lack facilities and amenities like electricity, good drinking water, transportation and decent housing that are found in the high-achieving schools' area like Takoradi and Sekondi. The teacher must be interested in what he teaches and in the children when he is teaching. If he is not interested in the work himself, he can never motivate the class to learn.

Awards could be instituted for performances. Areas such as school and pupil discipline, teacher performance, pupil attendance and achievement and community and parent participation in school activities should be rewarded to serve as a motivation.

Teachers should be re-trained to use more practical-oriented approach to teaching so that pupils will apply the lessons to everyday life. This will make them realize the importance of the lessons taught and not regard them as abstract. Interest will therefore be created in the children and their desire to be in school would be increased.

Teachers need to motivate the children. Motivation is the 'force that determines how much effort an individual puts into his learning' (Farrant, 1980). As put by Farrant (1980, p. 113),

> The engines of human motivation are *interest* and *desire*. When these are working at full power in an individual, remarkable feats of learning can be achieved. It is therefore in the teacher's interest to take the trouble to see that the child's interest and appropriate desires are aroused before trying to teach him.

It is therefore important that teachers attempt to arouse the interest and the joy in each lesson they teach. They could do this through the use of humor in the classroom, paying individual attention to the pupils, using different approaches to teaching and positive reinforcements.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to identify the factors that cause the poor academic performance of pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools in SAEMA. To identify these factors, comparisons were made with high achieving schools within the same metropolitan area. It has been found that certain factors that are believed to be responsible for general poor academic performances were present in both school groups. These factors include large class sizes, lack of supervision, school fees not promptly paid, low frequency of in-service training for teachers, irregular staff meetings, and school infrastructure and materials. Though the presence of these factors affect teaching and learning, the effect in both groups were the same and could therefore not be peculiar problems leading to low academic performance in the Shama sub-metro.

However, the study has been able to identify factors that pertain solely to the Shama sub-metro schools. These factors attributed to teachers, pupils, parents and the school environment were primarily responsible for the low academic performance of the sub-metro. It must be emphasised that these factors generally do not operate in isolation. Teacher absenteeism and lateness for example would result in incompletion of the syllabus and would also affect pupil's motivation, enthusiasm, zeal and commitment to learn. Improving the academic performance of the pupils in the Shama sub-metro schools should not involve paying attention to individual issues discussed. It should involve a total package.

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