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The state of school-community relations in public basic schools in the Wassa-Mpohor East District in the Western Region of Ghana

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the state of school-community relationship and its impact on teaching and learning in public basic schools in the Wassa-Mpohor East District. The study was descriptive survey conducted in twenty (20) selected Junior High Schools (J.H.S). The population of the study consisted of head teachers, teachers and parents. Questionnaire and interview guides were used to collect data from respondents. The sample of the study was 100 respondents-comprising 20 head teachers, 40 teachers and 40 parents. The study revealed that parents showed apathy towards the education of their wards in the schools-some pupils attended school with empty stomach. Community financing to the school was negligible. It was recommended, among other things that the District Assembly and other civil society groups should periodically sensitize parents to financially support the schools in the education of their wards.

Background

Schools in Ghana were first established by the European traders, missionaries and the colonial government around the 19th century to produce catechists /preachers for evangelization, clerks to serve the commercial interests of European traders and administrators for service in the colonial government (Asiedu-Akrofi 1978; McWilliams & Kwamena-Poh, 1975; Mankoe, 2007).

According to Wise (1956); cited in Mankoe, 2007), the belief of both the Christian missionaries and European traders as well as the colonial government in establishing the school in Africa was as follows;

“That Africans who were to serve the missions and the colonial government should make a complete break with their former lives. They were to put aside customary habits such as polygamy and fetish rituals, adopt some of the trappings of European life, avoid native dancing, take biblical names, wear European dresses and lean English”

A school, according to Mankoe (2007); Asiedu-Akrofi (1978) is an institution for educating or giving instruction, especially for children under 19 years, or for any level of instruction. A school includes Primary, Secondary, Colleges, Polytechnic or the University. A school is a structured organization where teaching and learning take place to enable individuals become better independent and useful people in the society. It has a planned and systematic instruction, teaching methods, specific rules and regulations, prescribed standard of qualified staff, lays special emphasis on literacy and numeracy, has laid down evaluation procedures, etc. (Afful-Broni, 2007; Campbell, Bridges & Nystrand, 1977; Hoy & Miskel, 1987; Mankoe, 2007; Asiedu-Akrofi, 1978).

Community on the other hand, refers to all the people living in specific locality, and unified by common interests. Important constituents in the community include traditional rulers, individual citizens, voluntary organizations, law enforcement agencies, business establishments, churches, schools and external networks. Richman and Farmer (1975); Campbell, Bridges and Nystrand (1977); Afful-Broni (2007); observe that school communities can be characterized as rural or urban, farm or non-farm, industrial or residential, and as upper, middle or lower class. The type of community

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obviously has a strong impact on the type of school that may be established as well as the kind of relationship that can exist. A school must establish a close relationship with its community because in the long run, a school cannot be any better than the community capable of making it.

Relationship, in a sense, refers to what the school and the various agencies in the community have to do with each other, or the way in which the school and the community stand to each other. While the general environment is similar to all schools, specific school communities, however, differ from school to school and from district to district depending on the particular circumstances. What has the school got to do with the community and what has the community got to do with the school? Mankoe, (2007); Afful-Broni,(2007); Asiedu-Akrofi, (1978); Levin and Young, (1994); Mescon et al, (1988) have emphasized that a school is inextricably linked to the wider social setting in which it is embedded, and that the influences of the wider social setting invade the school in both obvious and subtle ways.

In Ghana, two main school community relations can be identified. One is the kind in which the school and the community exist as separate entities. Both are seen as performing different functional roles and hence need not interfere with each other. School officials run the school while the community members look on. This kind of relationship is called the “closed system” (Mankoe, 2007). There is also the other relationship in which there is increasing involvement by both the school personnel and community members in the affairs of each other. There is a two-way flow of information between the school and the community. Usually, Parent-Teacher Association is formed. This kind of relationship is called “co-operative system” (Afful-Broni, 2007). The former system is usually common in rural areas and the latter system is usually common in towns and cities.

A strong or close school community relationship does not happen. It results from a well-orchestrated and constantly managed effort to build collaboration between the school and its community (Keith & Girling, 1991; Asiedu-Akrofi, 1978; Mankoe, 2007; Afful-Broni, 2007). In what ways should we establish and maintain a strong and close school community relationship? Mankoe (2007) opines that there are three ways to establish and maintain a strong and close school community relationship. It has to do with understanding the social environment of the school. While the school’s communities are complex and difficult to analyse, school authorities should first seek an understanding by examining the general characteristics of the environment. This insight should include guidelines associated with local customs, culture and population trends. Understanding the social environment is an extremely important element of the job of the school head.

Schools that collaborate closely with their communities gain political support from such communities. A major benefit from such political support is public funding. This is because the community understands and sympathizes with the school; its goals, objectives and programmes and consequently establishes a political will toward the school. The school enjoys improved mobilization of resources. Business houses, for example, donate materials and services to help augment both regular and co-curricular activities. Parents and voluntary agencies help with special events such as field trips and open days. Dissemination of information is another area to be considered. A community must be kept informed of the changes that are going on in the school. It should be informed, for example, of government educational policies such as the FCUBE, decentralization, cost sharing in education, the capitation grant policy, school feeding programme, etc.

Keith and Girling (1991) observed that connecting the school and the community is often a tough task. In spite of the notion that both the school and the community stand to benefit from establishing a close relationship, it is only in recent years that such a relationship is becoming a common phenomenon. Such relationship is characterized by a considerable degree of uneasiness and many citizens still do not get closely involved in school matters even if they have children attending a particular school. What reasons account for this uneasiness?

Statement of the problem

The education system in Ghana today essentially follows the pattern of colonial Ghana where education matters were over centralized and operated largely within the armpit of state/government control. Traditional Ghanaian societies/localities still have no marked influence on the school system (Asiedu-Akrofi, 1978, Mankoe, 2007). For example, issues such as curriculum design and implementation, training and certification of teachers, their appointment, promotion, salary, discipline, etc. are all controlled by the government. Local communities where the schools are situated are not consulted and, therefore have no influence in such matters. A review of the history and development of education in Ghana shows the difficulty of integrating schools and the local communities where the schools are located .This is because local people see the schools as foreign institutions aimed at producing teacher catechists for evangelization, clerks for the commercial houses and government offices(McWilliams & Kwamena-Pon,1975; Graham,1976;Asiedu-Akrofi,1978; Mankoe,2007; Keith &Girling, 1991;Levin&Young,1994).

Another challenge of integrating the school and local communities is that teaching and learning and other academic processes are not premised on Ghanaian standards and expectations, cultural values, local institutions and mores. Until recently, for instance, the teaching, learning and speaking of the vernacular in schools were frowned upon by education authorities and teachers. Pupils who spoke the vernacular on the school compound were seriously reprimanded and given some strokes of the cane. Even today the use of the local dialect in the teaching and learning process is strictly limited to the lower primary classes. Graham (1976) and Asiedu-Akrofi (1978) opine that the school has alienated its products from their own socio-cultural milieu. For example, many educated Ghanaians do not know how to properly greet in the local dialect at social gatherings such as funerals, festivals or marriage/naming ceremonies. The schools, in most cases, are “closed “to community participation and scrutiny in the decision making process. It is only when the school needs the local people in financial mobilization and the offering of free communal labour in the construction of a physical structure that local leadership ideas and support are solicited by the school. The above issues and others have motivated the researcher to find out the state of school-community relationship in the Wassa-Mpohor East District in the Western region of Ghana.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the state of school-community relationship and its impact on teaching and learning in public basic schools in Wassa-Mpohor East District of the Western Region. For this reason, the following specific objectives were outlined to guide the study.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives. To find out:

- I. The services the school renders to the community.
- II. The services the community renders to the school
- III. Challenges facing the school.
- IV. Challenges facing the community.
- V. Ways in which the school and community work to resolve their challenges?

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What service does the school render to the community?
2. What service does the community render to the school?
3. What challenges confront the school?
4. In what ways can the school and community work to resolve their challenges?

Significance of the study

The need to involve school staff and community members in the initiation, formulation, implementation and evaluation of school projects and programmes of the public basic schools cannot be over emphasized. It is hoped that the results of the study will create the awareness that the community has important contributions to make towards the development of public basic schools.

There is, therefore, the need for education policy makers, civil society and stakeholders in basic education delivery in Ghana to actively involve local communities in the affairs of public basic schools towards excellence in learning outcomes. Again, the results of the study will bring to the fore the intricacies and dynamics of school community-relationship that would inform school administrators to fine tune the running of their schools in collaboration with local community leadership. Active school-community partnership would improve teaching and learning towards better learning outcome. The study would also contribute to the body of knowledge in school-community relationship in Ghana.

Methodology

Research Design

The descriptive survey design was used to collect data. A survey design provides a description of trends, attitudes or opinions of population by studying a sample of that population. In this study, the assessment of the situation was made through the administration of questionnaire and interview guides (Creswell, 2003).

Population

The population of the study consisted of all head teachers, teachers and parents of Daboase public Junior High Schools. The total population was one thousand people (1,000)

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample consists of individuals, objects or events that form the population (Seidu, 2012; Creswell, 2003; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). Out of the 1000 people that formed the population, 100 respondents were chosen to form the sample size. Twenty (20) head teachers, one each, from the 20 selected public Junior High Schools were purposively chosen based upon their knowledge and experience in public basic school administration and management, especially in the area of school-community relationship. The selection of the 20 head teachers was done through the simple random sampling of replacement by chance. However, 2 teachers each were randomly selected from the 20 selected schools. Therefore, a total of 40 teacher respondents were randomly selected to participate in the study through the simple random method of replacement by chance. Again, 40 parents were also randomly selected from the community through the convenience sampling method. However, selected parents were respondents who had their wards in the selected schools. Thus, in sum, 100 respondents formed the sample size of the study. The distribution of the sample size is shown as follows:

Table 1: Categories of Respondents and Sample (N=100)

Categories of Respondents	N
Head teachers	20
Teachers	40
Parents	40
Total	100

Key to Table 1

N= sample size

Study Instruments

The researcher designed a questionnaire for the study. The questionnaire was made up of close ended questions such as checklists and the likert-type of questions as well as open ended questions. Structured interview guided was also developed for Headteachers and parents. The teachers were made to fill the questionnaire forms. The head teachers agreed to fill the questionnaire forms besides the interview sessions the researcher had with them. Again, the researcher made use of participative observation method in his data collection because he attended several Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings of the selected schools as an observer. The content and face validity of the instruments were done by fellow researchers at the Centre for Educational Policy Studies, Institute for Educational Research and Innovation Studies of the University of Education, Winneba and their comments included in the final questionnaire and interview schedules. The reliability of the instruments was computed by using the Cronbach co-efficient alpha (Alpha=.56). This is mathematically written as $\alpha=0.6856$ and falls within accepted range of 0.500 and 1.000.

Finding and Discussions

The first research question was what service does the school render to the community? The study identifies the following as services the school renders to the community. These are; transmission of knowledge to pupils, participation in community activities (e.g. Festivals, Sanitation, etc), giving of awards to pupils, community members, allows the community to use its facilities (e.g. Football field, classrooms for church services, etc.), employment to some members of the community, provides leadership roles in community affairs, etc. Table 2 indicates the responses of respondents the services the school renders to the community.

Table 2: Services rendered by the school to the community (n=100).

Types of service	Responses							
	SA 5	A 4	NAND 3	DA 2	SDA 1	WM	SD	I
Transmission of knowledge.	50	30	5	10	5	4.1	2.02	A
Participation of community activities egs (festivals, sanitation)	45	40	5	7	3	4.2	2.04	A
Giving of awards to pupils/community members	40	30	10	12	8	3.8	1.94	A
Allows community to use school facilities egs. classrooms, football field.	60	35	0	4	1	4.5	2.12	A
Employment to community members.	75	15	2	5	3	4.5	2.12	A
Provides leadership roles	55	20	10	7	8	4.1	2.02	A

Mean of means =4.2

standard deviation = 2.04

Source: computed from questionnaire responses.

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Table 2 indicates a mean of means of 4.2 and a standard deviation of 2.04. This means that respondents generally agreed that the school renders various forms of service to its community as shown in the table. This agrees with Asiedu- Akrofi, 1978; Afful-Broni, 2007; Mankoe, 2007 when they said that schools provide varied forms of service to their communities as ways of giving back to the community what the school's stakeholders had already given to support the school in its educational projects and programmes. Although it was generally agreed by respondents that schools provided services to their localities, yet there were some schools in the study area where head teachers had refused to release classrooms for christian church services and had also disallowed community members to use the school's football field for soccer.

In an interview with one head master of a school in the community, this is what he said:

We used to allow community members to organize their church services in our classrooms. We, however, discovered that our classroom furniture was being destroyed with reckless abandon by church members as well as our flower lawns and the flowers. To forestall further destruction of our school furniture and our flowers, the school staff took a decision not to give the classrooms for church service again. The school football field was walled to prevent further destruction on the green grass.

It was inferred from this interview response that sometimes when the school allows community members to use some of its facilities, community members tended to abuse that kind gesture.

In an interview with a parent, she agreed to all the services the school renders to the community except that she was apprehensive about the employment the schools offered to community members. This is what she said:

As far as I am concerned the schools in the study area don't offer employment to the indigenes of the localities except that a few and selected women have been employed to cook for the pupils as part of the School Feeding Programme of Ghana Government. I'm apprehensive of this kind of employment because all the cooks are party faithful of a particular political party in Ghana.

Key to the Table

N = sample size, SA = Strongly agree, A = agree, NAND = neither agree nor disagree, DA= disagree, SDA =strongly disagree; WM= weighted mean, SD= standard deviation and I= interpretation.

Interpretation of Weighted Mean

5.0 = strongly agree, 4.0-4.9 =agree, 3.0-3.9=neither agree nor disagree, 2.0-2.9=disagree and 1.0-1.9=strongly disagree.

The second research question was also on what service does the community render to the school? The study identifies the following as services the community renders to the school. These are; financial support, free communal labour, provision of accommodation for teachers, land for school building/school farm, community leadership roles, use of some community members as resource persons, philanthropic gestures etc. The table below shows the responses of respondents to the services the community renders to the school.

Table 3: Services provided by the community to the school (N=100)

Type of service	Responses							I
	SA 5	A 4	NAND 3	DA 2	SDA 1	WM	SD	
Financial support (egs. PTAs, old students Association).	60	25	10	3	2	4.4	2.09	A
Communal labour	50	30	15	4	1	4.2	2.04	A
Accommodation for teachers	40	45	5	4	6	4.1	2.02	A
Land for school building/ school farm	55	30	19	4	1	4.3	2.07	A
Community leadership roles(egs. Assembly man, member of parliament, chiefs, Opinion leaders etc).	48	32	5	10	5	4.1	2.02	A
Use of some community members as resource person (egs. Lawyers, engineers, etc).	45	30	10	9	6	3.9	1.97	A
Philanthropic gestures/ donations	50	38	5	4	3	4.3	2.07	A

Mean of means 4.2 standard deviation 2.04
 Source: Computed from questionnaire responses.

Table 3 shows a mean of means of 4.2 and a standard deviation of 2.04. This implies that respondents generally admitted that the community provides varied forms of service to the school as indicated in the data. This agrees with Mankoe, 2007; Afful-Broni, 2007; Asiedu-Akrofi, 1978 when they opined that communities provide various forms of service to their schools in order to support teaching and learning as well as other equally important school programmes and projects.

In an interview with head teachers to confirm or refute the services the communities render to the schools, one head teacher, on behalf of her colleagues, admitted that the communities support the schools as indicated in Table 3. However, she had this to say:

It is admissible that the communities are assisting the schools in various capacities. Nevertheless, when it comes to accommodation for teachers, it is only the head teachers who have been provided accommodation by the communities building head teacher quarters for school heads. The rest of the teachers rent their own accommodation in the communities.

The interview response indicates that not all teachers are accommodated free by the communities where the schools are located. The third research question was what challenges confront the school?

teachers are doing and how their wards are faring in their studies. Community support to the schools is also negligible.

The interview response indicates that schools in the local communities of the study area are challenged.

The fourth research question was what challenges confront the community? The following challenges were identified as confronting the local communities where the schools were located. These are as follows: chieftaincy dispute, poverty of parent/guardians, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, illiteracy level of local people, high school dropout rate, poor BECE results, etc. Table 5 indicates the responses of respondents to the challenges confronting the local communities where the schools were located.

Table 5: Challenges confronting the communities where the schools were located (n=100).

Type of challenges	Responses							
	SA 5	A 4	NAND 3	DA 2	S DA 1	WM	SD	I
Chieftaincy dispute	50	20	15	10	5	4.0	2.0	A
Poverty of parent/guardians.	61	24	10	3	2	4.4	2.1	A
Teenage pregnancy	65	22	10	2	1	4.5	2.1	A
Juvenile delinquency	53	26	5	10	6	4.1	2.0	A
Illiteracy level of local people	68	20	6	4	2	4.5	2.1	A
High school dropout rate.	60	30	5	3	2	4.4	2.1	A
Poor BECE results.	48	40	6	4	2	4.3	2.0	A
Mean of means = 4.3					standard deviation			

Source: computed from questionnaire responses.

Table 5 shows a mean of means of 4.3 and a standard deviation of 2.0. This means that respondents agreed that the communities have challenges that need to be addressed. This agrees with Afful-Broni (2007) when he said that local communities where our public basic schools are situated face host of challenges that impede their contributions to basic education delivery and development in Ghana.

In an interview with parents and community leadership, this is the summary of what they said:

Essentially, we are farmers. Our means of livelihood depends so much on our farming occupation. Unfortunately, revenue from the land continues to decline due to bad weather conditions and the erratic nature of rainfall. Many of us find it difficult to make ends meet, let alone support the schools in our localities to grow and develop. Our problem has been compounded by the long and protracted chieftaincy dispute that has divided the community into two rival camps. Local leadership finds it risky and difficult to mobilize resources to support the schools.

It is obvious from the interview response that communities where the study took place were challenged and need assistance from public spirited individuals and groups as well as the District Assembly and civil society organizations.

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toward a holistic socio-economic development of our communities. This we can do if we team up with all interest groups and public-spirited individuals in the schools and the communities to eradicate poverty and the amicable settlement of protracted chieftaincy feuds in our communities.

It is deduced from the interview response that the school and its communities can find ways to work together for academic progress of pupils as well as community development.

Summary of Findings

The following were the main findings of the study:

- Parental and community apathy to children's education.
- Failure of head teachers to involve community members in school affairs.
- Collaboration between the school and its communities towards basic education delivery was low especially in the rural areas.
- Dissemination of information was one-sided often from the school to the local people, especially parents.
- Some community members abused the use of school facilities such as classrooms for christian church services and other social functions by breaking tables and chairs as well as other school furniture.
- Community financial support to the schools was more realized in the urban schools than in rural schools.
- The Parents-Teacher Association (PTAs) and the School Management Committees (SMCs) in rural schools were not as proactive and dynamic as those in urban communities in the district.
- Some schools were challenged because school buildings were dilapidated and lacked adequate teaching and learning materials for effective teaching and learning.
- Some communities were also challenged (for example, Dabose, the district capital) due principally to chieftaincy dispute, poor income levels and therefore, could not support their children's education.

Conclusion

It is important that in all school districts, both the school and the community co-operate with each other. This would motivate the school to work with deep interest for holistic school-community relationship. Both the school and the community would work in the same direction for the proper and wholesome development of pupils and students. While the community would support the school with funds and free communal labour, the school would also disseminate to the community latest information on government education policies, programmes and projects, such as the capitation grant policy, school feeding programme, cost sharing in education, education decentralization and many more. In the context of close school-community relations, both would invite each other to its social activities. This would build a strong and harmonious relationship between the school and the community. For example, the school can tap the expertise of some professionals in the community to teach certain subjects to pupils as resource persons. The school would also undertake community services such as clean up campaigns or provide free labour to build, say community hospital, place of convenience, etc. in order to improve living conditions of the people in the community.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made to strengthen school-community relationship not only in the study area but also throughout Ghana.

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1. The District Assemblies as well as other civil society groups should periodically sensitize local communities, especially parents to support the schools in the education of their children.
2. The School Management Committees and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in the educational/school districts should be re-organized to function actively as partners with school authorities in public basic school development. The personnel at the District Education Directorates should take up this challenge.
3. The District Assemblies and other philanthropists should renovate dilapidated school buildings and also resource the schools to improve teaching and learning towards excellence in learning outcomes.
4. Timely release and disbursement of the capitation grant to the schools for effective teaching and learning and also to meet administrative expenses is recommended. The Government of Ghana is challenged to fulfill this responsibility.
5. Local groups of people and associations such as churches and football teams that use classrooms for church services and the football field of schools for soccer and other sporting activities should use these school facilities with utmost care and responsibility.

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