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Influence of school community relations on school management in basic schools in Agona Swedru, Ghana

Abstract
The study was undertaken to investigate the influence of school community relations on school management in Agona Swedru District. A population of 3,000 comprising of parents, SMC and PTA members (stakeholders) and school heads, assistant heads and teachers (School authorities) constituted the target group. The sample size was 150, comprising 2 headteachers, 80 teachers, 25 parents and 25 SMC\PTA members. The sampling methods adopted were purposive, simple random and stratified random sampling techniques. Data was collected by means of a questionnaire and the statistical tools used in data analysis were the percentage, mean and Chi Square. Key findings revealed that the problem of school-community relations and its implications for school administration was significant and should be tackled with intensity by school administrators, educational planners and policy makers. The main conclusion of the study was that where effective collaboration between school and community exists, it helps schools to attain their missions. It was recommended that basic school managers in Agona Swedru should endeavor through all positive means such as meetings with stakeholders, sensitization programmes on school activities, formation of committees of parents and staff, personal visits, open days and durbars to get parents actively involved in all activities and programmes..

Key words: *School community relations, School management*

Introduction
While the debate continues on how to revamp Ghana's educational system to answer societal needs, it seems almost incontrovertible that the need for fostering strong relationship between the school as a unit and the community cannot be over emphasized. The school and the community exist for each other's good, so that whatever happens in each has far reaching repercussions on the other. This symbiotic relationship between the school and community has been found to be quite advantageous to pupils, teachers and parents alike (Bory-Adams, 2006)

It becomes clear to the researchers that the success of any organization depends on its collaboration withits external inputs. It is of course undoubtedly true that as far as the school is concerned, these external inputs come from its major stakeholders such as the Parent-teacher Associations (PTAs), School Management Committees (SMCs) and the community from which it derives its sustenance. The success of the school itself hinges on consultations and ownership. Once defined, the common vision will be owned by all stakeholders through broad participation of stakeholders in defining the vision, formulating policies and planning their implementation. The most important forms of support are available to every school if it tries to forge closer links with its stakeholders. This relationship will encourage parents to become partners in the education of their children and in supporting their local

schools. A coordinated effort on the provision of formal support is critical if schools are to succeed in meeting their objectives and missions; it will also encourage and facilitate a joint approach to discovering support for schools (UNESCO, 2003).

The school itself can be regarded as a social unit or organization. This is because it is made up of people (teachers, students, pupils and supporting personnel). Smith (2012) believes that an organization is a tool that permits groups of human beings to aim at and achieve goals that would be far beyond the reach of their powers as individuals. Afful-Broni (2005:92) maintains that a formal organization is "… a system of consciously coordinated activities or forces of two or more persons".

Human beings live in groups and crave for company; "no man is therefore, an island unto himself" Says the old adages. Group living involves some kind of relationships which form a matrix of interactions. A relationship is very much involved with the problem of interaction among groups of people in any situation. Communication by the individuals within the group is meant to bring about understanding and harmonious living. Organizations do not exist in isolation. The external environment of the school organization comprises the community, stakeholders, PTA, SMC and resource persons. All these forces influence the management of the school in diverse ways and the school has to take account of them. From the foregoing, the forging of good relations between the school and community has far-reaching consequences on school management. A good relationship between the school and community is an imperative which stakeholders have to foster for good management. Unfortunately, in many schools in Ghana, PTAs and SMCs meetings, which can be used as platform to foster good relations between the school and the community are poorly patronized. The question one may ask: is there any need for the school and the community to forge closer relations and links? Available evidence appears to give credence to the fact that there is indeed an imperative for such relations between the school and the community. Mankoe (2002) asserts that the school is concerned with getting the society to know its functions, its purpose, its limitations, its aims and its ethics.

In the Agona Swedru area, it became evident that basic schools undergo very little activities; PTA and SMC meetings are poorly patronized; most parents do not therefore appreciate the role of school management and the school generally. Parents/guardians who do not make efforts to visit schools to know their children/wards' criticize school authorities for perceived failures (Agona Swedru District Education Directorate, 2012). This background to the study has given an update of the need and place of good school community relations and how such relations help to bring about productivity in school management.

Statement of the problem
The success of the school system depends very much on how well school management interacts with their external environments (the community) such as the PTA and SMC, community attitudes, desires, expectations, degree of intelligence and education, beliefs and customs. A good school head should be able to interact with these variables that constitute the external environment of the school. The points indicated above are conditions that should exist in every Community School such as those existing in Agona Swedru. However, despite relentless efforts by the District Education Directorate of Agona to foster effective School Community relations there are still challenges bringing into question the influence of School Community relations on school management in the area. The problem this research sets out to investigate then is: How do school community relations influence school management in the Agona Swedru basic schools?

Objectives
The overall objective of the study was to examine how school-community relations are being fostered in schools and the influence of such relations on school management. The specific objectives of this study were to:

1. Investigate the perceptions of school authorities and stakeholders on school-community relations among basic schools in the Agona Swedru District.
2. Assess the influence of school community relations on school management in selected basic schools in the Agona Swedru District.
3. examine the constraints to effective school community relations for optimal school management of basic schools in the Agona Swedru District

Research questions
1. What are the perceptions of school authorities and stakeholders regarding school community relations in basic schools in Agona Swedru?
2. How do school-community relations influence management of basic schools in Agona Swedru?
3. What problems militate against effective school community relations in Agona Swedru?

Significance of the study
The study is intended to help improve school-community relations as a tool for improving basic school management by sensitizing school and community leaders on the findings and recommendations generated from the study. It will provide literature on the relationship between school-community relations and effective school management at the basic level This literature will serve as important resource document for school authorities and community leaders. This research will further be of importance to education planners, the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Education Service (GES), circuit supervisors, heads of schools, teachers, parents and communities who will use its findings to mitigate the problems that militate against school community relations

Delimitation/Scope
As much as the researchers would have liked to reach to all basic schools in Agona Swedru, only 10 out of the 30 basic school were selected for the study. The study is limited to public basic schools, private schools are not included.

Literature review
    (a) Perceptions of school head, teachers, and parents/community on school-community relations.
School-community relations have over the years been perceived differently by school leadership and the community alike. Some writers such as Mankoe (2002), Afful-Broni (2005), Peterson and Skiba (2003), Keith and Girling (1988), Mescon, Albert, and Khadouri (1988) have perceived school-community relations as a vital ingredient in school management. It has been observed by Mankoe (2002) that it is not an easy task to forge school-community relations in most schools in Ghana. He notes further that it is only in recent years that both school leadership and the community are beginning to realize the importance of school-community relations. The community has for a long time seen schools as ivory towers in whose business they should not meddle. On the other hand, school leadership has often distanced itself from the community from which it derives its sustenance. School leadership does not realize that good school-community relations rather augment the work of management in schools. From what has been cited above, it is logical to presume that perceptions of parents and the community have affected attempts by school management to foster good school-community relations and this has far-reaching consequences on effective school management.

Analytically, this brings to the fore the role of school authorities- some of whom that believe that school work especially teaching should be professionally oriented and therefore must be carried out without interruptions or interference by parents (Skiba,2003). This attitude must change. School administrators must ensure that parents partake at some level in the affairs of schools.

Areas of influence of school community relations on school managements

There appears indeed, an urgent and an imperative need for school and community to relate. This relationship could allow them to benefit from each other. The school as part of the community environment cannot claim a separate existence from other entities within the environment. This assertion is supported by Epstein (1988) who note that the school is not an island but an intricate part of the local community, within which it derives its sustenance.

A significant and lasting influence of school community relations on school management can be demonstrated from the point of view of African culture which should constitute the foundation of traditional value passed on to children. Particularly for Ghana, this is why it is strongly argued by Mankoe (2004) that the teaching of indigenous language in primary schools is a good practice. The involvement of the community in the affairs of the school also has implications for the development of teaching methods, facilitation of field trips, mobilizing community resources such as experienced and retired school heads, and organizing extra-curricular activities.

How the school establishes relationship with the community

It is now well established that there is the need for an organization called the "school" to establish good relations with its external environment- the community (Keith & Girling, 1991). The first step according Mankoe (2002) is to gain an understanding of the environment within which the school exists. Authorities must first of all gain an understanding, through an examination of the general characteristics of the school's external environment. This insight and understanding must of necessity incorporate guidelines associated with the supra-tribal ethos, customs, culture, idiosyncrasies and population dynamics of the local milieu. The second way in the process of the winning the community to its side and establishing relationship with the community, according to Mankoe, (2002) for the school to forge working collaboration with the community.

He further suggests that through civic education, both school leadership and parents must establish a desire to collaborate with each other. Rationally, it will not even be any misgiving for a school teacher to use some parents as teaching assistants so as to utilize their skills and energies. This will ensure that parents obtain vital information of how their children are performing or coping in school. Such activities have more practical values then the mere issuance of report cards.

Problems that militate against effective school – community relations

Many challenges and problems militate against effective school-community relations. These challenges and problems occur as a result of lack of understanding and the creation of needless suspicion which cause tension between the groups. Another source of tension between the school and the community is the unnecessary demand made on children. These include compulsory extra-classes where exorbitant monies are charged and those who cannot afford are sacked. Parents, to meet these demands, force the children to engage in child labour activities, which in the long run affect children's academic performance (Ministry of Education, 2001).

Another barrier which militates against effective school-community relations is the over-emphasis on planning and monitoring of school management so much so that management fails to recognize that the school-community has potential to influence the school as an organization (Smith, 2012). This has grave consequences regarding the way schools are managed especially as it relates to heads of schools who are not confident enough in the performance of their duties. Yet, another problem in school-community relations is community interference in the affairs of the school. Some parents go to the extent of telling school management what should be done to their children in disciplinary matters and these are quite at variance with school rules and regulations laid down by the GES (Mankoe, 2002). Such developments hinder the mobilization of community resources in managing schools.

Research design
The research design adopted for the study was descriptive survey. A descriptive survey is concerned with conditions or relationships that exist, properties that prevail, beliefs, points of view or attitudes and perceptions that are held, processes that are going on, effects that are being felt, or trends that are developing (Cohen & Manion, 1994). Particularly, this study sought to investigate the relationship that exists between basic schools and communities, and how such relationship affects school management.

Population
The population was 3000 and this comprised school authorities (30), headteachers (30) assistants (30), 340 teachers, and stakeholders (50 PTA executives, 50 SMC members and 2500 parents) in basic schools in the Central Region of Ghana. The researchers selected Central Region basic schools, particularly Agona Swedru District Directorate for the study because of reported weak management structures, frequent media reports about the assault on teachers and unexplained demands made by school authorities (Swedru District Annual Report 2007). The main study was conducted in the Agona Swedru District comprising tthirty (30) schools with a target population of 3,000.

Sample and sampling techniques
The researchers employed simple random sampling to select ten (10) basic schools in the Agona District Directorate. The reason for the use of simple random sampling was to give each school a fair chance of representation. In each of the sampled schools, 1 head and 1 assistant head (20 in total) were selected by purposive sampling technique; eight (8) teachers were selected by a means of stratified random sampling technique from each of the 10 schools (80 in total), and 25 parents and 25 PTA/SMC executives who were part of the 10 schools were selected by stratified random sampling technique to respond to questionnaires. In all, the sample size came up to one hundred and fifty (150).

Instrument
The instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted items for school heads and assistant heads, PTA and SMC members and executives. The questions largely stressed areas of perceptions on school-community relations, problems that militate against school community relationships and the influence of school- community relationship on school management.

Results and discussions
Result question 1: What are the perceptions of school authorities and stakeholder regarding School-Community relations in basic Schools in Agona Swedru**?**
Research question one sought to find out the perceptions of parents and stakeholders regarding how they perceive school community relations in Agona Swedru
(Scale = Strongly agree, 1.00-1.40; Agree, 1.50-2.40; Undecided, 2.50-4.40; Disagree, 3.5-4.40; strongly disagree, 4.5-5.00)

Table 1 Perceptions of school authorities and stakeholders towards school community relations

Statement /Question	Strongly agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Stakeholders											
1. School-Community relations is necessary in school	47	82.7	17	22.7	4	5.3	4	5.3	3	4.0	1.6533
2. Effective school community relations promote effective school management	420	50.0	22	29.3	5	6.7	3	4.0	3	4.0	1.7067
School. Authorities											
1. School-Community relations is necessary in school	36	48.0	30	40.0	4	5.3	4	5.3	1	1.3	1.7200
2. Effective school Community relations promote effective school management	25	33.3	43	57.3	5	6.7	1	1.3	1	1.3	1.8000

(n=150; 75 for stakeholders; 75 for school authorities)
Mean Ranking: Strongly agree, 1.00-1.40; Agree, 1.50-2.40; Undecided, 2.50-4.40; Disagree, 3.5-4.40; strongly disagree, 4.5-5.00

Table 1 supports societal view that school-community relations are necessary in schools. About eight-three percent (82.7%) of stakeholders ticked strongly agree. The mean of 1.6533 in the test statistics which falls within the mean ranking (1.50-2.40) shows that most respondents agreed with the statement that school-community relations was necessary in basic schools. Majority of the respondents, about (79.3%) with a response mean of 1.7067, agreed that school-community relations promote effective school management in basic schools. Eight-eight percent of stakeholders with a response mean of 1.7200 also agreed that school-community relations was necessary in basic schools. Majority of the respondents also agreed that effective school-community relations promote good school managements (90.6%) with a response mean of 1.800.

The perception of both school authorities and stakeholders are similar and corroborate those of (Mankoe, 2002; Keith & Girling, 1991, Levin & Young, 1994; Asiedu-Akrofi, 1978). The view that effective school-community relations helps in school management is also corroborated by (Smith,2012) Musaazi, 1984) who all agree that effective school-community relations and parent/client involvement help school management in diverse ways and make the school achieve its goals.

Table 2: School authorities and stakeholders' perception on the necessity of school-community relations

Statement	School Authorities		Stakeholders	
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
It helps to bring community closer to school	16	21.3	23	30.7
Stakeholders appreciate the problems of school	31	41.3	30	40.0
It helps increase student achievement.	16	21.3	111	14.7
Reinforces people's beliefs in education	5	6.7	4	5.3
It helps in positive development of social goals	5	6.7	4	5.3
Contribute to quota of schools	2	2.7	-	-
Total	**75**	**100.0**	**75**	**100.0**

The synthesized responses of both school authorities and stakeholders in Table 2 show that 16 (21.3%) in the School authorities category and 23 (30.7%) in the Stakeholders' were of the perception that effective school-community relations help to bring communities closer to schools. The data in Table 2 also show that 30 (40.0%) stakeholders and 31 (41.3%) School Authorities felt that an effective school-community relation was necessary since it makes stakeholders appreciate the problems of schools. Sixteen (21.3%) School Authorities and 11 (14.7%) Stakeholders', respectively said that good and effective school-community relations also help to augment student achievement. Implicitly, more School Authorities supported this view than stakeholders. What is however, paramount is that both categories of respondents agreed with the reasons why schools and communities should relate. Deductively, such cordial relationship between the school and the community will inure to the benefit of both. Indeed, the necessity of the school and the community to work together can be demonstrated from the arguments of Mankoe (2002) that the school can serve as a community centre if it programmes are planned with reference to the need of the community. For example, the school curriculum can be adaptable to local needs such that the school can use local craft in its craft courses.

Research question 2: How does School Community relations influence effective basic school management in Agona Swedru?
The purpose of research question two is to find out how school community relations influence basic school management in terms of contribution towards the running of basic schools.

Table 3: Influence of School-community Relations on School Management

Influence	School authorities		Stakeholders	
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Parenting	29	36.7	40	53.3
Learning at home	9	12.0	6	8.0
Effective communication between school and community	14	18.7	13	17.3
Voluntary service to the school	12	16.0	3	4.0
Decision-making on school matters	6	8.0	9	12.0
Community collaboration running the school	5	6.7	4	5.3
Total	75	100.0	75	100.0

In the order of magnitude regarding influence of school community relations the following were listed as most important influences. Parenting, 29 (36.7%) and 40 (53.3%); followed by effective communication between school and the community, 14 (18.7%) for school authorities and 13 (17.3%) for stakeholders, respectively. The responses also revealed that respondents were of the view that voluntary service by parents at the school also influenced positively on school management, as evidenced by the scores 12 (16.0%) and 3 (4.0%) for school authorities and stakeholders, respectively. These responses were followed by 6 (8.0%) and 9 (12.0%) for decision-making on school matters and 5 (16.7%) and 4 (5.3%) for community collaboration and running the school for school.

These views expressed on the influence of school community relations on school management have been corroborated by researchers on school-community relations, For example, Smith (2012) notes that parents' involvement in school management enables schools to help parents increase involvement by teaching better child rearing skills through parenting. Bory-Adams (2006) also notes that parent-school management interaction through meetings also promotes the community and allows for their concerns to be addressed. These concerns, by inference, assist schools to be managed effectively. Again, these findings are in tandem with those of Epstein (1988) and Mankoe, (2004) that effective collaboration between school and community allows school management to achieve their goals. Smith (2012) noted that perhaps, of the most striking relating to school-community relations is how much parents appreciated being involved in the teaching of reading. This suggests that schools might reconsider the extent to which they allow parents to be involved in school activities, and that they might be more confident about developing new ways of working with them

views of Smith (201)(reinforce the need for the School and the community to relate much more deeper not only to get parents involved in teaching children reading, but in arousing their overall interest in the totality of school life.

Table 4: Influence of Parents' Involvement In School Management
Does parents' refusal to get involved in school activities affect school management..?

Response Stakeholders*	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Yes	52	37.5	14.5
No	23	37.5	-14.5
Total	75		
School Authorities**			
Yes	49	37.5	11.5
No	26	37.5	-11.5
Total	75		

* X^2 Cal = 11.213   df = 1   P $\leq$ .05 X^2 tab = 3.841   Significance = .001

** X^2 Cal = 7.053   df = 1   P $\leq$ .5 X^2 tab = 3.841   Significance = .008

From the Table 5, in the stakeholders' category, 52 (69.3%)   supported the view that parents' refusal to get involved in school activities does affect school management, while 30.7% disagreed. The test of significance yielded (X^2 Cal = 11.213   df = 1   P $\leq$ .05 X^2 tab = 3.841 Significance = .001).The critical value (X^2 tab) came up to 3.841. This shows that stakeholders agreed that parents refusal to get involved in school activities actually affect school management (ie 11.213 > 3.841). In the school authorities category, the test of significance also yielded (X^2 Cal = 7.053; df = 1; P $\leq$.05; Significance =. 008). With a table value (X^2 tab = 3.841). Since the table value is less than the calculated value it means there is ample evidence to show that school authorities' agreed that parents' refusal to get involved in school activities does in fact affect school management in diverse ways. These views are in consonance with those of Peterson and Skiba (2003); Epstein (1988); Smith (2012); Kube and Ratigan (1991) and Mankoe (2004) on school-community relations. These authors variously argue that the non involvement of parents in school activities adversely affect school management.

Research question three (3) : What problems militate against effective school community relations in Agona Swedru?
Research question three intended to unearth ascertain problems that confront school community relations in Agona Swedru
(Scale =Strongly agree 1.00-1.4; Agree 1.50-2.40; Undecided 2.50-3.40; Disagree 3.40-4.40; strongly disagree 4.50-5.00. *Stakeholders **School authorities).

Table 5: Problems that militate against effective school-community relation

Statement/ Question	Strongly agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Mean
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Suspicion and lack of interest in school programmes militate against effective School-Community relations.	*37	49.3	26	34.7	6	8.0	3	4.0	3	4.0	1.7867
	**28	37.3	27	36.0	7	9.3	6	8.0	7	9.3	2.1600
Unnecessary demands On parents lead to lack of interest in fostering good relations	*40	53.3	22	29.3	5	6.7	4	5.3	4	5.3	1.8000
	**36	48.0	28	37.0	5	6.7	4	5.3	2	2.7	1.7733
On-attendance to PTA, SMC meets Is a problem to good school-community relations	*35	46.7	29	38.7	3	4.0	5	6.7	3	4.0	1.8267
	**40	53.3	27	36.0	3	4.0	4	6.3	1	1.3	1.6533
Incompatibility between school and Community is a problem to good school-community relations	*41	54.7	20	26.7	4	5.3	7	9.3	3	4.0	1.8133
	**36	50.7	29	38.7	3	4.0	4	5.3	1	1.3	1.6800

(n=150; 75 for stakeholders; 75 for school authorities)
Mean ranking: Strongly agree 1.00-1.4; Agree 1.50-2.40; Undecided 2.50-3.40; Disagree 3.40-4.40; strongly disagree 4.50-5.00. *Stakeholders **School authorities.

Both stakeholders and school authorities overwhelmingly agreed that suspicion, distrust and lack of interest in school programmes militate against effective school-community relations. In the stakeholders' category, a combined total of 84.0% agreed and in the school authority category 73.3% agreed. Arguably, when parents and other stakeholders harbor suspicions of school intentions and mission statements, this poses many challenges to school authorities' intentions. If distrust of school intentions and the school's basic role in educational provision is undermined, if suspicion undermines the good culture of school management, then it behooves the community to desist from such actions and support activities of the school. Justifiably, parents are required to complement the works and efforts of the school in matters of learning, and character training. But in spite of the many benefits that accrue from school-community relations, client involvement does not succeed in many school districts (Asiedu-Akrofi, 1978). This assertion is consistent with the writings of researchers on school-community relations such as Epstein (1988), Coleman and LaRoque (1990) and Mankoe (2002). Epstein (1988), in a survey found out that 70% of parents never involved in any activities that could assist the staff in the school. Coleman LaRoque (1990) observes that only a small percentage of parents participated in a school committee. Much larger percentage was willing to participate only in specific events or tasks.

Conclusion
Available evidences derived from the research show that there is the need to encourage school-community relations. Majority of both stakeholders and school authorities agreed that there was effective collaboration between the schools and their communities. This finding however, appears to be quite at variance with those of Mankoe (2004); Coleman and LaRoque (1990) who posit that in general most stakeholders are apathetic towards such community involvement. They maintain that in general, only a small percentage participates in such school-community relations. A key conclusion

that can therefore be drawn is that progress in school management does not only depend on school managers, but on a pool of community leaders whose leadership skills and professional expertise are vital. This discourse signals the fact that schools in Ghana should not isolate themselves from the community which they were set up to serve.

Recommendations

As a result of the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. School Authorities in Agona Swedru must organize community approaches like Open-days, durbars and forums on the need for community members to get actively involved in school matters. In addition, parents who are knowledgeable in school subjects should be made resource persons so that they can frequently visit schools and actively get involved in the teaching and learning process.

2. School authorities in Agona Swedru must sensitize their clients, parents and the community in general to get actively involved in PTA meetings. Although many of the principal executive members, viz. Chairman, Vice Chairman and Treasurer are parents, the head-teacher is only an ex-officio member who gives situational reports at such PTA meetings. Unless the school authorities pool them along, parent-executive members simply relax. School authorities must work to know parents residences, pay periodic visits and sensitise them on PTA activities and contribute their quota for success.

3. In order cultivate community interest in school management, school authorities of Agona Swedru must form standing committees to deal with matters relating to school finance, discipline and teachers' welfare. These committees must be made up of parents and teachers. Such committees should as much as possible be chaired by parents.

4. In order to encourage clear and transparent communication as anticipated in the findings, Open Days should be organized by school authorities in Agona Swedru to show case the activities in the school, in the form of exhibitions, sports and games, cultural displays to parents and get them interested in the schools.

5. Another way school authorities can get the community feel part of the school, is to allow the community to use school facilities and other properties. School authorities of Agona Swedru must also educate parents on children's basic need-food, school clothing, healthcare and other childcare processes. This could be done through periodic sensitization programmes and meetings. Personnel from the Ministry of Health-Health should hold sensitization programmes and meetings.

6. Another way schools can get community involved in school's activities is for the school Agona Swedru to embark on communal labour and clean-up campaigns in the community. By so doing the school advertises itself to the community and wins their support for school programmes.

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