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Determinants of Academic Underachievement in Public Junior High Schools: Evidence from Kassena-Nankana East Municipality

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Abstract
This study investigated the determinants of academic underachievement in public junior high schools in the Kassena-Nankana East Municipality of Ghana. Underpinned by Ecological Systems Theory, the study used a descriptive survey design and involved one hundred and ninety-eight (198) students and forty-eight (48) teachers randomly selected from the Municipality. The research instrument used to collect the data was a structured 5-point Likert scale questionnaires. The results indicated that factors related to students, teachers, schools, and parent/home negatively affect students' academic performance. The study also found that student-related, teacher-related, school-related, and parent/home-related factors significantly influence students' low academic performance in junior high schools. The study recommends a partnership among key education stakeholders to ensure a rich and conducive learning environment where all students can strive for academic excellence.

Keywords: Students' Academic Performance, Student-related Factors, Teacher-related Factors, School-related Factors, Home-related Factors.

Introduction

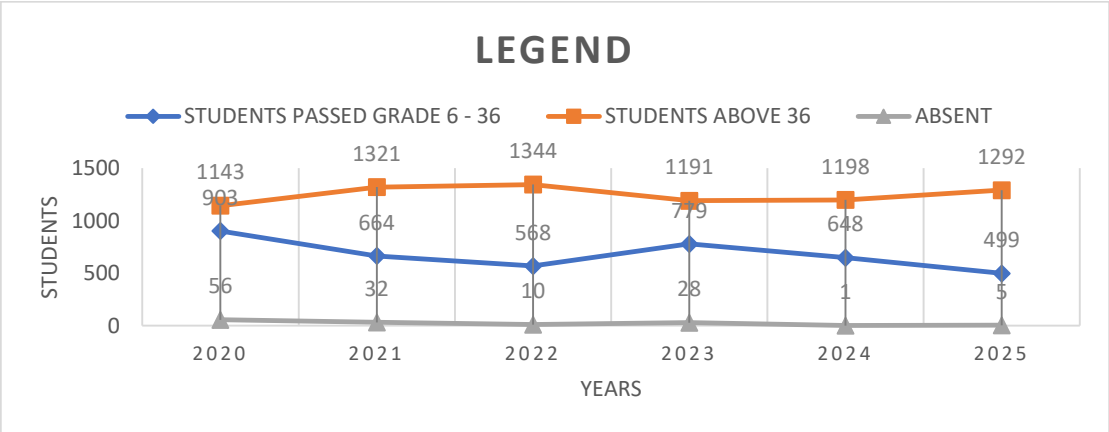
It is generally believed that the quality of human resources in a country determines the pace of the country's development. Human resources are an economic support, and they are needed and used to achieve efficiency in every sector of the economy (Darmawan et al., 2020). According to Van Hiep (2021), human resources, especially high-quality human resources, play an important role in the development of the economy and society. Addah (2015) also argues that developing countries worldwide depend heavily on quality human resources for their economic, social, and political survival, and Ghana, as a developing country, is no exception. There is therefore no refuting that children are the future leaders of this nation and, for that matter, the human capital of the nation. For children to grow into responsible adults who will manage the affairs of this nation successfully, they need quality education. Quality education is a key asset for growth and national development (Addah, 2015). For these reasons, countries worldwide regard investment in their citizens' education as a priority (Alemiya, 2018).

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda aims to leave no one behind; people see it as an all-encompassing, global, and interdependent concept. High-quality education will help develop more stable, long-lasting communities by broadening access to opportunities and fostering greater tolerance in society. The Millennium Development Goals prioritised education reforms to ensure that every child can attend a good elementary school. The current aim of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) is to increase the opportunities for learning to play a catalytic role in bringing about significant shifts in sustainable development (Adipat & Chotikapanich, 2022).

Accordingly, various government regimes in Ghana have identified education as a key national development tool and have worked tirelessly over the years to ensure free access to quality basic education. As a result, policies such as Free Universal Basic Education (FCUBE), implemented in 1995; the introduction of Capitation Grants (CG) in 2004; and the School Feeding Program in 2005 (Benson et al., 2022) aimed at improving quality basic education. Also, these policies by the Government of Ghana (GoG) aim to increase enrolment, attendance, and retention of students at the basic level. The GoG has also instituted the Best Teacher Awards (now the Ghana Teacher Prize) and other teacher career development programmes to motivate teachers, ensure the delivery of quality education, and improve students' academic achievement (Ministry of Education, Science and Sports, 2007). These government interventions have yielded the desired outcomes, including an increasing number of children accessing basic education in Ghana (National Schools Inspectorate Authority Report, 2022).

According to the Education Sector Performance Report (2015), the Gender Parity Index (GPI) for equitable access to school for both boys and girls has been achieved and sustained at the KG and Primary levels. In addition, completion rates have almost reached 100% at the primary school level and have increased substantially to 73.5% at the Junior High School level. Transition rates from Primary 6 to Junior High School 1 have also reached 99.1% (Education Sector Performance Report, 2015). Despite the governments' efforts aimed at improving students' academic performance and the gains achieved at the basic education level, the academic performance of students in most public basic schools in the country continues to decline (Addah, 2015) and public basic schools in the Kassena/Nankana East Municipality (KNEM) are no exception as shown in Figure 1, where the number of students who passed in the BECE in the Municipality continues to decline (from 43% in 2019/2020 academic year to 27.8% in 2024/2025 academic year). Hence, there is a need to study the socio-educational factors causing student underachievement in public junior high schools in Kassena-Nankana East Municipality.

Figure 1: Performance Trends of KNEM Students in BECE from 2020 - 2025



Source: Municipal Education Office – KNEM, 2026

Research Questions

1. What do students perceive as the factors responsible for students' low academic performance in public JHSs in the Kassena-Nankana East Municipality?
2. What do teachers perceive as the factors responsible for students' low academic performance in public JHSs in the Kassena-Nankana East Municipality?
3. From students' and teachers' perspectives, what factors influence students' low academic performance at the BECE in the Kassena-Nankana East Municipality?

Hypothesis

H_o: There is no significant relationship between the factors responsible for low academic performance and students' low academic performance.

H_a: There is a significant relationship between the factors responsible for low academic performance and students' low academic performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1989) Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner (1989) posits that an individual is influenced by interconnected and interwoven environmental systems, ranging from immediate surroundings such as the family to broad societal structures like culture. Bronfenbrenner (1989) argues that human development is dynamic and is shaped by systems over time. The theory classifies the environment into five nested systems: microsystems, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

The microsystem is defined as the pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships a developing person experiences in a particular setting with specific physical and material features, and with other people who have distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and belief systems. The mesosystem comprises the linkages between microsystems. The exosystem refers to external environments and societal structures that do not directly involve the individual but indirectly affect them. The macrosystem entails the broadest cultural context. This encompasses overarching societal values, cultural beliefs, economic conditions, and government laws. The chronosystem represents a time-based dimension that influences the operation of all levels of the ecological systems. The chronosystem refers to both the short- and long-term time dimensions of the individual over the course of a lifespan, thereby influencing the operation of all other systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

To examine the causes of low academic performance among public JHS students at BECE in the Kassena-Nankana East Municipality, one must consider the individual student as well as the context in which they learn. The ecological systems theory is relevant to the study because it leads researchers to understand low academic performance in the Municipality as a phenomenon influenced by wider social systems (Agyegelone, 2018). Explaining further, Agyegelone (2018) states that children within the Municipality are directly present within social systems, such as the household, school and immediate neighbourhood, and that there are others in which they are not directly represented, but which impact on their development, including their siblings, social network, parents, friendship, leisure and workplace relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). In addition, the theory highlights the influence of wider social systems, including culture, political systems, social institutions, and values, and argues that these should be considered in children's educational nurturing (Agyegelone, 2018).

Learning outcomes depend on how the teacher presents content to the learner, how the learner interacts with the learning experiences presented to him/her, and the environment in which learning takes place. These entities are therefore expected to be affected by factors associated with the school environment, home and community conditions, the teacher, education administration, and the learners (Agyegelone, 2018). Consequently, within this framework, the present study seeks to investigate the causes of low academic performance among public JHS students in the Kassena-Nankana East Municipality.

The Concept of Academic Performance

Academic success is the assessment of a learner's capability in many academic fields. Academic performance, according to Narad and Abdullah (2016), is the knowledge attained as measured by a teacher's grades or by educational objectives set by students and teachers to be achieved over time. They contend that these goals and objectives are assessed by continuing evaluation or examination results. For the purpose of this study, academic achievement means successful accomplishment in a particular subject area and is indicated by high grades. Academic achievement is essential for producing the best graduates who go on to lead and work for the nation with distinction and for fostering the nation's economic and social advancement (Norhidayah et al., 2009).

Osei-Mensah (2012) indicated that the availability of teaching and learning materials, teachers' competency, and the environment in which a school is located affect students' academic performance. It is clear that school climate and student performance are related in earlier research on organisation climate and student performance (Brookover et al., 1979). Higher levels of student achievement are found in schools with a disciplined and serious learning atmosphere, teachers who set challenging but attainable standards, and students who put in a lot of effort and respect peers who excel in the classroom. The discussion above implies that a variety of factors, including but not limited to student, teacher, school, and parent influences, affect Students' academic achievement.

Factors Influencing Academic Performance

Educational improvement studies have revealed that influences on learner achievement are both integrated and multilevel (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2009). Rothstein (2000) argues that learning is not only a product of formal schooling but also of communities, families, and peers. Socio-economic and socio-cultural forces can affect learning and, in turn, school academic achievement. Various factors that influence students' academic performance have been identified. Some of these factors are discussed in the subsequent sub-headings.

Student-Related Factors

Several student-related factors and characteristics have generally been identified as influences on academic performance. These include time spent with books and on homework, school attendance, students' attitude toward schooling, students' self-concept and motivation, and students' health and nutritional status (Allen-Mear et al., 2000; Abu-Hilal, 2000; Vein & Diaz, 2003). According to Engin-Demir (2009), regardless of intelligence, students who spend more time on assignments and homework tend to improve their grades. The time students invest in homework and related activities has also been found to be strongly related to motivation.

Teacher-Related Factors

Murati (2015) stated that the teacher with professional ability is a relevant factor in the training and preparation of didactic and methodical plans, organising and carrying out work on student learning. According to Gunawan (2016), the teacher is an important element and must be present alongside students. The teacher is a facilitator on whom students depend; the teacher's presence is influenced by students'

school life (Larasati et al., 2019). Several teacher factors influence academic performance. These include teacher attendance, interest, supervision and motivation, teaching effectiveness, and teaching methods (Etsey et al., 2004; Dunne & Leach, 2005; Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007; Adane, 2013). Teacher regularity in school is important for both learner's access to education and the nature of that access. Widespread teacher absenteeism is likely to contribute to poor learner performance (World Bank, 2004).

School-Related Factors

School environmental factors have generally been identified as influencing academic performance. These include the availability of instructional materials, school location and the quality of physical facilities, class size and student-teacher ratios, teacher qualifications and experience, and supervision. School location and the quality of the physical building influence learners' performance. According to Asikhia (2010), a school's location determines, to a very large extent, the patronage it will enjoy. Similarly, an unattractive physical structure could demotivate learners from achieving academically.

Home-Related Factors

According to Adane (2013), a learner's performance in school can be influenced by a wide range of household factors. These include socio-economic status (education, occupation and income) of parents, size of the household, type of discipline at home, family structure, and the level of parental involvement and interest in child schooling. Asikhia (2010) argues that learners from poor homes are forced out of school and made to engage in hawking, selling packaged drinking water, and other things to save money for their school expenses. Most of the time, they cannot afford instructional materials and are always at the mercy of examiners during examination periods. The persistence of these challenges in an individual student's life may spell doom for their academic success.

Also, the number of siblings a learner has is assumed to influence his/her academic performance. The larger the family size, the less attention and devotion parents can give a child, and the more difficulty parents face in meeting the child's physical and emotional needs, particularly in this austerity period when the prices of food and commodities have skyrocketed (Asikhia, 2010).

According to Adane (2013), structurally, a family is either broken or intact. Coukline (1996), cited in Agyegelone (2018), explains that a broken family in this context is one that is not structurally intact for various reasons: death of a parent, divorce, separation, disinheritance, and illegitimacy, in which case the family was never complete. Broken families face challenges such as diminished financial resources, the assumption of new roles and responsibilities, the establishment of new patterns in intra-familial interaction, and the reorganization of routines and schedules, which most often affects students learning (Agulanna, 1999).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a descriptive survey design. According to Shinija (2024), descriptive studies are systematically designed to gain information about characteristics within a select or a particular field of study. This design is a scientific tool used to determine relationships between variables; follow-up questions can be asked, and unclear items can be explained. Because the population is large, the researcher can generalise findings from the representative sample (Baidoo-Anu, 2017). This study is descriptive in nature because it was carried out to assess the causes of low academic performance.

Respondents of the Study

Asamoah-Gyimah and Duodu (2007) suggested that, for most quantitative surveys, a sample of 10% to

30% of the universe size is desirable. To this end, a total of 198 students representing 33% of the accessible population were randomly selected for the study, considering the suggestion from Asamoah-Gyimah and Duodu (2007). All teachers in the selected schools, numbering forty-eight (48), were also selected for the study. Therefore, a total number of 246 respondents were used for the study.

Research Instruments

The research instrument used for collecting data for the study was structured questionnaires. Dampson and Mensah (2014) argue that, to gather information about respondents' (students' and teachers') opinions on how far they agree or disagree with a given statement, the questionnaire is the ideal instrument. For these reasons, a structured questionnaire was used to gather background information of students and teachers and their understanding of the issues regarding learners' academic underachievement.

Reliability and Validity

Validity refers to the degree to which an assessment measures what it is supposed to measure (Kaplan & Saccuzzo, 2012). To ensure this, the instrument was sent to experts with extensive experience in basic education in Ghana, including knowledge of academic performance. Their suggestions on issues such as ambiguous and lengthy statements were noted and considered.

Cherry (2014) is of the view that reliability refers to the consistency of a measure. A pilot test was conducted to determine the reliability of the research instruments. After the pilot test, the Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS, version 21) was used to analyse the data from the pilot test to determine the internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient) of the questionnaires. The analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.79 for the students' questionnaire and 0.69 for the teachers' questionnaire. According to Leech et al. (2005), an alpha value of 0.70 and above indicates reasonable internal consistency, and alpha values between 0.60 and 0.69 indicate minimally adequate reliability. Hence, the research instrument (questionnaires) was considered to be reliable and suitable for collecting data for this study.

RESULTS

Factors Responsible for Students' Low Academic Performance in Public JHSs

The factors responsible for JHS students' academic underachievement at KNEM were categorized under four broad areas: students, teachers, parents/home, and school-related factors. Under the factors contributing to low academic performance, students and teachers were required to state their agreement or disagreement with statements describing behaviors/attitudes that contribute to low academic performance among students in public junior high schools. The responses of the students and teachers regarding the factors responsible for low academic performance among students in public junior high schools, with the descriptive statistics (WM = Weighted Mean; St. D = Standard Deviation; I = Interpretation), are shown in Table 1-6.

The students' questionnaire scale was SA = Strongly Agree; A = Agree; UC = Uncertain; D = Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree. That of the teachers was A = Always; U = Usually; O = Often; ST = Sometimes; N = Never. The Likert scale ranged from 1 -5.

Table 1: Students' Response on Student-Related Factors Contributing to Low Academic Performance

Item	SA	A	UC	D	SD	WM	St. D	I
When I develop bad behaviour towards my studies, it affects my academics.	70	100	5	10	13	4.03	1.09	A
Peer group influence affects my learning negatively.	8	9	5	105	71	2.08	0.96	D
Truancy affects my learning negatively.	71	103	10	11	3	4.15	0.87	A
My lateness to school affects my learning negatively.	47	125	8	14	4	3.92	0.92	UC
Absenting myself from school regularly affects my learning.	54	131	6	7	0	4.17	0.65	A
Failure to do my class exercises and homework affects my learning negatively.	60	120	7	10	1	4.15	0.75	A
I am not happy in school, and this affects my learning.	47	111	26	6	8	3.92	0.92	UC
When I go to school regularly, it positively affects my learning.	62	108	13	6	9	4.05	0.96	A
I mostly do not enjoy my teacher's lessons and it tends to affect my learning.	46	97	19	21	15	3.70	1.16	UC

Mean of means = 3.80 Standard Deviation = 0.95

From Table 1, it could be deduced that the students disagreed (mean score = 2.08, standard deviation = 0.96) that peer group influence affects their learning in a negatively way. Students' responses also showed uncertainty (mean score = 3.92, standard deviation = 0.92) about whether being late to school affects their learning negatively. Similarly, students indicated uncertainty (mean score = 3.92, standard deviation = 0.92) about whether their unhappiness in school affects their learning. Again, students expressed uncertainty (mean score = 3.70, standard deviation = 1.16) about whether not enjoying their teachers' lessons affects their learning. Although students agreed with most items measuring student-related factors contributing to low academic performance, the mean of means (average) score of 3.80 suggests that students generally doubted the potency of the items attributed to student-related causes of low academic performance among junior high school students.

Table 2: Students' Response on Teacher-Related Factors Contributing to Low Academic Performance

Item	SA	A	UC	D	SD	WM	St. D	I
My teacher doesn't encourage/motivate me to learn	85	83	9	17	4	4.15	0.99	A

My teacher doesn't appreciate my efforts to learn due to intolerance	56	115	12	11	4	4.05	0.87	A
My teacher does not show any interest in my school work	59	112	8	11	8	4.03	0.96	A
My teacher comes to school late very often	49	100	19	20	10	3.85	1.07	UC
My teacher absent him/herself from school on a regular basis	51	97	25	22	3	3.86	0.98	UC
My teacher doesn't complete the syllabus most of the time	50	123	13	9	3	4.05	0.80	A
My teacher doesn't make lessons interesting and enjoyable	84	80	5	25	4	4.09	1.07	A
My teacher doesn't support me in learning	85	92	4	11	6	4.21	0.95	A
My teachers use few or no material resources during teaching	72	99	3	21	3	4.09	0.97	A

Mean of means (average) = 4.04 Standard Deviation = 0.96

The students' responses regarding teacher-related factors contributing to low academic performance among junior high school students showed that students expressed doubt (mean score = 3.85, standard deviation = 1.07) about how often their teachers come to school late.

Similarly, students indicated that they were uncertain (mean score = 3.86, standard deviation = 0.98) about their teachers being absent from school on a regular basis. However, the mean of means (average) score of 4.04 and standard deviation of 0.96 suggest that students largely agreed with most of the items used to measure the teacher behaviors/attitudes that contribute to low academic performance among junior high school students.

Table 3: Students' Response on Parent/Home-Related Factors Contributing to Low Academic Performance

Item	SA	A	UC	D	SD	WM	St. D	I
Both my parents are not educated, so they do not encourage me to learn at home	48	134	3	13	0	4.51	0.72	A
My parents do not supervise my homework because of the demands of my other siblings	59	121	3	14	1	4.33	0.79	A
My home is not conducive for learning because my parents, myself, and siblings all live in the same room	57	124	8	8	1	4.45	0.72	A
My parents do not provide my basic needs for me	59	116	9	14	0	4.21	0.79	A

My parents do not provide subject textbooks for me	68	112	4	13	1	4.18	0.80	A
My parents provide breakfast for me before I leave for school	60	115	6	16	1	4.10	0.83	A
My parents make me sell after school hours to the family's income	68	109	2	18	1	4.17	0.87	A
My parents make me go to the farm after school hours	37	48	0	79	34	2.87	1.44	D
I live with only my mother/father, who is unemployed	100	68	1	25	4	4.19	1.09	A

Mean of means (average) = 4.10 Standard Deviation = 0.89

The students' responses on parent/home-related factors contributing to low academic performance among junior high school students clearly show that, apart from the item on which students disagreed (mean score = 2.87, standard deviation = 1.44) that their parents make them go to the farm after school hours, the students generally agreed (mean of means score = 4.10, standard deviation = 0.98) with the items used to measure the parent/home-related factors that contribute to low academic performance among students.

Table 4: Teachers' Response on Student-Related Factors Contributing to Low Academic Performance

Item	A	U	O	ST	N	WM	St. D	I
My students come to school before the morning assembly	6	11	8	23	0	3.00	1.11	O
My students absent themselves from school	5	3	11	29	0	2.67	0.99	ST
My students do their class exercises	18	15	6	7	2	3.83	1.21	O
My students do their assignments	16	16	3	13	0	3.73	1.20	O
My students participate in class lessons	11	23	8	4	2	3.77	1.04	O
My students participate in extra classes in the school	2	3	3	19	21	1.88	1.07	N
My students get motivated in studying	0	13	5	24	6	2.52	1.03	ST

Mean of means (average) = 3.06 Standard Deviation = 1.09

From Table 4, teachers indicated that students never (mean score = 1.88, standard deviation = 1.07) participated in extra classes at school. Teachers also reported that students sometimes (mean score = 2.67, standard deviation = 0.99) are absent from school, and that they (students) also sometimes (mean score = 2.52, standard deviation = 1.03) get motivated to study their books.

The teachers' responses further show that students often (mean score = 3.00, standard deviation = 1.11) come to school before the morning assembly. They (students) often (mean score 3.83, standard deviation = 1.21) do their class exercises. Similarly, the results show that the students often (mean score = 3.73) do their assignments and often (mean score = 3.77) participate in class lessons. Overall, the teachers'

responses in Table 4 suggest that students sometimes live up to expectations regarding their responsibilities in the teaching and learning process. This conclusion was based on a mean score of 3.06 and a standard deviation of 1.09, implying that students do what is expected of them in the school and classroom environment. The teacher's responses also validated the student responses presented in Table 1.

Table 5: Teachers' Responses on Teacher-Related Factors Contributing to Low Academic Performance

Item	SA	A	UC	D	SD	WM	St. D	I
When I use poor teaching techniques, it negatively affects my students' academic performance.	26	19	3	0	0	4.48	0.62	A
My good interpersonal relationship with students tends to affect their performance positively.	19	8	10	5	6	3.94	1.43	UC
My interest in students' school work affects their performance positively.	26	12	0	5	5	4.02	1.39	A
My lateness to school tends to affect students' learning negatively.	24	13	3	5	3	4.04	1.25	A
My regular absence from school affects students' performance.	30	12	0	3	3	4.31	1.17	A
Students' performance is affected negatively if I am unable to complete their scheme of work (syllabus)	25	25	3	2	2	4.19	1.14	A
My poor attitude towards students tends to affect students' performance negatively.	18	24	3	3	0	4.19	0.82	A
Failure to organize seminars, workshops, and in-service training for teachers affects students' performance	8	16	12	7	5	3.58	1.35	UC

Mean of means = 4.09 Standard Deviation = 1.18

The responses of the teachers presented in Table 5 show that they (teachers) were uncertain (mean score =3.94, standard deviation = 1.43) as to how their good interpersonal relationship with students tends to affect their students' performance in a positive way. The teachers equally expressed uncertainty (mean score = 3.58, standard deviation = 1.35) about how failure to organize seminars, workshops, and in-service trainings for teachers affects their students' performance in the class. Aside from these two doubts expressed by the teachers, they generally agreed (mean of means score = 4.09, standard deviation = 1.18) with the items used to measure their behaviors/attitudes that contribute to students' low academic performance in schools. Based on the results presented in Tables 2 and 5, both students and teachers largely agreed that certain teacher behaviors and attitudes contribute to students' low academic performance in junior high schools.

Table 6: Teachers' Response on School-Related Factors Contributing to Low Academic Performance

Item	VA	A	S	NA	UA	WM	St. D	I
How adequate are the teaching and learning materials (TLMs) in your school to help in the teaching and learning?	3	4	10	26	5	2.46	1.01	NA
How adequate does the school library aid teaching and learning?	8	0	10	16	14	2.42	1.37	NA
How adequate is the organization of in-service training, workshops and seminars for teachers in the school?	0	15	14	19	0	2.92	0.85	NA
How adequate is the organization of PTA meetings in the school?	6	8	19	12	3	3.04	1.09	S
How adequate are the classrooms equipped for teaching and learning in the school?	6	5	8	24	5	2.65	1.19	NA
How adequate are the pieces of furniture in the classroom for teaching and learning in the school?	6	10	6	15	11	2.69	1.37	NA
How adequate are the teachers to handle each subject in the school?	9	13	15	5	6	3.29	1.25	S

Mean of means (average) = 2.78 Standard Deviation = 1.16

The teachers' responses show that the frequency of organising Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meetings in their schools to discuss important matters regarding students' performance and other related matters was satisfactory (mean score = 3.04, standard deviation = 1.09). Similarly, the number of teachers available to handle each subject in their schools was also satisfactory (mean score = 3.29, standard deviation = 1.25). Teachers' responses generally show that teaching and learning materials, furniture, and learning spaces like classrooms are inadequate (mean of means score = 2.78, standard deviation = 1.16).

The Correlation Output between Students' Low Academic Performance and Factors Influencing Academic Achievement

A Pearson product-moment correlation was run to determine the relationship between the factors responsible for low academic performance and students' low academic performance, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Correlation Output between Students' Low Academic Performance and Factors Influencing Academic Achievement

Correlations		Students' Low Academic Performance	Teacher Related Factors	Parent/Home Related Factors	School Related Factors	Student Related Factors
Students' Low Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation Sig. (1-tailed) N	1 198	.701** .000 198	.690** .000 198	.756** .000 198	.246** .000 198

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed)

The results revealed a strong positive correlation between students' low academic performance and teacher-related factors at .701, parent/home-related factors at .690, and school-related factors at .756, which was also statistically significant at $p < .01$. Also, a very weak positive correlation existed between students' low academic performance and student-related factors at .246. Generally, the results suggest that students' academic performance is likely to improve when they have a conducive and supportive school and home environment.

DISCUSSIONS

The study found that the causes of low academic performance among JHS students in the Kassena-Nankana East Municipality fall into student-related, teacher-related, school-related, and parent/home-related factors. The study also found that student-related factors do not necessarily play a key role in contributing to low academic performance among students.

The results also showed that student-related factors such as peer group influence, truancy, interest, lateness to school, and absenteeism do not necessarily contribute to low academic performance among junior high school students. This finding contrasts with Allen-Meares, Washington, and Welsh's (2000) assertion that poor attendance, such as truancy or unexcused absence from school, cutting classes, tardiness, and leaving school without permission, is important in determining students' academic performance. This contradiction may also stem from students' inadequate knowledge of the student-related factors that influence academic performance. The results also revealed that students in public JHS in the Kassena/Nankana East Municipality sometimes meet expectations regarding their responsibilities in the teaching and learning process.

Teacher-related factors such as absenteeism, lateness, poor teacher-student relationships, failure to complete syllabi, insufficient supervision of students' work, failure to use teaching materials, and poor teaching techniques during instructional hours contribute largely to low academic performance among students in the JHSs. These results validate the findings of Dunne and Leach (2005) and Adane (2013) that schools with high rates of teacher lateness, absenteeism, and, at times, refusal to teach classes record poor academic performance.

Again, the study revealed that school-related factors such as inadequate teaching and learning materials, inadequate learning spaces (class size), inadequate furniture, and a lack of a supportive learning environment play a pivotal role in students' low academic performance. The availability of these school infrastructures contributes to improving students' performance, as Harbison and Hanushek (1992) opined that the quality of physical facilities is positively related to student performance. Moreover, attending a school with a better physical environment is associated with increased performance (Engin-Demir, 2009). The results further revealed that parent/home-related factors such as parents' illiteracy, large family size, poverty, unemployment, single parents, and lack of communication between parents and children about school contribute greatly to low academic performance among students in JHSs in the Kassena-Nankana East Municipality. This aligns with Asikhia's (2010) findings that learners from poor homes are forced out of school and made to engage in hawking, selling packaged drinking water, and the like to save money for school expenses. This finding also agrees with Akanle (2007) revelation that insufficient parental income influences students' academic performance. This also supports the assertion that larger family sizes lead to less favorable child outcomes. Children from larger families have been found to have less favorable home environments and lower levels of verbal facility (Parcel & Menagham, 1994) as well as higher rates of behavioral problems and lower levels of educational performance (Downey, 1995 cited in Adane, 2013).

This study therefore concludes that teacher-related, parent/home-related, and school-related factors have a strong, positive, significant influence on students' low academic performance in junior high schools. However, student-related factors have a very weak but significant positive impact on students' low academic performance at the junior high school level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Ministry of Education, through the Ghana Education Service (GES), should recruit and deploy highly qualified teachers to the junior high schools at KNEM to promote effective teaching and learning.
2. Junior High School headteachers at KNEM should make time to support teachers during classroom instruction rather than only checking in informally during co-curricular activities such as sports or science practicals. This will help build teachers' competence and skills in handling various subjects, minimising the tendency to skip and avoid topics.
3. The government, through the Ghana Education Service, should provide Junior High School at KNEM with the resources and facilities needed to support teaching and learning.
4. Parents should, as a matter of urgency, prioritise their children's education by providing basic school supplies such as textbooks, uniforms, bags, pens, and exercise books, and by regularly discussing their children's academic progress with them. This will motivate children to strive to succeed in their learning.

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