

STUDY HABITS OF PUPILS OF PUBLIC BASIC SCHOOLS: PERCEPTIONS OF THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

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ABSTRACT

Based on Bakare's (1977) study habit theory, this study investigated the perception of children in public basic schools in Ekumfi District in the Central Region of Ghana, on their study habits considering the present (nature and challenges) and the expectations for the future. The descriptive survey design in the form of mixed methods was used. Through stratified random sampling technique 380 children were obtained for the quantitative aspect of the study while ten children were conveniently sampled for the qualitative aspect. Data were collected using questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide. Quantitative analysis was done by using descriptive (mean, standard deviation) statistics while qualitative data was analysed using thematic approach. It was revealed that the dominant study habit practiced by the children was examination related, followed by homework and assignment, concentration, reading and note-taking, and time management. Inability to recollect information learnt, poor reading ability, poor spelling, high text/examination anxiety, studying many subjects at a time, and lack of parental support were identified as some of the challenges the children faced in their studies. The children were of the view that regular symposia on strategies (including time management) to learn effectively, remedial lessons by teachers on reading skills, and bye-laws by School Management Committee (SMC) and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) to monitor and prevent children from loitering and watching videos at night will help improve their study habits. It is thus recommended that Guidance and Counselling programmes in public basic schools in the District should be strengthened by the Ghana Education Service (GES) so that children will be counselled on the need to develop effective and appropriate study habits. In-service training should be organized by GES for teachers to adopt teaching techniques that suit the children's study habits.

Keywords: Childhood, perceptions, study habits, nature, challenges, future strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Education has been widely accepted as an engine of growth and development in every nation, and according to Achombo (2010) many countries are convinced that students form the core of every educational process and that without good academic performance, all innovations in education would be a failure. In Ghana, students' academic performance is a vital determinant for selection and placement into higher education and programmes. With the Computerized School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS) which is a competitive selection into Senior High Schools and programmes based on students' performance in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), academic performance has been of great concern for all stakeholders. Thus, contrary to the view that the school should adopt more holistic approach to focus on a much wider range of desired outcomes such as cognitive processing skills, emotional and social awareness, and moral character development (Huitt, 2006), there is consensus among practitioners that the primary focus of schools should be academic preparation for students (Tienken & Wilson, 2001).

Ackumme, Atta-Boison, Hama, Kankam, Ohene-Darko, Owusu-Mensah and Quist (2001) argue that education rests with the individual, and that nobody can learn on behalf of another person. They allude to the claim that learning does not occur by chance because learners ought to make a conscious and concerted effort to learn. Romeo (2006) substantiates this position by indicating that children have to practice good study habits but not learn simply by being told what to do or by watching others. He stressed that learners' success depends on their effectiveness, efficiency and concentration on studying, and these are affected by the learning materials they use and the way they use it. This idea suggests that even though learning resources are vital to children's success, it hinges on the energy they expend to study, and the application of learning resources to their studies.

Study habits could be viewed as the continuous practice or repetition of study skills over time. Children with poor study habits either lack effective or organized study routines while those with good study habits have more organized routines where they focus more effectively on the work at hand (Gettinger & Seibert, 2002). Therefore, the development and application of appropriate and effective study habits of children should be a matter of concern to education stakeholders. A study by Bakare (1977) illustrates that study habits of learners cannot be ignored from their academic performance because success in academic endeavours depends largely on reading in the search for knowledge.

Khurshid, Tanveer and Qasmi (2012) conceptualize study habits as the propensity of a learner to use his or her constant attention to acquire knowledge through systematic routines. According to Credé and Kuncel (2008) study habits refer to the degree to which learners engage in regular acts of studying that are characterized by appropriate studying routines occurring in an environment that is conducive. This suggests that two strands emerge as indicative of study habits. Firstly, there is a suitable and systematic procedure for studying implying that study habit is not a sporadic event, but a consistent pattern that learners usually adopt in their study. Intuitively, a study procedure which a student uses once does not constitute his or her study habit. Secondly, the study is done in a favourable setting. In line with this reasoning, it could be established that not all environment is appropriate for study. Hence, the formation of study habits entails an identification of appropriate environment that supports studying. However, Credé and Kuncel (2008) did not prescribe appropriate studying routines and conducive environment for study habits. Comparing the perspectives of Khurshid et al. (2012) and Credé and Kuncel (2008), it is observed that both of them agree that study habits encompass a methodical process. However, there is a point of divergence. While Credé et al. (2008) highlight a conducive environment, Khurshid et al. (2012) contend that uninterrupted concentration is key in study habits. Though theoretically different, these two elements are practically connected because a conducive environment could sustain a high degree of attentiveness, and vice versa.

Study habits as conceptualized by Bakare (1977) embraces competences in the areas of homework and assignment, time allocation, reading and note-taking, study period procedures, concentration, written work, examination taking and teacher consultations. Using his study habit inventory, he concluded from several researches that study habit variables correlated positively with academic performance. Other researchers such as Tope (2011), Bagongon and Connie (2009) and Salami and Aremu (2006) used Bakare's (1977) study habit inventory and established a relationship between study habits and academic performance. Osa-Edoh and Alutu (2012) in a study also established a high correlation between study habits and learners' academic performance. These findings suggest that children's academic performance is likely to improve when they cultivate proper study habits. The original study habit inventory by

Bakare (1977) consisted of many components. However five components (homework/assignments, time allocation, reading and note taking, concentration, and time management) were used for this study because they are considered to relate well to the context of education in the study setting, and the results would have implications for effective learning among the children.

There is consensus among scholars that the development of good study habit is critical to children's academic achievement. For instance, Rana and Kausar (2011) argue that even though it is worthwhile to recognize one's learning style, being able to master one's study habits could tremendously reduce the problems of underachievement among students. This means that children who are able to cultivate appropriate study habits overcome the challenge of poor academic performance. Relating this to the Ghanaian context, it is imperative for stakeholders in education to inculcate in children effective study habits to reverse the seeming worsening trend of poor academic performance. Sarwar, Bashir, Khan and Khan (2009) found out that overachievers possessed better study habits than underachievers. Nuthana and Yenagi (2009) also found out that reading and note-taking habits, habits of concentration, and preparation for examination have significant correlation with academic achievement. Thus, children who do well in reading and note-taking, well prepared for examination, and have good concentration may be successful in their academic pursuits. Therefore, in Ghana, especially at the basic school level, it important to investigate the nature of study habits that children students possess, and assist them to continuously enhance such habits.

Some challenges have been identified as impeding children's ability to make good use of their study habits. Rana and Kausar (2011) notice that some children find studying monotonous and this has implications for achieving good academic performance. Bailey and Garratt (2002) opine that each individual has a special way of grasping a particular concept which suggests that children do not employ universal study habits. In essence, many children do not perform well at school not because they lack the ability but because they have difficulty in school and frequently do not possess adequate and appropriate study habits and skills (Rana & Kausar, 2011; Mendezabal, 2013). A key challenge of children's study habit has been noted to be their inability to learn to effectively take notes and manage their time (Mutsotso & Abenga, 2010, Nagaraju, 2004). This implies that usually, children do not devote sufficient time to their studies and this brings about improper study habits among them. Mendezabal (2013) found out from a study that learners did not possess favourable study habits and attitudes and that they did not have efficient time management skills, they lacked planning and concentration in their studies, possessed poor reading skills, lacked effective examination techniques, and failed to inform their teachers of their challenges with academic work and ask for assistance. Garabedian (2014) also identified some common study problems to include: difficulty in reading and writing; poor concentration and note-taking; too many homework and class tests/exercises; too much anxiety; lack of enthusiasm and motivation; poor school attendance; difficulty in grasping what is taught; and lack of interest and confidence in the subjects.

The importance of study habits on the academic performance of children in schools have necessitated researches which seek to propose strategies to assist these children to develop and imbibe effective study habits (Mendezabal, 2013). Organizing the study environment, and appropriately using specific techniques such as efficient reading skills, listening skills, note-taking, writing and doing homework helped in improving study habits of children (Demir, Kilinc & Dogan, 2012). For Mutsotso and Abenga (2010) adequately catering for

individual differences among children in the school helps in addressing the study space needs and the efficiency and effectiveness of study habits. According to Siah and Maiyo (2015) good study habits depend on the attitudes towards work and sense of responsibilities. They outline some good study habits that result in better academic performance as: effective planning; regular class attendance, taking notes during classes; concentrating on studies; understanding content and avoiding rote learning; asking for clarifications from friends and teachers on what is taught in class; as well as preparing and following a timetable. Others are having proper rest periods; facing problems from home environment; facing challenges posed by school environment; and keeping daily survey and reflections of work done.

The main concern of all educational efforts, especially at the basic school level is to see that all the children perform very well in their academic work. In 2011 the Ekumfi District was carved out from Mfantseman Municipality of the Central Region of Ghana. This gave the opportunity for the District to have its own centre code for writing BECE. In 2011, the District recorded a 37% pass rate and this increased to 57% in 2012. In 2013, the percentage pass took a nosedive. It reduced from 57% to 34%. In 2014, the pass rate increased from 34% to 73%, and in 2015, the pass rate again reduced from 73% to 68%. This trend in the BECE has been on-going for several years in public schools, especially those in rural settings in Ghana. This seeming distressing phenomena of scholastic underachievement and failure is of great concern to educationists, guidance and counselling co-ordinators, educational planners (Mendezabal, 2013) and all stakeholders of education in Ghana. This seems to be a threat to the nation's achievement of the Millennium Development Goal of universal education.

One may wonder the causes of the seeming poor and inconsistent academic performance of children in public basic school in the Ekumfi District. Some studies in Ghana have shown that poor academic performances at the basic school level are as a result of factors such as poor headteachers' supervisory practices and teachers' negative attitude to work (Etsey, Amedahe, & Edjah, 2005). However, these might not be the only main reasons why students perform poorly in examinations. A meta-analysis by Credé and Kuncel (2008) identified that in addition to motivation and anxiety, study habits are the third most significant predictor of academic performance. From a study, poor study habit emerged as one of the major causes of poor academic performance (Nuthana & Yenagi, 2009). Researchers like Paaku (2008) have identified some internal and external school related factors that contribute to poor academic performance of children in pre-tertiary schools in Ghana. However, it seems research on study habits of children in public basic schools in the Ekumfi District is rare. It was thus imperative to conduct this study to examine the nature of study habits of children in public basic schools Ekumfi District, determine the challenges they go through in practising their study habits, and investigate the strategies to help the children improve on their study habits.

The findings of this study, which is possibly the first of its kind in the Ekumfi District, will hopefully bring to light the nature of study habits of children in public basic schools, the challenges these children go through in practising their study habits, and how the children will like to improve on their study habits to achieve successes in their academic pursuit. Hence, the findings will add to knowledge and literature on study habits of children. The findings will also help the teachers to know the best methods and techniques to employ in the classroom to help the children to effectively use their study habits. The findings of the study are likely to inform the guidance and counselling units of public basic schools in the District to plan and organise guidance programmes for the children and teachers with the aim of enhancing good study habits among the children.

The following research questions therefore guided the study:

1. What is the perception of children in public basic schools in the Ekumfi District on nature of their study habits?
2. What are the perceived challenges that inhibit the effective practice of study habits among children in public basic schools in the Ekumfi District?
3. What strategies do children in public basic schools in the Ekumfi District perceive to help them effectively practice their study habits?

Study Setting

The Ekumfi District which is located in the Central Region of Ghana was carved out from the Mfantseman Municipality in 2011 by Legislative Instrument 2007. It has Essarkyer as its capital, and bounded to the West by Mfantseman Municipality, to the North by Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam District, to the East by Gomoa West District, and to the South by the Gulf of Guinea. It has a projected total population of 65,775 made up of 32,230 males and 33,545 females. Pineapple production is the main farming activity in the District. Other agricultural products such as cassava, maize, vegetables and fruits are produced. Fishing is also carried out especially by the people along the coast. Salt mining is done on small scale at Suprodo and Narkwa while trading is done virtually in every area in the District with Essuehyia as a major focal point. The main language spoken is Fante. There are five education circuits in the District namely, Essarkyir, Narkwa, Eyisam, Essuehyia, and Otuam. The district has T. I Ahmadiyya Senior High School at Essarkyir, 42 Kindergartens, 41 Primary, and 39 JHS.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design in the form of mixed methods was adopted for the study because among others, it relies on large-scale data from a representative sample of a population with the aim of accurately describing the nature of existing conditions and giving a more complete picture of the phenomenon under study (Cohen, Manion & Morrisson, 2011; Denscombe, 2008). The choice of this approach was also based on the views of Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) that, “mixed methods as a paradigm has the advantage of drawing from the strengths and reducing the weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative approaches” (p. 15).

The target population consisted of all children in public Junior High Schools (JHS) in the Ekumfi District, and at the time of the study, the population was 3,164 children made up of 1644 boys and 1520 girls. These children were considered appropriate for the study because at the JHS level, they really prepare to write the BECE. Hence, their study habits are essential because it has implications for their performance in the BECE. A sample size of 475 children in JHS 1 and JHS 2 was drawn from the population for the quantitative phase of the study. This sample size was deemed representative of the target population based on the recommendations of Gay and Airasian (2003) that a sample size of 10% to 20% of the target population is representative in descriptive research. Junior High School 3 children were not used because at the time of collecting the data, they had completed writing their BECE. Hence, they were not in school.

Proportional stratified random sampling was used to put the population into strata and random selection was done so that each stratum was fairly a representative of the target population (Cohen et al., 2011) and that each member of the population had an equal chance of being selected to be in the sample. The selection of the sample was done at two levels. First, the target population was categorized into circuits, and the percentage of each circuit to

the population was computed. For instance, Eyisam Circuit had 695 children representing about 22% of the target population. Therefore, 22% of the sample size (475) represents about 104 children. To have a fair representation, the number of male and female children in each circuit was obtained and the proportional sample calculated. For instance, out of the population size for Eyisam (695), 332 (48%) were boys and 363 (52%) were girls. Based on these percentages, 50 boys and 54 girls were selected from Eyisam Circuit using simple random sampling technique. The same approach was used to get the sample for the remaining circuits. For the qualitative aspect of the study, convenient sampling technique which is a process of selecting samples that are readily available to a researcher (Cohen, et al., 2011). was used to select ten children (two from each circuit) who agreed to participate in the study. With this, one child was conveniently selected from JHS 1 and JHS 2 respectively from each circuit.

Questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide were used to collect data. The questionnaire which was adapted from Bakare's (1977) Study Habits Inventory (SHI) consisted of 34 items grouped under homework and assignments; time allocation; reading and note-taking; concentration; and time management. The questionnaire was made up of two sections. Section A focused on the background information of the children and Section B measured the variables as contained in the conceptual model and measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Undecided; 4= Agree; and 5= Strongly Agree). Sarantakos (1988) supports the use of Likert Scales because it has a high degree of validity and reliability even if the scale contains a few items. A semi-structured interview guide designed in line with the research questions was used a face to face verbal interaction (interview) with ten of the children to obtain an in-depth information on their experiences on study habits. The face and content validity of the instruments (questionnaire and interview guide) were done with colleague lecturers and some professors in UEW who are experts in designing instruments for research. Their comments helped in improving the items in the questionnaire and interview guide.

A pre-test was carried out in the Mfantseman Municipality with 80 children in selected public JHS. The choice of Mfantseman Municipality was based on the view of Kusi (2012) that participants in a pilot study should have similar characteristics as those in the study. Ekumfi District was carved out of Mfantseman Municipality which suggests that they have similar features. The Cronbach alpha coefficients obtained for the items in the questionnaire were: 0.89 for homework and assignments; 0.85 for time allocation; 0.78 for reading and note-taking; 0.81 for concentration; 0.83 for time management; and 0.85 for the entire questionnaire. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) maintain that Cronbach alpha coefficient should be at least 0.70 to be indicative of internal consistency. Thus, the questionnaire was reliable.

Data Analysis

For the main study, 475 questionnaires were administered but 402 were returned, indicating a return rate of 84.6% which is higher than the accepted range of between 30% and 70% (Draugalis, Coons & Plaza, 2008). However, 380 of the returned questionnaires were used for the analysis because some of the children either did not completely answer their questionnaire or some of the questionnaires returned contained errors that could not be used for the analysis. The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data were done in line with the research questions. Version 20 of the Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS) was used in analysing the data obtained from the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics (frequency counts, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used in the analysis. Thematic

approach, where themes and patterns were developed from the data collected from the semi-structured interview guide was employed in analyzing the qualitative data. It involved processes of listening, reading and re-reading, inductive reasoning, reflecting, coding the interview transcripts and drawing out major themes and patterns of views from the data. Interview recordings were listened to severally and transcribed. The transcription involved verbatim representation of the interview tapes into text which were used to describe the views of the children.

Analysis of Demographic Data

The data on the demographic features of the children from all the five Education Circuits of the Ekumfi District are shown in Table 1. The data indicate that 185 of the children were in Junior High School (JHS) 1 while 195 were in JHS 2. With the gender of the children, 194 were males and 186 were females, and their ages ranged from 11 to 19 years.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Children

Demographic Variables		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Level	JHS 1	185	48.7
	JHS 2	195	51.3
	Total	380	100.0
Gender	Male	194	51.0
	Female	186	49.0
	Total	380	100.0
Educational Circuit	Essuehyia	80	21.0
	Eyisam	99	26.0
	Narkwa	94	25.0
	Esarkyer	70	18.0
	Otuam	37	10.0
	Total	380	100.0
Age	11-13 years	65	6.6
	14-16 years	235	61.8
	17-19 years	120	31.6
	Total	380	100.0

Source: Survey Data, 2016

Analysis of Research Question 1

The first research question sought to investigate the perception of children in public basic schools in the Ekumfi District on the nature of their study habits. The answer to the question is deduced from the data in Table 1 which shows that the children mostly practiced examination related study habits while the least practiced study habit was time management. However, a cursory look at the results in Table 1 depicts that the children used multiple study habit skills since the recorded means seem not to be too different.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics on the Nature of Study Habit

Study Habit	Mean	Standard Deviation
Examination Related	3.57	0.58
Homework/Assignment	3.55	0.76
Reading and Note-taking	3.43	0.47
Concentration Related	3.46	0.64
Time Management Related	3.42	0.60

Source: Survey Data, 2016

Analysis of the interview data also indicated that the children practiced the study habits identified in the analysis of the quantitative data. Some comments from the children on the nature of study habits they employ include:

I have a timetable that tells me the subject to learn during the day, and I try to follow it. After school, I try to do my housework quickly so that I can have time for my studies. Sir the fact is that I find it difficult to follow the timetable because I do a lot of work after school such as selling, cooking, and washing (JHS2 Female Child, Interview Data, 2016).

I do not have a timetable I use to study at home but when they give us home work at school, I learn to answer the questions given to us as homework. Sometimes, if teachers don't give us homework, I do not learn when I am home (JHS 1 Male Child, Interview Data, 2016).

Sometimes I don't finish copying notes at school so in the evening I collect the notes of my friends and copy. That is how I sometimes learn because as I am copying the notes, I read. I don't have a timetable to guide me (JHS 2 Female Child, Interview Data, 2016).

We don't play with assignments or homework in this school. If we don't do assignment, the teachers will punish us. However, the secret is that most of us copy from our friends. Some of us don't do the assignment at home. We wait, and come to school the following morning and copy from our friends (JHS 2 Male Child, Interview Data, 2016).

Our teachers advise us to plan our studies, but we don't do it. We use our time to play football and watch movies after school. Some of us take care of ourselves because our parents have travelled. We go to the beach after school to get some fish to sell and make some money to take care of ourselves. We try to learn when it is getting to examination and sometimes class test (JHS 1 Male Child, Interview Data, 2016).

My father always tells me to study after doing my housework [chores]. I read notes that my teachers give us at school. I like learning RME [Religious and Moral Education], Fante, Social Studies and BDT [Basic Design and technology]. I don't like learning Mathematics and Science because these subjects are difficult, and I don't understand them (JHS 1 Female Child, Interview Data, 2016).

It could be realized from the findings of both quantitative and qualitative analysis that the children in public basic schools in the Ekumfi District exhibited the aspects of Bakare's (1977) study habit inventory used for the study. Thus, it substantiates Bakare's (1977) assertion that study habit embraces multiple competence skills in learning.

Analysis of Research Question 2

Research Question 2 investigated the perceived challenges that inhibit the effective practice of study habits among children in public basic schools in the Ekumfi District. It emerged from the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data that certain challenges are faced by the children as they practiced their study habits. Table 3 shows the quantitative results on the challenges the children experience as they study.

Table 3: Challenges of Practicing Study Habits

Type of Challenge	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Poor Reading and writing/spelling skills	294	77.4
Difficulty in taking-notes in class	276	72.6
Difficulty in understanding what is taught in class	298	78.4
Lack of Concentration	149	39.2
Excessive Noise in my Community	143	37.6
Inability to recollect facts during examination	194	51.1
Lack of time to study because of many house chores	327	86.1
Many homework at a time	187	49.2
No timetable to follow in studying at home	292	76.8

Source: Survey Data, 2016

Note: Percentages are non-additive

From the results in Table 3, it is realized that at home, the children did not have enough time for studies as indicated by 327 (86.1%) of the children. Another key challenge, as indicated by 298 (78.4%) of the children was the difficulty they have in understanding what they are taught in the classroom. It is also noticed from the results in Table 3 that 294 (77.4%) and 276 (72.6%) of the children perceived poor reading skills and difficulty in taking notes respectively as the challenges they experience as they try to practice their study habits. Again, 194 (51.1%) of the children perceived fear of examination (examination anxiety) as a challenge in their study habits. Other challenges perceived by the children are solving a lot of homework at a time (49.2%), lack of concentration (39.2%), and excessive noise in the community (37.6%). This suggests that the top five challenges that the children experience in putting into practice their study habits are lack of time to study as a result of many house chores, difficulty in understanding what is taught in class, poor reading and writing or spelling skills, unavailability of time tables for studies at home, and difficulty in taking notes in class.

The findings of the analysis of the interview data corroborated the findings from the quantitative data on the challenges faced by the children. For instance, during examination, children had challenges in recollecting information learnt. Some comments from the children are:

Sir, I sometimes fail in class tests and examinations because I forget all the things I learn, and I sometimes feel like crying. Even the things I learn just before the examination I find it difficult to remember [recollect] and write. But I can remember all the things I learn after taking the exam, and this pains me a lot (JHS 2 Female Child, Interview Data, 2016).

The time given in examination is not enough to answer all the questions. In some of the subjects like Science and Mathematics, one question has many sub-questions and this makes it difficult for me to complete answering all the questions (JHS 1 Male Child, Interview Data, 2016).

It could be inferred from the statements that the children experienced high test anxiety which inhibits their ability to think and retrieve learned information. It is deduced that some children are unable to answer the required number of questions, probably as a result of limited time or many questions to be answered within the duration for the examination. No doubt, this can affect their academic performance. It could be for this reason that Mendezabal (2013) found out that learners lacked effective examination techniques, and failed to inform their teachers of their challenges with academic work and ask for assistance. Similarly, Garabedian (2014) opines that difficulty in grasping what is taught, too much anxiety during

examinations, lack of interest and confidence in the subjects learned, and lack of enthusiasm and motivation posed serious challenges to children's academic success in school. Again, some children do not possess adequate and appropriate study habits and skills, and as a result, find studying monotonous which results in poor academic performance (Rana & Kausar, 2011; Mutsotso & Abenga, 2010; Garratt, 2002).

Poor reading and writing/spelling was identified as an examination challenge which lead to low academic performance of the pupils. The analysis revealed that children attempted to read whiles studying, but their poor reading ability was noted to militate against their study habits, a point stressed in the ensuing comments:

Most of us don't read our notes at home. Sir, it is not that we are lazy, but we cannot read well. Sir if you take a book to learn, but you cannot read it, how are you going to learn? I sometimes take my notes to learn, but because I cannot read, I sleep or put the book down to go and play or watch television (JHS 1 Male Child, Interview Data, 2016).

I read notes that our teachers give us, and sometimes I read the textbooks. Our teachers give us long notes. I find it difficult to know the parts I have to remember to pass the examination. Sir you can't remember the long notes that the teachers give us. Ah! It is too long (JHS 2 Female Child, Interview Data, 2016).

Some of us get low marks in examinations because we make mistakes in spelling words. Sir, for example, in Science, if you spell one word wrongly our teacher will not give you the mark. Our Science teacher does not consider [pardon] us at all, and the words in Science too are difficult to remember and write correctly. I can say the answers well, but when I write them down, I make mistakes and the teacher will mark me wrong (JHS 1 Female Child, Interview Data, 2016).

What I read all the time is the notes we copy in the classroom. With the questions our teachers ask in examination, the answers are in the notes they give us so I don't waste time to read other books. If you read other books, you can fail in the examinations because these books will not help you to answer the questions (JHS 2 Male Child, Interview Data, 2016).

The views expressed by the children hint that even though they are keen to study, they could not do so due to their inability to read. It could be deduced that notes given by teachers and what the children get from textbooks were the major reading materials. It could also be inferred from the statements that the children tried to memorize entire notes without identifying the salient ideas. Another deduction is that except textbooks and classroom notes, the children perceived other reading materials as irrelevant to their academic success. This position of the children possibly arises from the fact that teachers ask examination questions directly from the notes they give to the children. This makes it difficult for the children to read from other sources which could help improve their vocabulary and spelling. Besides, the children do not practice the skill of note-taking since they are unable to identify important points and write them as notes. It is therefore not surprising that 276 (72.6%) of the children perceived difficulty in note-taking as a challenge. The challenges of poor reading, writing and poor note-taking skills among the children substantiate the findings of Garabedian (2014), Mendezabal (2013) and Mutsotso and Abenga, (2010).

The children perceived numerous homework/assignment as a challenge they face in their studies. This is deduced from the following statements:

The assignments and homework are sometimes many. Sir we learn many subjects and the teachers give many assignments. Sometimes we will have about four assignments to do, and because we have other things to do at home, we don't complete all of them. For me, if I am not able to do assignments, I do not go to school because the teachers will punish me (JHS2 Male Child, Interview Data, 2016).

We don't play with homework in this school. If we don't do our homework, the teachers will punish us. But Sir, the secret is that most of us copy from our friends. Some of us don't do the assignment at home; we wait, and come to school the following morning and copy from our friends (JHS 1 Female Child, Interview Data, 2016).

The views expressed by the children show that their teachers give them a lot of homework and since they engage in a lot of house chores, they find it difficult to complete their homework. Hence, some of them have no option than copying from their friends. It could be inferred from the comments that the children viewed homework and assignments as school routines that must be carried out to escape punishment. Generally, doing homework and assignments were not seen as a way of studying, but rather, a means to avert sanctions from teachers. As a result, the children did not consider homework and assignments as a vital way to consolidate what had been learnt. Garabedian (2014) therefore hints that too many homework and class tests/exercises are some of the common study problems of learners.

The interview results also showed that the children had challenges with concentration-related study habits. This is seen from the following statements:

Sir, people make too much noise in our town so it does not make me think about what I am learning. People who sell drinks play music very loud and you cannot learn at all. When it is time for a funeral, they play sound system [public address system] for many days, so I can't learn when there is noise (JHS1 Female Child, Interview Data, 2016).

I cannot learn for a long time because I sleep when I am learning. I do a lot of housework, so I become tired. As soon as I take the book to learn, I feel to sleep (JHS 2 Male Child, Interview Data, 2016).

The statements from the children support the fact that outside distractions and fatigue are key factors that prevent them from concentrating on their learning tasks. This is in line with the view of Garabedian (2014) that poor concentration during studies negatively affects learners in their ability to grasp and understand what they learn.

It was revealed that numerous house chores performed by the children posed a challenge when it comes to their study habits. This greatly influence their time management. The following views expressed by the children show how house chores posed a challenge to them in practicing their study habits effectively:

Sir, some of us are close to the sea and we spend a lot of time every day at the beach to get fish to sell. If you go to other places like Essuehyia and Eyisam, they are close to Mankessim [market hub] so pupils can sell there [Mankessim]

during the weekends and learn during school days (JHS 2 Male Child, Interview Data, 2016).

For those of us who have parents who are fishermen and fish sellers, we don't get time to learn after school. We help our parents to carry the fish from the beach, prepare and fry or smoke it. Sometimes by the time we finish all these it is 1 o'clock am or more. But for those who farm like in Adansi [Essuehyia Circuit] and Nanaben [Eyisam Circuit], pupils there help their parents on Saturdays only or after school, but not at night (JHS 2 Female Child, Interview Data, 2016).

As for me I don't have particular times that I study. Time table? Sir, no. I always help my mother at the market to sell fish when I close from school and when I get back home in the evening I help my mother to cook. I become so tired that I cannot learn anything. Sir, even if I have a timetable, I can't follow it because I don't have time to learn at home (JHS 1 Female Child, Interview Data, 2016).

These views suggest that the occupation of parents tell the way the children learn after school. Children whose parents are farmers relatively had more time to study than those whose parents are fishermen and fishmongers. It could be inferred that generally, the children support their parents and perform many house chores after school. This makes them have little or no time to study at home. It could thus be deduced that the children lack proper planning and time management skills to help them in their studies at home. This is further stressed by the findings of Mendezabal (2013), Mutsotso and Abenga (2010), and Nagaraju (2004) that in most cases, children do not devote enough time to their studies and this results in improper study habits among them.

Analysis of Research Question 3

The third research question was to determine the strategies children in public basic schools in the Ekumfi District perceived will help them to practice their study habits effectively. Their comments include:

I find it difficult to read and write very well but my teachers are not ready to assist me. They tell me that at my age and stage, they are not to teach me how to read and write. I hope they change their mind and help me and other mates who go through the same difficulty so that by the time we will be writing our BECE, we can understand what we read, and write well to pass our examinations (JHS 1 Female Child, Interview Data, 2016).

I wish my parents will understand that I need to have some time to learn when I go home from school. My father for instance, will always want me to go to the farm after school to help him. I therefore get tired when we return from the farm and the day that I am not able to go to the farm after school, he gets angry and tell me he cannot be buying books and other things for me if I do not help him on the farm (JHS 2 Male Child, Interview Data, 2016).

Sir, I want our teachers to show us how to prepare our own time table and use it at home. I do not have a time table so when I go home, I only do my homework and then I sleep (JHS 2 Female Child, Interview Data, 2016).

I sell for my mother at the market after school and on weekends. When I go home from the market, I help to prepare food so I find it very difficult to have time to learn. I will be happy if my teachers tell my parents, especially my

mother to give me some time to learn at home (JHS 1 Female Child, Interview Data, 2016).

I think it will be good for our teachers to show us how to prepare for examination. For me, I become so afraid when it is time for examination. Sometimes, I do not know what to learn and the little I learn too, I forget most of them when I go to the examination room (JHS 2 Male Child, Interview Data, 2016).

The suggestions from the children indicate their awareness of the challenges they face in practicing their study habits. The suggestions also portray the desire of the children to be helped in addressing these challenges to enable them improve on their study habits, and perform well at school. Their suggestions of teachers helping them to understand what they are taught, planning and managing their time, and helping them to overcome anxiety during examinations are very laudable. Again, the children's call for their parents to be supportive in their school activities cannot be over emphasised. These suggestions from the children are similar to the views of Demir, Kilinc and Dogan (2012) that study habits of children can be improved through conducive study environment, appropriate use of specific teaching techniques such as efficient reading skills, listening skills, note-taking, writing and doing homework. Siah and Maiyo (2015) intimate that good study habits among learners which ensure better academic performance include effective planning; regular class attendance, taking notes during classes; concentrating on studies; understanding content and avoiding rote learning; asking for clarifications from friends and teachers on what is taught in class; as well as preparing and following a timetable. They also indicate the role of proper rest periods and learners' reflection on what they do each day in improving study habits. Mutsotso and Abenga (2010) add that when teachers cater for individual differences among children in schools, it helps in ensuring efficiency and effectiveness of children's study habits for improved academic performance.

CONCLUSION

It could be deduced from the above views that the children recognize time management as vital for the practice of study habits, and they make attempts to manage time for studies even though they find it difficult to go by their timetables as a result of house chores and other factors. Thus, while some of the children plan their studies, others do not. The views also suggest that parental support was either absent or inadequate and this made children to engage in economic activities to make a living and this deprived them of enough time to study. The analysis further revealed that those who study after school are selective in the subjects they study. This could have implications for their general performance. Except Social Studies, they seem not to study the compulsory subjects (English Language, Mathematics and Integrated Science) that constitute an integral component of the grading system at the pre-tertiary level. Assisting them to read and write well, plan and manage their time for house chores and studies, eliminate anxiety during exams, and parental support are essential measures to improve on the children's study habits which will eventually help them to perform well at school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Ghana Education Service should design and implement programmes to conscientize children in public basic schools in the Ekumfi District on the need to develop and practice effective study habits.

2. Workshops, seminars and conferences should be organized by the Ghana Education Service in the Ekumfi District to equip Guidance and Counseling Coordinators, Circuit Supervisors, headteachers and teachers in the District with current knowledge on theories and research findings on study habits so that they can offer the necessary assistance to the children on how to improve on their study habits.
3. The Ghana Education Service in Ekumfi District should organize in-service training for head teachers and teachers to help them identify the preferred study habits of the pupils and guide them accordingly.
4. Headteachers and teachers of basic schools in the Ekumfi District should adopt measures to strengthen children's reading and note-taking, planning, and time management skills to boost their (children's) academic performance.
5. Headteachers and teachers of public basic schools in the Ekumfi District should regularly re-orient the children in the schools to improve study habits in relation to time allocation, concentration, and homework/assignment since these are crucial aspects of schooling. Thus, headteachers and teachers should create awareness the children to enable them recognize the consequences of practicing effective or ineffective study habits. This will make the children apply result-driven study habits to achieve desired academic performance.
6. During Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings, headteachers and teachers should educate parents on the need to support their children in their academic pursuits. Hence, during PTA meetings and other fora, parents should be made aware of the importance of rest for children and encourage their children to make good use of their time table for studies. Parents should also be educated to help their children to plan and manage their time at home.
7. School Management Committees (SMCs) and PTAs of the public basic schools in the District should come out with bye-laws to help monitor and prevent children from loitering and watching videos at night. This may compel children in the communities to stay at home at night and learn.

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