

Investigating Factors Responsible For Low Academic Performance of Junior High School Final Year Students In The Builsa North District Of The Upper East Region

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Abstract

The study set out to investigate factors responsible for low academic performance of Junior High School Final Year Students in the Builsa North District. The study aimed at finding out factors that were responsible for low academic performance of final year students in the BECE results over the years in the Builsa North District. Descriptive survey design was employed and a sample of 15 Head Teachers, 115 Junior High School final year students and 30 subject Teachers were used. Structured questionnaire and interview schedule were used for data collection. Microsoft Excel, thematic and quick impressive analysis were used to analyze the data obtained. The findings of the study showed that there were Teacher/Pupil absenteeism, abnormal Teacher work load, and inadequate parental involvement in the learning process of their children. It was therefore recommended that Head Teachers should closely monitor their Teachers and parents to work collaboratively in matters relating to improving pupils' educational standards, parents to be educated on the importance of education to their children and urge them to provide basic learning materials for them.

Key words:

FINAL YEAR STUDENTS - Junior High School Students who are in the third year at the Junior High School level and participate in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE)

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE – results/grades of Junior High School graduates that show the level of attainment or success

LOW ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE - results/grades of Junior High School graduates that indicate that the person has not performed well and cannot progress to the next institution

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I. INTRODUCTION

The development of any nation or community in the world largely depends on the access to quality education to its citizens. It is generally believed that the basis for any true development must commence with the development of human resources. Hence, formal education remains the vital tool for social-economic development and social mobilization in any society or nation. Basic education is the foundation on which further education is built. Basic education has mainly two purposes. The first purpose is to produce literate population that can jointly deal with problems both at home and at work. It also serves as a foundation on which further education is built (Akanle, 2007). Achieving Universal Basic Education is an international priority set by the United Nations (UN). In April 2000, Work Education Forum was held in Dakar to achieve the EFA goals. In the same year, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were declared by the UN to assist developing countries in their efforts to increase the living standards of people. This millennium target is often Achieving Universal Basic Education is an international priority set by the United Nations (UN). The second MDG was to “ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of basic schooling” (UN, 2006, p.5). This millennium target is often measured through basic school-enrolment, primary-completion and the literacy and numeracy rate among school pupils (Vegas & Petrow, 2008 cited in Adane, 2013). In 2006/07, gross basic school enrolment was 90.8 per cent (Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research [ISSER], 2008).

In addition, the government has put in place useful strategies to encourage enrolment, daily attendance and retention of pupils in basic schools across the country to realize the objectives of the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) policy as well as the provision of Education for All (EFA) agenda. These strategies include the provision of school pupils with teaching and learning materials, school uniforms, and the introduction of the capitation grant per child enrolled. In spite of these efforts, the education sector continues to face many challenges such as poor academic performance including schools in the Builsa North District. This goes to buttress the issue that poor performance in BECE is a problem which needs to be tackled. Pupils'

performance is considered a vital indicator of good schooling, so the poor performance of pupils at the basic level of education has not only led to public outcry, but also educationists have been increasingly occupied in their attempt to identify factors that influence pupils' performance especially in Basic Education Certificate Examination in Ghana According to Anamuah-Mensah (2010), an educationist attributed the phenomenon to lack of effective supervision and monitoring at school, lack of motivation for teachers and inadequate number of qualified teachers to fill empty classrooms. Also, Etsey (2004) attributed the cause of poor academic performance in the Shama Sub-Metro of ShamaAhanta East Metropolitan Assembly (SAEMA) in Ghana to a combination of factors relating to the school environment, teachers, pupils and parents. Scholars like, Edmonds (1981), Scheerens&Bosker (1997), Lezotte, Skaife&Holstead (2002), and Daggett (2005), revealed that government schools can miraculously produce admirable results despite having majority of learners from poor backgrounds. It goes with the saying that, poor academic achievement in school may be the result of interplay of several factors. It is therefore important not only to carry out an empirical study on the causes of low academic performance of pupils, but also to find opportunities and propose measures to assist on-going efforts at improving pupils' academic achievement in general.

Sometimes it makes the general public wonder why some government schools fail to produce good results in public examinations while others manage to consistently impress the general public by yielding admirable results. A good number of scholars on institutional effectiveness, including Edmonds (1981), Scheerens&Bosker (1997), Lezotte, Skaife&Holstead (2002), and Daggett (2005), demonstrated that public schools can make a difference – even though the pupils in government school mostly from divntge families. These researchers discovered that the successful schools have unique characteristics and processes, which helped all children, learn at high levels (Kirk & Jones, 2004). The researchers in question postulated that the good performing schools have modalities put in place to complement their efforts that encouraged all the learners learn with minimal difficulties (Kirk & Jones, 2004) a number of studies have been carried out to establish what it takes for acceptable academic achievement or rather academic proficiency. Edmonds' (1981) research noted the following characteristics of successful schools: strong administrative leadership, focus on basic skills, high expectations for pupil success, frequent monitoring of pupil performance, and safe and orderly schools. Other similar characteristics identified by Sheerens and Bosker (1997) included the following: monitoring of pupil progress, focus on achievement, parental involvement, creating a safe and orderly climate, focused curriculum, strong leadership, cooperative working environment and time on task.

This study aimed at furthering research on the area of low academic performance of students in the Basic School Certificate Examination (BECE) in the Builsa North District by advancing the effective schools research in Mwense district so that low performing schools can also start performing well academically. The results of the BECE candidates for some years now in the Builsa North District are not encouraging and they have experienced serious failures which need to be addressed. The following is the summary of the results from 2014 to 2018, in the year 2014 the district presented 510 boys and 510 girls totaling 1020 and those who were able to get aggregate 6 to 30 were 213 representing 20.9%. The district also presented in 2015, 466 boys and 480 girls totaling 946 and only 26.2% got aggregate 6 to 30. The statistics also showed that in 2016 the district presented 570 boys and 538 girls, a total of 1108 candidates and an average of 24.0% aggregate 6 to 30. Moreover, the year 2017 statistics also showed that the district presented 505 boys and 507 girls and only 25.6% aggregate 6 to 30 at the final examination, then also in last year's examination the district registered 495 boys and 473 girls totaling 968 candidates and 24.7% aggregate 6 to 30. This is really an indication that the BECE results in the Builsa North District has been low over the years. It was in the light of this that the researcher set out to investigate the factor leading to the unfortunate situation. The main purpose of the study was to;

1. examine the home conditions that cause low academic performance of final year students in the Builsa North District.
2. identify teacher factors that contribute to the low academic performance of the pupils in the Builsa North District.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

On factors responsible for academic performance of students in BECE, literature was reviewed based on home-related factors, and Teacher-Related Factors.

Home-Related Factors on Academic Performance

Whether a child performs well in school or not, it can be attributed to a range of homebased factors. These include socio-economic status of parents (education, occupation and income), size of the household, type of discipline at home, and the level of parental involvement and interest in children schooling are all factors which affect the performance of the child.

Schiller, Kmelkov and Wang (2002) argued that parents who have education appear better able to provide their children with the academic and social support important for educational success when compared to

parents with less educated, Johnson and Kyle's (2001) study showed that parents education, particularly the mother's education has a big influence on children's school achievement. Fertig and Schmidt (2002) also found that mother's education has a greater effect on child's learning overall, but that father's education become more important when they have attained tertiary levels. Fuchs and Woodsman (2004) found parental education and occupation to have more substantial effects on the reading than on mathematics test scores. They stated that parental occupation and having at least one parent with a full-time job have important effects on pupil academic performance. In other words, poverty, low level of parental education, parental neighborhood, negative attitudes toward schooling in general.

According to Asikhia (2010) pupils from poor homes are forced out of school and made to engage in hawking, selling packaged drinking water and the likes so as to save money for their schools expenses. Most of the time, they cannot afford instructional materials, and are always at the mercy of examiners during examination period. The persistence of this in the life of an individual student may spell doom for his academic success. Tracy and Walter (1998) as cited in Asikhia (2010) corroborate this when they submit that individuals at the lowest economic level are often the least well served by the school system.

Research work has shown that the nature of parental discipline affects academic output of children. Oluwole (2001) found that the degree of self-efficacy and anxiety manifested by learners determine their academic performance. On the other hand, children from permissive homes are too complacent, unmotivated, and lack personal will to succeed. The democratic style of parenting has been found to be very helpful to teaching-learning situation. Here, children receive punishment that is commensurate with the offence committed. Such children are strong willed and ready for success. He observes that undergraduates that receive democratic type of parenting perform better than their counterparts from autocratic homes.

Furthermore, Conway and Houtenville (2008) also found that parental involvement has a strong positive effect on student achievement. Further research shows parental involvement in children's learning not only leads to higher academic achievement, but greater cognitive competence, greater problem solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioral problems at school.

Teacher-Related Factors on Academic Performance

Several teacher factors affect students' performance. These includes teacher attendance in school, teachers' interest and motivation, teaching effectiveness and method of teaching. A widespread problem of teacher's absenteeism is likely to contribute to poor pupil performance. The prevailing evidence is that a teacher absenteeism at basic school level in Ghana appears to have worsened in the last fifteen years (World Bank, 2004). This World Bank impact evaluation of basic education of Ghana found that, "in 2003, nearly 13 percent of teachers had been absent in the past month, compared to just over 4 percent in 1988" (World Bank, 2004, p. 101). It also observed that, "in 1988, 85 percent of schools did not suffer at all; whereas this figure has now fallen to 61 percent, with 13 percent of schools with over one third of the teachers being absent for reasons other than sickness in the past month". (World Bank, 2004, p. 103). The study also found absenteeism to be significantly worse in rural schools than in urban schools, and worse in public schools compared to private schools. Similarly, the CARE International (2003, p.18) report which look at deprived rural areas in northern Ghana talks of 'chronic teacher absenteeism' which 'adversely affects the learning environment' and Dunne and Leach (2005) cited Adane, (2013) talked about the low levels of professionalism in schools (especially low performing ones), with teachers having high rates of lateness, absenteeism and sometimes refusing to teach classes.

Ofoegbu (2004) linked poor academic performance of students to poor teachers' performance in terms of accomplishing the teaching task, negative attitudes to work and poor teaching habits which have been attributed to poor motivation. Corroborating this position, the study revealed that lack of motivation and professional commitment on the part of teachers produce poor attendance and unprofessional attitudes towards pupils which in turn affect the performance of students academically.

The influence of effective teaching on pupils' academic performance has been the subject of several studies. Quality of teachers and commitment are key inputs in educational production to perform better. Achievement according to Hedges (2000) many trained teachers are unwilling to accept postings to deprived communities in Ghana. As a result, there is a tendency for less qualified teachers to be employed in these communities, which affects their academic performance negatively. Darling, Hammond (2000) found that teacher quality characteristics such as certification status and degrees in subject to be taught are very significant and positively correlated with subject outcomes in science and mathematics.

III. METHODOLOGY

The researcher used descriptive survey research design. Kerlinger (2003) argues that descriptive survey is a method of collecting information by interviewing and administering questionnaires to a sample. Kerlinger has a view that it can be used when collecting information about people's attitudes, opinions, habits or any of the variety of education or social issues. Further, Kombo and Tromp (2006) suggests that major purpose of descriptive research is description of the state of affairs as it exists.

This research design was chosen because of the advantages it has over other designs. For example, by the use of interviews the researcher can explain the purpose of his investigation, and can explain more clearly on what information he/she wants. If the subject misinterprets the question, the interviewer may follow it up with a clarifying question (probe in). At the same time, he may evaluate the sincerity and insight of the interviewee. It is also possible to seek the same information in several ways, thus providing a check for the truthfulness of the responses (Kulbir, 2014).

In descriptive surveys participants are observed in a natural and unchanged environment. An example would be an anthropologist who wants to study a tribe without interfering with their normal activities or behaviour. Descriptive research may be a pre- cursor to future research because it can be helpful in identifying variables that can be tested.

Population and sampling

Kombo and Trompo (2006) define population as a group of individuals, objects or items from which samples are taken for measurement. Population can also refer to an entire group of persons or elements that have at least one thing in common. In this study, the population consisted of the Junior High School final year Pupils in the Builsa North District, all head Teachers and Teachers in the selected Junior High Schools. In all, the total population was about 431. This was made of 114 teachers, 302 final year students and 15 Head Teachers.

A sample size of 160 was chosen for the study. A purposive sampling strategy was used to select 15 head teachers from the 15 Junior High Schools in the District, then a simple random sampling strategy was used to sample 30 teachers (2 from each Junior High Schools), and 115 students in all the schools.

Research Instruments

The researcher used structured questionnaire and interview schedule to collect data. There were three sets of structured questionnaire; one for head teachers, one for the subject teachers and other for students.

In fact, the use of the questionnaires was chosen since studies by Bowling (1999) revealed that as an instrument for collecting data, questionnaires used in a survey increased the external validity of the study done in a natural setting. The questionnaires had different sections. The first section of the questionnaire contained information on particulars of the respondents (Bio data) while the other section of the questionnaire contained multiple choice and open - ended questions on the factors that affected the performance of pupils in Junior High Schools in their BECE in the Builsa North District.

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to gather data from head teachers and subject teachers. The questions were designed in such a way as to elicit subjective views of the research participants. Where it was noticed that the questions were falling short in some areas and not bringing out desired responses, probes were used so that the interviewee could open up and share a lot more. The information helped create and bring out the social reality of what was being sought.

Ethical Considerations

Before the commencement of the study, the researcher had to seek permission from responsible officers to allow him entry into their premises and conduct the study. When getting permission, the researcher also explained the kind of study he was carrying and why he had picked on such places and not others. The researcher also informed all the participants that the information that he was going to collect from them was for educational purposes and he would maintain confidentiality at all times. This was evident in the manner the questionnaires were designed. There was total anonymity as no names were required when filling in the questionnaires.

Participants' rights during the research process were exposed to them or rather made known. The researcher informed respondents that they were at liberty to withdraw from participating from the study at any point whenever they felt uncomfortable to continue as research respondents. In compliance to the above withdrawal right of participation, the researcher made it clear that an informed consent was going to be signed and their participation was purely voluntary. The informed consent had clear guidelines revealing all participants' rights during their participation in study.

Data Analysis

This study generated both qualitative and quantitative data; hence both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used to analyze the data obtained. Data analysis consisted of quick impressive analysis to analysis focus group discussions and item analysis of the questionnaire responses. Thematic analysis was used in analyzing the qualitative data from the interviews which led into categorization of data into themes. While quantitative data was analyzed using Microsoft office excel which allowed presentation of data in tables and figures to generate frequencies and percentages.

Data Presentation and Analysis

In the first objective, the study attempted examining certain home-based conditions that account for low academic performance of pupils in BECE in the Builsa North District. Home-based conditions are factors within the home or community that impede or enhance pupils'

Academic performance. In analyzing the home-based factors, the researcher considered parents' consultation with teachers about their wards and Parents assistance to Pupils in doing their homework. Variables such as rare, sometimes, often and never were used to rate parents level of consultation with teachers about their children's education in school. Pupils were also asked to indicate yes or no about whether they get assistance from their parents in doing their homework. Frequency table and pie chart were used for the analysis. These findings were analyzed from questionnaires answered by 30 teachers and 115 pupils who participated in the study.

Table 1: Teachers' responses on frequency of parents' consultation with teachers

Consultation	Teachers Response	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Rare	6	20.0
Sometimes	5	16.7
Often	4	13.3
Never	10	50.0
Total	30	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

From table 1, the teachers indicated that only 6 parents representing 20% rarely consult with about their education of their children, 5 parents representing 16.7% sometimes consult with teachers about their education of their children, 4 parents representing 13.3% often consult with teachers and as many as 10 parents representing 50% never consulted with teachers about the education of their children in school.

Parents Level of Consultation with Teachers on their wards' Performance

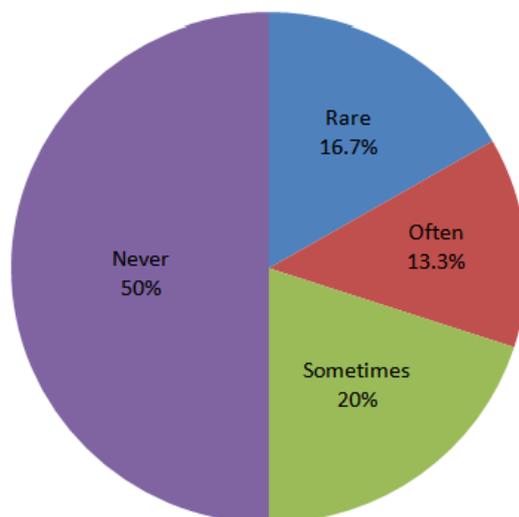


Figure 1: Pie chart showing parents-teacher consultation

Source: Field survey, 2019

Data obtained from figure1; indicated that majority of parents 50% never consulted teachers on education matters of their children, 16.7% indicated they sometimes consult and 13.3% do often consult with 20% rarely consulted teachers. This is an indication that most parents were not so much concerned about education of their children. The situation was really sad as parents' interaction with teachers is of paramount importance. Their continuous presence in school through regular visits put pupils on alert and concentrate on school work with the fear that their parents would be told about their academic performance by school management or respective subject teachers. Findings of previous studies indicate that pupil achievement improves when parents become involved in their children's education at school and in the community (Steinberg, 2006). A previous study by Snow, et al. (2001) also revealed that when parents are formally involved in parent-school activities such as PTA participation and attending school activities their children performance improves.

Learning involves self- discovery of information from various sources such as journals, text books among others. It's not always that the school provides all these materials. Parents as partners in providing education to their defendants must take an active role in proving basic educational materials to their children.

Table2: Parents assistance to Pupils to do home work

Response	Rate of response	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	20	17.4
No	95	82.6
Total	115	100

Source: Field data, 2019

From table 2, only 20 Pupils representing 17.4% indicated a yes on the support of their parents in doing their homework and as many as 95 Pupils representing 82.6% indicated that they do not get support from their parents in doing their homework

Parents assistance to Pupils to do home work

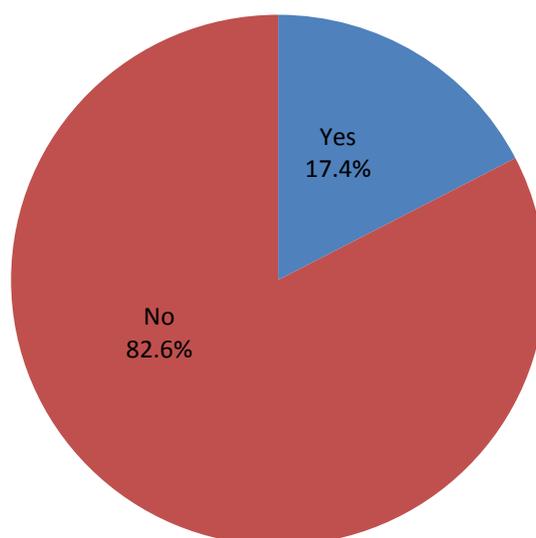


Figure 2: Pie chart on pupils getting assistance to do their work at home

Source: Field survey, 2019

Findings from figure 2 showed that majority of the pupils (82.6%) in the fifteen Junior High Schools did not get assistance to do homework at home and only 17.4% received some assistance to do homework from the people they stayed with at home. Those pupils who do not receive assistance at home to do their homework end up performing poorly in national examinations. Conway and Houtenwille (2008) found that parental

involvement in their children’s educational activities has a strong positive effect on student achievement. Further research shows parental involvement in children’s learning not only leads to higher academic achievement, but greater cognitive competence, greater problem solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioral problems at school. Other research work has also shown that the nature of parental discipline and non-involvement in their educational activities affect academic output of children. Oluwole (2001) found that the degree of self-efficacy and anxiety manifested by learners determine their academic performance.

The next objective of the study sought to identify teacher related factors that contribute to the low pupil academic performance in BECE in the Builsa North District.

Teacher-based factors are factors related to teachers that could hinder or promote academic performance of pupils in their schools. Teacher commitment, teachers' frequency in absenteeism, and teachers' work load were considered in the analysis. Head teachers were asked to indicate how high or moderate their teachers’ commitments were in the delivery of their work in the school. Frequency tables and pie charts were used in the analysis.

Table3: Commitment levels of Teachers in schools

Commitment	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	5	33.3
Moderate	10	66.7
Total	15	100

Source: Field data 2019

Table3, reveals that 10 head teachers in the fifteen Junior High Schools representing 66.7% described teachers' commitment as moderate with only 5 head teachers representing 33.3% who rated teachers' commitment as having high Commitment to work. However, it is important to realize that good performance is as a result of high commitment levels by the teachers.

The researcher followed up with an interview schedule to find out about teacher absenteeism as one of the indicators in the study. All the head teachers in the fifteen selected Junior High Schools in the Builsa North District when asked through interviews on what contributes to teacher absenteeism, they gave several reasons. One of them had this to say;

“absenteeism of teachers is mostly experienced at the end of the month. Most teachers leave their work places for their salaries since most of them get their salaries through Ghana Commercial Bank which had no other branch apart from the District Capital (Sandema). Indicating that during pay days most classes remain without teachers to attend to pupils”. Furthermore, another head teacher said; “a good number of them are doing studies by distance learning to upgrade themselves to either diploma or degree level. In the process they leave their classes/teaching and rather concentrate on writing their own assignments”.

Teacher presence however, is cardinal in an effective school to provide academic guidance to his or her learners. Absenteeism by teachers reduces the amount of instructional time and this result in the syllabi not being completed. This in return results to lower output of work by the pupils. Ofoegbu (2004) linked poor academic performance of students to poor teachers’ performance in terms of accomplishing the teaching task, negative attitudes to work and poor teaching habits which have been attributed to poor motivation. Corroborating this position, the study revealed that lack of motivation and professional commitment on the part of teachers produce poor attendance and unprofessional attitudes towards pupils which in turn affect the performance of students academically.

Teachers work load was another indicator that was looked at. Table 4.4 showed the number of periods a particular teacher had per week. If a teacher is over loaded it becomes difficult for such a teacher to prepare lessons adequately. Table 4.4 gives an over view of teaching loads for teachers in the fifteen Junior High Schools in the Builsa North District.

Table 4: Teachers workload per week

Periods per week	Frequency	Percentage (%)
16-20	2	6.7
20-24	10	33.3
24-28	12	40.0
28-32	6	20.0
Total	30	100.0

Source: Field data 2019

Table 4 indicates that 2 teachers representing 6.7% had 16-20 periods per week, 10 teachers representing 33.3% had 20-24 teaching periods per week, 12 teachers representing 40% also had 24-28 teaching periods per week and 6 teachers representing 20% had 28-32 teaching periods for a week. There is a clear indication from table 4.4 that most teachers had as many as 24-28 periods to teach in a week.

Teachers Teaching Load Per Week

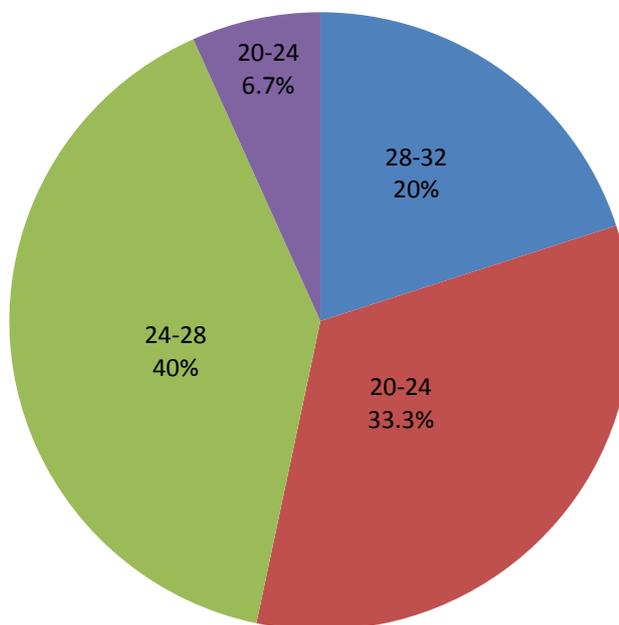


Figure 3: Pie chart on teachers' teaching load per week

Source: field survey, 2019

Figure 3, shows the number of periods respective subject teachers taught per week. A good number of head teachers (6) (40%) indicated that most subject teachers had periods between 24-28 while a small percentage 6.7% (2) had periods between 20 and 24. This implies that most teachers in the fifteen Junior High Schools were overloaded hence; their output in terms of national examinations performance would be affected in a way.

Major Findings

From the first objective the findings were based on home-based factors that affect pupil performance in the schools under review. Findings from the study were that there was a big gap between parents and teachers in terms of communication. Parents hardly contacted teachers on issues pertaining to performance of their children. Similarly, findings of the study revealed that there was less parental involvement in assisting children with assignments given to them in form of homework by their teachers.

The second objective was on teacher based-factors. On this aspect the major findings of the study indicated that there was rampant teacher absenteeism in the Builsa North District. A number of teachers were upgrading their qualifications and as such devoted most of their time writing assignments at the expense of teaching and leaving their classes unattended to. It was also discovered that teacher commitment in the schools under review was very low.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. parents should be encouraged to show interest in, and offer assistance to their children in their homework, visit them in school to see how they are doing and meet all other educational needs of their children.
2. School head teachers should make sure teaching and learning materials such as text books, equipment and science laboratories are put under judicious use.

3. Both internal and external monitoring should be intensified in all schools in the Builsa North District to ensure that teachers are making good use of instructional time in order to enhance academic performance of pupils.
4. With cases of both teacher and pupil absenteeism, the Ghana Education Service should find appropriate measures in dealing with the culprits in order to discourage it in all schools in the Builsa North District.

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