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Relationship between Learners Residence Distance and Attendance in Community Senior High Schools' in the Hohoe Municipality of Ghana

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Abstract

School attendance is one important measure of students' success and is of much concern to stakeholders in education in many countries including Ghana. Few studies have examined the relationship between learners' residence distance and their school attendance. This paper investigated the relationship between learners' residence distance and attendance in community senior high schools in the Hohoe municipality of Ghana. A stratified random sample of 354 grades 11 and 12 students from three community senior high schools responded to a questionnaire. Pearson Product Moment correlation coefficient and t-test were used to test the null hypotheses. The study found a weak positive correlation between students' residence distance and school attendance but that residence distance was a statistically significant predictor of school attendance. There was no statistically significant difference in the academic performance of students with short-distance residence and students with far-distance residence to the school. Students' inability to follow lessons was one reason for their non-attendance at school, but not the distance. The research team recommended that much focus should be placed on formative assessment to motivate students' school attendance.

Keywords: Attendance, learning success, residence distance, teaching method, truancy

1.0 INTRODUCTION

School non-attendance has been linked to low academic performance of learners. Studies have investigated variables that account for learners' school non-attendance or truancy (Reid, 1999; Mitchell, 1993). Authors have provided varied definitions for truancy and summarised it to mean students' failure to attend school regularly. Clark (2008) explained absenteeism as absence from school "without a valid excuse communicated by the student's family not to be at school during the school day or a part of the school day". Robinson (2009) notes that non-attendance is where a learner fails to attend school or class with or without permission. Attendance to school and learners' residence distance or travel time to school have been linked to learners' learning success.

Galabawa (2002) noted that when schools are situated far from learners' residences it affects learners' academic performance because they spend much time travelling long distances to reach school and this sometimes runs into their lesson periods. Engelbrecht, Kriegler, and Booyens (1996) researched the sitting of schools and reported that distance travelled by learners from home to school correlated negatively with the academic performance of students. The researchers claimed that most of the learners were affected by the distance as they used their time on travelling rather than learning. Further, Morakinyo (2003) studied the effect of school distance from learners' residences on their learning success and observed that students' academic performance fall with an increase in school distance.

Mgonja (2016) explored factors influencing truancy in community secondary schools in Mtwara District of Tanzania and reported among others that residence distance to school, unreliable transport system, lack of definite policy on student truancy and differences in parents' socioeconomic status account for low school attendance. Adeboyeje, Olaniyi and Adepoju (2003) identified home-school distance as one among several factors that causes low performance of students in public examinations. This was similar to Reche et al., (2012) claim that walking long distances to school makes students reach school hungry and late that affects their learning success negatively. In a related research, Adell (2002) pointed out that low learners' success in schools is a worldwide problem linked to the low socio-economic background of learners and their school locations.

Texas Transportation Institute (2004) explained that school sites need to consider demographics, utility, road access and topography to ensure the safest and fastest traffic movement to school. According to the International Labour Organisation report (as cited in Vuri, 2007), schools are necessary for taking children out of the labour market. In less developed countries school facilities and subsidies to education cost and school quality are a means of encouraging poor families to send their children to school. The report stated that in remote areas of less developed countries supply constraints such as access to school in terms of distance to the nearest school and travel costs may affect how learners share their time for school and work. The report asserted that access difficulties to secondary schools could be one of the reasons why some pupils do not attend school.

Vuri (2007) in a working paper on "the effect of availability and distance from school on children's time allocation in Ghana and Guatemala" observed that the distance to primary school is an important part of households' decisions to send children to school or work. The longer the distance to primary school the more difficult it is for children to reconcile both activities of school and work, however, the availability of a secondary school enhances attendance. Because the returns to secondary education are perceived to be higher than for primary education, parents are motivated to send their children to primary school rather than to work if the chances that the children may also have access to secondary education are brighter.

This issue of access difficulties has policy implications for governments of developing countries if enrolment targets are to be met and school attendance is improved. Schools need to be provided as much as possible at reasonable distances from communities to enhance access. An idea some African countries including Ghana and Kenya have embraced to provide access and ensure attendance.

In the Ghanaian context, this category of schools are referred to as community senior high schools. Most of these community senior high schools have few or no boarding/hostel facilities compelling many learners travel different distances by transport, cycling or trekking to reach their schools. Though these community schools provide access to learners, academic performance in these schools often falls below public expectations. This situation compels parents to seek admission for their wards in the more endowed senior high schools where the chances of learners scoring higher grades are brighter leading to overcrowding in the more endowed schools.

Studies have pointed to travel distance, travel time and absenteeism as contributing factors to academic performance in schools. Gasparovic (2014) found that travel time influenced learners' learning success. The author reported a relatively weak but statistically significant relationship between travel time to school and the academic performance of learners. Learners who travel longer time to school had lower grades and academic success than those who travel less. Learner participants in the study believed that travelling has more impact on their school activities as it related to their being late for school, loss of time due to travelling, traffic congestion and frequency of transport lines inter alia. Moreover, travel time to school affected pupils' absence from classes. The number of pupils absent from classes due to transport rose with travelling time to school. Learners' grades and academic success decreased with an increase in number of absences from classes.

In another study Bammou, Bouhali and El Alaoui (2024) found that there exist significant correlations between the time pupils spend commuting to school and various indicators of academic performance, such as tardiness, absenteeism, and overall academic performance of pupils.

In developed countries, commuting long distance to school is relatively safe due to efficient transportation systems. However, in less developed countries commuting long distances to school could be a difficult and dangerous task as majority of students have to walk long distances through mountains and rivers in some instances (The New Times, 2016). Pradhan and Sinha (2017) noted that early departures and late returns seriously restrict students' time for personal study, and commuting distances further affect the sleep patterns of learners. Taiwo (2019) reported that walking long distances to and from school daily affects students' academic achievement and contributes to absenteeism and fatigue resulting in low focus on studies and interest in school activities. This researcher argues results in undesirable consequences including delinquency and indiscipline among far-distance residence students.

On the contrary, Kirby and McElroy (2003) reported that learners who travelled more than 30 minutes to university had an attendance rate of 8.6 percentage points greater than learners who travelled less than 10 minutes. The researchers guessed that this might be because far-distance learners spend the entire day on campus once they arrive so their marginal travel time may be much lower than learners who have a short residence distance to the school and may have to walk from their residence to attend each class. Moreover, travel time to school is highly correlated with live-at-home students, hence their class attendance may have been influenced by their guardians.

However, van Goeverden and de Boer (2013) argued that the issue of travelling to school has received relatively little attention and few studies have focused on the problem as most articles examine the topic of travelling to work. Most existing evidence shows that the long-distance travel to school significantly affect student school attendance and performance resulting from fatigue, reduced learning time, and lower academic achievement. However, other studies have reported that residence distance have no significant effect on learners school attendance and their academic performance.

In the context of Ghana few studies have focused on the relationship between residence distance and learners' learning success in community senior high schools. This is the motivation for the current study to find out how residence distance has affected school attendance and academic performance in senior high schools in the Hohoe municipality of Ghana as learners' academic performance in national examinations have not match up to public expectations.

1.1 Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

Research Question 1: What hindrances impede class attendance of grades 11 and 12 students of community senior high schools?

Null hypotheses
H_{o1}: Residence distance is not a statistically significant predictor of class attendance in community senior high schools.
H_{o2}: There is no statistically significant difference in academic performance between students with short-distance residence and students with far-distance residence.
H_{o3}: There is no statistically significant difference in class attendance between students with short-distance residence and students with far-distance residence.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

1.3 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

The study involved three variables which are students' school class attendance and residence distance as independent variables and academic performance as a dependent variable. The two independent variables and the one dependent variable generated continuous data and were examined through a correlation research design. The t-test was used under inferential statistics while frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used under descriptive statistics. Participants were (354) grades 11 and 12 students randomly sampled through the stratified technique from three community senior high schools in the Hohoe municipality.

1.4 DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected from students' class attendance registers and the corresponding end-of-term examination scores in Economics with a document analysis guide. Questionnaires were developed and validated through expert judgement. Participants responded to a questionnaire to indicate the hindrances to their class attendance. Data were collected from a sample of 354 students in three public community senior high schools. The response rate was 97%. The student was a unit of analysis in this research which allowed a sound generalization about students' class attendance, residence distance and academic performance to be made. Descriptive statistics were used to organise and summarise the data to facilitate understanding of the state of affairs of the phenomenon under investigation. The t-test was used to examine if there was a statistically significant difference among the variables studied.

1.5 RESULTS

This paper examined whether there was a correlation between students' class attendance and their academic performance and also determined the influence of students' residence distance on their academic performance on the one hand and their class attendance on the other hand.

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	214	60.45
Female	140	39.55
Total	354	100

Source: (Field data, 2024)

Table 1 shows that 60.45% of the respondents were males while 39.55% of the respondents were females. This indicates that there were more males than females pursuing Economics in the three-community senior high schools studied.

Research Question: What hindrances impede class attendance of grades 11 and 12 students of community senior high schools?

Views expressed on hindrances to class attendance among 11 and 12th-grade students of community senior high schools. Table 2 shows the views expressed by students on the various hindrances to class attendance among them. The following responses which appear in Table 2 are explained below as follows:

SD = Strongly Disagree D = Disagree
A = Agree SA = Strongly Agree
M = Mean Std. = Standard Deviation
The degree of agreement or disagreement was measured on a 4-point scale as follows: Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1; Disagree (D) = 2; Agree (A) = 3; Strongly Agree
(SA) = 4. The following meanings were given to the mean ratings along the continuum: SD = 1.0-1.99; D = 2.0 - 2.99; A = 3.0-3.99; SA = 4.0.

Table 2: Students' Dominant View about each Statement on Hindrances to their Class Attendance

Statement	Response	Frequency	Mean	Sd.	Meaning
1. I am ill	3	354	3.48	.61	Agree
2. My food items are finished	3	354	3.25	.74	Agree
3. My up keep money is finished	3	354	3.38	.67	Agree
4. Am unable to pay exam fees	3	354	3.66	.49	Agree
5. I do not understand economics lessons	3	354	3.00	.76	Agree
6. Economics tutor is absent	2	354	2.63	.85	Disagree
7. I am bereaved	2	354	2.98	.77	Disagree
8. The weather is bad	2	354	2.95	.74	Disagree
9. Am afraid of punishment	2	354	2.90	.79	Disagree
10. I am unhappy	2	354	2.79	.87	Disagree
11. Peer pressure excuses	3	354	3.10	.77	Agree
12. Am assign work by my parents	2	354	2.46	.61	Disagree
13. Raising money for self-support	3	354	3.0	.77	Agree
14. Distance travel to school	3	354	3.60	.50	Agree

Source: (Field Data, 2024)

MSA=Males School Attendance, FSA=Females School Attendance

One issue that the study seeks to find out is whether illness hindered students' class attendance. This statement had a mean response of 3.48 and a standard deviation of .61 meaning the majority of students agree with the statement that illness hinders them from attending class. This finding supports Kearney, (2007) who stated that chronic health conditions are the most significant predictors of student inability to attend school regularly. The researcher indicated that illness is one of the most important predictors of school attendance. He further explained that absenteeism related to illness can be exacerbated by numerous factors, including poverty, medical care, as well as the student's living environment.

Statements 2, 3, 4, 13 and 14 find out whether when learners food got finished, if they had no money, if they were not able to pay their exam fees, raising money for self-support and distance travel to school hindered them from attending economics class, their responses yielded the following means and standard deviations; 3.25, 73; 3.38, 0.67; 3.66 .49, 3.0, .77 and 3.60, 0.5 respectively. These averages and standard deviations suggest that the respondents agree with each one of the four statements that they were hindered from attending class.

Other statements were whether the economics tutor is absent; I am bereaved; the weather is bad; am afraid of punishment; I am unhappy and am assigned work by my parents hindered the respondents' class attendance. The following means and standard deviations were recorded from their responses: 2.63, .85;

2.98, .77; 2.95, .74; 2.90, .77; 2.9, .87; 2.46, .61. These responses suggest that the respondents disagree that any one of these six statements mentioned hindered them from attending economics class.

Concerning the statement as to whether respondents absent themselves from school due to their inability to understand economics lessons and become confused or bored, their responses produced a mean of 3.0 and a standard deviation of .76. This suggests an indication that respondents respond in the affirmative. This supports literature which suggests that students are less likely to attend school when they perceive that their classes are boring or irrelevant; feel unsupported or disrespected by teachers and other school staff; and feel uncomfortable with behavioural issues Reid (2004). The same research also noted that students were less likely to attend school when they perceived that they had fallen behind on their schoolwork or could not balance the competing demands of work and school.

The finding is further in tandem with studies that have asserted that a tutor's capacity to analyse and synthesise difficult materials make them easy for learners and explain the materials clearly to learners accounts for high-class attendance. Tutors' ability to organise and arrange material and communicate the material in the simplest possible form have been identified as excellent teaching techniques in the views of learners and thus their motivation for high-class attendance (Feldman, 1989; Race, 2002; Exley & Dennick, 2004; McKeachie & Svinicki, 2010). This implies tutors were unable to make lessons simple enough to the satisfaction and motivation of learners to attract high-class attendance during lessons. This is further in line with evidence from empirical review "that organizing and rolling out capacity building foras improves teachers' teaching skills in their subject areas, widens teachers' pedagogical experience and strengthens teacher teaching competences enabling them grow as a teacher professional teaching" (Jepketer, Kombo & Kyalo, 2015, P. 46.).

Also on the statement that respondents do absent themselves from school when they are unhappy, a mean of 2.79 and a standard deviation of .874 were recorded suggesting that the respondents disagree with the statement. Finally, on the statement that peer group pressure excuses caused respondents to absent themselves from school, a mean of 3.1 and a standard deviation of .77 were recorded suggesting that respondents agree with the statement. This finding is in line with the findings of Kirby and McElroy (2003), as the researchers posited that peer pressure effect and drug/alcohol use are also significantly related to student absenteeism. They further explained that adolescents with ages between 12 to 18 years, peer pressure effect and drug use was strongly associated with truancy and increased likelihood of high school dropout.

H_{o1}: Residence distance is not a statistically significant predictor of class attendance in community senior high schools.

This hypothesis seeks to establish whether learners' residence distance significantly predicts their academic performance as shown in Table 3

Table 3: Coefficients of Learners' Residence Distance and their Class Attendance

Model	B	S.E	Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	57.117	.878		65.058	.001
LRD in Km	-3.018	.332	.436	-9.089	.001

Note: R^2=.190; Source: (Field data, 2024)

In finding out if residence distance is a statistically significant predictor of class attendance, a bivariate regression was performed in Table 3. A scatter plot showed that the correlation between residence distance and class attendance was negative and linear. There were no bivariate outliers. The relationship between residence distance and class attendance was statistically significant r (352) = -.436, p < .001. The regression equation for predicting attendance from learners' residence distance is Y = -3.018x - 57.117. The r^2 = .190 for the equation meaning 19% of the variance in class attendance was predictable from learners' residence distance. This is a weak correlation (Cohen, 1998). The bootstrapped 95% confidence interval for the slope to predict class attendance from residence distance ranged from -3.672 to -2.365. This means for a unit increase in residence distance, class attendance decreases by about 3.7 to 2.4 units

in kilometres. Following the analysis, a null hypothesis that states that "residence distance is not a statistically significant predictor of class attendance in community senior high schools" was rejected because the test is significant. This finding supports Vuri (2007) who observed that longer distances do not affect secondary school learners' attendance as the availability of a secondary school was enough motivation to enhance attendance.

H_{o2}: There is no statistically significant difference in academic performance of students with short-distance residence and students with far-distance residence

This hypothesis seeks to determine whether students' residence distance has any statistically significant relationship with learners' academic performance as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Result of t-test Mean Difference between Academic Performance of Students with short Distance Residence and Students with far Distance Residence

Group	Number	Mean	Sd	Df	*T*	Sig (Two tailed)
SDRS	204	64.0196	9.65206	352	1.11	.268
FDRS	150	62.8867	9.26315			

Source: (Field data, 2024)

SDRS = Short Distance Residence Students

FDRS = Far Distance Residence Students

This hypothesis seeks to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between students' residence distance and their academic performance. Base on this two Groups of students were identified, those who commune short distances of two kilometres and less to school: Group 1 (SDRS**)** and those who commune distances more than two kilometres to get to school: Group 2 (FDRS). The independent sample t-test was performed to test this hypothesis. The output variable was normally distributed and assumption of equal variances met base on the test results. The short distance residence students (M =64.01, SD = 9.66) was not statistically different than the long distance residence students (M = 62.89, SD = 9.26), condition t (352) = 1.11, $p < .268$ (two-tailed) at an alpha level of .05. The result shows that the $p < .268$ is greater than t critical value of 1.984. There was a small effect size of .119. The study therefore failed to reject the null hypothesis which claims that there is no statistically significant difference between academic performances of short-distance residence students and far-distance residence students. This finding shows that students from both far and near performed same in academics. This finding indicates that distance to school may not matter if there is commitment on the part of students in addition to good transportation system. The study thus fail to reject a null hypothesis which states that "there is no statistically significant difference in academic performance of students with short-distance residence and students with far-distance residence"

H_{o3}: There is no statistically significant difference in class attendance of students with short distance residence and students with far distance residence.

This hypothesis sought to determine whether students' residence distance to school has any statistically significant relationship with their class attendance as shown in table 5.

Table 5: Result of t-test Mean Difference between Class Attendance of Students with short Distance Residence and Students with far Distance Residence

Group	Number	Mean	Sd	Df	*T*	Sig (Two tailed)
SDRS	204	50.1569	7.55635	352	.850	.396
FDRS	150	49.4867	7.01842			

Source: (Field data, 2024)

SDRS= Short Distance Residence Students, FDRS = Far Distance Residence Students

This hypothesis sought to determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the attendance of students with short-distance residence to school and students with far-distance residence to

school. Two Groups of students were identified, those who commute short distances of two kilometres and less to school: Group 1 (SDRS**)** and those who commute far-distances more than two kilometres to school: Group 2 (FDRS). The independent sample t-test was performed to test this hypothesis. The output variable was normally distributed and the assumption of equal variances was met based on the test result. The short-distance residence students group (M =50.16, SD = 7.56) was not statistically different from the far-distance residence students group (M = 49.49, SD = 7.02), condition t (352) = .850, p < .396 (two-tailed) at an alpha level of .05. The result shows that the p < .396 is greater than t critical value of 1.984. There was a small effect size of .91. The study therefore failed to reject the null hypothesis which claims that there is no statistically significant difference between class attendance of short-distance residence students and far-distance residence students. This finding shows that students from far and near have the same attendance at school and class. Any difference in attendance between the two groups of students may thus be due to chance.

This finding supports Vuri (2007) who observed that longer distances do not affect secondary school learners' attendance as the availability of a secondary school was enough motivation to enhance attendance. This the author explained is because the returns to secondary education are perceived to be higher than for primary education and thus parents are encouraged to send their wards to school rather than to work if access to secondary school was available. This result is also in agreement with Kirby and McElroy's (2003) finding that learners who travelled more than 30 minutes to the university had an attendance rate of 8.6 percentage points greater than learners who travelled less than 10 minutes. The researchers guessed that this might be because distance learners spend the entire day on campus once they arrive so their marginal travel time may be much lower than learners who have a short residence distance to the school and may have to walk from their residence to attend each class. Moreover, travel distance to school is highly correlated with live-at-home students, so their high-class attendance may be a result of influence by their guardians.

1.6 CONCLUSION

The study concluded that one important issue which prevented learners from attending class was money for upkeep. It came to light that students sometimes were not present at school because they had to go and perform some jobs to raise funds for their maintenance. This points to the fact that though secondary education is free, there are still hidden costs that students and their parents incur in various forms; transport, school uniforms, shoes, belts, textbooks, hostel, examination fees and feeding were the others. These hidden costs hinder low-income home children from being regular at school as they absent themselves some days to work and raise money for their upkeep.

Moreover, unattractive and boring lessons that learners do not cope with were identified as hindrances to students' attendance. It was also established that there was a high positive correlation between class attendance and learners' academic performance. It was noted that male students performed statistically significantly higher than females in economics. Moreover, peer pressure was identified as a hindrance to class attendance among learners.

The study concluded further that the mean difference between the academic performance of students with short-distance residence and students with far-distance residence was not statistically significant. Low performance by community high school students may not be attributed to far-residence distance to their schools. In addition, the mean difference between class attendance of students with short-distance residence and students with far-distance residence was not statistically significant. There is, however, the need to compare the attendance and performance of far-distance residence students and short-distance residence students of well-endowed and community senior high schools for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The research team therefore recommends that education services focus on building the capacity of teachers to deliver lessons with more interactive delivery methods to encourage learner participation and class attendance to improve learner learning success in community senior high schools. The research team further suggested that much focus and weight should be placed on formative assessment to motivate students' school attendance.

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