



Influence of Motivation, Continuous Assessment and School Culture on Junior High School Students' Performance

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Abstract

The study examined the influence of motivation, continuous assessment tests, and school culture on Junior High School students' performance in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) in Nkwawie District. The objective of every school is student success or accomplishment. It was therefore appropriate to see how school culture factors and assessment exams affect the academic achievement of students at Nkwawie District JHS BECE. The purposive sampling was used in the form of census in picking the headmistress and the two headmasters whereas convenience sampling was used in selecting seven teachers from three public basic schools in the district to form participants for the study. The qualitative research design was used in this investigation. With an interviewer's guide, interviews were used to collect data, which were analyzed thematically. The findings of the study revealed components of school culture influenced students' performance in the BECE at the Nkwawie District. Almost all the respondents recognized the schools' mission, vision, and values off the top of their heads, but knowing them did not necessarily ensure positive results. They needed to help internalize their schools' mission, vision, and values in the students to help them perform well in the BECE. Continuous assessment tests were crucial in favorably affecting students' performance, and they should be given more weight by both teachers and students. Teachers lacked the motivation to perform at their best. Only motivation has a direct impact on academic success. As a result, teachers in the district must be sufficiently motivated to help improve final results.

Keywords- Motivation, Continuous assessment, School culture, Performance, Influence

INTRODUCTION

Education is extensively approved as the underpinning of progress and development (Kung, 2016). Every country, therefore, considers it paramount to make provisions to make their education system better to inform their development in the long run. The pursuit for better output of education is a collective effort of the government, leaders in educational institutions as well as parents. One major responsibility of the government is the making of educational reforms to change school arrangements with the motive of improving the quality of education in a particular country (Vasquez-Martinez et al., 2013).

Taking into account the approaches used in school reforms, Deal & Peterson (2016) presented five particular strategies to ensure school development. One such approach is the school culture or ethos approach. This approach emphasized

behavioral outlines and the values, beliefs, and norms that explain those outlines. According to Deal and Peterson (2016), this approach is hinged on the hypothesis that teachers and students are deeply swayed by morale, procedures, and conscious or unconscious treaties concerning how things are done in their schools. One major recommendation the authors made was that focusing on school culture can help ensure the accomplishment of a change in reform.

In 2007, an educational reform was introduced by the government which transformed all Junior Secondary Schools in Ghana into Junior High Schools and also, pursued to make the Junior High School the admittance point of an inclusive Senior High School education (Kung, 2016). A statement made by the government in the Educational Reform (2007), suggested that the Junior High Schools are to furnish the students with an extensive knowledge and expertise to them a well-proportioned individual. In efforts to make this a reality,

every facet of a school's activities must add to making education complete. It also means that a particular school must have a culture that is focused on the sole preparation of the students for education that is comprehensive. Bolman and Deal (2008) explain the culture to be the adhesive that connects an organization, bonds people and helps an organization achieve an expected objective. For a particular person to benefit from quality education, quality teachers must be deployed and engaged (Baker-Doyle, 2010). School leadership is related to school culture and teacher commitment which have effects on students. School culture and teacher retention have been connected to the performance of students (Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Debnam, & Johnson, 2014).

Yeboah (2016) emphasizes that a collective effort is perceived in efforts to ensure the culture of a school. According to the author, teachers, administrators, students, parents, community members, government policies, and the principles of the school, all contribute to ensuring a school's culture. Hence, leadership plays the most important role in the culture of a school. Leadership and culture are associated unswervingly with student success and makeup (Helterbran, 2010).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Kane and Staiger (2008) affirm that the performance of students in examinations as well as their behavioral makeup is mostly determined by the teaching, learning, and leadership styles that transpire in the school. The authors stated emphatically that, the attitudes of students, punctuality, as well as how they relate to one another all amount to their performance academically and morally. The belief is that there is a connection between culture and the success of students and that, school success depends on culture, hence; culture cannot be ignored and must be a focus of every school.

There is the belief that a major factor for the attainment of poor education in primary schools is the lack of adequate motivation for school administrators, teachers as well as students and that if a school operates with a culture that highly motivates teachers, it will contribute to the improvement of student's academic performance.

Though teaching and learning in the classroom affect the education of students, motivation, school culture which comprises values, beliefs, principles, objects, etc., and other factors have an influence either positively or negatively on the total education of students.

The study examined the influence of motivation, continuous assessment, and school culture on Junior High School (JHS) students' performance in the Nkawie District with the objectives:

1. Exploring the influence of school culture on students' BECE performance at the Nkawie District
2. Investigating the effects of motivation through prize giving on students' BECE Performance at the Nkawie District
3. Examining the effect of continuous assessment tests on students' BECE performance.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the influence of school culture on students' BECE performance in the Nkawie District?
2. How does motivation through prize giving affect students' BECE Performance at the Nkawie District?
3. How do continuous assessment tests affect students' BECE Performance in the Nkawie District?

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to scholarship in respect of the effects of school leadership on school culture. The study will be of importance to schools in the Nkawie District in Ghana because it will highlight both the negative and positive components of school culture and how these components impact student's education. This will consequently help in the adoption of a positive culture that will enhance the improvement of students in schools. This will also ensure that the most appropriate and recommendable leadership approach that impacts positively on school culture is used.

LITERATURE REVIEW

School Culture

Culture refers to the underlying assumptions, attitudes, and practices that all members of a school community share. According to Chisum (2019), a fundamental tactic for enhancing the development of schools is to promote the culture of the school. Hinde (2014) states that school culture is an all-encompassing component of schools, yet it is difficult to locate and describe. Gruenert & Whitaker (2017) point out that determining what makes up a school's culture is not easy. The way individuals think, act, and learn at a school is influenced by its culture.

Every institution has its own distinct culture. It's either an ineffective culture defined by a lack of vision and cohesion or a productive culture defined by staff and student confidence, trust, collaboration, and a desire to achieve their best. Evidence from both ancient and contemporary research suggests that school culture has an impact on students and teachers.

Leadership and culture

Organizational health is the single most valuable asset any firm can own. Even though it is easy, free, and open to everyone who wants it, most leaders disregard it (Lencioni, 2012).

Teachers' perceptions of leadership and atmosphere, according to Leithwood & Beatty (2008), are closely tied to their commitment. The paradox is that a leader may believe they are following a plan and that everything is flowing well, yet the instructors' demands are not being satisfied, and their view of the leadership is deteriorating. By being more active in school and acting in a way that conveys a good message, a leader can make a difference.

Three leadership types have been linked to school culture, according to research: distributive leadership, instructional leadership, and transformational leadership.

Instructional leadership

All aspects of school culture are statistically relevant when it comes to instructional leadership (Sahin, 2011). According to Sahin, there is a favorable association between instructional leadership and all elements of school culture.

Transformational leadership

Transformative leadership, on the other hand, had no direct influence on student success, according to the findings of research conducted by Lencioni, P. (2012). Instead, they discovered a link between transformational leadership and Collective Teacher Efficacy, School Mission Commitment, Professional Community Commitment, and Community Partnership Commitment. According to Kung's (2016) study, transformative leadership has an indirect influence on students' achievement.

Distributive leadership

Distributive leadership, according to Petersen (2011), can help schools improve. Distributive leadership disperses leadership across the whole organization, reducing the school's or organization's reliance on particular leaders.

Positive School Culture

A positive school culture denotes one, that is typically beneficial, motivating teaching and learning healthily. Schools with strong positive cultures, according to Deal and Peterson (2016), are those where there is a common sense of purpose and total commitment to teaching. Collegiality, improvement, hard effort, rituals; traditions to commemorate student achievement, instructor creativity, and family dedication are the underlying principles in these institutions.

According to Jones (2009), a healthy school culture improves teacher performance through motivation, and this, in turn, improves student achievement. As evidence of a healthy school culture, Wibowo, Marini, Safitri, & Wahyudi (2020) cite traits such as excellent communication, a focus on stated goals, and staff cohesiveness, power equalization, innovativeness, and successful resource usage.

Mullen, Shields & Tienken (2021) essentially agree with Chen & Huang (2017) about characteristics such as practical support and the safeguarding of what is essential as evidence of a healthy school culture.

Openness to give feedback, embracing adjustments, and trying new things are good. As a result, a healthy school culture is one in which everyone has a voice and a vision. The principal and the teachers are working together. Challenges are considered as chances to improve on established objectives. Teachers' ability to adapt to change is a critical component of a strong school culture. In a healthy school culture, this adaptability fosters innovation and energy.

Negative School Culture

A negative culture, on the other hand, is unhealthy or poisonous. It is terrible in the sense that it makes teaching and learning more difficult. Teachers do not have a pleasant connection, and they operate in solitude. There are no established objectives, and teachers don't hold high expectations for their students. Teachers do not feel valued or

acknowledged, and they are excluded from school decision-making processes.

Deal & Peterson (2016) discovered several similar traits in toxic cultures in schools. Stakeholders who seek self-interest and labor are the first poisonous characters they detect. If there is any concentration, it is skewed toward non-academic work. Teachers strive for a hierarchical degree of command. Factionalism is the second character they describe. There are divisions along a variety of categories, including ethnic, racial, and departmental boundaries. The third personality trait is animosity, which leads to a lack of consensus and concentration. The school is progressively being demolished. Deal & Peterson (2016) talked about a lack of collegiality and went on to say that kids are viewed as a burden and that teachers are even pleased when students are missing from school and vice versa.

Motivation

Motivation is a process of increasing employees' morale at their respective working places which can only be achieved by satisfying them. It is an important ingredient because it leads to effective teaching in schools and has a positive impact on students' performance.

There is the belief that the question of low performance of teachers would be minimized if the management of schools incorporates the notion of offering staff training and other incentive packages that are likely to motivate and meet their needs. The package is demonstrated in private schools. Most of them are offering several incentive packages to keep their members performing higher compared to government institutions. These include free transportation, mortgage facilities, free medical care, and free teachers' child education (Sahin, 2011).

With increasing levels of development, the working environment has also become more competitive. The employer now demands for more skilled, trained, and qualified workforce since the institutions' output depends on the employees' performances (Jones, 2009). Employees also look for attractive incentive packages, so to retain personnel and increase their performance has remained a problem for human resource management practitioners (Petersen, 2011).

Jones (2009) has tried to identify the factors important in analyzing the performance of employees at the time of hiring and they found that employees' productivity depends on many factors including level of job satisfaction and motivation.

Continuous Assessment

Continuous assessment is the evaluation of a student's progress throughout the study, as distinct from such evaluation by examination (Le Grange & Raddy, 1998). It could be used as an alternative to the final examination system. Whereas traditional examination measures cognitive aspects of learning, continuous assessment promotes learners' skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values. Le Grange & Raddy are of the view that continuous assessment is cumulative. This is to say that the assessment mode of students' performance at the end of the term or year is based on cumulative scores from a series of assessment instruments. This characteristic of

continuous assessment requires that there should be proper records. Tools meant for continuous assessment are believed to be, among other things, teacher's observation notes, videotape, audiotape, photographs, artifacts products of the student.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1

1. What is the influence of school culture on students' BECE performance in the Nkwawie District?

On the influence of school culture on students' BECE performance in the Nkwawie District, some of the items on the interviewer's guide focused on the characteristics of school culture such as vision, mission, and values.

Sharing their views on whether the school had a clear vision, mission, and values, most of the participants were of the view that there were clear vision, mission, and values in the basic JHSs at the Nkwawie District and that these vision, mission, and values were geared towards students' performance. On the question of teachers' sensitive nature to the school vision, mission, and values, all the participants expressed the view that they were very much concerned about them and that they were working seriously towards the embracement of these vision, mission, and values by students because they believed when the students embraced the vision, mission, and values of the school, their attitude towards studies would change positively.

Commenting on this, one of the participants observed passionately, "As for the vision, mission, and values of the school, if the students fail to embrace them, then we, as teachers, will equally fail because their failure to embrace them will reflect in their abysmal performance in the BECE exams".

Substantiating this point, a participant who was later identified as a Social Studies Teacher, added, "This is the main reason the headmasters have always ensured that there is a clear vision, mission, and values in the schools and they are very passionate about them".

A female teacher, in her contribution, said, "Our wish, or should I say our duty, is to ensure that the vision, mission, and values are geared towards performance, and this is a herculean task".

Another female participant came into the discussion with the exclamation, "Say it again! A very difficult task indeed because of the way the students understand these visions, missions, and values. They do not embrace them early enough. Normally, by the time they see the importance of these vision, mission, and values, they have a few weeks to begin the BECE".

In the end, all the participants agreed that the importance of the schools' vision, mission, and values was such that they had to work collaboratively to ensure their sustenance and embracement not only by the students but also by the teachers.

The findings above are consistent with those of Thacker & McInerney (1992), who discovered a link between school mission, vision, and values and academic success. One of the major aspects of school culture, according to Brown (2004), is the school's vision and mission. He pointed out that a school that knew where it wanted to go and what it needed to do to get there was more effective than one that did not.

The headmistress was engaged in a one-on-one interview because of her position as a female head of one of the schools to get her views about the effects of the schools' vision, mission, and values on students' BECE performance at the Nkwawie District. In her contribution, she admitted that the schools had a clear vision, mission, and values and that she believed these were geared towards the students' performance. Her concern, however, was how the students and some of the teachers took these vision, mission, and values.

When she was asked whether the teachers were concerned about them, the headmistress said, "Well, how can I complain? They are concerned about the vision, mission, and values of the schools, but like every institution, there are some bad nuts. Some of the teachers, at times, behave as if they are not aware of the existence of the vision, mission, and values of the school. Such teachers, in situations like that, behave in a way that may compel you as head to also act as if you don't like them".

About the students, and how they took the schools' vision, mission, and values, the headmistress in a comment said, "I will not blame them much, for they are still young. When you talk to them about the importance of the vision, mission, and values of the schools, they listen to you attentively and try to do the right things but soon, most of them go back to their waywardness, and this is what makes me believe the maturity level is still low, and that it will take time for them to see the positive impact of the school's vision, mission, and values on their lives. I must admit, however, that the impact of the school's vision, mission, and values on their BECE performance is not bad".

Research Question 2

2. How does motivation through prize giving affect students' BECE Performance at the Nkwawie District?

The question of the effect of motivation through prize giving on students' BECE Performance in public JHSs in the Nkwawie District generated very interesting discussions. There were quite several areas where the participants were asked to express their thoughts in the interviewer's guide. One issue that generated a lengthy discussion among the participants was an item in the interviewers' guide that sought to find out whether prize giving was more significant to students than to teachers.

Expressing their thoughts about the item, the participants were almost equally divided in thought – five against four – with two female participants in the group of four and one female participant in the group of five. Whereas the group of five participants strongly opposed the view that prize giving was

more significant to students than to teachers, the group of four participants was of the view that that should rather be the case. In other words, prize-giving was more significant to students than to teachers. The substance of the argument of the group of four participants was that it is the students who were doing the studies, and if they do it well and excel in terms of performance in the BECE, then they should be the focus of motivation, but not the teachers.

However, the group of five participants contended that the role of the teacher in the student's studies was so crucial that without him or her the students could not do much. One headmaster within the group of five said, *"We are not saying that the student does not need to be motivated but our point is that if we were looking for results for the students in terms of BECE Performance, then motivation by way of prize giving should not be more significant to the students than the teachers"*.

It is worth recognizing that in the end, both groups of participants agreed that both students and teachers need to be motivated. It is the quantum of motivation and the donor of the motivation that nearly dragged our discussion but the researchers shifted attention from those areas and focused more on the other items in the interviewer's guide.

On the issue of whether prize giving was more significant to students than to teachers, the headmistress who was engaged in a one-on-one interview had this to say, *"My dear ones, you may understand me better. Both teachers and students need to be motivated, but you realize that you need something more valuable to motivate the teacher whereas the student can be motivated by something small. Moreover, you don't need to reward all the students; you reward a few to generate competition in them to learn. That is why for me, motivating the students, regularly, is more important than motivating the teachers. After all, the teachers are paid, and all things being equal, they should be motivated by their salaries"*.

Another issue that generated a lot of discussion was whether the administration fully supported prize giving. On this issue, three of the participants were of the view that the school administration did not fully support prize-giving. Commenting on the issue, one of the participants, a Mathematics teacher questioned, *"How can the administration claim it fully supports prize giving when it organizes speech and prize giving just once in two years? The administration rather partially, I repeat, partially, supports prize giving."*

Another participant who was of a similar view wondered whether the prizes given on such occasions were appreciable and motivating enough. This participant, an English Language teacher posed the question, *"How can the administration give four exercise books to a student who has done well in two years and expect that student to be motivated? And they think they are motivating the teachers too when the administration gives a crate of minerals to the Senior housemaster for all his efforts in two years."*

One lady participant, also a language teacher, said, *"As for me, I do not know whether to throw my weight behind such*

prize-giving exercises or not. They organize them but the prizes involved are too paltry to my liking."

It was at this juncture that other participants came in to support the prize-giving exercises. Two of them said, in unison, after the language teacher's comment that, *"Then the administration indeed supports the prize giving."*

Four other participants (including the two headmasters) were of a similar view that the administration was doing its best to motivate the students and the teachers through their organization of such prize-giving exercises. One of the headmasters observed that *"The items involved in these motivation exercises are not provided by the District. The administration does not get assistance from any quarters in organizing these programs. So whatever it is, we have to recognize and accept the fact that the administration fully supports the giving of prizes."*

What was worthy of notice was the consensus among all the participants that the prize-giving functions should be held more regularly in the school.

On the issue of whether students were adequately rewarded during prize-giving functions, almost all the participants were of the view that students were not, and must be adequately rewarded during prize-giving functions. Two teachers believed that the students were adequately rewarded. To them, as they observed, *"If the prize-giving exercise could be held yearly, then no matter how small the prizes might be, the students would be adequately rewarded."*

From the one-on-one interview, the headmistress was of the view that the administration fully supported the giving of prizes. In her submission, she raised several issues: *"I strongly support the giving of prizes. The school does not have money for the organization of speech and prize-giving days, and there is no support from anywhere. If I had my way with the resources, I wouldn't mind organizing enticing, mouth-watering speeches and prize-giving days on a timely basis. I look forward to seeing the days when I will have the resources to be able to motivate both my students and teachers well and regularly"*.

The next item on the interviewer's guide was on whether teachers were fully motivated by the prizes given. Contributing to the discussion on this issue, the participants agreed that the teachers were not fully motivated by the prizes given and that they could not be fully motivated by the administration. They shared the view that it was the government who could come close to motivating teachers fully. They, however, conceded the fact that the huge numbers of teachers could not support any idea of the full motivation of teachers. As some of the participants observed in unison, *"The burden of full motivation of teachers will be too much for any government."*

It is worth recognizing that giving incentives to teachers during award-giving days is one approach to motivate them at school. This aligns with Ouma's (2011) discovery that only motivation affects academic accomplishment directly; all other characteristics only affect achievement indirectly

through their effect on motivation. Change can be facilitated by school culture. It can accept new ideas and assimilate them into the school's principles and ideals. Renchler (1992) established that an atmosphere or climate that supported the motivation to study could be cultivated in the classroom or throughout an entire school, and the study corroborated this.

Research Question 3

3. How do continuous assessment tests affect students' BECE Performance at JHSs in the Nkwawie District?

The researchers sought to find out how continuous assessment tests affect students' BECE Performance at JHSs in the Nkwawie District. This was done by asking the participants if they were happy with their school's performance. From the discussion on this issue, it was recognized that almost all the participants (teachers and headmasters) – nine of them were dissatisfied with the school's low performance. This indicated that more investigation was needed to determine the causes of the poor performance and the participants recommended the implementation of the necessary measures to rectify the situation.

When the researchers asked the participants to explain why their students' performance was poor, they gave several reasons, one of them being indiscipline among students. On indiscipline, more than half of the participants – six of them – testified that most of the students absented themselves from school, others came to school late and there were yet others, who would never do homework or show any signs of seriousness in class.

Almost with disappointment, one of the participants, a Social Studies teacher, commented thus, *"We have to tackle indiscipline in the school before we can expect to see good results. We have to get the students to know the importance of regular class attendance and more importantly, participating in in class exercises. That is how they can build a solid foundation for continuous assessment tests"*.

They also mentioned the lack of a competitive culture among students as one of the causes of poor performance. The participants admitted that there was no keen competition among the students, and this was not a sign healthy enough for good academic exercise. One participant, a Mathematics teacher observed, *"But there is no competitive spirit among these students so it is not easy to get them to perform to expectation. It is even miraculous that the performance has not been too discouraging."*

The participants also mentioned low entry grades or weak foundations as another cause of poor performance among the students. The issue of poor performance among the students, according to the participants, rested on the weak foundation with which most of the students entered Junior High School.

Commenting on the weak performance of the students, one of the female participants, a language teacher said, *"The foundation is something. The foundation is not strong. But this is an issue we cannot do anything about. When you admit students with a poor foundation, it is not easy to bring them*

up to perform marvelously at the BECE because all the class exercises form part of the final exams"

The other issue that the participants raised as a cause of poor performance was the lack of students' self-drive. They had the belief that most of the students had no self-drive in achieving the best in education.

When asked which of the causes was a major one in triggering poor performance, six of the participants felt that indiscipline among students was the primary cause of poor achievement, while three cited a lack of a culture of competition and a lack of students' self-drive.

The headmistress' view (through the one-on-one interview) was solicited on how continuous assessment tests affected students' BECE Performance at JHSs in the Nkwawie District. Her observation was as follows: *"Frankly speaking, I am not too happy about the performance of the students at the BECE"*.

When the headmistress was asked why she was not happy about the students' performance, she said, *"Considering the efforts the teachers put up, I expect the students to do better. Teachers are always in class, teaching but the rate of absenteeism among students does not generate good results for them at their final BECE. You know, continuous assessment forms part of the final results of the exams"*.

The headmistress gave possible explanation as to why the students were not performing well due to indiscipline among the students – indiscipline, which according to her, showed up in their absence from classes and refusal to do homework. The headmistress' explanation of the students' poor performance corroborated the group of participants' testimony that indiscipline was the cause of the problem, and that, they had to tackle indiscipline in the schools before they could expect to see good results.

The headmistress also admitted, *"The fact is that there is no competitive spirit among the students so it was not easy to get them to perform to expectation"*.

The findings backed up Petersen's (2011) conclusions that ongoing evaluations were used to measure students' progress and prepare them for the final exam. Teachers' and students' perspectives in Mwebaza's (2010) study revealed that there were numerous continuous assessment procedures to be implemented, all of which had a good association with students' final examination results. Unfortunately, the continuous assessment tests organized at JHSs in the Nkwawie District did not have a good association with the student's final examination results, and this seemed to be a challenge that had to be addressed by both students and teachers.

CONCLUSION

Most of the students in the research recognized their purpose, vision, and values off the top of their heads, but knowing them did not ensure positive results. They needed to internalize their schools' mission, vision, and values.

Both students and teachers lacked the motivation to perform at their best. Only motivation, as Ouma (2011) put it, has a direct impact on academic success. As a result, teachers and students in the district must be sufficiently motivated to improve final results.

According to the findings of the study, components of school culture influenced students' performance in the BECE in JHSs in the Nkawie District. Continuous assessment tests were crucial in favorably affecting students' performance, and they should be given more weight by students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Students must understand and act according to the school's mission, vision, and values, as simply knowing them will not improve their performance.
2. The school administration should develop a variety of motivational strategies for students and teachers that will appreciably motivate and challenge them to perform their best.
3. Teachers should give their students more frequent continuous assessment exercises so that they will be more confident and prepared for the final BECE exams.

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