

# Evaluation of Family Background on Students' Academic Performance in Basic Schools in Ghana

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## Abstract

This paper evaluates the family background on students' academic performance in basic schools in Ghana. Family is one of the oldest and most common human institutions from pre-historic times. The study was conducted to find out the impact of family on an individual's educational attainment in Bantuma M/A Basic School in Elmina. The researchers used a case study as the research design for the study. The population was made up of all pupils and their parents in the entire Bantuma M/A Basic School in Elmina. Simple random and convenience sampling techniques were used to select forty (40) pupils and twenty (20) parents for the study. Data Collection was facilitated through the administration of questionnaire, interview and observation. The data was edited, coded and analysed into frequencies, percentages with interpretations. It revealed that pupils from well-to-do homes were given their educational needs than those from the poor homes. The study recommended that, the head teacher of a school, in collaboration with the guidance coordinator must establish guidance and counselling services that can seek information from pupils as to what problems they encounter in their various homes. This will help the guidance coordinator to adopt strategies to address pupils' difficulties.

## Keywords

Evaluation, Family Background, Students' Academic Performance, Bantuma, Elmina, Ghana

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## 1. Introduction and Background

It has been long recognized that several factors or circumstances influence the intellectual development and academic achievement of children. They may include performance of the teacher, the school attended, the individual's aspiration, socio-economic states of parents, peer pressure, just to mention a few. The individuals' family background, however plays the most important role in their academic achievement. According to the Oxford Advanced Dictionary, a family is a group consisting one or two parents

and their children and close relations.

In Africa especially, where the extended family is practiced, membership of the family is made up of the father, mother, children, uncles, aunties, nephews, nieces, cousins and anybody who has blood ties to the family. The nuclear family system which includes the father, mother and children is also practiced in Ghana and some part of Africa as a whole. It is the duty of the family to provide basic amenities of life such as food, clothing, shelter and care to enable the individual to survive in life [1]. A study on Family, State, and Child Well-Being, posit that parents' interest in their children's education and their beliefs in the value of schooling accounts for more

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of the variation in children's school achievement. Most families have come to the realization that knowledge is the best policy they can give to their children [2]. They are therefore doing everything possible to raise the standard of their children's education. That is the best tool they can give to the children to fall on in the future.

However, some families do not value the importance of education and as such, and therefore do not see the need of giving their children any form of education. They perceive education as waste of money and time [2]. They prefer the children helping them in their farms, fishing, household and other forms of labour. The levels of education of some members of the family do not motivate the individual in any way to attach seriousness in his or her education. Currently, the family impacts the individual's educational attainment to a large extent. This prompted the study on the assessment on the effects of family background on the individual's academic performance [3]. Family background is the most important and mightiest factor in determining the academic performance attained by the pupil. This includes the family's economic status, parent educational status [4], their interest in education, attitudes towards education, etc.

Basically, the family lays the psychosocial, moral and spiritual foundations in the overall development of the child. While the mother's significant role in this cannot be over-emphasized, studies on father-child relationship suggest that the presence of a father in the home influences significantly the development of a child [5]. Thus, parenthood is a responsibility requiring the full cooperation of both parents who must ensure the total development of their offspring (s). Structurally, a family is either broken or intact. A broken family in this context is one that is not structurally intact for various reasons; death of a parent, divorce, separation, desertion and illegitimacy in which case, the family was never completed [6]. This analysis becomes necessary because life in a single parent family can be stressful for both the child and the parent. Such families are faced with the challenges of diminished financial resources, assumptions of new roles and responsibilities, establishment of new patterns in interfamilial interaction and reorganization of routines and schedules [5, 7]. These conditions are not conducive for effective parenting. This is because when the single parent is overburdened by responsibilities and by their own emotional reaction to their situation, they often become irritable, impatient and insensitive to their children's needs [8].

Although, the home environment or family has been recognized as having a lot of influence on the academic performance of students [8, 9], previous studies have been concentrated on the area of socio-economic status of parents. Other aspects of parental environment such as the structure of the family have been grossly neglected. Parent's constant

disagreement affects children emotionally and this could lead to poor academic performance in school. In Ghanaian society, it is the general belief that the type of family one comes from usually determines his or her performance in a school set up [10]. It is belief that people from rich families perform better in schools since their parents and other members of the family provide the necessary educational support [3]. On the other hand, those from poor homes perform poorly since they are disadvantaged because the provision of the necessary education materials is a problem [3]. It is against this background the researchers aimed at finding out the extent to which the family background can contribute to the academic performance of the pupils in Bantuma M/A Basic School in Elmina. These research questions guide the study (1) How does family income or parents' income influence child's academic performance? (2) How does number of siblings in the family affect pupils' academic performance? (3) What educational support do family members offer to their children? 4. How does the family support influence the regular attendance of their children in school?

## 2. Review of the Literature

A school of thought describes the family as one of the oldest and most common human institutions and thus from pre-historic time, family has been an important organization in the society. Study of family characteristics, such as their attitudes towards education, their interest in their children's education and their belief in the value of schooling account for more of the variations in children's school achievements. Most families have come to the realization that knowledge is the best policy they can give to their children. They are therefore doing everything possible to raise the standard of their children's education. They see it as the best tool they can give to the children to fall on in the future.

Basically, a family is a group consisting of a set of parents and children living together as a unit [1]. One function of the family is to meet certain emotional and social needs of family members. A child may have problems with his or her academic performance due to the family background from which he or she is brought up. The home is the pivot of family activities. Children learn certain basic social skills at home. Every society has a way of categorizing its members. For some societies, gender, birth order, colour and so forth are the traits that determines a person's class. Other societies classify their members according to achievement and status. Others too do so by educational background, occupation, income level and family aspirations. Social class groups have different behaviour patterns, attitude, different goals and expectation which influence the way they train their children. Upper and middle class parents being better educated, value

education as a stepping stone to future success and they support their children to make good grades, unlike lower class parents and children who grow up to see school as a waste of time and money.

However, low parental regard for education has a retarding influence on a child's progress and achievement at school [11]. This brief outline of the family and social class values show that the environment in which an individual is brought up influences his or her educational attainment and intellectual development to a large extent. Children from rich families generally have more motivation to learn than those from poor home. There are several factors that affect the influence a family can have on a child's educational attainments and intellectual performance. Some of these are, parent interest and attitudes towards formal education, occupation and aspiration of the family, sibling size, peer orientation, divorce and step parenting income of the family and others [3].

Education impacts individual's life at a very basic level [12]. At its best, it can widen a person's outlook of life's success and aspirations from a very narrow concern with individual needs to an interest in global affairs. It can transform an individual from one social class to another and it can also enable an individual to enjoy economic success. There is an inescapable link between educational attainments and marketable job skills in our current technology-based society. This link strengthens us as we witness the diminishing of needs for factory production workers and loss of traditional family farms to agribusiness [12].

Apparently, the attitude parents exhibit towards education and the consequential degree of encouragement they offer their children in school activities are in part, a reflection of the value they place on education and an indication of their own perception of the relevance of educational achievement to their own life purposes and to their aspiration for their children are likely to have high achieving children [12]. Parents with limited educational background are most likely to live in or on the poverty line. The level of parental educational achievement may influence the development of strong verbal and cognitive skills in the children. For example, reading to a young child promotes the acquisition of language skills and later achievement in reading comprehension and success in school [13].

Writing on the subject "*the solidarity of self-interest: social and cultural feasibility of rural health insurance in Ghana*" in 2003, postulate that a lot of parents show very little concern for the progress of their children's studies [14]. Where the children are day students, the parents' attention is always on the morning preparations for school, scarcely do they turn their attention to the school affairs of their wards,

except when the unexpected happens. However, the author suggested that there should be a necessary coordination at home issues with school performance to ensure educational attainment. The writer concluded that parents' involvement in the academic development of their children is a catalyst to intellectual achievements. Additionally, parents should consult teachers on their children's academic progress at school whilst also making effort to periodically monitor their wards.

A publication on a research about teaching and learning emphasized the importance of parents taking interest in or contributing towards their children's education [15]. The author was emphatic that parents interest and for that matter parental involvement in children's education helps them to learn more effectively and improve their academic attainment. Based on these findings, the United States of America Department of Education in 1986 threw a challenge to parents in a report by the National Commission on Excellence Education titled "A nation at risk, the imperative for Education Reform". It said, among other things that parents bear a responsibility to be interested and to participate actively in their children's education.

An attempt had been made by many researchers, to show the connection between socio-economic level and educational progress [16]. A book titled *Sociology of Education for African Students* affirms that there are three (3) main variables that impact children's education. These are the size of the family, attitude of the family towards education and the socio-economic status of the family. He pointed out that the upper and middle social class provides congenial learning atmosphere for their children at home through the provision of educational materials and even private tuition. He further observed that socio-economic status of one's family or parent is paramount in determining one's social mobility. He claims that in Ghana, the avenues of social mobility from the lower to the upper classes have been monopolized by the middle and the upper class families for themselves and their children. The avenues are specifically school educational attainment, which is a key to job or occupational placement. Thus the middle and upper class families are able to provide better education and therefore their children are able to get good jobs and the cycle continues leading to the entrenchment of the social class cleavage [17].

A book titled Family background and educational opportunities in Ghana pointed out that the children from higher socio-economic background have more educational opportunities and attainments than those from the lower socio-economic background [1]. Most importantly, children of middle class parents may have arrived at school with advantage in two respects. The first is that they may indeed have learnt more as a result of their form of socialization and

their expectations may be high. They may find the school as an extension of home life and they may appear to the teachers as more sophisticated. The second is that such children may also be more intellectually advanced. They supported this claim by stressing the need to conceive the competence and experience that may be prevalent in the middle and upper class households as resources are differently distributed throughout the class structure and they may be of concrete advantages to children who receive them [18]. This posits that many students who have the strong socio-economic status or background of that find themselves in a supportive educational family environment. The parents placed great importance on the academic success of the children.

Research in Europe and America indicated that children in large family size tend to have lower intelligence quotients (IQ's). Social class and linguistic development of children in large family size show backwardness in language [19]. The phenomenon according to him is due to the fact that in a large size family, there is hardly any attention paid to personal development of the individual child. Both parents and children are affected by the number of children in the family. The more the children, the more interactions within the family but there is likely to be less individual parent-child interactions. Children in large families may have many resources to draw upon for company, playmate and emotional security. They may also increase responsibility in the form of chores or caring for young siblings [20].

In large families, parents especially those with limited living space and economic resources tend to be more authoritarians, are more likely to use physical punishment and are less likely to explain their rules than parents of smaller families. A small family generally produces intelligent children [21]. He further argued that in a small family, the children are in closer touch with their parents and habitually use more mutual language and ideas that they would as if they were lost in a cloud of siblings. He may therefore appear to have higher intelligence than he really has, particularly on test which are mainly verbal. The writer supported his claim by the fact that if intelligent families are not directed by their intelligence to limit the size of their families then their family may be large [21].

Finally, a paper on "*A Framework for Assessing Individual Retirement Planning Investment Policy Performance*" published in *The Journal of Wealth Management* asserted that even children of higher or good intelligence will not use their intelligence as effectively as they might if they were members of large families particularly when their fathers were manual workers [21]. He supported this by quoting a statement that working class boys from small families have a better chance of gaining a grammar school place than

working class boys from larger families [22].

The adolescent's level of educational aspiration and consequently educational achievement is positively related to his or her peer membership, both at home and in school. If the group's regard for education is low, the individual's desire for educational attainment will be limited or low. On the other hand, if the peer group places a high premium on educational attainments or achievements, his or her perception of education is usually in line with those of the group. The higher the level of educational aspirations, so will it be in the level of educational achievements of the adolescent [23]. As the child progress towards adolescence, his or her integration into the sub-culture formed by his or her friends in sets and 'gang' becomes firmer. Neighbourhood plays a part in a child's life [16]. Excessive peer influence can lead to both emotional and educational neglect on the part of parents, especially when the peer influence is not considered positive. The resultant effects include truancy and in an excessive case, drug abuse and alcohol abuse. This situation is more pervasive in situation where the parents cannot provide the basic necessities of life for the child due to poverty.

A study on "Young People's Perceptions of Family, Peer, and School Connectedness and Their Impact on Adjustment" indicated that there is a positive correlation between peer group members and low academic grades [24]. He found out that the "non-conformist" group of students had the best academic records and the "collegiate" group, the poorest. According to Wallace, at the very start of their college careers, freshmen's attitudes towards grades and towards social integration with peers were positively related, but rapidly become negatively related owing to rapid decline in grades orientation among students who were strongly desirous of social integration.

Divorce refers to the legal termination of marriage relationship. Step parenting is usually the result when there is a re-marriage by a father or mother. Women, regardless of marital status usually do not earn more income as compare to men [25]. Although men are legally required to support their children following divorce, and in some rare cases, their wives too, evidence shows that majority of men do not continue to show support. Bianchi argued that children who live in mother-only families have almost 50% chance of being impoverished. This is in sharp contrast to less than 10% chance of children living with both parents. Divorce affects the distribution of authority within the family. Prior to the divorce, the father may have more authority because traditionally, he had been regarded as the primary bread winner or authority may have been shared by both parents. After the divorce however, the custodial parent (usually the mother) assumes the day to day responsibilities over the

children and the non-custodial parent becomes restricted to areas spelt out in divorce agreement.

A research on “*The Effects of Divorce on Children*” indicated that both parents’ authority over children as indicated by their parenting practices tends to deteriorate in the first year following divorce [26]. A scientific study on “*A new conception and subsequent taxonomy of clinical psychological problems*” published in US National Library of Medicine concluded that, the rate at which new family is formed, new problems are also likely to arise [27]. The impact of re-marriages of a family is second only to the cries of divorce. If the interactions are similar to those in any family, they are sometimes faced with anger, guilt, and jealousy etc. Step family relationships are instant; they do not evolve as in a family of orientation, where a child is born and grown. Having to live with new rules and values, while still trying to deal with the old rules and values from both parents, places an enormous burden on the child. Children, who have different histories of upbringing, now must live under the same roof with new sets of rules. At least half of the children living in step families are likely to face an additional strain. Studies have indicated that younger children and older adolescents are most likely to accept a step parent whereas pre-adolescents’ children from about age nine (9) to fifteen (15) do the poorest [27].

Income of the family, determines the relationship between the family and the child’s educational achievement [28]. Financial difficulties also produce premature and early exit, even though a maintenance grant is given to parents of children who remain in school after age fifteen. In spite of the elimination of fees in state schools, and the provision of grants for higher education, financial material inequality continues to play significant role in determining who is successful or otherwise in the education system. They pointed out that the situation was specifically so at the extremes of the hierarchy of advantage for the wealthiest children and the poorest. There are stringent losses associated with free schooling received by the majority of pupils. These include the cost of transportation and outdoor clothing for journeys to and from school. School uniforms and meals as well as expenses associated with the curriculum, books and equipments for studying at home, sports kits, materials for craft subject and in some cases, examination fees, and these cost are a particular burden for poor families. The recorded examples of children being excluded from lessons or having to miss school activities because they lack the right clothing or equipment are thought to be a tip of the iceberg [28].

In Ghana, majority of the parents do not enjoy any child maintenance allowance or support from the government. They only rely on their insignificant income for the upkeep of their families and their education as well. The influence of financial

stringency concludes that unemployment and casual employment of parents’ cause backwardness of an individual’s school work. Poverty also plays a role in the poor performance of pupils’. The Ghanaian worker has to live on a minimum wage below twenty Ghana Cedis which does not permit most families to give their children the quality education they planned for them. In effect, most parents had to sacrifice a lot of things in order to use their insignificant income to provide their children quality education.

### 3. Methodology

The research design for study was a Case study. The study was carried out in Bantuma M/A Basic School in Komenda Edina Eguafu Abirem (K. E. E. A) municipality in the Central Region of Ghana. The population was made up of all pupils and their parents in the entire Basic School in Bantuma. However, the accessible population, were selected upper primary classes pupils in Bantuma M/A Basic School in Bantuma and selected parents. Simple random and convenience sampling techniques were used to select respondents for the study. Simple random sampling was used to select forty (40) pupils from the upper primary, thus classes four, five and six. However, convenience sampling was also used to select twenty (20) parents of the selected pupils.

Data Collection was facilitated through the administration of questionnaire, interview and observation. The questionnaire data entry and analysis was done by using the SPSS software package. The data was edited, coded and analysed into frequencies, percentages with interpretations. The interview and observation data were analysed by the use of the interpretative method based on the themes arrived at during the data collection. The themes were related to the research question and interpreted on the number of issues raised by respondents. These were based on question on the semi structured interviews and observations done.

### 4. Findings and Discussions

This section presents the findings of the study, based on the analyses of data collected on pupils and parents. The researchers blended discussions with the presentation.

**Table 1.** Parents Income Distribution.

Income Range	Frequency	Percentage
50-199	7	35
200-399	6	30
400-599	4	20
600 above	3	15
Total	40	100

Source: Field Data, 2019

From Table 1, majority of the parents (35%) earned a lower income (50-199). Six (6) of the parents representing 30% earned within 200-399. Four (4) parents constituting 20% of the total population earned within 400-599 and three (3) representing 15% 600 above income which is the lowest among the parents. Majority of the pupils' respondents reached by the researcher complained that their needs are not met by their parents. Some put on torn uniforms, while others also complained that they do not eat before coming to school. Some also said they are given little money to buy food at school. This may be due to the low income of most parents. Finding of the study was supported by the literature that there are stringent losses associated with free schooling received by the majority of pupils. These include the cost of transportation and outdoor clothing for journeys to and from school. School uniforms and meals as well as expenses associated with the curriculum, books and equipment for studying at home, sports kits, materials for craft subject and in some cases, examination fees, and these cost are a particular burden for poor families. The recorded examples of children being excluded from lessons or having to miss school activities because they lack the right clothing or equipment are thought to be a tip of the iceberg. The literature posited that there are stringent losses associated with free schooling received by the majority of pupils. These include the cost of transportation and outdoor clothing for journeys to and from school. School uniforms and meals, as well as expenses associated with the curriculum, books and equipment for studying at home, sports kits, materials for craft subject and in some cases, examination fees, and these cost are a particular burden for poor families. The recorded examples of children being excluded from lessons or having to miss school activities because they lack the right clothing or equipment are thought to be a tip of the iceberg. This posits that children from low income families have problems in climbing the academic ladder to the top.

**Table 2.** Number of Siblings.

Range	Frequency	Percentage
1-2	10	25
3-4	22	55
5-6	7	17.5
7 above	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Source: Field Data, 2019

Table 2 seeks to explain the number of siblings living with the pupil respondents of the research and their respective percentages. It is a general fact that when there are more siblings' parents' resources in terms of time, money, attention, etc. must be share among the children. From the Table 2, it can be seen that ten (10) pupils representing 25% have 1-2 siblings. There was as many as twenty-two (22) pupils

representing 55% have 3-4 siblings. Seven (7) pupils constituting 17.5% have 5-6 siblings and only one (1) person which constitute 2.5% have 7 and above siblings. Parents resources of time, money and attention spent on children in relation to a greater sibling's size can have a negative impact on a child's educational attainments. The sleeping place of such children in the family might be small in size and this will make them uncomfortable or not to have any serious studies after school. There can also be a challenge in providing the needs these children. Even though this assertion can be over ruled out by the fact that some able parents can fend for their numerous children, their number or percentages is insignificant. A similar study on social class and linguistic development of children support the findings of the study that in a large size family, there is hardly any attention paid to personal development of the individual child [19]. Both parents and children are affected by the number of children in the family. The more the children, the more interactions within the family but there is likely to be less individual parent-child interactions. Children in large families may have many resources to draw upon for company, playmate and emotional security. They may also increase responsibility in the form of chores or caring for younger siblings [20].

**Table 3.** Family's support for Children.

Support	Frequency	Percentage
Both Parents	6	15
Father	20	50
Mother	10	25
Guardian	4	10
Self	0	0
Total	40	100

Source: Field Data, 2019

Table 3 talks about the support for pupils. According to the Table, three (3) pupils representing 15% have their education being taken care of by both parents. Half (20) of the total population, representing 50% also have their education being taking care of by their fathers, whilst ten (10) constituting 25% have their mothers taken care of their education. Four (4) pupils representing 10% also have their education being taken care of by their guardians. None of the pupils takes care of their education all by themselves. It is an indication that about 90% of the pupils' respondents have their education being taken care of by their parents. This will have a positive effect on the child's academic performance.

An interview with the pupils by the researchers revealed that 50% of them had their social needs catered for by those who cater for their education. 50% of the pupils were of the view that even though their parents and guardians provide their educational needs, they do not support them in their social



needs. This can have a negative effect on the pupils' academic performance.

On the part of the support, an interview with pupils by the researchers revealed that 90% of the pupils stated that they had not been provided with a place to study at home. They concluded by saying that they sit anywhere around the house to study and do their take home assignment. When places of study are not provided at home for pupils to use, it can hinder their interest in learning at home and this will affect their academic performance. Ten percent of the pupils revealed that they have a comfortable place for learning at home. In observing the home work books of these pupils it was observed that their home assignments are properly done and supervised. In comparing to the other 90% pupils it can be concluded that when a child has a comfortable place of study at home, it goes a long way to arouse their interest in learning and also improve their academic performance. Children from middle and upper class households may be prevalent to resources in their academic progression than children who are from less privileged homes [18]. This posits that many students who have the strong socio economic status or background of that find themselves in a supportive educational family environment. The parents placed great importance on the academic success of the children.

**Table 4.** Regular School Attendance.

	Response	Frequency	Percentage
Do attend school	Yes	32	80
Regularly	No	8	20
Total		40	100

Source: Field Data, 2019

Concerning the punctuality of pupils at school, the data collected shows that thirty-two (32) pupils representing 80% attends school regularly and eight (8) also representing 20% responded 'No', meaning they do not attend school regularly. In observing pupils class attendance register it revealed that 80-82% of the pupils attend school regularly whilst the rest do not attend school regularly. The pupils gave diverse reasons as to why they do not attend school regularly:

*"A students were of the view that sometimes he faces financial problem; five pupils attributed their absence to illness; one person was also of the view that he normally stays away from school due to the kind of punishment melted when one goes wrong".*

In observing pupils' assessment and performance records, it was realised that pupils who are encouraged by their parents to study at home perform well in class and vice versa. Though parents shows much concern about what their children learn at school, visiting children in school and ensuring the child does his/her take home assignment will improve their academic performance, the child must also

show a positive attitude towards education to achieve a better height in education. The level of parental involvement in the educational achievement of their children may influence the development of strong verbal and cognitive skills in them. For example, reading to a young child promotes the acquisition of language skills and later achievement in reading comprehension and the entire academic success in school [13].

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Families that were large in size tend to share their resources of time, money, emotions on these children. Enough time and attention is not given to the children as compared to children in small size families. The study also revealed that, those who lived with guardians were not psychologically sound and did not behave the same as those who lived with their real parents. Some step children did not feel comfortable staying with their guardians. All these have impact on their education.

Based on conclusions, it is recommended that, in order to encourage pupils as well as their parents to develop interest in education in the community, the assembly, in conjunction with the district education directorate should embark on serious educational campaign in the area to sensitize the inhabitants on the need for higher educational attainment.

It is also recommended that, the head teacher of a school in collaboration with the guidance coordinator must establish guidance and counselling services which seek information from pupils as to what problem they encounter in their various homes. This will help the guidance coordinator to adopt strategies to address pupils' difficulties.

Basically some parents have financial difficulties in taking care of their children's education. It is therefore recommended that, the District Assembly in consultation with other stakeholders in the community, and financial institutions must institute financial assistance such as scholarship schemes and education endowment funds in the community or the district to assist brilliant, but needy pupils in the community to support them achieve their educational attainment.

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