

Article

Factors that Influence the Academic Motivation of Female Students

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Abstract: The study used qualitative research approach and a case study research design to explore the factors that motivate females to complete formal education in Tolon District. The population for this study comprised all females in the Tolon District who have successfully completed formal education. A purposive sampling technique was to select ten (10) females who have successfully completed formal education and are now working in the Tolon District. The main instrument used for data collection was interview guide. Data were analysed by the use of the Interpretive Method based on the themes arrived at in the data collection. The themes were related to the research questions and interpreted on the number of issues raised by participants. The study concluded that the Girl-Child requires a conducive learning environment free from limitations to successfully acquire formal education. The presence of an impressive teacher-student relationship in schools contributes immensely to the academic accomplishment of the academic goals of the female student. The study also concluded that the female students need self determination to rise above the socio-cultural limitations encountered in formal education. They obviously have to work hard and persevere enough to achieve their desired academic accomplishment. It is recommended that teachers should be encouraged as part of their teaching responsibility to give equal opportunity to both boys and girls, in answering their questions during classes. Thus, the Girl-Child deserves extra attention to ensure their participation and fair inclusion in curricular and other extra-curricular activities while in school. It is also recommended that teachers should sensitize and advise the female students to eschew the habit of associating with men, during the early stage of their life.

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1. Introduction

Education is the process through which individuals are made functional members of their society [1]. It is a process through which the young acquires knowledge and realizes her potentialities and uses them for self-actualization, to be useful to her and others. It is a means of preserving, transmitting and improving the culture of the society. In every society, education connotes acquisition of something good, and something worthwhile. Education is perceived as a cornerstone of economic development, social development and the principal means of improving the welfare of an individual [2]. In the economic and political development, education is perceived to have positive impacts on making informed decisions and choices which contributes to the formulation and implementation of sound economic and social policies by promoting good governance and evolution of civil society through community and natural capacity building [2,3]. Women's

participation in formal education reflects their economic position and related factors in society [4]. Although enrolment rates of boys and girls in secondary school have levelled off in some regions, girls' chances of reaching the highest level of education are considerably less than those of boys, when money is scarce to higher levels due to the anticipated returns. In addition, parents worry about wasting money on the education of girls who are likely to get pregnant or married before completing their schooling [5]. The governments in many parts of Africa are aware of the benefits of female education. Gender inequalities and bigotry in education have continued to play a significant role in the slow development [6].

Many countries have made progress towards achieving gender equality in education. Girls continue to face many obstacles that impede their path of learning. Some of the factors include cultural factors, availability of role models, sexuality and family background. They are also discriminated against on the basis of gender, unequal rates of investments; ladies are not being given any inheritance by parents in some communities and several hardships while undergoing the education process [7].

Basically, disparity is more in the Northern part of the country in favour of the boy-child than in the southern part. In South-eastern states, there are more girls than boys in the secondary schools, but more boys than girls in the pre-primary, except for Ebonyi and Imo state [8]. In Ghana, girl-child education that a combination of poverty, disease and backward cultural practices continue to deny the girl-child her rights to education [9]. The quality education was not about how well a child was performing in school but a number of factors that enrich the wellbeing of a child in school. She cited the issues of administration of discipline, corporal punishment, sexual harassment, child abuse and child labour as some of the things that lead to exclusion of groups of students from accessing quality education [10]. United Nations statistics, national reports and studies initiated by non-governmental organizations, repeatedly showed that girls, as a group, had lower literacy rates, receive less health care, and were more impoverished than boys. Today we are in a revolution and this will be reflected in teaching, research and community work, which will help the girl child to fit into the global society [11, 12].

The 1992 constitution of Ghana gives further impetus to the provision of education as a basic right for all Ghanaians. Article 38, Sub-section 2 of the Ghanaian Constitution States; "The government shall within two years after Parliament first meet after coming into force of this constitution, draw up a program for the implementation within the following ten years for the provision of a free, compulsory, universal, basic education. "Launched in 1996, the Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education program is designed to establish the policy framework, strategies and activities to arrive at Free and Compulsory Basic Education for all children of school-going age [13].

It is therefore imperative that children both male and female are given equal opportunities to stay in and complete formal education in honour of the constitutional right and also in fulfilment of one of the sixteen principles of Sir Gordon Guggisberg which states that, "Equal opportunities to those given to boys should be provided for the education of girls" [14]. In a report by Asare National Programme Officer of the Ghana Education Campaign Coalition, he stated that the complexities in the challenges to attain gender parity in basic school enrolment, retention and completion, and appreciating that the existing quantity and quality defects in girls' education, is a result of structural deficiency deeply rooted in policy and practice, is vital. He added that working to remove barriers to quality girls' education should not only be seen as statutory in fulfillment of girls' right but a building block to sustainable development. In his opinion, the need for Government and Civil Society to collaborate to safeguard gender interests in basic education is immediate and imminent for Ghana to remain on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals on education and gender [15].

For every human endeavour, like education, motivation is very vital. In order to increase productivity in any organization, individuals need to be motivated or their

morale increased. Therefore, in all institutions, organizations, companies and the like, if the productivity of their members is to be increased, management of such institutions needs to motivate their subordinates to put their maximum best [16]. In our Ghanaian education institutions, primary secondary and tertiary, for students to stay in school and complete and for their performance to be improved, they need to be motivated. Hence, students' performance can be boosted if the schools possess good teachers, libraries, decent accommodation, ICT Centres etc. Motivation is seen as "the process of influencing or stimulating a person to take action that will accomplish desired goals". Thus, motivation can be defined as the energy creating and guiding processes behind our actions, or as the force which energizes and directs behaviour. In short, motivation is seen as a way of arousing and sustaining an individual's interest to perform a task or activity [17].

Educationally, the Tolon District is endowed with two (2) Senior High Schools. That is one public S.H.S and one private S.H.S, 68 kindergartens, 69 primary schools and 19 J.H.S. Though the schools appear to be more, some communities in the district are without educational facilities. Thus, children of such communities have to travel long distance to access education in neighbouring communities [18]. In the past, little was said and even less was known about female education in the Tolon District. Although it is no longer the case today, girls' enrolment and retention in school still needs much to be desired. In the Tolon District, preference is given to boys' education than girls. This is due to the cultural stereotype of women's roles, customary patrilineal inheritance systems, and the perception that boys had greater prospects for formal sector employment than girls. Women in the Tolon District carry a greater chunk of household chores than men do and the notion is that these tasks are feminine. Mothers, therefore, assign domestic tasks such as fetching water, collecting firewood, cooking and caring for the children to their daughters than to their sons. In fact, studies have revealed that, those teenage girls in Ghana and for that matter, the Tolon District worked longer hours than boys, whether or not they were enrolled in school, a factor inhibiting girls' academic performance [19].

It must however be noted that the education of the girl-child is paramount to the development of a nation. This is because women are involved in all kinds of activities, both at the community level and regional level; farming, trading, childbearing and general household chores are all associated with women. Hence there is an urgent need to make education accessible to them to enable them to contribute meaningfully to national development. The misconception about females over the years that the kitchen remains their main office has contributed significantly to the low education of females in the country. It is worth noting that countries with smaller gender gaps in education have a better indication of social welfare. For instance, improved nutrition, increased life expectancy for the next generation are social benefits that will arise if more females are provided with proper education [20]. Furthermore, the importance of female education cannot be overemphasized as rightly pointed out by Aggrey, an eminent scholar who remarked that: If you educate a man, you educate only an individual: but if you educate a woman, you educate a whole nation [21]. The above question summarizes the essence of education to the girl child. No nation can afford to neglect the education of her citizens, especially the girl-child who will be the mother of tomorrow's educational reform [22].

1.1. School Factors Influencing Academic Motivation of Girls

Education is considered by various stakeholders and players as a basic need and a basic right. The performance ranks high on the national agenda, with educators and policymakers focusing on testing, accountability, curriculum reform, and teacher quality, school choice and related concerns. Conspicuously absent has been an examination of how school conditions affect teaching and learning, even though extensive literature exists that links school facilities to the quality of education and to teacher morale and teacher productivity [23]. Randomized trials have provided evidence from several developing

countries. In Nicaragua, workbooks and radio instruction raised pupils' Mathematic scores [24]. Only among the best students, perhaps because the textbooks were difficult for most students [25]. Evidence from Kenya also suggests the little impact on test scores from flip charts. The teachers' influence at school has also been found to be a hindrance to girls opting for Science and Mathematics [4]. Studies have shown that teachers tend to carry the societal expectation of girls into the school and therefore treat boys differently from girls [26].

Some teachers are said to actually discourage girls by uttering statements such as "Mathematics and Science are not meant for girls" [27]. Studies conducted by Wellesley Centers for Research on Women reported that, violence toward girls in schools is pervasive and worldwide. An unsafe learning environment is among the reasons that girls discontinue their studies or parents refuse to enroll and keep their daughters in school [28]. In schools with a strong culture, teachers are motivated and tend to be more committed, hardworking, loyal to their schools and students and satisfied with their jobs. They also point out that motivated teachers have a positive impact on learners' learning thus being able to create an appropriate classroom atmosphere, have reasonable control of their work activities are willing to accept responsibility and are personally accountable for outcomes [29]. Teachers are the group who can have the single most significant influence on culture and learners' achievements, and it is important to note that a teachers' attitude whether good or bad filters down to the norms such as discipline, hard work, issue-based research problem solving and equality. A research was conducted on two schools to find out how culture influences performance. The two schools were Umzamo and Fundiseka. Umzamo's culture was that of independent thinking, there was no ownership thus no feelings of belonging or pride in the school on the other hand in Fundiseka there were feelings of belonging, trust and pride in the school and each other and the determination to do best to preserve these and the name of the school. Fundiseka engaged more in extra-curriculum activities more than Umzamo. Fundiseka referred to their teachers as 'our teacher' and 'our students' while in Umzamo they referred to their teachers as 'The teacher' and 'The Student' [30]. In conclusion, Fundiseka's performance was much better than that of Umzamo. There was no comparison between the two schools in terms of performance and discipline. That implies that the culture of a particular institution can affect performance.

1.2. Cultural and Community Factors Influencing Academic Motivation of Girls

The challenges to girl child education in Ghana emanate from several dimensions such as cultural, political, social and economic. Negative attitude towards women's education, the dowry system, control of women's lives, male privilege and time constraint as well as the multiple roles women perform are some of the cultural barriers impeding women's access to education [31]. Society also believe that higher education endangers women's moral lives. It is therefore a general notion held in Africa that the women's place is the kitchen. Women do not need higher education to be able to play this role, hence the denial of their right to education. Despite the platform created for women in the fourth world conference held in Beijing in 1995, women still face limitations that hinder their efforts to acquire formal education [22]. It is obvious that two-third of the world's illiterates is women and that majority of them are from developing countries [31]. Gender equality and women empowerment are the major challenges facing the United Nations and the world today.

The problems of the girl child education begin from home. It is at this level in the community that girls are educated in a different manner as compared to boys. The parents, siblings, relatives and even the neighbours, identify girls to be fundamentally different from boys. They possess this viewpoint that boys are the assets of the family; they will bring wealth and enhance the reputation of their families, if they are provided education. Though this viewpoint is not correct that, boys are more intelligent, proficient, skilled and

responsible and therefore more important within the society as compared to girls. Although both girls and boys are brought up together at home and within the community, there are still restrictions imposed upon girls and they are forced to grow up differently in the community, where there is implementation of certain restrictive practices. They are not given the same opportunities as boys to prove their potentials and enhance their skills. As a result, girls grow up believing that they are grossly inferior to boys just because they are girls. As gender bias prevails within the society, girl child education will continue to experience social discrimination [32].

1.3. Personal Factors influencing Academic Motivation of Girls

A learner's level of need to achieve success significantly affects his performance [33]. A study found that there is a progressive and significant age change in interest across the elementary and middle school years which affect performance. Harter states that lower primary school children are interested to learn in order to get tokens like sweets, a clap, and a pat on the back or a smile from the teacher. As they progress in school, their need for achievement tends to be more intrinsic. In the context of nomadic girls, the level of interest may either increase or decrease as they advance in age [34]. Also, underage or overage nomadic girls, both of whom are likely to have a feeling of not fitting in, maybe physically in school but not effectively learning [35].

The relationship between achievement goals, learning strategies and academic achievement has been widely explored in previous studies [36]. But studies that examine the relationships among intrinsic motivation, achievement goal, learning strategy and academic achievement have been lacking [36]. Individuals' actual achievement behaviour depends not only on their motivation to achieve but also on whether they expect to achieve and whether they fear failure. People are more likely to work hard when they perceive a reasonable chance to succeed than when they perceive a goal to be out of reach. Children's expectations of success can be measured by asking them to predict a certain grade, indicate how sure they are that they can solve a particular problem, and select the hardest task they think they can do from a collection of tasks varying by the degree of difficulty [37]. A study found that the socio-economic status of the girls imposes considerable constraints upon their continuing stay in school. In fact, they asserted that a girl's particular socio-economic inheritance may have a direct and important effect on educational attainment [38]. In the case of female students in the Tolon District, they have to travel down South for 'kayaye' that is head potting in order to get monies to pay for their school fees.

1.4. Statement of the Problem

High girl-child participation rate in education is one of the most important talking points in any society. This is because education is one of the most effective instruments a nation has at its disposal for promoting sustainable social and economic development [39]. Girl child education lowers infant mortality and improves health, nutrition and environmental management. The fact that school drop-out has been with us for decades cannot be overlooked. "The Portuguese teachers have to be paid two hundred and forty (240) grains of gold a year, but if the child discontinued the course, the teacher's pay was correspondingly reduced." This testifies to the fact that the problem of drop-out had existed right from the inception of formal education in Ghana [14]. It is imperative that female education has been confronted in the past and the present day with many obstacles. The obstacles impeding female education are a myriad of factors including family background, peer influence, teacher and government policies [40].

The incidence of school dropout rate in the Tolon District is of increasing rate per UNICEF studies conducted in the district from 2002 to 2005. According to the studies, enrolment at the basic level is higher but as clamped up higher in the educational ladder, there is a drastic reduction in number. For instance, the studies unveiled that out of a

population of nine hundred and fifty (950) students of which 410 are girls who moved from primary six to JHS, about 20% of the girls drop out of school before getting to the form three of JHS. This means that about eighty-two (82) of them will drop. The few that has made it to the tertiary level and are now working in the formal sector are now better than their colleagues in that, it reduces poverty. When women are provided with equal rights and equal access to the education, they go on to participate in business and economic activity. Increased earning power and income combat current and future poverty through feeding, clothing and providing for the entire families. The sustainability and progress of all regions depend on the success of women across the globe. As President Obama said while addressing the United Nations General Assembly in 2012, "The future must not belong to those who bully women. It must be shaped by girls who go to school and those who stand for a world where our daughters can live their dreams just like our sons". Also, females who are educated turn to have smaller families. Increased participation in school reduces fertility rates over time. In Mali, a woman with secondary education or higher has an average of three children which their counterparts with no education have an average of seven children according to the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization [41]. Again, when females are educated, it reduced human trafficking. Women are most vulnerable to trafficking when they are undereducated and poor, says the United National Inter-Agency project in Human Trafficking [42].

Furthermore, when females are educated it increases their political representation. Across the globe, females are underrepresented as voters and restricted from political involvement, United Nations Woman's Programs on Leadership and Participation. The United Nations Women's Program on Leadership Participation suggests that civic education training and all-around empowerment will ease this gap. Despite the high drop-out rate of female students in the Tolon District, there are a few who have made it to the top so far as education is concern [43]. The questions one may ask are: How did the few make it within the same environment? What might have motivated them to attain the level they are now? What retained them at the basic level? Then factors that contributed to the success of the few educated females who gave up within the Tolon District environment are therefore the basis of this research. The purpose of the study was to examine the factors that influence the academic motivation of female students in Tolon District in the Northern Region of Ghana. The study sought to answer these research questions – (1) What School Factors Influence the Academic Motivation of Female Students in Tolon District? (2) What Community and Cultural Factors Influence the Academic Motivation of Females in Tolon District? (3) What personal factors influence the academic motivation of females in Tolon?

2. Materials and Methods

The study used qualitative research approach and a case study research design to explore the factors that motivate females to complete formal education in Tolon District. The population for this study comprised all females in the Tolon District who have successfully completed formal education. A purposive sampling technique was to select ten (10) females who have successfully completed formal education and are now working in the Tolon District. The main instrument used for data collection was interview guide. Data were analysed by the use of the Interpretive Method based on the themes arrived at in the data collection. The themes were related to the research questions and interpreted on the number of issues raised by participants.

3. Results and Discussions

This section of the study presents results and discussions on the three (3) research questions – (1) What school factors influence the academic motivation of female students

in Tolon District? (2) What community and cultural factors influence the academic motivation of females in Tolon District? (3) What personal factors influence the academic motivation of females in Tolon?

Research question one stated, "What School Factors Influence the Academic Motivation of Female Students in Tolon District?" In response to this question, two questions: question items 1 and 2 on the interview guide, were positioned to answer this question. The question items were:

1. What were some of the school factors that motivated you to complete your education?
2. What role did the teachers or headteachers play to enable you to complete your education?

The most common themes emerging from the interviews as school factors are as follows; Conducive learning environment, Motivation from friends, good teacher-student relationship, motivation from teachers, awards of best-performing students, and placing of students' results on the notice boards. The following responses were elicited on the issue; 8 out of 10 of the respondents agreed that *"a conducive learning environment in the school fostered their academic successes"*. Also, all the 10 respondents affirmatively agreed that *"a good teacher-student relationship sustained them to stay and complete their education"*. Moreover, 6 out of 10 of the respondents said:

"Awarding of best students and placing students results on the notice boards encouraged them to be up and doing with respect to their studies". Our teachers were up to the task, imparting knowledge and instilling discipline into us. I can still remember the advice the headteacher used to give us at assembly by emphasizing that we should take our studies very seriously and pointing other people by saying we should learn hard and be like those people"

A respondent posits that:

"In fact, I was ok with the conducive nature of the learning environment where we could ease ourselves when the need arises, changing sanitary pads at a place of convenience when the need arises without anyone knowing except the health lady in charge".

Again, a respondent added that:

"...hmmm Madam could encourage and motivate us to learn even if you were the lazy type you won't be left out. Indeed, she was a role model to me and helped to explain to me things that were taught in class and I did not understand it".

It can be inferred from the above that a conducive learning environment, motivation from teachers and good teacher-student relationships contributed significantly to their academic success. This conforms to the views of these scholars; Physical access to school and other non-monetary costs affect the student performance [44]. When teachers are caring and supportive and emphasise the teaching-learning process over the performance outcomes, and give feedback, children tend to be motivated to achieve and to expect success [45].

Research question two states "What community and cultural factors influence the academic motivation of females in Tolon District?" Question items 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 were designed to elicit responses to the question. The question items stated:

3. Explain some of the views of the community towards female education.
4. What were the beliefs of the community towards female education?

5. Were there any educational funds in the community that could be used to support students?
6. Were there any role models in the community who inspired you to become who you are today?
7. Are there any community bye-laws that were binding parents or guardians to send their wards to school?

The theme that emerges from the interviews are as follows; Role models in the community organisation and motivate female students and female friends in the community encouragement. Also, negative factors that emerge during the interview are as follows; early marriage of young girls, harassment of young females in the community by their male counterparts, cultural factors (female doing the house chore) and resources of the families are directed towards male students. In response to these questions, respondents had varying responses which include; all the 10 respondents affirmatively agreed that; *“there were no community bye-laws that were binding parents or guardians to send their wards to school”*. With respect to the views of the community towards female education, 5 out of the 10 respondents said *“their community viewed female education as good”*, while the remaining 5 out of the 10 also said; *“their communities did not value female education and rather see it as a waste of resources”*.

With respect to whether the respondents had role models that they emulate, all the 10 respondents affirmatively said 'yes' they were having role models. With the question of whether there were beliefs in the community towards female education, 5 out of the 10 respondents said; *“there was not any belief system in their communities towards female education”*, 2 out of the 10 participants said; *“their communities had good beliefs towards female education”*, while 3 out of the 10 said *“their communities had bad beliefs towards female education”*.

One respondent said that:

“Their views were that female education is not good because the females are supposed to get married and remain in the husbands' house but not to be educated and think she and the husband are at the same level and therefore will not accord the husband the due respect needed.”

Another respondent said that:

“My community perceived female education to be very good because through it most of the females don't end up being in the kitchen, it helps the females to earned income to sustain their families, Females who are educated are highly respected in the community and also opportunities are given to them to expressed their views in the society. It helps the females to know their rights by preventing people from infringing on the rights of the females”

Also, a participant said that:

“.....The person was a nurse who helps me a lot because when I was a young lady I used to fall sick and anytime am sick she give me drugs to take and get well so I always tell myself I want to be like this nurse in future”

From the above results, it is clear to justify that, the role of role models as well as views and values of some communities contribute immensely to the success of female education. This is in line with the saying *“Cultural expectations and values also play an important role in influencing the pattern of women's participation in secondary schools”*

[4]. Though some communities see female education as important to societal development other communities view it otherwise. It is in the light of this that these scholars said, the high status accorded to marriage and motherhood in many communities impacts negatively on female participation in education [46].

Research question stated, "What personal factors influence the academic motivation of females in Tolon?" To respond to this question, question items 8 and 9 were raised in section 'B' of the research interview guide to provide an answer to this effect. The question items stated:

8. How did you see yourself as a female student in a larger or small community?
9. How were you able to reach that level in education as opposed to other options you might have had?

The themes that emerge from the interviews are personal factors that influence females to complete their education is as follows; determination, hard work and perseverance, the courage of the female student, and prayers. The elicited information revealed that all the 10 respondents said; *"determination, perseverance and hard work were the striving forces that enable them to attain higher education in their life"*. This suggestion is consistent with a previous study that an individual's motivation to work on his or her school work is a strong determinant of academic performance. According to him, a student who is determined to excel in school would work hard on his or her books in order to attain the desired level of performance [47].

A respondent responded that:

".....hmm my brother, growing as a girl in a larger community, in fact, it was not easy but determination and hard work has proved it all. Today as I speak, I'm very happy and independent because I can do a lot of things on my own which makes me confident within my peers"

Also, a respondent shared her experience that:

"Through determination and hard work, as an up-coming young lady in a community where there are lot of challenges, I always tell myself no matter how hard things are, I will want to be a teacher one day, and now I am a teacher, instead of a market woman. I also persevered and said the only solution to my problems is formal education because it will protect me from stress and other complications I would have encountered as a physically challenged person."

From the above responses, it can be justified that self-determination, perseverance and hard work contributed to their success in education. This statement is in consonance with early study that there is a progressive and significant age change in interest across the elementary and middle school years which affect performance. Harter states that, lower primary school children are interested in learning in order to get tokens like sweets, a clap, and a pat on the back or a smile from the teacher. As they progress in school, their need for achievement tends to be more intrinsic. Implications of the research findings suggest that individual effort is key in attaining formal education in Ghana, especially in the case of the girl-child.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concluded that the Girl-Child requires a conducive learning environment free from limitations to successfully acquire formal education. The presence of an impressive teacher-student relationship in schools contributes immensely to the academic accomplishment of the academic goals of the female student. In addition, reward schemes for good performance were found to motivate the female students by inspiring and enticing them to put in their best towards better academic achievement. The study further

concluded that the presence of role models to encourage and motivate the Girl-Child in the school was a major contributory factor since they had an opportunity to emulate such people. Again, some communities view female education as equally important as their male counterparts. The study also concluded that the female student needs self determination to rise above the socio-cultural limitations encountered in formal education. They obviously have to work hard and persevere enough to achieve their desired academic accomplishment.

It is recommended that teachers should be encouraged as part of their teaching responsibility to give equal opportunity to both boys and girls, in answering their questions during classes. Thus, the Girl-Child deserves extra attention to ensure their participation and fair inclusion in curricular and other extra-curricular activities whilst in school. It is also recommended that teachers should sensitize and advise the female students to eschew the habit of associating with men, during the early stage of their life. Whiles in school they should rather put in maximum effort into their education. Early marriages in communities should be discouraged to allow the Girl-Child to make good use of the opportunities available to her, to fully complete formal education in the Tolon district. The female student should be made conscious of their potential and to instill in them the need to work hard towards their academic achievements in life.

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