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**Teacher Time–On–Task in Basic Schools in the Juaboso District in the Western Region of Ghana for the Period 2000 – 2010**

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## Abstract

This study investigated teacher–time–on–task in basic schools in the Juaboso district in the Western Region of Ghana. The purpose of the study was to identify the time teachers spend on lesson preparation, setting and marking assignments and the time teachers spent on co-curricular activities. To carry out this mission, the study relied on four research questions which included; how teacher–time–on–task is exhibited in basic schools in the Juaboso district and what are the causes of teacher time robbing. A descriptive design survey which aims at obtaining information concerning the current status of a phenomena to describe what exist with respect to variables or conditions in a situation was used for the study. Questionnaires, interviews and

observation guides were the instruments used for the study. Teachers, parents, pupils and officers in the Juaboso district education directorate constituted the population for the study. Both Nwana (2005) and Fisher et al (2008) methods of sample size determination were used for the study. Four hundred pupils were used for focused group discussion. All the seventy-eight Parent Teacher Association (PTA), School Management Committee (SMC) chairmen, all the eight circuit supervisors and the district director of education and his four front line Assistant directors were purposely selected for the study. Two hundred and eighty-six teachers were selected for the study. The study revealed that some teachers rob instructional time through lateness, absenteeism, attending meetings and engaging in personal businesses. This behaviour of some teachers could be the cause of low academic performance in the district. It is recommended that trained teachers especially female teachers be recruited in schools to enhance the government's girl child education policy and heads should ensure that teachers teach the number of periods allotted to them.

**Keywords:** teacher-time-on-task, wait time, teacher time-robbers, time-on-task, mandated time allotment.

## INTRODUCTION

Most people in Ghana these days have the notion that academic standards have fallen drastically so hardly a week passes when a mass media report commenting on fallen standards of education in Ghana is published or discussed on radio. The quality of work in a school and how well students perform is largely affected by what is actually done by educational authorities to manage educational institutions entrusted in their care.

Atakpa and Ankomah (1998) pointed out that factors such as capable teaching force, availability of professional teachers, good supervision and especially effective utilization of time by school administrators and teachers are necessary for effective school management. Of all the factors mentioned and other resources available to schools, time seems to be the worse resource managed (Osei-Amankwah 2010). Time may be described as an epoch or an indefinite extent during which an event occurs or continuous in uninterrupted succession (Nickel et al, 1975). For them time is as costly as any commodity. They stated that managing time is a misnomer, because people in reality cannot manage time but what people can do is to manage its use. For example, according to them, man cannot prevent the next thirty minutes from coming but what man can do is what should be done within the coming thirty minutes for the benefit of society so time should be managed effectively because once it is

gone, it is gone forever. According to Wiley (1991), time is absolute. No one has found a way to create it, suspend it, prolong it, delay it, accelerate it or store it, we therefore speak figuratively when we say we save, spend, or waste time.

Ghana as a country sees the provision of quality education for the citizenry as a cornerstone for nation building since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For instance, the 1987 educational reforms emphasised free Compulsory Education and huge sums of money have been and are being spent on education. Teachers are not left out in this regard as they have major roles to play for the accomplishment of the educational reforms and this can be seen if teachers are to be on their tasks as expected of them. To be on their tasks effectively, teachers should possess the needed basic qualification, skills and the appropriate methods in imparting knowledge to the young ones who have been entrusted into their care at the appropriate time.

Learning is a natural spontaneous process which can be observed in the play of young children as they imitate and model their behaviour and attitudes on the people around them. Learning (based in institutions) is typically concerned with acquisition of knowledge or skills. Individuals are often tested, graded and deemed to have passed or failed a preconceived and agreed standard. Mullins (2000) identified individual's perception, ability levels, attitudes and motivation as the variables for learning. For him, if an individual perceives a learning task for example to be difficult, the individual will find it difficult learning it and vice versa. From the external perspective, Mullins (2000) mentioned the environment in which learning takes place, relationship between parties involved in learning and the reward systems as factors that make learning effective or ineffective. Studies have shown that learning outcomes are related to the amount of times students engage in learning tasks. However, visits to some schools in some countries by educational officers revealed that students are often taught for only a fraction of the intended times particularly in lower-income countries (Abadzie, 2007). These time losses according to Abadzie (2007) were due to informal school closure, teacher absenteeism, delays, early departures and sub-optimal use of time in the classroom. Abadzie (2007) indicated that the percentage of time that students were engaged in learning vis-à-vis government expenditure was approximately 39% in Ghana, 63% in Pernambuco and 71% in Morocco.

Worldwide, governments define the number of days or hours that schools should teach specific materials, and these are usually 850 – 1000 instructional hours or 180 – 220 days per school year aside from breaks and extra-curricular activities. The implication is that if the school fails to operate within this framework, and does different things rather than the teaching and learning within the allotted time, it would be seen as robbing time (Abadzie, 2007).

There is ineffective use of contact hours in most Ghanaian schools because some teachers absent themselves from classes with or without permission, some come to school late and most at times in the rural areas, pupils are sent on errands such as carrying cocoa beans from people's farms within the community, some teachers even send children to work on their (teachers) farms, and for teachers who do not own farms they take to be involved in businesses like selling petty items like children's wear, shirta, cosmetics and establishing provision stores (GES, 2005). Attention in some cases is focused on these activities by teachers more than the teaching and learning for which they have been hired.

In recent years, pupils' academic performance in the Juaboso district has been very low. Can this be attributed in part to the inefficient use of contact hours (use of time) in schools as put down by GES (2005)? It is therefore imperative for this area of teacher-time-on-task in basic schools in the Juaboso district to be investigated so that the necessary action could be taken to address its effect on the academic performance if it has a hand in it.

### **Research Objectives**

The study had two main objectives which were general and specific. The general objective of the study was to add to the body of knowledge in the area of teacher- time -on task in basic schools in Ghana.

Specifically, the study aimed at:

- Finding out how teacher -time- task is exhibited in basic schools in the Juaboso district.
- Ascertaining how teachers rob instructional time in basic schools in the Juaboso district

Finding out the effect of teacher -time- on task on academic performance of pupils in basic schools in the Juaboso district

- Determining how stakeholders in education can control teacher time robbers in basic schools in the Juaboso district.

Time is a scarce resource and when it passes away it is unrenowable. Unfortunately, this scarce resource does not seem to be managed effectively by heads and other educational

administrators in most Ghanaian schools. Precious time is wasted through lateness to school by teachers and students, teacher absenteeism, early closures, and others. The decline in standards of teaching and learning in basic schools in Ghana continues to be one of the major problems for the government, parents and other stakeholders in education. It is in the light of this that hardly a week passes in Ghana recently without a mass media's comment on the poor performance in the basic schools and in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). The government through the Ghana Education Service (GES) has come out with many programmes and interventions to curb the situation, for example the fee-free policy, capitation grant, school feeding and others to basic schools in the country. There are also time tables, teachers' handbooks, teachers' manuals, series of workshops (seminars), building of schools (infrastructure) and provision of furniture to schools; but there seems to be no improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. The issue then is "would there be a drastic change in academic performance of pupils in schools especially in the Juaboso district if teachers and pupils have been on their tasks in terms of time?" The communities seem not to be satisfied with the performance of pupils both in school and at the Basic Education Certificate Examination. This research therefore sought to find out whether or not the issue of teacher-time-robbing existed in basic schools in the Juaboso District and if it did exist, what were the causes and what could be done to curb the canker.

The study sought to inquire into teacher-time-on task in basic schools in the Juaboso district in the western region of Ghana. It sought to identify the time teachers spend on lesson preparation, setting and marking assignments and the time teachers spend on co-curricular activities. The study also aimed to identify teacher-time-robbars, if any, in basic schools in the Juaboso district and determine the effects of such time-robbars on academic performance of students in the Juaboso district. Finally the study aimed at finding out how teacher time robbars could be controlled in the Juaboso district.

The following four research question guided the study.

1. How is teacher-time-on task exhibited in basic schools in the Juaboso district?
2. In what ways do teachers rob instructional time in basic schools in the Juaboso district?
3. What has been the effects of teacher-time-on-task on academic performance of pupils in basic schools in the Juaboso district?

4. How do stakeholders of education in the Juaboso district control teacher-time robbers in basic schools.

The findings of this study would expose probable shortcomings in the use of teaching time in basic schools in the Juaboso district. This could provide the authorities in the educational sector some information upon which they could make decisions regarding teachers' use of instructional time. It could also be a tool for the planning and budgeting divisions of the Ghana Education Service (GES). Results from the study could be applied to other districts like the Bia district which has the same characteristics like the Juaboso district. The researchers are of the opinion that results from the study could add to the body of knowledge on issues relating to teacher-time-on-task as it could serve as a reference material for future researchers.

The study was delimited to basic schools in the Juaboso district in the western region of Ghana. Its findings are therefore limited to the Juaboso district though the results can be applied to other districts that have similar characteristics. The study considered official school time hours between 7:30am and 3:00pm from Monday to Friday. Periods before 7:30am and 3:00pm, public holidays and closure of schools due to industrial actions, were also included.

The researchers preferred to have conducted the study on a larger scale to cover the whole country however, a district in Ghana was selected for the study and even within the selected district a number of constraints made them concentrate on 78 out of the 161 schools.

Some of the respondents thought the study was aimed at exposing them to the public so some of them failed to answer all the questions on the questionnaire.

Road networks in the Juaboso district are not fully developed so movement from one place to the other is hampered so the researchers concentrated on the areas that were more accessible to them.

It should however be noted that despite the above limitations among others, efforts were made to ensure that the number of respondents who were needed for the study were

contacted for the necessary information to be received so that the needed results could be obtained.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research design for the study was descriptive survey design because the study aimed at obtaining information concerning a current status of a phenomena to decide what exists with respect to variables or conditions in that situation. In descriptive survey, events are described and the number of times something occurs or the frequency of occurrences are provided.

The population of the study consisted of all teachers and head teachers, all parents who had wards in Basic Schools in the Juaboso district, the district director of education in the Juaboso district and his four frontline assistant directors. Also all the eight circuit supervisors in the district educational directorate were included.

Four hundred pupils were selected for focus group discussion. Two hundred and eighty-six teachers were selected using Fisher et al (2008) sampling method and all the seventy-eight (78) Parent Teacher Association Chairpersons were selected for the study. Additionally all heads of the seventy-eight schools selected for the study out of the 194 basic schools were part of the respondents for the study. The district director of education, the four frontline assistant directors and all the eight circuit supervisors were purposively selected for the study. Parent Teacher Association Chairpersons and the seventy-eight head teachers were also purposively selected for the study.

### **Instruments**

A combination of observation guide, questionnaire and interview guides were used for the study. A 62 item questionnaire was designed for the study. The questionnaire was in five sections namely, A B C D and E. Section A dealt with personal data of respondents, section B dwelt on how teacher-time-on-task is exhibited in basic schools in the Juaboso district, section C dealt with effects of teacher-time-on-task on academic performance of pupils in the district, section D looked at what causes of teacher time robbing in the district and

section E focused on how teacher time robbing is controlled. Respondents had both open and close ended questions to deal with on the questionnaire.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Data from the completed questionnaire were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20.0. Percentages and frequencies were the statistical tools used.

### Presentation of Results.

Table 1: How time is used in the classroom.

ITEM	NO. OF RESPONSES	PERCENTAGE
No of classes Taught : 1	218	76.3
2	5	1.7
3	63	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00</b>
No of Subjects Taught: 1	3	1.0
2	58	20.3
3	11	3.8
4	214	74.8



<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Postponement of task:		
V. often	4	1.4
often	100	35.0
seldom	182	63.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00</b>
How often do pupils do corrections?		
V. often	25	8.7
often	131	45.8
seldom	130	45.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Field Study 2010

Results from table 1 shows that most teachers in basic schools in the Juaboso district are on their tasks because their activities are normal because teachers teach the required number of classes and subjects as stipulated by the Ghana Education Service though some teachers seemed to be overloaded.

Table 2. Teacher time–robbing in basic schools in the Juaboso District.

ITEM	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE

How far is your school away from your residence?		
50 – 100m	99	34.6
200 – 500m	72	35.2
1 – 2km	97	33.9
3km	18	6.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00</b>
How often do you go to school late?		
Often	6	2.1
Seldom	277	96.9
Never	3	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00</b>
What prevents you from coming to school early?		
Family matters and distance	110	36.5
Weather conditions	136	47.6
Family and weather conditions	20	7.0
Weather and distance	20	7.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100 .00</b>

**Source: Field Study 2010**

From table 2, it can be deduced that teachers in basic schools in the Juaboso district rob time in many ways. First, one hundred and seventy-one teachers (171) stay within the distance of 50 -500 metres away from their schools but unfortunately two hundred and seventy-seven (277) of teachers claimed to come to school late seldom. Interestingly, only three (3) teachers claimed they never attended school late but through observations by the researchers they

(researchers) realised that at least within a week three teachers in a school come to school late and this was confirmed by pupils during focus group discussion. This revelation supports what Abadzi, (2007) indicated that most teachers rob teaching and learning time through delays and absenteeism.

On the question what prevented teachers from coming to school early, one hundred and ten (110) attributed it to family matters and distance and one hundred and thirty-six respondents attributed it to weather conditions. If one hundred and seventy-one teachers live within 50 metres and 500 metres away from their schools and yet attributed their lateness to school to distance and weather conditions, then teachers in Juaboso district during the period of study robbed time for their own sake as indicated by GES, (2005).

**Table 3. Location of school and academic performance**

ITEM	RESPONSE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Where is your school located?	Circuit centre	91	31.8
	Near circuit centre	77	26.9
	Far away from circuit centre	118	91.3
<b>Total</b>		<b>286</b>	<b>100.00</b>
How far is your Circuit away from the District office	District office	42	14.7
	Near the district office	93	32.5
	Far away from district office	151	52.8
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>286</b>	<b>100.00</b>

**Source: Field Study 2010**

In the Juaboso district schools that are either at the circuit centres, nearer to or at the district headquarters perform better academically than schools that are far away from the district headquarters or circuit centres GES, (2005). Table 3 above attests to that fact because it was observed by the researchers that supervision (by officers from the district or local circuit officers) was low in schools that were far away from the district headquarters. The implication is that such schools do not perform well academically as compared to schools nearer the district headquarters. This was evident in the results released by the West African Examination Council for the study period.

**Table 4 distribution of Teachers by Gender, Qualification and Age**

ITEM	RESPONSE	PERCENTAGE
Gender of respondent		
Male	254	88.5
Female	32	11.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Age of respondent		
20 – 39yrs	156	54.6
40 – 49yrs	89	31.1
50+ - yrs	41	14.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Qualification of respondent		
MSLC	118	41.3
A (4yrs)	39	13.6
	77	26.9

SSCE, O/A Levels	52	18.2
Others	286	100.00
<b>Total</b>		

**Source: Field Study 2010**

From table 4 most teachers are males, and many of them - one hundred and fifty-six (156) are below 40 years. This means that the Juaboso district during the study period had teachers who were within their youthful stages of human development. It can be concluded that all other things being equal the district could have the services of these energetic teachers for at least fifteen more years. The table also revealed that there are many untrained teachers in the Juaboso district. Can this be a factor that leads to the poor academic standards in the district? As the table revealed a male dominance in the teaching profession in the district during the study period could a further research be conducted to find out the cause(s)?

### **Discussion of findings**

From what have been said so far it is seen that many teachers rob time for their own sake. It may be that as majority of teachers are in their youthful stages of human development, they might be moving from place to place to search for greener pastures. This is because the teaching profession seems to be unattractive to them as some of them told the researchers during interviews with them and that was confirmed by the district director of education most circuit supervisors interviewed.

There are a few ladies who are teachers. The issue is that the government's agitation for the girl child education is not predominant in the Juaboso district. It should be addressed and sustained.

Schools that are far away from the district education office seemed to perform poorly academically which could be attributed in part to low supervision. Schools inspectors from the district education office should pay unannounced visits to such schools. Teachers who absent themselves without permission should be dealt with to serve as deterrent to others.

## CONCLUSIONS

Findings from the study showed that teacher–time–robbing is not uncommon in the Juaboso district in the Western Region of Ghana. This may stem from the fact that many of them are untrained so they are not aware of the rubrics of the teaching profession, so they tended to do their own thing.

Another factor could be that as most teachers are below the age of 40 years and see the teaching profession to be unattractive, to them they rob time in search of better paid jobs.

Lastly, supervision at the outskirts of the district headquarters may be relaxed. Authorities should sit up and put things in their right perspective.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- More trained teachers should be employed in basic schools in the Juaboso district to augment the efforts of the untrained teachers. This may lead to improvement in the academic performance of the district as the trained teachers are supposed to know better than the untrained teachers. These untrained teachers could be given in-service training by their heads or circuit officers to equip them with the needed skills in teaching.
- Untrained teachers in the district could be sponsored by the district assembly or be encouraged to enrol in colleges of education to upgrade their skills in the teaching/learning process.
- Many female trained teachers should be employed in basic schools to serve as an encouragement to many females to go to school. In this way the government's policy of girl child education could be achieved in the district.
- Supervision in all schools in the district especially those far away from the district education office should be intensified so that teacher–time–robbing could be minimised.
- Teacher–time–robbers should be dealt with severely to serve as deterrent to others.

### Further Research

This research was conducted for the period 2000 – 2010, it would be appreciated if a research could be conducted on the same district for the period 2011 – 2017 so that comparisons could be made. Also there was a male dominance in the teaching profession in the Juaboso district during the study period, could further research be conducted to find out the causes? Lastly a further study could be conducted in the district to find out whether or not the dominance of pupil teachers in the district was a factor that contributed to the poor academic performance in the district.

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