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Assessment of teachers' utilisation of school time in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis. A case study of some selected primary schools within the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis

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ABSTRACT

Maximising academic learning time has been identified as a critical tool for improving student achievement. The study aimed at assessing factors that influence the utilisation of teaching time allocated to primary schools, how distortions in the allocated time affect teaching curriculum, and measures in place to ensure that instructional time is efficiently utilised in schools within the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Stratified sampling procedure was used to sample 63 respondents. Questionnaire and observation guide were used as instruments for collecting data. SPSS version 17 and Microsoft Excel 2007 Edition were used to analyse the data. Descriptive statistics, chi square and one sample t-test were used to describe the data. The study found that there was poor regulation of time in the activities of the schools. Factors influencing the utilisation of allocated times to schools included teacher and student absenteeism, teacher and student lateness, inadequate teaching and learning materials, and driving away of animals on school compounds. These have contributed to reduce both the quality and quantity of time used for academic activities. The study recommends that head teachers in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis should monitor activities both within and outside classroom to ensure that times allotted to various activities are adhered to.

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Introduction

Education at the primary level provides the foundation upon which further education is built, as such, it is very essential. Ministry of Education (1994) indicated that the government of Ghana recognises primary education as the fundamental building block of the nation. Education is thus the bedrock of every economy and this is the reason why the school is established to shape, grade and produce the manpower needed for the society and for that matter the entire economy.

In educating an individual, the teacher who is a facilitator plays a major role in the teaching and learning process. Essential among the resources that facilitate teaching and learning is the use of time. In the school, the teacher is the one who manages it and gets things done through people so that desirable goals are achieved. According to Ministry of Education (1994), it behoves the head teacher to ensure that instructional time is used judiciously. This is done by ensuring that both teachers and pupils are engaged in teaching-learning activities at the appropriate times. Outlining the determinants of instructional time utilisation, Lockheed and Verspoor (1991, p. 58) stated,

The annual number of hours available for children to study given subjects in school is determined by three factors: the hours in the official school year; the proportion of these hours assigned to the subjects; and the amount of time lost

because of school closing, teacher absence, student absence and miscellaneous interruptions.

The 2007 Educational Reforms brought about a universal and compulsory basic education of two years of kindergarten and six years of primary education. Kindergarten education enables children to learn by doing. This provides them with expressive activities that demand their participation in all learning. This lays the foundation for later formal experiences in learning. Their learning activities such as listening, speaking and decision-making are enhanced at an early age. At the primary level, fewer subjects are taught to improve upon each pupils grounding in the basic skills required for entry into the Junior High School. Emphasis is laid on literacy, numeric and problem-solving skills.

In the primary school, the Ghana Education Service (GES) schools operate a standard time schedule and all one session primary schools start at 8.00a.m. and closes at 2.00p.m. However, it appears that not all schools are able to adhere to this directive since activities pertaining in each district or town is different. For example, in areas where accessibility of transport is a problem to both pupils and teachers especially where they have to walk long distances making it virtually impossible for school to begin at 8.00am. This leads to the loss of time in the morning. As Lockheed and Verspoor (1991) observe that Ghana spends approximately 610 hours in a year for instructions in primary grades one

through to six, which falls below the world wide average of 880hours.

Time as a resource is scarce and once it is lost, it cannot be regained. Time use is the string running through almost all aspects of teaching, these include organising the day, organising the classroom activities, recording and marking pupils' assessment or keeping time-consuming behaviour problems to a minimum. Tamakloe, Atta and Amedahe (1996) observed that every aspect of instructional programme of a school depends on the effective management of pupils in the classroom.

An important aspect of formal education is that it is well structured in terms of its curriculum. Head teachers need to distribute syllabuses to staff members and stress the importance of using them to prepare schemes of work for every subject they teach. The teacher is expected to break down the broad outline of the syllabus into topics and arrange them in logical order. The time to be spent on each topic must also be estimated and the topics should be planned so that they are taught at the most suitable time of the year and in relation to other relevant subject topics. The time allocated to subjects in the primary schools is determined by GES. The head teacher plays an important role by supervising that all these are done and checked if the new educational reform syllabuses are being applied in the classroom.

Punctuality on the part of teachers is vital. Koomson, Akyeampong and Fobih (1999) indicated that teachers in the public basic schools do not attach so much importance to the need to go to school regularly and on time, especially when they are in the villages where transportation to school is a problem. Eventually it affects the contact hours between the teacher and the pupils leading to non-completion of syllabus resulting in low academic performance of pupils in such areas. Berliner (1990) describes four types of school-day time. They are Allocated Time, Instructional Time, Engaged Time and Academic Learning Time. Allocated Time is the total time for teacher instruction and student learning. Instructional Time is the time teachers are actively teaching. Engaged Time is the time students are involved in a task. Academic Learning Time is the time teachers can prove that students learned the content or mastered the skill. Teaching takes a lot of time as such there is never enough of it. In the classroom situation, time is limited as there is no time for lessons to be switched from one to another. As such, its judicious use is very important. Adequate time is needed to organise and manage lessons efficiently, since rushing through a topic with less time does not make pupils learn effectively.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the social learning and constructivist learning theories. The social learning theory views the role of the teacher in the traditional classroom as that of a model who can serve as an instructor and motivator (Berliner, 1990). The teacher's job in the social learning theory is to present new information, correct students' misunderstandings, and to demonstrate skills. The traditional teacher determines what will be learned, when it shall be learned, where it will be learned and who will be the learner. The teacher's role in the contact hours of the child therefore plays a significant role in the learning process. Thus, the length of the contact hours available for teachers to impart knowledge into children, the effective use of that time in terms of the proportion of that time committed to teaching and learning, and the proportion of the time children are engaged

in the actual learning process is essential in the learning process.

Miller (1993) indicated that children's knowledge of the world changes as their cognitive system develops. As the knower changes, so does the known experience is always filtered through the child's current ways of understanding. Piaget described the process of knowing as occurring in stages. Each stage is a period of time in which the child's thinking and behaviour reflects a certain kind of basic mental organisation. Every child passes from one stage to another until he or she reaches a final period of achievement. The stages proceed in a particular order, and no stage can be skipped. As a child moves through a stage, or to another stage, he or she strives to maintain a state of equilibrium which is brought about by learning.

A child constructs meaning through assimilation and accommodation (Raines & Canady, 1990). Movement through each stage is caused by physical maturation, experience with physical objects, social experience and equilibration. Thought becomes increasingly organised and builds on the structure of the previous stage (Piaget, 1951). However, these partly depend on the length of time children are engaged in specific tasks. The theory shows that the effective utilisation of instructional time in the form of the quantum of time students are engaged in classroom learning as well as the quality of teaching and learning are critical in the child learning process. Until recently, social learning theory has been a major force in classroom arrangement, curriculum design, learning assessment, and teachers' expectations of student learning and behaviour. Dissatisfaction with the results of learning based on this theory has led to a wider acceptance of constructivist learning theory and active learning. Retaining the successful aspects of a behaviouristic curriculum, educators have moved on to accept constructivism as the dominant explanation of learning in children. DeVries and Zan (1995) reported that constructivist education is a developmentally appropriate approach to early education, inspired by Piaget's theory that the child constructs knowledge, intelligence, personality and social and moral values. This approach has been defined in terms of activities that appeal to children's interests, encourage experimentation in the physical world, and foster perspective taking and cooperation in the social world.

The constructivist understanding of learning has resulted in a changing perspective regarding the role of the learner. Educators now view the learner as an active participant in learning rather than a passive participant. This theory of learning understands that process is more important than product, which results in less emphasis on finding the "correct answers." Learning is directly related to the learner's prior knowledge and individual context, and it is made relevant when it is related to the real life of the learner. DeVries and Zan (1995) indicated that the teacher's ability to relate issues to real life experiences within the child's environment is essential for effective learning. Constructivists therefore suggest the availability of the necessary teaching and learning materials in the classroom is critical for effective learning. The constructivist believes that the quality of teaching and learning that take place during the instructional hours of school is the most essential. It can be deduced from the theoretical framework that the quantum of time children are engaged in real learning and the quality of teaching and learning that take place during the instructional hours of the school are very imperative.

Statement of the Problem

Education has long been the engine of growth and the backbone of every economy. Every nation is bent on developing its manpower through education. However, it requires a period of time for one to gain any form of Education depending on the curriculum put in place and the material resources needed to carry out the programme. Yet, concern has been expressed by the public and educational authorities about teachers' use of teaching time in Ghanaian schools. While at the national level, Koomson et al. (1999) reported that a number of concerns have been raised about teaching time utilisation in schools and various causal factors have been given by people during public discussions in the electronic (such as the Talking Point programme of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation GTV) and the print media in the nation, little attention has been given to researching into the teacher time utilisation at the metropolitan levels in the country. It is within this context that this study was carried out with the aim of assessing the status of teaching time utilisation in schools within the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out how instructional time is used in public primary schools in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan. The Ministry of Education has approved time allocation for school activities to promote teaching and learning. As such, this study was to find out the utilisation of school allocated time and make some suggestions that can be implemented to improve upon the use of instructional time at the public primary school in the Metropolitan.

Research Questions

The following questions were formulated to guide the study.

1. How do teachers utilise their teaching time in primary schools within Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan?
2. What factors influence the utilisation of time allocated on time tables in primary schools within Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan?
3. How do distortions in the allocated time affect the teaching curriculum in primary schools?
4. What measures have been put in place to ensure that instructional time is efficiently utilised?
5. What can be done to improve upon teaching time utilisation within schools in Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan?

Design of the study

The study adopted the descriptive research design. Babbie (1990) explained that for the purpose of generalising from a sample to a population, descriptive sample survey is appropriate design for a survey research. Amedahe (2002) maintained that, in descriptive research, accurate description of activities, objects, and processes is the objective.

Osuala (1991) reported that a descriptive survey is versatile and practical especially to administrators in that, it identifies present conditions and points to present needs. However, Sarantakos (2005) reported that results from descriptive research are always open to question and to different interpretations. The use of descriptive survey enabled the researchers to examine the utilisation of instructional time in primary schools in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan.

Study Population

The study population comprised all primary schools in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Area and District Education Directorate. The Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan has 105 pre-schools, 118 primary schools and 79 Junior High Schools

across the nine educational circuits. There are a total of 1,012 basic school teachers in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sampling frame for the study was the list of schools in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Area. Stratified sampling technique was used to sample the schools for the study. According to Creswell (2002), stratified sampling method is used to select samples in situations where the populations is heterogeneous but has definite strata or classes which are homogenous. Creswell further indicates that the same proportion or different proportions may be used to select samples separately from each stratum using simple random sampling approach.

The sampling frame was stratified into nine strata along with the educational circuits of the Metropolitan. This enabled the researcher to examine the utilisation of instructional time across the nine educational circuits of the metropolitan. Due to the common regulations used by GES to regulate activities in each category of schools, a school each was randomly sampled from each stratum for the study.

The list of schools in each stratum was obtained from the District Education Directorate. The lottery method was used to sample schools from each stratum. This was to ensure that every school has equal chance of being selected into the sample. With the lottery method, the names of the schools were written on equally-sized papers and folded into a bowl. The papers were shuffled to make sure that they were not in any pre-determined order. The first draw was made without replacement and the name of the school was noted. The papers were reshuffled and the second draw was made and the name of the school was noted. This process was repeated in the other strata to sample two schools from each. Six teachers and a head teacher were selected from each school. A total of 54 teachers and nine head teachers were sampled for the study. The total sample size for the study was 63.

Instrumentation

Questionnaire and observation guide were used as the instruments for collecting data. The questionnaire was considered as appropriate instrument for the collection of data from the teachers and the headmasters. This was because they were considered as literates and would be able to administer the instrument themselves without support from the researcher. The data collected through the questionnaire were authenticated through observation of daily routine of the school, as well as critical examination of the teacher's lesson notes and the student's exercises on the subject. Both instrument combine open-ended and closed-ended items to gather information. The closed-ended questions were to examine how responses conform to issues in the literature, while open-ended questions were used to allow respondents to provide additional information. Likert scale questions were also used in the instruments.

The questionnaire was structured into five sections. The first section was on the background of the respondents. It includes questions such as gender, level of education and age. The second section was on the utilisation of teaching time in school. Questions captured under this section include times spent on conducting morning assembly, classroom activities and school activities being regulated by timetable. The theme for the third section was factors influencing the utilisation of allocated time in school. Some of the issues captured under this section were lateness to school, absenteeism and school infrastructure. The fourth section was on the effect from the distortions in the allocated time in teaching curriculum. Some

of the questions were reduced teaching time, unable to complete syllabus and poor academic performance. The fifth section was on measures to ensure that instructional time is used efficiently. Issues considered under this section included recuperating cancelled classes and pairing or grouping students where textbooks were not adequate. The observations were divided into school conditions, distribution of time to the various subjects, classroom management and Factors influencing the utilisation of teaching time.

Results and Discussion

Utilisation of Teaching Time in School

This section analysed the utilisation of teaching time in the selected schools. The aim was to examine the activities that consume teaching time. Some of the issues considered under the section were regulation of teaching time, adherence to schools' time table and absence of teachers from school.

The amount of time spent on the various school activities is essential in ensuring effective utilisation of school time. According to Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain (2005), the allocation of time to the various school activities gives a picture of the culture of learning and teaching in a particular school. The study therefore analysed the average time spent on the various school activities. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Average Time Spent on School Activities in a Day.

Activity	Allocated Time (minutes)	Actual time (minutes)
Morning Assembly	20	28
Classroom activity	270	241
Break	45	58
Others	25	33
Total	360	360

From Table 1, there were a total of 360 minutes (8:00am to 2:00pm) allocated for school activities in a day. Out of the total, 270 minutes (75%) were allocated to classroom activities, while 45 minutes (12.5%) were allotted for break time. In other words, more time was allocated to classroom activities to ensure effective teaching and learning. However, the actual average times observed for the various school activities shows that 241 minutes (66.9%) were used for classroom activities, whereas 58 minutes (16.1%) were used for break.

The implication is that there is poor regulation of time in the activities of the schools which affect classroom activities. The poor regulation of time of the various school activities has reduced the actual time for classroom activities. Thus, poor regulation of time resulted to the loss of 10.7% of the allocated time for classroom activities. From the observation, the poor regulation of time affected the times for certain subjects and adherence to the schools' time tables.

A one sample t-test between the allocated time for classroom activities of 270 minutes and the observed average time for classroom of 241 minutes yielded a p-value of 0.001 (t-statistic value = -163.4, mean = 14.3, df = 53). Comparing a p-value of 0.001 with the acceptable margin of error of 0.05 shows that there is a significant difference between the allocated mean time of 270 minutes and the observed mean time of 241 minutes. The implication is that teachers in the selected schools do not conform to the allocated time for classroom activities. This is likely to affect the utilisation of school time for effective teaching and learning. According to Rivkin et al. (2005), poor time regulation and management

over school activities limit the effective utilisation school time for teaching and learning.

Blauw (1998) indicated that regulation of school activities is essential for maintaining discipline and good organisational culture. Budhal (2000) added that proper regulation of school activities ensures effective utilisation of activities and promotes effective teaching and learning. From the study, majority (57.4%) of the sampled teachers admitted that they use timetable to regulate activities in their schools, 25.9% indicated that school activities are regulated by teachers, while 16.7% reported that their school activities are regulated by time keepers.

However, observation of the school activities showed that teachers did not keep good track of the times that were spent on the various subjects and school activities throughout the week. The implication is that behavioural policies to regulate the activities of both teachers and students within and outside classroom were not effective. This affected the time used for other subjects and other school activities. The finding corroborates with that of Akyeampong et al. (2006) that a large portion of rural school teachers did not follow the prescribed weekly timetable.

Teachers' absenteeism and tardiness contribute to time loss in schools which also influence the effective utilisation of instructional time. The number of times teachers absent themselves from school is therefore crucial in analysing effective utilisation of instructional time. According to the Metro Director of Education, teachers are entitled for 10 days of absence from school in a year. Head teachers also have power to give up to three casual leave days to teachers in a term. Any additional absence from school without reasonable and evidential proof attracts punishment. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of Times Teachers absent themselves from School in a Term.

Days	Frequency		Total (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
1 – 5	6 (27.3)	16 (72.7)	22 (40.7)
6 – 10	4 (25.0)	12 (75.0)	16 (29.6)
11 – 15	1 (9.1)	10 (90.9)	11 (20.4)
More than 15	1 (20)	4 (80)	5 (9.3)
Total	12 (22.2)	42 (77.8)	54 (100.0)

Table 2 shows that majority (72.7%) of the sampled teachers who absent themselves from school between one and five days in a term were female, while 27.3% were males. Similarly, 90.9% of the teachers who absent themselves from school between 11 and 15 days in a term were females, whereas 9.1 percent were males.

The implication is that some of the teachers absent themselves for more than the approved number of days from GES. This is likely to distort academic calendar and effective utilisation of instructional time in the selected schools. A chi-square test of independence between male and female teachers yielded a chi-square value of 68.73 (p-value = 0.08, df = 3). Since the p-value of 0.08 is greater than the alpha value of 0.05 implies that there is no significant association between male and female teachers in their absence from school. This further implies that male teachers and female teachers have similar absenteeism records. This disagrees with the finding of Cardoso and Verner (2007), that absenteeism is often lower among female teachers.

From the study, none of the head teachers admitted to having reported any of their teachers for absenting themselves from school for more than the approved number of days by GES. This is likely to encourage more teachers to absent

themselves from school. During the data collection period, 14 teachers absented themselves from school. This resulted to the loss of 1.7 percent of the total school time for the 15 days period. Eight out of the 14 teacher absenteeism occurred on a Friday, three occurred on a Monday, two occurred on a Thursday, while one occurred on a Tuesday.

Figure 1 presents factors that influenced teachers to absent themselves from school.

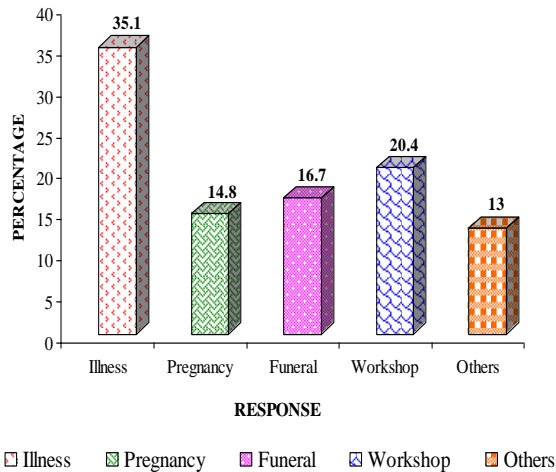


Figure 1. Factors Influencing Teachers to absent themselves from School.

From the Figure, 35.1% of the respondents indicated that they absent themselves from school due to illness, 20.4% reported that they absent themselves because of workshops organised by GES, while 16.7% absent themselves because of funeral related activities. The others comprised family issues such as sickness of child, sending child to school (SHS), searching for accommodation, and logistical issue such as break down of vehicle. The results imply that official, cultural and health related issues form the bases for teacher absenteeism in primary schools in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. The results are also in line with the finding of Cardoso and Verner (2007) that illness in general is the major causes of absenteeism in certain countries.

Lateness of teachers also results to loss of instructional time in schools. Accordingly, Farahati, Marcotte and Wilcox-Gok (2003) recommended that efforts to ensure effective utilisation of instructional time should identify and address the causes of lateness of teachers to school. This section of the study therefore examined the causes of teacher lateness in the selected schools. The results are presented in Figure 2.

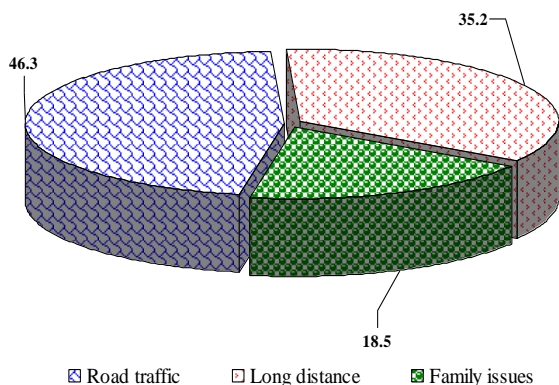


Figure 2. Causes of Lateness among Teachers.

From Figure 2, 46.3% of the sampled teachers attributed the cause of their lateness to school to heavy road traffic, 35.2% attributed theirs to long distance, whereas 18.5% attributed their lateness to school to family issues. The implication is that factors at the community level have influence on the punctuality of teachers to school. This is in line with the finding of Farahati et al. (2003) that higher absence rates among teachers are predicted by factors at the community level.

From the observation guide, the researcher found that three out of the nine selected schools had some pupils hanging around during class hours. Out of the 54 classes visited, 19 had less number of pupils at the close of class compared to the number of pupils at the start of class. Some of the pupils did not return to class after the second break, while others were sent home due to illness. However, there were no sanctions for majority of such pupils upon their resumption to class in subsequent days. This is likely to encourage more pupils to go home before the official closure of schools. Twenty-nine out of the 54 classes had pupils not paying attention during classes. This mostly occurred in the periods after break. This disrupted classroom activities since teachers sometimes had to take time to call such pupils to order. Other activities that consumed part of the instructional time were marking register, marking of exercises, writing of notes and disciplining recalcitrant pupils.

Distribution of academic learning time among the various subjects of study in a school is very essential in promoting the effective teaching and learning of particular subjects. It ensures that adequate times are made available for all subjects. Table 3 examines the actual utilisation of allocated time for learning among the various subjects.

Table 3. Utilisation of Time among the Various Subjects within a Week.

Subjects	No. of periods	Time (minutes)	Time loss/gain
English language	6	153	-27
Mathematics	6	141	-39
French	3	87	-3
Science	6	144	-36
Ghanaian language	3	81	-9
Citizenship	4	133	13
Creative art	3	104	14
ICT	5	135	-15
Religious and moral education	4	144	24
Total	40	1,122	-78

Table 3 shows that English language, Mathematics and Science have six periods each in a week, while citizenship and religious and moral education have 4 periods each per week. The implication is that the distribution of allocated time for learning favours the teaching and learning of English language, Mathematics and Science. This may be due to the importance of these subjects in the foundation years of academic learning.

Table 3 further shows that there was a loss of 39 minutes in the academic learning of Mathematics per week, whereas Science and English language lost 36 minutes and 27 minutes in their learning, respectively. On the other hand, Citizenship, Creative art, and Religious and moral education gained 13 minutes, 14 minutes and 24 minutes, respectively in their academic learning times. The implication is that such subjects gained additional times from other subjects. This may also imply that some of the teachers preferred teaching subjects

such as Citizenship, Creative art, and Religious and moral education more than others like Mathematics, Science and English language. This was so because the head teachers were unable to frequently monitor the activities in the classrooms. Three of the head teachers attributed their inability to monitor classroom activities to official duties, whereas one attributed it to the handling of other classes when teachers are absent.

This section examined the utilisation of instructional time among the various activities that take place in the classroom. According to Rockoff (2004), classroom management forms an important basis for effective utilisation of the instructional time. The measurement of the times for the various activities was recorded through observation of classroom activities. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Classroom Management

Activities	Time (minutes)	Percentage
Copying of notes	478	11.8
Disciplining students	162	4.0
Calling roll	225	5.6
Academic learning	2,298	56.7
Sharing of books	193	4.8
Marking of exercises	506	12.5
Teacher in class but not teaching	188	4.6
Total	4,050	100.0

Table 4 shows that a little above half (56.7%) of the instructional learning time really went into academic learning, 12.5% was used to mark students' exercises, 11.8% was used to copy notes, while 5.6 percent was used to call the roll during class hours.

This further shows that about 2.5 hours out of the actual 4.5 hours allocated for classroom learning was really used for teaching and learning. This is greater than Akyeampong et al.'s (2006) finding that students were engaged in learning 38.7% of the allocated time; but lower than Lewin's (2009) finding that Ghanaian teachers spent 70.2% of the time engaging students in learning. The rest of the instructional time was consumed by other activities in the classroom. This corroborates with the finding of Lewin (2009) that important block of academic learning time in schools is lost to other activities in the classroom. This is likely to affect effective teaching and learning in the selected schools.

Factors Influencing the Distribution of Allocated Time in School

This section examined the factors that influence the distribution of allocated time in the selected schools. This was imperative to identify some of the issues that affect the effective utilisation of instructional time in primary schools at the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. Some of the issues discussed under the section were lateness of students and teachers to school, absenteeism of teachers and students to school, and inadequate teaching and learning materials.

Lateness of teachers to school affects both the instructional time and engagement time. It reduces the allocated time for certain subjects as well as the contact times for effective teaching and learning. Punctuality on the part of teachers is therefore vital. This section presents results on teacher lateness on the utilisation of allocated time in schools. From the study, 87% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that teacher lateness to school influences the utilisation of instructional time in school, while 13% disagreed. From the study, 19 out of the 54 sampled teachers and three out of the nine head teachers reported late to school. However, there were no punitive measures in place to curb teacher lateness in the schools. This is likely to encourage more teachers to take excuses for attending to school late. According to Farahati et

al. (2003), weak mechanisms for tackling teacher lateness to schools perpetuate teacher lateness to school.

Akyeampong et al. (2006) indicated that students reporting late to school result in the loss of school time of 10.7 days in Ghana. Student tardiness to school is therefore a critical factor in the effective utilisation of instructional time in schools. The study found that 70.4% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that lateness of students affects the effective utilisation of instructional time, whereas 29.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Table 5 shows how workshops influence the utilisation of instructional times in the selected schools.

Table 5. Workshops Influencing the Utilisation of Allocated Time.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	11	20.4
Agree	21	38.9
Neutral	7	12.9
Disagree	10	18.5
Strongly disagree	5	9.3
Total	54	100.0

From the table, 59.3% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that teachers attending workshops influences the effective utilisation of allocated time, 27.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 12.9% were neutral. This agrees with the finding of Abadzi (2007) that teacher participation in educational workshops affects the utilisation of allocated time in schools. Some of the teachers absented themselves from school during the workshop days, while others came to school late.

From the study all the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that teacher absenteeism influences the effective utilisation of the instructional time. In the period of the study, 12 teachers absented themselves from school. This resulted to the loss of 22.2% of the instructional time within the 15-days study period. Some of the schools combined classes when teachers were absent from school, while others assigned teachers from the pre-school to handle classes whose teachers were absent. In some schools, the head teachers stood in to handle classes when teachers were absent. However, in any of the situations the idea was to get the students engaged and not to continue with the curricula activities of the absented teacher.

Student absenteeism has also been identified as one of the critical factors which influence the utilisation of instruction time in schools. Akyeampong et al. (2006) found that student absenteeism contributes to time loss in schools. The study therefore assessed how student absenteeism influences the utilisation of instructional time in schools. From the study, 64.8% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students absenteeism influences the effective utilisation of instructional time in schools, 20.4% disagreed, while 14.8% were neutral. In the period of the study, 67 students absented themselves from school.

From the study, 53.7% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that inter school games influenced the utilisation of instructional time in their schools, 37.1% agreed, while 9.3 percent were neutral. In addition, 48.1% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that inter school cultural activities influence the utilisation of instructional time in schools, 38.9% agreed or strongly disagreed, while 13% were neutral. Four head teachers indicated that inter school games and inter school cultural activities are factored into the allocated time for school curricular activities. As a result, inter

school games and inter school cultural activities do not interfere the allocated time for school activities.

According to DeVries and Zan (1995), the availability of the necessary teaching and learning materials in the classroom is critical for the effective utilisation of academic learning time. The study examined how inadequate teaching and learning materials influence the utilisation of instructional time in the selected schools. The results have been presented in Figure 3.

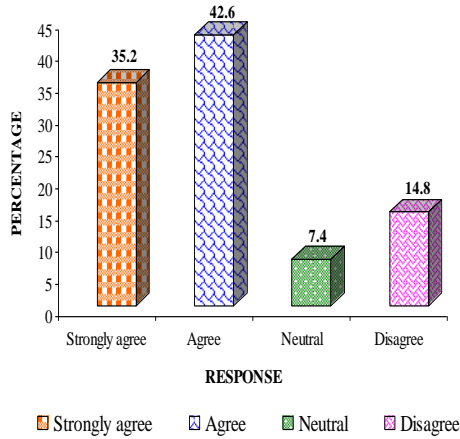


Figure 3. Inadequate Teaching and Learning Materials as a Factor Influencing the Utilisation of Allocated Time to School.

Figure 3 shows that 77.8% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that inadequate teaching and learning materials influences the effective utilisation of the allocated time to schools, while 14.8% disagreed. From the observation, an average of eight minutes of the academic learning time were lost to pairing students to make use of inadequate learning materials during teaching. Similarly, an average of 17 minutes of the academic learning time was lost to writing notes from textbooks which could have been avoided if there were adequate learning materials.

School infrastructure plays an essential role in the effective utilisation of instructional time in schools. Chisholm and Vally (1996) indicated that the adequate availability of physical resources such as classrooms, laboratories, libraries, infrastructure, stationery and instructional aids are important for the culture of teaching and learning and the effective use of instructional time. The study therefore examined how school infrastructure influenced the utilisation of instructional time in the selected schools. The results are presented in Figure 4.

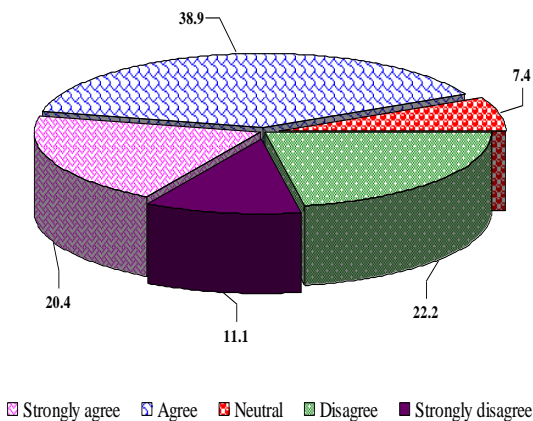


Figure 4. School Infrastructure as a Factor Influencing the Utilisation of Allocated Time to School.

From the Figure, 59.3% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that school infrastructure influenced the utilisation of allocated time to school, whereas 33.3% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The implication is that majority of the sampled teachers faced infrastructure problems in their schools. From the observation, three out of the nine schools did not have places of convenience. This affected utilisation of instructional time since students took an average of 47 minutes to visit places of convenience in the communities. An average of six students attended to nature’s call per day which resulted to the loss of instructional time.

Certain activities in communities may also influence the effective utilisation of instructional time in schools. Accordingly, efforts to separate school activities from that of the community is an important step to ensure effective teaching and learning. From the study, 57.4% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that activities in the community influence the utilisation of allocated time in the schools, while 29.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed. Two head teachers reported that refuse dumps located close to their schools affect school activities, while another two head teachers indicated that pathways created through their school compounds disrupts academic learning activities. From the observation, free range animals also disrupted school activities. Thus, teachers sometimes stopped teaching to talk to livestock herders to drive their animals from school compounds. A total of 51 minutes was lost through the driving away of animals on school compounds within the 15 days period.

From the study, 40.7% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that climate influences the utilisation of allocated time to school, 42.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed, whilst 16.7% neutral. One head teacher indicated that some classes have to be combined when raining because of leakage roofs. This is likely to reduce academic learning time as well as effective teaching and learning in the schools.

Effect of Distortions in Allocated Time on Teaching Curriculum

This section assessed the effect of the distortions in allocated time on teaching curriculum in the selected schools. Koomson et al. (1999) contended that distortions in the allocated time to school eventually affect the contact hours between the teacher and the pupils leading to non-completion of syllabus resulting in low academic performance of pupils. An assessment of the effect of the distortions was therefore necessary. Issues captured under this section included reduction in teaching time, inability to complete syllabus, and poor academic performance.

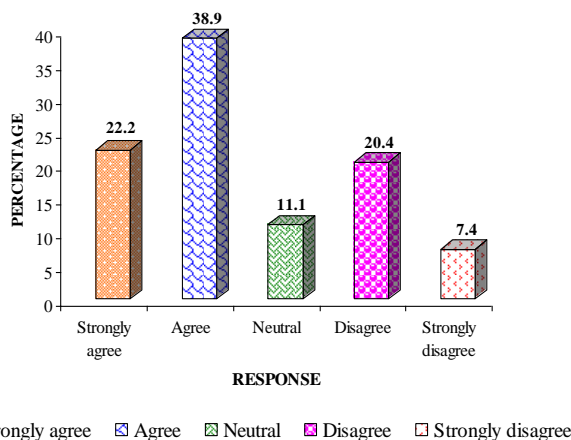
Teaching times are allocated to schools to ensure effective interaction between teachers and students, and to promote quality teaching and learning in schools. As a result any activity that results to a reduction in teaching time affects quality teaching and learning. This section assessed the effect of distortions in the allocated time on reduction in teaching time at the selected schools. The study found that all the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that distortions in the allocated time for schools results to reduction in the teaching time. The implication is that distortions in the allocated times for schools affect the quality of teaching and learning.

The study further assessed the effect of the distortions in school allocated time on the ability of teachers to complete syllabus. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Distortions in Allocated Time resulting in Reduction in Teaching Time

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	12	22.2
Agree	17	31.5
Neutral	7	13.0
Disagree	13	24.1
Strongly disagree	5	9.3
Total	54	100.0

Table 6 shows that 53.7% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that distortions in the allocated time result to reduction in teaching time, whereas 33.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The implication is that some of the students do not receive all the necessary academic training before graduating to the next academic level. This is likely to affect the academic performance of such students as indicated by Koomson et al. (1999). According to them, distortions in the allocated time to school eventually affect the contact hours between the teacher and the pupils leading to non-completion of syllabus resulting in low academic performance of pupils. Distortions in the school allocation time sometimes result to situations where teachers are forced to rush through syllabus. The study therefore examined how teachers in the selected schools encounter such situations as a result of distortions in their allocated times. From the study, 70.3% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that distortions in school allocation time forced teachers to rush through syllabus, whilst 24.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This is likely to affect effective teaching and learning in such schools. Another possible effect of distortions in school allocated time is poor academic performance. The study therefore assessed the effect of the distortions in allocated time on the academic performance of students in the selected schools. The results are presented in Figure 5.

**Figure 5. Distortions in Allocated Time resulting in Poor Academic Performance.**

From the Figure, 61.1% of the response agreed or strongly agreed that distortions in allocated time result in poor academic performance of students, whilst 27.8% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Measures to ensure that Instructional Time is Efficiently Used

This section examined measures put in place by the schools to ensure that instructional time is used efficiently. In other words, the section assessed how distortions in the allocated times are catered for to ensure effective teaching and learning. These include measures instituted to make up for classes which are cancelled, absented teachers and ensuring the appropriate use of teaching time.

From the study, majority (72.2%) of the sampled teachers indicated that their schools do nothing to cater for classes which are cancelled, while 27.8% reported that their schools organise extra classes for students. Three head teachers added that the schools do not have the power to charge fees to organise any extra-curricular activities to regain times lost through class cancellation. Two head teachers reported that teachers sometimes organise extra classes and weekend classes for students to make up for some of the classes lost through cancellation.

The study further examined measures adopted by schools to cater for missing teaching hours due to the absence of teachers. The results are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Measures in Place to Utilise Allocated Time in the Absence of Teachers

Measure	Frequency	Percentage
Substitute teacher	11	20.4
Class taken over by head teacher	13	24.1
Combine classes	22	40.7
Keep students in class	8	14.8
Total	54	100.0

The Table shows that 40.7% of the respondents indicated that their schools combine classes to utilise allocated times in the absence of teachers to school, 24.1% reported that classes are taken over by their head teachers, whereas 20.4% said the teachers are substituted. These measures are aimed at reducing the negative impact of teacher absenteeism.

From the study, 40.7% of the sampled teachers indicated that teaching time can be appropriately used by teachers sticking to schools' time table, 33.4% reported that the school should introduce subject teacher system to reduce the impact of teacher absenteeism on instructional time, whereas 25.9% said there should be effective monitoring from head teachers on the activities in the classroom.

Conclusions

The length of the contact hours available for teachers to impart knowledge into children, the effective use of that time in terms of the proportion of that time committed to teaching and learning, and the proportion of the time children are engaged in the actual learning process is essential in the learning process. However, instructional times were not effectively utilised in primary schools in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. Huge proportions of the academic learning times were lost through long morning assemblies and breaks, marking of exercises, roll calling and copying of notes. These have affected the duration for certain subjects and adherence to schools' time tables.

Factors influencing the utilisation of allocated times to schools included teacher and student absenteeism, teacher and student lateness, inadequate teaching and learning materials, and driving away of animals on school compounds. These have contributed to reduce the both the quality and quantity of time used for academic activities in primary schools in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis. Teachers are therefore forced to rush through syllabus which also has negative implications on the academic performance of students. Some of the measures to ensure that instructional time is efficiently used in primary schools were sticking to schools' time table, introduction of subject teacher system to reduce the impact of teacher absenteeism on instructional time, and effective monitoring from head teachers on the activities in the classroom.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made to enhance the effective utilisation of instructional times in primary schools in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis:

1. The study recommends that head teachers should monitor activities both within and outside classroom to ensure that times allotted to certain activities and subjects are adhered to. This can be done by GES employing school administrators to relieve head teachers of some of their official duties and to get time to monitor times for specific activities in schools effectively. This will help to enhance the effective utilisation of instructional time in primary schools in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis.
2. GES should factor in roll calling and marking of exercises after sections in the syllabus in the preparation of time tables for schools. This will help to curb the situation where certain activities consume part of the allocated times of academic learning in schools.
3. GES should also ensure adequate supply of teaching and learning materials in schools to eliminate time lost through pairing of students and copying of notes. This will help to increase proportion of instructional time that goes into academic learning.
4. GES should institute punitive measures to control teacher lateness and absenteeism in schools. This can be done by empowering head teachers to take certain actions against teachers who often come to school late or absent themselves from school.
5. The Ministry of Education should fence schools in the metropolis to separate activities in the school from those in the community. This will help to eliminate the taken over of schools' surroundings by livestock, and disruptions in academic activities by people who use the schools' compounds

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