

## Parental School Involvement: The Case of Ghana

Kingsley Nyarko

University of Ghana  
Psychology Department  
P.O.Box LG 84. Legon Ghana

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### Abstract

*This study was carried out to analyze the link between parental school involvement and the academic achievement of young students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds between the ages of 15 and 20. As expected, the results indicate a positive and significant correlation between mothers' school involvement and the academic achievement of the students. Surprisingly, fathers' school involvement was found to be non-significant to the academic achievement of the students. The significance of the results is examined.*

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**Keywords:** parental school involvement, academic achievement, parental occupation, parental education, family structure, adolescence

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### INTRODUCTION

Parental school involvement refers to the involvement or engagement of the parents in the school activities of the children with the aim of fostering their children's academic success. Their involvement has soared in recent years. This increase in the school activities by parents could be attributed to the interest and willingness of parents to be involved in the learning process of their children and the value they place on their children's educational success. Brittle (1994) has stated that children, schools, and parents themselves benefit when they are allowed to volunteer, act as audience for programs, and/or partake in the decision making process of the school. According to Elam, Rose, and Gallup (1994), areas of parental involvement within the school that have received tremendous attention and support comprises; attendance at meetings in connection to school related problems, attendance at plays, concerts, sporting events, and attendance at school board meetings.

Countless number of studies has documented the importance and centrality of parental involvement in the school. In a study conducted by Shumow and Miller (2001), it was revealed that parental involvement at school was positively correlated with academic grade point average. A survey conducted by Dornbusch (1986) revealed a strong connection between the degree of parental engagement in school activities and their children's grades irrespective of the educational level of the parents. These studies corroborate the findings by Stevenson and Baker (1987) which established the fact that parental involvement itself has a significant impact on school performance despite the fact that the mothers' educational level was a strong predictor of parental involvement. Studies on parental school involvement in Ghana are scanty, but there are a few studies that have focused on community participation in school

activities (e.g., Addae-Boahene & Akorful, 2000; Boardman & Evans, 2000; Nkansah & Chapman, 2006). Even though, involving the community in school is a useful activity due to its beneficial effects in improving the infrastructure base of the schools and also making resources available for the educational success of the students, the commitment of the individual parents and families is also very essential in ensuring that the community and school's objectives in producing a functional student is achieved.

According to a study conducted by Pryor and Ampiah (2003a & 2003b) in a village community called Akurase in the Ashanti region of Ghana, most of the parents were apathetic to the schooling of their children. These parents lacked interest in education and for that matter did not bother to engage in the learning activities of their children. As a result of the impetus that the active involvement of parents at the school brings to the academic success of students, and the parochial understanding of parents about parental school involvement, this study was carried out to find out the connection between parental school involvement and students' academic performance in Ghana.

### METHOD

#### Source of Data

The sample for the study was drawn from some selected schools in the central region of Ghana. The students who were used in the study were in their second and final years of their education. Out of a sample size of 239, 45.2% were males and 54.8% were females. The participants belonged to different family structures. 72.3% (149) of the students lived in nuclear families whilst 27.7% lived in non-intact families. The educational level of the parents was placed into three genres: below secondary school, secondary school, and university. 14% of the fathers

had education below secondary school, 28.1% had education up to the secondary school level, 44.4% had education up to the university level, and 13.5% of the students did not know the education level of their fathers. With regard to the mothers, 37.5% had education below the secondary school level, 31.0% had secondary school education, 22.3% had university degrees, and 9.2% of the students were in the dark concerning the educational level of their mothers.

The occupational status of the parents was categorized into: lower, middle, and upper classes. 12.9% of the fathers belonged to the upper class, 43.3% belonged to the middle class, 41.5% belonged to the working class, and 2.4% was unemployed. In the case of the mothers, 7.1% belonged to the upper class, 23.4% belonged to the middle class, 67.9% belonged to the working class, and 1.6% was unemployed.

**Procedure**

Before the data collection process began, a written permission was sent to each of the headmasters of the participating schools requesting their schools to be used as the population of the study. After the headmasters had acquiesced to the request, they informed the teachers and those who were interested participated in the study. The teachers then informed the students about the study, and those who consented to partake, were randomly selected to participate.

**Measures**

A questionnaire was used to collect the data for the study. This instrument asked for specific information regarding the living condition of the students. The demographic variables that were assembled for the study were age, gender, family structure, parental education, and parental occupation.

**Parental School Involvement**

This scale was developed by Nyarko (2008) to measure the extent of parental school involvement activities of the participants. The scale was measured on a five-point likert scale ranging from 1-almost never to 5-very often. Some of the items on the scale are “My parents discuss my school progress with my teachers,” “My parents visit me at school,” The alpha coefficients are: Mother=0.77 and father=0.72.

**Financial Pressure Scale**

This scale is a nine item scale adapted from Conger et al., (1994). The items on the scale are answered on a four point response format ranging from 1=not true to 4= exactly true. In this study it was used to measure the financial hardship of the adolescents and their families. Listed below are some of the items on the scale: “My parents are often worried whether they can pay their bills or not”, “We often run out of

money”, “I cannot afford buying as many things as my peers.” The scale has a reliability of 0.80.

**Educational Achievement**

The academic grades of the students for one academic year in four core subjects were aggregated and the average score was used to delineate their educational or academic achievement. These subjects are English, math, general science, and social studies. Because the students were in the second and third (final) year of their education, I decided to use their second year test scores in those four subject areas in the study.

**Data analysis**

The data collected for the study was analyzed by using diverse statistical methods. Descriptive statistics was used to present an overall picture of the responses provided by the students. Bivariate correlation was used to test for linear relationships among the variables. Finally, partial correlation was used to ensure that the relationship that exists between the variables (parental involvement and academic achievement) was not influenced by a third variable.

**RESULTS**

**Relationship between Parental School Involvement and Adolescents’ Educational Achievement**

The results (table 1) show that mothers’ school involvement, but not fathers was positively and significantly related to the school grades of the students (r=0.318, p<0.01).

Table 1: Relationship between Parental School Involvement and Adolescents’ Academic Achievement

		Students’ School Grades	Mothers’ School Involvement
Mothers’ School Involvement		.318**	
		n= 184	
Fathers’ School Involvement		.116	.476**
		n= 171	149

\*\*p< 0.01

**Partial Correlation- Mothers’ School Involvement**

The results of the partial correlation conducted (table 2) revealed that after mothers’ education level, mothers’ occupation, mothers’ marital status, financial hardship, and gender had been controlled, mothers’ school involvement was still statistically significant. Thus, in spite of the reduction of the correlation coefficient from 0.318 to 0.287, the correlation was still significant (r=0.287, p<0.01).

Table 2: Partial correlations of Mothers' School Involvement

Control Variables	Student's School Grades	Mothers' School Involvement	Mother's Education Level	Mother's Occupation	Mother's Marital Status	Financial Hardship
Mothers' School Involvement	,318**					
Mother's Education Level	,042	,019				
Mother's Occupation	,234*	,188*	,044			
Mother's Marital Status	,055	,094	,122	,029		
Financial Hardship	-,214*	-,075	-,030	,442**	,162*	
Gender	,097	,037	-,022	,000	-,070	-,079
Mother's Education Level & Occupation & Mother's Marital Status & Financial Hardship & Gender	Student's School Grades					
		,287				

\*p&lt; .05      \*\*p&lt; .01

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The association that was expected to be between parental school involvement and the academic performance of the students was supported only in the case of the mothers even after controlling for the background variables, but not in the case of the fathers. The results showed that mothers' school involvement was positively and significantly correlated with the academic performance of the students, whilst fathers' school involvement in connection to the students' academic performance was found not to be significant. This means that when it comes to parental school involvement, mothers stand out. The positive and significant association that was found between mothers' school involvement and the academic performance of the students corroborates with the findings of Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) who found that mothers were more involved than fathers on each of the three aspects of parental involvement in children's schooling: behavior, cognitive-intellectual, and personal. These mothers might hold the idea that the education of their children is their responsibility and thus have to sacrifice their resources-money, material, time, etc to ensure that their children succeed in school. In Ghana, it is not uncommon to see parents, especially mothers selling their personal property or even borrowing from the banks or friends in order to promote the educational success of their children.

The non-significant correlation between fathers' school involvement and the academic performance of the students was not expected. In fact, it was expected that their school involvement would also

positively impact on the academic performance of the students. Nord (1998) indicated that fathers can be a positive force in their children's education, and that when they get involved, children have a better chance to succeed in school. The author also revealed that although children living in father-only households perform less well as juxtaposed with their counterparts living in two-parent families; those living in father-only households do better in school, are more likely to participate in extracurricular activities, enjoy school more, and are less likely to have been suspended or dismissed if their fathers are involved in school as compared with those whose fathers are not involved in their school activities. But the reason why fathers might not be so much involved in their children's education at the school could be due to the fact that fathers in the country are considered to be the head of the family and thus have to cater for the needs of the family. Considering the fact that about 44.8% of the population lives under one dollar a day, it is expected that most of the fathers have to work extra harder in order to even provide one square meal for their families. This scenario makes fathers in most cases ask the mothers to represent them at school meetings and other events in the school.

Due to the impact fathers' school involvement have on the educational accomplishments of their adolescent children (Nord, 1998), I would suggest that this study be replicated using a different sample to ascertain the effect of fathers' involvement on school involvement. Again, as the result has shown the positive and significant relationship between mothers' school involvement and the educational achievement of the students, I recommend that school

authorities design and implement programs that would encourage mothers to be active in the educational activities of their children in their schools. Teachers could develop a program that would bring mothers together to key out ways that would enable them to actively participate in the educational activities of their children in the school. Through this program they could form some social networks which could serve as a platform for exchanging information which could be beneficial in helping their children succeed in school.

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