



FALLING EDUCATIONAL STANDARD OF RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION SUBJECT AT THE MFANTSEMAM DISTRICT: THE VIEWS OF MULTI-PARTIES IN A SEQUENTIAL EXPLORATORY STUDY.

Amponsah, J.

Holy Child College of Education, Takoradi, Ghana.
amponsa76@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study seeks to examine the causes of falling educational standards of religious and moral education subjects in the Mfantseman District in Ghana and to draw the attention of all stakeholders to the poor academic performance of students in religious and moral education.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study employs the case study method, which was informed by a qualitative research design approach. A Purposive sampling technique was chosen to select 43 participants. The data collection method that was used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide. Thematic analysis was applied manually to the data.

Findings: RME education was influenced by religious and cultural biases, leading to a lack of diversity, tolerance, and respect for different religious and cultural values and beliefs.

It was revealed from the study that teachers lack the autonomy to develop their teaching methods and strategies, leading to a lack of innovation and creativity in RME education.

Again, it was established that many RME teachers did not receive adequate training to teach the subject effectively, leading to poor teaching practices and low student engagement.

Research Limitation/Implication: The study focuses on the falling educational standard of religious and moral education. The study concentrated on some selected communities in the Mfantseman District.

Practical Implications: Develop strategies to address the factors that contribute to the decline in the quality of RME education, such as inadequate teacher training, outdated curriculum, and insufficient resources.

Social Implications: This requires a coordinated effort among policymakers, educators, religious organisations, and other stakeholders to address the challenges facing RME education and promote the development of effective strategies that can improve the quality of RME education and promote social development and harmony.

Originality/Value/ Novelty: The novelty of this paper lies in its potential to identify the root causes of the problem and propose practical solutions that can improve the quality of RME education, thereby contributing to the overall development of students and society at large.

Keywords: *Education. knowledge. performance. religious. standard*

INTRODUCTION

The knowledge and skills that students should possess at pivotal junctures in their academic careers are addressed by educational standards. Communities, societies, and entire countries engage in education as a universal practice to promote growth, continuity, and development.

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This is due to the fact that learners receive the fundamental knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills necessary for them to function well through education. Learners cannot fully participate in the process of national development and nation-building without access to high-quality religious and moral education (Aggarwal & Shama, 2018). Due to the importance of religious and moral education in people's lives, the government of Ghana has worked very hard over the years to make sure that its citizens receive the high-quality religious and moral education they deserve. Among these efforts are the implementation of the religious and moral education curriculum at the basic schools, which aims to improve the moral lives of young people of school-going age across the country.

Despite significant efforts by the government of Ghana and other stakeholders in education, there is widespread public concern that Ghana's religious and moral educational standards are deteriorating (Opoku-Asare, 2019). It should be noted that poor academic performance of religious and moral education is manifested meaningfully in students' academic achievement after they have been exposed to the necessary instruction (Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2016). This is obvious because, according to Amedahe (2017), indicators of educational standards are levels of academic achievement, quality of teaching and learning, supervision, efficiency, staffing adequacy, and norms of discipline and behaviour in educational institutions. It should be noted that when these indicators are manifested in the educational sector of an economy, the overall academic achievement of students either increases or decreases. This might affect educational standards or the quality of education.

All educational stakeholders in Ghana, including the government, the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Education Service, and parents, have a strong interest in providing high-quality religious and moral education. According to Adu-Agyem and Osei-Opoku (2019), ensuring the quality of education entails putting the appropriate mechanisms in place, such as providing quality inputs and delivery in the educational process to support the achievement of excellent educational outcomes. The Ghanaian educational system should offer a comprehensive and high-quality approach to education in order to achieve quality. The high quality of religious and moral education offers a well-rounded person with the necessary knowledge, skills, values, and aptitudes for self-realization, socioeconomic development, and political transformation of the nation (Adu-Agyem & Osei-Opoku, 2019).

It should be noted that the government of Ghana's vision for education includes the goal of providing high-quality education for all people through the provision of adequate resources and facilities at all levels of education. Amedahe (2017), however, pointed out that certain input and process factors within a context are barriers to high-quality education. These factors come from a variety of sources, such as the community, parents, teachers, students, and schools. Particularly, factors like parental support, large class sizes, ineffective class management and supervision, and insufficient teacher preparation to implement the reforms contribute to poor academic performance. In a similar vein, Etsey (2015) noted that insufficient textbooks, a delay in the delivery of curricula and textbooks to schools, as well as time spent on tasks, have an impact on students' performance and, as a result, affect educational performance. Adu-Agyem



and Osei-Opoku (2019) state that factors like a lack of adequate teaching and learning facilities, subpar infrastructure, a dearth of teachers who are motivated and committed, and subpar working conditions all have an impact on educational quality. One gap in the literature on the falling educational standard of Religious and Moral Education (RME) subject in schools is the limited research on the specific factors contributing to the decline in the quality of RME education (Obeng-Odoom, 2021). While some studies have identified broad factors such as inadequate teacher training and outdated curriculum, there is a need for more focused research that can provide deeper insights into the specific challenges facing RME education in schools and inform the development of targeted strategies to address these challenges. Additionally, there is a lack of research on the effectiveness of specific interventions aimed at improving the quality of RME education, which can limit the ability of policymakers and educators to make evidence-based decisions on investment and resource allocation (Hao & Zhang, 2020).

THE CONCEPT OF EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

Education standards address the knowledge and abilities that students should have at key junctures in their academic careers. Educational standards are crucial because they form the cornerstone of meaningful educational outcomes and reforms in every nation, (Hattie, 2019). This is obvious because when standards are set, it forces policymakers and other educational stakeholders to define precisely what they want from education. A meaningful educational standard, in accordance with Amedahe (2017), aids in measuring students' success and learning outcomes in terms of predetermined standards. Countries all over the world are establishing a variety of learning outcomes that serve as the foundation for efficient learning after taking into account the relevance of educational standards over time. This is to ensure a general focus in terms of educational outcomes and expectations from learners.

It should be pointed out that, curriculum and assessment systems are organised around the expectations in all subject areas that are taught in schools. It is in this regard that in Ghana, students are expected to achieve the learning objectives in the various subjects that are taught in schools. This is because, based on complexity, skills are presented in various cognitive abilities such as knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation, and these are manifested when students are able to meaningfully accomplish the set targets or standards (Amedahe & Asamoah-Gyimah, 2021).

Student Factors that Influence Falling Educational Standards of Religious and Moral Education

Empirical studies have shown that factors that originate from pupils/students influence falling educational standards of religious and moral education in a country. According to Tanko (2018), factors such as indiscipline, absenteeism, lateness, lack of punishment and alcoholism among students influence falling educational standards of religious and moral education. Indiscipline, for example, exposes students to becoming uncommitted to their education and studies. This further corroborates to lateness and other undesirable behaviour such as occultism, alcoholism and truancy (Tanko, 2018). When students exhibit these kinds of attitudes, they tend not to focus attention on their studies which consequently affects their



academic performance, thereby leading to poor academic performance. Similarly, Etsey (2005) found in his study from a sample of 495 students, 25 head teachers and 133 teachers that pupils/students' characteristics such as incidence of lateness, absenteeism, language usage and the time pupils spent with their books and homework affect pupils' academic performance.

As part of student factors, Odumbe (2016) and Udoh (2015) established that poor study habits, peer influence, examination malpractices, entry behaviour of students/pupils, indiscipline and alcoholism influence academic performance and educational standards in general. Also, Bucheche (2015) in a study reported that pupils/students' absenteeism and lateness were the leading factors that influence falling educational standards. This is evident because, when pupils/students are found to be absent or late for classes, they tend to miss the majority of the concepts that are taught and this exposes them to learning gaps as most of the concepts serve as the basis for subsequent concepts. Bucheche (2015) further indicated that when students/pupils are exposed to negative peers, they tend to engage in various acts such as truancy, gambling, and other related actions that tend to decrease their academic performance thereby affecting their performance in religious and moral education.

Teacher Factors that Influence Falling Educational Standards of Religious and Moral Education

In order to improve pupils'/students' performance and educational standards in religious and moral education, teachers play a vital role. Teachers are expected to communicate concepts to the understanding of the pupils/students. In cases where teachers fail to play roles that are required of them or demonstrate undesirable attitudes towards teaching, there cannot be meaningful learning (Mlambo, 2019). Factors such as low motivation, commitment, lateness, absenteeism and misuse of instructional time affect academic performance. Teachers' absenteeism, tardiness, and poor teaching methods, according to Mwnenda, Gitaari, Nyaga, Muthana, and Reche (2018), contribute to students' poor academic performance in religious and moral education. Similarly, the World Bank (2014) reported that teachers' tardiness, absenteeism, and low motivation have worsened at the Basic and Secondary School levels in Ghana, resulting in low academic standards. This is obvious because when teachers are late or absent, the teaching and learning process is also slowed. When this occurs on a regular basis, it has an impact on students' learning outcomes in religious and moral education subjects.

In addition, teachers' motivation and interest have been found in the literature as affecting falling educational standards of religious and moral education. For instance, Ofoegbu (2014) reported that poor performance of students leading to low educational standards was related to poor teachers' motivation and interest. It should be noted that negative attitudes such as poor teaching pedagogy and misuse of instructional time toward work significantly affect the quality of educational standards of religious and moral education.



School Factors that Influence Falling Educational Standards of Religious and Moral Education

The school is an important environment for pupils/students. It is obvious that pupils/students and teachers can be found in the school where teaching and learning take place. The school cannot be overlooked in order to achieve higher educational standards in religious and moral education. School-related factors have an impact on the declining educational performance of religious and moral education. For example, Saidu and Ahmad (2015) reported in a study that a lack of qualified religious and moral education teachers is to blame for declining educational standards in religious and moral education subjects. Similarly, insufficient recommended textbooks and a lack of a school library all have an impact on educational standards religious and moral education. In a study, Baba (2016) reported that inadequate core textbooks, a lack of adequate furniture and library facilities, and insufficient classrooms were to blame for low-quality education delivery in religious and moral education. Adu-Agyem and Osei-Opoku (2019) discovered a similar finding, indicating that a lack of adequate teaching and learning facilities, an overburdened curriculum, a high pupil/teacher ratio, and poor infrastructural facilities all have an impact on educational quality and limited educational standards.

According to Mwenda et al. (2018), school location and quality have a tendency to affect students' academic performance. This is so because the location of the school directly affects how many children and students choose to attend there. Learners may become less motivated if the physical plant and structure of the school building are generally unattractive. Due to the current situation, fewer students will participate in school activities. This implies that students who attend schools close by and in good buildings perform academically well, whereas students who attend schools far away or with poor facilities may perform less well. As a result, improved school environments and good infrastructure are responsible for raising educational standards (Engin-Demir, 2019). Studies have shown that schools with good teaching and learning activity, and supervision have their students perform well, which generally affects educational standards. For example, Diaz (2017) found that regular instructional supervision, including checking of students' notebooks, classroom visits and inspections by school administrators, checking of teachers' lesson plans, and inspection of teachers' record-keeping, has a significant positive relationship with academic standards. In a study published in 2014, Ghanney and Aniagyei discovered a significant correlation between academic performance and irregular supervision of teaching and learning, which has an impact on educational standards.

Parent Factors that Influence Falling Educational Standards of Religious and Moral Education

Parents play an important role in an individual's development. Therefore, the kind of background a child comes from as determined by parents' socio-economic status can have effects on the child's educational outcomes. According to Ogunsola, Osulale and Ojo (2016), parent factors such as parental education, parental occupation, indiscipline and poor attitudes of parents, parental income, poverty and lack of cooperation hinder the achievement of better education, thereby affecting educational standards. It should be noted that lack of parental income and/or poverty has a direct negative relationship with students' educational attainment



because it hinders the individual from gaining access to resources for effective learning. For example, Rouse and Barrow (2015) in a study found that economically disadvantaged parents are less able to afford the cost of education for their children, which consequently limits their children from achieving better educational standards.

Parental interest in education and overall educational background also tend to increase educational standards. Kalmhin (2010) reported that educated mothers and fathers provide their children with more materials and activities that promote educational outcomes. Rowan-Kenyon, Bell and Perna (2018) stressed that educated parents can better communicate with children regarding their progress in school and supervise their children's work. It is in this regard that Ogunsola et al. (2014) indicated that parental factors which include household composition, socioeconomic status and parents' level of education were stronger predictors of students' educational attainment which influence educational standards in religious and moral education. Parents from intellectually stimulating homes provide opportunities for their children and encourage them to be disciplined. Also, parent-child interactions that support the pursuit of excellence in academic and cultural experiences enable children to be more successful in school.

Community Factors that Influence Falling Educational Standards of Religious and Moral Education

Studies have shown that factors from the community such as ethnicity, lack of community-school relationship, lack of cooperation from members of the community, social vices and witchcraft influence educational standards particularly in religious and moral education (Ogunsola et al., 2014; Adu-Agyem & Osei-Opoku, 2019). The community is the entire social context in which the educational systems work. When the entire social context which is the community portrays a lack of interest in education, academic outcomes which serve as the standard of measurement of educational standards are also affected. Ogunsola et al. (2014) found that racial and ethnic identity predicted academic achievement among African/American college students. In a community that is characterised by teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and interest and overemphasis on cultural practices such as funerals and festivals the neglect of education influences falling educational standards. In general, if the entire community in which the school, teachers and pupils/students are located demonstrates actions that lead to lowering academic standards, the ultimate outcome would be the falling educational standards of religious and moral education in that country. This becomes worse when the community sees the school as less important and fails to ensure a better relationship with the school.

From empirical literature, it has been observed that academic performance as well as educational standards particularly in religious and moral education at all levels of education in Ghana within the last two decades had been falling. For example, in Southern Ghana, UNICEF (2016) reported that a lot of children over 65% and 84% of pupils/students are not proficient in English thereby affecting their understanding of religious and moral education. Specifically, the Mfantseman District has been recording low academic performance (more than 83% of pupils/students failing) in the religious and moral education in the Basic Education Certificate



Examination since 2016 (Performance Analysis Report, 2017). In 2019 for example, the Mfantseman District recorded an 81% failure rate in religious and moral education and was placed at the 169th position out of 182 districts that were ranked with an average of 13.9% which was far below the average academic performance of 46.9% (Performance Analysis Report, 2019). It has also been observed from the literature that, although previous researchers have examined factors that influenced falling educational standards in religious and moral education, the majority of studies by researchers such as Asare- Danso (2020); Etsey (2015); Opoku-Asare (2016); Mlambo (2011); Kainuwa and Yusuf (2016); Tanko (2016) and Odumbo (2017) employed only quantitative methods. Also, it appears that research so far has not been fully devoted to exploring factors that influence falling educational standards in religious and moral education in the Mfantseman District by using qualitative research methods. It is in this regard that the current study adopted a qualitative research design approach to explore factors that influence falling educational standards of religious and moral education subjects at the Mfantseman District.

The purpose of the study was to examine factors that influence the falling educational standards of religious and moral education subjects in the Mfantseman District of Ghana. Specifically, the study sought to explore how pupil/student factors; teacher factors; school factors; parental factors and community factors influenced falling educational standards of religious and moral education subjects in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research design approach. Specifically, the case-study method was used for an in-depth understanding of how pupils/students, parents, teachers, school and community factors influence falling standards in religious and moral education subject of the Mfantseman District. Also, the case study method was deemed appropriate for this study because, a small group comprising 43 participants involving pupils/students, parents, teachers, management staff of the District Directorate of Ghana Education Service and community members were needed to carry out an in-depth study. Cohen and Manion (2007) noted that case studies allow for the collection of very intensive data in order to produce an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

The study covered the five circuits in the Mfantseman District namely, Mankessim town, Saltpod, Kormantse, Abadze and Egyaa No 1. Purposive sampling which is normally used when dealing with a sample that has persons with special knowledge or characteristics (Creswell, 2014) was employed to select 43 stakeholders in education in the Mfantseman District in order to ascertain their views on the factors that influence falling educational standards of religious and moral education subject in the study area. The stakeholders included (three) 3 management staff of the District Directorate of Ghana Education Service; (eight) 8 teachers; (twelve) 12 pupils/students; (five) 5 heads of both basic schools; (five) 5 circuit supervisors; (three) 3 traditional rulers; (four) 4 opinion leaders and (three) 3 Assembly Members.



To be able to collect data for the study, semi-structured interview guides were designed and used. The main issues that were covered in the semi-structured interview guides were how pupils/student factors, teacher factors, school factors and community factors influence falling educational standards of religious and moral education subjects in the Mfantseman District. In order to establish the validity and reliability of the semi-structured interview guides used to collect the data for the study, the items were designed taking into consideration the objectives of the study as well as the key variables of interest to the study. Also, the semi-structured interview guides were given out to experts in education for their assessment and comments on the items in the context of clarity, ambiguity, relevance and generality which helped to improve the quality of the items. The interviews were subjected to content checking where the recorded interviews were played back to the interviewees for amendments and clarification.

Steps were also taken by the researcher to ensure ethical measures in the data collection process. Specifically, ethical issues such as confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary participation were all considered and held in high esteem. The researcher arranged an interview section for each participant sampled for the study. The purpose of the study was explained to the participants. This was followed by one-on-one interviews in the homes, offices, and schools of the participants sampled for the study. The data was collected personally by the researcher with the help of three field assistants who were trained in the techniques of how to gather interview data.

The data gathered through semi-structured interviews was analyzed using a thematic data analysis method. Braun and Clarke (2006) claim that when using the thematic data analysis strategy, the researchers' tool for analysis is to find, arrange, describe, and report on themes within the data set. The researchers first transcribed and organized all of the interviews into the various themes they had developed based on the study's objectives before using the thematic data analysis strategy. In order to identify patterns and relationships, responses were grouped and paraphrased. In some instances, the participants' exact words were reported.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study were presented and discussed in line with the research questions. Research question (one) 1 sought to examine how pupil/student factors influence falling educational standards in the Mfantseman District. Participants were asked to share their views on the pupil/student factors that influenced falling educational standards of religious and moral education in the study area. The study participants identified factors such as absenteeism, truancy, lateness to school and classes, drug abuse, negative peer influences and occultism, lack of reading culture and low interest in religious and moral subject education. A basic school teacher commented on absenteeism and lateness as follows:

“Most children don’t go to school on Fridays rather they come to town to work for money even throughout the weekend and you can’t be sure they’ll be in school on Monday. Some parents engage their wards in fishing activities before



they are allowed to go to school in the morning, obviously these children report late at school.”

With regard to truancy, another basic School teacher stated as follows:

“Pupils/Students roam about during school hours without studying. Some pupils/students tell lies that they are at school yet go to places of their interest and return home when schools have closed.”

It is clear from the findings that pupils/students do not come to school regularly and are often late. This implies that they are truant and this eventually affects their performance. This is because, instead of the pupils/students going to school, they roam about doing their own things at the expense of their education. The participants indicated further that the use of phones, alcoholism, peer group influence and interest in sexual relations influence falling educational standards religious and moral education. A Junior High School teacher commented on the use of phones as follows:

“Modern technology has eaten up the pupils/students; it is collapsing the habit of learning. Most students’ attention is on the media such as films and phones. They go to bed very late because they prefer to watch films and videos and go to school the following day sleeping in class. Nowadays pupils spend much time watching brothers as well as the law of revenge, popular TV programmes on daily basis. Phones facilitate the watching of pornographic films. Pupils/students use all their time to practice what they see on the television at the expense of their education.”

Commenting on interest in sexual relations, a Junior High School teacher stated as follows:

“Amorous relationship between students of the opposite sex is now a common phenomenon. Some of the children are already in relationships; last year when we were writing the WASSCE, eight girls were pregnant while some were breastfeeding.”

On alcoholism and drug abuse, a parent had this to say:

“My 11-year-old boy is in class 3; since school re-opened the boy is not in school but every day he drinks alcohol, he either uses the father’s name to get the drink on credit or he goes to gather stones to sell and use the money to buy the drink. Again, in my village, the boys drink alcohol or sniff snuff and other herbs before going to school; some of them have no respect for a school authority.”

On negative peer influence, a Basic School teacher reported as follows:

“Peer pressure leads to migration from rural towns to the district capital to do menial jobs for money – washing of bowls, prostitution or petty trading this makes some of them highly sexually active.”



Participants also indicated the lack of reading culture and low interest in education as influencing falling educational standards of religious and moral education. A Basic School teacher had this to say:

“As for some of the children, they are just lazy or unwilling to learn religious and moral education. In the absence of the teacher, pupils do not read on their own; at the primary four and five levels, most pupils cannot read and write. The reading culture is dead; we have books but they are not enough.”

A Junior High School teacher stated the same issue as follows:

“Students are not serious these days; they don’t seem to understand the essence of education, no respect for their teachers I am saying this because some students after classes will not make any attempt to learn until the following day, they get back to school. Some students over-rely on leakages so they don’t learn; their whole minds are set on seeing the examination questions before the exam begins. When the opposite happens, frustration sets in and they can’t even recall what they have been taught previously.”

The findings clearly show that indiscipline, absenteeism, lateness, and alcoholism are factors influencing the falling educational standards of religious and moral education subjects in the Mfantseman District. It should be noted that indiscipline causes pupils/students to lose interest in their studies (Tanko, 2016). The findings of this research indicate that some pupils/students in the study area exhibit undesirable attitudes and behaviours, and as a result, they tend not to focus their attention on their studies, which eventually affects their performance in the religious and moral education subject.

The findings of the current study that indiscipline, absenteeism, and lateness influenced falling educational standards of religious and moral education in the Mfantseman District is in consonance with earlier studies by Odumbe (2017) and Bucheche (2015). When pupils/students are indisciplined, they tend to be absent themselves from school which exposes them to experience learning gaps. In the Mfantseman District, educational standards of religious and moral education are falling probably as a result of absenteeism and truancy among pupils/students.

Research question (two) 2 sought to explore how teacher factors influence falling educational standards of religious and moral education subjects in the Mfantseman District. Participants were asked to share their views on teachers’ factors that influence falling educational standards of religious and moral education subjects in the study area. The study participants identified factors such as absenteeism and lateness to school, lack of commitment/poor attitude to work, low motivation and misuse of instructional hours. To confirm these factors, a Junior High School student had this to say with regard to lateness and absenteeism:

“Some teachers sign the register as present but they are physically absent from school. Teachers attend funerals on Fridays instead of going to school. Some



teachers can be in the classroom but no work is being done; some may be seen massaging their phones while others will go out and sit with their friends under the trees conversing. Again, some teachers report to school late and leave early before closing time.”

To corroborate what the Senior High School student said, a Junior High School headteacher had this to say:

“Some teachers attend too many meetings and therefore miss lessons with pupils/students. For some of the newly posted teachers, it takes them about two weeks after re-opening to report to the school and also a week to vacation most of them disappear again. Teachers start teaching late after the term has resumed (e.g. two weeks after the term has resumed).”

On a lack of commitment/poor attitudes to work and low motivation, a head teacher in a Basic School stated that:

“There is a lack of commitment by some teachers; they are only interested in their salaries and getting rich quickly by engaging in other businesses. Teachers are not motivated; this is due to delays in payment of salaries, especially newly posted teachers, and delays in the promotion to the next grade. Frustration and low morale set in due to this. There are no arrears paid after a six to seven months waiting period for salaries.”

The findings suggest that absenteeism and tardiness may result when teachers do not show the necessary dedication to their jobs. It should be noted that teachers start to act unprofessionally toward their work if they are not dedicated to their careers. Again, many RME teachers did not receive adequate training to teach the subject effectively, leading to poor teaching practices and low student engagement.

The results of this study unequivocally demonstrate that teachers in the study area would be unable to complete their schedule of work due to a lack of commitment and absenteeism. As a result, there would eventually be gaps in the knowledge and skills that pupils and students are expected to acquire during the course of their education, which would lead to declining academic performance. This is consistent with the assertion of Amedahe (2016) that content standards are the knowledge and skills that students should attain; that is what students are able to know and be able to do such as the way of thinking, working, communicating, reasoning and investigating important ideas, concepts, issues, and knowledge essential to the discipline.

The participants further stated that factors such as misuse of instructional hours, alcoholism and sexual relationships with some pupils/students, especially female students, impact negatively on educational standards of religious and moral education subjects. On the misuse of instructional hours, a head teacher in a Basic School lamented as follows:

“Some teachers use instructional hours to chat with colleagues or spend time on their phones, especially female teachers. Some teachers are engaged in



Distance Education so they spend more time on their studies and leave the children on their own.”

A Junior High School student also commented on the misuse of instructional hours as follows:

“Some teachers use their religious and moral education period to joke with students instead of teaching till their periods are over. Some teachers make negative utterances to students such as ‘I will be paid at the end of the month whether you understand or not’.”

On alcoholism, a Junior High School student stated as follows:

“Some teachers get drunk before coming to school; they dress shabbily and teach out of syllabus. Some teachers get drunk in the morning; they teach what they know and not what they are supposed to teach.”

On poor teaching or the use of the wrong methodology, a Basic School head teacher stated as follows:

“Some teachers use the wrong methodology to teach students at the basic level e.g. lecture method. Teachers sometimes don’t prepare before going to the class.”

On sexual relationships/harassment, a Junior High School student had this to say:

“Some teachers engage in sexual relations with some of us with the promise of making us pass our exams. This makes it difficult for us to concentrate on our studies.”

It should be noted that teachers are expected to serve as role models to be able to appropriately communicate concepts to the understanding of the pupils/students they teach. It is evident from the findings of this study that in the Mfantseman District, some teachers exhibited undesirable behaviours and failed to play the roles expected of them, leading to falling educational standards of religious and moral education in the area. Mwnenda et al., (2016) underscored teachers’ undesirable behaviours such as lateness, absenteeism as well as poor teaching methods as contributory factors to the poor academic performance of pupils/students. This is also consistent with the findings of a study by the World Bank (2014) which indicated that teacher absenteeism and lateness at the Basic and High Schools levels in Ghana have worsened, leading to falling educational standards in the country.

The findings of this study suggested that some male teachers engaged in sexual relationships with some female pupils/students in the Mfantseman District was likely to affect the quality educational standards of religious and moral education. This is because some female pupils/students who are victims of these acts invariably find it difficult to concentrate in class. This corroborates the assertion of Ofoegbu (2014) that poor teachers’ motivation and interest lead to negative attitudes such as sexual relationships with female pupils/students, alcoholism, poor teaching methodology and misuse of instructional time which influence falling educational standards. It must be pointed out that these factors, as exhibited by some teachers



in the Mfantseman District, are equally responsible for the falling standards of education in the area.

The research question (three) 3 intended to determine how school factors influenced falling educational standards of religious and moral education at the Mfantseman District. Research participants were asked to share their views on the school factors that influenced falling educational standards of religious and moral education in the study area. The participants identified factors such as inadequate teaching and learning materials, inadequate infrastructure, interference from opinion leaders/parents, and school environmental issues. To confirm these factors a Junior High School teacher commented on inadequate teaching and learning materials as follows:

“Inadequate textbooks in core subjects (the last time the District was given textbooks was 2016). Textbooks are not available for both teachers and pupils; some subjects particularly religious and moral education does not have textbooks at all. Lack of Continuous Assessment Registers, Report Cards, Cumulative Record Booklets, TLMs.”

On issues of infrastructure, a Basic School teacher stated as follows:

“The shades under the trees serve as staff common rooms so during rainy season teachers have to join students in the classrooms. Lack of teachers’ quarters to save teachers from travelling long distances to school every day. This at times leads to teachers being late. Again, as a result of inadequate school/classrooms; there are still some schools under trees, especially at the KG level.”

Similarly, a Management staff at the District Directorate of Ghana Education Service at the Mfantseman had this to say on infrastructure:

“The District Office needs a new office building. Inadequate office space for Circuit Supervisors and inadequate fuel supply for their motorbikes. Because of lack of space, Circuit Supervisors have no comfortable place to sit and compile their results.” “Inadequate furniture in all the schools.”

The findings of this study clearly point to the fact that school factors influence falling educational standards of religious and moral education in the Mfantseman District. It should be noted that there cannot be any meaningful educational experience without the necessary logistics or teaching and learning materials, as well as infrastructure in the schools. The study participants further indicated that, interference from opinion leaders/parents, lack of supervision, lack of in-service training and the nature of the school environment, influence falling educational standards of religious and moral education.

On the issue of interference from opinion leaders/parents, a Junior High School teacher stated the following:



“Chiefs asking for permission for students in their localities to go and attend festivals. Parents asking for permission for students to attend funerals of distant relations.”

On school environment issues, a Basic School teacher had this to say:

“The school environment must be conducive; classes are too small and crowded, windows are not opened and sometimes the weather conditions affect learning. The poor lighting system in the night.”

With regard to the lack of supervision, a Basic School teacher commented as follows:

“Supervision is now geared towards the preparation of lesson notes; there is no supervision on lesson delivery and checking on the availability of logistics. Inadequate supervision from circuit supervisors and headmasters.”

On lack of in-service training, a head teacher from a Basic School had this to say:

“There is always a failure to organize in-service training for teachers. No in-service training for teachers due to lack of funds.”

School factors are significant determinants of quality educational standards and higher academic achievements of pupils/students. This is because pupils/students and teachers operate within the school in which teaching and learning occur. The findings of this study underscore the fact that factors that originate from the school influence falling educational standards. This is consistent with Saidu and Ahmad (2017), who in their study reported that inadequate school factors such as lack of textbooks, qualified teachers and library facilities influence falling educational standards. This is also in line with the findings reported by Adu-Agyem and Osei-Opoku (2019) who in their study found that lack of adequate teaching and learning facilities as well as poor infrastructural facilities negatively affect the quality of education and limited educational standards.

It should be pointed out that effective supervision of teaching and learning results in higher academic performance which eventually influences educational standards. Diaz (2017), observed that regular instructional supervision such as checking of pupils/students’ notebooks, classroom visitation and inspection by school administrators and inspection of teachers’ record keeping have a significant positive relationship with educational standards. However, from the findings of the current study, it is evident that the Mfantseman District lacked some of these valuable activities that promote effective teaching and learning. The findings of this study showed that there was irregular supervision due to logistical constraints. This corroborates the assertion of Ghanney and Aniagyei (2020) that irregular supervision of teaching and learning negatively influenced educational standards.

With research question (four) 4, the objective was to explore how parent factors influenced falling educational standards of religious and moral education at the Mfantseman District. To achieve this objective, research participants were asked to share their opinions on parent-related



factors that influenced falling educational standards of religious and moral education in the study area. The participants identified factors such as the negative attitude/behaviour of parents towards education, poverty and alcoholism. An Assembly Member reported as follows:

“During fishing season parents send their children to the seaside in the early morning. Some students also smoked fish before they come to school, so they come to school already tired some parents do not even allow their children to attend school at all but rather help them in their activities.”

On poverty, a Basic School teacher had this to say:

“Some parents do not have any source of income to support their wards’ education. Poverty is the major problem in this community which affects academic performance negatively because some parents cannot afford to pay school fees.”

With regard to alcoholism, a parent stated as follows:

“Most community members have taken to getting drunk. Some parents encourage their wards to drink alcoholic beverages.”

Looking at the findings, it was noticed that some parents in the study area, do not understand the relevance of education. The implication, however, is that if parents do not see the importance of education, it would be difficult to invest and work hard towards their children’s education. The situation becomes worse when parents are faced with poverty and are involved in alcoholism and other actions that hinder their children’s education. According to Ogunsola et al., (2018) parents factors such as lack of interest in their children’s education, parental income, poverty and lack of cooperation between parents and the school, hinder the achievement of better education, thereby affecting educational performance.

Poverty on the part of parents has a direct negative relationship with students’ educational attainment. This is because it hinders the individual from gaining access to resources for effective learning. Specifically, economically disadvantaged parents are less likely to afford the cost of education of their children and this limits their children to achieve better educational standards. According to Kalmhin, (2019), parental interests in education and overall educational background increase educational standards. Obviously educated parents provide their children with more materials and activities that promote good educational outcomes because they are more likely to understand the relevance of education. Ogunsola et al., (2018) indicated that when parents lack interest in their children’s education, they exhibit attitudes that prohibit better educational standards for their children. This is consistent with this study and this might have influenced the falling educational standards of religious and moral education in the Mfantseman District.

The objective of research question (five) 5 was to establish how community factors influence falling educational standards of religious and moral education at the Mfantseman District. When research participants were asked to share their views on the subject matter, they



identified factors such as witchcraft, interest in community socio-economic activities, lack of community school relationships and interest in festivals and funerals. An Assembly Member had this to say on witchcraft:

“Since the inception of Mfantseman District there have been a lot of witchcraft cases in our schools perpetrated by pupils on both their colleagues and teachers. This causes fear and panic in the schools and the community. Some children even confessed what they have been doing to teachers spiritually through witchcraft so the issue of witchcraft is frightening...”

Similarly, a Basic School teacher commented on witchcraft as follows:

“Students indulged in witchcraft can cast spells on teachers and intelligent students to retrogress in their studies. This puts fear into brilliant students. For example, water was dripping from a piece of chalk a teacher was writing with and a student owned up to being responsible for the act. The high level of witchcraft is deterring some pupils/students and teachers from studying and teaching.”

Concerning the community’s interest in socio-economic activities, a parent stated as follows:

“Most people here cherish fishing, petty trading and migration to the coastal parts of the region for greener pastures. Some of them state categorically that education is no longer profitable because of the prevailing unemployment in the country.”

On the issue of the lack of community-school relationships, a traditional leader commented as follows:

“Some community members think that the school belongs to the teachers and the government instead of teaming up to support the school teachers and students. Community values inform behaviour but now most communities are into fishing and animal rearing so most of the members in the communities do not understand the importance of education and therefore are not willing to provide the educational needs of the children.”

For interests in festivals/funerals, a Basic School teacher had this to say:

“Most traditional festivals take pupils/students away from school. In communities where funerals are cherished, a parent may withdraw a child from school until the funeral is over.”

The findings of the study imply that when community members place a premium on community socio-economic and cultural activities such as farming, festivals and funerals at the expense of their children’s participation in education, the latter’s academic performance would be negatively affected and consequently would lead to falling standards in the education of religious and moral education. RME education was



influenced by religious and cultural biases, leading to a lack of diversity, tolerance, and respect for different religious and cultural values and beliefs.

This is consistent with what was reported by Ogunsola et al. (2018) that interest in cultural practices such as funerals and festivals by community members to the neglect of education would bring about falling educational standards in the area. Moreover, the absence of community involvement in school activities, the relationship between the two entities is strained. Thus, the lack of support and neglect of activities of the school by community members would tend to negatively affect academic performance and educational standards.

The findings of this study further point to the fact that in communities where a lot of witchcraft cases are perpetrated by school pupils/students on both their colleagues and teachers, there is fear and panic in the schools and this hinders effective teaching and learning. As asserted by Adu-Agyem and Osei-Opoku (2019), the community is important because it serves as the entire social context in which the educational systems work. Therefore, when the entire community portrays a lack of interest in education or demonstrates actions that hinder educational progress, educational standards are also affected negatively.

These findings further corroborate the findings of Adu-Agyem and Osei-Opoku (2019) that factors from the community such as ethnicity, lack of community-school relationship, lack of cooperation from members of the community, the value placed on ventures in the community and social vices and witchcraft affect educational standards. In general, if the entire community in which the school, teachers and students exhibit actions that hamper quality academic standards, the ultimate outcome would be the falling standards in education particularly religious and moral education and these factors are evident in the Mfantseman District. It is important to state that it is through education that knowledge is imparted and acquired, faculties are trained and skills are developed. Therefore, any society that toys with the education of its citizens will stall in its effects to achieve socio-economic development.

CONCLUSION

This study explored factors that influenced the falling educational standards of religious and moral education subjects in the Mfantseman District in Ghana. From the findings of this study, it can be observed that factors that originate from the pupils/students, teachers, school, parents and community influence falling educational standards of religious and moral education at the Mfantseman District. The study concludes that the falling standards of education of religious and moral education at the Mfantseman District cannot be attributed to just a single factor but a multiplicity of factors.

Policy Implications

The policy implications of falling educational standards of Religious and Moral Education (RME) subjects in schools are:

1. Develop policies and regulations that prioritize RME education in schools and provide adequate resources to support effective teaching and learning.



2. Investing in the development and implementation of effective teacher training programs that focus on RME education, and provide opportunities for continuous professional development.
3. Revise the RME curriculum to ensure that it is up-to-date, relevant, and aligned with the needs and expectations of students and society at large.
4. Encouraging the use of innovative teaching methods and technologies to enhance student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes in RME education.
5. Promoting collaboration and partnerships between schools, universities, religious organizations, and other stakeholders to share knowledge, resources, and expertise in promoting the quality of RME education.
6. Encouraging the involvement of parents and community members in promoting the importance of RME education and supporting schools and teachers in their efforts to improve the quality of RME education.
7. Develop policies that promote diversity, tolerance, and respect for different religious and cultural values, which can help foster social cohesion and understanding.
8. Providing funding and support for research and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of strategies and interventions aimed at improving the quality of RME education, and using the findings to inform policy and practice.

Overall, the policy implications of falling educational standards of RME subjects in schools require a coordinated and multi-stakeholder approach to address the challenges facing RME education and promote the development of effective strategies that can improve the quality of RME education and promote moral and ethical values among students.

Practical Implications:

The practical implications of falling educational standards of Religious and Moral Education (RME) subjects in schools are:

1. Developing effective strategies to improve the quality of RME education, including teacher training, curriculum reform, and adequate resourcing.
2. Encouraging the use of innovative teaching methods and technologies to enhance student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes in RME education.
3. Promoting collaboration and partnerships between schools, universities, religious organisations, and other stakeholders to share knowledge, resources, and expertise in promoting the quality of RME education.
4. Encouraging the involvement of parents and community members in promoting the importance of RME education and supporting schools and teachers in their efforts to improve the quality of RME education.
5. Promoting diversity, tolerance, and respect for different religious and cultural values in RME education to foster social cohesion and understanding.
6. Providing opportunities for students to participate actively in RME education, such as through debates, discussions, and community service, to enhance their engagement and motivation.



7. Using assessment and evaluation to monitor the quality of RME education and identify areas for improvement.
8. Invest in the development of a robust monitoring and evaluation system that can provide regular feedback to policymakers and educators on the effectiveness of strategies and interventions aimed at improving the quality of RME education.

Overall, the practical implications of falling educational standards of RME subjects in schools require a concerted effort among policymakers, educators, parents, and other stakeholders to promote the development of effective strategies that can improve the quality of RME education and promote moral and ethical values among students.

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