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Principals' strategies for improving the academic achievement of students of disadvantaged rural junior high schools in Ghana

Erasmus Kormla Norviewu-Mortty
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**PRINCIPALS' STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE ACADEMIC
ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS OF DISADVANTAGED RURAL
JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN GHANA**

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A thesis presented for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

Faculty of Education and Arts

Edith Cowan University

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“When you see fire burning the house of your neighbour, you should begin to pour water on your own” (Ewe proverb from Ghana, West Africa)

ABSTRACT

The academic performance of students in public basic schools in rural Ghana during the past two decades has declined significantly (Akyeampong, 2007). Government efforts to remedy this have not yielded any sustainable result (Atta-Quayson, 2007). The Saboba District Junior High Schools are among the lowest-performing rural schools. Generally, inadequate funding and resourcing are blamed for poor academic achievement of disadvantaged, rural students.

During eight years of teaching in the Saboba District, the Researcher observed that the academic achievement of students in some schools remained high while that of others in the same locality remained low. Further, the Researcher's experiences suggested that the disadvantaged schools whose students continuously performed well were led by effective principals. The purpose of this research therefore was to identify leadership and management practices, skills and attitudes employed by principals of disadvantaged rural schools in the Saboba locality that create an environment that fosters high standards of student achievement.

The research design was based on a set of four case studies of Junior High Schools from the Saboba rural District. Two of these were top-achieving disadvantaged rural schools and two were low-achieving disadvantaged rural schools with ambitions to improve. Qualitative data for each case were obtained through interviews and focus group meetings with principals, teachers, students, parents, local education officers and community leaders. Triangulation of data was established through multiple data collection techniques, and a variety of data sources and types, such as interviews, focus group meetings, direct observation and field notes, and document analysis. After transcribing the audio-recorded data and documenting data records, reading and re-reading of all transcripts and documents was carried out. This helped to identify salient aspects of data and to describe emerging themes and select quotations to illustrate themes. The data were compiled into four case studies. A cross-case analysis, drawing on the key findings, which represented the core emergent idea from a series of narrations of a case, helped to identify seven themes of effective school leadership.

These seven themes or elements of effective leadership comprise a series of specific strategies for improving academic standards in disadvantaged schools in the Saboba District. These are: shared school vision, the principal's positive personal attributes, successful instructional and managerial leadership, thriving collegial

leadership, productive school and community partnerships for recruiting resources for the school, innovative physical and human resourcing and emerging positive values.

The cross-case analysis demonstrated that the seven elements of effective leadership not only need to be sufficiently present but also interconnected to enhance school effectiveness in disadvantaged rural schools. The study also identified implications for leadership research and for educational practice.

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Date:30th March 2012.....

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Erasmus Kormla NORVIEWU-MORTTY (November, 2011)

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all principals and headmasters, who in spite of enormous resourcing challenges, exhibit dedication, commitment and genuine spirit of service to humanity by employing their ingenuity, creativity, time and energy in strategising to involve parents and community positively, in order to enhance student discipline, and promote teacher professional conduct and welfare towards the improvement of teaching and learning, and sustenance of better student learning outcomes.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examinations. This is a certificate awarded by the regional Anglophone West African Examinations Council to candidates who completed successfully school year nine or the Junior High School in Ghana.
CRIQPEG	Centre for Research on Improving Quality of Primary Education in Ghana (a research centre of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana).
DCE	The District Chief Executive. This is the political and administrative head of a civil district in Ghana, who also plays the role of the Mayor of the District's capital city.
DFID	Department for International Development of the United Kingdom.
ERNWACA	Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa.
FCUBE	The Free and Compulsory Universal Basic Education policy of Ghana developed by the Ghana Government and introduced in 1995-1996 academic year to promote primary and middle school education.
GES	Ghana Education Service.
GNAT	Ghana National Association of Teachers.
JHS	Junior High School in Ghana.
MOE	The Ghana Ministry of Education.
MOESS	The Ghana Ministry of Education, Science and Sports.
NGO	Nongovernmental Organisation.
NNED	Northern Network for Education Development (A nongovernment organisation for the promotion of quality formal education in the three most northern and underdeveloped regions of Ghana with headquarters at Tamale, the capital city of the Northern Region of Ghana).
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.
SHS	Senior High School in Ghana.
UNESCO EFA	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Education for All policy.
USAID	United States Agency for International Development.
WAEC	The West African Examinations Council.
WGESA/UNESCO	Working Group on Education Sector Analysis/United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Paris.

CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Introduction

As an education network, we appreciate the various government interventions in the education sector; however, we have noticed that, little is being done by Government to address the issue of poor learning outcomes at the basic level. According to the National Education Assessment (NEA) tests in 2009, less than 30% of primary school children reach proficiency levels in English and Mathematics. In 2011, over 40% of candidates who sat for the BECE failed the examination and could not gain placement in any of the second cycle institutions, representing a below average performance. Enrolment rates have however increased at the basic level. This clearly shows a gain in access without any corresponding action to improve learning. (Myjoyonline News, 2012, p. 1)

This observation by Leslie Tettey, National Co-ordinator of the Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition in a press statement on educational standards in Ghana Junior High Schools (JHSs) in early 2012, explains the core issue of low academic standards in Ghanaian Junior High Schools.

There has been a sharp decline in the academic performance of students from public elementary or basic schools in rural communities, in Ghana over the past two decades. Government efforts to remedy the situation have not yielded any enduring positive results (Atta-Quayson, 2007; Government of Ghana, 2004; Ministry of Education Science and Sports, 2007b; Myjoyonline News, 2012; Peil, 1995; Scadding, 1989). The junior high schools of rural and deprived Saboba District of Ghana are the most affected, although a few of them still perform well (GES: Saboba-Chereponi, 2005; GES: Saboba-District, 2006).



Figure 1.1. Junior High School students on break

This research identified, through a case study methodology, the leadership practices of principals from effective and less-effective rural schools in the Saboba locality, in order to determine what promotes effective teaching and learning and high achievement of students. With insight from relevant literature, and cross-case analyses of research data, key suggestions and propositions for enhancing effective teaching and learning, in the midst of scarce funding and resourcing, have been developed. These may serve as crucial steps in resolving underperformance of students from disadvantaged rural schools such as those of Saboba and other low socio-economic communities, be they rural or urban.

This chapter specifically discusses the background to this research, the problem of the study, the rationale and significance of the study as well as the purpose of the study and its research question.

Background

Basic education in the Republic of Ghana, in West Africa, comprises nine years of schooling; six years of primary and three years of junior high school (JHS). It culminates in the West African Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), which determines the eligibility of basic school students to enter senior high school (SHS) or a vocational and technical school. The senior high school comprises four years (Ministry of Education Science and Sports, 2007b) and prepares students for tertiary education.

The Government of the Republic of Ghana in West Africa (Government of Ghana, 2004; Ministry of Education, 1951, 1987a), like UNESCO (2000) and other scholars (Akyeampong, 2007; Anamuah-Mensah, Koomson, & Godwyll, 1996; Banya, 1993; Foster, 1965; Godwyll, 2008; McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975), recognises that high-quality basic education is the essential goal of formal education as it enhances the development and well-being of the individual and society. To promote quality education and to resolve the poor academic achievement of students from rural basic schools, the Government, through its Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service (GES), implemented a series of education reform schemes. Notable among these reforms were the 1987 education reform (Ministry of Education, 1987b) to improve access to basic and secondary education, and the introduction in 1996 of the *Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education* (FCUBE) policy to address access to education and quality concerns in basic education (Ministry of Education, 1996; Ministry of Education Science and Sports, 2007a, 2007b). These reforms failed to

highlight the specific role of the school principal in school improvement, which was deemed to be crucial by educational scholars (Atta-Quayson, 2007; Peil, 1995; Scadding, 1989).

In spite of these educational reforms, Ghana's deprived rural basic schools regularly fail to produce knowledgeable graduates, capable of pursuing further education (Akyeampong, 2007; Donge, 2003; Karikari-Ababio, 2003; Nsawah, 2003). A skilled human resource base for the social and economic development of a nation depends on a highly educated citizenry (Atta-Quayson, 2007). It is, therefore, essential to explore other solutions to address effectively the prevalence of poor academic work by basic students in deprived, rural junior high schools of Ghana.

The Problem

There is evidence of declining academic performance in deprived rural junior high schools, in Ghana.

Five Junior High Schools in the Twifo-Hemang-Lower-Denkyira District in the Central Region (of Ghana) scored zero percent in the 2008 Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). (...) Mr Samuel Agyeibie-Kessie, the District Chief Executive, disclosed this at the assembly's general meeting at Twifo Praso on Friday. (Ghana News Agency, 2008)

The zero per cent score in the quotation refers to the fact that no individual student from the schools mentioned had an aggregate score of 30 or lower in the six core and elective subjects at the BECE. A student needs to obtain that aggregate score to be eligible to enter a senior high school. This comment by a political head underscores the present low standards of rural junior high schools. The significant decline in the academic performance of students (Ministry of Education Science and Sports, 2007b) from public junior high schools in rural communities in Ghana during the past two decades has been well documented (Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa-Ghana, 2003; Ministry of Education Science and Sports, 2007d; Peil, 1995).

In fact, the Ghana Ministry of Education recognised the enormity of academic underperformance by basic school students.

Despite the numerous interventions to improve education, achievement levels of school children, especially at the basic level, were low. The results of public schools in the Criterion Reference Tests (CRTs) conducted from 1992 to 1997 in English and Mathematics indicated an extremely low level of achievement in these subjects. (Ministry of Education Science and Sports, 2007b, p. 3)

The results of the 2007/2008 Basic School Certificate Examinations (BECE) were poor, as almost 50% of the total number of candidates failed (Myjoyonline News, 2008) and many of those who failed came from rural and deprived junior high schools.

The inefficient preparation of basic school students renders many ineligible to enter senior high schools, and thus denies them tertiary education (Akyeampong, 2007). The present scenario of low-quality basic education has provoked the discontent of both students and their parents against teachers and education officers. It has also ignited passionate discussions (Tettey, 2003; World Bank, 1996) in both the print and electronic media as to what the future holds for numerous young Ghanaians, who leave basic school semi-literate. It seems this is their lot because they happen to live in the rural areas of the country. Furthermore, the majority of Ghana's school age children live in rural communities, where educational resources are minimal and teachers teach subjects in which they have little expertise (World Bank, 2004). This situation puts at risk the educational future of a sizeable percentage of Ghana's youth.

However, personal observation in the Saboba locality revealed that some deprived JHSs have succeeded in improving the performance of their students, and those were headed by principals who demonstrated some level of effective leadership. There seems to be a link between effective rural school leadership and better student academic achievement and vice versa (Agyeman, Baku, & Gbadamosi, 2000; Kadingdi, 2004). What accounts for the difference between high-achieving and low-achieving rural JHSs? What do successful principals of effective rural junior high schools know and do to create a positive learning environment for their students? What vision, attitudes, knowledge, beliefs about learning, actions, practices and skills of these principals lead to the good academic work of their students despite funding and resourcing challenges? Effective principalship in rural junior high schools of Saboba is therefore, the focus of this study.

Rationale

Discovering the factors or interventions that actually influence students' academic achievement requires research. However, there is not any available research conducted specifically by Researchers in Ghana on equipping basic school principals, working with few resources in deprived communities of Ghana, to improve their students' academic performance. Some studies in Ghana (Baku & Agyeman, 1997; Central Intelligence Agency, 2009; CRIQPEG, 1993; Daaku, 2002) have sought to improve basic education through exploring better supervision of the work of principals

and teachers, improved training of teachers, provision of relevant text books, better infrastructure and funding, and more incentives for teachers and community participation. In addition to these, research supported by different case studies from rural Africa, reported by the Basic Education Cluster of the Africa Program Development Team of the World Bank (2000) highlighted other strategies to reduce the influence of war and conflicts, HIV-AIDS and nomadic situations on the academic progress of African rural children. These studies only partially highlighted the leadership issues of principals of rural schools, and it is this vacuum that this research seeks to fill.

In the Saboba locality, the leadership practices of the few principals who have succeeded in improving the achievement of their JHS students, while their colleagues in a similar setting have failed, may serve as a source of new knowledge. This rare contextual knowledge, like the innovative leadership skills, practices and attitudes of the high-achieving principals of disadvantaged rural schools in Ghana, should be tapped to the benefit of all. Finally, in rural Ghana, parents and most adults, generally respect the views of elders and those in authority such as the principals of their schools. Therefore, centring the research on the principal helps garner legitimacy and credibility among the rural parents and the community at large.

Significance

This study develops new knowledge about the leadership skills and management strategies that lead to enhancing the achievement of rural JHS students through sustained and progressive school effectiveness. Furthermore, the educational model that exemplifies effective school leadership in deprived, rural schools in Saboba, Ghana could be used by education authorities in Ghana and elsewhere to inform the development of new policies and professional learning programs for school principals. This study is a pioneering educational investigation of effective principals' practices and skills for improving academic achievement of basic school students in less-resourced rural communities in Ghana.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this research is to study both effective and less-effective rural junior high schools in the Saboba locality in Ghana, in order to identify leadership skills and management practices that truly enhance rural school effectiveness and student academic achievement in spite of inadequate funding and resourcing. The less-effective

schools are those which have acknowledged their low standards of academic achievement and are open to change but have not initiated any effective means towards improving the lot of their students. Specifically, this study addresses the following research question: “Which leadership skills and practices of principals of deprived rural schools in the Saboba District of Ghana seem to create an environment that fosters high standards of students’ achievement?”

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter explains the educational context of Ghana and reviews literature predominantly related to Western nations, although a few works from Africa and other developing countries are also consulted. This literature review focuses firstly on Ghana, its education system and its educational goal. Secondly, it develops a few school improvement processes and effective school leadership practices that promote effective schooling and student achievement. The chapter concludes with the presentation of the conceptual framework for the study.

Literature from Western nations is privileged for the fact that most of Ghana's education reforms not only had been modelled on those of Western nations such as the United Kingdom and United States of America, but had also been directly influenced by financial and professional input provided by these countries through their nongovernment organisations, such as the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) of the United States of America (Akyeampong, 2007; Ghana-Education-Service, 2001; Kadingdi, 2004) and others.

Ghana and Saboba District

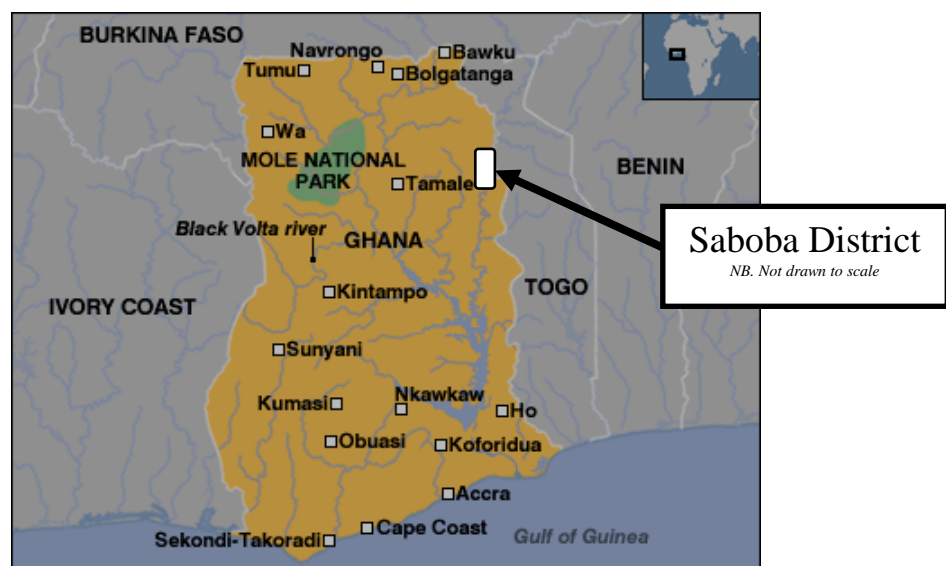


Figure 2.1. Map of Ghana and Saboba District, modified after BBC News (2008)

Ghana, a developing country and a former British colony (1874-1957) in West Africa, gained its independence in March 1957. Ghana has 227,533 square kilometres of

land and 11,000 square kilometres of water (Index-Mundi, 2011a). Despite a heritage of more than 250 native languages and dialects, English is its official language and is the medium of instruction at all levels of education and business. Ghana, whose capital is Accra, comprises 10 administrative regions. Being just a few degrees north of the Equator, Ghana has a warm climate and the Saboba locality and district, which is at the centre of this study, is located in the eastern corridor of the Northern Region of Ghana. Ghana's total population in 2010 (Index-Mundi, 2010) was estimated at 24,392,000 but this has since increased to 24,965,816 in 2011 (Index-Mundi, 2011b). The adult literacy rate of those of age 15 and above was 66.6% in 2009, a considerable improvement over the rate in 2000, which was 57.9% (Index-Mundi, 2012). Thus, while the rate of adult literacy improves at a slow pace that of population increase continues to run high.

The Saboba District is one of the least developed and most deprived rural communities in the country. The few schools that dot the district are ill-equipped in staffing, infrastructure and funding (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2007).



Figure 2.2. Cheerful rural pupils coming out from their classrooms for break

Staffing is inadequate with trained teaching-staff and student ratio at 44:1 in 2008 (GES: Saboba-District, 2008). The inhabitants practise mainly subsistence agriculture, which does not sufficiently support all their socio-economic needs; including providing for their children's school materials. Pupils and students serve as farm hands so as to increase their family's farm output.



Figure 2.3. Rural JHS students work after school, in parents' farm

The students also help in petty commerce or trading to increase the income of the household. School age children have little time outside the regular school hours to spare for studies and receive little support from home to stay in school. The majority of children in rural communities such as Saboba enter primary school at age five or six without any pre-primary or kindergarten education. Pre-primary education, even though formally established with the Education Act of 1974 (Akyeampong, 2007; Kadingdi, 2004; Ministry of Education, 1997) is still not fully developed and implemented across the country (Akyeampong, 2007; Kadingdi, 2004). Therefore, the first year of primary school is for many children, their initial contact with formal education, where instructions are given mainly in English, a second language not yet sufficiently learnt and mastered by them. This socio-economic situation negatively affects academic standards in junior high schools, in Saboba.

The Education System of Ghana

The education system of Ghana is modelled on that of the British school system. Pre-tertiary education in Ghana comprises nine years of basic education excluding kindergarten. These nine years consist of six years of primary and three years of junior high school (Ministry of Education Science and Sports, 2007b; Ministry of Information and National Orientation, 2007). The junior high school or middle school is the Australian and North American equivalent of the seventh to ninth years of schooling. Basic education in Ghana ends at the final year of JHS, when all students sit the Basic Education Certificate Examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). A student needs an aggregate score of 30 or less in six core and elective subjects to be eligible for entry into a senior high school (SHS) or a

technical/vocational school for further education. The total number of JHS graduates who pass the BECE with an aggregate score of 30 or better in each school determines the success or failure rate of JHSs. This serves as the criterion for evaluating the quality of academic performance at basic school level in Ghana.

Ghana: Goal of Education, the FCUBE Educational Reform

The Ghana Ministry of Education, in its syllabus for all levels of basic education, emphasises that “the principal purpose of basic education is to help the pupils acquire basic literacy in English Language and good knowledge in Mathematics. This would serve to develop further their abilities and talents through additional education and skills training” (Ministry of Education-Ghana Education Service, 1998, p. 2).

The above statement underscores the purpose of formal education in Ghana as originally outlined in the Ghana *Accelerated Development Plans for Education* of 1951 and 1961 (Government of Ghana, 2004; Ministry of Education, 1951, 1987a). It is this educational goal that was echoed by subsequent education reforms in Ghana (Ministry of Information and National Orientation, 2007) and also by the *Education for All* project of UNESCO (1990), which identified education as the engine of social, cultural, economic, scientific and technological growth and progress of the nation. It is in pursuance of these goals that the Government, through the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service implemented a number of education reform programs since 1951 (Government of Ghana, 2004; Ministry of Education, 1951, 1987b, 1997). Notable among them was the Free Compulsory and Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) program of 1995-1996. Many, including Ministers of State and other decision makers in education, saw the FCUBE (Ministry of Education, 1997) as a panacea to overcome the poor-quality basic education in the country. In 1994, in anticipation of the implementation of the FCUBE, the then Minister of Education acknowledged the poor academic standard of junior high schools and outlined the rationale for the FCUBE.

The greater majority of primary 6 pupils are functionally illiterate in English and Mathematics. Without functional literacy pupils won't gain comprehension and skills in other subjects, they will not be prepared for the world of work. How can we justify continuing expenditures on expanding a system that doesn't lead to learning? Reaching a target of universal participation in primary schooling is not a sensible goal unless that participation leads to learning and skills. To examine strategies for providing effective basic education, to revitalize the teaching and learning in the schools is the focus of our policies and of this forum. (Ministry of Education-Education Reforms Review Committee, 1994, p. 3)

The FCUBE was a direct response to the public outcry about low standards of education at the basic school level (Akyeampong, 2007; CRIQPEG, 1996; Kadingdi, 2004).

In 2003, seven years after the FCUBE policy was implemented, the number of Northern Region Districts in which at least 50% of students passed the BECE benchmark was only eight out of the 13 districts. In 2004, the number of districts with a 50% pass rate at the BECE was reduced to seven, and this further declined to four Districts in 2005. Education statistics of the period showed that junior high schools in Saboba district were among the lowest-performing schools (GES: Saboba-Chereponi, 2005; GES: Saboba-District, 2006; Northern Network for Education Development, 2006). This trend of low academic performance by students in the Saboba locality is not unusual as the case is similar in other rural basic schools in the country.

Enhancing Students' Achievement

There is ample Western literature concerning those factors that influence the effective learning and high performance of students. Some scholars (Corcoran & Wilson, 1989; Levine & Lezotte, 1990; Lezotte & McKee, 2006; Lezotte & Pepperl, 2002; Reeves, 2004, 2009) have described extensively specific characteristics that distinguish effective schools and sustain successful teaching and learning, and enhance students' achievement. Others highlight internal school improvement processes or mechanisms of evaluation that help promote effective learning and high achievement of students (Bollen, 1996; Harris et al., 2002; Hopkins, 1994, 2000). Some scholars also emphasise the family background of students as an important factor that explains students' achievement (Coleman et al., 1979; Shimada, 2010). Other intellectuals discussed aspects of school leadership skills and methods that enhance the quality of schooling and higher academic performance of students (Duke, Tucker, Salmonowicz, & Levy, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). All of these are significant for a better understanding of the varied factors that positively or negatively impact on students and their school achievement.

Characteristics of effective schools

Literature of effective schools describes the criteria and the characteristics by which a school may be judged to be effective. Edmonds (1982) and Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) see the attainment of educational excellence, through students' mastery of basic skills and the art of independent, creative thinking and team work, as the hallmark of an effective school. Goodlad (1984) on the other hand, stressed the

overall educational progress of students through the promotion of students' academic, intellectual, vocational, socio-civic, cultural and personal development as key measures of effective schools.

Lezotte and Levine (1990), and McKee (2006), Reeves (2009), Corcoran and Wilson (1989) also identified some key characteristics of effective schools. Effective schools must have competent principal leadership and committed teaching staff with an instructional focus on fundamental skills. Effective schools expect high academic standards for all students in a positive and caring atmosphere, supported by teachers, support staff and local community. Bollen (1996) in support of Lezotte and Levine argued that an effective school is the one that sustains "... the climate and culture in which an effective teaching/learning process will flourish" (p. 11). Reynolds (1994) described these school effectiveness characteristics as practical "effectiveness generating school processes" (p. 24). Reynolds however, warned that "academic effectiveness", that is classroom achievement, must not be linked with social or "affective effectiveness" (p. 24), which deals with attendance rates, home background and delinquency (Bosker & Scheerens, 1989; Cuttance, 1992; Mortimore, Sammons, Ecob, & Stoll, 1988; Reynolds, Sammons, Stoll, Barber, & Hillman, 1996). Reynolds, Sammons, De Fraine, Townsend, and Van Damme (2011) and Hallinger and Murphy (1986) observed that what might make one school effective might not necessarily hold across other schools and most schools may manifest specific aspects of effectiveness and yet be lacking on others (Smith & Tomlinson, 1989).

Day (1999) and Day and Leithwood (2007) highlighted the essential role played by the collective vision of an effective school. According to Day, the effective school is that whose vision and mission are shared by the principal, teachers, as well as students. The school that identifies itself with one vision is the one that can effect change integrally and sustain school effectiveness. Dawson (2007) believes that it is the level of participation in the crafting of the collective school vision and mission by teachers, students and principal that gives potency to the actual vision and mission statements for improving teaching and learning. Thus, when staff and students are not consulted in the development of a school vision, it becomes difficult for the school community to identify with that vision and to cooperate towards its realisation.

School improvement processes

The debate on what makes an effective school led other Researchers to emphasise different characteristics such as the schools' internal improvement processes

and mechanisms for evaluation and monitoring, as the crucial factor for promoting student achievement. Hopkins (1994) described school improvement as internal school “strategies for improving the school’s capacity for providing quality education” (p. 75). By enhancing “the teaching-learning process and the conditions which support it” (p. 75), these internal school strategies improve students’ achievement. The school improvement perspective is therefore complementary to school effectiveness (Hopkins, 2000).

The essential difference is that while school effectiveness literature focuses on characteristics of effective schools, school improvement literature emphasises existing internal school processes that could be improved through monitoring, internal evaluation, and supervisory mechanisms. Reynolds (1988, 1994; Reynolds, et al., 2011) believes that school effectiveness and school improvement concepts could be applied simultaneously to deliver successful schooling, leading to sustained high levels of student achievement. While school effectiveness has the potential to inform us about what makes good schools ‘good’, the school improvement movement has the power to make schools good, as they continue to grow, develop, incorporate and critique their school effectiveness knowledge (OECD, 1989; Reynolds, 1994). Bollen (1996) explained this further and proposed that the “... use of school effectiveness knowledge will give the diagnosis phase of the improvement process more meaning” (p. 15). Despite scholarly emphasis on characteristics and mechanisms of improving and sustaining effective schools in order to promote high achievement of students, others viewed students’ backgrounds as a key factor influencing students’ achievement. Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld and Dare (1979) recognised the impact of illiterate parents and poor social and economic environments as key determinants of the achievement levels of students. Hence, it is significant to also examine the possible effects of students’ backgrounds on their learning and achievement.

The effect of students’ backgrounds

The student background literature argues that the background of students more than anything else determines their overall school achievement, both academic and socio-effective. Coleman et al. (1979, p. 325) explained that it is difficult to measure the influence of teachers, principals and schools “... on a child’s achievement”. From their research on the inequalities in education in the U.S. they drew the following conclusion:

That schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his [sic] background and general social context; and that this very lack of an independent effect means that the inequalities imposed on children by their homes, neighbourhood, and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they will confront adult life at the end of school. (p. 325)

In a related study, Goldstein and Cuttance (1988) affirmed that: "... the attainment of ... children when they first enter the school is the single most important determinant of subsequent achievement" (p. 197). Similarly, Beaulieu, Israel and Wimberley (2003) believed that family characteristics have from five to 10 times as much influence as school characteristics, on reading and mathematics scores of rural eighth graders, in the U.S. These scholars concluded that the best way to help rural youth succeed academically would be to harness the collective responsibility (or the social capital) of families, schools and communities, towards the integral development of the child.

Students' backgrounds certainly influence the achievement of students (Nuttall, 1991; Saunders, 1999); however, this alone does not explain the achievement levels of students, since the input of the school on achievement is immense. The work of Watson, Partington, Gray and Mack (2006) on the academic achievement of Australian Aboriginal students in Mathematics illustrates the benefits of effective integration of exemplary instructional leadership with community cultural values.

Effective School Leadership

Since the late 1990s, most educational leadership academics have studied the dynamics of successful school leadership that leads to effective schooling and high achievement of students. Contemporary scholars such as Duke, Tucker, Salmonowicz and Levy (2006) have observed that the lack of effective leadership in schools lowers students' achievement because the absence of quality leadership often results in ill-adapted school organisation and programs. It also leads to unstable and difficult staffing, students' negative attitudes to academic work and discipline, an unhealthy school system and climate, and non-cooperation of parents and community. The consequences of failed school leadership are grave. This seems to explain the significance of shifting the debate on effective schools from unique school effectiveness characteristics and school improvement mechanisms to more pragmatic and integrally, efficient educational leadership traits, which enhance students' learning and achievement. Certain key themes or practices emerged from the literature on effective school leadership. These are conceived as leading through: cherished personal qualities

or attributes of the school leader, strong instructional leadership with integration of cultural, community values, individual principal's management and collective leadership skills and the promotion of professional learning communities.

The role of personal attributes of the school leader

Values are important, accepted principles or standards of an individual or a group of people and often, have positive influence on the individual, the group and on humanity at large. In a school context, values and norms are in fact, the heart of the school culture. Greenfield (1986) asserted that many parents would love to see the schools of their children reflect the same values and aspirations that the parents cherish. Similarly, MacNeil and Maclin (2005), further described as an essential function of the successful school leader, the development with and among his or her collaborators: teachers, students and parents a set of values that unites all. This is what naturally nurtures the development of a common purpose with and for the entire school community. Sergiovanni (2001) on the other hand, saw shared school values as a powerful socialiser of thought and behaviour. As a result, these values and norms must be a negotiated product of the shared aspirations, sentiments and principles of the community. As shared school values and norms are a useful unifying component of the school community, no other individual than the school leader carries the onus of exemplifying these values and positive attributes.

Scholars attested that the beliefs, attitudes and conduct of those being led are influenced by the personal qualities or attributes of their leaders. This is the view of Berson, Oreg and Dvir (2008), and also of Schein (1992) as well as Schneider (1987). Other Researchers such as Carpenter, Geletkanycz and Sanders (2004) also confirmed this in their extensive work on the influence of leaders' personal attributes on their decisions, options and choices in exercising their leading roles. In other words, the school leader's personal character and values play a role in the school's effectiveness as these influence the attitude and cooperation of the school staff and students. as emphasised by Hambrick and Mason (1984). These scholars did not emphasise, for example, a specific list of attributes of the successful school leader. Another author Guruchandran (2009) was more specific and explained at length the specific attributes that usually characterise effective leaders.

What are some of these specific attributes which are identified with a successful leader? Guruchandran (2009) attempted to answer this when he explained that all effective leaders are characterised by certain key attributes. They have self-belief and

motivation, they are team players, they are visionaries, and they are listeners and observers and also, have a personality. Guruchandran also stated that it was possible to have leaders who might not possess all the important attributes but such leaders might be wise enough in masking their negatives by their excellent positives.

Strong instructional and managerial leadership

Instructional leadership provides direction, coordination, supervision (Crowther, Kaagan, & Ferguson, 2002; Glatthorn, 1990) and resourcing for improving teaching and learning. Whatever the school principal does in the school, to help change or sustain practices that would improve student learning is referred to as instructional leadership by Halverson, Grig, Prichet and Thomas (2005). Instructional leadership is intertwined with managerial leadership. Whereas instructional leadership focuses mainly on direct initiatives that would directly influence teaching and students learning, the managerial leadership rather emphasises the responsibilities of maintaining facilities, ensuring student discipline and the usual running of school administrative affairs. This is the view of Jazzar (Jazzar, 2004). Hoyle (2006), whose work complements that of Jazzar, further explained the managerial role of the school leader as that which inspires and empowers the personnel through the appropriate use of resources for the welfare of all. Both Jazzar and Hoyle agreed that the managerial functions of the school leader must serve or enhance his or her instructional role. In fact, they emphasised the instructional leadership role of the school leader, and saw it as a major determining factor of academic improvement.

Not all scholars concentrated extensively on the instructional role of the school leader as a significant factor of effective student learning and achievement. Hardré (2009; Hardré, Sullivan, & Roberts, 2008) proposed that the support of teachers and their families and teachers' efforts at both school and community levels are essential for improving achievement in rural schools.

Hattie (2009), another scholar who has written extensively on academic achievement of students, rather emphasised more the roles played by responsible teachers and students than that of the principal, in improving teaching and learning and obtaining good learning outcomes. Hattie gave more emphasis to the roles played by responsible teachers and students than to the role of the principal, in improving teaching and learning and obtaining good learning outcomes. In his meta-analysis on academic achievement, however, he mentioned the significance of the instructional role of the school leader through management of teachers and students. His emphasis was on

teachers and students, who know their tasks, and collaborate with the principal in the improvement of teaching and learning. Hattie identified the respective roles of effective principals, teachers and students but maintained his emphasis on teacher effects, teacher-student relationships and responsibilities as catalysts of change that boost the efforts of the principal in improving teaching and learning and sustaining achievement.

Examining the research conducted on teachers' influence on students' learning and achievement in developed countries such as the U.S. and New Zealand, Hattie (2003) concluded that excellent teachers are "... the single most powerful influence on achievement" (p. 4). His meta-analysis has shown that, besides the student's own personal prior knowledge, which accounted for "... 50% of the variance of achievement", it was the expert teacher's input, "... about 30% of the variance" that makes the difference in student learning and achievement (pp. 1-2). Hattie further reported that the principal and the school, like the peers and the home, had only "5-10%" (pp. 1-2) of the student's achievement variance.

Despite Hattie's strong emphasis on the teachers' role in student academic achievement he, nevertheless acknowledged, to some extent the instructional and community leadership role of the effective principal in school achievement. Hattie stated that the effective principal is the one who creates "... a climate of psychological safety to learn ... a focus of discussion on student learning ..." (2003, p. 5). Thus, Hattie believed that the effective principal is the one whose leadership influences a healthy school climate; including cultural responsiveness for enhancing efficient teaching through the expert teacher, and harnessing the students' prior knowledge for effective learning and achievement.

Notwithstanding Hattie's conclusions regarding the significant role that expert teachers play in students' learning and achievement, one may submit that without the principal's efficient instructional and managerial leadership, even the most gifted expert teacher on staff may be unable to effectively teach students. Furthermore, in some developing countries where traditional and local attitudes and customs show little respect for education norms and regulations, the principal's committed instructional and managerial leadership becomes crucial for any effective teaching and learning to take place. Thus, the role of the expert teacher in such situations may no longer be "... the single most powerful influence on achievement" (Hattie, 2003, p. 4) as stoutly defended by Hattie but an integral part of the school leadership efforts for improving learning.

Given that Hattie's (2003) sample was drawn mainly from OECD countries this may make the finding less relevant to schooling in some less-developed African countries.

Simply, the strong emphasis on the role of teachers can be put in perspective with that of the principals in order to demonstrate the intrinsic link between both actors. One cannot be successful without the other. The OECD expressed this clearly when it remarked that good teachers are in fact, the number one factor for excellence in student achievement but next comes high-quality leadership (OECD, 2008a, 2008b).

Instructional leadership: Integration of community values

Walker and Dimmock (2002) developed cross-cultural perspectives that could influence school leadership and management practices in different cultural contexts. They acknowledged that the community, its culture and values influence school leadership and student achievement. Their work reported the socio-cultural influences upon schooling and school effectiveness in East and Southeast Asia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and others. They, however, emphasised the need of circumspection when culturally appropriate effective leadership practices of one socio-cultural context are introduced in another.

Based on their investigation, Watson, Partington, Gray and Mack (2006) argued that students' academic achievement in Aboriginal and minority communities, in Western Australia depended on focussed principalship that harnessed school community values, and also involved teachers and students effectively. These Researchers observed that "Schools where Aboriginal students, as a group, were achieving better in numeracy by external and internal standards were also generally those where numeracy teaching strategies were culturally inclusive/responsive and language focussed" (p. 3). They concluded that the managerial, instructional (use of culturally inclusive numeracy teaching strategies) and cultural, community leadership of the school principal was the essential factor for the high academic performance of Aboriginal students in Mathematics.

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) argued that the greatest contribution of principals to the performance of their teachers and students is their ability to create meaningful, collaborative cultures in their schools. They emphasised that when principals are able to redesign their school organisation through collaborative cultures and structures within and outside the school and build productive relations with parents and the community, they strengthen the effectiveness of the school. Norviewu-Morty (2010) made a similar observation in his initial study of effective principals in

rural Ghana. The Australian Council of State Organisations and the Australian Parents Council highlighted the significance of school and community partnership in improving student achievement. They defined school community partnership as the relation that exists between families and schools, and between schools and communities for improving academic quality and educational experiences of students (Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau, 2008). This position is endorsed by Mazibuko (2005) and also in his work with Gathu, Mkatshwa and Manyatsi (2008). Mazibuko and his colleagues researched the significant role played by community partnership in the successful management of schools in Swaziland in promoting academic standards. This explains why every dynamic community, does not only comprise people who live in the same area but most essentially, people who also have common background and shared interests (Manser & Thomson, 1997; Soanes & Hawker, 2008).

Similarly, Glaze, Pervin and Maika (2007) stated that leadership that focuses on engaging students' families and communities, in promoting students' learning and achievement must equally exercise a strong instructional direction. Skilled school and community leadership is not only a logical precondition of educational success in public schooling but remains the pivotal element of school effectiveness and student achievement; hence principals need to be trained to develop relevant skills. This need for training principals in appropriate leadership and instructional skills was their conclusion after studying schools in the Canadian province of Ontario. Glaze et al. (2007) argued that the principal's precise vision of students' achievement, and his/her high instructional leadership in coordinated numeracy and literacy programs (in and outside classroom hours in collaboration with parents and community) was crucial to the high achievement of students. Similarly, in Australia, the work of Panizzon and Pegg (2011; 2007) identified enhanced strategic methods of teaching Mathematics and Science and promotion of ICT in remote rural schools of Australia as an important step in reducing the achievement gap between rural and urban schools. Zhang (2010) on the other hand, proposed the improvement of school processes and strengthening of home support for children's academic work as the essential leadership strategy for enhancing learning in rural schools and improving achievement.

Principal's management and collegial leadership skills

The personal, managerial leadership skills of the principal can promote the achievement of students. Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) specifically examined the place of the principals' leadership in students' learning and claimed:

After examining 69 studies involving 2802 schools, approximately 1.4 million students, and 14000 teachers, we computed the correlation between the leadership behaviour of the Principal in the school and the average academic achievement of students in the school to be 0.25. (p. 10)

PricewaterhouseCooper (2007) provided an overview of the research of Marzano and others and reported that high-quality leadership "... has a significant impact on both pupil academic and non-academic outcomes. In other words, good leadership and management lead to good teaching and learning, which in turn leads to higher standards for all pupils" (p. 1). PricewaterhouseCooper (2007) quoted Leithwood and his colleague who reported that: "... as far as we are aware, there is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement directly in the absence of talented leadership" (p. 1). Leithwood and Mascall (2008) found that: "The influence of collective leadership was most strongly linked to student achievement through teacher motivation" (p. 554). It is the principal's leadership, identified as his or her corporate managerial and administrative expertise in engaging and motivating students, teachers and community that promoted students achievement. This position is consistent with Leithwood's (2007) earlier work on educational leadership.

Managerial leadership of the principal also comprises physical and human resourcing. The successful leader is the one who ensures that he or she employs the right, qualified personnel who assist and cooperate to make things happen in productive manner in order to achieve the goals of the institution. Torrington, Hall and Taylor (2005) reported that the successful leader knows how to balance meeting human aspirations of the personnel and achieving set strategic goals of the institution. These intellectuals believed that all efficient leaders are effective human resource managers.

Despite the significance of the principal's role of physical and human resource management in achieving the school's set goals, most scholars commented more extensively on the principal's ability to blend this role with his or her collegial and instructional leadership. Successful school leaders share responsibility of instructional leadership with their teachers through teamwork, and mutual cooperation, which is an exercise of collegial leadership. Hoerr (1996) explained that it is when the principals share their authority, power and some responsibilities with staff that they gain the support of the teachers and other staff. Hoerr also observed that it is the school leader who collegially empowers his or her teachers who also cements team work, and encourages teachers to be more responsible and effective. Hoerr described, as key

elements of collegial leadership: effective communication, interpersonal relationships and teambuilding.

Hoerr's (1996) position on the significance of collegial leadership for the success of the school leader's instructional role is underscored by the apparent need to inculcate collegial leadership skills in teacher trainees who would become the future school leaders. Teachers who acquire teambuilding skills during their training are also better equipped to become more effective leaders in the future.

This is what Campbell-Evans and Maloney (1998) explained in their work on a collaborative teaching model for field experience. Their work emphasised the importance of collaborative work through professional dialogue and articulation of knowledge about teaching and learning in respect of teacher professional development.

Principals who receive no formation in school leadership and management prior to their appointment as school leaders may have difficulties in their collegial responsibilities such as consulting, coordinating, supervising and encouraging with diligence for the welfare of the staff. In fact, Hoyle (2006) warned that school heads who failed to practise collegial leadership might become leaders who would get the teachers to follow orders, and to get things done, without any attention to the teachers' welfare. Thus, the 'military commander' type of school leadership is no longer a viable leadership option for the contemporary principal.

In order to prevent school leaders from stifling progress and collegiality, principals should be appointed from among those who have received prior training in school leadership and/or organisational management. This echoes the work of Karstanje and Webber (2008) on essential signposts that must characterise the training and formation of principals in Eastern Europe. Their work, which stipulated, for example, specific topics which should be included in training modules for the preparation of principals remains a worthy source of practical clues for the effective future school leader. An earlier work by Burger, Webber and Klinck (2007) which focussed on the essentials of an effective educational leader from the perspective of several educators from varying backgrounds is another complementary work on the specific training and preparation of school principals. In Ghana and many other developing African countries, school principals are regularly recruited from among teachers. The major criterion employed to appoint principals is teaching experience and good conduct with no reference to a prior preparation or training in management of schools or organisations. This practice explains to some extent the difficulties principals in

developing African countries experience in leading change in their schools. In this regard, Karstanje and Webber (2008) remarked: “School leaders cannot be recruited any more from the teaching staff only by looking at their teaching capacity or their ability to organise festivities. School leadership nowadays is a profession requiring special preparation for the job” (p. 741). The work of Onguko, Abdalla and Webber (2008) which reported on the preparation of school principals in Kenya and Tanzania may be instructive as well.

Leadership through professional learning communities

One of the popular, contemporary efforts to define an educational leadership style that guides the entire school system: principal, teachers, students, support staff, parents and local community, towards active learning and higher performance by students is the professional learning community model (PLC). According to DuFour (2004), the professional learning community is a school which has purposely taken certain concrete strategies to evolve into a skilled learning community. Teachers in a PLC learn not just to teach, but to ensure that students are learning. Teachers, other staff and students, collaborate intensely in order to learn from and to complement one another, while at the same time being accountable for the actual performance of every student.

All successful, professional learning communities are characterised by three distinct major goals and one commitment. First, they ensure that all students effectively learn. Second, they intensify the culture of collaboration among all players. Third, they ensure that every individual student attains satisfactory results, and finally, by committing to work hard as a team they strive to achieve each of these three goals. According to DuFour (2004), PLCs also employ three specific learning enhancement strategies, to guarantee a comprehensive academic performance of every student. The first strategy is to employ intelligent, pragmatic-solution-seeking and probing questions in search for practical means to attaining the efficient learning of every student. The second strategy is to use appropriate procedures to identify early every student with learning difficulties for an immediate and sustained intervention. The third strategy is to identify and remove all perceptible barriers-to-success.

In a similar vein, Fullan (2008) emphasised the significance of PLCs when he spoke of collaborative cultures that generate greater student learning. He said: “... a focus on learning, a collaborative culture, collective enquiry, an action orientation, a commitment to continuous learning, and a concentration on results” is the key to

students' achievement (p. 18). Creating collaborative cultures to improve school effectiveness has to do with the principal's ability to enhance the talents and skills of all the people in the organisation. Fullan's two other works on school leadership (2004) and school improvement (2006) complement and develop further his insightful position on effective school leadership and academic improvement.

Elmore (2000), who agrees with Fullan's position, highlights relational dimensions of this collaborative culture when he concludes that:

The job of administrative leaders is primarily about enhancing the skills and knowledge of people in the organisation, creating a common culture of expectations around the use of those skills and knowledge, holding the various pieces of the organization together and producing a relationship with each other, and holding individuals accountable for their contributions to the collective result. (p. 15)

Advocacy for professional learning communities (PLCs) has rejuvenated educational leadership philosophy and policies across the Western world. However, the effectiveness and success of the implementation of the policies advocated by the literature on PLCs was based on the assumption that all the players in the community have similar or acceptable standards of living and social concerns, and would naturally collaborate. So, this may apply to most Western and developed nations.

However, in rural schools of less-developed countries for example, where some teachers absent themselves from school in order to work and earn extra income, it becomes cumbersome and almost impractical to develop and sustain an effective collaborative culture, a necessary and sufficient condition for the establishment of PLCs. In some instances, rural students have to travel far distances on foot to fetch water and sometimes food from the farm to prepare their breakfast before attending school. Those students would come late to school regularly and it may be difficult for teachers and the principal to successfully involve such regular student late-comers in any PLC inspired tutoring and supervision. The role of school leaders in developing and sustaining the goals of PLCs is fundamental. The school leaders who possess certain core characteristics of effective leadership are better positioned in developing effective PLCs. Some of these core characteristics of the successful school leader have been reviewed by the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP) as explained by Moos, Johansson and Day (2011) and Ylimaki and Jacobson (2011).

International Successful School Principals Project

The importance of the principal's leadership in the improvement of students' academic achievement was the special concern of the International Successful School Principals Project (ISSPP), headed by Professor Christopher Day of the University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom. The ISSPP has published a series of instructive works on effective school principalship and successful academic achievement through case studies from Australia, Canada, China, Denmark, England, and Norway, Sweden and the United States of America and others (Moos, et al., 2011).

The respective studies carried out in the seven original countries detailed a set of characteristics that identify the effective principal who enhances the academic achievement of students. In Australia, Gurr, Drysdale and Mulford (2005) stressed the role of the principal's personal traits such as integrity, high energy and persistence; and appropriate behaviour that was consultative, conciliatory and inspirational. They also mentioned the school leader's beliefs and values in the promotion of child-centred education and development of staff and relationships as key elements that enhanced success and achievement. While Wong (2005) from China identified the effective 'top-down' management with a degree of consultation, as an important characteristic of the effective principal, Moos, Krejsler, Kofod and Jensen (2005) from Denmark explained how the principal's robust participatory consultation with teachers and other stakeholders promoted student achievement.

Day (2005) also described how successful principals in selected schools in England used resilience, integrity, and genuine concern for values that promoted achievement to build a sense of identity and community that enhanced student learning opportunities and academic performance. In Norway, the successful school leader was described as the one who exemplified collaboration and team efforts in promoting a learning-centred approach in teaching (Møller et al., 2005). Further, Hoog, Johansson and Olofsson (2005) from Sweden described how principals' efforts in building teacher teams and in developing in students, a sense of social values helped in promoting learning and achievement. Finally, in the United States of America, Jacobson, Johnson, Giles and Ylimaki (2005) reported that successful principals who influenced higher achievement of students knew how to establish a safe and nurturing learning environment, and to set and ensure the attainment of high achievement expectations for all, students, teachers and other staff, parents and the principals themselves.

These sets of characteristics of the successful school principal have been thoroughly reviewed by other scholars. Key among these were those of Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006a), Leithwood and Riehl (2005), and Leithwood and Day (2007). The key aspect of effective school principalship that was highlighted in these reviews was the school leader's ability to: build vision and set a clear mission, know how to develop people, redesign the school organisation, enrich curriculum, promote teacher quality, manage and enhance quality teaching and learning, and develop effective internal collaboration and relationships with school neighbours and stakeholders (Drysdale, Goode, & Gurr, 2011; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006b).

All the literature reviewed attempted to describe the successful principal and what he or she does in order to enhance school effectiveness and quality academic performance of students. The development of the *Australian National Professional Standard for Principals* (Education Services Australia, 2011) draws on this literature to articulate and inform educational leaders in Australia.

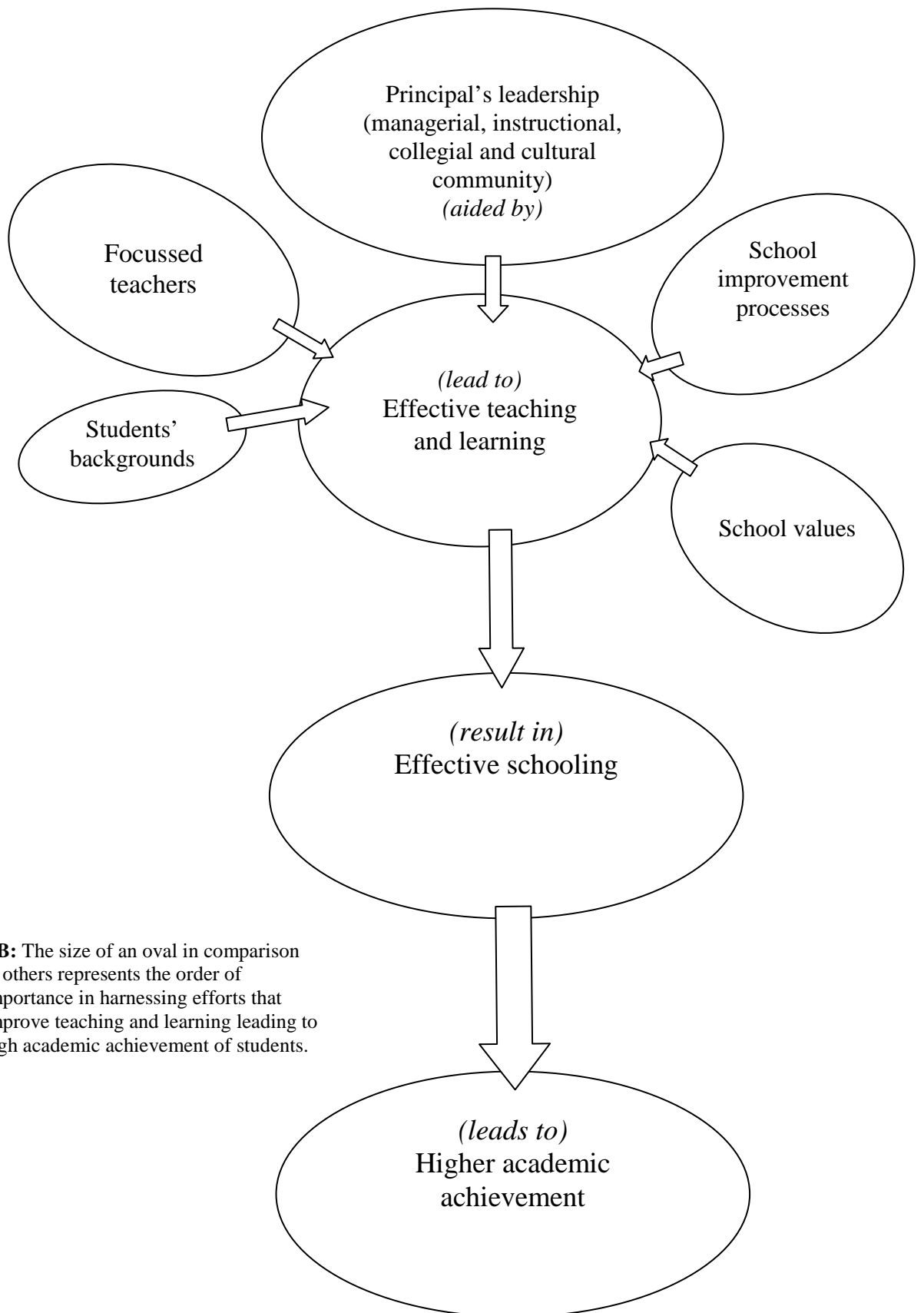
Australian National Professional Standards for Principals

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has provided a set of professional standards for all school leaders across the nation. The AITSL worked in collaboration with the Australian Commonwealth Government and other professional bodies and sectors “to promote excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership” (AITSL, 2011, p. 1). The standards for principals highlight three crucial elements that should characterise all school leaders, namely: vision and values; knowledge and understanding; and, personal qualities, social and interpersonal skills. These essential requisites are developed and enhanced through five professional practices: “leading teaching and learning, developing self and others, leading improvement, innovation and change, leading management of the school, and engaging and working with the community” (AITSL, 2011, p. 3).

The authors of the professional standards for Australian school leaders believed that through these attitudes and practices principals would lead high quality learning, teaching and schooling, which will result in “successful learners, confident creative individuals and active informed citizens” (AITSL, 2011, p. 5).

Conclusion and Conceptual Framework

The 1987 (Ministry of Education, 1987b, 1997) education reforms designed to improve basic schooling in Ghana failed. However, there seems to be a way out for Ghana's under-performing basic education. The various efforts by Western scholars to identify ways of improving teaching and learning and making schools effective in the promotion of higher achievement of students have been discussed. Irrespective of the influence of students' backgrounds, most scholars emphasised a strong instructional, managerial and cultural, community leadership of the principal as crucial to effective teaching and learning and better student achievement. The effective leadership of the principal results in the effective engagement of focussed teachers and students. Thus, effective leadership supports staff and the school community towards enhancing the academic performance of students. These insights from the literature therefore, inform the conceptual framework for this study (see Figure 2.4).



NB: The size of an oval in comparison to others represents the order of importance in harnessing efforts that improve teaching and learning leading to high academic achievement of students.

Figure 2.4. Conceptual framework

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This research explores how some principals of rural, disadvantaged junior high schools in Ghana employ a variety of leadership skills and practices to facilitate students' learning and achievement in spite of an unfavourable socio-economic environment and limited resources. To identify the strategies developed by these principals, qualitative research, through a case study approach, in the spirit of constructivism and interpretivism, was employed. This chapter presents the research approach and methodology, the research design and selection of research participants. It also details the data sources and how data were collected and analysed, and ends with ethical issues.

Epistemology

This study opted for a theory of knowledge that identifies truth or meaning as the outcome of our interactions with the realities in our world. Meaning is therefore constructed from the engagement of the mind with people, culture, nature, situations, environment and events, and with physical and social realities. Meaning is not posited there for the Researcher to discover as it pertains in objectivism. The interactions between the Researcher and the participants in their environment and situations construct the meanings or interpretations that emerge. Thus, the same reality or phenomenon can be interpreted differently by different persons. This process of knowing or obtaining meaning is referred to as constructivism by Guba and Lincoln (1989). For the purpose of this research constructivism was adopted as the epistemological perspective with a focus on the meaning-making activity of the Researcher with participants.

Theoretical Perspective

This research made an effort to put the Researcher in the place of the participants in order to understand the reality of the participants from their own perspectives. Thus, its philosophical stance or theoretical perspective was interpretivism, which includes phenomenology (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), hermeneutics (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002) and symbolic interactionism (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002). While phenomenology has a focus on gaining a deeper understanding or meaning of everyday experiences, hermeneutics stresses the

importance of understanding the context, the culture, the intended meanings, the circumstances and backgrounds of the participants in interpreting experiences and interactions (Patton, 2002). Similarly, symbolic or social interactionism underlines the significant influence of language, communication, interrelationships and community on our perceptions, our attitudes and values (Crotty, 1998). This study was grounded on this theoretical perspective.

To explore and construct meaning from the perspectives of our participants in this study in the spirit of its epistemological stance and its theoretical perspective, a qualitative inquiry was preferred with a research design of a set of four cases.

Research Methodology: Why Qualitative Inquiry?

Qualitative research is one credible methodology in constructing meaning from the perspectives of the actors (Flick, 2009; Huberman & Miles, 2002). As explained by Marshall and Rossman (2006): “Human actions are significantly influenced by the setting in which they occur” (p. 53). In fact, human experiences (activities, events, and processes) will not be understood, unless the meaning those humans assign to them is understood. What people experience, and how they interpret those experiences is the objective of a qualitative methodology (Patton, 2002, 2008).

The purpose of this research was to study the leadership skills and strategies of successful principals of rural junior high schools in the Saboba district of Ghana, in order to identify exemplary practices. These skills and strategies could be adapted by principals of other local, rural schools willing to improve the academic achievement of their students. Case study is a suitable qualitative inquiry method that identifies and describes practices, beliefs, attitudes, and “... perceptions, opinions, feelings and knowledge” (Patton, 2002, p. 4) that underpin the leadership skills of principals, whose work has promoted and improved students’ achievement in rural JHSs of the Saboba locality. In fact, employing a case study methodology enabled the principals and other participants to gain meaning of their reality, and it helped the Researcher acquire an understanding of those experiences being studied (Patton, 2002, 2008; Yin, 2003, 2009, 2011).

Research Design

This study comprised case studies of four schools: two effective and two less-effective junior high schools in Saboba. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, direct observations, field notes and document analysis. A

cross-case analysis was conducted to identify key factors enhancing or limiting schools' effectiveness and students' academic achievement in the junior high schools.

The use of multiple data collection techniques, and a variety of data sources and types (Figure 3.1) facilitated cross-checking and triangulation of data within a case (Creswell, 2006; Patton, 2002) which ensured the credibility of data and the confirmability of research findings (Burns, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Further, a cross-case analysis which compared and contrasted findings from each case helped identify and confirm the themes arising from the data.

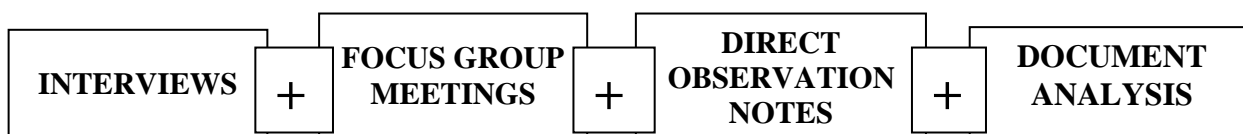


Figure 3.1. Variety of data collection techniques and sources

An interpretive approach was used to analyse the data and generate meaning and conclusions. These insights, themes and conclusions were instrumental in arriving at recommendations and suggestions for improving students' academic achievement in rural, junior high schools, in Ghana.

Participants

In any case study research, the selection of an appropriate case is crucial. Specific boundaries are provided for the case study by determining who is to be studied and in what settings (Berg, 2001; Flick, 2009; Stake, 2000). The Saboba locality is most affected by the decline in the achievement of JHS students during the last few years (GES: Saboba-Chereponi, 2005). Of the few high performing junior high schools in the Saboba district and locality, two were selected for this study. Similarly, there were many less-effective rural JHSs in the Saboba locality, yet only two were included in the study. These two are among those which acknowledge the low academic performance of their students, and although not initiating any observable effective change to remedy the situation were open to improvement.

Participants were purposively selected in order to ensure the quality of data collected (Berg, 2001; Creswell, 1998, 2006). In total, four JHS principals and four district education officers were interviewed, while four to six JHS teachers, six current JHS students, six immediate JHS graduates and four to six actively involved parents from each of the four schools participated in focus group meetings during the study. In addition, four community opinion leaders (the District Chief Executive or the mayor, a

representative of the Traditional Chief, religious education unit officers) from the Saboba locality also participated in focus group meetings. Based on their knowledge and experiences, these participants, 100 in total, were the most appropriate choice for research credibility, in that they would have personal experience of the principal's leadership and for practical efficiency. See *Figure 3.2* for the framework for research data sources, data collection techniques.

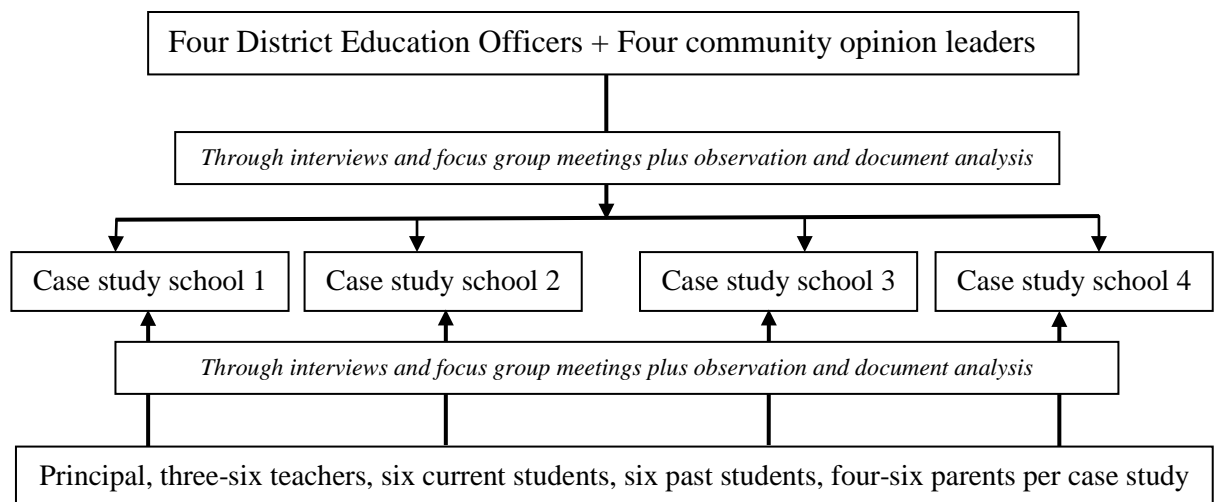


Figure 3.2. Data sources and data collection techniques

Rationale for Selection of Participants

The Researcher has worked for eight years in the Saboba locality and district as a teacher and a member of the Saboba District basic education inspection team and this experience has helped inform the selection of participants. The insider knowledge of teachers and the experience of students and graduates from these target schools helped check, corroborate and enrich the data obtained from the principals. Generally, principals in Saboba interact both formally and informally with the district education officers, whose offices are located in the town. The experience and opinion of the education officers brings a significant perspective of school authorities to the study. Also, the contribution of parents (literate and illiterate) and that of community opinion leaders gives the research insights from the local community in respect of the principals of their rural schools.

All the sample, principals, teachers, students, education officers, parents and community leaders, were purposely selected based on their positions of service and responsibility as well as on their level of involvement or influence on the academic achievement of students at the case study schools.

Data Sources and Collection Techniques

Interview and focus group questions were initially critiqued and revised several times by two education professors, and then they were pilot tested in Joondalup, Western Australia and in Tamale, Ghana. (See Appendix B for focus group schedules and questions). At Joondalup, a primary school Principal, a primary school teacher and three education postgraduate students, two of whom had been principals were involved. While all of them participated in a focus group discussion, some were also interviewed. In Tamale, five students, four teachers and three parents participated in separate focus group meetings. One principal was also interviewed. These pilot tests helped address ambiguities, bias and blind spots in the original drafts of the interview and focus group questions. Also, a few focus group questions and semi-structured interview questions were rephrased, and this enhanced the reliability of the instruments (Yin, 2003, 2009). Some challenges also emerged during the pilot testing in Tamale, Ghana. One was the difficulty in obtaining a commonly acceptable translation of focus group questions into the local language. As a result, at the beginning of the data collection period time was devoted to obtaining an appropriate, locally approved translation of all focus group questions for illiterate parents and also, for finding good translators who would participate in the meetings.

This research employed semi-structured individual interviews, focus group meetings, observation and journaling, and analysis of written and verbal school vision statements, classroom artefacts and BECE results. Data collection techniques included the recording of observations while visiting schools and classrooms by means of research journal entries and photographs of the school environment. Interviews and focus group meetings were audio recorded digitally and transcribed for analysis. In addition, students' records and other relevant educational, statistical data were assembled and analysed.

Interviews are useful tools to assist the Researcher to understand the meaning principals, teachers, students, parents and education officials make of their experience of school leadership (Patton, 2002). In-depth interviews gave the participants the opportunity to tell their stories in a way that conveyed meaning of their own experiences. In-depth interviews helped elicit the views, events, experiences and observations of these participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). See Appendix B for sample semi-structured interview questions.

Focus groups helped to produce qualitative data that provided an insight into attitudes, perceptions and opinions of the participants (Krueger, 1994; Patton, 2002, 2008). Use of open-ended questions generated information and opinions on the experiences of teachers, students, parents and community leaders in respect of students' achievement in the Saboba locality. Focus group meetings were a useful forum to hear these participants speak about their own experience among their peers. Focus groups also enhanced data quality especially data obtained through interviews, as participants debated their informed responses and as a result, limited their personal opinions. Appendix C shows sample semi-structured focus group questions.

Direct observation and journaling enabled the Researcher to watch carefully the workings of each case study school and permitted recording or journaling of what was happening. It helped simultaneously to examine the meaning of events and activities and to redirect observation, when necessary, to refine or substantiate those meanings (Huberman & Miles, 2002; Stake, 1995, 2000). It enabled the Researcher to observe school events and activities such as students' engagement in class and on campus, the rapport between the principal and his staff, staff meetings, the principal's interaction with teachers, teachers' class control and styles of teaching and parents' engagement with school. An observation schedule guided and structured observations so that they were consistent across the four schools. See Appendix D for a sample observation schedule.

Document Analysis permits the Researcher to have access to records of activities and data that the Researcher normally could not observe directly. For example, a "... School Improvement Plan or an achievement test report can be key repositories" (Stake, 1995, p. 68) and in this case, the students' average scores in the West African, Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) served as measures for evaluating the academic standards of each of the four schools in this study. Sometimes, according to Stake (1995, 2000) these documents can complement the work of the Researcher and other data sources. The documents helped to identify the link between what some principals actually do and what they planned to do as reported in their vision statements and strategic plans.

Data Collection Procedure

First, the research interviews and focus group questions were initially pilot tested in Joondalup, Australia, reviewed and pilot tested once again in two basic schools of low socio-economic communities in Tamale, Ghana. Second, the Researcher sought

and obtained approval from the Northern Regional Director of Education and the Saboba District Director of Education in order to carry out research in the Saboba district. Third, the BECE results of all the JHSs in the district for the past five years were collected and analysed with assistance from the District Education Directorate. This was instrumental in the selection of the two effective, and two less-effective schools for the research which were given the pseudonyms, Aarie, Baarie, Caarie and Daarie. Fourth, all the participants, including local education officers, were approached to seek their informed consent to participate in the study. Fifth, separate interviews with the four District Education officers took place.

Sixth, research in the first high-performing junior high school Aarie, commenced with an interview with its principal. The interview began with the collection of information about the school and the Principal, his verbal or written vision or mission statements, strategic plans and projects of the school. Seventh, focus group meetings with teachers, students, immediate graduates and parents of Aarie were carried out in that sequence. The sequence of interviewing the Principal first before organising focus group meetings was accordingly repeated in each of the other three JHSs. The research activity in the two effective schools Aarie and Baarie preceded that of less-effective Caarie and Daarie.

Eighth, a focus group meeting with community and opinion leaders from the Saboba locality took place. Finally, the Principal of each of the four JHSs and the District Director of Education were again separately interviewed at the end of the research. This was to give them feedback on the study and also to seek their comment on the entire research process in the school and in the district. This feedback with the Director of Education, for example, influenced his renewed efforts towards resolving a peculiar leadership problem in one of the target schools. It was also an opportunity for the principals and the Education officers to highlight separately, any additional issues they wanted to. In all, 18 different focus group meetings, involving a total of 92 participants and semi-structured interviews with eight individuals, took place between November 2009 and April 2010, thus bringing the total number of participants to 100. The knowledge gained in the course of the research, in respect of practices that improve students' learning and achievement, in the two rural effective schools, Aarie and Baarie, was shared with the two less-effective schools, Caarie and Daarie.

Methods of Data Analysis

Journal records from observations and all digital audio recordings of focus group meetings and interviews were transcribed and analysed concurrently. Data gathered from document analysis were used to scrutinise the themes that emerged from data gathered through interviews, focus group meetings and observation. Patton (2002, 2008) explained the importance of making sense of data by reducing the data into manageable, intelligent pieces of information that communicate the essence of the data. In an earlier work, Patton (1990) remarked: “the analysis of the empirical data aims to make sense of the massive amounts of data, reduce the volume of information, identify significant patterns, and construct a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (p. 377). This is a key element of the interpretive research paradigm.

Through the use of thematic analysis to identify patterns in seemingly random information and of content analysis to facilitate “... data reduction and sense making” (Patton, 2002, p. 453) the Researcher was able to construct each case. This process of constructing the case study comprised three key stages. First, the raw case data (all information gathered about the principals and the schools) were assembled, second, a case record was constructed (condensation of raw case data organised, classified, and edited into manageable data files) and third, the writing of the case study narrative (readable, descriptive story about a principal and a school) was written. The criteria of internal homogeneity (how data in a given category hold together or dovetail in a meaningful way) and external heterogeneity (how differences among categories are unambiguous and clear) were employed. The coding and classifying of convergence and divergence in analysing data facilitated the use of inductive and deductive analysis that enabled the emergence of themes and categories. In order to discover patterns and themes, inductive analysis of the case narratives was carried out. To find answers to the research question, a deductive analysis of these emergent themes and patterns from case data was done in relation to the research question and conceptual framework. The meanings that emerged (the findings) informed the development of research conclusions.

In a summary, it should be recalled that the Researcher passed through the following stages in the treatment of the data. After transcribing the audio-recorded data and documenting data records, reading and re-reading of all transcripts and documents was carried out. This helped to identify salient aspects of data and to describe emerging themes and select quotations to illustrate themes. The key findings, which represented

the core emergent idea from a series of narrations of a case, informed the cross-case analysis from which assertions were generated. The assertions provided the study's conclusions.

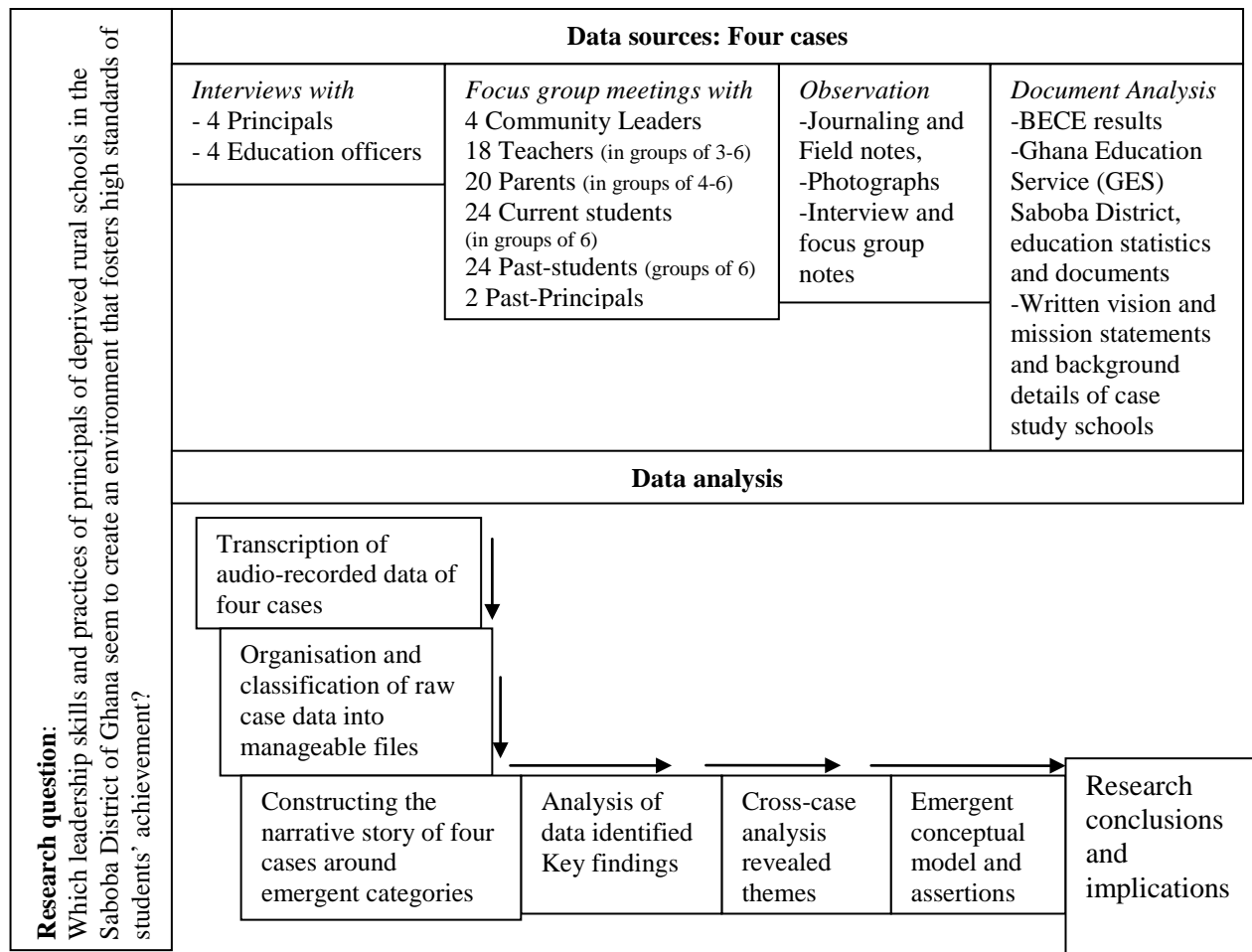


Figure 3.3. Data sources and analyses

Ethical Considerations

In conclusion, it should be noted that an application to undertake this research, which involved human subjects, was submitted and approved in 2009 by the Edith Cowan University's Human Research Ethics Committee. Accordingly, informed consent of all participants was obtained prior to the commencement of the study. The Researcher met participants in the selected schools and education offices to discuss the purpose of the research, the expected time commitments and the procedure for the research activities. All participants were given a guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity in reporting the information provided for the study. Further, they were assured that pseudonyms would be used in all documents and transcripts, and every participant was free to opt out at any stage of the research. The data will be stored securely for at least five years.

CHAPTER FOUR: CASE ONE - AARIE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

This research investigates the strategies employed by principals to promote positive learning environments, better teaching and learning and improved student achievement in rural, disadvantaged Junior High Schools (JHSs) in Saboba. This chapter presents the first of four case studies carried out in Saboba, Ghana from November 2009 to April 2010.

In this chapter, the first case study of Aarie Junior High school is presented. The introduction which situates the context and setting of the School is followed by the narrative that develops the themes which characterise the multiple strategies employed by the Principal, who is referred to henceforth as Arrack, to improve and sustain student achievement and better academic results. The narrative, supported by relevant quotes or paraphrasing of participants' conversations, leads to clearly identified themes, in which key findings have been identified and summarised in Appendices.

The conclusion to the chapter shows how Arrack, supported by teachers, students, parents and the local community succeeded in achieving his vision and mission for the school, which was making Aarie the top school in the Saboba District through educating students to become confident and ready to sit the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE).

Introduction to Aarie Junior High School

School settings

Aarie was founded by a church in collaboration with the local government of Saboba in the late 1990s (*Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009*). It is regarded in the town and in the District as the best performing Junior High School in the District based on BECE results (GES: Saboba-District, 2008).

As a Junior High School, Aarie admits students who have completed Primary Six, and have passed an entrance examination that qualifies them to enter Aarie for their three-year middle school education. Like all JHSs in Ghana, students who complete and successfully pass the BECE with good scores gain direct admission into any Senior High School (SHS), or any second cycle Technical and Vocational institution in the country (GES: Saboba-Chereponi, 2005; Ministry of Education Science and Sports,

2007c). The major preoccupation of Aarie, like all good schools in Ghana, is to effectively prepare their final year students to confidently pass the BECE with high scores (Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009). Aarie, at the time of the research, enrolled 372 students which included 181 girls and 191 boys. At the time of the research, the 104 JHS Year Three students were feverishly preparing and revising for the BECE that was to take place in April 2010 (Field Notes, 26-28/11/2009).

The School had two separate school buildings, each comprising three classrooms and two extra rooms. These two additional rooms were built with only a single entry, in the form of a chamber and a hall. In one of the buildings, the outer room served as an office of the Principal and the inner room was used as a storage facility for books and other school materials. In the other classroom building the additional two rooms were used as a make-shift staff common room and a mini-library with no furniture provided.

Aarie not only had separate toilet and urinal facilities for female and male students and staff but also maintained and kept them clean throughout school hours. It also had neatly covered containers used for storing water for drinking by staff and students (Field Notes, 28/11/2009; 10/12/2009; 08/02/2010; 23/02/2010). Aarie thus had an average school infrastructure.

Pebbles and lateritic stones were used to demarcate the alleys and paths on the School premises. Some paths were covered with riverside pebbles manually collected by students with the aid of buckets. Students neatly arranged these stones to keep them in straight lines every morning as part of cleaning the School compound. Thus, the School compound and premises were regularly swept clean and well-kept by both female and male students every morning before lessons began (Field Notes, 10/12/2009; 8/02/2010).



Figure 4.1. Rural JHS girls and boys busy sweeping their school premises

According to the community leaders interviewed (Community leaders FG Meeting, 12/12/2009), Aarie had been the top performing Junior High School in the Saboba locality for many years (GES: Saboba-Chereponi, 2008). A brief analysis of the BECE results of Aarie students from 2005 to 2009 showed that the overall District performance at the 2009 BECE was poor, with only 35% of 896 candidates passed and eligible for admission into second cycle schools. Aarie's 48% pass rate in 2009, which was their worst in the five-year period under consideration (2005 to 2009) was still higher than the District average pass of 35% (GES: Saboba, 2010). An analysis of the overall BECE results of all JHSs in the District during this five-year period shows that no other JHS in the District had attained the level of Aarie in spite of the lower 2009 results (Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009). During the years 2005 to 2008, Aarie students registered a pass rate as high as 90% in 2006 and 79% in 2008.

Aarie graduates were the best achievers in the District in terms of the percentage of candidates who passed the BECE with required aggregate scores that qualified them for further education (GES: Saboba, 2010). The story of Aarie begins with an account of the Principal's personal professional attributes and his vision and mission for the School.

Arrack's Personal Attributes, Vision and Mission

Aarie Junior High School was led by a young and energetic principal, who at the time of the study (December, 2009) had more than ten years of teaching experience. He had been the Principal of Aarie for the past six years. Prior to his appointment to Aarie,

Arrack headed a nearby rural primary school for some years. (*Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009; Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009*). He graduated in late 1990s with a Teaching Certificate 'A' from a public Training College in Ghana. This teacher training institution was situated in a rural town, whose demography, culture, climate, and socio-economic activities were similar to those of Saboba. While heading Aarie, he completed part-time studies to obtain both a Diploma of Basic Education in 2005, and a Bachelor of Education in Basic Education in 2007. He was proud to be the longest serving principal since Aarie was founded (*Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009*).

Principal's Personal Attributes

Arrack had endeared himself to both his students and teachers as a hard working, disciplined and duty conscious leader. He led by example and put in a lot of effort to create an appropriate learning environment that continuously improved the academic performance of his school irrespective of the challenges. Many teachers, students, parents and community leaders acknowledged that he was an effective leader because of his positive personality and conduct. His friendliness, love for school, warm human interpersonal skills and accessibility to students, teachers and parents was applauded by all. One of his teachers during a focus group discussion expressed this clearly:

I'm an old boy in this school, and now as a teacher. I have seen a lot of change. When I was here as a student you only occasionally see staff seated together with the head and discussing issues. This time you see the staff and the head always together and talking. You cannot actually make the difference between the teachers and the headmaster. (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*)

Some former teachers of Aarie, who were on study-leave, attributed their principal's success in gaining their trust and cooperation to his good human relations, notably his openness and transparency.

He has good relationships with every one, and we all respect him. Well, we co-operate with him because he respects us. He gives instructions but he listens to us, to what we have to say. So, we all strive to also listen to him, we understand his ways of doing things, and he explains things and doesn't hide things from us, even regarding school money, so we always co-operate with him to keep the standard. (*Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009*)

Arrack acknowledged this when he said: "It is about how you relate with the people you are working with, because as a human managing institution you have to be first of all an open-minded person, who accepts views from all quarters" (*Aa Principal*

Interview, 21/12/2009). Arrack was equally appreciated for his personal humility, simplicity, openness to correction and advice from staff and students, his positive arbitration and negotiation skills, enthusiasm and drive in his leading, resourcing and supervisory role of the School. One final year student expressed this very succinctly.

He also settles misunderstandings between our teachers and sometimes between our parents and some teachers, so the parents like him. Our headmaster is very responsible and shows concern for all of us, he meets us, and he speaks with us freely and advises us to study hard and pass our exams. Sometimes he asks our opinions. (Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009)

The Principal himself reiterated this when he said:

Any time I see that there's going to be a problem I quickly find a way of solving it. Sometimes I have to behave as if I'm the cause, this makes the two parties to feel that I have caused it and I will take the blame and they are free. (Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009)

These positive personal attributes, drive and exemplary conduct are key characteristics of the personality of Arrack.

Key finding 4.1

Arrack's personal and professional attributes which comprised friendliness, love for school, warm human relational skills and accessibility to students, teachers and parents, resourceful supervisory leadership, exemplary conduct and arbitration skills were well attested by teachers, students, parents and by himself.

Principal's vision and mission for the school

Listening to the teachers and the students as well as to the community leaders, the Researcher observed that the Principal had a specific vision and mission for the School. Many applauded his enthusiasm and his focus on helping the students through every means possible to be well prepared and confident to write the final BECE. According to one of the community leaders:

The headmaster ensures that the academic performance of the students is always a target; it's always a point that is discussed at all meetings with the teachers. So, for that matter the teachers are bound, you know, to put up their best. (Community Leaders FG Meeting, 19/12/2009)

The Principal alluded to the fact that good dialogue with a clear purpose and goal is crucial for teachers' effective teaching and students' learning. He declared:

So, for an effective teaching and learning to take place, you also have to give direction to your teachers, who are well informed about the goal of the School, about how the School is moving, that is what makes the School to be up and doing. (Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009)

Similar to the observation made by the Principal, other community leaders, who spoke about Aarie and other schools, identified hard working and effective principals as those who worked towards the academic excellence of their schools by means of good initiatives, direction and example. One of them said:

We do visit our schools to make sure that the right thing is done, and the right thing in our perspective is that we need academic excellence and this is what the hard working heads always try through their actions to preach and to instil in their teachers and students. (Community Leaders FG Meeting, 19/12/2009)

According to his teachers, Arrack worked hard to achieve academic excellence and to sustain it. This was his vision for the School as was reiterated by a teacher who said that: “In fact, he guides us as well as the students to behave well, to study hard and to focus on achieving greater success; our goal” (Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009). Another teacher explains how the headmaster planned strategies that would enhance the success of students.

Just for instance, yesterday we have to be at a staff meeting called by the head to restructure how we are going to put things in order, most especially for our candidates who are just preparing for the April 2010 BECE exams, so that they will perform and make us proud. That is just what he does. (Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010)

In order to sustain the School’s vision of top academic performance, and its mission of preparing students to be BECE confident and ready, the Principal encouraged parents to free their children who were in their final year from house chores so that they could spend more time studying. He argued that this was the only way he could achieve both the vision and the specific mission of the School. A final year student attested to this when she said that the Principal, during PTA meetings asked their parents “to minimise the work in the house” for them so that they could have more time to study at home in order to pass their BECE with good results. (Aa Current Students FG Meeting. 21/12/2009).

The Principal stated that in the face of the challenges of scarce funding and inadequate resources, the collaboration with local Education Officers and partnership with parents was essential for achieving the mission of the School. According to him,

that was the crucial step for helping all students to pass their examinations in order to become useful persons in future. He affirmed this in an interview:

I tell the parents, the argument is that you do not only want a school because you want your child to be wearing a school uniform, but you want him to learn and pass well and become somebody tomorrow, so they should cooperate with us to achieve that. (Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009)

Furthermore, some former students of Aarie explained that the Principal ensured that their teachers were always present in the School to teach and coach them so that they performed well in their examinations (Aa Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009). He rebuked those who absented themselves without formal permission. It should be noted that in Aarie as in other rural schools in Ghana, teachers sometimes, absented themselves from school with or without permission in order to pursue other economic activities that might earn extra income to supplement their inadequate wages.

Planning with his teachers and supervision had become important tasks that the Principal regularly performed as a means of achieving his vision for the school. These tasks helped the teachers evaluate teaching and learning strategies in order to improve the performance of students. The Principal explained:

Yes, I have plans for this year. In the last year or so, our performance somehow, was not very, very good. So this year we are finally working hard to improve. I have to meet the whole staff to talk to them, and ask for their plans for helping the children to pass this year with higher grades despite the challenges. How this should be done, what each one has to do, what they should do is what we shall discuss in my next staff meeting. (Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009)

The Principal had declared what were his vision, and also, his specific mission for the School and had led his key collaborators, namely; teachers, students, parents and community leaders to understand and support that vision and mission.

Key finding 4.2

Arrack had a distinct vision and mission for the School and prevailed upon his teachers and students to understand these and to support and work towards achieving the vision through the implementation of the mission. The vision was the commitment to maintaining the School as a top academic achieving school and the mission, preparing Aarie students to be BECE examination confident and ready.

Principal's Instructional Leadership

Arrack's instructional leadership was demonstrated through his supervision and coordination of teachers' work, his personal coaching of some teachers, as well as by his development and sustenance of a series of teaching and learning enhancing strategies.

Principal's supervision and coaching

In Ghana and rural Saboba specifically, assuring the punctuality and presence of both teachers and principals in school on a daily basis can be very challenging. Teachers sometimes sacrificed their presence at school by going elsewhere to do other jobs such as gardening and petty trading to supplement their meagre salaries. There was not a single day when the Researcher visited Aarie, in the course of the research data collection, when the Principal was absent. The School was visited in the mornings and also in the afternoons. While some of my visits were planned, others were unannounced. Yet, each time the Researcher entered the School he found the Principal either in a classroom talking to students or having a conversation with the teacher. Sometimes, the Principal was found in his office, reading through lesson notes of teachers, which he corrected with annotations written in red or green. Both current and former teachers of the School attested to this active involvement in lesson preparation as captured in the following statement by a teacher:

He normally helps us in lesson preparation, especially in selecting some key books that are useful in understanding the topic. He always gives assistance even in the classroom and teaches when a teacher is absent and whenever he's capable of doing so (*Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009; Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*).

In Aarie, the preparation of lesson notes by teachers was a standard practice. The Principal ensured that all teachers complied. He individually collected and corrected each teacher's schemes of work and lesson notes at specified times. Sometimes he suggested some books and resources that he believed would enhance the teacher's understanding of a topic and improve the lesson notes. All the teachers who participated in the focus group discussions were unanimous in their appreciation of this instructional help offered by the Principal, as demonstrated by their positive comments on how his input facilitated their teaching. Teachers took seriously the preparation of their lesson notes, which some viewed as an occasion to update their knowledge in the topics they were teaching. At the beginning of each term every teacher received two sizeable note

books that were to be used for writing lesson notes. A former teacher noted that the Principal sometimes discreetly admonished teachers who failed to submit their lesson notes on time or make the corrections he requested in earlier ones (*Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009; Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*).

Another important aspect of Arrack's instructional leadership was his regular academic meetings with teachers. Twice, he was observed in the staff common room discussing issues concerning students' assignments and tests with his teachers (*Field Notes, 15/12/2009; 17/12/2009*). According to those interviewed, Arrack usually conducted periodic academic meetings with Heads of Departments of English, Mathematics, Science, Social and Religious Studies to discuss and resolve academic issues (*Community Leaders FG Meeting, 19/12/2009; Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*).

Academic staff meetings had become an important school routine according to the teachers. At the beginning of every school term, the Principal encouraged teachers to specifically meet and discuss students' academic performance during the previous term. At these meetings the concerns of the Principal and teachers in respect of teaching and learning, and ways of resolving them were discussed (*Circuit Supervisor Interview, 27/01/2010; Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009; Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*). As explained by one of his teachers at a focus group meeting:

Since we re-opened he has met the departmental heads with respect to the tests and results of last term. He used to call a general staff meeting for us to all sit down and plan the term. We try to review what we have done previously, and then the subsequent attempts as well as what we could do to supersede what we have done previously. Just for instance, yesterday we have to be here at a staff meeting to restructure how we are going to put things in order, especially for our candidates who are just preparing for the April 2010 BECE exams. (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*)

A key aspect of Arrack's instructional support was the fact that he observed classroom teaching and sometimes helped to teach a class when a teacher was absent. He randomly checked students' assignments and work books when he made his rounds in the classrooms. "When he notices that a teacher is absent or late for a lesson, he would enter that classroom and discuss with the students what they have been taught the previous day", a student declared (*Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009*). Some teachers, according to the students, would voluntarily invite the Principal to their class to help explain and teach a particular concept or a topic for which he has expertise. (*Aa*

Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009; *Aa* Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009).

The Principal, in the course of an interview confirmed this:

I visit the teachers in their classrooms, to encourage them and also to see how they are doing their work with the students. Sometimes, some of my teachers seek help in their teaching by coming to me or going to their colleagues. (*Aa* Principal Interview, 21/12/2010)

Thus, the Principal encouraged the teachers to exchange among themselves the challenges they face with their lessons. Teachers did this quite naturally during their usual social interactions in the staff room and classrooms. This has been attested by a number of teachers who stated that they volunteered to help resolve some of the concerns of their colleagues regarding the teaching of a particular lesson topic or student disciplinary issues (Field Notes, 12/02/2010; *Aa* Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010).

Another useful practice that helped the teachers to enrich their content knowledge and vary their teaching methods to suit their students and the subject content was the participation of teachers in on-campus and off-campus professional development workshops and seminars. These were organised by the Ghana Education Service, NGOs, and the School. Although they were not conducted on a regular basis, these workshops were appreciated by teachers for the wealth of knowledge they provided, and the refreshments that accompanied them (Field Notes, 24/02/2010; *Aa* Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010; Ex-District Director Interview, 09/01/2010; *Aa* Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009).

It is clear from the foregoing that the Principal gives regular instructional guidance to his teachers through academic staff meetings, correction of teachers' lesson notes and instructional advice. The provision of appropriate reference books and resources to teachers, random check of students' assignments, conducting of professional development programs on syllabus and teaching, and ensuring that teachers are not regularly absent from school are other means of enforcing his instructional leadership style.

Key finding 4.3

The Principal's instructional leadership was demonstrated through his supervision of teachers' work. Elements worthy of note in Arrack's actions were: the correction of lesson notes, direct coaching of some teachers and the random check of students' work as well as the conduct of academic and staff meetings to evaluate students' learning.

Teaching and learning enhancing strategies

Arrack proved his instructional leadership through salient teaching and learning enhancing strategies. These were strategies employed by the School in preparing all students to be confident and ready when they sit the BECE. These strategies included extra-tutorials, group studies, regular class tests, debates and quizzes, expert tutors and teachers, multiple practice examinations and teacher improvisation for text books, Science and ICT equipment.

Extra-tutorials.

Started initially with the accord of parents but without their financial support, extra-tutorials took place regularly at 3:00 pm to 4:00 pm, and sometimes at 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm during normal school days. Extra-tutorials became a standard practice in Aarie. During the weekends and school holidays they were conducted from 6:00 am to 9:00 am (*Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009; Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010; Aa Principal Interview 21/12/2009*). These tutorials supplemented lessons taught during normal school hours and enabled teachers as well as students to cover all that must be learnt according to the approved subject syllabuses (*Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009; Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009*). Above all, these extra-tutorials were geared towards adequate drilling and preparation of students for the BECE. According to Arrack and his predecessors (*Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009; Aa Ex-Principals Interview, 06/02/2010*), those extra-tutorials just like other learning enhancing programs were initiated when the results of the School were not the best and the Principal and teachers wanted to change the situation for the better.

In the beginning, teachers who participated in the extra-tutorials received no extra remuneration or incentive. They freely participated and taught the students. However, later on all the teachers who took part in the extra-tutorials were rewarded with school farm produce and at other times were offered some small cash remuneration from the School's self-generated welfare fund, principally developed from sale of school farm produce, teachers' contributions and students' handiwork and craft (*Aa*

Principal Interview, 21/12/2009; *Aa* Ex-Principals Interview, 06/02/2010; *Aa* Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010; *Aa* Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009). This was the situation until the time parents, through the PTA, freely opted to levy themselves to support extra-tutorials and other academic activities (*Aa* Parents FG Meeting, 10/02/2010).

Current and immediate past students interviewed were unanimous about the benefits of extra-tutorials in their individual preparations towards the BECE (*Aa* Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009; *Aa* Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009). According to them, during extra-tutorials their teachers explained certain concepts in more detail. They demonstrated how to solve some BECE questions and gave them the opportunity to ask more questions than they would during normal school lessons. A student explained: “If you don’t know Mathematics, it is difficult to learn it on your own. Only the teachers can help you to make it hence the importance of spending more time with the teacher through extra classes” (*Aa* Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009). A number of the teachers explained that they enjoyed teaching during extra-tutorials most especially because of the disposition of the students. A teacher explained this in these words:

Before you get there, they have arrived, they are already sitting waiting for you, and whatever your state, when you look at them, it will change you, it will encourage you, you have the zeal to teach, to deliver, you will be happy to teach and teach well. That’s because if they didn’t need our help they would not have come. So that’s what we normally teach even after class hours. (*Aa* Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010)

The students regularly arrived on time and waited for the teachers to arrive and this was a motivation for the teachers to teach them well. All the students went home after the day’s lessons either on foot or on bicycle and returned to school campus by the same means for the evening extra-tutorials. For most teachers, these efforts by their students served as a motivation for them to further improve their teaching.

Group studies.

Another important learning enhancing strategy used by Arrack to boost children’s confidence in leaning was the use of study groups formed voluntarily by final year students themselves. These groups normally comprised of a maximum of six members who felt at ease with one another and were willing to study together as a group. The members would usually meet either in the evenings of weekdays or early mornings and evenings of weekends on the School campus, mainly on days when there were no formal extra-tutorials (*Aa* Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009).

Each member of the group was tasked ahead of the group's meeting to choose a particular topic with which he or she was most familiar. The student would then share his or her knowledge with other students of the study group when they met. Students often might choose a Mathematics problem, an English comprehension passage or grammar and punctuation, a Science concept, an English essay topic, a topic in social studies and so on to prepare and present in their study groups. Once all members had chosen their topics, the group settled on which day and time it would meet and how many among them would give a presentation on topics selected. Once that was settled, each member had to read all the notes taken in class on the topic and when necessary, sought help from a subject teacher or another student while preparing the presentation. Sometimes, these students met in the home of one of their group members. That home usually would have outside electric lights and a big table with stools and chairs for the students to use (*Aa Parents FG Meeting, 10/02/2010; Aa Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009*).

As expressed succinctly by a student, these study groups helped students to share what they knew about a particular topic or examination question. If a student presented an answer that was considered by other colleagues in the group as insufficient or incorrect, the missing links or additional content information were provided by others in the group (*Aa Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009*). In this way, a study group provided a vital learning forum for students who felt shy to ask questions during normal lessons with their teachers. Questions or issues that appeared to defy the knowledge and academic competence of all members were taken note of and presented either during or after the usual lessons at school to the respective subject teacher for his or her assistance.

Regular class tests.

Regular supervised class tests in Aarie were important for two reasons. First, they helped students and teachers to assess the level of learning that was taking place with regards to each student and secondly, they served as a means of checking and keeping track of students who regularly attended classes and had been participating in all class assignments and tests. These tests were written in the students' usual class assignment exercise books. A teacher, in the course of a discussion, remarked that supervised tests and class exercises were useful means of keeping track of a student's progress (*Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009*). A teacher might not have access to a student's notebooks to verify whether or not he or she had up to-date notes on topics taught, but he or she could regularly check a student's class exercise books to ascertain

how many tests and assignments he or she had completed (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010; Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009*).

Arrack usually and randomly checked such corrected supervised tests during his classroom rounds, especially at the times when the class or subject teacher was absent. Supervised class tests were conducted at least twice in the course of a term. The class or subject teacher determined which day and time the supervised class test would occur. Often, the questions set for these class tests were based on the subject content the teacher had previously taught. Teachers had the freedom to either inform the students about the impending supervised class test in advance or not. These tests were corrected on the spot by the teacher. After a thorough teacher-student discussion of all the test questions, correct answers were written on the chalkboard with detailed explanations on each question and its corresponding answer. Students who might have scored low marks in such class tests were encouraged during those discussions to ask questions for clarification and comprehension (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010; Aa Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009*).

Another salient contribution of supervised class tests to improving students' learning was the fact that students were encouraged to effectively study at all times as they did not know the exact time a supervised class test might take place. It should be remarked that in Ghana, the continuous assessment grading of students in Junior High Schools had become an integral part of the final scores awarded by the West African Examinations Council to candidates who sat the Basic Education Certificate Examinations. Generally, students whether in Aarie or elsewhere, would be conscious of the importance of participating in class assignments and tests, which were part of their continuous assessment and grading (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010; Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009*).

In Aarie, the uncertainties of sitting a supervised class test at a time when one might least expect it was a crucial inducement to students to be studious and ever prepared. This uncertainty about the time of writing another class test had become a distinct motivation for learning and regular school attendance, according to all the students interviewed. Regular school attendance and participation in supervised class tests were actions which boosted a student's grades in continuous assessment and consequently, in the final external examinations.

Debates and quizzes.

In Aarie, the conduct of debates on topics of popular current affairs, on merits and demerits of science and technology, on environmental protection, and on politics and democratic governance, abolition of corporal punishment in schools as well as on local social, cultural and economic issues had become an essential means of informing and training students in public speaking and in the correct use of the English language in presenting logical arguments and analysis. There was a committee of teachers who worked with the Principal to select topics for all debates in the School throughout the year. Those who selected these topics took into consideration the requirements of the English language syllabus (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*).

In order to use these debates as another strategy to encourage final year students to adequately prepare for the BECE, the Principal through the teachers ensured that the topic for a debate was announced at least two weeks in advance so that the students would have enough time to prepare and actively participate. Often, eight students, comprising two pairs who would speak 'for' the motion and another two pairs, who would speak 'against' the motion, participated in these debates. Thus, although only eight students were involved in the actual debate, all final year students were requested to use one school week, during their non-school contact hours to research on the chosen topic of debate. In general, all final year students were informed that any of them was eligible to be selected to participate in the planned debate. As a result, all were requested to adequately prepare themselves to participate. It was only in the course of the week when the debate was to take place that the eight students pre-selected by the staff were announced; and often, this announcement would be made only two days ahead of the debate (*Field Notes, 18/12/2009; Aa Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009*).

Teachers and students attested that this practice was useful not only in making all students research and study the topic of the debate, but most especially, because it served as an additional opportunity for students to master a number of potential English comprehension passages and topics of essays and compositions that might appear in the final end of school English language examinations.



Figure 4.2. A rural JHS student studying during school lunch break

Furthermore, some of the students interviewed stated that most students studied harder in order to be selected to participate in school debates. These debates had become a showcase for the bright students in the School. In fact, according to some of the students, their parents queried them if they were not selected to participate in any school debate throughout the School term. Participating in these debates had become a prestigious affair for some students (*Aa Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009*), nevertheless it had helped invigorate otherwise unmotivated students to study more seriously (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*).

Special prizes in the form of notebooks, pens, pencils, novels and text books were usually awarded to each of the eight students who took part in any school debate. Often, the winning pair of students received more prizes than the losing pair. These awards also served as another vital motivation to students to study and perform better in class tests and quizzes. These tests and quizzes were used as partial criterion for selecting eligible students who would participate in school debates (*Community leaders, FG Meeting, 19/12/2009; Aa Ex-Principals Interview, 06/02/2010*).

Quizzes were equally an integral learning strategy used in Aarie to prompt students to study on their own and to help them have a better grasp of the course content of their respective subjects. Quizzes were conducted on two levels. Firstly, they were conducted in the classrooms by the subject or class teacher for only those students in that particular class. Class quizzes were generally not announced in advance to the students. They were meant to be a class activity with an element of surprise.

Secondly, quizzes were conducted for all students in the School on their student grouping level or among students of a senior class and those of a junior class. Quizzes that had been organised for all students or for two competing classes were always announced at least one week prior to the quiz. This was to enable all students to study and revise the topics that would be covered during the quiz. Generally, the quizzes were discussed with students on the spot by the teacher or any designated officer who conducted them. This enabled the students to ask questions on the quiz and the teacher to explain further not only the questions of the quiz but equally the concepts and topics that were covered in the quiz. Class teachers, subject teachers and the Principal at various times, conducted these periodic quizzes.

Quizzes organised among competing students from different classes drew a lot of following and interest as each class wanted to demonstrate that it was the best. Both levels of quizzes had set in motion an intense rivalry among the students as each student endeavoured to score higher in order to receive the corresponding awards for top performance. Like the debates, prizes in the form of text books, notebooks and other stationery were awarded to students who performed highly in quizzes and these prizes were a motivation for students to study (Circuit Supervisor Interview, 27/01/2010; *Aa* Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010; *Aa* Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009).

Some students explained that the one-week preparation towards the quiz helped students, including the less serious students, to intensively learn again for a full week. Accordingly, the pre-quiz revision became an important moment for students to update and study their notes (*Aa* Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009; *Aa* Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009).

It should be noted that quizzes generally served three purposes. Firstly, they were used by subject and class teachers to ascertain the level of learning that was taking place in a particular class at a particular time. Secondly, they served as appropriate opportunities for teachers to sample possible BECE questions that teachers believed their students had not yet encountered in any other test or examination. Thirdly and

finally, quizzes served as occasions for revision of specific lessons taught in class (*Aa* Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010; *Aa* Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009; *Aa* Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009).

Expert tutors and teachers.

During the course of this research, all the teachers and students interviewed commented unanimously on the huge challenges that Aarie faced in recruitment and retention of qualified and capable full-time teachers, most especially in English, Mathematics, Science, ICT and French language. Aarie, in its bid to ease this challenge, engaged the services of expert tutors and teachers. These expert tutors were mainly professionals who worked in the Saboba locality as administrators, accountants, government statisticians, nutritionists, medical practitioners as well as full-time teachers in nearby sister schools. In some extreme cases expert tutors were recruited from among regular basic school teachers in neighbouring Togolese villages, located a few kilometres across the Ghana-Togo border.

There was a clear distinction between who was an Aarie expert teacher and who was an Aarie expert tutor. The expert teacher was a trained teacher, who might be a full-time or a part-time teacher in Aarie or in any other school and had distinguished himself or herself as an accomplished teacher in a specific subject or subject area but was not teaching the final examination class. Thus, in addition to his or her normal teaching load the expert teacher would accept to teach the BECE examination candidates in his or her specific subject area of expertise outside the regular class contact hours.

The expert tutor however was someone who was not trained as a teacher, yet had demonstrated through the record of his or her previous school achievements an exceptional ability or knowledge in a particular subject or subject area. Expert tutors and teachers, once identified by the Principal and his close associates, were approached and encouraged to volunteer to teach and help prepare Aarie students towards the BECE. Although some did decline any remuneration, the Principal would normally give a token incentive to most volunteering expert tutors and teachers.

Extra-tutorials were the main opportunities for expert teachers and tutors to teach both final year and other students. This explains why a good percentage of Aarie's extra-tutorials took place in the evenings, early mornings, and weekends and during school holidays. This arrangement enabled expert tutors and teachers to use their free time to assist the students. They assisted the students to understand and master concepts and other difficult subject topics that some of their own teachers in those areas might

not have mastered well enough or might have failed to adequately teach. These expert tutors and teachers were those who normally worked with the examination committee of Aarie, established by the Principal to set and correct the questions of the School's practice examinations.

Multiple practice examinations.

Even though it is quite an expensive school activity in a poorly funded and less resourced school like Aarie, practice examinations were held to test the level of preparedness and exam confidence of students. The practice examinations were modelled on past BECE questions and were set and corrected by a panel of teacher experts from and outside Aarie. These practice examinations were conducted at least twice preceding the actual writing of the BECE by JHS3 students. The Parent Teacher Association of Aarie played a crucial role in the organisation of practice examinations. Parents willingly and regularly levied themselves to support Aarie to pay for the cost of organising these practice examinations. The levies paid by parents enabled the School to pay for printing of the examination question papers and to give a token cash gift to teachers who set the questions and corrected the exam papers.

According to the students, sometimes these practice examinations were conducted more than three times, provided the parents were willing to pay the appropriate levies and teachers and students demonstrated the need for them. Students seemed to appreciate the benefits of multiple practice examinations as they encouraged their parents to pay the appropriate levies. Furthermore, some students believed that their teachers conscientiously explained to them all the questions they failed to correctly answer during the practice examinations. Since students normally burnt the midnight oil in order to study and prepare for these practice examinations, they had become another useful strategy not only for improving learning in Aarie but for training final-examination confident and ready students.

From the foregoing one may conclude that the employment of specific learning enhancing strategies such as the organisation of multiple practice examinations, extra-tutorials, student group studies, regular supervised class tests, debates and quizzes as well as the use of expert tutors and teachers served Aarie in improving the level of scholarship of students and academic preparedness of final year students.

Teacher improvisation in teaching Science and ICT.

The absence of a Science laboratory on the School premises and inadequacy of Science equipment and consumables made teaching of Science a real challenge in Aarie. In order to make up for this serious inadequacy in teaching and learning, Arrack

and his teachers devised a number of locally manufactured models which were used as teaching aids in Science. The teaching of Biology and Agricultural Science was enhanced with the cultivation of selected plants and trees on school premises and in the nearby school farm. Students, during Biology and Agricultural Science lessons, would go out with their teachers to study some of the plants on their premises. Sometimes, branches, leaves and suckers were cut and sent to the classroom for further examination (Field Notes, 20/01/2010).

Teachers who were highly experienced in drawing would also draw, on cardboards and other posters, whole dissections of animals or plants as teaching aids in Science classes. Sometimes, the entire class with their teachers would travel to a neighbouring Senior High School in order to use that School's Science laboratory to conduct science lessons and experiments. However, those visits to the laboratory were infrequent as they were tiresome. The five-kilometre journey to the Science laboratory was done either by walking or by riding bicycles (Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010).

With regard to the teaching of lessons in Information Communication Technology (ICT) the Principal brought to the School his own personal desktop computer which was used once in a while by the teachers in ICT lessons. It was not unusual to spot about 10 to 15 students massing around one computer with their teacher explaining and demonstrating how to use Microsoft Word. Generally, the teaching of ICT was mainly based on use of models and sketches and drawings in ICT text books. For example, students could narrate quite convincingly how to open an email account, how to copy and save a message, yet many had never opened or used an email account (Aa Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009). Sometimes, discarded computer peripherals like old keyboards were also used as models in teaching ICT.

In an environment of inadequate school resourcing, appropriate strategies for improving teaching and learning had been developed through the instructional leadership provided by Arrack.

Key finding 4.4

Extra-tutorials, student study groups, regular supervised class tests, debates and quizzes, instruction by expert tutors and teachers as well as multiple practice examinations and teacher improvisation in Science and ICT were employed as standard practices for improving teaching and learning and preparing students to be BECE confident and ready.

Principal's Collegial Leadership and Dialogue with Students

Arrack's leadership was collegial in many respects and characterised mainly by sharing responsibility with teachers. He established his collegial style of leadership through a participatory decision making process in the form of regular staff meetings to discuss disciplinary issues, and plan teaching and learning activities. It was equally demonstrated through consultations with implementation committees and Heads of Departments. These consultations which also involved a dialogue with students were meant to reinforce a rapport between the Principal and the students. His collegial leadership was also demonstrated through his classroom teaching and sharing of his personal resources with teachers as well as through his speedy, respectful arbitration of misunderstandings and conflicts.

Participatory decision making process

The Principal initiated and encouraged a participatory decision making process through regular staff meetings, consultation with implementation committees and heads of department and a dialogue with students.

Regular staff meetings.

Unlike the academic teaching-staff meetings, mentioned earlier, where only academic issues were discussed, the regular staff meetings catered for all issues, ranging from teachers' welfare, students' discipline, parents' support, teaching and learning and academic performance to sports, recreational activities and socio-cultural issues.

During one of his visits to Aarie (11/01/2010), the Researcher noticed that none of the teachers was present in their classrooms. The classrooms were quiet and the students were busy doing some class assignments. He knocked on the door of one of the classrooms and upon an invitation he entered. He greeted the class and inquired about the whereabouts of their teachers and was informed that they had all gone to attend a staff meeting with the Principal. He queried them further to know whether this was just an impromptu meeting or a standard practice. The students almost in unison responded: "Headmaster always meets our teachers when we reopen school" (Field Notes, 11/01/2009). Basic Schools had just reopened in Ghana after the 2009 Christmas break and the Principal was meeting his teachers for the first time. The Researcher thanked the students and dashed to the teachers' common room where the meeting was taking place. He was fortunate to have been spotted and invited into the staff common room by the Principal. A teacher was speaking about the team that would visit and express the School's condolences to a parent who had been bereaved. Another teacher spoke about

the reason why the English Spelling Committee was unable to organise more spelling quizzes during the past term and what the Committee was planning to do during the new term that was just commencing.

This account illustrates an aspect of the collegial effort of Arrack to involve teachers in decision making and in running the School. Arrack stated that: “I have to meet the whole staff to discuss with them their plans for helping the children to pass this year (2010 BECE exams) with higher grades” (*Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009*). He organised regular staff meetings, discussed and formed different implementation committees for academic and non-academic affairs. These committees comprised teachers, both trained and untrained, with the head of a department or an experienced teacher as the leader (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*).

Consulting implementation committees and heads of department.

In order to sustain a regular line of communication and feedback with his teachers, Arrack consulted on a regular basis not only the formal departmental heads of Mathematics, English and Social Studies, Science and ICT but also the conveners of other staff committees that he has established. These were the English Spelling Committee, which was responsible for organising quizzes in English spelling across all the classes; the Academic Committee, which managed time tabling, provided counsel on suitable teachers for various subjects, organised and supervised the setting and correction of all examinations across the School. The Examinations Committee was tasked with the logistical preparation of all important internal examinations, including the end of term examinations and practice examinations, while the Welfare Committee oversaw all welfare issues concerning teachers and socials. These committees would contact the School Prefect or other students for their input when that was deemed appropriate.

Principal’s dialogue with students.

The Principal informed the students of happenings in the School and of major events and activities through daily morning assemblies with students and teachers. Sometimes, through the students’ School Prefect and Girl’s Prefect, he obtained relevant feedback from students on academic, disciplinary or financial concerns of students. He encouraged students to meet and discuss certain issues among themselves and to report back to him. He also met students inside their classrooms from time to time to discuss directly academic as well as other concerns (*Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009; Aa Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009*).

Key finding 4.5

Arrack developed a collegial working relationship with his teachers and students through participatory decision making processes that focussed on regular teaching-staff meetings, consultation with implementation committees and heads of departments and regular dialogue with students.

Principal also teaches.

In addition to his managerial and supervisory leadership functions, Arrack also sometimes taught students, mainly when a teacher was absent and the lesson to be taught was one that he was familiar with. Thus, he had shared the experience of teacher frustration in managing students. This had made it easier for him to discuss these issues with teachers and students (*Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009*). Some teachers interviewed stated that their Principal was ready to visit their class and teach a particular subject topic or concept in his area of expertise whenever they invited him to do so. According to them this flexibility of the Principal to help teach the students whenever the need arose became motivation for some of them to accept additional tasks that the Principal sometimes requested of them. Moreover, in the absence of adequate teaching and learning materials, Arrack had put at the disposal of his teachers some of his personal teaching resources like text books, personal computer and past lesson notes on subjects that he had taught as a classroom teacher (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*). Thus, Arrack had cleverly combined, from time to time, classroom teaching with his normal leadership role.

Speedy respectful arbitration of conflicts

Arrack made personal efforts to establish good relations and mutual trust with all teachers so that his teachers would feel at ease to share their hurts and opinions in confidence whenever he had to help resolve conflicts. The teachers belonged to different ethnic groups with varying traditions and cultural affinities and these differences sometimes resulted in misinterpretations and misunderstandings among them (*Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009; Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2010*). In all circumstances of arbitration, Arrack ensured that there was fairness and mutual respect for the dignity and honour of one another. He expressed the desire to respect the dignity of both parties so that no one would leave arbitration feeling humiliated. Employing a local traditional method of conflict resolution and peace-building, the Principal would ask the offending party to pay for some drink and all who had participated in the arbitration, including the offender's victim, would be invited to share

that drink to renew the tainted friendly bonds. The drink served as the ‘means’ to the ‘end’ of halting all misunderstandings and disagreements. His skills in using local traditional norms and practices in resolving misunderstandings were developed through his friendship and partnership with the leaders and people of the local community.

Arrack devised personal means of rapidly identifying and resolving misunderstandings and conflicts among his staff as a way of establishing a friendly school atmosphere, an asset for effective teaching and learning. In line with this, he made enormous efforts to resolve any squabble among his teachers as soon as practical. Arrack would try to settle such misunderstandings within the same week that he might have learnt of them. He did this by observing his teachers as he interacted with them on a daily basis in the staff common room, during school assembly and across the campus. So, once he noticed that some teachers were no longer enthusiastically exchanging greetings and pleasantries, which were local traditional ways of salutations, he took the initiative to approach one of those teachers and sought candid confidential information from the teacher about what might be amiss. He did likewise with the other teacher. Even though the teachers were free not to disclose what was happening, often they openly explained the issues and proposed solutions. In this way, he intervened regularly to resolve misunderstandings before they developed into conflicts (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010; Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2010*).

Sometimes he made himself a scapegoat, giving the impression that the remote cause of the teachers’ misunderstandings might have been his mistake or inability to provide a particular piece of information at the appropriate time and so on. Other times, he made an appeal to the teachers’ love for the students and encouraged them to accept mutual arbitration and settlement of the quarrel. He commented that continuous bickering between two teachers would have adverse effects on their fellow teachers and students. In extreme cases he would make an appeal to the PTA chairperson to intervene and help reconcile their differences (*Aa Parents FG Meeting, 10/02/2010; Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009*).

Arrack’s readiness to teach when necessary and making available to teachers his personal teaching resources as well as his enthusiasm for speedy arbitration of conflicts among staff were other essential aspects of his collegial leadership.

Key finding 4.6

A significant aspect of Arrack's collegial leadership was his specific practical occasional classroom teaching, sharing of his personal teaching resources and his speedy respectful arbitration of conflicts.

Engagement and Partnerships with Local Community

The employment of local traditional methods of resolving misunderstandings was one of the means Arrack employed in connecting with the community, showing respect for and honouring the traditions of the local inhabitants of Saboba, the Kokombas. He conscientiously established or participated in a number of activities and events that concerned the local community and its inhabitants as a way of nurturing a dynamic relationship with parents and the community, and also promoting the involvement of the community in the affairs of the School and supporting the School. Some of these relationship initiatives consisted of maintaining an active Parent Teacher Association (PTA) through regular meetings in order to recruit resources for the School (*Aa Parents FG Meeting, 10/02/2010*). Other initiatives to enhance a good relationship with the community were the casual visits by the Principal to the local traditional chief and elders, to the local Government officers and District Education officers and by respecting local traditions and norms as well as participating in local social events. According to Arrack and as confirmed by community leaders and parents, these acts helped to establish a cordial relationship between the Principal, the School and the community, which in turn showed interest in the School's affairs and assisted in recruiting resources for the School (*Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009; Community leaders FG Meeting, 19/12/2009; Aa Parents FG Meeting, 10/02/2010*).

Promoting an active Parent Teacher Association.

By law, all schools in Ghana must have a working Parent Teacher Association; (PTA) however, how active this parent-teacher relationship would be depended on the initiative and leadership of the Principal. So, Arrack actively and purposefully pursued engagement opportunities with parents as a strategy for promoting a dynamic PTA. In Aarie, meetings with parents through the PTA had become a regular affair. These meetings, attended by a significant percentage of the total number of parents (approximately 70 to 80% of 273 parents) whose children were in the School, took place at least once every school term (*Field Notes, 18/12/2009; Aa Principal Interview,*

21/12/2009. The Principal and the executive members of the PTA met and set the dates for all ordinary PTA meetings within the School year.

The PTA membership at the time of the research was 273. It included four top executive members who performed the tasks of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer with the help of three other parent representatives of the executive board. The Chairperson and the Secretary maintained regular contacts with the School and all cheques for payment were co-signed by the Treasurer and the Chairperson. The Secretary, who was a teacher of Aarie, besides his job as scribe, also assisted the Vice Chairperson and other three parent representatives in public relations activities and in the promotion of the interests of the PTA in the local community. The three representatives normally contacted parents to invite and remind them to attend PTA meetings. In a rural farming community like Saboba personal visits to invite people to attend meetings was crucial for having successful meetings (*Aa Parents FG Meeting, 10/02/2010; Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009; Field Notes, 05/02/2010*).

The Principal and the PTA Chairperson jointly invited the parents to attend the meetings, either through verbal communication or through a formal invitation letter. Although the executive members were responsible for inviting parents to attend meetings, the students also served as a link for expediting any information from the School to their parents and vice versa (*Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009*). The Principal or any other PTA member, through the Chairperson could introduce items for discussions at all meetings. Decisions arrived at were adopted through a simple majority voting system where all present had one vote and neither the executive nor the ordinary members had vetoing powers.

During PTA meetings, parents freely expressed their opinions about developments in the school regarding the conduct of the teachers, the Principal and the students, while the Principal and the teachers did likewise. These meetings were seen by both teachers and parents as forums for effective dialogue between parents and the School. For example, when the results of the 2009 West African Basic Education Certificate Examinations were published, the Principal invited all the parents to the School and explained to them the overall performance of the School with detailed explanation of the School's achievement in each subject. During such meetings the academic achievement of the immediate past JHS3 students as well as obstacles confronting effective academic work and achievement were discussed and strategies that involved parents were determined and approved. Generally the dynamism of the

PTA has helped Aarie in recruiting local resources to support teaching and learning, providing some funding for teachers' welfare and support and gaining the cooperation of parents and community in disciplining students (*Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009; Circuit Supervisor Interview, 27/01/2010; Community leaders FG Meeting, 19/12/2009*).

Recruiting local resources to support teaching and learning

The members of Aarie PTA regularly deliberated on measures to sustain the top academic achievement of the School so that their wards would continue to gain access to further education and to become professionals in and outside their locality. Parents interviewed declared their pride in contributing to the progress of a top school in their village. Some even donated gifts in form of farm produce to the School to reward teachers whose subjects recorded higher scores at the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (*Aa Parents FG Meeting, 10/02/2010*).



Figure 4.3. The Researcher poses with parents as a meeting begins

Parents through the PTA levied themselves to fund teaching and learning activities such as the purchase of specific text books, past BECE examination question papers, the repairs of school furniture and the purchase of stationery for internal school examinations, including practice examinations (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*). Levies paid by parents were also used to give a token allowance to teachers who participated in the School's extra-tutorials.

Providing support for teachers' welfare

The Parent Teacher Association of Aarie has also helped in promoting the welfare of teachers and staff. At their meetings they not only discussed the welfare of teachers, and what to do to encourage the teachers to give out their best and stay longer in Aarie, but they also discussed how to liaise with the local Director of Education and encourage him to post qualified teachers to Aarie (*Aa Parents FG Meeting, 10/02/2010; Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*). The PTA established a special welfare fund which was meant to cater for the welfare needs of teachers in Aarie. This was different from the School's own self constituted teachers' welfare fund. Sometimes, teachers who were sick were visited by the Chairperson or another representative of the PTA, who would carry gifts from their members. These gifts were in the form of foodstuffs, live poultry and locally brewed beer called *pito* (*Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009*).

Parents and community cooperate to maintain student discipline

In addition to recruiting resources for the School, the Aarie PTA also assisted the Principal in instilling discipline in Aarie. The PTA Chairperson and other members of the executive board regularly intervened in settling misunderstandings between a parent and a teacher regarding a student or students. Sometimes, the PTA executive board members supported the Principal by insisting on the need to carry out a punishment or a disciplinary measure prescribed for a recalcitrant student in spite of pleas from the student's parents. In a traditional rural society like Saboba where the maintenance of good human relations with parents and society is an essential investment for effective partnership, neither the Principal nor the teachers would like to hurt the feelings of parents and the community, even if they were carrying out their legitimate responsibilities as school authorities. Consequently, the Principal alone or a teacher could not impose a disciplinary measure on a student if there was a prior opposition from the student's parents. The PTA executive board played a key role therefore in sustaining school discipline through their support for disciplinary measures taken by the School against undisciplined and truant students (*Aa Parents FG Meeting, 10/02/2010*). To sustain the cooperation between the School and the parents and the community, Arrack had advised his teachers not to take any exceptional decisions in respect of students without first informing him, and through him, the parents. The teachers and the Principal believed that negotiating the settlement of student disciplinary issues with parents had helped some parents better appreciate the working of the School and brought them closer to the School (*Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009; Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*).

Finally, the Principal acknowledged the significance of the continuous education of parents and the community on the School's expectations, vision and mission. This according to him has helped Aarie in gaining a high level of cooperation from parents and the community.

Key finding 4.7

Principal conscientiously engaged and partnered with the local community through the promotion of an active Parent Teacher Association to recruit local resources to support teaching and learning, teachers' welfare and to enhance student discipline.

Principal visits traditional leaders and school officers

Arrack also did other things to enhance his partnership with the community, namely: his personal courtesy visits to the chief and elders of the community, and respect for their traditions and norms. In spite of the numerous engagements and responsibilities of Arrack, he indicated that he had designated some specific times for visiting the local traditional chief and his elders, the local District Assembly office, as well as the Saboba District Education office, to greet and exchange ideas. Some of these visits were very casual, non-scheduled and brief. He observed that each time he visited any of these leaders and officers he discussed some of his concerns and sought tacit approval for some of the unpopular measures he was about to take or had taken in the management of the School.

Furthermore, he endeavoured to respond to any invitation to participate in social events or activities organised by the local District authorities, by the traditional chief or by the District Office of the Ghana Education Service. These social interactions helped him to be in contact with a number of parents, who also attended such functions (*Aa* Principal Interview, 21/12/2009; Community leaders FG Meeting, 19/12/2009).

According to Arrack, through such visits, the local District Education office had assisted him in resolving some school disciplinary problems and getting newly trained teachers to the School. The education office also partnered with the PTA in seeking funding from the local Government to re-roof a classroom building whose roof was blown off (*Aa* Principal Interview, 21/12/2009). He used his relationship with these bodies to boost the reputation of the School and to keep his focus on making Aarie a top school. Arrack believed that all these public entities were proud of the School and wanted it to remain a top-achieving school.

School identifies with local norms and social events.

In Aarie, staff and students had learnt how to observe and respect the traditional norms, values and practices of the dominant ethnic group, which is Kokomba. Students explained how some of their teachers who did not belong to the local ethnic group learnt from them how to greet elders in the local language during social events. Traditional norms such as respect for and abstention from unruly criticism of elders and anyone older than oneself in public were highly regarded by Aarie (*Aa Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009, Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009*).

Furthermore, although a school delegation would visit a bereaving family that was close to the School, to express condolences, students were also required to fetch water to the bereaving household, a traditional gesture of solidarity and friendship.

Marriages and naming ceremonies for babies were the other important social functions that the staff of Aarie regularly attended as a sign of solidarity with the community. Some of the teachers, both natives and non-natives, who were not necessarily good dancers, learnt how to dance the traditional kinacho (the dance of cows) of the Kokombas when they participated in those social events. Kinacho is the most popular dance in the Saboba locality. It is danced at funerals, during Sunday church services and at marriages. These were all useful moments that endeared Aarie and its staff to the community (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*).

Key finding 4.8

The Principal not only respected local traditions, but also regularly paid courtesy visits to the traditional chief and elders, local government and education officers and some parents, including PTA executive members as a way of promoting cordiality.

Aarie School Community Culture

Anyone who has visited Aarie even for the very first time would invariably notice that the compound was swept clean, the stones demarcating the lanes, well arranged, the urinals and toilets washed clean and the classrooms neat and orderly. The girls in their well ironed and neat green robes with a white belt to match, and the boys with their clean green shirts with white collars and a pair of khaki shorts seemed to leave a good impression on any visitor to Aarie. In fact, this is not all. At 7:15 am when the daily school assembly began, the Researcher noticed that only a handful of students were still arriving to the assembly ground as most of the students were already on campus and, after cleaning the premises with their brooms and cotton napkins have

settled down with their books waiting for the bell that summons them to the School assembly ground to ring. The orderliness and the cleanliness of the School premises and the punctuality of students were just some of the many values cherished and practised by Aarie staff and students. These and other values have become part and parcel of the Aarie School community and have created a school community culture. In other words, Aarie seemed to have established its own ethos, a set of unwritten traditions and values which have been absorbed by all, students, teachers and principal alike.

These sets of values and norms of rightful behaviour and conduct were promoted by the Principal and his teachers. Three distinct attitudinal dispositions or values encouraged by the School and practised by all seemed to have emerged in the course of this research. These were: discipline and punctuality and orderliness; commitment and perseverance; and pride being a top school.

Discipline, punctuality and orderliness

Discipline and punctuality reigned supreme in Aarie. In Aarie, discipline was defined as conscious self-control and self-motivation to keep to school order and regulations, to be punctual for school and school activities, to obey school authorities, to conscientiously carry out one's assignment and duty. It also included showing respect to school staff and students, keeping the School environment clean and orderly and demonstrating willingness to accept admonitions in case of misconduct. Further, discipline was understood as the readiness to cooperate with others in all instances for the good of the School.

Discipline and punctuality were therefore seen as key elements of success. The Principal stated this quite clearly:

The students are disciplined; they cooperate well with the teachers. They take what the teachers tell them seriously. This is shown in the classrooms. They do not make noise when their teachers are absent. This discipline is good for academic work. Most of them are always on time for lessons even for the extra-tutorials. (Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009)

Most of the teachers interviewed also spoke highly of the role played by discipline and punctuality in the academic performance of the School. According to them, they have observed that the real factor of the high achievement of students of Aarie was the fact that there "was a kind of discipline that the children themselves had imposed on themselves to be punctual and learn" (Aa Teachers FG Meeting; Ex-District Education Director Interview, 09/01/2010). The Principal's own punctuality in arriving at school every day, according to teachers and students interviewed served as a model

and motivation for them also to be punctual at school and at school activities and gatherings (Aa Teachers FG Meeting 16/01/2010; Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009; Aa Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009).

The Principal was not only regularly punctual and present at school; he also ensured that the teachers were always present. Students alluded to this when they said that their Principal sometimes would visit the classrooms to find out from class prefects the whereabouts of a teacher who might have reported to school earlier on, yet was not present in class during the Principal's rounds. Teachers were always required to sign the book of attendance at the end of a lesson. The class prefect kept the record and presented it to the Principal fortnightly. This seemed to have obligated teachers to avoid missing classes and also to uphold their own dignity and respect vis-à-vis the students (Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009).

In Aarie punctuality seemed to be sacrosanct. Discipline and punctuality permeated every aspect of life as one of the teachers testified. "I don't miss my lessons and that is just the very task I have given to myself and it is my idea to do that and I am always in school" (Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010). Aarie teachers helped their Principal in instilling discipline in students not only by coming to school on time and regularly, but also by guiding, advising and disciplining students when they misbehaved. This was clearly explained by a student who said:

The teachers do a lot of things to ensure discipline and you know with discipline one can do a lot of things, even if you are not capable of doing them. So, because of the discipline in the School, the students normally cooperate with our teachers and study well and that brings the good results. (Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009)

Commitment and perseverance—show of concern and hard work

Commitment and perseverance were values which characterised Aarie students, teachers and Principal. The Principal, for example, taught sometimes in addition to his tasks as the Head of the School. In an interview he declared that:

I'm the head teacher, at the same time a subject teacher. Despite the challenges, I find joy in doing my work as head and teacher, especially as my teachers cooperate well. They are hard working and show concern for the students. The hard work and dedication of the teachers and the students is very important. (Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009)

The majority of the teachers interviewed also mentioned the significance of dedication or commitment and perseverance in their work as teachers. In spite of some

challenges to their work as teachers they still enjoyed teaching. One teacher expressed this clearly when he said:

I enjoy teaching. It's just that, there are a few complications or problems that we do encounter sometimes, like lack of text books for students, lack of science equipment for science lessons... otherwise it is fine, that is good, I like my work. (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*)

Another teacher recounted how he borrowed a computer keyboard, a mouse and a printer from friends in town in order to use them to teach computer hardware in an ICT lesson. According to the teachers, some of them who taught ICT, often drew the CPU, the monitor and other computer accessories on the blackboard and tried to explain these as best as they could while following the instructions given in ICT textbooks provided by the government. These teachers remarked that it was their personal commitment and perseverance to sustaining Aarie's success that motivated them to innovate and seek practical solutions to the mounting challenging issues of ICT lessons (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2009; Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009*).

Some teachers demonstrated their dedication and perseverance in teaching by bringing to acceptable standard students who were promoted to the next class without having attained the requisite standard due to age or other factors. All the teachers who took part in the research expressed a unanimous opinion of the difficulty and sacrifice involved while teaching such students to steadily catch up with their colleagues.

It has now become the teacher's burden to work very hard so that the child who was promoted without attaining the required standard performs like the others... It brings more work to that teacher and a very difficult task but often we handle that as part of our work. (*Aa Current Teachers, 16/01/2010*)

Aarie students also commented on dedication to their studies and their perseverance to regularly attend school and participate in all the extra-tutorials, class tests and practice examinations, while still keeping up with their usually demanding house chores. Students who were interviewed hinted that they committed themselves to study hard despite the sacrifices they had to make because they also wanted to pass the BECE and do further studies and to become professionals one day. Some of the students complained about the frequency of extra-tutorials, supervised class tests, quizzes and practice examinations in the School. However, they also accepted that these were meant to help them pass their final examinations, since the normal school contact hours and lessons were insufficient for the teachers to teach them all that the examination syllabus required. According to the interviewed students, the Principal and their teachers often

spoke to them about the importance of discipline, dedication, commitment and perseverance in their efforts to pass their BECE with flying colours (*Aa Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009, Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*).

Final year students acknowledged the fact that they belonged to a school whose students regularly recorded the best BECE grades in the Saboba District. This was a motivation for them to persevere and work harder in order to perform better than their predecessors and to maintain the good achievement record of the School. In order to keep the standard, and thus make their teachers and the School proud they cooperated with their teachers by studying hard. They believed that the good results of Aarie were possible because of the discipline, the dedication and perseverance of them, the students (*Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009*).

Commitment and perseverance in Aarie was demonstrated through conscious exemplary dedication, sacrifice and hard work of the Principal and teachers as well as through the individual efforts of students who studied hard in and outside normal school contact hours and cooperated with their teachers towards passing the BECE with good grades and thus, maintain Aarie as a top-achieving school.

Pride in being in a top school

“It is true that for the past five years, we are the best, the results are good, the School has been performing so well and I am proud to teach here” (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*). This teacher expressed quite succinctly what was the feeling and opinion of most students and teachers of Aarie. Some of the teachers interviewed hinted that students felt proud and esteemed when admitted to Aarie. One teacher explained this:

Whenever the School is mentioned in town or in the District, everybody feels that it is the best school, so whenever a student is admitted, yeah, that student is sure that he is a good and very brilliant or a very hard working child”. (*Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010*)

Teachers as well as the Principal viewed the school as the top-achieving school in the entire District and expressed their pride in working hard to maintain that status. Arrack mentioned that he was proud to be the Principal of Aarie and that was his motivation in working hard to maintain the high standards in the School. He emphatically stated this when he explained:

When I came and took over I was able to still move the School ahead to still maintain its academic standard up to date, and the School is still one of the JSS schools, JSS in town that still take the lead in BECE results. I

think it's been the discipline of the teachers and the students as a whole, the co-operation of the PTA that account for all this good achievements that make us the best school in our district. (Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009)

Arrack categorically insisted that since he took over the headship of Aarie, it had performed above average in the District because its students have recorded higher scores in the various subjects and had achieved the best overall school performance. According to him, the School as a whole recorded above average performance for the past few years. He explained this with figures (Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009). He believed that even though the 2009 BECE results were not as good as they had expected, their school still remained the best achieving school in the whole district. Teachers' comments also supported this view. One of them stated this when he said: "For the past five years, and so in the whole district, you will not hear of any other school's name being mentioned as top school than Aarie JHS" (Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2009). Similar opinion was articulated by students, and one of them said:

Since I came to this school, I notice it is the best in the District, always it records high percentage of passes and it encourages and helps students who are going to write exams, to do more, to study more. We try to maintain the good record of the School, so we work hard with our teachers. (Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009)

Not just the Principal and the students expressed their pride in their school; parents as well as teachers did likewise. Parents saw Aarie as a good school that had helped the children to become professionals, technicians and tradesmen and women, as a number of Aarie graduates had become teachers, nurses, police officers, prison officers, builders, and auto mechanics and so on. Some parents also stated that they were proud in having their children study in "a good school" like Aarie. According to some, this had motivated them to continue to pay the levies to support the School (Aa Parents FG Meeting, 10/02/2010). The cherished values of Aarie such as discipline, punctuality, orderliness, commitment and perseverance and pride in their school as a top school facilitated the work of the Principal and the cooperation among teachers, students and parents in making Aarie a top performing school. A teacher made this point quite clearly when he stated: "Oh, yes we do a lot of things as teachers with the help of the Headmaster to make our students examination ready and confident at all times" (Aa Teachers FG Meetings, 16/01/2010).

Pride in Aarie as the top-achieving school in the locality was demonstrated by students, teachers and principal often in gesture and words. That pride was a driving force behind the sacrifice, understanding and cooperation shown by all.

Key finding 4.9

The efforts of Arrack, the teachers and students to make Aarie a top-achieving school had been enhanced by the School's cherished values of discipline, punctuality and orderliness, commitment and perseverance and pride in Aarie as a top school.

Throughout the course of the research data collection in Aarie, the Researcher had the impression that not everything was smooth sailing in the School. On one occasion he caught up with some students who clustered around two desks in their classroom and asked what they were doing that early morning. They informed him that one of the students had brought past BECE questions on French language and a French teacher from the neighbouring school was coaching them on solving the French examination questions (Field Notes, 20/03/2010).

Aarie had no permanent French teacher and relied on the services of French teachers of other neighbouring Junior High Schools to teach French language in the School. This was just one of the many challenges that Arrack, teachers and students had to grapple with in their efforts to focus on their vision and to attain their mission, which was training examination-confident and ready students. These challenges came in different forms and of varying degrees of severity. Notable challenges which tested the resilience and focus of Aarie have been identified in the course of this research and categorised as follows: teaching and learning hurdles, parents' interference in student disciplinary issues, students' complaints, parents failing to cooperate in school resourcing.

Teaching and learning challenges

Some of the fundamental challenges that militated against the efforts of Aarie in remaining focussed on its goal and mission were issues that concerned teaching and learning. In spite of Aarie's status as a top school, teacher attrition rate remained a huge challenge for a number of reasons. For example, students interviewed expressed their concern that Aarie has not had for the past five years a continuing teacher in some of the teaching and examinable subjects, namely Mathematics and Integrated Science. The students complained that some of them got confused with certain concepts when they

were taught by different teachers during their schooling in Aarie. They stated that the methods of teaching and the use of formulae and theories by each teacher seemed to differ. According to them, their efforts to understand the course content and to study effectively and perform well in their tests and examinations were frustrated by the fact that when they seemed to have mastered and became familiar with a particular teacher's style of teaching then that teacher departed the School to do further education. Similarly, a transfer of a class teacher or a subject teacher to a different school also resulted in a mismatch in the teaching of that subject by the new teacher.

Thus, Aarie had insufficient numbers of adequately qualified teachers for some of its key subjects such as Science, Information Communication Technology and French language. As a result, the newly engaged Mathematics teacher, who happened to have developed a personal interest in ICT during his training, was asked by the Principal to participate in limited professional development programs for teachers who would teach the subject in the School. At the time of this research the Mathematics teacher was still the only teacher who taught ICT in the School. Despite their efforts at improvisation, students found it difficult to grasp the ICT lessons.

The situation was even worse with regards to the teaching of Science. The only qualified Science teacher resided about 60 kilometres away from the School and had to commute by motorbike either daily or weekly to school. In the course of the research, his motorbike broke down for almost a week and there were no lessons in Science that week. However, according to the testimonies of final year students, the Science teacher was an accomplished teacher and was able to intensively teach them whenever he was available. These students believed that they could still pass their Science examinations despite this hurdle (*Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009*). Similarly, the teaching of French without the presence of a permanent French teacher in the School was a real challenge to students, but was mitigated through extra-tutorials and students' group studies with accomplished French students from neighbouring schools.

Inadequate library facility, library books and school textbooks as well as insufficient Science and ICT equipment and materials were other major hurdles Arrack confronted in promoting effective teaching and learning in the School. By making available for use by teachers and students Arrack's personal ICT equipment and books, in addition to other books acquired with funding from parents, and also, through periodic visits to the Science laboratory of a neighbouring Senior High School, Aarie

surmounted, to some degree these difficulties (*Aa Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009*).

A further obstacle to effective teaching and learning in Aarie was the unusual complaints from a few parents whose children were demoted or not allowed to progress to the next class because of their below-average performance. These parents, according to the Principal and the teachers, seemed not to appreciate the fact that repeating a class was a second opportunity for these children to progress in their education. Repeating a class helped the children to master the same concepts they failed to learn the previous year. Arrack explained that he attempted to resolve this misconception of the motive of repeating a class through regular education of parents during PTA meetings and in his casual contacts with some of them.

Since the ethos of the School did not tolerate unnecessarily upsetting a parent, special exceptions were made sometimes to allow ill-prepared students to be promoted to the next class; for example, when dealing with mature-aged students. Such inevitable exceptions thus created additional burdens and challenges for teachers. The teachers interviewed explained that they were up to the task although it required extra hard work and sacrifice (*Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009; Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009; Community leaders FGM, 19/12/2009*).

Uncooperative parents

The support and collaboration of parents was a crucial strategy in Aarie's efforts to recruit local resources to sustain the School as a top performing school. Generally, most parents had supported and cooperated with the School in various ways. However some parents were not always cooperative and had interfered in the School's maintenance of discipline. Others had failed to pay their PTA levies and provoked difficulties in the School's efforts to maintain good rapport with all parents and community. Some also inappropriately interfered in student disciplinary issues.

Occasional parental interference in student disciplinary issues.

According to Arrack to garner parents' support for maintaining school discipline, he not only informed the parents but also had obtained their approval of the School's disciplinary measures for recalcitrant students. Nevertheless, Aarie also experienced the interference and complaints of some parents who had disagreed with one or another form of punishment for truancy and disobedience and miscreants. For example, teachers interviewed explained how a parent attempted to manhandle a teacher in town because of the punishment that teacher meted to his miscreant child on campus.

Others narrated that some parents entered the School campus and argued with a teacher who had previously disciplined a disobedient child (Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010; Aa Ex-Teachers FG Meeting, 21/12/2009). Teachers explained how much they were embarrassed when a parent erupted in school, and scolded a fellow teacher for punishing her son by requiring him to work in the School farm and for preventing him from attending lessons until the punishment was completed.

Arrack encouraged his teachers to bear these unpleasant attitudes and interference from certain parents and to manage parents' grievances, real or imagined, with tact without necessarily compromising their own integrity and school discipline. Other times, the PTA executive members intervened to help resolve issues with intransigent parents (Community leaders FG Meeting, 19/12/2009; Aa Parents FG Meeting, 10/02/2010). Arrack accordingly admitted his difficulty in managing maturely the outbursts of parents and of teachers to avoid straining relations and to maintain a cordial school atmosphere and positive partnership with parents and community.

Not all parents pay PTA levies.

In spite of the seemingly active cooperation and partnership between Aarie and parents and the community, comments raised by parents and teachers and the Circuit Supervisor indicated that not all parents seriously cooperated in recruiting resources for the School. For example, according to the Principal, only about 50% to 60% of 273 parents whose children were in the School regularly paid the PTA levies meant for school resourcing. However, he also remarked that some of those parents who failed to pay their levies sometimes paid in kind when they visited the School and showed appreciation for their work by offering foodstuffs to the teachers (Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009).

Difficult management of rapport between School and parents.

The Principal expressed his dismay at parents who hardly or never attended PTA meetings and therefore missed out on all the educational input on parent-teacher relations and on developments in the School. These parents therefore, were ignorant of decisions made and developments in the School. Those were the parents who sometimes erupted in the School and clashed with teachers on issues already resolved at previous PTA meetings. According to him, this phenomenon really posed a serious challenge to his efforts in maintaining cordial relations with parents and community. A teacher reported how difficult it was sometimes, to accept the compromised position of the Principal in order to avoid prolonging an altercation with a parent. This was corroborated by the Principal, when he said that he appreciated the efforts of his

teachers to accept his arbitrations, even though sometimes he knew they were not the fairest outcome. He had to always think of maintaining the relationship with the community and the parents and did everything to avoid escalations and prolonged disagreements (Aa Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010; Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009).

Students' complaints

It was not unusual to hear complaints from students, especially the female students, who had been overtaken by numerous daily and weekly house chores including fetching of fire wood from the nearby bush, fetching water from the dam, and cleaning the compound and preparing the family meals. The overtaxed female student participants complained about the pain and sacrifice involved in coping with the overload of domestic chores and studies, including class assignments and supervised class tests. Despite the fact that the female students were mostly impacted by the tight schedule of house chores and demanding studies, the boys also complained about overstraining studies. Both the boys and the girls were unanimous in believing that the School made too many demands on them with regards to assignments, quizzes and class tests. Some stated that they did feel sometimes that they were studying a bit too much compared to their colleagues in other schools (Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009). They, however, explained that they accepted in good faith all these exigencies from the Principal and the teachers because they knew they were meant for their good. They also admitted that despite the constraints they believed that these were the conditions which made their school to be a top school and the prospect of good BECE results (Aa Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/12/2009; Aa Current Students FG Meeting, 21/12/2009).

Key Finding 4.10

Aarie had to grapple with a number of challenges to the School's progress. The most taxing ones were a lack of specialist teachers, inadequate library facility, text books, Science and ICT equipment and materials. Other challenges were difficult management of un-cooperating parents as well as parents' interference in students' disciplinary issues and students' complaints about rigorous academic life.

In view of the above, one might conclude therefore that Arrack's personality and conduct, his vision and mission, his instructional and collegial leadership as well as his engagement and partnership with the local community were all part of his grand efforts

to maintain Aarie as a top performing school, where students regularly record high scores at the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (*Aa* Principal Interview, 21/12/2009). The commitment of Arrack and his teachers (*Aa* Teachers FG Meeting, 16/01/2010) attracted the cooperation of many, including parents and community leaders as well as education officers whose support (Circuit Supervisor Interview, 27/01/2010; Community leaders FG Meeting, 19/12/2009) played an important role in Aarie's academic pursuits and success.

Summary

From the themes that emerged from the analysis of the Aarie research data, a flow-chart was constructed that captured the story of Aarie. This flow-chart, presented in Figure 4.3 guided the narration of the case study of Aarie.

With a collective school vision and mission and his personal attributes, the Principal effectively employed his instructional, collegial and community partnership leadership roles to undertake a series of teaching and learning improvement and community engagement strategies with teachers, students and parents. These strategies promoted the emergence of a school community culture and values, which created a positive academic atmosphere and improved teaching and learning. Despite other persisting challenges, all this resulted in better preparation of final year students and the attainment of top grades of Aarie students at the BECE.

The Narrative Flow-Chart of Aarie JHS

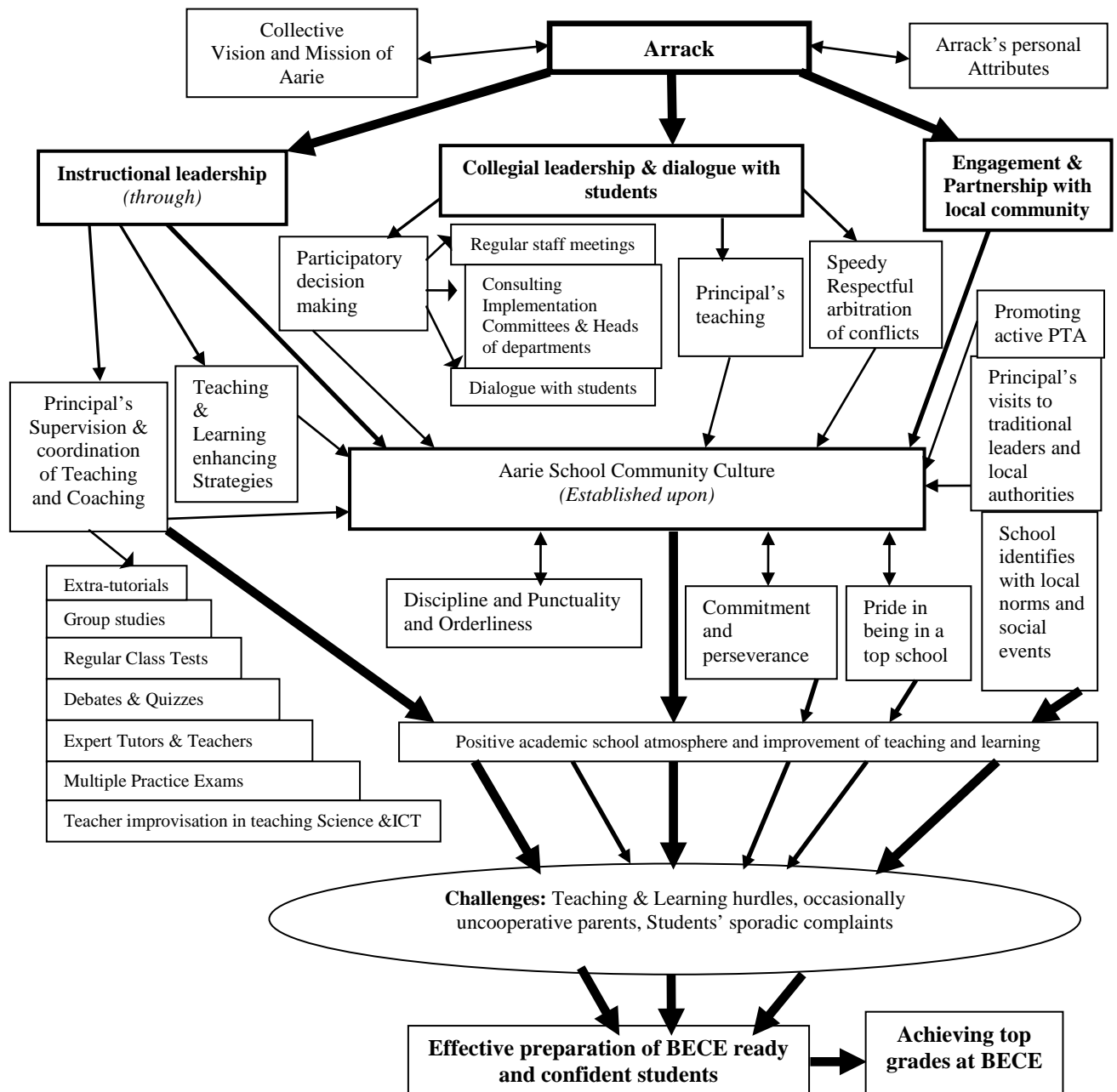


Figure 4.4. The narrative flow-chart of the story of Aarie JHS

Throughout this research the Researcher noticed that teachers, students and Principal were all motivated by a common purpose to which they, in diverse ways, exhibited some level of commitment, dedication and sacrifice. This common purpose was the mission of Aarie: the teachers training all students to be BECE confident and ready. This was a practical way of realising their vision of maintaining their status as the top-achieving school in the District (*Aa Principal Interview, 21/12/2009*). The positive personality of Mr Arrack, the Principal of Aarie, his drive and exemplary conduct were instrumental in his successful supervision and management of Aarie

Junior High School. The Principal's instructional leadership, collegial leadership as well as his engagement and partnership with the local community to recruit resources and his efforts to promote a set of values were all intended for preparing students who would be confident and ready to sit their final examinations (the BECE) and pass with higher grades.

Achieving best academic results through hard work and commitment was not the preoccupation of Arrack, the Principal only. All, including teachers and students, were concerned about maintaining good academic results. Consequently, teachers taught during extra-tutorials even at the time when there was no remuneration for that. They not only advised and encouraged students to behave well and to study hard but showed by example, through their own efforts to harness their talents in support of one another, especially the less experienced teachers. Aarie teachers cooperated with the Principal by attending regular staff meetings as well as academic meetings and also by providing leadership as Department Heads and Convenors of Implementation Committees. The students on their part actively cooperated with their Principal and teachers through their commitment to attending classes, doing their class assignments and participating in class tests, quizzes, debates and practice examinations. Parents of Aarie, Community leaders and the entire locality in general, showed a high level of concern and interest in Aarie and invested in sustaining a cordial and dynamic partnership through their collaboration with the Principal to resource a disadvantaged rural Junior High School.

These contributions notwithstanding, the special involvement of a hard working Principal, constantly researching ways of recruiting local resources for the School, reminding and encouraging his teachers of their tasks and also showing interest and support for them did make a lot of difference. The Principal's good relationship with teachers, students, parents and community seemed to have set the tone for an effective and cordial school environment that promoted teaching and learning. The key findings that emerged from the analysis of Aarie data are presented in Appendix F.

CHAPTER FIVE: CASE TWO - BAARIE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

This chapter introduces Baarie Junior High School in Saboba, one of the oldest Junior High Schools of the Saboba District. The chapter begins with a brief description of the context and setting of the school leading to the narrative which unfolds through relevant quotes and paraphrasing of the conversations of participants, revealing major themes that explain the multiple strategies initiated by the Principal of Baarie to nurture and maintain effective teaching, learning and improved academic results. The narrative is structured around themes including key findings identified and summarised.

The chapter concludes with a narrative flow-chart which is a snapshot of the key elements around which the story of Baarie was narrated. It will show how the newly appointed Principal, in collaboration with teachers, students, parents and local community utilised his critical evaluation of the underperforming School and initiated a series of highly important strategies to turn Baarie from a low-achieving school to one of the best-achieving schools of the District within two years.

Introduction to Baarie Junior High School

School settings

Baarie was founded by the Saboba District Assembly as one of the first Middle Schools or Junior High Schools (JHSs) in the Saboba locality. Since then, other JHSs have been founded with the support of the local government (Community Leaders FG Meeting, 12/12/2009).

Baarie was similar to other schools in Saboba, having two separate school buildings. Each building housed three classrooms, thus the school had six classrooms in total. One of the classroom buildings also had two additional rooms which served as a staff common room and an office for the Principal. One of the classroom blocks appeared old and unkempt as the paint of the walls was peeling off. Only the other classroom block in which the Principal's office and staff common room were located appeared decent and well maintained, probably because it was recently constructed.

There were no facilities to house the school's library books or a store for teaching and learning materials and equipment. As a result, text books, scanty library books and other teaching and learning materials, as well as the harvested grains from

school farms, were kept in the staff common room and in the congested office of the Principal. Mr Barack preferred to work sometimes under the trees on campus rather than in his congested office (Figure 5.1). In the absence of a permanent library facility the few library books were piled in the staff common room on shelves and in small cupboards. Students could borrow the books and read during the usual school break time for lunch or rest. Students were not allowed to borrow and take any book outside of the school premises. This was meant to secure the few books available.

The School compound was adorned mainly with shady dry climate trees planted in rows along the boundaries of the school property and at particular points across the entire compound. These provided shade during the hot tropical afternoons. Some dry season hedges had also been planted along the verandas of each of the two main buildings to beautify them. Fine pebbles from the nearby river were arranged neatly in a circle around the School's flag pole, planted in front of the veranda of the Principal's office and against the eaves of the building. The national flag of Ghana was hoisted on this wooden pole and the school assembly normally took place in front of the national flag. During the school assembly, which always began with the singing of the Ghana National Anthem, the Principal and other staff gave notices and other important information to students before the commencement of lessons.

All the footpaths leading to the main school buildings were demarcated with neatly arranged lateritic stones as were the grounds for holding the daily School assembly. Each day, all of the male and female students swept clean the school premises including the classrooms, staff common room, Principal's office, urinals and toilets. (*Ba* Current Students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010; Field Notes, 14/01/2010). Baarie had separate urinal facilities for male and female students and for staff. However, these were inadequate for the population of the school and a new pit latrine was under construction at the time of the research. Water for drinking was provided in locally assembled filtered containers, which students filled daily with water from a borehole or from the river.

In the early years of Baarie's establishment, it was considered as a top-achieving school in the locality, and its graduates were among the majority of those gainfully employed in the District as teachers, nurses, technicians, secretaries and traders. The academic performance of Baarie students at the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) level for the past decade however, had been poor even though they performed creditably in 2008, 2009 and 2010 (GES: Saboba-District, 2008, 2009;

2010). Typically, all students who completed their Primary Six and applied to enter Baarie to do their middle schooling were admitted without passing any entry tests. When the present Principal of Baarie, henceforth referred to as Barrack was appointed in 2007, he established an entry examination to screen and ascertain the level of competence in English literacy and numeracy of all candidates who sought admission to Baarie.

Baarie, like most other schools in the locality, had difficulty maintaining a stable and adequate teaching-staff (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; Community Leaders FG Meeting, 12/12/2009). Most of the teachers were newly posted and only half of them were qualified teachers as the remaining half were untrained helper teachers. The previous Principal did little to recruit and maintain qualified teachers in the school. The previous Principal had been involved in local party politics and this adversely impacted on his leadership of Baarie and on teaching and learning. During this period fewer students passed the BECE with an adequate aggregate score to be able to continue further education in the Senior High Schools (SHSs) and in Technical and Vocational institutions (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; Community Leaders FG Meeting, 12/12/2009).

For the 2009-2010 academic year 300 students, 134 girls and 166 boys were enrolled. Sixty-six of them were in JHS 3 and were preparing to sit the BECE at the time of this research (Field Notes, 26-28/11/2009).

At the time of the research, students of Baarie, for the first time, in many years, recorded their best performance, as 55% of the 75 candidates passed the BECE in 2009 (GES: Saboba-Chereponi, 2008). In other words, Baarie thus, produced the highest proportion of qualified students from the Saboba District, who gained admission into senior high schools and technical and vocational schools in 2009 (Community leaders FG Meeting, 12/12/2009).

An analysis of the BECE results of Baarie students from 2005 to 2009 (GES: Saboba-Chereponi, 2008), revealed that only 44% of the total 363 candidates earned passing grades (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010). In 2008, Baarie recorded its second worst BECE result during the five-year period under review. Only 26% of the total 110 who sat the examinations earned passing grades (GES: Saboba, 2010). The 2007-2008 academic year was Barrack's first as head. According to him, the results of 2008 were a consequence of the breakdown of discipline and low academic standards that Baarie was grappling with when he assumed the headship in September 2007 (*Ba*

Principal Interview, 10/02/2010). The lack of discipline among students and teachers and an ineffective teaching and learning environment were the trigger that set in motion his three-point academic overhaul of Baarie. In other words, the bad BECE results of Baarie became the catalyst for a comprehensive academic renewal in the School.

Barrack's Background and Experience

Barrack's background and attributes

At the time of the research Barrack had been Principal of Baarie for two and half years. Baarie was his first teaching post since he graduated from a Government Teacher Training College where he obtained his Teaching Certificate 'A' in 2004. Barrack taught in Baarie as a trained teacher from 2004 and then became its principal in 2007. He later studied part-time at a public university and acquired a Diploma in Basic Education in 2007. He originated from one of the tribes in the Southern regions of Ghana and did not speak Likpakpaln (popularly referred to as Kokomba), the traditional local language of the inhabitants of Saboba (Circuit Supervisor Interview, 27/01/2010). Despite the fact that his initial teacher training was in an urban centre, he always wanted to teach in a rural setting (Field Notes, 10/02/2010). Barrack acknowledged that his experience as principal was limited as he had only served in the position for barely three years. He indicated that he continued to learn from the advice of his teachers, parents, students and the community elders (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010).

Barrack was well aware of the academic challenges of Baarie when he assumed the position of Principal. Students and teachers alike acknowledged that Barrack was a very unassuming person, who related well with teachers and students. Some students explained that Barrack sometimes joined them in the school farm and worked with them. They found him a simple and approachable person. Teachers also admired his spirit of dialogue and commitment to helping teachers to resolve some of their personal welfare problems. Many commented on the support they had received from Barrack on academic and personal levels. Some teachers said that the dedication and the enthusiasm of Barrack had made them also change for the better.

Key finding 5.1

Barrack had minimum qualification and only three years experience as a teacher when he was appointed Principal. However, Barrack influenced positively his teachers, students and parents by his simplicity, his spirit of dialogue and consultation, his deep respect and support for his teachers and students alike.

Collegial Leadership: Collective Critical Evaluation of Baarie

Barrack stated why he found it necessary to involve all his teachers in a critical evaluation of Baarie's academic environment and standing. Barrack explained that when teaching at Baarie he was appalled by the ever-falling academic standard, especially the low achievement of Baarie students at the BECE. As a result, he and a few of his colleagues tried without success to encourage the then Principal, his predecessor, to introduce certain policies and activities to improve the School's falling standards. He said: "I realised that the performance of the School at that time was not the best. We recorded bad results, and that was in 2006. I was praying that the Headmaster would ask us to do something about it" (*Ba Principal Interview, 10/02/2010*). As a result, when he became the Principal, he sought to quickly overhaul the School's teaching and learning environment. Barrack also intimated that his predecessor was aware of the low reputation of the School as the community leaders and some parents complained about it openly. Barrack believed that his predecessor was also part of the problem since he demonstrated low professionalism in dealing with teachers and school issues. Explaining this, he said: "In fact, I can also say that he was not all that motivational; he was talking about teachers' personal problems but was not supporting them" (*Ba Principal Interview, 10/02/2010*). Barrack explained how severe the breakdown of teacher professionalism in the School was:

Formerly, a whole lot of things were happening, yes. If it was the teaching period of a teacher, you would see that teacher pick his bicycle and then would ride away to somewhere and would not go into his class and teach. At the end this affected the academic performance of students. (*Ba Principal Interview, 10/02/2010*)

Barrack saw his appointment to the position of Principal as an opportunity to redress the situation and restore the School's legacy as one of the best-achieving Schools in the locality. Barrack's first strategy for improving teaching and learning and boosting students' performance was to involve his teachers in a critical evaluation of the School and in finding concrete ways to resolve the issues and to raise the standards (*Ba Principal Interview, 10/02/2010*).

The teachers stated that Barrack led the change in Baarie. They said that Barrack invited all the staff to a series of meetings, where they discussed the situation of students' unsatisfactory achievement (*Ba Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010*). A teacher explained that when he arrived in Baarie in 2007, he noticed that the academic performance of the School at the BECE was very low, so he together with other

colleagues and the Principal decided to do something about the situation. He explained: “so we took steps and then decided to put in place so many strategies and we realised they worked. We are hoping to perform even better with this current class of final year students” (*Ba Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010*).

In fact, some teachers had invariably admitted their part in the numerous problems such as teacher absenteeism that were affecting academic work in the School. For example, in a casual chat with a teacher who lived in Yendi, a distant neighbouring town of Saboba, this teacher declared: “I am not even living here in Saboba. I live about 50 kilometres from here. So, I cannot always be in school but each time I’m in school, I teach the students well” (*Field Notes, 18/02/2010*). This was corroborated by another teacher who explained that there were other factors which prevented teachers from being regular in school. In fact, during the research, the Researcher personally experienced this irregular school attendance by teachers. A focus group meeting planned in accordance with participants’ availability and convenience was postponed at least three times. It took almost three months and the show of displeasure and disappointment by the Researcher for the meeting to finally take place. It seemed that each time one teacher was present for the meeting, another invariably was absent with plausible excuses (*Ba Current Teacher FG Meeting, 15/02/2010; Field Notes, 18/02/2010*). However, the Researcher noticed that the teachers of Baarie were invariably aware of their part in improving the learning environment of the School.

Barrack also remarked that he did not meet much opposition to his initiatives from his colleague teachers, because most of them were aware of the situation and also wanted a change. It was through a number of extraordinary staff meetings that they, as staff, carried out a critical evaluation of Baarie. Barrack explained that during these meetings, he expressed his personal observation and critical remarks on the academic situation of the School and also requested each teacher to present his or her critical evaluation and also, to offer his or her suggestions for improving the academic situation.

This exercise led them to identify areas that needed immediate attention and redress (*Ba Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; Ba Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010; Community leaders FG Meeting, 19/12/2009*). These included:

1. Lack of teacher professionalism and teacher support. Teacher absenteeism, irregular and less rigorous lesson preparation by teachers, absence of regular teacher supervision, scarce or irregular staff meetings, and inadequate supervision of students’ learning were evident. There was also a lack of

teacher support systems and teacher motivation programs, and lack of unity and team spirit among teachers (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; *Ba* Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/01/2010; *Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010).

2. Student indiscipline and absence of a challenging academic and healthy environment. Absenteeism, failure to do class assignments, disrespect for authority and truancy were evident. There was also a lack of extra-tutorials, debates and quizzes as well as poor sanitation and lack of regular physical education and sports (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; *Ba* Current Students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010).
3. Very low level of resourcing. There was no electric lighting on the verandas and in some classrooms. There was also a lack of basic text books, poorly maintained school furniture and inadequate toilet facility and urinals.
4. Absence of active partnership and collaboration with parents resulting in limited parents' support. There was a dysfunctional Parent Teacher Association and meetings were irregular (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; Field Notes, 14/01/2010).

Addressing these issues became the strategic priorities of Barrack's leadership as principal. They influenced what became Barrack's personal vision and mission for the School.

Key finding 5.2

School evaluation conducted by Barrack and staff highlighted certain negative practices in the School that were responsible for the persistent low academic achievement of students. Notable among these were lack of teacher professionalism, absence of sustained supervision of teaching and learning, lack of motivation among teachers, lack of discipline among students and challenging academic environment for students as well as a dysfunctional PTA and inertia towards parents and community.

Principal's Vision and Mission for the School

Barrack explained his personal vision for the school, which he stated as: "Baarie will be the best school in the District in terms of academic performance, discipline, sports and health from 2015 and beyond" (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010). This vision led to the specific mission of overhauling teaching and learning to attain higher student academic achievement and improve school discipline, sanitation and sports.

Barrack explained that the mission of the School was directly linked with the situation of the school at the time he became the Principal. He stated that teachers and students had all acknowledged the low standards and wanted a change. Also, Barrack, personally realised that the “standard of discipline in the School was horrible and alarming” so, he discussed this with the staff and the students and together they agreed on how to check absenteeism and raise the standard of discipline in the School (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; *Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010). He believed that good discipline among teachers and students like a clean school environment was essential for improving teaching and learning.

He therefore defined his mission and that of the School as “improving the fallen standard of academic work in the school, achieving better BECE results and also improving upon sports and sanitation condition, in the school in order to promote good health among pupils” (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010). Barrack believed that good sanitation, clean environment and sports were essential in keeping students healthy and fit for serious learning. He explained that through his efforts the PTA had provided funding for an additional pit latrine which was under construction. He emphasised that this project was necessary because the School’s toilet facilities were inadequate for the school’s current population and negatively affected sanitation (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010).

A Mathematics teacher who was responsible for health issues in the School explained that he and his colleagues, in addition to educating the students on sanitation, also checked the personal hygiene of each student on a regular basis through general inspection of students’ clothing and hair (*Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010). This was to promote healthy and fit students who would study well.

The mission of the School was obvious to the teachers interviewed. One teacher said: “my aim as a teacher is that at the end of the three year programme (three-year JHS) the students excel in their BECE with flying colours” (*Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010). It was on the basis of this vision and mission, identified with the obstacles to effective teaching and learning and their possible solutions that Barrack and his teachers and students initiated, corroborated and redeveloped a series of programs that were meant to turn the situation around (Field Notes, 15/02/2010).

Key finding 5.3

Baarie's vision of improving its reputation by becoming a top-achieving school at the BECE and a leader in healthy lifestyles was to be achieved through its mission of revamping teaching and learning towards higher achievement that is sustained by discipline, good sanitation and physical fitness.

Barrack's collegial strategies for improving learning

Barrack, aided by some of his teachers, made concerted efforts to resolve if not all, some of the academic and disciplinary hurdles Baarie was facing when he assumed office as Principal (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; *Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010). Barrack believed that the good reputation of Baarie would be only restored through continuous improvement of students' academic achievement.

Consistent with this belief, he and his teachers took a number of decisions about the strategies that should be adopted. The three major strategies were: to restore teacher professionalism and establish a teacher support program; restore student discipline and develop an academically challenging and healthy environment for students (which included the promotion of students' health through sanitation and sports); revamp school resourcing initiatives through an improved school, parent and community partnership (*Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010; *Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010).

To implement the three priority-decisions, Barrack devised and implemented a number of short-term and long-term programs and strategies. These varied action-oriented policies and measures were meant to lift Baarie to a renewed and sustained top performing school. These were the means deployed to improve Baarie's reputation as a low-achiever. These also helped to promote sanitation-conscious and fit students who would work harder to obtain best grades (*Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010; *Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010).

Key finding 5.4

In order to overhaul the teaching and learning landscape of low-achieving Baarie and improve academic standards, Barrack and his staff resolved to restore teacher professionalism and teachers' welfare support, re-establish student discipline and provide an academically challenging learning and healthy environment, and to also revamp school resourcing initiatives through School, parent and community partnerships.

Instructional Leadership: Learning Improvement Strategies

Barrack and his teachers resolved to implement practical strategies that had an immediate as well as a long term impact on the declining academic performance of Baarie. (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; *Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010).

Restoring teacher professionalism

Stop teacher absenteeism.

Restoring teacher professionalism and teacher support was a foremost goal to address teachers' non-professional attitudes and behaviours. To stop teacher absenteeism, Barrack provided a class register that was to be signed by every teacher at the end of his or her lesson. While on official duties and absent from the School, Barrack would ensure that his teachers were present in class. One of the students explained that the Principal checked the presence of the teachers through the teachers register that was under the care of the Class Dean, who handed it to the Principal every weekend (*Ba* Ex-students FG Meeting, 18/01/2011). During the interview, Barrack would often complain about the absenteeism of his teachers. Once, he remarked: "...you would see that teacher pick his bicycle and then would ride away to somewhere and would not go into his class and teach (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010).

Barrack believed that teacher absenteeism was a direct result of indiscipline and non-professional conduct of his teachers. He stated that sometimes a teacher would come to school one day, and the very next day, he would be absent without giving a prior notice to the Principal. To reinforce discipline and encourage teachers' presence in class, Barrack would write queries to them or invite them to his office, and admonish them.

Improve teacher discipline through instructional leadership.

During the research, the Researcher observed that Barrack made rounds in the classrooms to watch his teachers teach and also offered individual coaching when necessary. This assistance had helped some of the teachers to become more confident and effective in their teaching (*Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010). Notes taken during his usual rounds informed his decision to invite individually to his office, a teacher whom he thought needed some help in teaching methodology or subject content in order to offer him or her appropriate assistance. Sometimes, he would use staff meetings to discuss serious common flaws that he had observed and would propose possible solutions or suggest resources that those teachers could use.

Through the correction and discussion of a teacher's scheme of work, lesson plan and notes Barrack provided coaching to his staff. He also used the correction of teachers' lesson plans and notes to verify whether the lessons already taught by a particular teacher and the class tests and assignments conducted, actually corresponded to what he had personally checked in students' note books and assignment books (*Ba Principal Interview, 10/02/2010*). This was another means of ensuring the regular presence of teachers in their classrooms as they became fully aware that their Principal had various ways of ascertaining their presence or absence at school at all times (*Ba Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010*). Teachers who were usually late or absent had difficulty finding tangible excuses for not teaching or conducting tests they had outlined in their previous lesson scheme and notes. Some of the teachers interviewed explained that they felt embarrassed meeting the Principal to collect their corrected lesson notes each week, whenever they had failed to teach what they had planned. The teachers believed this had caused some of them to become more regular and punctual in the School. Some teachers also hinted that they began to ask permission whenever they would be absent from school as this helped in avoiding the embarrassment they would otherwise experience when meeting the Principal on their return to the School (*Ba Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010*).

Teacher supervision of students' learning.

Regular staff meetings were re-introduced by Barrack to discuss mainly teaching and learning in respect of students' class tests and assignments. These class tests and assignments were used as a yardstick to verify the level of learning that was taking place in the School, and also to ascertain which teachers or students needed additional help to meet the target set for each class in respect of subject syllabus and past BECE questions. During staff meetings teachers and Principal also discussed the performance of students on quizzes and debates. Quizzes and debates were organised among students of Baarie and of sister schools. Teachers would then compare the performance of students from sister schools with that of their own students to determine the level of learning and mastery of concepts by their students (*Community leaders FG Meeting, 19/12/2009*).

Benchmarking and positive rivalry among teachers.

To encourage teachers to be committed and effectively teach their students, Barrack introduced a benchmarking scheme for teaching in the School. At their academic staff meetings at the end of each term's examination period, teachers and Principal examined the average achievement level of students by subject and by class.

The teacher whose students scored best grades would be formally congratulated (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; Circuit Supervisor Interview, 27/01/2010). Also, the performances of Baarie students in each of the BECE subjects were benchmarked with sister schools. Baarie teachers whose students recorded better scores than those from neighbouring schools were also congratulated and sometimes rewarded. The teachers explained that this benchmarking had pushed some of them to become more serious with their teaching and preparation of the final year students. They felt embarrassed when their colleague teachers were congratulated publicly and they were left out. This became a motivation for the teachers to work harder so that their students would perform better next time round and thus, bring them honour as teachers (*Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010; Circuit Supervisor Interview, 27/01/2010).

Instituting teachers' welfare and support.

Barrack remarked that formerly, some teachers would enter the classroom but were unable to teach the students well because they were not motivated and had not adequately prepared their lessons. He therefore introduced social activities and motivational awards to promote good relationships among teachers, reward hard work and also to enhance unity and team spirit among the teachers.

Barrack established a social gathering of all the staff from time to time to show his appreciation for their work (*Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010). These socials in form of snacks and locally brewed beer and soft drinks were paid for from the School's self-constituted welfare fund, fed by income from school farm produce, teachers' contributions or sometimes from PTA funds. The welfare fund was used to also provide financial assistance to teachers who had financial difficulties and other social issues. Barrack believed that this had uplifted the spirits of his teachers and they became enthusiastic and motivated in their teaching. "Since I started with that now, they are all enthusiastic with their teaching" (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010). Baarie teachers interviewed agreed that the socials offered by the Principal were useful gatherings that kept them together as a team and as friends. Besides, his friendship and good rapport with them also helped some of them to take their work seriously and teach the students with enthusiasm and commitment. They remarked that they could communicate what they thought and felt without fear and Barrack would listen to them. This was a motivational factor for some of them (*Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010).

Barrack also stated that he usually observed the teachers and he would call any teacher he suspected to be troubled to his office and he would discuss the issue and

together find a solution. He would visit his teachers who were sick and would show solidarity with those who were bereaved. These acts of support had positively changed the school climate (*Ba Principal Interview, 10/02/2010*).

In conclusion, Barrack had observed that his efforts were bearing some fruit. He remarked that he had been regularly meeting and talking with his teachers and encouraging them, and had since noticed that they were becoming hard working and committed. He had also observed more team spirit and unity among his teachers, who he believed were having more confidence in their work. A teacher emphasised their commitment when he said:

I would say the reason why maybe the students perform well; in spite of major challenges is the commitment we, masters have for the children. I think in the school, every single master is committed in this way, and we teach with all our hearts. (*Ba Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010*)

Recruitment of experienced trained teachers.

Achieving the mission of Baarie required other strategies that could be implemented in the long-term. These long-term strategies were crafted as a means of sustaining the continuous improvement of Baarie's academic environment and achievement, necessary for realising the School's vision (*Ba Principal Interview, 10/02/2010*). Barrack explained that the recruitment of experienced trained teachers in all the subjects remained his long-term aspiration for Baarie. He believed that when the School had more experienced trained teachers, these would guide their colleagues who were untrained and thus promote quality teaching in the School. Furthermore, Barrack and the teachers believed that the continuous support of the welfare of teachers should be a major preoccupation of the School. The School and parents should remain active partners in recruiting support for teachers' welfare.

Key finding 5.5

Principal's short-term and long-term strategies to realise his first priority decision comprised multiple acts of teacher supervision and support. This invigorated cordial relationships among teachers and Principal and strengthened teachers' instructional confidence and responsibility, discipline and motivation, and also led to the improvement of teacher professionalism and welfare in Baarie.

Restore discipline and learning

Re-establishing student discipline and providing an academically challenging and healthy learning environment for students was intended to halt student indiscipline, lateness and absenteeism, and also to stop students' failure to do class assignments. It was also meant to discourage disrespect for authority, truancy and student laziness. Barrack and his staff believed that truancy and laziness of students would be addressed by the introduction of extra-tutorials, debates, quizzes and regular class tests. Similarly, an improvement of sanitation and students' health and fitness would contribute in redressing some of these concerns, they opined (*Ba Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; Ba Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010*).

Stop student indiscipline.

The foremost measure introduced to promote student discipline was to reduce student lateness and absenteeism (*Ba Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; Ba Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*). Barrack asked the teachers to furnish him on a daily basis the names of all latecomers and absentee students. Students became worried about meeting the Principal to explain their lateness or absenteeism and they gradually began to attend school on time. A student clearly explained this when she said:

Our principal makes sure that, every morning he goes through the class register and checks whether every student is present and takes note of any student who is not present in that class. So he will make sure that the students who are absent are punished. (*Ba Current Students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010*)

Students' good behaviour and discipline became a key objective of all teachers. This was strongly encouraged by the Principal, who ensured that good behaviour was rewarded and misbehaviour duly punished. Consequently, no recalcitrant student would go free without being punished. A student explained this quite clearly and said: "In our School, the main objective of the teachers is discipline" and another added: "Why I like this school is that a student can never do wrong and will not be punished" (*Ba Current Students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010*). The teachers confirmed this when one said: "the discipline has improved. Maybe, before, we did record every year about four to five pregnancies, but now I don't know if any are happening". Barrack appointed some of the experienced teachers to serve as teacher-counsellors to counsel and encourage students to be responsible and hard working and to remain focussed on what they wanted to achieve through education. These teacher-counsellors also gave talks on reproductive health to all students although with special consideration for female students. The counsel of these teachers might have partly contributed to the reduction of

the rate of student pregnancies in the School (*Ba Current Students FG Meeting*, 17/01/2010).

A few parents clandestinely requested some teachers to spy on their children while at school to ensure that they were doing the right thing. These teachers exchanged information about the student with parents while parents did likewise with the teachers. One of the students interviewed remarked that when she discovered this covert dialogue between her teacher and her parents, she changed her behaviour both at school and at home, and became more hard working, respectful and serious with her studies (*Ba Parents FG Meeting*, 28/01/2010; *Ba Current Students FG Meeting*, 17/01/2010).

Create an academically challenging and healthy environment.

Barrack observed that students' laziness and poor achievement appeared to be related to the non-challenging academic environment that prevailed in Baarie. To correct this, he introduced, in the same year he became Principal, an obligatory entrance examination which all Primary Six candidates who desired to enrol in Baarie for year seven had to pass. This screening was the criterion used to ascertain each candidate's level in English language literacy and in numeracy. Barrack and his teachers presented this screening as a way of promoting competition among the students in the rural town (*Ba Principal Interview*, 10/02/2010). They believed that it had helped the poorly-prepared candidates to avail themselves of another opportunity to learn and master the basics of English language and mathematics at the Primary level prior to entering Junior High School.

A second short-term strategy implemented by Barrack and the teachers to help students improve their academic achievement was the observance of a 'silent hour'—total silence, observed across the school premises by all students, every morning prior to the school assembly. It occurred between the time the students had finished cleaning the school compound and the time they were to begin the day's school assembly. The students explained that this was meant for individual learning at one's desk. To monitor and supervise students' class assignments and tests, the Principal, during his rounds in the classrooms, inspected randomly-selected note books and exercise books of students. Students who failed to do their assignments were identified and punished by having to weed the grass on the School compound or to work in the School farm (*Ba Teachers FG Meeting*, 15/02/2010; *Ba Current Students FG Meeting*, 17/01/2010).

As a deterrent to truancy and misconduct and encouragement for hard work, teachers sometimes punished students who performed poorly in class tests and

assignments. More often, these students would be among those who regularly were absent from school or had failed to do their class assignments or had misbehaved in school (*Ba Current Students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010; Ba Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*). Barrack also introduced benchmarking of the performance of Baarie's students with that of students from sister schools such as Aarie. He also compared the scores of students in the lower classes with those of students in the final year after they had taken part in quizzes or debates. This created a serious rivalry among senior students and junior students who were all working hard to outperform the other and win the prizes and awards provided by the Principal.

Furthermore, students declared that their teachers taught them thoroughly by asking them probing questions on topics they were teaching. A teacher would introduce a new topic only when he was satisfied that the students had understood the previous concept. The teachers, as instructed by Barrack, also used class tests, assignments and practice examinations as well as quizzes and debates to check the students' level of understanding of particular topics and concepts. Some of the students interviewed said that they had received prizes for good academic performance in the form of pens, text books, notebooks and sometimes, cash from a delighted class teacher (*Ba Current Students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010*). The teachers used past BECE questions to set class tests and practice examinations for the final year students as a way of preparing them for the BECE. At the time of the research all students interviewed believed that they had already been adequately prepared to sit the BECE, as they had written a number of practice examinations which had been corrected and well explained to them. One student declared:

Our teachers used to go to through the past BECE questions from 1991 to 2008. They will check and see normally which questions have regularly appeared every year. They go through them with us, and they will make sure that we understand the questions before moving on to another. (*Ba Current Students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010*)

Students also mentioned the cleanliness of their school premises and the punishment senior students used to give to junior students who littered the grounds. Teachers also punished them when they failed to keep their classroom clean. Barrack emphasised his desire to inculcate in the students a desire for sanitation and fitness. He believed that this would help the students to remain healthy and to study better. Barrack declared:

Well it is not ok for the School not to have sufficient toilet facilities. This is why we're doing that. It improves the sanitation and cleanness in the

school and keeps students healthy. So through the PTA, the work has begun and they have agreed to contribute money so that we will be able to put up more toilets for this school. (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010)

Students explained that they had physical education and sporting activities such as netball, football, volley ball and handball once every week. These kept them healthy and “freed their minds to study well” (*Ba* Current Students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010). They also did racing or running during the sports time to keep themselves fit and they liked the games, which were obligatory. A student said that they liked these games to keep them fit and healthy to the point that they sometimes—without the knowledge of teachers—organised a running race among themselves from the School compound to the School farm to see who would be the first to reach the farm (*Ba* Current Students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010).

A Mathematics teacher who stated that he was also responsible for health issues in the School explained that he and his colleagues, besides educating the students on sanitation, also checked the personal hygiene of each student. They would sometimes at School assembly, he declared, inspect each student’s school uniform, hair, teeth and finger nails. Those students who were unkempt would be punished and made to present themselves for another inspection within the same week. He suggested that this regime of keeping the students neat and decent made them become conscious of their personal hygiene and general sanitation in school (*Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010; *Ba* Current Students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010).

Some students interviewed however, gave the impression that some of them observed hygiene and participated in the sports because they were afraid of being punished if they failed to do so. At home, they had difficulty practising good sanitation and keeping fit because the basic sanitation facilities at home were absent. Many had no toilets at home; they visited the nearby thicket to respond to nature’s call. Some homes had no fence walls and straying domestic animals would enter at will and leave droppings on the compound (*Ba* Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/01/2010; Field Notes, 17/01/2010).

Maintain strict student discipline, healthy students and invigorate learning.

Barrack and the teachers of Baarie acknowledged the difficulty of sustaining student discipline without a closer collaboration between school authorities and parents and had planned to continue to use PTA meetings to educate parents on school discipline and regulations. They also decided to find other methods of deterrence and admonitions to encourage students to discover the importance of sanitation and sports

for their health and fitness and to appreciate healthy lifestyles. Finally, Barrack planned to find other funding sources to sustain extra-tutorials, quizzes, debates and practice examinations, even when parents' financial contributions dwindled, as these learning evaluation activities would help students to remain focussed on studies, and be active learners.

Key finding 5.6

Barrack and his teachers implemented strategies to restore student discipline, create an academically challenging and healthy environment that sustains learning as a short-term plan.

They instilled strict discipline among students through deterrence measures (punishments) and through positive means (rewards) such as awards for hard work, academic excellence and good conduct, and encouraged cleanliness and healthy lifestyles. These measures resulted in four positive transformations. First, teachers recommitted themselves to teaching effectively, and students responded positively to disciplinary measures and showed renewed enthusiasm for studies. Second, disciplinary measures dissuaded and reduced absenteeism and lateness to school. Third, students not only became sanitation and health conscious, but also took their studies more seriously and actively participated in all academic activities. Fourth, academic work and students' achievement improved.

As a long-term strategy, Baarie advocated partnership with parents and teacher cooperation to enhance student discipline, cleanliness and healthy lifestyles that sustain learning.

Community Partnerships towards Improving Learning

To enhance school resourcing Barrack and his staff decided to: develop an active partnership with parents and make a direct appeal to the PTA to financially contribute towards teaching and learning activities; court the assistance of local politicians to improve school infrastructure; and, intensify school farming activities to raise additional income through the sale of school farm produce.

Revamp PTA, involve parents in funding.

In order to boost collaboration and partnership with parents and community Barrack rejuvenated the Baarie Parent Teacher Association through renewed regular meetings with its executive members and parents. This action helped to forestall a

dysfunctional PTA and culminated in the recruitment of resources to supplement the School's efforts (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; Field Notes, 14/01/2010).

As a sign of respect and interest in the community, Barrack visited occasionally the local chiefs and elders and also some parents at weekends ((*Ba* Parents FG Meeting, 20/01/2010; Field Notes, 14/01/2010). Since Barrack began to involve the parents and helped to conduct PTA meetings on a regular basis, parents responded positively and showed interest in the School and cooperated with Baarie in several respects. Parents paid PTA levies to fund the School's resourcing and also assisted the School by collaborating in maintaining student discipline. They supported the Head and teachers whenever certain parents tried to unduly interfere in school disciplinary measures. The PTA and parents also motivated hard working teachers in the form of awards for excellence in teaching (*Ba* Parents FG Meeting, 20/01/2010; *Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010). One teacher affirmed the good rapport that was being developed between the School and the PTA when he remarked: "On every occasion the PTA chairman is here, the relationship is okay. I have never seen or heard of any problems with the PTA officers" (*Ba* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010).

Contributing levies to support the School came at a cost to parents. A parent explained that it was difficult for them to always find the required money to pay for PTA levies and also pay for their children's note books and other school materials. However, they sometimes sacrificed a lot in order to save money and pay the PTA dues. They sacrificed by "not buying pito on market days" (*Ba* Parents FG Meeting, 20/01/2010). 'Pito' is the locally brewed beer which is very popular with both men and women in Saboba. Buying pito and sharing it with friends was the most popular form of socialising in Saboba locality. In general, people who normally do not drink pito at home would join a group in the village once a week, on a market day and enjoy some pito. A market day is a weekday set aside by the villagers to sell their farm produce and domestic animals in an open market. Farmers from neighbouring and distant villages participate in these weekly market days. Normally, people do not go to farm on this day and after selling their produce, they would sit in groups and drink pito as they socialise. Another parent remarked that she always attended PTA meetings because she wanted to directly hear from the PTA executives and School authorities what they had to contribute as they did not trust their children, who sometimes demanded more money than what was required by the School (*Ba* Parents FG Meeting, 20/01/2010).

Some ex-students explained that they assisted their parents in the farms so that they would willingly pay for their school materials and PTA levies (*Ba Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*). They also served as intermediaries between the School and their parents. Students would normally inform parents on issues discussed at school and would invite their parents to PTA meetings. Students therefore cooperated in the re-organisation and rejuvenation of Baarie PTA and partnership with parents and community.

PTA levies were used by Baarie to undertake a number of resourcing and support programs. PTA funds helped to repair broken down school furniture, to begin the construction of a new pit latrine, rewire and install electric lights in one classroom and also to award prizes in form of pens, pencils, note books and text books to deserving high-achieving students. Furthermore, PTA levies were used to pay token remuneration to teachers who participated in extra-tutorials and to award prizes in form of farm produce or token cash donations to deserving teachers, who distinguished themselves by preparing students who recorded the best BECE grades in the subjects those teachers used to teach. Barrack explained that:

The PTA is helping us, as you know, by way of collecting levies. We have an account for awarding high performing students in debates and so on. Now especially, the parents are paying levies to help build toilets for the school. Current facilities are not enough. (*Ba Principal Interview, 10/02/2010*)

Seeking help from politicians, education officers.

Barrack explained that as Principal it was his duty to link the School and the community so that “whatever needs that the school may have, the community will come to assist” (*Ba Principal Interview, 10/02/2010*). Besides PTA funding for lights in one classroom, Barrack also succeeded in procuring additional funding for the wiring and installation of electric lights in the remaining two classrooms and adjacent verandas of the School. Having lights in the classrooms at night made it possible for students to return to school in the evenings and study. Some students would study in groups under the lights on the verandas. Lighting of classrooms also invigorated more individual learning by students after normal school hours, mainly by students whose houses had no electric lighting (*Ba Current Students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010*). This extra funding for lighting the remaining two classrooms and adjacent verandas came from the former Member of Parliament for the Saboba Constituency, explained Mr Barrack.

Furthermore, Barrack courted the assistance of the local Education Office in resourcing the School through government grants for purchase of text books and other

teaching materials (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010; Ex-District Director Interview, 09/01/2010).

Employing students' labour in school farming to boost school income.

Barrack also re-introduced school farming where maize and groundnuts were cropped, harvested and sold as another means of generating internal income for school expenditure. Students explained that they normally worked in the School farm on Fridays. Sometimes, they also worked in other farms which belonged to local farmers for a fee, which was paid to the School (*Ba* Current Students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010). The Principal acknowledged this during an interview (*Ba* Principal Interview, 10/02/2010). Parents, local education officers and community leaders were in accord with the practice of students working in School farms and in third party farms to generate income for their School's learning and teaching programs and for improving school infrastructure (*Ba* Parents FG Meeting, 20/01/2010; Community leaders FG Meeting, 12/12/2009; Circuit Supervisor Interview, 27/01/2010).

Sustain resourcing by community partnership and school farms.

Barrack had also considered making savings towards his long-term objective of purchasing PCs and other ICT equipment to enhance ICT lessons. These savings could also be used in acquiring additional essential but costly text books for the School. Other long-term strategies Barrack envisaged to sustain resourcing and income generation were to maintain the interest of parents in supporting the School through regular PTA meetings and casual visits to a few parents. Also, the School was to maintain students' interest in school farming activities, to produce higher farm yields, without sacrificing overly the time for teaching and learning, and sports.

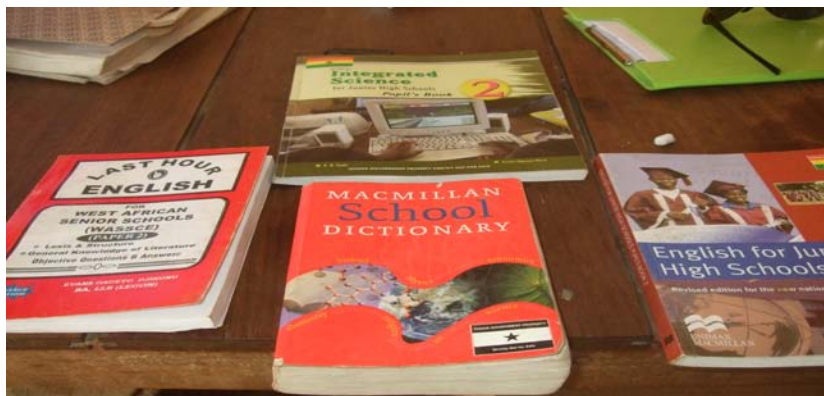


Figure 5.1. Key text books are scarce in rural JHSs

Key finding 5.7

By renewing regular meetings with PTA executives and parents Barrack had helped to revive interest of parents in school affairs. Parents began to pay levies to fund school programs and cooperated with the School on students' disciplinary issues. Also, through his visits and sustained involvement with the local chiefs, elders, politicians and education officers, he procured further assistance in the form of text books, repair of school furniture, wiring and electric installation in classrooms. His cooperation with teachers to supervise students at school farms resulted in good harvests that generated additional income to support teaching and learning.

The implementation of all these short-term and long-term strategies in Baarie helped the School to radically improve the academic atmosphere and to succeed in producing the best BECE results in the Saboba District within two years. Barrack proudly stated that in 2009, they had set a specific mission for the School and they were able to achieve it. He said: "Last year we set our mission; our mission was to make sure that the School would perform well during the BECE examinations, and we were able to achieve that". This was confirmed by an analysis of the BECE results of all Junior High Schools in the Saboba District for 2009 (GES: Saboba, 2010).

This rapid positive transformation seemed to have set in motion certain values which were being developed by the Baarie school community and were helping to sustain these gains and support Baarie's efforts to restore its lost glory and become once again the top-achieving school in the District.

Emerging School Values

The efforts made by Baarie to remain focussed on its vision and mission through the implementation of various strategies to raise academic standards, had impacted on the behaviour and conduct of students and teachers alike. These efforts according to students interviewed, had helped them to become more health-conscious and to show respect to their teachers and be in school on time (*Ba Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*). According to Barrack and the teachers, these efforts had actually led to an emergence of identifiable school values such as team spirit, good rapport among teachers and students, punctuality and cleanliness (*Circuit Supervisor Interview, 27/01/2010; Ba Principal Interview, 10/02/2010*).

Barrack also explained that students had become proud of their school and spent more time on school campus than they were used to doing. Students interviewed said that they strove to be present in school every day and not to be late to school, as lateness had become a shameful act (*Ba Current Students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010*). Discipline in form of punctuality and regular presence in class was evolving as a cherished value among the students.

Furthermore, students had shown renewed interest not only in extra-tutorials but also in participating in activities such as class assignments, quizzes, tests, debates and practice examinations. Students spoke about their desire to participate more often in debates and quizzes, as these helped them to determine their preparedness for BECE and also gave them an opportunity to prove what they knew (*Ba Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*). Thus, positive rivalry or the spirit of competition in academic achievement seemed to be reawakened.

Students' renewed interest for studies was demonstrated during this research, when the Researcher visited the School around seven in the evening on a Friday, and on the following Saturday. During the visit, he saw a number of students, mainly those in the final year, busily studying in their classrooms in complete silence. During the Saturday visit, the Researcher also noticed that two Baarie teachers were also present and teaching in two other classrooms (*Field Notes, 12th & 13th March 2010*). These events demonstrated the renewed interest of Baarie students for their studies and their hard work to cooperate with their teachers and to compete favourably with other JHS students of the District in academic achievement. The desire for hard work and individual learning seemed to be developing among Baarie students. These students also demonstrated some interest in keeping their school environment clean and neat. During the research it was observed that litter around the school premises was regularly collected and burnt, and classrooms were kept clean at all times, while students endeavoured to keep their school uniforms neat and decent. This seemed to be suggestive of a growing effort in improving sanitation and keeping oneself healthy.

Staff socials introduced by Barrack seemed to have helped to promote cordiality and team spirit among the teachers. The teachers interviewed remarked that until the arrival of Barrack there were hardly any staff meetings to discuss school affairs or to socialise. Thus, the regular staff meetings and socials introduced by Barrack had engendered interest not only in school affairs and their colleagues but had also boosted

their desire to discuss, to take decisions and work together as staff, explained a teacher (*Ba Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010*).

Key finding 5.8

Concerted and focussed positive leadership initiatives and practices introduced by Barrack in form of dissuasion, persuasion and supervision to improve Baarie's academic environment engendered and promoted certain values such as team spirit, dialogue, hard work, positive competition, pride in school, studiousness, discipline and good rapport and interest for good sanitation and healthy lifestyles.

Other Challenges

All was not smooth sailing for Baarie as the School continued to face some challenges which constantly impact negatively on all the efforts and strategies that were put in place to improve students' academic achievement. Notable among these challenges was the generally poor academic preparation of students at Primary Six level prior to their entry into Junior High School. The students explained that the lack of teachers (trained or untrained) to teach them during their Primary schooling resulted in their inability to learn some of the concepts they were supposed to have learnt and mastered before entering a Junior High School (*Ba Current students FG Meeting, 17/01/2010; Ba Ex-Students FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*). The worst nightmare of teachers was the very weak foundation of children in English language and Mathematics. A teacher explained this:

We have just three years to change the poor level of English of our students I do my best to bring them up but it is difficult. I always feel that the foundation has been very weak for the children. (*Ba Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010*)

The students' poor grasp of the English language was again aggravated by the fact that Baarie lacked the required number of English language text books for the use of students. An English teacher explained that in his year two classroom, he had only two text books for the use of 70 students in the class and these were actually the teacher's copies. Even though they were insufficient, the School had a fewer copies of text books in ICT, French and Mathematics. These, according to a teacher were provided by the Ghana Government (*Ba Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010*). All the teachers who had been interviewed complained about the absence of a trained French teacher in the School. They were worried that the lack of a regular French teacher in Baarie was negatively affecting the morale of their final year students, as a low score in

French language at the BECE would result in poorer aggregate score of these students. French had been made a core BECE subject like English, Mathematics and Science. Out of four JHSs studied, only one, Aarie had a trained French teacher on staff; others either had none or were making do with untrained French tutors informally recruited from a neighbouring town.

Another challenge that remained a cause of worry was the use of untrained teachers in the School in the absence of sufficient trained teachers. Both trained and untrained teachers explained that no matter how experienced an untrained teacher was, he or she would still make mistakes in respect of teaching methodology and could cause some harm to students' learning and progress. One of the teachers who had taught in Baarie as an untrained teacher and later trained as a professional teacher explained this when he said:

Because I was a 'helper teacher' (an untrained teacher) in fact, to be frank, after the methodology I have learnt and acquired at the Training College, I realised that I was harming the children with the way I used to teach them. I was just tutoring them because I was very good in Science instead of teaching them. (*Ba Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010*)

Lack of sufficient classrooms, which resulted in large classes of 70 to 100 students at a time, remained another concern in Baarie. One of the teachers explained that they needed more classrooms and more trained teachers to be able to teach adequately.

Other persisting challenges were the premature departure from school on Fridays, by students. They travelled by bicycle or by foot to their distant villages for the weekend. They needed more time to reach their destination before darkness fell hence the early departure from school. These journeys were purposefully made by students whose foodstuffs and other basic necessities were depleted during the week and wanted to replenish new provisions for the subsequent week. Generally, Baarie students, who came from far-away villages from Saboba would stay with some relations and attend school. Those who had no relatives in the rural town would rent local mud rooms, where they would stay and go to school (*Field Notes, 20/01/2010*). In the absence of a regular and reliable means of transport this arrangement was their best way of accessing formal education.

This affected teaching and learning, as a good number of students would be absent on Fridays, while teachers would still teach as usual. Another concern was the absence of a female teacher in Baarie. Most teachers felt that a female teacher would

make a difference in advising their girl-students to concentrate on their studies and refrain from non-ethical conduct. About an average of four students got pregnant each school year until recently, when the new Barrack established a team of teachers who regularly counselled and advised the female students. This task, the teachers believed, would be better performed by a female teacher than male teachers who were uncomfortable in discussing certain reproductive health issues with female students.

Parents sometimes complained about the long absence of their students from home, especially in the evenings, when students remained in school to attend extra-tutorials. Parents wanted their children to be at home to do house chores. In spite of all these challenges the commitment of Barrack, his teachers and students, and the cooperation of some parents, was making a positive difference. The teachers mentioned their efforts in improvising teaching and learning materials for lessons in Science and one even used his own money to purchase a Science apparatus that he needed to be able to satisfactorily teach a particular concept in Science. One teacher explained this: “Our commitment overrides all the challenges, we teach with all our hearts” (*Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/02/2010*).

Key finding 5.9

Certain challenges that seemed to be related directly to the system of rural schooling in Saboba, and were beyond the reach of Barrack and his staff remained unresolved. These were the use of untrained teachers, poor preparation of candidates admitted to the School, inadequate teaching and learning materials and lack of ICT equipment. Others were students’ premature departure from school at weekends, teenage pregnancy, inadequate infrastructure and absence of a female teacher on staff. Nevertheless, Barrack’s efforts to sustain an effective learning environment for better student performance received support from teachers, students and some parents.

Summary

From the themes that emerged from the analysis of the research data, a flow-chart was constructed that captured the story of Baarie. This flow-chart, presented in Figure 5.1 guided the narration of the case study of Baarie.

Barrack’s personal background and teaching experience influenced his collective critical analysis of the academic environment of Baarie, which in turn, determined his vision and mission for the School. In light of the School’s vision and mission, he took three strategies to improve academic standards. He enhanced instructional, collegial and

community partnership leadership through the implementation of short-term and long-term strategies. These actions supported the emergence of new school values and also, resulted in rapid improvement of teaching and learning and better BECE results of Baarie students despite many enduring challenges.

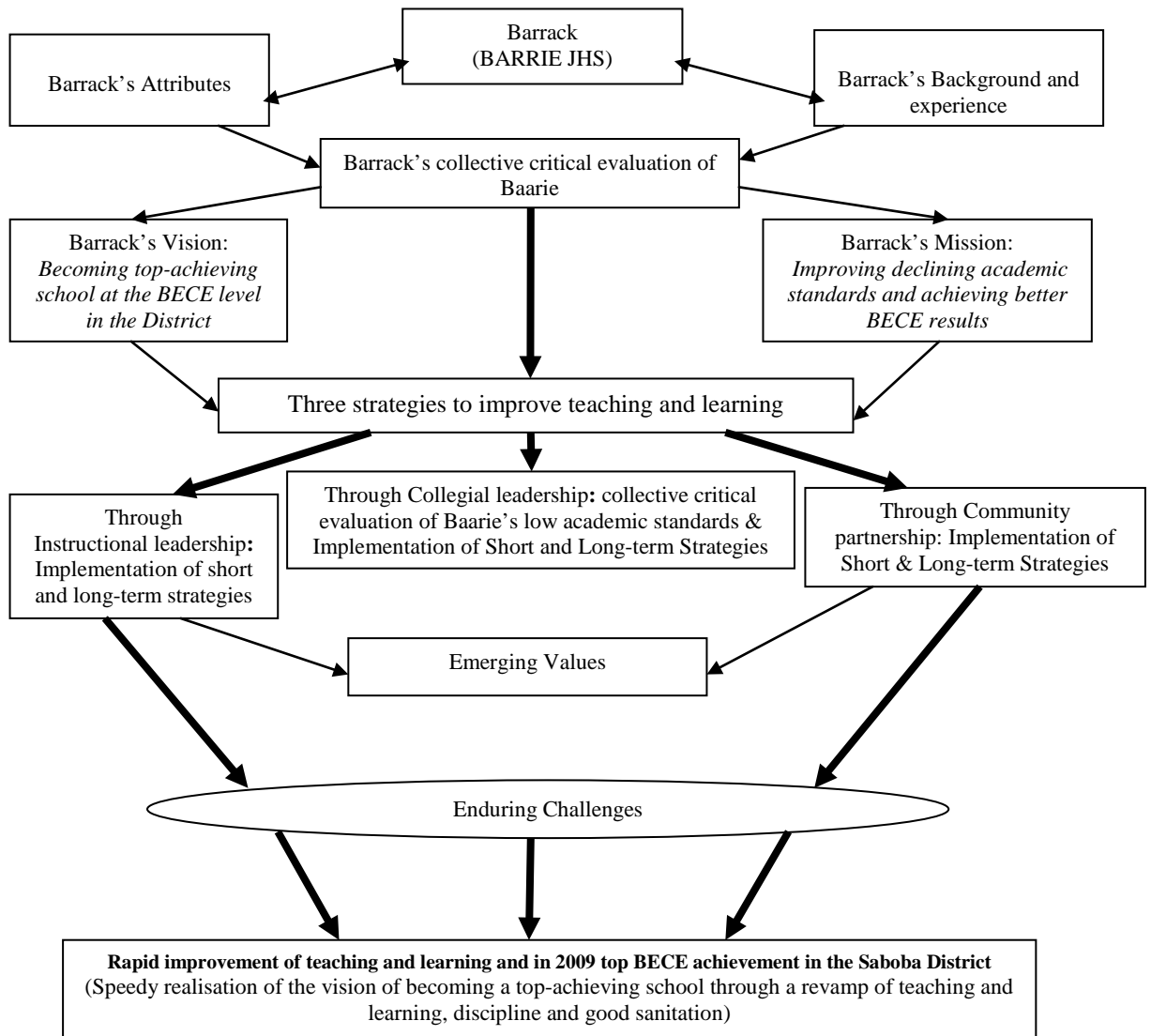


Figure 5.2. The narrative flow-chart of the story of Baarie JHS

Barrack’s three years of teaching experience in Baarie prior to his appointment as Head provided him with knowledge of the prevailing leadership and academic problems of Baarie. This served as an opportunity for Barrack to uplift the School and to transform it within a short period of two years into a growing, high-achieving Junior High School in the Saboba District. Barrack did a thorough critical evaluation of the leadership, academic and resourcing situation of the School in concert with his staff and unearthed four major issues which plagued the School. He identified these as: a lack of

teacher professionalism and teacher support; student indiscipline and absence of challenging academic and healthy environment; very low resourcing; and, absence of active partnership and cooperation with parents for their financial support.

In order to resolve these four hurdles Barrack, together with his staff decided to implement a set of strategies on a short-term as well as on a long-term basis. These strategies were to: restore teacher professionalism and teacher support as well as restore student discipline; to create an academically challenging and healthy environment; and, to revamp school resourcing through community partnership and school farms. These efforts yielded positive results which invigorated the academic environment of Baarie and improved teaching and learning as well as higher academic achievement within a short period. These efforts supported the emergence of values hitherto absent in Baarie: team spirit, discipline, hard work, positive competition, studiousness, pride in school, appreciation of good sanitation and good rapport among staff. These successes notwithstanding, Baarie continued to grapple with a number of enduring challenges, which had to do with maintaining a productive partnership with parents, sustaining and growing a challenging academic and healthy school environment, and finding adequate funding to invest in more expensive school materials and equipment in future. The key findings that emerged from the analysis of data from the Baarie case study are presented in Appendix G.

CHAPTER SIX: CASE THREE – CAARIE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

A description of the school setting of Caarie and of the Principal's personal and professional attributes, as well as her vision and mission for the School, introduces the chapter. The Principal's managerial, instructional and collegial efforts and partnership with parents and the local community to improve the academic standards are reported and evaluated. The chapter concludes with a narrative flow-chart that summarises the emerging themes and key findings.

Introduction to Caarie Junior High School

School settings

Caarie was founded by the Ghana Education Service in collaboration with a Christian Church in Saboba in the mid-1990s. Caarie used to be among the top performing schools in the Saboba District but the achievement of its students at the BECE during the five year period of 2005 to 2009 was only average. Caarie scored its best performance in 2007 when 85% of 79 candidates who sat the BECE passed and had its worst performance in 2009 when only 18% of the 139 students who took the examinations passed (GES: Saboba, 2010).

At the time of the research, Caarie had 300 students enrolled and 63 of them were preparing to sit the BECE. With a teaching-staff comprising seven trained teachers and four 'helper teachers,' Caarie was by far one of the best-staffed Junior High Schools in the Saboba locality.

Caarie had two main classroom buildings. Each housed three classrooms with a veranda that served sometimes as a playground whenever it rained. Both buildings were dilapidated and needed some repairs and repainting. There was sufficient classroom furniture for all students. The building that housed the Principal's office had a staff common room which also served as the School's library. The library comprised a few wooden shelves and cupboards which stored the School's few text books and library books. There were no facilities for students to sit and read, even though students borrowed books and read them during their break time. The Principal's office had two rooms. The inner room served as the School's store room and the outer room, which had a desk and a chair with extra chairs for visitors, was used as the Principal's main office.



Figure 6.1. Makeshift library facilities of a rural JHS

The premises of Caarie appeared unkempt and disorderly as the short green grasses that surrounded the buildings were littered with used plastic bags and paper. The few hedges were also unkempt. Only the two and half meter wide lane in front of each of the verandas of the classrooms was swept clean and kept neat. There were few trees on the campus, but a number of smaller plants were growing in some spots of the school compound. Caarie had three walled but unroofed urinals. One was used by teachers and the other two were used by male students and female students respectively. All males and all females had their separate walled and roofed pit toilets.

Principal Carrack: Background, Attributes, Vision and Mission

Background

Principal Carrack, at the time of the research was nursing a baby of a few months. She went about her duties as Head with the baby at her back or in a baby's cot. She had taught in a nearby JHS for three years before coming to Caarie as a teacher. She completed a three-year Post-secondary Teacher Training Certificate in 2002. Prior to her appointment to the position of Head of Caarie, she had no experience as Head of a school. She was the only female staff member in Caarie. Carrack was portrayed by both teachers and students as a lady with motherly sympathy who developed good human relationships with both students and teachers.

Personal and professional attributes.

Teachers and students remarked that Carrack was a person of dialogue, who also showed a lot of sympathy and concern for students and staff alike. A teacher expressed this: “She will consult, make sure that she put it before the staff and she will wait and then, I mean to receive suggestions from each and every one” (*Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009*). A student also remarked: “I have seen Madam calling the girls together and trying to explain in fact, what they gain, at the end of the day if they study hard” (*Ca Students FG Meeting, 22/12/2009*). Another student mentioned that Carrack had helped teachers who had welfare problems. This was confirmed by teachers also. One teacher said: “And she tries to find out our problem... she tries to find out the problem and to make sure that it is solved” (*Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009*). Carrack also underlined her efforts to show interest in her teachers’ welfare and to relate with them well. She said:

You don’t make them run a marathon. ...whether they are okay with their health or not they must come to school. I don’t treat my teachers like that. I relate with them well, I visit them in their houses ...we live as a family.
(*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*)

Key finding 6.1

Carrack demonstrated much interest, sympathy and concern for the welfare of teachers and students.

Teachers and students also acknowledged the commitment and perseverance of Carrack. Despite the fact that she was a nursing mother, she was always in school and only went home when the child needed to be breastfed, explained one of her teachers. A student remarked: “She doesn’t relax and doesn’t allow the people (Education officers) to cheat us without giving us our share, like chalk and other things, she makes sure that they are there” (*Ca Students FG Meeting, 22/12/2009*).

Some parents also testified that the Head was committed and showed interest in helping the female students who left school due to pregnancy and returned after they had given birth. A parent explained:

Actually the Head is doing her best with regards to trying to control students, to learn the problems of the teachers and to help the school, even to the extent of organising a committee to tell her, to advise her of how they would try to bring the children back to school. (*Ca Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*)

Some teachers also saw their Principal as a person who always tried to bring the teachers together, to help resolve their differences and to encourage team spirit among them. One teacher said: “They (the teachers) were not just united. But when the Head came, she was able to make sure that she brought all of us together, so that we work as a team” (*Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009*).

These personal and professional attributes however, were not enough to help Carrack improve teaching and learning in Carrie. Some of the teachers and parents believed that the Principal was not doing enough to help improve teaching and learning and to raise the falling standards. A teacher said: “Also if maybe, the Head too can do better so that she could also get more materials, like the text books through PTA help” (*Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009*). A parent was blunt when she said:

The Headmistress is not performing to her best. ... even if what she is doing is not big (enough), people would see (the little that she is doing) and say, this person is trying to do this but because of lack of this and that she is not able to do much. (*Ca Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*)

Thus, the commitment and perseverance of Carrack, her sense of sympathy for students and teachers; and dialogue and consultation with teachers, students and parents had been attested by her collaborators. However, none of the participants demonstrated how these attributes actually helped Carrack in engaging them to promote effective teaching and learning and to improve students’ achievement.

Key finding 6.2

Although Carrack’s attributes of commitment, sympathy, perseverance and dialogue were acknowledged and admired, however, they had not been harnessed to improve standards.

Carrack explained in her own words what constituted, for her, the vision and mission of Caarie. In the course of an interview with Carrack, she gave two similar statements, each as an answer to what was her vision. Firstly, she said:

Our long-term (goal) is we are looking forward to seeing that our students will have 100% performance or results so that a time will come, when all the candidates we register would be able to qualify for the Senior High School. (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*)

In a second instance, Carrack clearly stated in writing, in response to an interview question that her vision for the School was to work hard towards achieving a 100% success rate for BECE candidates so that they would all get admission into Senior High Schools. These two declarations by Carrack emphasised how much she wanted to

transform Caarie into a high-achieving school whose candidates would not only pass the BECE but also gain admission into Senior High Schools.

Key finding 6.3

Carrack, the Principal of Caarie JHS stated that her personal vision for the School was to improve standards by leading the School to become one where students achieve a 100% pass rate at the BECE and qualify to pursue further education in Senior High Schools.

In respect of the mission of Carrack and the School, she said she was running the school as a family that was building a favourable and peaceful atmosphere for effective teaching and learning. In her written response to an interview question, she developed quite a different theme in explaining the School's mission:

All teachers will use extra classes (tutorials) judiciously to enable them (to) complete their syllabus, there will be discipline on the part of pupils and teachers, and pupils will take lessons seriously; and teachers will be giving and marking class assignments frequently. (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*)

So, Carrack's mission was three fold. Firstly, it was to ensure that teachers made maximum use of extra-tutorials in order to complete subject syllabuses; secondly, to instil discipline among teachers and students, and thirdly, to guarantee that students attend lessons, teachers teach, give assignments and correct them. She explained that she had encouraged teachers to teach the students not only during the usual contact hours but also during the extra-tutorials. She said that teachers sometimes came voluntarily to teach the students during those extra-tutorials. "They come to teach at any time and this has actually helped (the students)" (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*).

Key finding 6.4

Carrack's mission to realise the vision was to use extra-tutorials to cover uncompleted syllabuses, instil general discipline among students and teachers, and to raise teacher professional commitment and student studiousness.

Carrack's vision and mission informed her personal decisions and actions but also found echo in some observations of her students and teachers. A student explained that her teachers often advised them to study hard if they wanted to pass their BECE. Another student said: "Our Headmistress (Principal) tells our masters (teachers) to keep us busy, we shouldn't use our leisure time, and we should use it to study" (*Ca Ex-*

Student FG Meeting, 27/11/2009). “I have taken extra classes as one of the strategies” said a teacher who had reiterated the concerns of Carrack, which was that: “Most of the time the subject teachers couldn’t complete the syllabus and that could have caused some of these (academic) problems” (Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009).

Similarly, a parent explained her desire to see her granddaughter learn seriously and gain admission into Senior High School. So when she had observed her granddaughter’s low performance at Caarie, she refused to allow the child to be promoted to the next class even though the School wanted to. She said:

My granddaughter is not performing well because I saw her class work and I wasn’t happy with it, and I think she was supposed to even go to the next class but she couldn’t go. I made her to sit back to repeat and learn more. (Ca Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010)

Parents, teachers, students and the Principal of Caarie had all mentioned the importance of teaching and preparing students to learn well and pass their examinations and thus qualify to enter Senior High Schools. However, none of them linked their efforts to achieving Carrack’s purported vision and mission. Carrack made allusions to her vision and mission for the School in her interactions with the staff, students and teachers during school assemblies and staff meetings. However, she did not formally inform them, about what were her motivating factor; her school vision and mission. Consequently, she was unable to rally her teachers and students towards achieving her declared School’s vision and mission.

Key finding 6.5

Although Carrack made allusions to her vision and mission for the School in her interactions with students, teachers and parents, she failed to formally inform them about this and as a result, she could not rally her teachers and students towards achieving that vision and mission.

Carrack’s Attempts to Rally Staff to Resolve Caarie’s Low Achievement

Carrack’s Managerial Leadership

Principal Carrack was very articulate in pointing out what she perceived as the key causes of the falling academic achievement at Caarie during the past five years. She acknowledged that Caarie performed excellently in the 2007 BECE. She said that she taught in Caarie for two years prior to her appointment as the Principal. She was one of

the teachers who taught the class that performed well in the April-May 2007 BECE. That was a few months before she was appointed as Head of Caarie. She underlined a number of factors she believed were responsible for the downward trend in Caarie's academic achievement. These included students' lateness to school, students' loss of interest in learning, the continuous absence of some teachers, lack of text books, lack of cooperation of parents and inability of the School to complete the teaching syllabus for the BECE (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*).

Carrack's evaluation of Caarie was based on her personal observation as Head and what she believed others, like teachers, parents and students considered to be the School's debilitating academic problems. She organised staff meetings at least twice every term, and PTA meetings once every term. She used these forums to formally discuss and find solutions to some of the School's problems, but as she admitted, her teachers were not responding positively. So, she worked hard alone with her Deputy Principal to find solutions to some of these problems, with little success. She explained that she delegated her Deputy to be in charge of school discipline and to review and carry out all disciplinary issues concerning students. However, teachers were not collaborating actively with her Deputy in these disciplinary matters. She also appointed teachers to carry out other non-teaching responsibilities such as coordination of sports. She declared: "I delegate quality teachers to take up other duties in the School apart from the teaching. I am the administrator of the School, seeing to it that the right thing is done at the right time" (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*). In spite of her managerial efforts, some teachers failed to perform these additional responsibilities because they were regularly absent from school, she explained.

One of Carrack's significant achievements was bringing electricity to the School which enabled students to use the classrooms for their evening studies. She said: "We applied to the (Saboba) District Assembly and some other Nongovernmental Organisations to provide electricity to the School. The school wasn't having electricity. I sent out some applications and did follow-ups and we've been connected to the national grid" (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*). As a result, Carrack repeated that students had begun to return to school in the evenings to study in their classrooms instead of studying at home with hurricane lanterns or poor lighting. She also adopted a three-step system in helping absentee teachers to reform. She first discussed the issues with the teacher but when the teacher still continued the practice, she then requested her Deputy to admonish the teacher. If that also failed then she went a step further and

reported the case to the Circuit Supervisor for action. She however, complained about failure of education officers, including the Circuit Supervisor, in helping her to resolve unprofessional conduct of teachers as cases of teachers' continuous absence or regular lateness reported to them were seldom followed up.

Similarly, Carrack organised a few PTA meetings with parents to address some of the problems of Caarie. She acknowledged the difficult communication and relationship with parents and the PTA. She complained that the PTA was not united and as a result could not make decisions to help find collective solutions to the School's many problems. She complained about the disunity in the PTA and how ineffective it was, but said little about how to communicate and collaborate more effectively with parents and invigorate the PTA. She stated:

We have PTA meetings at least once a term, once every term. At this time we have a problem, the executives are divided and we are not able to relate well any longer with them. That is a limitation for us. Yes. And the other limitation we have here is lack of effective PTA. (*Ca* Principal Interview, 12/12/2009)

Key finding 6.6

Carrack had ineffective delegation and communication with parents and PTA and thus could not collaborate with them effectively.

However, those parents who were interviewed did not mention any issue concerning disunity in their ranks. Listening to them, the Researcher observed that parents were aware of the low achievement levels at Caarie and were concerned. One said: "The last two years, the performance is nothing to write home about" (*Ca* Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010). Some parents even identified indiscipline on the part of students and teacher unprofessionalism as chief causes of low standards in the School. A parent said that teachers were no longer very regular in school as some came to the school and left school at will on a daily basis. A parent said: "When you visit the School, sometimes there is only one teacher who is regular during the whole term" (*Ca* Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010). A student confirmed this and said: "Yes our School didn't perform well last year... Most of the teachers weren't at school. So the students were left alone" (*Ca* Students FG Meeting, 22/12/2009).

Parents not only complained, they also mentioned efforts that some of them were making to collaborate with the Principal to resolve some of these problems and improve the academic standards. The PTA Chairman for example remarked:

I meet with the Head to see how many teachers are there...., are they enough or not. If they are not enough what measures are we talking to get more teachers? If they are enough are they all doing, performing their roles and I don't know. (*Ca Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*)

Other parents expressed the desire to assist the Principal in stopping teenage pregnancy and school attrition, by visiting the School and giving moral talks to their children, especially the girls. They mentioned that some of them had collaborated with Carrack in resolving such issues in the past. This was confirmed by Carrack when she said: "The Parent Teacher Association agreed to always send pregnant students away. When they deliver or when they give birth, they can come back" (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*). They however expressed their frustration with the Principal for not involving them regularly in discussing these problems and seeking together, solutions or strategies to change the situation. Another parent reiterated this: "The performance is not good... Within these last two years ..., they couldn't pass BECE. They repeated students, and the problem was still the same... (Yet), they (school authorities) don't want the parents to direct (advise) them" (*Ca Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*).

Undoubtedly parents, like the Principal, were anxious to lift the School out of its predicament, yet no one was providing the leadership needed to create the team spirit needed to boost collaboration on all fronts. Interestingly, the Principal and the parents, separately and independently, identified similar problems and possible solutions when interacting with the Researcher and yet each group kept to itself (*Field Notes, 17/01/2010*). Meanwhile, Carrack was certainly very much aware of her role as the administrator of the School, the team builder and leader. This was how she expressed it: "I am the administrator of the school, seeing to it that the right thing is done at the right time" (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*).

Key finding 6.7

The Principal and parents knew of the academic problems of Caarie but the lack of effective collaboration between them prevented active cooperation to resolve these challenges, and also dissipated the Principal's efforts.

One major challenge in ensuring that the right thing was done at the right time, as explained by Carrack, was the difficulty students had in attending school on a regular basis. Some students were absent from school the whole day while others came to school in the morning and then left later during the day before lessons were over. This

was a real concern for Carrack, for parents and for teachers. Carrack explained: “And then the other one (problem) is absenteeism on the part of the children. This time, I don’t know why ... it’s like children are losing interest in education. It has become an ‘on-and-off’ affair; today they are in school, tomorrow they are nowhere to be found” (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*).

Parents also criticised the rampant student absenteeism and lateness to school. One concerned parent remarked: “You don’t know the break hours, you don’t know the classes’ hours” (*Ca Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*). Parents observed that they had found students who loitered in town during normal school hours. They were unhappy about the situation in which some students were regularly late to school and others were absent from school. Some parents remarked that their own children sometimes left the house to go to school and they ended up loitering in town. Parents believed that the Head and the teachers could do more to keep students in school during lesson hours. Managing student truancy was a real concern that Principal Carrack attempted to resolve by giving permission, sometimes, to teachers to whip students who came to school late. She also gave pep talks to the students especially the girls, as a way of encouraging them to come to school regularly and study more seriously. However, Carrack believed that all her efforts and those of her teachers to stop or reduce student absenteeism and lateness to school were less-effective because the problem had become too difficult to manage and overcome.

Key finding 6.8

Carrack and the parents acknowledged student absenteeism and lateness as a factor of ineffective teaching and learning.

The management of students as well as teachers, in order to create an efficient schooling environment, was also a real concern for Carrack. She was concerned about teachers’ unprofessional conduct and she emphasised this in several conversations. She explained:

Then the teachers' indiscipline, on the part of the teachers, this seems to happen. Some teachers come to school late. Even we keep talking about punctuality all the time, they come to school late... And then the other issue is that teachers decide to travel, teachers travel a lot. (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*)

Another act of teacher misconduct Carrack mentioned as a major concern and cause of low standards was teachers’ regular absenteeism and lateness to School. Some

teachers regularly absented themselves from School without any permission. Others also came late to School and spent less time in teaching students. Some teachers also regularly sought permission to be absent from School. As a result, students sometimes spent many hours without a teacher.

Carrack even remarked that some teachers would send hand notes on a particular concept that they were yet to teach and request one student, often the cleverest in the class, to either dictate these to other students who would then write them into their note books or to first copy them on the chalkboard while the other students also recopied the paragraphs by hand in notebooks. Carrack described this practice of teachers sending hand notes for students to copy instead of being present and teaching, as a most painful experience (Field Notes, 17/01/2010). Carrack linked this unprofessional conduct of her teachers to her teachers' inability to complete the entire syllabuses prior to the students sitting the BECE. She explained that this problem negatively affected the students' performance. Carrack confirmed that she was compensating for this problem by requesting the teachers to voluntarily provide extra-tutorials to cover the gaps in the syllabus. She explained: "So what we have agreed to do is voluntary extra classes or extra lessons. Teachers come, either in the mornings or evenings depending on the teacher's own convenience and whatever time the teacher feels he can come" (*Ca* Principal Interview, 12/12/2009).

Carrack's position was confirmed by a teacher who said: "I have taken extra classes as one of the strategies. Most of the time we, the subject teachers couldn't complete the syllabus and that could have caused some of these problems" (*Ca* Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009). The teachers did not explain why they were unable to complete the syllabuses during the normal contact hours and had to resort to extra-tutorials to fill in the gaps. One teacher however admitted that teacher absenteeism harms the learning and progress of the students.

Although Carrack had attempted some measures to check lateness and absenteeism of students and teachers, she was unable, during the interview, to present her strategies for overcoming this problem. When asked about this, she responded by saying that she and her teachers were doing their best, yet some students and teachers still came to school late and others failed to attend lessons, including extra-tutorials for days or even weeks (*Ca* Principal Interview, 12/12/2009).

Key finding 6.9

Extra-tutorials were introduced to compensate for lost teaching time and complete the syllabus. However, Carrack's inability to curb the problem of teacher lateness and absenteeism resulted in failure to complete the syllabus.

Carrack's Instructional Leadership Efforts

Principal Carrack and her teachers presented extra-tutorials and practice examinations as one solution for improving student learning and achieving better academic results at the BECE.

Carrack observed that when she became Head of Caarie, she wanted to make some changes to improve the academic environment and student performance. She explained how important the extra-tutorials were in helping teachers to make up for lapses in teaching and also, for students to catch up with all the requirements of the BECE syllabus. She asked her teachers to indicate their preferred times to teach students at extra-tutorials, organised at weekends and during weekday evenings. This was to enable every teacher to actively participate and reduce teacher absenteeism. She had also put in place a committee that was responsible for cooperating with her to organise these extra-tutorials. Another committee of teachers was responsible for organising practice examinations, quizzes and debates. She explained: "Another change I made was forming committees..., like discipline committee, counselling committee, examination or academic committee and they all have their rules" (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*).

However, students mentioned that they were unable to use the extra-tutorials to revise what they had been taught by their teachers as the teachers used the tutorials to cover the syllabus and teach them new things. A student voiced his frustration: "Like I say some of the subjects you start from Form One and you will not finish, you come to Form Two, you will not finish and still they have not finished" (*Ca Students FG Meeting, 22/12/2009*).

The teachers explained that they were no longer setting the practice examination questions by themselves but rather purchased already prepared practice examination kits published by examiners and experienced lecturers in the respective subject areas that would be tested at BECE. One teacher said: "But the four past years, we used BECE practice exam questions set from outside the School. I think they were questions from

outside, to help the student to learn...., to raise their standard,” (Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009). Despite these important instructional initiatives, students complained that their teachers did not always discuss with them the corrected practice examination scripts as was done in other schools. Some students claimed that sometimes, the practice examinations were not corrected and they did not get any feedback on their scripts before they sat the BECE (Ca Ex-Students FG Meeting, 27/11/2009). They believed that some of their teachers had little mastery of some concepts that featured in the practice examinations and thus, were unable to correct those questions. Some students complained about the difficulty of learning from their mistakes if they never saw their corrected scripts. A student remarked:

After they have finished marking them (the answer scripts) they (the teachers) give the paper to us. I don't know why the students are not receiving their papers (scripts). And they say that most of the teachers, those who are supposed to mark them, they are not able to finish marking them (Ca Students FG Meeting, 22/12/2009).

Students and teachers acknowledged this difficulty. Some teachers explained that the correction of the scripts of the BECE practice examinations was done by a team of teachers from different schools and Caarie teachers had no control over when the corrections would finish. Further, some teachers remarked that the delay in correcting the practice examination questions came about because the external experienced teachers, who were supposed to correct the examination scripts, were also busy preparing their own students for the BECE and as a result, did not have enough time to correct those of Caarie students.

Teachers remarked that they sometimes sought help from their colleague teachers in other schools who had better mastery of specific concepts they wanted to teach or were teaching. Carrie did not have qualified teachers for all the BECE subjects. Carrack acknowledged that the School bought education materials including BECE practice examination questions as learning support materials for the students. She explained:

So, we buy, we look at good pamphlets. We buy them and distribute to the subject teachers to use to support the materials that Ghana Education Service gives us. But we make sure that they buy useful materials to support the learning. (Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009)

The purpose of practice examinations was to enhance students learning and preparedness towards the BECE. However, in Carrie, the failure of external teachers to

correct the exam scripts on time, prevented students from receiving crucial feedback on their learning and helping them to be prepared for the BECE.

Key finding 6.10

In spite of Carrack's introduction of extra-tutorials to compensate for student and teacher lateness, and failure to cover the syllabus, teachers' continuous use of tutorials to teach new concepts rather than revise; and their failure to correct and give feedback on practice examination scripts deprived students opportunities to be prepared fully for the BECE.

Carrack corrected teachers' lesson notes and also gave some direct coaching to some teachers, especially those who taught Science, the subject she used to teach. Carrack declared: "You realise that a particular teacher has a problem in a subject area. You try to, like, kind of, guide the person to improve upon it" (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*). However, students complained about the difficulties they had in Science as Carrack no longer had enough time to teach them due to her administrative work. The new Science teacher was unable to teach all the concepts despite the coaching he had received from Carrack.

Carrack also engaged some of her experienced teachers to coach the untrained 'helper teachers'. She observed that the 'helper teachers' were very poor in methodology and some of them in content as well. She had sent away some 'helper teachers' for non-performance. She explained an incident:

I went to the class one day; he was telling the children that malaria is caused by sheep, guinea fowls, pigs, and a lot of other things... I had to just send them away because I tried and we gave in-service training, but there was no change. (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*)

Despite Carrack's efforts to coach some of her teachers, and also organise an internal professional development session once every term, the majority of the teachers felt that was insufficient. In fact, some newly trained teachers and others who were still developing their teaching competence, most especially those who taught Mathematics and Science, sometimes approached their colleagues in other schools and sought personal instructional help. One of the teachers said: "I do call on him and when I see something and it's conflicted, I call him and he does confirm or otherwise of it, then I know I'm on the right course" (*Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009*).

Teachers' efforts were not however recognised by parents. Parents, who complained about the falling standards in Caarie, believed that the teachers were not

committed to their teaching. Parents thought that most teachers behaved as if they were under an obligation to teach, and therefore showed no personal interest in teaching. These teachers had no desire to help the students to learn and pass the examinations. A parent explained:

The standard was falling, falling, falling and last year I'm sure it is the worst school in the District. To me I feel the school becomes low, it is not average, because when the school is established it was the best school. (*Ca Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*)

Another parent exclaimed: "I think that we are currently trying to talk to teachers to do their best 'cause most of them are not serious" (*Ca Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*). Parents' complaint about lack of commitment on the part of Caarie teachers found an echo in what some teachers remarked concerning the conduct of quizzes and debates in Caarie.

Teachers who were formally charged by the Principal to organise quizzes and debates claimed that they could not conduct any for a while because Carrack was unable to provide prizes. Thus, although quizzes and debates took place in Caarie, they were mostly organised in preparation for an inter-school competition, or as an *ad hoc* act to occupy students when the weather was too hot for students to play outside, rather than as a specific strategy to improve learning. Friday afternoons had been scheduled for outdoor sports and whenever it was too hot for playing, the students were given a quiz. Carrack herself remarked: "When the Sun rays become hot, we gather under the trees and then we have quiz" (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*).

Students also refused to cooperate with their teachers towards their own learning. Carrack deplored the bad habit of students who regularly refused to do class assignments which she had emphasised as crucial to students' learning. She explained the need to use corporal punishment as a last resort to pressurise students to do their class assignments. She remarked. "Like, some teachers always experience this problem where students refuse to do homework or assignments. You have to use force before they will do anything" (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*).

Not all students in Caarie were unmotivated and undisciplined. Some were serious about their studies and took personal initiatives to be abreast with the requirements of the BECE syllabus, irrespective of the inability of their teachers to complete the syllabus prior to the BECE. Such responsible students borrowed note books from past senior students who had passed the BECE. Others also borrowed text books from students in nearby schools that were performing well. Students also looked

for recommended text books for the BECE and checked how much their teachers had taught them and how much of the syllabus was still left to be covered. A student explained: “I’ll read the text book and I’ll see some topics that were not taught. So I want to believe that what is in the text book is corresponding to our syllabus” (*Ca Students FG Meeting, 22/12/2009*). Another student declared:

Even though the notes given to us sometimes do not satisfy me I have to read it (them) and make sure I will read beyond. That is why I have lent (borrowed) books from seniors who have passed (the BECE) and then to come and compare with my own notes. (*Ca Students FG Meeting, 22/12/2009*)

Students’ self-help efforts to study and pass the BECE were also attested by some past graduates of Caarie who performed well at the BECE. They said that their success was the result of their ability to organise their own private study groups, which were sometimes joined by their teachers who explained concepts that they, the students, did not fully understand (*Ca Ex Students FG Meeting, 27/11/2009*).

Key finding 6.11

Carrack coached some teachers and organised some professional learning workshops but this made little improvement to the quality of teaching and learning as a lack of commitment of many teachers and students persisted. However some students were self reliant and took their own responsibility to improve learning.

Carrack’s Collegial Leadership Efforts

Carrack organised a staff meeting every school term or every quarter. These were meant for consultation among teachers and between the teachers and the Principal. Many of her teachers attested that Carrack was a very open-minded person who loved dialogue and consultation. One teacher declared: “She will consult, make sure that she put it before the staff and she will wait and then, I mean to receive suggestions from each and every one” (*Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009*). Another teacher opined that: “She tries to find out our problems. If she is not in the School, and there is a personal problem, when she comes, she tries to find out the problem; and to make sure that it is solved” (*Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009*). Carrack had cordial relations with her staff but the members of staff were reluctant in collaborating with her as she would have wished. She said she tried to relate well with them and avoided being bossy, however this resulted in some staff members not taking her instructions seriously. She

wanted to be a ‘mother’ to all, she emphasised but some of her teachers took advantage of that and were not collaborating as she wanted.

Further, Carrack used to delegate authority to her Deputy Head. He was responsible for all disciplinary issues in the School and also assumed responsibility for the School whenever Carrack was absent. A teacher made this remark concerning the Deputy Principal. “In the absence of the Headmistress, he tries to make sure that things are on the right path. And even if the Headmistress is there he tries to help her to put things right” (*Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009*).

Carrack herself explained that she delegated responsibilities to experienced and hard working teachers. She said: “I delegate quality teachers to take up other duties in the school apart from the teaching” (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*). She had established English Spelling Committee, Examinations Committee, Quizzes and Debates Committee and Sports Committee and each was headed by a teacher. While some of these committees were active, others were ineffective at the time of the research. The Examinations Committee, for example, was unable to assist students to get back their BECE practice examinations’ scripts for revision. She complained about lack of commitment on the part of some of her staff.

The organisation of extra-tutorials was another important collegial act of Carrack. Teachers explained how they deliberated and put in place a time table for the extra-tutorials that suited every teacher. Carrack herself mentioned that she met the teachers and together they prepared a timetable for the extra-tutorials, one that was acceptable to everyone, however, some of the teachers failed to report for the extra-tutorials. Parents and students complained about this. A parent who had met Carrack in the School later made this observation: “So they were advised to be helping during their vacation, but she (the Principal) was surprised that out of nine teachers of this school, whom she talked to only few came” (*Ca Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*).

Carrack used the Government Capitation Grants to acquire stationery and other articles which teachers used as awards to deserving students in quizzes and debates. These were not frequent though. Carrack consulted both the PTA and teachers in disbursing these grants. This was attested by teachers and parents. Through that consultation she had used part of those grants to repair school furniture and also contributed a token towards the electrification of the classrooms, a job that was funded mainly by the Member of Parliament for the locality (*Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009*). Despite these collegial efforts, Carrack complained that she lacked the

collaboration of her teachers who still absented themselves from classes and other duties, sometimes without her permission. With regards to the parents, she was convinced that parents and the PTA were suffering from internal squabbles and thus were not united to assist her and the School.

Students and teachers testified that Carrack had some level of dialogue with students, especially the girls, whom she met from time to time to give motherly advice and to encourage them to study and avoid getting pregnant. Teachers and students acclaimed that her efforts had helped to reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy in the School. A student remarked: “I have seen Madam calling the girls together and trying to explain in fact, what they gain at the end of the day if they study hard and avoid pregnancy” (*Ca Students FG Meeting, 22/12/2009*).

Carrack’s efforts to halt teenage pregnancy went beyond pep talks to the girls. She demonstrated her collegiality by inviting some parents to speak to the students on the negative consequences of teenage pregnancy. A parent mentioned how she went to the School with other parents and they advised the students. “But, we talk to them both, boys and girls but we work particular on the girls because they are always the victims. They always pull them out to go and marry” (*Ca Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*). The School still experienced teenage pregnancies every year; however, the number had reduced since Carrack had been engaging the girls in dialogue and pep talk. Despite this, the girls were still the majority of latecomers and school absentees as attested by both the Principal and the teachers.

Collegial leadership is nurtured through partnership, trust, support and active mutual collaboration among the parties towards achievement of a common goal. In spite of the level of collegiality and dialogue demonstrated by Carrack, this did not help her to involve teachers, students and parents in stamping out the unprofessional conduct of teachers, nor did it generate a productive working relationship with parents and the PTA. Students were still coming to school late and being absent for long periods.

Key finding 6.12

Carrack’s acclaimed good sense of collegiality and cordial relations and delegation of responsibilities did not gain the collaboration and commitment of her staff, students and parents and thus, failed to improve teacher professionalism, student discipline and cooperation of parents.

Engagement and Partnerships with Local Community

“And then, like I told you, we are trying our best to establish a very good relationship between the teachers and the PTA. We’re trying to restore that relationship”, remarked Carrack (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*). Carrack explained that in 2007, when Caarie had the best academic achievement in its history and in the whole Saboba District, the PTA and parents spontaneously came to the School and presented gifts to each of the teachers, including her, as she was teaching Science at the time. This was how Carrack expressed it:

In 2007, just after the results were released, the Parent Teacher Association brought us some parcels, parcels for each and every individual teacher. And that was a very good motivating factor. It motivated the teachers. They usually come around to find out our program. When we have family programs they do visit us. And when they also have problems we too, we send a delegation to visit them. (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*)

Carrack admitted that it was difficult working with the parents and the PTA to improve the academic work of students. The reason she ascribed to this was the disunity that characterised the executive board of the PTA, which had paralysed its functioning. PTA members and parents interviewed were aware of the falling standards at Caarie. They did not mention the problem of disunity in their ranks but rather lamented teacher unprofessionalism as a major contributing factor or “a big problem” of the School. A parent declared:

Below average and I want to stand on one issue. It’s actually below average. Because the issue is the school was the best and standard was high ... and now it’s nothing to write home about. Even their behaviour, the behaviour among even the teachers who are supposed to behave (well) and children will learn from that... The discipline is not there among the teachers and the children. It is a big problem in the school today. (*Ca Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010*)

Other parents believed that because the Principal and the teachers were aware of the fact that they were responsible for the low standards in the School, the School kept its distance from them, parents; and did not want them to be around and be blaming them. A parent reportedly questioned a teacher about the reason why the academic situation had deteriorated that much, and the teacher responded and said they were doing their best, and they did not know why the BECE results of the students were still low (*Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009*).

At the time of the research the rapport between Carrack and the community was not the best. Some parents who initially gave portions of the land on which Caarie was built had begun to encroach upon some parts of the School land with the excuse that their children needed more land to cultivate and farm. Some were requesting the Ghana Education Service to compensate them with cash even though they initially offered the land as a donation to the local Government. Some of these parents stopped Carrack from planting trees to beautify the campus and provide shade for students and teachers. Repeated appeals by Carrack to the local Education officers to intervene and resolve the stalemate went unheeded and other parents were reluctant to get involved (*Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009*).

Caarie teachers spoke loud and clear of the difficult relationship between the School and the community, and most especially the Parent Teacher Association. Teachers appreciated the support of the PTA in purchasing a used computer which was yet to be installed and used in teaching ICT. They also commented positively about parents who had visited the School and given moral talks to the students, and advised the female students to be studious and avoid dropping out of school. However, most of the suggestions made by those teachers interviewed focussed either on a list of things they wanted the PTA and parents to do for the School, or the kind of relationship they wished existed between the School and the community. These requests and wishes illustrated again the difficult partnership between parents, the community and the School. Some of the teachers' desires were similar to those expressed by the parents. For example, parents were willing to be involved in discussing how to raise standards, and teachers were also feeling embarrassed by the low standards in the School, yet both groups could not meet and discuss a remedy (*Field Notes, 17/01/2010*).

The teachers mentioned that the PTA could help improve learning by providing prizes to reward high-achieving students in each subject at the end of each school term (*Ca Teachers FG Meeting, 15/12/2009*). Teachers believed that that would set in motion a healthy spirit of competition among the students and would help raise standards. Some of the teachers thought that the Principal was partly to blame, as she was not fighting enough to convince the parents and PTA to contribute towards buying text books and other teaching and learning materials. Other teachers wanted the parents to monitor their children when they returned home after school to ensure that the children continue to study even at home. A teacher expressed his thoughts like this:

PTA meetings, frequent PTA meetings, most of the time, some of these parents they are illiterate, and they don't actually know ... what (is) the education of their ward. Some don't know. So during this PTA meeting, we'll tell them, please, you have to buy books for them, you have to monitor what they do as they are doing that exercise (assignment) for this particular subject. I think that is the way the school can do to make these parents more involved in (the School and) to have an effect. (Ca Parents FG Meeting, 18/01/2010)

Other teachers wanted parents to free their children to participate in extra-tutorials and to study more at home. Some teachers also complained about the failure of parents to provide food for their children, and as a result, some children did not have the energy to study effectively. These were the views of the teachers but it seemed that the system in Caarie had failed to communicate these effectively to the parents.

Thus, there was some degree of contacts between Caarie, parents and PTA through informal contacts and formal PTA meetings but the relationship was a difficult one, as all parties agreed. Thus, although all parties identified similar challenges for Caarie, they failed to unite in discussing and resolving them. Each party was doing something, to improve academic standards but often in isolation. Parents participated less in assisting the Principal in addressing the School's challenging circumstances and therefore contributed less towards the development and progress of the School. This was what Carrack acknowledged when she said that "we are trying our best to establish a very good relationship between the teachers and the PTA. We're trying to restore that relationship" (Ca Principal Interview, 12/12/2009).

Key finding 6.13

Parents, like the Principal, were open to being involved in resolving the low standards of the School. However, neither Carrack nor the PTA were able to partner towards effective resolution of the School's low standards which both parties acknowledged, deplored and wanted to change.

Summary

From the themes that emerged from the analysis of the Caarie research data, a flow-chart was constructed that captured the story of Caarie. This flow-chart, presented in Figure 6.2 guided the narration of the case study of Caarie.

Carrie's low academic standards were caused by a set of challenges, namely: teacher unprofessional conduct, student indiscipline, parents' dissatisfaction with Principal's leadership and lack of community support. The Principal, the teachers,

parents and students were all seeking solutions but lack of common vision and mission and the Principal's weakened managerial, instructional, and collegial and community partnership efforts resulted in limited cross-collaboration and the low academic standards of Caarie remained unresolved.

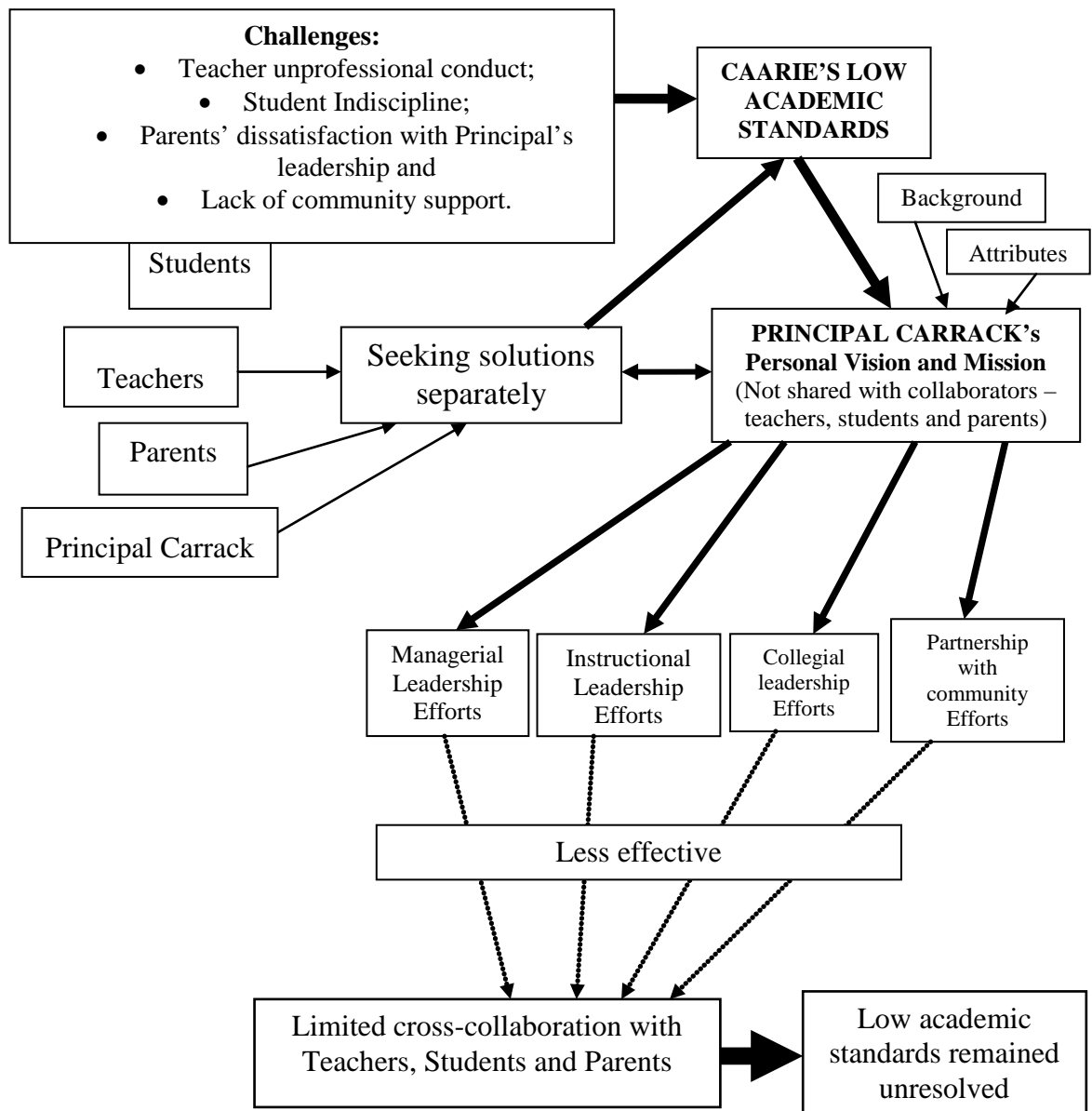


Figure 6.2. The narrative flow-chart of the story of Caarie JHS

Carrack, despite her genuine personal efforts and commitment to improve the low academic standards in Caarie, failed to exert the required leadership in managing Caarie vis-à-vis the challenges posed to effective teaching and learning. The major causes of the low standards were the unprofessional conduct of teachers, indiscipline of students, and parents' mistrust and weak support for the School. Carrack had some positive managerial, instructional, and collegial as well as community partnership initiatives. However, these were demonstrated as ineffective, as she failed to develop

her personal vision and mission into a common school motto to rally her collaborators, including staff and parents, in championing the academic revival of Caarie.

Interestingly, all concerned: parents, teachers, students and Principal were aware of the issues, but they were unable to team up and resolve them as partners. Best efforts were isolated and personal. The key findings that emerged from the analysis of data from the case study of Caarie are presented in Appendix H.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CASE FOUR - DAARIE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

The chapter on the fourth case study, Daarie JHS begins with the description of Daarie's school setting and special circumstances, including its complex leadership and infrastructure constraints. It then presents the Assistant Principal, Darrack (the informal acting Head), his personal vision and mission for the School. This is followed by a description of the managerial, instructional, collegial and community partnership challenges that were faced by Daarie and Darrack's attempts to improve academic standards. It concludes with a narrative flow-chart drawn from the Daarie case data.

Introduction to Daarie Junior High School, Saboba

School settings and circumstances

The establishment of Daarie, like many other Junior High Schools in the locality, was initiated by the villagers of Daarie, a suburb of Saboba. The local Chief and elders together with their community wanted a Junior High School their children could attend without walking the long three-kilometre route to the nearest JHS. Following the tradition in the Saboba locality, the villagers of Daarie approached a Christian Church and requested their involvement in advocating with the local education and government officers to help build a local Junior High School. As a result of lobbying by this Church, the Ghana Education Service and the Saboba District Assembly finally agreed and built Daarie. This practice of a Church lobbying the Government to build a school in a particular locality did not make any operational difference, as the schools remained Government schools with salaries and running costs borne by the Ghana Education Service.

Daarie's complex leadership situation.

In spite of the numerous efforts made, the Researcher was unable to meet the official Principal of Daarie, who was reportedly on a 'French leave' (unauthorised absence) for almost one and half years. He was supposedly living in the town, and was not sick either, as explained by the acting Head, staff and students (*Da* Principal Interview, 05/02/2010; *Da* Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010; *Da* Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010; *Da* Ex-Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010). In his absence, his Assistant Principal took a personal initiative in consultation with the teachers to function as the informal Acting Principal in order to maintain discipline and keep the

School running. The local education authorities, although aware of the situation, failed to confirm Daarie's Assistant Principal as Acting School Principal. In fact, Darrack was the de facto Acting Principal of Daarie, as teachers, students, parents and local education officers were dealing with him as if he was the Acting Principal. This was how he explained this:

When you ask him (the absentee Principal) anything about the school, he says that they should come and see me. Meanwhile I have not received any confirmation from the office indicating that I should head this school, and this started since last academic year. (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*)

This confused status of the acting informal Principal created challenges for Daarie.

Teachers, students and some parents were cautious about their loyalty to the Assistant Principal, whom they regarded as unapproved or a non-legitimate Principal, and thus, did not fully cooperate with him. In the Saboba locality, traditions of respect for the elderly and authorities were strong. Many teachers, parents and students still acknowledged and respected the absent Principal as the formal Head of the School. As a result, some of them remained cautious in participating in any serious discussions and activities with the Assistant Principal for fear that this might affect their relationship with the official Principal.

Key finding 7.1

The Assistant Principal of Daarie took the initiative without any formal approval to act as Principal in the protracted absence of the official Principal.

Daarie's facilities.

Daarie was a relatively young Junior High School and had a problem with recruitment of qualified teaching-staff. The majority of its teachers were untrained supply or voluntary teachers, popularly referred to in the local parlance as "helper teachers" (*Da Community leaders FG Meeting, 12/12/2009*).

Daarie had only one building that housed three classrooms with two additional rooms which served respectively as an office for the Principal and a staff common room. The classrooms were poorly furnished, especially those of the junior students. While the final year students each had a desk or a writing table and a chair, four students in the junior classes shared one desk constructed for seating two students. The two classrooms were congested and some students had to content themselves with either sitting on the classroom floor or standing outside by the window to follow lessons.

Arguably, Daarie needed two additional classrooms to reduce the congestion in the existing classrooms. Daarie's classroom building had neatly painted walls as it was only recently constructed.

The two rooms that served as offices had only one entry door which led into the outer hall. The outer hall was originally designed as the visitor lobby and reception of the Principal's office but had been converted into a makeshift teaching-staff room. Thus, the inner room, with a separate door served as the Principal's office and school store. At the time of the research it served as the office of the Acting Principal.

Daarie had no library facility and the limited library books donated by nongovernmental organisations were kept in cupboards at the Principal's office. Teachers were allowed to borrow books to prepare their lessons and could take them home if they needed to. Students could only borrow books during school hours and were not allowed to take them home for fear that they would misplace or soil them.

Daarie had three separate urinals for boys, for girls and for the staff. There were also separate toilets for boys and girls. Students kept the school compound clean and free from litter. Even the leaves shed by the few trees planted around the compound were swept, gathered and burnt in a nearby pit every morning prior to the commencement of lessons. Students used both verandas of their classroom block as play areas during breaks, especially if the weather was extremely hot. Daarie had few trees and there was little shade to give protection against the scorching Sun during the afternoons.

Water for drinking was kept in clean plastic buckets and clay pots at the staff room and at vantage points on classroom verandas. A big polyethylene tank was installed at the western end of the classroom building for the purpose of harvesting rain water for use by students.

During the 2009 and 2010 academic year, 232 students; comprising 101 girls and 131 boys were enrolled. Fifty-four students were preparing to write the BECE in April 2010 at the time of the research. Daarie had its best academic performance at the BECE level in 2007, the year when its first intake or 'pioneers' sat the examinations and 94% of the 20 candidates recorded a pass. At the time, Daarie had a different Principal, who was transferred at the end of the third quarter of 2007. It was then that the current official, absentee Principal of Daarie was appointed. In 2008, 31% of the 39 candidates presented at the examinations passed and in 2009, only 29% of the 86 students who wrote the BECE passed.

Key finding 7.2

Daarie had infrastructure challenges such as inadequate library facility and insufficient and poorly-furnished classrooms which caused classroom congestion. In the past two years less than a third of students passed the BECE.

Assistant Principal Darrack: Background, Attributes, Vision and Mission

Darrack's difficulty in leading Daarie, even if informally, is better appreciated with an understanding of his background, attributes and experience, as a teacher. His individual vision and mission that he set for the School, although it remained personal and unknown by his collaborators, influenced his thoughts and some of his actions.

Darrack's background

Having completed with success his Senior High School, Daarie gained admission into a public Teachers' College of Education to train as a teacher. He obtained his Diploma in Basic Education in 2007 and was posted to Daarie. He had no prior experience as an accredited teacher or as a school Head. In the first year of his posting to Daarie, in addition to Darrack there was only one other trained teacher at the School. This teacher had since left the School towards the end of Darrack's first year of teaching to pursue further studies at the University. As a result, when Darrack began acting as Head at the beginning of his second year in Daarie, he had to rely on eight untrained helper teachers. They were typically senior high school leavers who might have scored highly at the BECE in the subjects they were teaching. The helper teachers were not salaried and depended on the cash and in-kind support from the community. Unfortunately, the helper teachers became one of the most complex hurdles he had to manage in his maiden administration of Daarie. At the close of this research Darrack was still not approved officially as the acting Head of Daarie.

Darrack's personal attributes

Students admired Darrack's sense of discipline and time management skills. Some students even nicknamed him "the mad Whiteman" because he was always the first to be in school in the morning and always on time for his lessons whenever he was available to teach them. Darrack explained: "I have instilled discipline and the students have given a nickname to me, they've given me a nickname, 'the mad Whiteman'..., the mad Whiteman is coming".

Students also appreciated his special concern and care for them. Some students testified that he was persevering, hard working and disciplined. One student said: “About our Assistant Principal ..., he’s doing his work; he’s doing the office work and at the same time teaching us, English” (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

Students described Darrack as the only teacher who really cared for their academic progress and tried to find time to teach them and to encourage them to learn in spite of his administrative activities. Students also declared that because Darrack was concerned about their academic progress, he advised them to study hard so that they could pass the BECE. A student remarked:

If we have something like... they want to organise some quiz in town, for all the Schools in Saboba, he will make sure that he will prepare us and whatever they want us to do, he will make sure that he will teach us part of that ..., and he makes sure that if we are going there, he will also follow us to that place. (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*)

Some teachers also commended Darrack for his efforts to keep the School running in the absence of the official Principal. They saw him as a disciplined and hard working leader who had love and interest for students and for the School. This was in contrast to the official Principal whom some teachers described as lacking interest for the School. A teacher explained:

He (Darrack) is very (much) disciplined. And if ..., Mr Darida (pseudonym) who is Head of the school was here..., you would have seen a student outside, because he’s not serious. He doesn’t come to school to know whether the students are in the school or outside... He doesn’t sit with the masters (teachers) oh, to talk about how to strengthen teaching and learning activities... It will collapse. The school will collapse if Darrack has not taken the initiative to act (as Principal). (*Da Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010*)

Darrack’s concern for helping students to work hard and perform well underpinned his vision and mission for Daarie.

Darrack’s vision and mission for Daarie

Although Darrack had a vision and a mission for the School, these remained essentially Darrack’s own ideas. They were not explicitly and formally discussed nor declared and acknowledged by his teachers, students and parents. He only made allusions to these ideas in his interactions with teachers and students. Nevertheless, his vision and mission for the School found indirect echoes or parallels in individually-initiated efforts, made by some teachers and students, to promote teaching and learning.

Darrack's vision was to make the School a reputable, outstanding institution in academic achievement in the District. His mission was to achieve this vision by improving teaching and learning, and obtaining better results at BECE with the collaboration of educational partners, namely the GES, NGOs and parents.

In fact, Darrack said that he would make Daarie "one of the best schools in town" (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*) by improving teaching and helping students to be more hard working, and to perform better at the BECE. He remarked: "I always wanted to achieve better results wherever I find myself, so my target is if I leave, I shall leave a legacy that people should miss me, a better legacy than that of my predecessor..." (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*). In more concrete terms, Darrack expressed vision and mission as follows:

To make the school a reputable institution in the district; to bring on board other partners in educational development (i.e. Nongovernmental Organisations, PTA, etc); strengthen the Academic Board and enforce discipline in teachers and students respectively; recruit competent trained teachers to handle core subjects. (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*)

Darrack therefore wanted, firstly, to strengthen the School's Academic Board. He explained that this was to make it more proactive in taking measures such as intensifying extra-tutorials in order to boost teaching and learning. The Academic Board was an internal school committee, which was exclusively composed of teachers. The School Head was never a member. In collaboration with the Assistant Principal, it oversaw the review of past examinations, organisation of new examinations, academic competitions and students' academic records. Members were responsible for operational matters that would reduce academic impediments and improve achievement. At the time of the research, the Academic Board had not met for almost two months due to the regular absenteeism of some of the members.

Secondly, Darrack wanted to enforce discipline among teachers and students. He emphasised that he would take steps to advise teachers to reduce lateness to school, and prolonged absenteeism without permission. Thirdly, he would lobby the GES to recruit competent trained teachers to teach the core subjects of Mathematics, Science and English Language. (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*).

Darrack's vision of making the School "one of the best schools in town" and his mission of improving teaching and learning to achieve better BECE results seemed to be formally unknown to the students, teachers and parents. Staff and students separately emphasised their own vision and mission for the School in similar or different words

and terms through their complaints and/or their purported solutions to solving the School's varied problems.

These variously-conceived visions and missions for the School by individual teachers and students remained isolated and uncoordinated. Lack of awareness of a common School vision and mission among teachers and students prevented Darrack from finding a common rallying motto for taking collective initiatives towards improving Daarie's academic environment. In fact, even though Darrack had a sense of a vision and mission for the School, he had not yet formally articulated this to the school community. They remained essentially his ideas which guided his individual initiatives as teacher and Assistant Principal. Darrack nevertheless attempted, even if unsuccessfully, some managerial actions to rally or engage his teachers, students and parents in improving the School's learning environment and academic performance.

Key finding 7.3

Darrack's personal vision and mission to make Daarie an outstanding institution of high academic achievement with top BECE results, through improvement of teaching and learning and with aid of school partners, remained unknown to the School community.

Attempts at Rallying School Community Support

Darrack's Managerial Leadership Efforts

Daarie was faced with numerous challenges, some beyond their resources. However, Daarie could have resolved a number of the challenges that militated against an effective learning environment if only certain initiatives within their reach were deployed. Failing to do so created a number of critical managerial concerns or challenges in the School, as admitted by those interviewed and observed by the Researcher.

The main managerial challenges that were seriously affecting the academic standards of Daarie were: concern for resolving the headship impasse; lack of teacher professionalism, and student indiscipline.

Concern for resolving the headship impasse

All in Daarie, from the Assistant Principal through the teachers to the students, stated that their Principal was regularly absent from school. A teacher explained: "I can't actually tell whether he's on leave (or) he's on retirement, I just can't tell, he

doesn't come to school" (*Da Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010*). These teachers also expressed their desire to resolve the School's leadership impasse. They complained that their Principal's regular absence from the School had affected school discipline, and teaching and learning. One remarked:

I haven't seen (the Principal) because when I came here I met him in the house. I never met (him) in (during) the school activities... He's not serious because he doesn't care about the school activities. And two, he doesn't come to school to know whether the students are in the school or outside. And he doesn't come; he doesn't sit with the masters oh, to talk about how to strengthen teaching and learning activities... (*Da Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010*)

Some students also observed the continuous absence of their Principal. One said: "He came only once this term, the first day and he didn't come again. He entered his inside office and he went away so, I don't know where he has gone." (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*). Other students claimed that they did not even know their official Principal. A female student reiterated: "I don't know our Headmaster, he doesn't come to School" (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

Darrack was concerned about the leadership situation in the School and would like to get it resolved quickly. He acknowledged that he took the initiative to act as Principal of Daarie when he observed that the official Principal had been absent for a long time without any explanation from him or from the local education authorities. The following illustrated in Darrack's own words how he became the informal acting Head:

That's my own initiative to act as acting head... Nobody pushed me... When the Head stopped coming to school... That was around 2008. The Head stopped coming to school since June 2008. We were four staff, and everybody was reluctant to do something. I saw that law and order was virtually not there in the school because there was no Head – when the head of the family is not there, everybody does what he or she wants. So I took it upon myself to at least put things in order. I did that in consultation with another staff... and he said that it was a good position if I could go ahead. I said I needed his support at least to instil discipline and put things in order. He told me that I'm good; I can handle that so he'll back me. So I started by acting – it was just getting to the end of the term in July, so I organised exams for the end of the term and it went on smoothly... I took the total movement of staff, total movement of students, opened the school officially in the log book and then drew a timetable for the beginning of the academic term. Yes in 2008 and 2009..., (I) organised first staff meeting for the term and then apportioned lesson-periods and staff to subjects, subject areas. They started their academic work and that was just going down smoothly. Up till now, that's how... (*Da Principal Interview; 05/02/2010*)

In spite of this bold initiative to act as the Head of the School and the expressed concerns of his staff and students about the headship impasse, Darrack did not take immediate steps to request the local education authorities, the Ghana Education Service, to confirm his acting headship or to find a replacement. He rather continued to count on the absentee Principal to take the initiative in resolving the impasse. Darrack declared: “Sometimes we would talk and he would say oh, I’m leaving now, I’m going to the office (of the District Director of Education). Very soon he will confirm you. ... But nothing happens” (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*).

Darrack accepted the status quo and kept working. He sometimes formally received local education officers who visited the School to carry out official duties. These officers had the authority to resolve the leadership confusion in the School, yet Darrack did not bother them on this. He admitted that: “Any time they (GES officers) come they ask: ‘Where’s my boss?’ ‘He hasn’t come, as usual?’ They would say..., and I would say ‘yes, he hasn’t come’. Then they’ll go ahead and do whatever they came to do” (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*).

Resolving the leadership impasse in Daarie was also a major concern for the teachers. All teachers who were interviewed remarked that they wanted the official Principal to either return to the School or to seek a formal approval of Darrack as Head. Some teachers emphasised that it was unnecessary for the Parent Teacher Association and other stakeholders to continue to advise the absentee Principal to return and become active again. Those teachers insisted that since a number of parents and education officers had advised the legitimate Principal, and yet he failed to resume his responsibility as official Principal, he should be replaced by a new Principal. One teacher said: “I think if they give the school a new headmaster it will help. Because I don’t think..., yes; I don’t think any amount of advice, will change him” (*Da Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010*).

The teachers, however, acknowledged the fundamental managerial role Darrack was playing in running the School. They explained that: “It will collapse. The school will collapse if Darrack has not taken the initiative to act (as Principal)” (*Da Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010*).

Daarie students also complained about the regular absence of the official Principal and the subsequent headship impasse. Some thought that the absence of an official Principal was the cause of the numerous problems that plagued the School. Some students also stated that if there was an official Principal in their School, he or she

would ensure that the helper teachers would regularly come to school and be on time. The students complained that their poor achievement was also caused by the helper teachers who came to school late and regularly missed their teaching periods. A student reported: “Some (helper teachers) would come to School at 8 (am) and a half (half past eight) and by that time, their (teaching) period, their class has passed (elapsed)” (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

The appointment of a new official Principal for Daarie or the confirmation of its Assistant Principal as acting head was perceived as impractical by some local education officers and also by some parents. They still regarded the absentee Principal as the legitimate School Head (*Da Ex-District Director Interview, 09/01/2010*). Some parents, in fact, commented on the difficulty they had in discussing certain issues with Darrack for fear of displeasing the absentee Principal. Some acknowledged that they were friends with the official Principal and they had appealed to him to be present and active in the School but to no avail. Others mentioned that, although they appreciated the efforts of the young Assistant Principal who was now informally heading the School, they still recognised the absentee Principal as the formal Head and still discussed their children’s school issues with him whenever they met him in town or elsewhere (*Da Parents FG Meeting, 11/02/2010*). Despite parents’ dilemma some parents indicated their readiness to cooperate with the Assistant Principal (*Field Notes, 30/03/2010*).

Key finding 7.4

The informal acting Principal, staff, students, parents and education officers acknowledged that there was a leadership vacuum in Daarie which was affecting school authority, and teaching and learning. Yet, no one took action to resolve the situation.

Lack of teacher professionalism

This unusual situation of headship impasse rendered administration of the School difficult, as the Assistant Principal did not have the full authority and control over his teachers. For example, teachers continued to indiscriminately cane students who disobeyed, although that was against the will of Darrack. Teachers sent students to fetch water to their homes as punishment during school contact hours, an act which was not only contrary to school regulations but was continuously discouraged by the Assistant Principal. In Daarie, carrying of water by students to teachers’ homes was almost exclusively done as punishment for recalcitrant students. This treatment of

Daarie students by their teachers created an atmosphere of tension and discontent between teachers and students.

Generally, all students in the Saboba locality would fetch water to the homes of their teachers as an act of generosity. This was done to help the teachers to be at school on time and not looking for water for themselves and their families. This had become a usual practice due to the perennial water scarcity caused by ineffective planning and poor water distribution system by local authorities. In some schools, where discipline and order was a virtue, students, with the help of their class prefects, established rosters that indicated which day and to which home a particular student would carry water. This was done to ensure that no student would fetch water more than once in a week. Thus, it helped to limit the number of students who would leave the School campus to fetch water to teachers' homes at a given time.

Lack of teacher professionalism remained a major concern to Darrack as most of his teachers, who were untrained helper teachers, lacked discipline and failed to cooperate with him. However, his hands were tied; he could not exercise authority on them as they were volunteer teachers and had no remuneration from the Ghana Education Service.

At the time of the research, out of 10 teachers, only Darrack and the absentee Principal were qualified to teach. The remaining eight were untrained and were teaching as helper teachers (Field Notes, 30/03/2010; *Da* Principal Interview, 05/02/2010). These untrained teachers were recruited on a voluntary basis by the Principal in consultation with the local education officers. However, once they began teaching they expected some remuneration in the form of cash or in-kind, such as foodstuffs. In some schools, parents, through Parent Teacher Associations, championed the support for helper teachers on a regular basis. Although some parents in Daarie had begun to contribute some levies in support of teachers, the PTA executive members were inactive and organised hardly any meetings, and failed to provide regular support for the eight helper teachers *Da* Principal Interview, 05/02/2010). As a result, they had to fend for themselves and this situation was used by the helper teachers as a good excuse to be absent from school for long periods. Some of them came to school to teach when it pleased them and absented from school whenever that was convenient and this affected the smooth running of the School. Students complained about how the lateness and absenteeism of their teachers negatively affected their lessons and academic progress.

However, these helper teachers essentially perceived themselves as volunteers who received no remuneration from the School. Some did not see anything wrong with absenting from school, sometimes without seeking permission. They explained their absence by stating that they needed to undertake economic activities in order to earn their living. These helper teachers also complained about school meetings that took place on local market days. These were days on which people from villages and towns far and near, come to town, to either sell their farm produce and animals or to buy provisions and foodstuffs for their families. These helper teachers wanted to be free on market days so that they could go early in the morning to the market to buy and sell what they needed for the week. One helper teacher complained about the inconvenience caused them by the visits of the Circuit Supervisor, which usually occurred on market days. Interestingly, all the interviewed helper teachers admitted that sometimes, they came to school late or were absent from school. One said: “Most of the staff, including myself, we do not actually come to school frequently” (*Da Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010*).

Besides absenteeism and lateness to class, some teachers had a problem with alcohol abuse. This was how Darrack presented it: “We also have (members of) staff who are drunkards. I have to be frank here. They come to the classroom drunk. I think the PTA had lodged a complaint on this” (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*).

Students also denounced the unusual practice of teachers having affairs (intimate relations) with student girls. An immediate past student explained:

“Some masters (teachers) used to disturb girls here whenever they are in the School or in class. During our time it wasn’t like that, but they now..., yes, having sex with the girls. Before the year would end, you hear that this girl is pregnant and it is due to the masters. The masters are involved there”. (*Da Ex-Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*)

Some teachers also made reference to this. In response to a question on how well Darrack was leading the School, one teacher said:

I think that Darrack (is instilling) discipline, this immoral activity..., has been reduced and you will hear of this. This teenage pregnancy, we have a major problem facing us. I (am) thinking that with this, we are making headway. (*Da Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010*)

Students’ catalogue of complaints against their teachers’ conduct emanated from their discontent about the negative academic environment in the school and its impact on their own academic progress.

Key finding 7.5

Darrack lacked full authority over his volunteer teachers. Teachers' acts of disobedience and disrespect for authority and their undisciplined conduct of absenteeism, alcohol abuse, and inappropriate relations with female students remained unchallenged.

Student indiscipline

Parents complained that some of their children used to trick them in order to go out at night. They used to say: "I am going to learn, going (to) the master to learn" yet, instead of going to the School or to the teacher, they would proceed to a different place, unknown to parents (*Da Parents FG Meeting, 11/02/2010*).

The Assistant Principal of Daarie although unhappy about students' indiscipline and its negative effect on their learning, showed some understanding of the precarious situation of some students in his school. He had observed that some of the acts of indiscipline such as lateness to school or absenteeism by students were caused by socio-economic factors which were beyond the control of the students. He explained:

One of the key limitations that we have is that many of our students are taking care of themselves. Some have lost one parent or both and as a result they do at times, jobs to buy their books and uniform and other basic necessities and this makes them not able to attend school regularly. Most of them miss lessons. (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*)

These severe socio-economic factors might prevent some Daarie students from coming to school on time and regularly, yet they could not explain the undisciplined conduct of most students while in school. For example, students generally were noisy and disorderly in class. They explained that when they arrived early in school and noticed that their teachers were not there to teach, then they began to chat in class. A student said: "We come to School at 6:00 (a.m.) and we wait an hour and our teachers would not come and teach us. So, most of the time, the Class (students) are doing unnecessary things (making noise)" (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*). Some students who were regularly in school spent much of their contact hours either playing or making noise in their classrooms in the absence of their teachers. A student expressed this convincingly: "We like playing, (and) joking because there are no teachers (around), most of us don't concentrate on our books because the teachers are not there" (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

Some students also acknowledged their own part in the School's unhealthy teaching and learning environment and its ensuing poor academic standards. Students interviewed reported that lateness to school and absenteeism had become almost normal behaviour for some of them. They stated that they no longer saw the rationale in coming to school on time when they knew that they might have to wait for one or two hours for their late-coming teachers to arrive and teach them (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*). Students were taking the law into their own hands, one might say.

Other students, in justifying their lateness to school, explained that fear of corporal punishment by caning and stress in fetching water from the distant river to the homes of teachers had made them choose to stay away from school rather than going late and getting punished (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*). Some stated that they used to be absent from School for long periods in order to stay at home and help their parents in the farm or in the market to earn some income for the family. During the course of the research it was observed that students, like their teachers, continued to arrive late for school.

Teachers admitted that they were sometimes late to school; nevertheless they disapproved of the habitual lateness of students to lessons and blamed that as one of the causes of ineffective learning in Daarie. In discussing lateness of students to school and the poor academic standards of students of Daarie and how to resolve this, a teacher proposed the following:

The student doesn't come (to school) and now..., we can't minimise it, though maybe if we realise that the student doesn't come anymore and are not punctual ..., (the teacher on duty) should make sure that he would write their names and give them punishment to stop them coming late. (*Da Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010*)

Some teachers as well as students complained about indiscipline and inappropriate behaviour on the part of some of the students. They alleged that some male students engaged in sexual affairs with their female student friends in the nearby bushes (*Da Ex-Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*). One of the teachers who corroborated this report declared: "Quite a number (of students), some students, we caught them doing, having affairs with each other in the bush... but when (Darrack) came, oh they are disciplined" (*Da Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010*). This teacher explained that this inappropriate conduct of students was not uncommon during the time the substantive Head was present. When these students were reported to the absentee Principal for proper disciplinary action, he would often tell teachers to pardon the

students. It was Darrack, upon assuming the responsibility of leading the School, who began to punish such students and the number of incidences reduced.

Key finding 7.6

Darrack, through advice and use of punishments, had helped to reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy in the School but failed to halt other student undisciplined behaviour such as habitual lateness to school, long absence from school and noisy disorderly behaviour in classrooms.

Darrack's Instructional Leadership

Darrack exercised his instructional leadership through his interactions with his teachers and students in and outside the classrooms both as classroom teacher and as the Head of the School. Darrack's individual efforts towards improving students' learning were appreciated by his students, although their import was negligible. The teachers largely remained ineffective and apathetic towards students' learning, due to both overwhelming personal socio-economic challenges and difficult teacher-student relationship. Overloading one teacher with many subjects also affected teacher efficacy in the classroom.

Darrack teaches and shows concern for students' learning

All students interviewed unanimously commended Darrack for his knowledge of English Language and his student-centred teaching style. They stated that Darrack allowed them to ask questions during lessons. He would help them to practise essay writing in class and also prepared them to participate in inter-school debates and quizzes. Students gave an example of how Darrack prepared them and also accompanied them to participate in these quizzes, debates and spelling competitions. They explained that whenever the Assistant Principal was absent on an official duty and they needed such assistance to prepare for a quiz or any academic competition, the helper teachers regularly failed to help them.

(In) all the Schools, their Masters (teachers) helped to write their essay, because the English Master was not there, none of the teachers helped us even (though) we informed them, they didn't help us. We went there to Class, they didn't help us to do anything or to even finish writing or to read and correct our mistakes (or) tell us how to conclude the speech, how to do that, they didn't tell us. We just did it. (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*)

Darrack explained why he personally provided extra-tutorials for the final year students. He said:

Basically I rely so much on the extra-tutorials when I am teaching. This is to enable me to give them the necessary information as to how to answer questions when they get into the examination hall. Because I'm the only teacher handling English, it can be very, very tedious. (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*)

Darrack sometimes used his personal resources for teaching and learning. For example, he said: "I sacrificed my own resources to keep the School running. This includes personal money, books. I give my personal books to other tutors to improve teaching and learning and a lot (of) the teachers can testify to this" (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*).

Most students acknowledged the efforts made by the Assistant Principal to help them improve learning through his morale-boosting talks, through his advice to teachers and students who regularly arrived in school late, and through providing extra-tutorials in English Language (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010; Da Ex-Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*). Darrack personally organised extra English Language tutorials for all the three classes he taught from time to time. He did so to make up for English Language lessons he had missed as a result of administrative activities and travel on school business. A teacher explained:

Every day he moves up and down..., because there's nobody who takes the English (in his absence), he said oh no, he'll organise some extra classes..., for the time lost, he will cover it... He had some time to organise extra classes for the boys. So, to me, he's very good and he's hard working guy. (*Da Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010*)

Darrack remarked that he was successful with his English Language tutorials but had difficulty in efficiently organising extra-tutorials in the other core subjects.

Inefficient extra-tutorials in the core BECE subjects

Darrack emphasised his option for extra-tutorials during weekends, holidays or early mornings of normal school days. He explained that this was a strategy to improve students' learning. Extra-tutorials were an integral part of his personal mission for Daarie. Yet, he acknowledged that his teachers' weak cooperation or failure to be present regularly to teach as scheduled had affected the efficient organisation of these extra-tutorials. Darrack said: "And this is a very big challenge... Other tutors who do not frequently come to school. And I can't understand" (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*).

His students restated what Darrack himself recognised, that extra-tutorials in Daarie were poorly organised. Teachers were not always present or were coming late. A student commenting on this said: “We have extra classes (extra-tutorials) in the School, but it is (they are) not effective because we won’t pass” (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

An incident reported by students would best illustrate the teachers’ lack of concern for their students’ learning and academic performance. Students explained that on one occasion one of their teachers came late to the School to teach them during extra-tutorials. Due to his lateness, the Assistant Principal opted to teach them until the scheduled teacher would arrive. However, when the scheduled teacher finally arrived and noticed that the Assistant Principal was teaching them, the teacher became infuriated and went away without teaching them despite the fact that the Assistant Principal left the classroom soon afterwards in order to make way for the teacher. This latecomer teacher explained that he refused to teach the students because they failed to inform him in advance that the Assistant Principal would take the class in case he was late. A student explained this:

When he (the Assistant Principal) came, he saw that we are not having enough teachers to come and help during the holidays, so he came and was helping us with the English..., (our teacher) too, he was not there. So one of them came ..., and met ..., the Headmaster and he was angry that we didn’t come and inform them that the Assistant Headmaster was coming to teach us so they were just angry and the other one said we didn’t come to his house and call him to come and teach us so for that (they would not teach us). (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*)

Key finding 7.7

Barrack’s personal teaching capability and efforts to help students’ learning through his English Language extra-tutorials were acknowledged by students and teachers. However, he could not rally teachers to do the same as the teachers remained uncooperative and poorly participated in scheduled extra-tutorials for the core subjects.

Teacher ineffectiveness: The problem of helper teachers

Darrack was very much aware of some of the key instructional problems of Daarie. One of these was the problem of helper teachers, who lacked knowledge in teaching methodology. He deplored the situation but was unable to find a solution. He complained that the lack of teaching methodology by the helper teachers made it

difficult for the students to comprehend certain lessons and perform better. He explained that although the helper teachers might have mastered the subject content, they nevertheless had difficulty teaching and imparting that knowledge to students. Above all, the erratic presence of helper teachers at school and the uncertainty of the duration of their absence were responsible for the unusual teaching situation in the School. Different helper teachers would teach the same subject to the same students with different approaches to teaching, thus confusing the students. This situation persisted most especially in teaching of Mathematics. Darrack declared:

We saw that mathematics was a problem... because we've not had a substantive (official) mathematics tutor. Like (So), they (the students) pass through these different hands (untrained teachers). Most often they (the untrained teachers) are content perfect, but lack teaching methodology. (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*)

Similarly, students also complained of having to grapple and cope with the teaching styles of different helper teachers for the same subject within a month or a school term. A student explained her frustrations:

We don't have permanent Masters (Teachers). If the person is here today, tomorrow he is gone. They come now to teach each week and go away and another will come. They come (He comes) this week and next week he has run away. (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*)

Another student supported this view and expressed it with a clearer argument.

He said:

I wanted to say that if we can get Government trained teachers, the permanent ones... so that if this one starts from Form 1 to Form 3 and if it (he) is (the) only one Science master, ... (he) may know our problem. The places (areas/concepts) that he didn't cover (teach) ... he will be able to solve later. (Now), this one will come and then teach half and go away. Maybe the topics that this one wanted to start, this one (the other one might) ... have already started. (One comes and teaches) one topic and the other come and take another one. (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*)

Other students also lamented the confusion created in the teaching of Mathematics. All past and current students interviewed, denounced the lack of cooperation and collaboration among teachers of Mathematics. The students were baffled with regards to formulae in Mathematics. In fact one student explained: "One (teacher) would come and use one formula and this one (another) would come and use another formula so, we don't know which to take" (*Da Ex-Student FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*). Students could not understand why one teacher would begin to teach a

concept and would not complete it but would leave it for another to continue or complete. The other, who came afterwards, would often either change the formula and the method, or abandon that particular concept and topic for a new one. Students attested that this manner of teaching of Mathematics by different teachers at the same time had made their knowledge and performance in Mathematics weak (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

Students also complained about the unwillingness of their teachers to teach them as it was done in other schools. Students in the final year, preparing for the BECE, mentioned how teaching had been ineffective since they began the new school term in January 2010. A student remarked: “We Form 3s (final years) since School resumed, they haven’t teach (taught) us. They haven’t teach (taught) us anything ...and I don’t know what they (are) doing to help us to pass our BECE” (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*). A few students protested against the practice where some teachers would set examinations on concepts and subject topics which had not been covered in class and as a result, students failed their class tests and practice examinations.

We normally fail because sometimes our Masters would conduct exams on topics we don’t know. So when we fail they tell you a lot of things you don’t understand (they made critical remarks about your work) but you cannot say something. (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*)

Another student remarked that sometimes their teachers failed to teach all the specific topics that had been indicated in the revision-package for the BECE practice examinations. This was a set of books, booklets and flyers designed by experienced teachers across the country in consultation with some examiners of the BECE. It was meant to assist teachers in verifying how much content they had taught or covered with respect to the BECE. It was also meant to test students’ knowledge and preparedness to sit the BECE (*Field Notes, 05/02/2010*).

In fact, the unavailability of trained teachers was a special concern of students. A student who was in the final year class and preparing to sit the BECE remarked that: “Our school is not performing well because we don’t have enough masters (sufficient number of teachers)” (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*). According to some students, the problem of inadequate number of qualified teaching-staff was compounded by the inexperience of some of the helper teachers. They explained that some helper teachers could not express themselves well when they taught students. This made it hard for the students to grasp what the teachers were teaching. In relation to

this, a student declared: “So, I’ll be happy if you have trained teachers...., better trained teachers who do more than helpers” (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

Students were capable of distinguishing between who was a trained teacher and who was not. They all acknowledged Darrack’s mastery of the English Language and his teaching capability. Students would have preferred him spending more time to teach them English rather than carrying out his administrative tasks. Students had complained about his absence during the regular teaching period for English Language and his attempts to catch up through extra-tutorials. Students had wanted to be taught during normal teaching periods and to use extra-tutorials for revisions or studying other concepts not well grasped in class. They did not want normal class hours to be sacrificed for extra-tutorials because teachers continuously were absent or reported late. This complaint by students was unknown to Darrack, who saw himself as doing his best to improve teaching and learning by combining administrative tasks with his usual teaching load. Students were too afraid to mention this to him and they could also not mention it to their teachers, whom they disliked. So, this illustrated not only a lack of avenues for dialogue between teachers and students and students and their Head, but also a disconnection between the Head and his teachers as far as instruction was concerned.

Notwithstanding the veracity of the complaints about the poor teaching methods of the helper teachers, these helper teachers equally had made a point about their daily socio-economic challenges. These teachers explained that they sometimes came to school late, or were absent from school for a prolonged period, because they were busy with their commercial activities to earn their living, as they received no regular remuneration at the School. They believed that they would only have the peace of mind to concentrate and teach when their basic needs were guaranteed. A teacher said: “We are not trained teachers but the sort of motivation that we need to teach is absent” (*Da Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010*)

Another teacher explained that he could be in the classroom yet his mind would be elsewhere, since he had to keep reflecting on what to do to earn enough income to fulfil his responsibilities as an adult or a parent. This means that even if the Head had obliged the teachers to be present at school and to teach regularly, these teachers would still be unable to concentrate and teach effectively without resolving the issue about their support. This was explained at length by a Mathematics helper teacher (*Da Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010*). Meanwhile, as far as Darrack was concerned, the

major cause of poor achievement of students was teachers' poor teaching methodology, lateness and absence in school.

Arguably, Darrack was unable to identify common ground with his teachers in respect of the Daarie's teaching and learning challenges, especially with regards to teachers' role in resolving some of those challenges. Neither the teachers nor the Assistant Principal were able to debate as partners the core issues confronting the School.

Key finding 7.8

Daarie's ineffective teaching and learning environment was partly caused by the lack of training and unprofessional conduct of helper teachers. Yet, Darrack did not acknowledge how economic challenges facing the unsalaried helper teachers negatively influenced their commitment to teaching; hence Darrack failed to garner teachers' cooperation in addressing the School's academic problems.

Teaching overload complicates student learning

To some of the Daarie students, the inadequate number of trained teachers was a huge issue. Students reported that two of their teachers, namely Darrack and the untrained but hard working French teacher, were overloaded with teaching. Each of them taught all three year groups (year seven to year nine) as well as subjects outside their own specialised discipline. As a result, these two teachers became less efficient in teaching and helping students to learn. A student explained: "(The) problem was that there weren't enough masters..., one master was handling (teaching) two subjects" exclaimed an immediate graduate of Daarie (*Da Ex-Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

This overload of teaching on two teachers became a major concern for students of Daarie. The students were not unaware of the demanding administrative functions of Darrack; however, they thought that his engagements and work as acting Head had prevented him from regularly teaching them. A student remarked: "The Assistant teaches English but he is doing the work of the Head. Sometimes because of this work, he cannot teach us. (He is) always at (the) Headmaster's office and can't teach us to pass (the BECE)" (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

This challenge was affirmed by Darrack. He remarked:

And quite apart from my administrative duties, I'm the only English tutor and considering that the overload... is very big, huge (and I teach) Form 1

to Form 3. It has been a very difficult task for me. As a result, we often resort, or I often resort to extra tuition or extra classes..., and this is just to enable me to cover the syllabus before the BECE. (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*)

Daarie nevertheless, had a few hard working students who sympathised with Darrack's efforts and took seriously his advice to concentrate on their studies and learn even when the teachers are late or absent. Thus some of these students not only complained about the unprofessional conduct and ineffectiveness of their teachers, they also proposed possible ways of resolving some of the challenges that impeded effective teaching and learning in Daarie.

Key finding 7.9

The students lamented that Darrack and the French teacher were overloaded with teaching so many subjects and lessons which compromised the quality of their teaching.

Student efforts to improve the situation

Students had undertaken specific tasks to improve their academic performance and also had proposed a number of measures that they believed, if implemented, would help them to work harder and to obtain better results at the BECE.

First, they wanted their parents to team up with the Assistant Principal in putting pressure on the local education officers to appoint newly trained teachers who would teach Mathematics, Science and English Language. A student explained: "(We want trained teachers) to teach us, they can understand the things that they are teaching easily. Yes, because if all the teachers are trained ...the students would get good results" (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*). Darrack made a similar observation:

We don't have adequate number of trained teachers under (in) the major core subjects, the core subjects, that is (are) English, Maths and Science ..., (We need) to have trained teachers for them. We only have one trained teacher who takes English. (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*)

Second, a few students had taken individual initiatives such as coming to school early in the morning and organising study group meetings with other students in order to study difficult concepts that they had not mastered. Others also did likewise in the evenings with selected students whose homes had electricity.

Third, they had regularly organised, with the help of their parents, extra-tutorials in English Language, Mathematics and Science in the evenings at the campus of Caarie, another school in town. They did so without informing or involving any staff of Daarie,

including Darrack. “We are preparing towards the exams. We organise classes (extra-tutorials) ourselves outside the school in Caarie” (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

Fourth, some students convinced their parents to free them from overburdening house chores so that they could devote more time to their books. Others also sacrificed their sleep in order to study deep into the night and cover more topics in preparation for the BECE. A female student declared: “I know the BECE is normally not too easy. Due to that, I don’t sleep like Form 1s and also I told myself that any Master who comes to teach me, I will respect him or her” (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

Fifth, and finally, some students stated that they had made efforts not to be noisy and disorderly like other students when their teachers were absent. Those students reported that sometimes, during the absence of their teachers, they would organise themselves into groups and compete in quizzes. A student explained: “Sometimes people come to school here and then there are no teachers... in the class, there is nothing. We organise ourselves and let the Class Prefect lead us in a quiz competition against each other” (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

Other students remarked that they studied together with students from some of the top-achieving schools in the town so that they could learn from them. Some also said that they collected the practice examination questions from their friends or relatives who studied in top-achieving schools in the town and they would attempt to answer the questions and get them corrected by teachers during the extra-tutorials (*Da Ex-Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010; Field Notes, 30/03/2010*).

These were some of the tangible steps taken by a minority of students to improve their learning environment, enhance their learning opportunities, and better their chances of success at the BECE. These students showed determination to study and do better at the BECE than their predecessors.

Key finding 7.10

Students deplored the scarcity of trained teachers in their School and earnestly requested more to be recruited. Students, who were determined to pass the BECE in spite of all the odds against them, took both individual and group initiatives to do away with irresponsible behaviours in class. They decided to make maximum use of their time at school and at home, with or without the involvement of their teachers in order to improve their chances to pass the BECE.

Darrack's Collegial Leadership

Darrack's efforts to consult

Darrack's effort to consult teachers was demonstrated when he consulted one of the teachers, who had since left for further studies, about his initiative to act as the informal head of Daarie. It was the encouragement from that teacher that made him to begin to act as the informal head of Daarie. Darrack also explained that at the beginning of each school term; he would organise a staff meeting to discuss and plan for the whole term. He said: "I organised first, staff meeting for the term and then apportioned lessons periods and staff to subjects, subject areas" (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*). However, staff meetings were rare in Daarie. A teacher remarked: "Yeah, all what I want to say, they've mentioned, there are no regular meetings of staff" (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

Informal staff conversations replace regular staff meetings.

In the absence of regular staff meetings, Darrack and the teachers often sat in informal casual meetings during school breaks and had conversations which centred on personal problems, students' indiscipline, parents' unnecessary interference in school affairs, students' academic performance, absence of official School Head and many other topics of common interest. Darrack narrated what transpired in one such informal meeting: "(We) all will sit here and complain about the students' performance..., I sit with them and some will complain: oh the students are (not) doing well; they are not performing (well)" (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*).

Thus, Daarie teachers and Assistant Principal had few formal staff meetings as it was often difficult to have all teachers present at the same time for a planned meeting. The issue of irregular staff meetings could be understood from the view point that many teachers regularly were absent from school and thus could not participate in any scheduled meetings. As a result, this unprofessional conduct of teachers, mainly their absenteeism, hampered the prospect of regular, effective staff meetings. For example, Darrack could not tell when some teachers would or would not be present in School (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*). The informal casual meetings during lunch break with those teachers present became regular and served almost as the exclusive means of discussing issues with teachers and seeking their feedback.

Consequently, lack of regular staff meetings resulted in lack of consensus building. There was a clear lack of common policies and measures accepted by all and implemented in tandem with common purpose and focus. Neither the Head nor the

teachers had met and formally agreed on what measures were priorities in tackling poor academic work in Daarie although they informally discussed these problems. For example, Darrack stressed teachers' non-professional conduct and students' indiscipline as key obstacles to students' academic achievement and he wanted to resolve that. His teachers, on the contrary, identified lack of regular support and remuneration for their work by parents and local education authorities as the cause of poor teaching and learning.

No delegation of authority.

Darrack explained that he could not delegate much to the staff because most of them refused to come to school regularly. According to Darrack, he had no guarantee that in his absence, the other teachers would effectively supervise the students so he rarely delegated responsibilities to others. In fact, during the research, the Researcher observed an interesting incident. During his first visit to Daarie, Darrack was absent and when he met some of the teachers and requested to meet the head of the School, they told him that the "head" of the School "for the day" was Madam D, a female untrained teacher who was nursing a baby at the time. It was through further probing that the Researcher discovered during his subsequent visit that the female teacher was one of the few who was more regularly in school (Field Notes, 21/01/2010).

Darrack confirmed this development in the School. He said that any of the teachers was free to act as interim Head in his absence when the need arose, for example, to welcome school visitors. He could not assign the role of 'interim Assistant Principal' to any teacher even in his absence because he was not formally approved as the acting Head.

Key finding 7.11

Darrack's inability to regularly conduct staff meetings and his personal efforts to consult his teachers through casual meetings were insufficient for involving his teachers and for charting together a common course of priorities and strategies that would address Daarie's academic problems.

Darrack's Engagement and Partnership with the Local Community

Parents and Parent Teacher Association executive members declared that Darrack was not cooperating with them effectively. They stated that the classrooms lacked sufficient furniture for the students and they requested Darrack to find a solution

by contacting the local education authorities and the local Government officials. When he did not do much in getting this problem resolved, a parent stated his frustration:

This academic year, when the school is facing a lot of problems, especially on the part of furniture... We told the headmaster to find all the means to get the furniture for the students. And the children have to carry furniture from home to come in here and sit on it. So that is bad... (*Da Parents FG Meeting, 11/02/2010*)

In response to this, Darrack explained that the parents wanted him to solve the furniture problem by seeking help from elsewhere. He lamented that parents were not prepared to levy themselves and help the School to purchase classroom furniture.

Parents also complained that they had bought a computer for use by teachers for the teaching of ICT lessons but they had not seen much effort on the part of Darrack in getting electricity to the School to power the computer. The computer had not been used for almost one year. A parent declared:

... and we bought a computer. Now the school has not much money for (electricity connection). There are no lights... So that's a sad side..., and we don't know what to say. That we have been to the headmaster to make sure that that thing (the electricity connection) is done. And since then, the computer, we bought it one year and it is still standing there (not used). (*Da Parents FG Meeting, 11/02/2010*)

Students also complained about this. A student explained that although they had one computer and its accessories, paid for by parents, they had no electricity to use it. Some expressed their dissatisfaction with the situation, mainly because they felt that their parents sacrificed a lot in paying the levies that were used to buy the computer that was lying idle.

Lack of adequate classroom furniture for the total number of students enrolled in each of the two junior classes was also a huge infrastructure challenge. Parents remarked that there were more than 90 students in one classroom built to accommodate a maximum of 50 students. The Assistant Principal, teachers and students also complained about lack of classroom furniture. A student remarked: "So, especially the Form 1s, they always sit on (lean against) the windows and some bring their parent's chairs from their houses to sit down (in the classroom)" (*Da Current Students FG Meeting, 29/01/2010*).

Interestingly, this practice of students who would lean against classroom windows in order to follow lessons was the result of one of Darrack's measures to resolving the problem of classroom congestion and inadequate furniture. Although this

practice was criticised by both students and parents and by some teachers, it remained one of the strategies employed by Darrack to resource the School. He told the Researcher that in order to pressure parents to purchase classroom furniture for their children, he decided that all children who had no furniture would no longer be allowed to sit on the floor during lessons. Parents might either buy classroom furniture for their wards or have their wards stand on the classroom verandas and follow lessons.

Instead of purchasing the set of furniture for their children as Darrack requested, some parents took an intelligent and pragmatic decision. They allowed their children to carry to school each morning, a table and chair or a stool from home, and back home when they returned in the afternoon or evening. Parents however found this practice cumbersome and wanted the School to resolve the furniture problem. A concerned parent commented:

The school is facing a lot of problems, especially on the part of furniture. And we told the headmaster to find (to speak to) all the GES officers to get the furniture for the students. And the children have to carry furniture from home to come in here and sit on it. (*Da Parents FG Meeting, 11/02/2010*)

The acute problem of classroom congestion and the need for the construction of another set of classrooms were challenges acknowledged by Darrack, parents and students, yet it remained unresolved as Darrack and parents disagreed on how to seek funding for resourcing. Parents wanted Darrack to seek funding from the local school authorities or the local Government for a new school block and for school furniture. Darrack preferred lobbying the local Member of Parliament and other Nongovernment Organisations to provide the funding. Thus, there was a complete lack of consensus between parents and Darrack. This difficult relationship did not help the already precarious resourcing challenges of Daarie and indirectly, Daarie's efforts to improve teaching and learning.

In fact, the challenges of school improvement appeared to have remained Darrack's individual battle as he failed to effectively have dialogue with his collaborators and take any initiative to specifically engage the authorities, parents, staff and students to devise strategies to address key problems.

Key finding 7.12

Darrack's inability to effectively dialogue with parents hindered consensus building with parents in respect of infrastructure problems and the means to resolving them.

Darrack also expressed his dissatisfaction with parents who negatively interfered in the affairs of the School. He believed that this negative attitude of parents was creating indiscipline in the School. He explained: “We also have cases where parents come to school directly to pick their children and send them to farms. And we have experienced this situation on a number of occasions” (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*). Further, Darrack deplored the attitude of parents and elders in the community who at times threaten to physically abuse teachers who wanted to discipline their recalcitrant children in school. He said: “There are situations whereby the community also comes out to threaten teachers who want to instil discipline on (in) their pupils” (*Da Principal Interview, 05/02/2010*). He also complained about the lack of regular meetings by the executives of the Parent Teacher Association, while the parents lamented the inability of the School to organise regularly PTA meetings.

Parents stated that they visited the School at times to greet the teachers, but they also observed that teachers were sometimes absent and were not teaching the children. This they believed was part of the causes of poor academic achievement of students. A parent said: “And when the children don’t perform well, what we are saying (is) that teachers don’t teach’ (*Da Parents FG Meeting, 11/02/2010*). They blamed the teachers and Darrack for the ineffective teaching and learning environment but did not explain what they could do to help Darrack and the teachers to perform better. Problems remained unresolved.

Teachers who were untrained and non-salaried volunteers deplored the unwillingness of parents and the community to support them in kind. These helper teachers were unhappy at the failure of parents and community to give them some material support for their upkeep. They lamented how Daarie compared negatively with other schools in the Saboba locality where the parents and community supported teachers with foodstuffs. A teacher explained:

Support from the parents... I quite remember last term, (in) one of our sister schools, the parents came together, and they think oh, let’s do something for the masters, for the Christmas. So they said they wanted to contribute, anything that (each parent) have... One of the teachers from that school told me that when the students came, they all brought yams and that each master was able to get about 15 tubers of yam. I think it will help the masters and it will encourage them also give of their best. (*Da Teachers FG Meeting, 05/02/2010*)

Key finding 7.13

The parents and community did not give any support to the helper teachers of Daarie; and Darrack and parents were also unable to collectively resolve the problems affecting low achievement of students.



Figure 7.1. A typical school building of disadvantaged rural JHSs

Summary

From the themes that emerged from the analysis of the Daarie research data, a flow-chart was constructed that captured the story of Daarie. This flow-chart, presented in Figure 7.2 guided the narration of the case study of Daarie.

Daarie's low academic standards were caused by a number of fundamental challenges. These included leadership impasse, inadequate infrastructure, dependence on untrained, volunteer helper teachers, student indiscipline, and a lack of economic support for the helper teachers, weak relationship with the PTA and community, and a lack of community support. Attempts at finding solutions by the Principal, the teachers, the students and parents were ineffective because the Principal had not only failed to clearly communicate his vision and mission to rally and involve his partners but was also ineffective in his managerial, instructional, collegial and community partnership leadership roles. Consequently, this limited collaboration with Darrack's partners resulted in the lack of coordinated strategies in resolving the challenges of inadequate classroom infrastructure, student indiscipline and teacher unprofessionalism; key factors that were responsible for the low academic standards of Daarie.

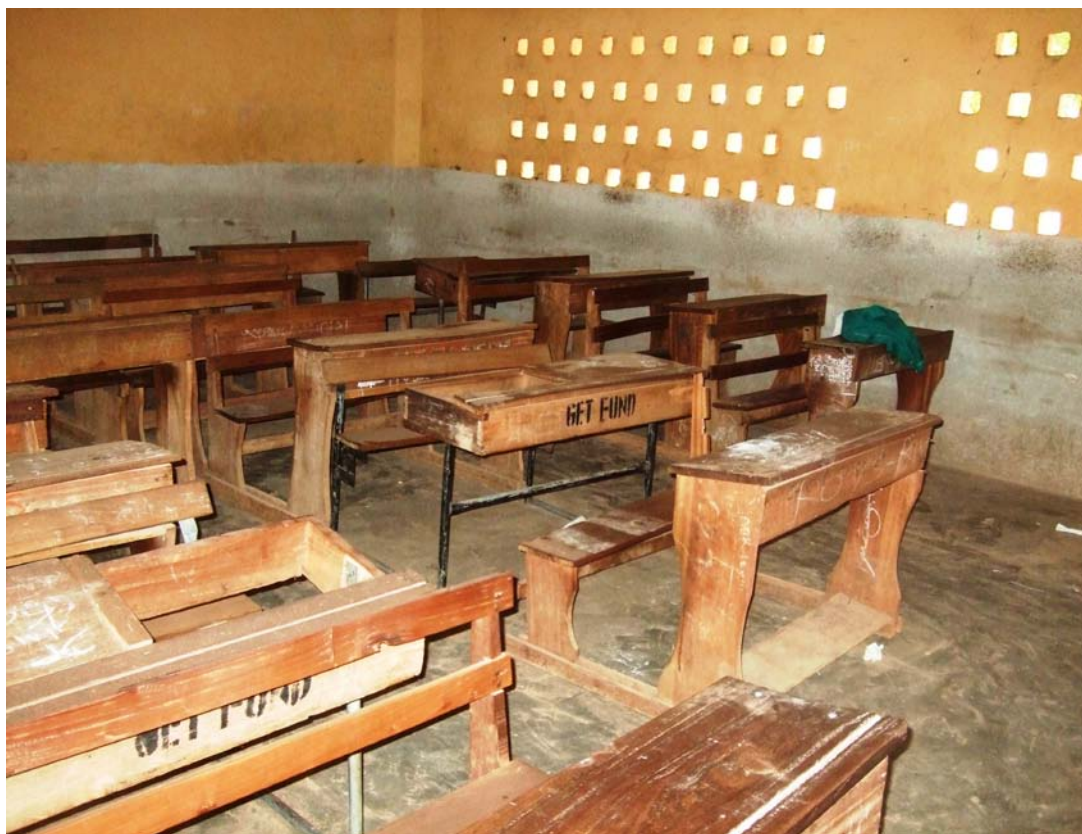


Figure 7.2. Inadequate classroom furniture is a major challenge in rural JHSs

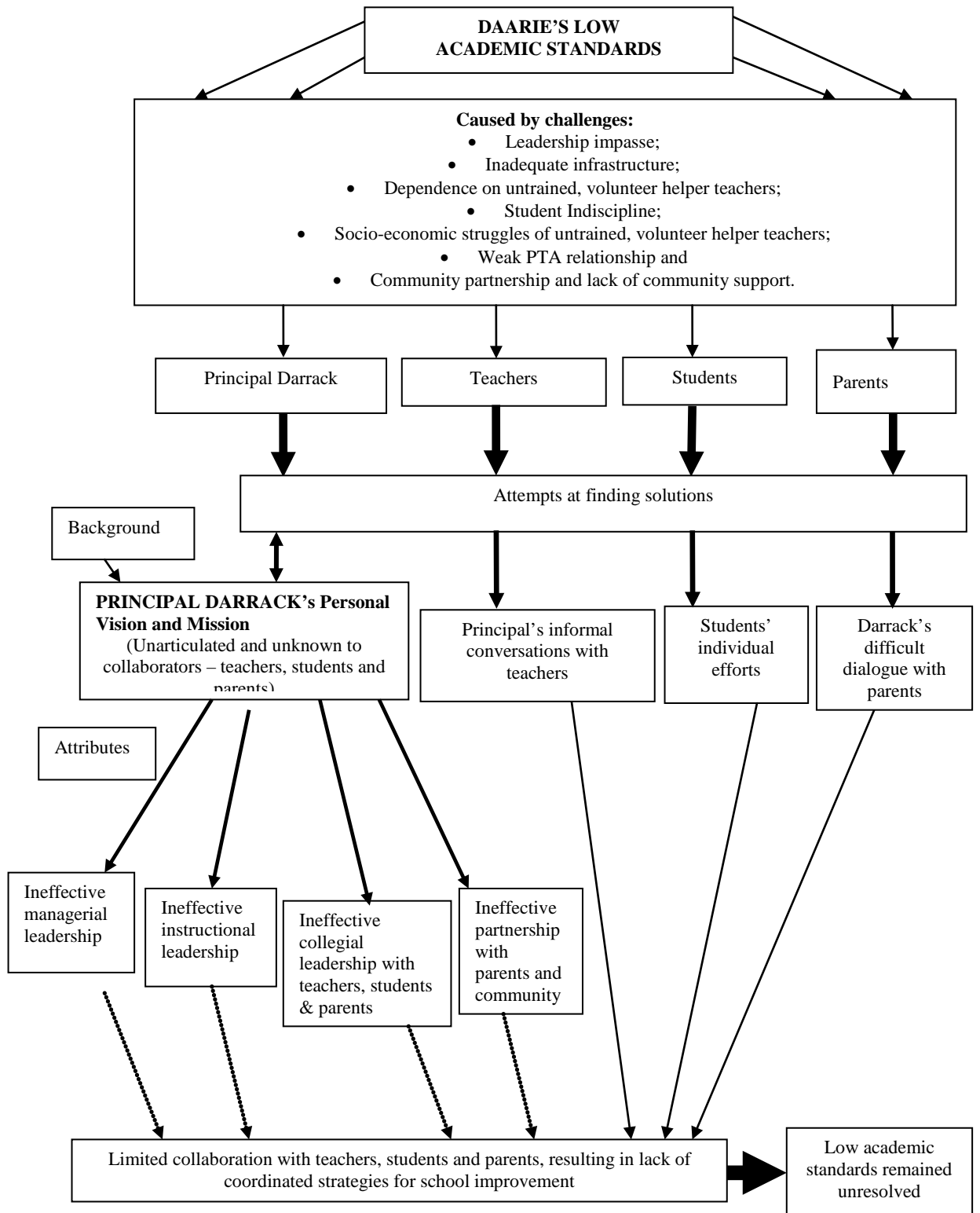


Figure 7.3. The narrative flow-chart of the story of Daarie JHS

This chapter has presented the numerous challenges faced by Daarie in its effort to recreate an effective teaching and learning environment in a context of a leadership impasse, dependence on untrained, volunteer helper teachers, students' indiscipline and parents' weak collaboration. The leadership vacuum created by the prolonged unapproved absence of the official Principal and non-approval of the Assistant Principal as acting Head, resulted in Mr Darrack having little authority to exert over his teachers and to rally students, parents and education authorities in discussing and resolving the issues. Despite Darrack's personal efforts and those of some hard working students to enhance learning, his ineffective leadership, which resulted in loss of common purpose, focus and direction, did not help Daarie improve its learning environment to boost effective learning and better student achievement. In this peculiar context of Daarie, a probable key strategy that should have been implemented to resolve the problem of low academic standards would have been a concerted effort to lobby the authorities to supply more trained teachers, but Darrack, the Assistant Principal, parents and teachers were unable to do so. The key findings that emerged from the analysis of Daarie's case data are presented in Appendix I.

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter explains and discusses the seven major effective leadership themes that have emerged from the analysis and interpretation of key findings (KFs) from each of the four cases. Each theme is defined and then developed briefly by demonstrating how the theme manifested in the data with reference to the KFs. Each theme is further interpreted with relevant supporting literature to generate assertions. The chapter closes with a model that summarises the relationships between the themes and a traffic light framework which is used to compare the four cases.

Overview

This research was undertaken to investigate the question: ‘How do principals of disadvantaged rural schools in the Saboba District of Ghana create an environment that fosters high standards of students’ academic performance?’ Analysis of each of the cases collectively generated a series of key findings. A cross-case analysis, drawing on the key findings, gave rise to the seven themes of effective school leadership. The extent to which each of the principals demonstrated effectiveness in relation to the themes determined the level of effectiveness of that school. The themes are: shared school vision, the principal’s positive personal attributes, successful instructional and managerial leadership, thriving collegial leadership, productive school and community partnerships for recruiting resources, innovative physical and human resourcing, and emerging positive values.

The positive personal attributes of the effective principal influenced students and teachers and created trust that enabled the principal to collectively craft a school vision and mission, which helped in initiating and maintaining productive relationships and partnerships with teachers, parents and the local community. These partnerships with the community generated or recruited significant physical and human resources for the school. Through his or her thriving collegial, instructional and managerial leadership and exemplary personal qualities, the effective principal promoted certain positive values, such as punctuality, studiousness, perseverance, positive rivalry and commitment among teachers and students. These helped in creating an environment that fostered effective teaching and learning and better academic achievement of students.

Theme One: Shared Vision

Vision is often defined as that ability to think about, and plan for the future by using intelligence and imagination (Soanes & Hawker, 2008). A school vision is the philosophy or motto that expresses the long-term, clear aspirations and desires of an educational institution. This vision becomes the central goal that the entire school community acts collectively to achieve. An institutional vision is accompanied by a mission that expresses the tangible means of realising those long-term ideals or vision. Institutions which have a clear vision and mission are able to rally their staff and resources around that vision to work concertedly in implementing the mission, leading to the realisation of the vision.

The study of these four cases reveals elements of clear and collective school vision and mission. Some principals of the disadvantaged schools crafted with their teachers, students and parents, a concise school vision and mission that acknowledged the prevailing academic context of the school, and they took concrete measures to improve it (KF 4.2, KF 4.3, KF 4.4, KF 5.2, KF 5.3, KF 5.4, KF 5.5). Arrack, the Principal of Aarie, had a distinct vision and mission for the School (KF 4.2) and he prevailed upon his teachers and students to understand them and to support and work towards their realisation. Teachers and students recalled and articulated the vision and mission of their school in their interactions. Staff meetings and school assemblies were used as forums to disseminate, articulate and rally the school community towards achieving the School's vision and mission.

The vision of Aarie, for example, was a commitment to maintaining the School as a top academic achieving school with the mission to adequately prepare Aarie students to be BECE examination confident and ready (KF 4.2). Likewise, Baarie's vision of improving its reputation by becoming a top-achieving school at the BECE and a leader in healthy lifestyles was to be achieved through its mission of revamping teaching and learning towards higher achievement, sustained by discipline, good sanitation and physical fitness (K.F. 5.3).

Conversely, other principals who either had only their personal undeclared school vision and mission, unknown to their collaborators, or had no school vision and mission, failed to rally their collaborators, teachers, students and parents towards collectively improving the learning environment and raising academic standards. For example, although Carrack, the Principal of Caarie, made allusions to her vision and mission for the School in her interactions with students, teachers and parents; she failed

to formally inform them about this and as a result, she could not rally her teachers and students towards achieving that vision and mission (KF 6.7). Similarly, Darrack's personal vision and mission to make Daarie an outstanding institution of high academic achievement with top BECE results, through improvement of teaching and learning and with aid of school partners, remained unknown to the School community. This hindered a coordinated action in addressing school problems (KF 7.3). The managerial and partnership efforts of Carrack and Darrack recorded little success, due in part to a lack of short-term and long-term goals that were shared by all teachers, students and parents.

As a result, this study has demonstrated that those principals who rallied and empowered their school community, comprising teachers, students, and parents, through a clear school vision and mission, succeeded in effecting a positive change that created better teaching and learning, which in turn engendered improved academic standards. Therefore, it is evident from this study that a school vision and mission ought to be developed collectively and to be known to and owned by the school community in order to have a positive impact on teaching and learning, and subsequently on academic standards.

In his work on how to develop teachers to be confident, responsible and enthusiastic in their teaching and leadership roles, Day (1999; Sammons, Gu, Day, & Ko, 2011) explained that it is those schools that have shared goals and are clear in their vision that are capable of promoting an atmosphere of collegiality and a sense of responsibility to make a difference. Teachers and students alike continue to learn and improve because they have similar objectives, captured in the school's vision and mission statements. Day's work explains how a school vision and mission, shared by the principal, teachers and students can influence the school's transformation.

This Ghana-based research demonstrated the import of Day's assertion. These heads of effective disadvantaged schools were able to motivate their teachers, students and even parents by means of a commonly recognised school vision and mission. This is how they led a positive change and improved academic standards in their respective schools.

Day's (1999; Sammons, et al., 2011) position is supported by Dawson (2007, p. 6) who said: "The old paradigm where vision/mission/values statements were created by managers and 'imposed' upon the workers in an attempt to motivate them is obsolete". Dawson claims that it is the collective processes by which school vision and mission is developed that give genuine power or force to the vision and mission statements.

Dawson, in fact, believes that it is the collective creation process of the school's vision and mission that actually empowers staff and students to develop trust and social capital that impact student learning. Dawson's position, like that of Day, is clearly demonstrated in this research. This study has shown that Arrack and Barrack, although did not directly involved students in crafting their vision and mission, they engagingly shared the school vision and mission with staff and students. By involving, disseminating and consolidating the school's vision and mission with staff, students and parents, the effective principals, Arrack and Barrack were able to rally the entire school community towards a positive transformation from low-performing to high performing schools. This study has underscored the significance of rallying parents and the local community around the school's vision and mission as reported in relevant literature (Beaulieu, et al., 2003; Glaze, et al., 2007; Mazibuko, et al., 2008). Without a clear strategy by the principal to involve parents and the community with the school's vision and mission, the principal would not have succeeded in garnering the crucial support and collaboration of the local community towards improving academic standards.

Theme Two: Principal's Personal Attributes

Positive personal attributes are defined as personal qualities or desirable characteristics of an individual (Williams, 2005). They consist of the positive traits of character of the individual. Being a good listener, open-minded and caring, sympathetic towards the concerns of others, inspiring, a team player and committed to one's goal are some positive traits of character also known as positive attributes (Kotelnikov, 2001; Stevens, 2003). These personal qualities or dispositions are often employed by successful leaders to create a positive response to their initiatives, policies, instructions and actions from their followers.

In this study, some principals, who were effective, demonstrated positive professional and personal attributes such as friendliness, commitment, interest and dedication to the school and students. Arrack was noted for his friendliness, his interest and dedication to the School, his warm human relational skills and accessibility to students, teachers and parents, his resourceful supervisory leadership and exemplary conduct and arbitration skills (KF 4.1). In Baarie, Barrack positively influenced his teachers, students and parents by his open-mindedness, his spirit of dialogue and consultation, his deep respect and support for his teachers and students alike (KF 5.1).

The effective principals demonstrated resourceful supervisory leadership, exemplary conduct and arbitration skills, sympathy and concern for the welfare of

teachers and students, as well as perseverance and dialogue. These positive characteristics were not only acknowledged and admired by their collaborators but principally helped to create better rapport with staff, students and parents in making decisions, and garnering support in implementing them. This resulted in improved collegiality and cooperation between the effective principal and his collaborators and also, positively influenced measures taken to improve teacher professionalism, student discipline and enhance student learning.

However, in less-effective disadvantaged rural schools, although the professional and personal attributes of the principal might be acknowledged, these hardly influenced the behaviour and attitudes of staff and students. For example, although Carrack's attributes of commitment, sympathy, perseverance and dialogue were acknowledged and admired (KF 6.2, KF 6.3), her lack of managerial skills prevented the effective harnessing of these attributes to command respect, authority, obedience and collaboration from her staff (KF 6.3, KF 6.7, KF 6.10, KF 6.12). As a result, she could not gain their commitment and cooperation in implementing policies and strategies towards improving standards (KF 6.3, KF 6.7, KF 6.8, KF 6.12). Her inability to gain the active collaboration of her staff in spite of her personal attributes and efforts was demonstrated by her failure to stop staff unprofessional conduct and halt student indiscipline as well as to gain parents' cooperation (KF 6.12, 6.13, KF 6.14).

It was therefore evident that personal qualities of the principal alone were insufficient to gain the positive respect, obedience and collaboration of teachers, students and parents towards implementing the policies and actions necessary to create a positive learning environment for students and teachers. As team leaders, principals needed other skills and experiences in managerial and instructional leadership to be able to harness their personal attributes to positively influence the conduct and collaboration of their followers.

Karthik Raj Guruchandran (2004) explained that there are many qualities that characterise a successful leader. However, among all the positive attributes of an individual who is a leader, he believes five of them are most essential. These characteristics or attributes are: having a personality, being a visionary, being a listener and observer, having self-belief and motivation, and being a team player. Guruchandran also argued that some successful leaders may not have all the required positive attributes of a good leader but they would be intelligent enough to conceal their

negatives by those qualities they possess and thus, be effective in their leadership endeavours.

Undoubtedly, the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of those being led are usually influenced by the personal attributes of their leaders. The concept of the influence of the leader's personal attributes is well developed by Berson, Oreg and Dvir (2008), and also by Schein (1992) and Schneider (1987). Carpenter, Geletkanycz and Sanders (2004) explain that leaders always influence those they lead by their personal attributes and values; their traits of behaviour. Hambrick and Mason (1984) like Carpenter et al. did extensive research on the significant influence of leaders' personal attributes on their decisions, options and choices in their leading roles. These authors explained that these positive personal attributes of the leader influence the behaviour of the followers through the leader's responsible management and leadership.

Similarly, in this study, evidence has demonstrated that the principals of Aarie and Baarie showed friendliness, warm human relational skills as well as deep respect, care and support for staff and students. Further, their personal commitment to their schools, their concern for the welfare of staff, their spirit of dialogue and consultation; in short, their personal positive attributes earned the respect and active cooperation of students and staff alike in their efforts to improve teaching and learning. Students of Aarie, who were edified by the exemplary conduct of Arrack, especially his punctuality, began to arrive at school on time, while teachers who admired his arbitration skills and resourcefulness became more cooperative and committed (KF 4.1, KF 5.1). One may ask whether these personal attributes by themselves, without the managerial and instructional skills of these leaders would have influenced positively the attitudes and response of their followers; the teachers, students and parents and community.

Evidence from this study, however, shows that the personal attributes of principals alone were incapable of influencing the behaviour and attitudes of collaborators and partners in working as a team and collectively achieving a set of goals. The research showed that personal attributes only influenced attitudes, behaviour and response of those being led provided the principals, also exhibited a high level of instructional and managerial leadership. For example, Carrack was admired by her teachers and students for her sympathetic attitude towards teachers and students, and also for her commitment to the School and her sense of perseverance (6.1, 6.2, 6.3). However, due to her lack of management and supervisory skills, as exhibited by her inability to check teacher and student lateness and absenteeism (KF 6.10), these

personal values failed to gain a positive response from staff and students in her efforts to improve academic standards. In other words, personal attributes of the principal are necessary but not sufficient condition for his or her ability to promote high academic standards. Yes, it is important to have a person with positive attributes, good character and values as a principal. However, the good mannered principal also essentially needs good managerial and supervisory skills or experience to become an effective leader of positive change and academic improvement in a disadvantaged school. Thus, the leading roles of the principal, whether they are managerial, instructional or collegial, are always enhanced by his or her personal positive attributes but the lack of leadership skills of the leader cannot be compensated for by his or her personal attributes alone.

Theme Three: Successful Instructional and Managerial Leadership

Instructional leadership is that function of the school principal that provides direction, coordination and resources for the exclusive improvement of curriculum and instruction. In other words, instructional leadership is the role of the principal in directing, coordinating and resourcing for the improvement of curriculum and instruction that is often referred to as instructional leadership. Halverson, Grigg, Prichett and Thomas (2008) explain instructional leadership as the creation of accountable learning systems in schools to help change practices that will improve student learning in respect of standardized testing.

Managerial leadership, on the other hand, refers to maintaining facilities, ensuring student discipline, and meeting state reporting requirements (Jazzar, 2004). Others see this managerial role more as inspiring and empowering personnel to seek quality for the school and help assure the welfare for all persons (Hoyle, 2006). These scholars emphasised that effective leaders today are no longer necessarily good managers who know how to command everyone to complete school improvement projects. Today, capable school leaders are those who bring along everyone in the school team, by developing their talents, by motivating them and by guiding them collegially to achieve the goals of school improvement and student achievement.

Therefore, according to Hoyle (2006), instructional and managerial leadership of the principal has to do with the intentional creative efforts of the principal to seriously improve classroom teaching and student learning, and enhance academic achievement through his or her able coordination, direction, provision, and maintenance of the school's physical and human resourcing. However, Hoyle (2006) and Jazzar (2004) emphasise more the instructional role of the principal and less his or her managerial

role. The managerial role of the effective school leader serves essentially to promote and consolidate his or her instructional roles.

This research revealed that some effective disadvantaged rural school principals demonstrated their instructional leadership through their multiple teacher supervision activities and regular checks on student learning. In Aarie, the Principal's instructional leadership was demonstrated through his supervision of teachers' work. Elements worthy of note in Arrack's actions were: correcting lesson notes, direct coaching of some teachers and the random check of students' work, as well as the conduct of academic and staff meetings to evaluate students' learning (KF 4.3). Other strategies and practices which had direct influence on instruction and learning were extra-tutorials, student group studies, regular supervised class tests, debates and quizzes, instruction by expert subject tutors and teachers, as well as multiple practice examinations and teacher improvisation in Science and ICT. These were employed as standard practices for improving teaching and learning and preparing students to be BECE confident and ready (KF 4.4). Management of staff and students to enhance staff professionalism and student discipline featured prominently among the numerous leadership tasks of principals who headed the two disadvantaged but effective rural schools, Aarie and Baarie.

These effective principals also implemented short-term strategies such as benchmarking teacher performance to promote teacher competency (KF 5.5). These instructional practices and efforts did not take place in a vacuum. They were inspired, accompanied and consolidated by well-reflected and creative managerial initiatives and actions. For example, as a short-term strategy, Barrack provided welfare and support to teachers. This invigorated cordial relationships between teachers and Principal and strengthened teacher instructional confidence and responsibility, discipline and motivation (KF 5.6). Also, through Barrack's sustained involvement with local politicians and education officers he procured further assistance in the form of text books, repair of school furniture, wiring and electric installation in classrooms. His cooperation with teachers to supervise students at school farms resulted in good harvests that generated additional income to support teaching and learning (KF 5.8).

For long-term improvement, the Principal of Baarie was lobbying the local education authorities for the recruitment of more experienced, trained teachers and active parent teacher cooperation in supporting teachers (KF 5.6). Barrack and his teachers implemented their second strategy, which was to restore student discipline and

create an academically challenging and healthy environment that would sustain learning as a short-term plan (KF 5.7). Managerially, they instilled strict discipline among students through deterrence measures (punishments) and through positive means (rewards) such as awards for hard work, academic excellence and good conduct. These measures resulted in four positive transformations.

Firstly, teachers recommitted themselves to teaching effectively and students responded positively to disciplinary measures and showed renewed enthusiasm for studies. Secondly, disciplinary measures dissuaded students and reduced absenteeism and lateness to school. Thirdly, students became sanitation and health conscious and also took their studies more seriously and actively participated in all academic activities. Fourthly, academic work and students' achievement improved (KF 5.7).

It is noteworthy that at the very beginning of Barrack's appointment as the official Principal of Baarie, he devoted significant time, energy and resources to management issues, such as meeting parents and encouraging them to assist the school, checking teacher and student absenteeism and lateness, and meeting and planning with staff on how to improve the learning environment. He dedicated less time and energy to actual supervision of instruction in the classrooms at that time. Barrack began to place more emphasis on his instructional leadership role, only after student discipline and teacher professionalism improved.

These standard practices of Arrack and Barrack blended to some extent the interplay between their instructional and managerial roles as principals. However, there is no doubt that both school leaders devoted, in the long run, more time and energy to initiatives and actions that directly contributed to improving teachers' classroom teaching and students' learning. Their success in reducing teacher and student absenteeism and lateness, for example, boosted the quality of teaching and learning that was achieved during school contact hours. It was those practices which created an effective learning environment that enhanced both teaching and student learning, and consequently, helped in preparing students to be confident and ready to sit the BECE.

However, the less-effective principals who attempted certain instructional strategies such as use of extra-tutorials, practice examinations and class tests to improve student learning and raise achievement failed, as they lacked the managerial skills to garner the cooperation of their staff and students. In Caarie, Carrack's inability to curb the problem of lateness, despite her many initiatives to do so, rendered the introduction of extra-tutorials to cover the syllabuses ineffective (KF 6.11). In fact, Carrack

undertook other instructional initiatives, such as coaching of teachers and organisation of some professional learning workshops, but these made little improvement to students' learning, as lack of commitment of many teachers and students persisted (KF 6.13). Inadequate supervision of staff, lack of collaboration among teachers and Principal and absence of dialogue with students led to the failure of extra-tutorials as a strategic tool for improving learning in Caarie. Teachers continued to teach new concepts during extra-tutorials, and failed to correct and give feedback on practice examination scripts, and thereby deprived students of any preparation prior to sitting their final examinations (KF 6.12).

Finally, lack of instructional leadership and management skills of principals of less-effective schools created more problems for teaching and learning. For example, Daarie's ineffective teaching and learning environment was partly caused by the lack of teaching ability and unprofessional conduct of unsalaried helper teachers. These teachers wanted some form of financial support for their work and were open to coaching to improve their teaching skills and professionalism, but Darrack was unable to provide the leadership to achieve that. Darrack's inability to acknowledge and to resolve the economic challenges faced by these unsalaried helper teachers partly provoked teacher apathy and unprofessional conduct (KF 7.8). Consequently, not even Darrack's personal teaching capability, as attested by students, or his individual commitment in organising, single-handedly, extra-tutorials in the English Language, were sufficient to garner teachers' cooperation in addressing the School's low standards (KF 7.7).

In his case study based on insights from approximately 500 principals and 50 school superintendents from the Southern districts of the Great Lakes State, Jazzar (2004) not only explained the interplay between the instructional and managerial roles of the principal but also emphasised why it is necessary to keep a good balance between both roles. Jazzar emphasised the importance of instructional leadership in comparison to managerial leadership. He reported that a nationally-acclaimed teaching award winner threatened to be transferred to a new school because her principal considered investigating a reported roof leak more important than keeping to his earlier appointment with his grade five teachers. Jazzar, illustrated the danger of neglecting instructional leadership through excessive managerial practices. He explained that the management efforts of the principal must serve his or her instructional goals, as it is the instructional leadership that improves learning.

This study has indicated how the effective principals of Aarie and Baarie successfully strategized with teachers and students to improve teaching and learning. Arrack as well as Barrack, through managerial initiatives, gained cooperation of parents and community in recruiting resources to support teachers' welfare, to provide additional teaching and learning materials and to maintain student discipline. These managerial successes led to the improvement of teaching and learning as teachers became motivated and more committed and students took their studies more seriously. Further, supervision of teaching, correction of teachers' lesson notes, and random check of students' class tests and assignments by the principals ensured that teachers and students were performing their respective roles effectively. The clean and orderly school environment and cordial school atmosphere created through the cooperation of teachers and students with their principals helped to maintain a healthy learning atmosphere (KF 5.7). Thus, the effectiveness of Aarie and Baarie is an illustration of how these principals balanced both their instructional leadership and managerial leadership roles in creating a favourable learning environment that fostered high student achievement.

The principals of both effective disadvantaged schools in the Saboba locality at various times had to give priority to one of these leadership roles. Barrack did not introduce extra-tutorials, nor did he begin to check students' assignments and class tests, until he was satisfied that he and his teachers had identified the factors that were causing poor academic standards and had collectively begun to implement strategies to resolve those challenges. In other words, in the context of those disadvantaged rural schools in Ghana, where infrastructure and qualified teaching personnel remained a systemic problem, the most effective principal may be the one who has greater creative managerial initiatives in managing these hurdles while at the same time spending sufficient time to supervise instruction, promote teacher professional development and student learning. No matter how much time and energy the principal in these schools may invest in ensuring effective instruction and learning, all those efforts come to nothing if he or she fails to reduce lateness and absenteeism of teachers and students. So, a balance between managerial and instructional roles of the disadvantaged-school principal should be encouraged.

Theme Four: Thriving Collegial Leadership

Collegial leadership or power-sharing leadership can be defined as the efforts of the leader, in this case, the principal, to involve his or her colleagues, teachers and other staff in the administration and management of the school. Collegial leadership engages

and motivates teachers, students and community towards improving academic performance (Leithwood, 2007). Collegiality can be achieved through sharing and vesting of power and authority on an equal basis or to a certain degree. What really matters is how the principal's consultative initiatives and actions with staff help to boost instructional leadership. So, collegial leadership has to do with effective engagement, consultation, dialogue, delegation, cooperation and collaboration between the principal and the staff. Thus, any effort made to consult others, including colleagues, in making and executing decisions is a collegial effort. When collegiality is absent or reduced, the school leader becomes a 'dictator' and this inhibits creative initiatives of others in the school community. Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (2004) remarked that a leader who has only one person making all the decisions is in fact, not a leader.

This research has attested the role played by collegiality in the effective disadvantaged schools, namely; Aarie and Baarie. Both principals carried out an evaluation of the academic environment of their schools in direct consultation with their teachers. They collegially identified the negative practices that impeded effective learning and the ways to resolving, if not all, at least some of them (KF 5.1). Their consultations through regular staff meetings and dialogue with students and sometimes with parents resulted in concerted strategic decisions and implementation in resolving some of the school's teaching and learning challenges (KF 4.5).

It was through such collegial dialogue that Barrack, for example, opted together with his staff to overhaul the teaching and learning landscape of their low-achieving school and to improve academic standards (KF 5.2). Among the strategies crafted through this consultation were the restoration of teacher professionalism and teachers' welfare support; the re-establishment of student discipline; and, creation of an academically challenging learning and healthy environment (KF 5.4). Other collegial efforts by Barrack were his successful consultation with parents and his success in earning their partnership to enhance resourcing. The introduction of school farming with the cooperation of teachers and students was achieved also by Barrack through his collegial efforts.

Further, both effective principals developed a collegial working relationship with their teachers and students through participatory decision making processes that focussed on regular teaching-staff meetings, consultation with implementation committees and heads of departments and regular dialogue with students (KF 4.5). Arrack, also demonstrated his collegial leadership through specific pragmatic acts such

as occasional classroom teaching, sharing of personal teaching resources and speedy respectful arbitration of conflicts among staff (KF 4.6).

In the less-effective schools, although the Principals sometimes showed some collegiality through consultation with their teachers, often the lack of commitment on the part of the teachers, exhibited by continual teacher absenteeism and lateness, impeded the collective implementation or realisation of those decisions. In the less-effective schools, poor collegial efforts of the principals, demonstrated by lack of effective communication and collaboration among the parties prevented the charting of a common course of priorities and strategies in addressing the School's academic problems (KF 7.11). As a result, the small efforts attempted individually or in isolation to improve academic standards were either jeopardised or compromised by absence of a dynamic collegial spirit and commitment. For example, in one less-achieving disadvantaged school, in spite of the Principal's involvement with teachers to introduce extra-tutorials to compensate for student and teacher lateness and improve learning, teachers' continual use of tutorials to teach new concepts, and their failure to correct and give feedback on practice examination scripts, deprived students of any revision prior to sitting the BECE (KF 6.12). Thus, an activity that was meant by the Principal and the teachers to improve learning became an obstacle to learning due to poor communication among teachers and students and the Principal. In other words, instructional leadership efforts are necessary but not sufficient to improve academic standards, as their effectiveness depends largely on the level of collegiality demonstrated by the principal. Collegiality and consultation require the leader to have authority to ensure the community works with the leader.

Fullan (2008), Leithwood and Mascall (2008) and Hoerr (1996) explained the influence of collegial leadership on student achievement. Hoerr (1996) observed that the exigencies placed on principals make it almost impossible for the principals to do their job all alone. He argued that the effective principal shares responsibility for instructional leadership with his or her teachers by building collegiality and by supporting teachers. According to Hoerr (1996), the only way by which the principal gains the support of his or her teachers and staff is through his or her collegial efforts, especially those which enable the teachers to grow professionally. It is through collegial leadership that the principal shares his authority and power, and some of his responsibilities. The principal who empowers the staff through collegial means is also

the one who cements team work and encourages the teachers to develop a school-wide, not just a classroom, perspective in undertaking their tasks (Hoerr, 1996).

The positions of Hoerr (1996), Fullan (2008) and of Leithwood and Mascall (2008) are in direct contrast with the definition of leadership in the early to mid-twentieth century, where scholars such as Henri Fayol as quoted by Gross (1964) emphasised the planning, organising, commanding, coordinating and controlling aspects of leadership, with little or no allusions to collegial aspects of leadership. Today, a successful leader is the one who consults, coordinates and plans with the staff not by controlling them but by collegiality. It is by the principal's collegial efforts that he or she nurtures what Hoyle (2006) refers to as essential elements of the art and science of leadership such as "teambuilding, communications, interpersonal relationships, curriculum and instruction" (p. 12). Consequently, Hoyle indicates that only dynamic collegial leadership can reduce the danger and the tendency of the principal becoming the boss who influences staff to do what he or she wants to do and to manage others to follow him or her in completing a task without any due attention to their welfare and demeanour. Hoyle (2006) argued that today, there is a new kind of leadership, which is transformational leadership. "Transformational leadership is making organizations especially schools more caring communities by leaders guided by principle, morality, and service to others" (pp. 4-5).

Similarly, the success of Barrack in transforming his low-achieving school into a top-achieving school within a short period of time, and the ability of Arrack to sustain the top academic performance of Aarie, were possible because each of these principals exercised effective collegial leadership (KF 4.5, KF 5.1). Barrack evaluated the prevailing low academic standards of Baarie with all his staff at regular staff meetings, and together, they identified the issues and agreed on what strategies were necessary to resolve them (KF 5.1, KF 5.3). For example, in Baarie, teacher unprofessional conduct like lateness and absenteeism reduced considerably because Barrack and his teachers identified teacher unprofessionalism as a factor that created poor teaching and learning in the School. The teachers subsequently conducted themselves more responsibly. Thus, the efforts of consultation, regular staff meetings, pep talks and support for teachers were the actual collegial acts which galvanised team spirit and commitment from Baarie teachers and helped Barrack in his instructional initiatives and efforts.

This study has confirmed the assertion by academics such as Hoyle (2006), Hoerr (1996), Fullan (2008) and Leithwood and Mascall (2008) that collegial leadership

of the principal helps to nurture and cement team spirit and camaraderie (not compliance) that must characterise every school that wants to succeed in improving learning through effective instructional leadership. In the light of the literature on school improvement and school effectiveness, presented in chapter two of this work, the assertion that collegial leadership enhances team spirit is true in any effective schooling environment, whether it is disadvantaged and rural or highly-endowed and urban. This assertion is well emphasised by the fact that the principals who headed less-achieving disadvantaged rural schools and failed to transform their schools' low academic standards were also those who exercised low collegial leadership by their inability to maintain regular dialogue and consultation with their teachers and to support their welfare.

Theme Five: School, Community Partnerships for Recruiting Resources

Community partnership for the purpose of recruiting local resources to improve teaching and learning, as practised by the effective disadvantaged rural JHSs Aarie and Baarie, can be explained, first, by defining what is 'community' and what is 'partnership' and second, by understanding the link between community partnership and recruitment of local resources.

Community may be defined as a group of people who live in the same area and who, often, have a common background and shared interests (Soanes & Hawker, 2008). Partnership is explained as cooperation between two or more people or groups who work together for some purpose. Community partnerships are described by some scholars such as Leithwood, Louis and Wahlstrom (2004) as an example of meaningful collaborative cultures, designed by principals to build productive relationships with parents and community, and as a result, strengthen their schools' effectiveness. In Australia, for example, the Family-School and Community Partnerships Bureau (2008), a joint collaborative project between the Australian Council of State School Organisations and the Australian Parents Council, explains school community partnership as partnerships that exist between families and schools, between the schools and their communities, to improve quality of schooling and obtain satisfying educational experiences of students and, to strengthen the communities.

As a result, school and community partnerships for recruiting resources is the active collaborative involvement of school and parents and the entire local community, initiated and sustained by the Principal, to recruit additional local resources for

improving teaching and learning, and better academic achievement of students. Although this partnership enables parents to discuss other school improvement issues and to collaborate with teachers in instilling student discipline whenever necessary, it is mainly geared towards the generation of resources to promote effective learning in these resource-poor schools.

In this study, effective principals initiated partnerships with parents and the local community to recruit resources to promote and enhance efficient teaching and learning, and better academic outcomes. For example, the Principal of Aarie conscientiously partnered with the local community by promoting an active Parent Teacher Association that recruited local resources to support teaching and learning, teachers' welfare and to enhance student discipline (KF 4.7). Barrack, personally advocated for parent and teacher cooperation as the best way of sustaining student discipline and parents' support which is necessary for creating an effective learning environment (KF 5.5) Barrack renewed regular meetings with PTA executives and other parents. He revived the interest of parents in school affairs and parents began to pay levies to fund school programs and also assisted the School in disciplinary issues concerning students (KF 5.5). These effective school leaders also encouraged the respect for local ethos by teachers and students. The principals of Aarie and Barrie regularly paid courtesy visits to the traditional chief and elders, local government and education officers and to some parents, including PTA executive members (KF 4.6, KF 5.7).

Similarly, less-effective principals attempted to improve their relationship with the executive members of the Parent Teacher Association, parents and community but they failed. Sometimes, this was caused by a lack of engaging dialogue between the school and parents (KF 6.8). At other times, it was due to a lack of determination, commitment and perseverance from these principals. However, sometimes even the minimal efforts of these principals were frustrated by parents' apathy towards school and by disagreements with the PTA on ways of resolving the many challenges. For example, Darrack's inability to effectively dialogue with parents hindered consensus on which infrastructure problems should be prioritised and resolved (KF 7.12). Moreover, the parents and the local community of the schools, headed by less-effective principals, did not give any support to the teachers, as illustrated by the gross neglect of non-salaried helper teachers of Daarie (KF 7.13).

In Australia, the Family-Schools and Community Partnerships Bureau (2008) argued that research has shown that where there is effective collaboration and

partnership between the school, parents and local community, the quality of schooling improves and students have better learning experiences. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) also stated that the greatest contribution of principals to the performance of their teachers and students is their ability to create meaningful, collaborative cultures or partnerships in their schools. They emphasise that when principals are able to redesign their schools' organisation through collaborative cultures and structures within and outside the schools and build productive relationships with parents and communities, they strengthen the effectiveness of their schools. In a similar vein, Fullan (2008), speaking about professional learning community, explains the significance of the establishment of collaborative cultures and partnerships which is a distinctive mark of professional learning communities. He believes that these partnerships enhance the contribution of all players in the school community, which includes the principal, teachers, students, parents, and the local community towards generating greater student learning. Watson, Partington, Gray and Mack (2006) also argued that students' academic achievement in Aboriginal and minority communities, in Western Australia, depended on focussed principalship that harnessed school and local community values and partnership. Glaze, Pervin and Maika (2007) stated that leadership that focuses on engaging students' families, community and culture, as well as the school system, in promoting students' learning and achievement, must equally exercise a strong instructional direction. In the context of Africa, the work of Mazibuko, Gathu, Mkatshwa and Manyatsi (2008) on promoting community partnership in the management of schools in Swaziland is informative.

Similarly, this research has demonstrated how the principals who headed Aarie and Baarie, successfully transformed their schools and created better teaching and learning environments through the promotion of better rapport with the executive members of the Parent Teacher Association, and with parents and the local community. They sustained their warm relations with parents and community by occasional courtesy calls on elders, chiefs, selected parents and other leaders of the community (KF 4.6, KF 5.7). Further, their interaction with parents, through regular PTA meetings, helped to sustain an active relationship that supported the recruitment of needed resources to enhance teacher support, teaching and learning. These local resources were critical for they helped these principals to procure teaching and learning materials and also to give token remuneration for teachers who taught extra-tutorials and to support 'helper teachers'. This was how the community partnership influenced better teaching and learning outcomes.

As illustrated by the literature, an active partnership with local community helps schools in achieving goals of improving teaching and learning and obtaining better learning outcomes of students. However, the literature of Western developed countries makes little mention of the establishment of better rapport with parents and community purposely for the recruitment of financial resources to remunerate salaried and non-salaried teachers, and in support of acquisition of teaching and learning materials and teachers' welfare. This research demonstrates this unique community partnership for recruiting resources in support of 'helper teachers', teaching and learning, and boosting students' achievement in an African under resourced rural school context.

Theme Six: Innovative Physical and Human Resourcing

Resourcing is finding and providing the appropriate material, finance and people needed for the successful execution of a specific task or project. It is noteworthy that the word resource (Soanes & Hawker, 2008) originated from the Old French term, '*resourdre*', which means 'rise again', 'recover'. Thus, resourcing through provision of physical, material or financial means and human capital is a necessity for any successful human undertaking or project such as schooling. All institutions necessarily need resourcing to be able to function normally and achieve their declared objectives, vision and mission.

With respect to institutions such as schools, resourcing is often described in terms of physical and human resources. Physical resources refer to the tangible reality that exists in the real material world. In the school context, these may include classroom and office buildings and furniture, library and Information Communication Technology gadgets and facilities, school vehicles, science equipment, various teaching and learning materials, and so on. Human resources comprise mainly the appropriately qualified and experienced personnel employed in an organisation to work towards the realisation of the goals of the organisation. Torrington, Hall and Taylor (2005) explained that the fundamental business of any organisation is to make things happen in a productive manner so that the business will continue to prosper and the personnel also continue to thrive. These authors also stated that a good manager or organisational leader must balance efforts of meeting human aspirations of his or her resourceful personnel with achieving the strategic goals of the organisation. This research has identified a series of physical resourcing challenges faced by all four disadvantaged schools that were studied. Among these were inadequate infrastructures in respect of classrooms, school

furniture, lavatories, library, ICT and science equipment and facilities, and a host of teaching and learning materials such as text books (KF 5.9, KF 4.10, KF 6.15, KF 7.2).

It also demonstrated a number of human resourcing challenges that were faced by all the four schools, namely: the use of untrained helper teachers (KF 5.9, KF 7.5), teaching overload (KF 7.9), teacher unprofessionalism (KF 5.2, KF 6.14, KF 7.2, KF 7.10) and teacher apathy and non commitment (KF 5.2, KF 6.14, KF 7.8). It also showed examples of resilience, perseverance and ingenuity of some effective principals in harnessing inadequate physical and human resources to achieve their goals of creating a learning environment that fostered effective learning and higher achievement of students (KF 4.4, KF 5.5, KF 5.7). For example, in the absence of qualified trained teachers to teach specific subjects, the Principal of Aarie recruited, on a voluntary basis, expert tutors and expert teachers from the locality, who taught students during extra-tutorials (KF 4.4). Both Arrack and Barrack, devised strategies that helped them compensate for the inadequacy in physical and human resourcing. For example, these principals initiated an active partnership with parents and community in order to recruit additional funding to support teachers' welfare and to purchase teaching and learning materials (KF 4.7, KF 5.5). Their collaboration with local education officers and politicians also helped them to find further assistance, although minimal, in physical resourcing of their respective schools (KF 5.5, KF 5.7). These strategic efforts were necessary and useful for achieving their goal of improving academic standards.

The inability of the two less-effective principals of Caarie and Daarie to initiate collectively, strategies to resolve even to a minimal degree, their physical and human resource inadequacies had adverse influence on their individual efforts towards the improvement of academic standards of their respective schools. For example, Darrack failed to resolve the problem of inadequate school furniture and congestion in the classrooms because he was unable to rally the parents to collectively appreciate these issues and seek common solutions (KF 7.2, KF 7.12). Darrack and parents remained divided on issues related to infrastructural resourcing to improve standards. Carrack, on the one hand, succeeded in collaborating with education officers to bring electricity to Caarie, a major boost to learning, as students were able to return to school in the evening and study (KF 6.8). However, she was unable to improve and sustain her relationship with parents and PTA for further recruitment of physical resources to facilitate and improve teaching and learning (KF 6.8, KF 6.15). Further, in the face of acute human resourcing challenges in Daarie, namely lack of trained teachers and the

unprofessionalism of untrained, non-salaried helper teachers, Darrack failed to initiate concrete steps towards resolving these issues (KF 7.5, KF 7.10).

Good human resource management positively influences good physical resource management. Torrington, Hall and Taylor (2005) emphasised that all successful leaders are effective human resource managers in meeting the classical four organisational objectives, namely; adequate staffing, performance, change management and administration. In this study of disadvantaged rural schools in Saboba, it has been observed that the successful principals Arrack and Barrack developed strategies that enhanced supervision of teachers' work and students' learning (KF 4.3, KF 5.5). They also demonstrated improved management of the necessary changes that they had initiated in order to mitigate and reduce teaching and learning inadequacies and enhance learning (KF 4.4, KF 4.7, KF 5.5). Torrington, Hall and Taylor (2004) also stated that successful human resource management is that which enables the staff and the authorities to agree on the nature and objectives of their working relationship and ensures the fulfilment of that agreement. By crafting and promoting a common vision and mission for their respective schools, both Barrack and Arrack rallied their teachers, students and parents through the Parent Teacher Association, in identifying firstly, the issues militating against effective teaching and learning, and secondly, in collectively agreeing on and implementing specific strategies towards improving the status quo (KF 4.7, KF 5.2, KF 5.5). In Baarie, for example, teachers not only acknowledged the unprofessional conduct of some of their colleagues but accepted the challenge and changed their attitudes, thus improving teaching (KF 5.2, KF 5.4, KF 5.6). These effective heads of disadvantaged schools had demonstrated, to some extent, good human resource management that enhanced their efforts to create an adequate learning environment that boosted effective learning and better academic achievement.

Theme Seven: Emerging Positive Values

Values are beliefs of a person or a group of persons about what is right or wrong and what is important (Soanes & Hawker, 2008). Emerging positive values in this research refer essentially to those emergent values that characterised the top-achieving disadvantaged schools (KF 4.9, KF 5.8). Positive values are the accepted principles or standards of an individual or a group of people. Greenfield (1986) declared that what many parents really want is for their schools to reflect the same values that are meaningful and important in their own lives. In a school context, values and norms are

the bedrock upon which a school culture is nurtured and thrives. These values always influence the vision and mission of the school and how they are achieved.

MacNeil and Maclin (2005) explained that leaders of successful schools help to develop, with and among their collaborators, teachers, students and parents, a set of values and norms that help bind the people around them together. It is through collective decision making, infusion of shared ideas, beliefs, theories and values that the successful school leader facilitates the process of developing school culture and a learning environment that supports improved student achievement. According to these intellectuals, school leaders who work together with their collaborators and favour collegiality achieve a collective purpose that gives direction and shapes beliefs, values and attitudes of the school community in promoting better learning outcomes. As a result, every effective school has a strong functioning culture and sense of purpose. The set of values, principles and norms upon which this functioning school culture is built and developed came about often as a negotiated product of shared sentiments of members of the school community (Sergiovanni, 2001). He explains that when these values and attitudes have become established in the school, they easily become a powerful socialiser of thought and ‘programmer’ of certain behaviours.

In the course of this study it has been observed that the personal positive conduct of the effective principal, his or her sense of duty, dialogue, collegiality and team spirit coupled with the orderly school atmosphere positively influenced the attitudes, conduct and behaviour of teachers and students. For example, punctuality and orderliness, commitment, perseverance and pride in maintaining the school as a top-achieving school were cherished values in the high-achieving disadvantaged schools, Aarie and Baarie (KF 4.9, KF 5.8). These values begin to emerge as a result of the cordial relationship that existed between staff and students and the efforts of students to imitate the positive dispositions of their principal and their teachers. The use of dialogue, positive dissuasion, persuasion and regular supervision helped in discouraging less positive attitudes, such as students’ lateness to school, long absence from school and failure to do class assignments (KF 5.8). This was instrumental in encouraging an enhanced sense of responsibility, discipline, perseverance, hard work and the spirit of positive competition and studiousness. The attitudes, behaviour and conduct of the students were gradually characterised by these values (KF 7.10). For example, in some effective disadvantaged schools, students were self-reliant and took their own responsibility to improve learning (KF 6.13). They organised group studies in their

homes where some of their colleagues would help reteach or explain concepts not well understood during the normal lessons on campus. Some students began to develop their sense of hygiene and healthy lifestyles as a result of their school's policy on a clean school environment and physical fitness. The emergence of these values boosted teacher and student cooperation in improving learning and thus contributed to raising standards.

Although the principals of the less-effective disadvantaged schools demonstrated a number of positive attributes and values, these did not influence or alter positively the behaviour and conduct of their teachers and students. For example, students of Daarie admired the punctuality of Darrack, the acting Principal, yet many of those students kept coming to school late (KF 7.6). It is through working together as a team with similar interests and collective objectives that the positive attitude and values of an individual may influence the conduct of other members to the point of altering behaviour (Sergiovanni, 2001). Consultation, team spirit and concerted efforts were rare in the less-effective disadvantaged schools and as a result, attitudes of students and teachers remained unchanged, possibly hampering the development of cherished values such as punctuality and commitment. For example, students and teachers of Caarie and Daarie continued to be absent from school and came to school late (KF 6.9, KF 6.10, KF 7.5, KF 7.6). The failure to change attitudes rendered any concerted effort to redress their school's low academic standards less effective.

This study has confirmed the observation made by MacNeil and Maclin (2005) that through collegiality and dialogue or collective decision making, infusion of shared ideas, beliefs and values, the effective principal facilitates the process of developing school values that shape behaviour of the collaborators and promote better learning outcomes. Principals of Aarie and Baarie led their respective schools by example. Their personal punctuality influenced the change of attitude of students and teachers, who reduced lateness and absenteeism (KF 4.9, KF 5.8). This affirms Sergiovanni's (2001) assertion that when values and positive attitudes have become established in a school, they easily become powerful socialisers of thought and 'programmers' of certain behaviour. In Baarie, students responded to the Principal's punctuality and orderliness by becoming sanitation and health conscious, and taking their studies more seriously through active participation in all academic activities (KF 5.6).

These seven elements of effective leadership that characterised the leadership of the high-achieving disadvantaged, rural Junior High Schools in the Saboba locality were not sufficiently present in the less-achieving rural schools. As a result, the level of

school effectiveness that fostered an improved learning environment and better academic results depended on how many of the elements were present in a particular school. The presence of one or two or more elements of effectiveness in a school was no guarantee of its effectiveness but rather, the cluster and the interconnectedness of all the seven elements that created the environment that fostered high academic standards and improved student achievement. Thus, each of these effectiveness elements was necessary, but not a sufficient condition for high academic standards. The following model helps elucidate the relationships between the seven elements and answers the research question: How do principals of disadvantaged rural schools in the Saboba District of Ghana create an environment that fosters high standards of students' academic performance?

Effective Leadership Model

The model that has emerged from the analysis and interpretations of data gathered during the research is represented here in Figure 8.1. The model represents how the seven elements of effective leadership accounted for the transformation from low to high academic achievement that took place in the effective disadvantaged rural schools of Saboba.

The model consists of six different spheres of near equal size interconnected with one another. The designation of near equal size of the spheres is to show that although each of the elements was of similar importance, the level of significance of some elements might be slightly higher than that of others, depending on the context and setting of the school. The six spheres represent the first six elements which in combination led to the emergence of positive values. These values in turn created an effective learning environment and improved academic standards that produced better results at the Basic Education Certificate Examinations. In other words, the model illustrates how all of the elements worked together to produce the positive result of higher academic achievement of students of disadvantaged rural schools in the Saboba locality. No individual element that emerged from the study is sufficient by itself to transform low academic standards of a disadvantaged rural school to higher student learning and achievement outcomes. It is the interconnectedness of these six effectiveness elements, developed through a series of specific strategies employed by the effective principals of disadvantaged rural schools of Saboba that resulted in the emergence of positive values which in turn created an encouraging teaching and

learning environment which fostered higher academic standards, and improved student performance, as evidenced by better BECE results. See Figure 8.1.

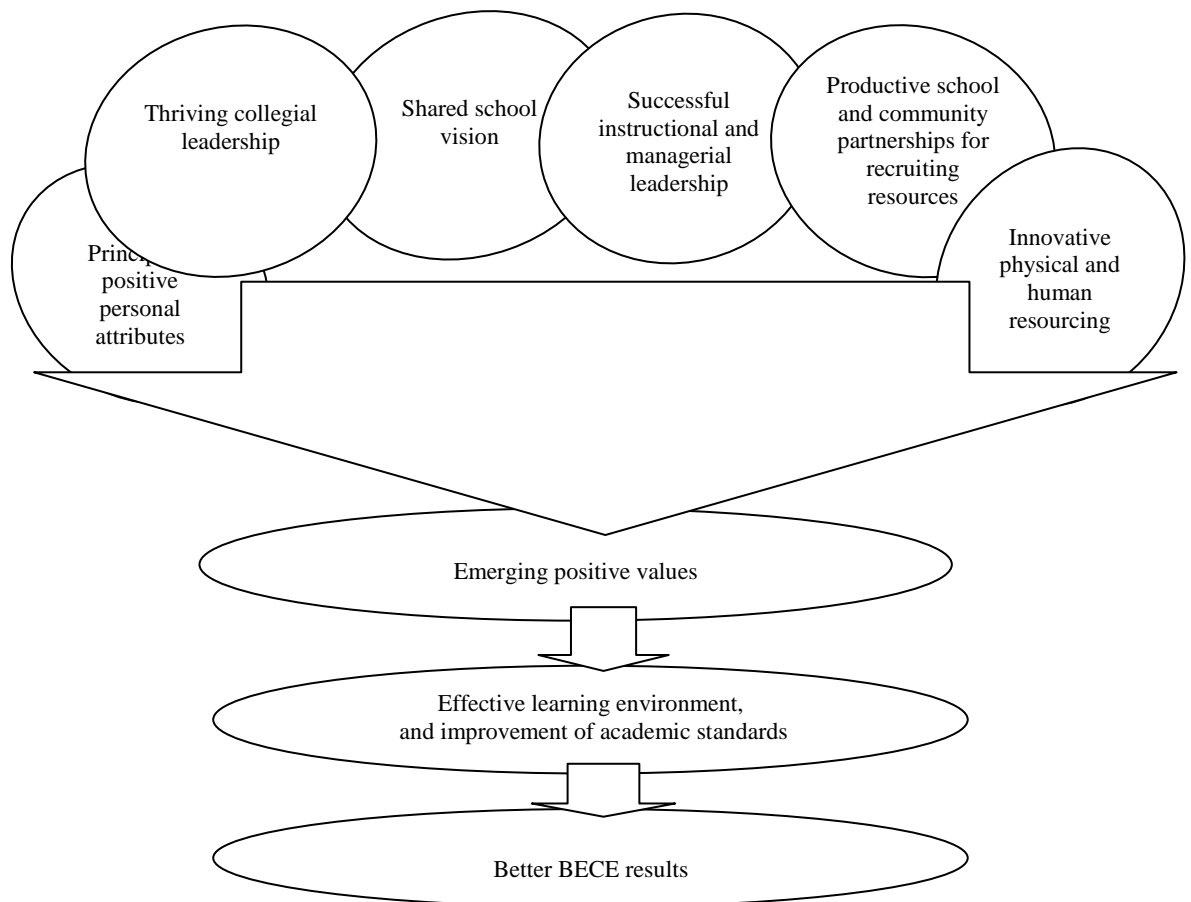


Figure 8.1. A model of the interconnected elements of effective school leadership

The Traffic lights Representation of Leadership of the Case Study Schools

The traffic lights representation employs the three classical colours; red, amber and green of traffic lights, to represent how many of the seven effectiveness elements were significantly present (green), partially present (amber), or almost absent (red) in each of the four cases. Consequently, more green lights represent a school where the major characteristics of effectiveness are present; and a school with more amber or red lights is one with a lesser degree of effectiveness. In other words, the disadvantaged school with more green lights exhibited those effectiveness elements to a maximum level, and thus, was an effective school. While the school with fewer or no green lights but more amber and red lights, exhibited the effectiveness elements to a minimal level, and was therefore a less-effective school. (See Figure 8.2.)

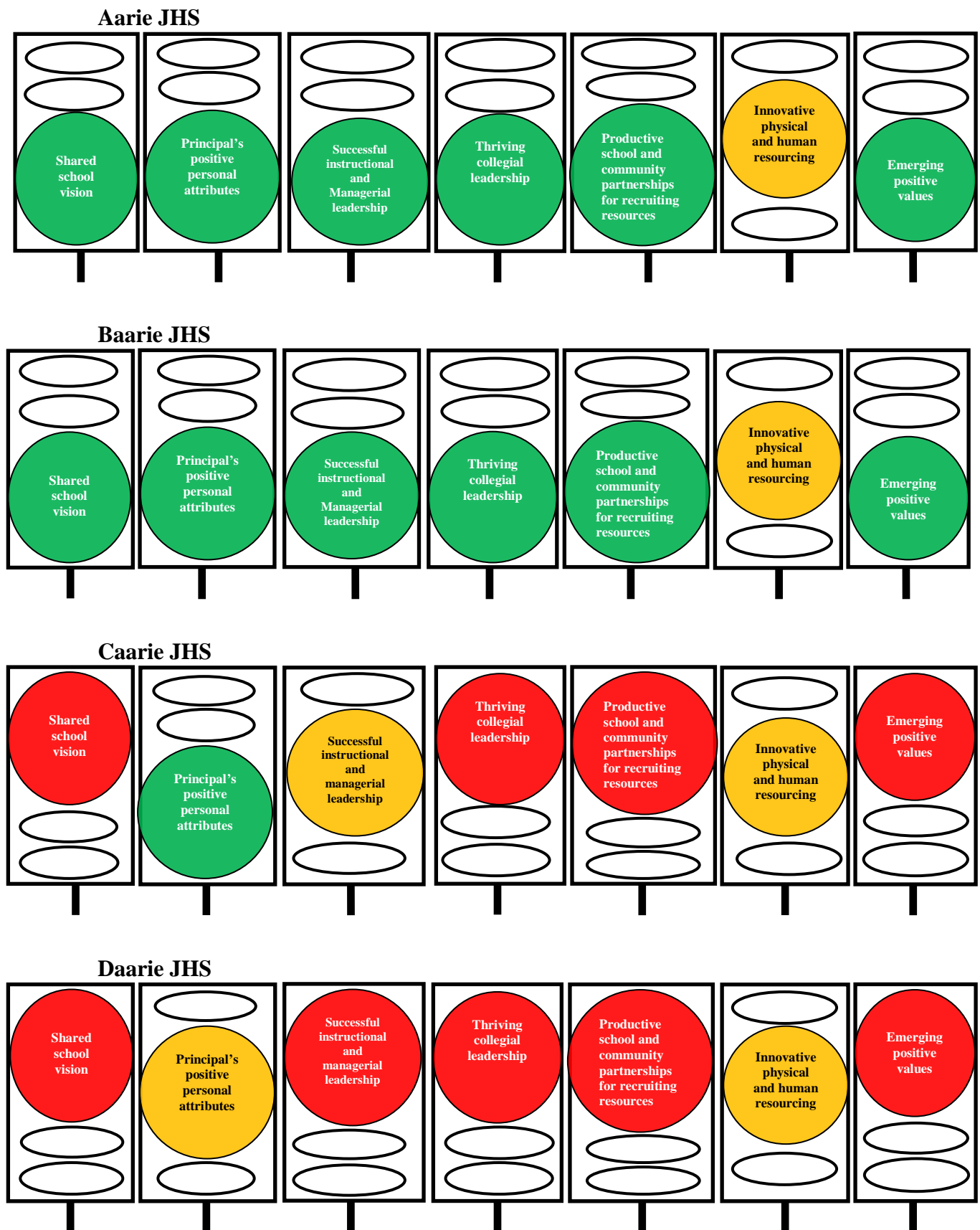


Figure 8.2. The traffic lights representation of the four case study schools

A close look at Figure 8.2 reveals that Aarie and Baarie each had many green lights, indicating that Aarie and Baarie were characterised by most of the seven elements of effectiveness and were therefore, the most effective disadvantaged rural schools in the Saboba locality. Although Caarie had one green light while Daarie had no green light, both schools had four or more red lights, which indicate that there were many barriers to school effectiveness. Further, it is noteworthy that all the four disadvantaged schools had amber lights with regards to physical and human resourcing. This suggests that all the four disadvantaged schools had similar challenges with regard to funding and resourcing, yet unlike Caarie and Daarie, this obstacle did not prevent Aarie and Baarie from creating the right teaching and learning environment that supported effective learning and better student achievement as illustrated in Figure 8.1.

Summary

The discussion chapter has helped in identifying clearly the *raison d'être* of each of the major themes that emerged from the analyses and interpretations of data gathered, in response to the research question that guided and directed this study. These seven themes or effectiveness elements are: shared vision, the principal's positive personal attributes, successful instructional and managerial leadership, thriving collegial leadership, productive school and community partnerships for recruiting resources, innovative physical and human resourcing and emerging positive values. The significance of each of these seven elements of effective leadership and the way they interact to produce the effectiveness of those disadvantaged rural schools has been illustrated by the model presented in Figure 8.1.

These essential indicators of effectiveness in the disadvantaged rural schools in Saboba may provide a way forward for resolving academic underachievement in some of the disadvantaged rural schools in Ghana. The next and final chapter lists a number of assertions that summarise the claims made which comprise the answer to the research question.

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This final chapter recalls the journey that was begun almost three years ago to undertake this research, the concerns that led to the research question and methods, and findings that have emerged. The major assertions of the research, informed by the variety of academic improvement strategies employed by the effective principals of the disadvantaged rural schools to improve low academic standards are stated. Finally, the chapter presents the contribution to knowledge, limitations of the study, and the key implications which may serve as useful signposts for school leaders wanting to lead their schools towards more effective teaching, better learning and higher student achievement.

Overview of the Study

This research into principals' strategies for improving the academic achievement of students of disadvantaged rural Junior High Schools (JHSs) in Ghana was initiated as an effort to understand and respond to the growing low academic achievement in many Ghanaian JHSs in rural districts (Akyeampong, 2007). This was illustrated by the below-average performance of many rural Junior High School students who sat the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) during the past 10 years (Ghana News Agency, 2008; Tettey, 2003; World Bank, 1996). Since success at the BECE is required for admission to the Senior High School, many Ghanaian youth from the rural disadvantaged schools have not been able to continue their education beyond the Junior High School.

Nevertheless, a few disadvantaged rural JHSs in the same locality with similar level of public funding regularly continue to perform well despite all the challenges of resourcing and funding. So, what explains this disparity in academic performance between high-achieving and low-achieving disadvantaged rural schools? The Researcher's observation as a teacher, in the Saboba rural locality of the Northern Region of Ghana for eight years led him to wonder if the difference could be attributed to the effectiveness of the principal.

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to research the strategies employed by effective principals, as well as less-effective principals, of disadvantaged rural JHSs, to improve teaching and learning and academic achievement. Therefore, the research question that guided the study was: How do principals of disadvantaged rural schools in

the Saboba District of Ghana create an environment that fosters high standards of students' academic performance?

A review of literature on school leadership, school effectiveness, school improvement, professional learning communities, cultural community engagement, personal attributes of school leaders and school values has helped to identify and clarify important issues concerning the enhancement of students' academic performance. Further, relevant literature helped in identifying qualitative research by case study as the most appropriate methodology to investigate school leadership in these schools.

Saboba and its locality belong to the Northern Region of Ghana, one of the most deprived rural regions of Ghana. Two high-achieving (Aarie and Baarie) and two less-achieving (Caarie and Daarie) JHSs were chosen thorough analysis of the results of Basic Education Certificate Examinations from 2005 to 2009. The BECE, sat by students at the end of school year nine, serves as the criterion for evaluating academic standards of JHSs in Ghana (Akyeampong, 2007; Ministry of Education Science and Sports, 2007a).

The Researcher spent six months (November 2009 to April 2010) in Saboba, Ghana, collecting data. Research data were obtained through interviews and focus group meetings with 100 participants, including four serving principals, two ex-principals, 18 teachers, 48 students, 20 parents, four officers from the District Office of the Ghana Education Service and four community leaders. All interviews and focus group meetings were digitally recorded and transcribed. Field notes taken during interviews and focus group meetings, daily research journaling, collection of artefacts in the form of photographs, as well as an analysis of relevant local education documents, helped to supplement and corroborate the data gathered from interviews and focus group meetings. This helped to improve triangulation (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002), credibility and reliability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

An interpretive approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005; Locke, 2001) was employed through data analysis, cross-case analysis, and reporting of data in a narrative form. Key findings (KFs) supported the development of themes which became the core elements of effective leadership that explained the difference between high-achieving and low-achieving disadvantaged rural schools in the Saboba locality. These themes were further interpreted in the light of existing literature to produce the eight assertions presented here. .

Conclusions

The research question “How do Principals of disadvantaged rural schools in the Saboba District of Ghana create an environment that fosters high standards of students’ academic performance?” was the focus of the research study. The conclusions to the research are reported here as a set of assertions which were developed through interpretation of data and the generation of seven themes in the light of existing literature as reported in the Discussion chapter.

These seven assertions relate to the elements of effective leadership that distinguished effective disadvantaged rural schools from less-effective disadvantaged schools.

Assertion 1

Principals of disadvantaged schools who succeeded in collectively crafting, disseminating and consolidating a school vision and mission with their staff and students, and involved parents and community via their shared vision and mission, were able to rally the entire school community towards a positive change and to transform low academic standards to improved academic achievement.

Assertion 2

Positive personal attributes of the principal of a disadvantaged rural school, when combined with effective instructional, managerial and collegial leadership, can help gain the trust of collaborators and influence positively the attitudes and behaviour of teachers, students and parents. However, these positive personal attributes of the principal may become less influential without the support of good managerial and instructional leadership skills.

Assertion 3

The effective principals of the disadvantaged rural schools exhibited good instructional and managerial leadership. The effective principals emphasised more their managerial role at certain times and concentrated on their instructional role at other times. Consequently, the effective principals of disadvantaged rural schools, first resolved the basic issues of student indiscipline (lateness and absenteeism), teacher unprofessionalism (lateness, absenteeism and uncooperative conduct), and a lack of minimal infrastructure (extremely insufficient classroom furniture and learning

materials) before concentrating on supervision of teachers' teaching and students' learning.

Assertion 4

Collegial leadership is a key element of effective leadership of rural disadvantaged schools. The collegial leaders were able to influence the conduct and commitment of teachers and community members through their attention to the welfare of teachers, through dialogue and consultation, and sharing of responsibilities and privileges.

Assertion 5

In an under-resourced and disadvantaged rural school setting, effective principals established school and community partnerships through the Parent Teacher Association, parents and the wider community. These partnerships were used to recruit financial and other resources for the school and for teachers' welfare in order to improve the teaching and learning environment and student achievement.

Assertion 6

The effective principals of disadvantaged rural schools ingeniously established cordial relationships with local politicians, education officers and community, whom they lobbied in resolving to some degree, some of the physical and human resourcing challenges of their schools, such as the lack of sufficient trained teachers, electricity in classrooms and inadequate school furniture, text books and ICT equipment.

Assertion 7

The effective principals transformed their schools not only through effective management and instructional efforts but also, and most essentially, by awakening in their teachers, students and collaborators, values, and positive attitudes and beliefs that they cherished themselves, and practised via their collegiality, dialogue and collective decision-making focussed on school improvement.

Assertion 8

Effective disadvantaged rural schools in Saboba demonstrated that each element of effective leadership, namely, principal's positive attributes, thriving collegial leadership, shared school vision, successful instructional and managerial leadership, productive school and community partnerships for recruiting resources, and innovative physical and human resourcing are each necessary but not sufficient on its own to transform a school. It is the interconnectedness of the strategies employed to enhance each of these effective elements that resulted in the emergence of the positive school

values which created a thriving teaching and learning environment that fostered higher academic standards and improved achievement.

Contributions to Knowledge

There are a few research reports on improvement of rural education in Ghana (Akyeampong, 2007; Baku & Agyeman, 1997; Godwyll, 2003; Kadingdi, 2004; World Bank, 2004) and in other parts of Africa (Habyarimana, Das, Dercon, & Krishnan, 2003; Hardré, 2009; Mazibuko, 2005; Norviewu-Mortty, 2010; Onguko, et al., 2008; Shimada, 2010) but none specifically focussed on the strategic role of principals of disadvantaged rural schools in enhancing effective schooling and high academic achievement.

This research not only affirmed that many of the principles of effective school leadership reported in the literature of Western developed countries have some application in disadvantaged rural schools in Ghana but also highlighted the significance of the interconnectedness of these effective elements in enhancing disadvantaged rural students' learning and achievement. A further contribution of this study is that there are other implications for research and practice.

Research Limitations and Implications for Further Research

The major limitation of this research and of any case study is that it is context bound which limits generalisation to other contexts. There is therefore, a need for replication studies in other rural and urban Ghanaian contexts and settings to establish if the findings of this study are robust and also, to identify any differences between urban and rural contexts.

This study, however, is silent on what constitutes the minimal infrastructure and resourcing that a rural disadvantaged school in the Saboba District may require so that it can focus on developing strategies that improve teaching supervision and students' learning, and raising academic standards. This may be a useful focus of any future research.

Further, this research demonstrated that the onus of positive transformation from a low-performing disadvantaged rural school to a high-performing disadvantaged rural school rested on the key strategic initiatives of effective principals. Thus, students' backgrounds at admission seemed not to be a deciding factor in respect of strategies employed towards improving academic standards. The findings of this research may also be consolidated or further developed through any future study that will focus on

students' backgrounds, as a possible factor of low student achievement in disadvantaged rural schools in Ghana

Implication for Practice

This study has identified key elements of effective leadership and a model of the interconnected elements of effective school leadership (Figure 8.1) which can be adopted in the training and formation of principals of disadvantaged rural schools in Ghana. The findings of this research can contribute in crafting of future professional development programs for principals of disadvantaged rural schools.

It is noteworthy that the principals mentioned in this study were only minimally qualified, inexperienced and lacked regular professional learning support. Thus, for these principals to succeed, they cannot be left on their own without any regular support in the form of professional development, peer-mentoring and regular contact with other principals, especially in disadvantaged rural settings. Appropriate professional learning development programs that would encourage dialogue, give feedback to principals and enhance their experiential learning should be promoted as suggested by the report on preparation of school principals in Bulgaria and Eastern Europe (Karstanje & Webber, 2008). Hoyle's (2006) emphasis on transformational leadership that makes organizations, especially schools, more caring communities by leaders, guided by principle, morality, and service to others may also offer a useful insight for improving principalship in rural Ghana. Further, the research of Stuart, Acheampong and Croft (2009) on the appropriate training of teachers in developing countries, and the case study research of Day and Leithwood (2007) on what effective principals from various socio-cultural contexts do to improve learning can both be useful resources. Similarly, the work of Glaze, Pervin and Maika in the Province of Ontario in Canada (2007) stressed the need for the principal to focus on each student's achievement and offer coordinated numeracy and literacy enrichment programs in and outside classroom hours. This can be presented as a useful strategy to include in the resource for the professional development of principals of rural disadvantaged schools. Finally, the background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report on Ghana by Akyeampong (2004), which highlighted the achievements, weaknesses and key lessons for the success of whole school development in Ghana, remains a practical clue for improving the effectiveness of principals working in rural schools of Ghana.

Further, the local education officers, in the case of Saboba, at the District level, must be seen to be in charge of their schools in providing regular advice, visiting,

observing and listening to the principals and propping up their authority when necessary. Further, the District office must do its job by acting on time to appoint principals or acting principals whenever the need arises to avert the negative impact that a leadership vacuum, even if for a brief period, can have on school efficacy and academic achievement. District officers must provide regular professional development programs to support principals if they want them to be effective leaders.

Finally there is a fundamental need for policy change in respect of the use of unsalaried and untrained helper teachers, whose good intentions to help voluntarily to educate rural students can easily turn into unprofessionalism if their socio-economic needs are not catered for. The Government and School authorities should either cease to use the services of these well-intentioned, untrained voluntary teachers or find concrete means to adequately remunerate them for their services. For the sake of fairness and effective schooling, the responsibility for remunerating helper teachers must not be left in the hands of generous, but poor, subsistent farming parents.

Finally, effective in-service training or professional development programs that are crafted to help all volunteer untrained teachers, as well as trained teachers, in disadvantaged rural schools will be a useful strategy in promoting both teacher efficacy and students' learning and achievement.

Final Remark

There is no doubt that low funding and resourcing remain a stumbling block to efforts to improve the teaching and learning environment of rural schools and enhancing academic achievement. However, the effective principals of disadvantaged rural schools in Saboba, Ghana, who equally grappled with huge infrastructure problems such as lack of ICT and science equipment, lack of text books and other essential teaching and learning materials, even without a retinue of trained teachers succeeded in not only improving the learning environment in their schools, they even sustained top achievement of their students because they know *how to wash their hands and eat with the kings* (an Ewe adage about ingenuity).

In other words, principals of effective disadvantaged rural schools know which types of initiatives to take in order to earn both the respect and the attention of those who matter in the local community and thereby, benefit from their largesse and support. Those effective principals learn to garner the trust and cooperation of parents in recruiting resources to support their efforts, to rally their teachers and students in promoting student discipline and teacher professionalism. These initiatives were the

foundations that boosted their concerted efforts in improving student learning and top performance, despite funding and resourcing challenges.

Recruiting additional resources through active partnerships with local community and parents and creating a school climate of urgency, tailored teaching and efficient supervision of learning in order to help students effectively pass their final external examinations remains an optimal educational strategy that is making a difference between high achievers and low achievers in disadvantaged rural schools of Saboba, Ghana. Consequently, those leadership strategies of successful principals of disadvantaged rural schools in Saboba, Ghana, who led positive change to improve academic standards in their deprived schools, may well guide any prudent school leader who desires to succeed in similar school settings.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Schedules and Questions

Interview Schedules

Venue (Saboba, Ghana):

For the principals

1. School campus of school *A*
2. School campus of School *B*
3. School campus of School *C*
4. School campus of School *D*

For the District Education officials

1. District Education offices.
2. Other suitable venues in the town and chosen by interviewees.

Time:

During and after school hours between October 2009 and February 2010.

Whom:

1. The Principals of the four JHSs
2. The Saboba Education officials

Strategies:

1. The five semi-structured interview questions will be written out and given to each Principal or District Education Official one day ahead of the interview, for each to reflect upon prior to our scheduled meeting the next day.
2. Prior to the meeting, the Researcher will find out from the principals and the Education officers, the most convenient place for the interviews. This is to ensure that the Researcher respects their feelings and sensitivities. The choice could be their offices or any other suitable venue.
3. On the scheduled day of interview, the Researcher will arrive one hour earlier to the scheduled time and spend few minutes to greet other staff or students around and familiarise with the person to be interviewed and also ensure that venue and other logistics (such as note books and pens, digital audio recorder, some snack if necessary – all provided by the Researcher) are in place.
4. The actual interview will begin by usual pleasantries, followed by the semi-structured interview questions, including those already given to the interviewee in advance. Some questions and answers will be probed further for clarification and concise information when necessary. The digital audio recorder will run throughout the interview sessions. Brief notes will also be taken during the interviews.

Questions:

Interview questions for individual principals of schools A, B, C, D.

1. Sir/Madam, please kindly tell me something about your job as the principal of School A (B, C, D).
2. How do you judge the performance of your school over the last few years and what accounts for this level of performance?
3. What are the main issues limiting the effectiveness of this school and students' academic achievement?
4. Did you make any changes when you first came to this school? Why was that? Have these changes been effective?
 - *What strategies are you using this year to make your school more effective? What is your focus for this year?*

Questions:

Interview questions for individual District Education officers.

1. Sir/Madam, please kindly tell me something about your job as the District Education Director (as Deputy District Director for Supervision, as Circuit Supervisor) of the Saboba District.
2. How do you judge the performance of the Junior High Schools in the entire District during the last few years and what accounts for this level of performance?
3. What would you like to say about the achievement level of each of the Junior High Schools, present here in the Saboba town/locality during the past few years?
4. What do you think might be the critical factor or factors causing the very low academic performance of most of the Junior High Schools in Saboba, and in the District as a whole?
 - *Do you have any advice for parents and the local community towards the improvement of academic standards in Saboba?*
5. If you are to give an advice for each of the Principals and teachers of these Junior High Schools in Saboba to help them improve academic achievement of their schools, what would that be? Feel free to mention the name of the Junior High School you wish to comment on.

Appendix B: Focus Group Schedules and Questions

Venue (Saboba, Ghana) for:

Teachers and students (current and past)

1. Respective campuses of schools A, B, C, and D.

Active parents

1. Respective school campuses or any other suitable venue in the town.

Community opinion leaders (District Chief Executive, Saboba Chief or Representative, two religious leaders and two nongovernmental organisations)

1. Suitable venue for each group, which will be within the town, will be determined in consultation with the respective participants. Possible choices will be District administration meeting rooms, school meeting rooms or common rooms.

Time:

During and after school hours between October 2009 and February 2010

Whom:

1. Teachers
2. Opinion leaders
3. Students (current and past)
4. Parents

Strategies (Teachers and Opinion Leaders):

- The Researcher will arrive one hour earlier to the scheduled time to ensure that logistics are in order and also familiarise myself with the participants arriving for the focus group meeting.
- Once all have arrived, the Researcher will distribute to each participant six sheets of paper, which has each, one focus group question.
- Participants (who will not be more than six at a time) will be told not to write their names on the sheets of paper. They will then have at least 20 minutes to read and reflect upon each of the focus group questions printed on their sheets and then write down few notes on each as a response. This will give different points of view at a go, to each of the focus group questions.
- Once all have read and written down some notes on their respective questions, they will be asked to drop the sheets, without any name, into six bins or baskets. Each bin will hold only sheets with the same focus group question. In turns, a sheet with only one question will be read out and all participants will be invited to freely respond.
- This procedure will be followed until all the sheets have been read and discussed. Debate and questions for clarification and precision will be encouraged and tolerated during the focus group discussions.
- Only during the plenary discussion session of the focus group that digital audio recording will take place.
- Brief and sketchy notes will be taken throughout the meeting.

Questions:

Focus group questions for Teachers of English, Mathematics and Science.

1. Please kindly tell me something about your work as teachers in this school.
2. How do you judge the performance of your students over the last few years and what accounts for this level of performance?
 - *What factors limit the academic achievement of your students?*
3. What do you think your school has done or is doing that has helped to promote better academic performance of the students?
4. What role has the principal of the school played to improve the performance of your students?
 - *In what ways has the school changed since he/she became principal?*
5. Do you have any suggestions for improving the school's performance?

Questions:

Focus Group Questions for Opinion Leaders from the town of Schools A, B, C and D.

1. Sir/Madam, please kindly tell me something about your work and your relationship with School A (*B, C or D*).
2. How do you judge the performance of this particular school?
3. What do you think explains the level of performance of students in this school?
4. What impact has this principal had on your school?
5. How could the school be improved? Do you have any suggestions?

Strategies (JHS-3 Students and Immediate Past Students of JHSs A, B, C and D):

- The Researcher will arrive one hour earlier to the scheduled time to ensure that logistics are in order and also familiarise myself with the six students who are arriving for the focus group meeting.
- After the usual pleasantries and familiarisation, when all are seated preferably in one of the classrooms, the Researcher shall briefly present the purpose of the meeting and remind them that each will be asked for his or her personal opinion on any of the questions but are free to withdraw at any time.
- Each focus group question will then be clearly explained and questions of clarification by the students will be encouraged and responded to in simple and concise terms.
- Once there is evidence of above average understanding of all the questions, the six student participants will be asked to take a break of five to ten minutes. This is to encourage some informal sharing at peer level among the students.
- On return from the break, all the sheets of papers will be retrieved from the students except the one with the first question. The first question will then be written on the chalk board, and students will be asked to respond. Each response will be followed by a debate or contributions from others in reaction to the answer given. Only students who wish to respond to a question or contribute to the debate would be encouraged to do so. None will be obliged to respond to each of the questions or contribute to each response.
- The digital audio recording will run throughout this discussion period.
- This procedure will be repeated until all the five questions have been dealt with.
- Short breaks for some snack will be taken when necessary to reduce fatigue.
- The entire focus group meeting will last for a maximum of one and half hours.

Questions:

Focus Group Questions for JHS-3 Students of Schools A, B, C and D.

1. Please, kindly tell me something about your school life and activities.
2. Is this a good school where students get good results? Why is that? What does the school do to promote good results?
3. Do you think you are being adequately prepared for your Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE)?
 - Explain how the school actually prepares you for the examinations.
4. What does the principal do to make your school a good school?
5. Do your parents encourage you in any way to do well at school? Explain how.

Questions:

Focus Group Questions for Immediate Graduates of Schools A, B, C and D.

1. Please, kindly tell me something about what you have been doing since you left school.
2. Was your former school a good school where students get good results? Why is that? What did the school do to promote good results?
3. Do you think you were adequately prepared for your Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE)?
 - *Explain how the school actually prepared you for the examinations.*
4. What did the principal do to make your school a good school?
5. Did your parents encourage you in any way to do well at school? Explain how

Strategies (Currently Active Parents – literate and illiterate):

- The Researcher will arrive one hour earlier to the scheduled time to ensure that logistics are in order and also familiarise myself with the parents who are arriving for the focus group meeting.
- After the usual pleasantries and familiarisation, when all are seated preferably outside under a shed or in one of the classrooms, the Researcher will briefly present the purpose of the meeting and remind them that each will be free at any time during the discussion to express his or her personal opinion on each of the questions to be asked. In as much as possible, parents will be made to feel relaxed and not under any duress to respond to every question.
- The questions will be explained simply and clearly, one at a time and the parents will be asked to respond or to say whatever comes to mind.
- This meeting will be conducted in both English and the local language, as not all the parents will be able to express themselves in English. One of the literate participating parents will serve as an interpreter.
- Digital audio recording will take place throughout the discussion with the parents.
- No written notes will be taken.
- Some snack or form of refreshment will be provided.

Focus Group Questions for Currently Active Parents (illiterate or literate).

1. Sir/Madam, please kindly tell me something about your work and your relationship with School A (*B, C or D*).
2. How important is education for your children?
3. How do you judge the performance of this school, and most especially that of your child?
4. What do you think explains the level of performance of students in your child's school?
 - *What has the principal done to make this a good school?*
5. How can your child's school be improved? Do you have any suggestions?

Appendix C: Letter to Regional Director of Education, Tamale, N.R.

Principals' Strategies for Improving Students' Academic Achievement in Rural Junior High Schools in Ghana

July 2009



JOONDALUP CAMPUS
270 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup
WA 6027
AUSTRALIA

Dear Regional Director (GES, Tamale, Northern Region),

I am Erasmus Norviewu-Mortty a PhD candidate at the Edith Cowan University, Australia. I am undertaking an education research project that aims to develop and improve and sustaining better academic performance of our Junior High School students in the Saboba District by tapping the expertise and experience of some of our best headmasters/principals. This is to complement the efforts of the District and the Ghana Government in resolving underperformance in our JHSs.

Formal education is the best tool to fight the cycle of poverty and deprivation. Consequently, success at the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) remains the crucial step that may lift our rural students from the deprivation and poverty that their parents suffer.

During my eight years as a graduate teacher of English and Religious and Moral Education in St. Joseph's Technical School, Saboba I had the opportunity to serve as a member of the District Education Planning Team (DEPT). I therefore participated in a few inspection tours of some of the Junior High Schools (JHSs) in the Saboba District.

Although poor funding and lack of resources are a major factor limiting the performance of our schools my observations indicate that the JHSs where students perform well are those that had effective principals/headmasters. I therefore wish to find out what actually has been done or is being done by those headmasters/principals to promote effective teaching and learning and higher achievement of their students. Tapping the knowledge and experience of these principals/headmasters together with insights from relevant literature might lead to the development of possible suggestions for resolving academic underperformance in the Junior High Schools of the district and also help to sustain higher achievement of students in other deprived rural schools.

Please note that this research project is a qualitative one in which the Researcher will work with four JHS principals/headmasters and some teachers, students and parents from these schools principals/headmasters in improving the achievement of their students.

The project will involve:

- Two separate interviews of one to two hours with four principals/headmasters
- Two separate interviews of one to two hours with some Education officials (Education Circuit Supervisors, District Director and his/her Deputy)
- One focus group meeting of one to two hours with six JHS teachers (Maths, Science and English) at each of the four schools

- One focus group meeting of one to two hours with six current JHS students at each of the four schools
- One focus group meeting of one two hours with six immediate past JHS students at each of the four schools
- One focus Group meeting of one to two hours with six parents (including the school's PTA chairman) at each school
- One focus Group meeting of one to two hours with six community opinion leaders associated with each school]

The research data will be gathered through digital audio recording of interviews and focus group discussions, brief observation notes on lessons and other school activities/events by the Researcher, photographs of school environment and document analysis. All data will be confidential and transcripts, observational notes and electronic files will be stored securely and will be destroyed five years after completion of this study. No teacher, principal, student nor school will be identified in any research reports.

The written report on each interview or focus group will be made available to participants so that they can check that the reports fairly represent their views. The outcome of this research will provide recommendations for improving schooling in rural schools.

I am happy to discuss any question you may have about the project and you may contact me, Erasmus K. Norviewu-Mortty, on 0242608494 or by email using enorview@student.ecu.edu.au. This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Edith Cowan University. If you have any concerns about the project or would like to talk to an independent person, you may contact my research supervisors:

Associate Professor Glenda Campbell-Evans
School of Education
Edith Cowan University

270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP, WA. 6027. AUSTRALIA

g.campbell_evans@ecu.edu.au

Associate Dean Professor
Mark Hackling
School of Education
Edith Cowan University

270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP, WA. 6027.
AUSTRALIA

m.hackling@ecu.edu.au

If you are happy to approve of this study, could you please sign the consent form attached to this information letter and return it to me. Please note that you are free to withdraw your consent for this study at any time.

Regards

Erasmus K. Norviewu-Mortty
(PhD-Education Candidate)

Principals' Strategies for Improving Students' Academic Achievement in Rural Junior High Schools in Ghana



JOONDALUP CAMPUS
270 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup
WA 6027
AUSTRALIA

October 2009

I have read the attached information letter and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I give my consent for the four nominated schools in the Saboba District to participate in this research study and I understand that their participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

Yes

No

I give my consent to participate in interviews with the Researcher and I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

Yes

No

} Please omit. Thanks.
[Signature]
Researcher
Erasmus
K.W. Mortty
24/11/09

Name of Regional Director (G.E.S.):

Name of the Region: *Nantheri*

Signature: *[Signature]*

Date: *20/11/09*
GHANA EDUCATION SERVICE
REGIONAL DIRECTOR
NORTHERN REGION

**Please return the signed consent form to Erasmus K. Norviewu-Mortty at:
St. Joseph's Technical School, Saboba by hand**

Or by mail to:
Erasmus K. Norviewu-Mortty,
St. Joseph's Technical School,
P.O. Box 3, Saboba. N/R.

Appendix D: Letter to District Director of Education, Saboba

Principals' Strategies for Improving Students' Academic Achievement in Rural Junior High Schools in Ghana



JOONDALUP CAMPUS
270 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup
WA 6027
AUSTRALIA

July 2009

Dear Director (GES, Saboba),

I am Erasmus Norviewu-Mortty a PhD candidate at the Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia. I am undertaking an education research project that aims to develop ways of improving and sustaining better academic performance of our Junior High School students in the Saboba District by tapping the expertise and experience of some of our best headmasters/principals. This is to complement the efforts of the District and the Ghana Government in resolving underperformance in our JHSs.

Formal education is the best tool to fight the cycle of poverty and deprivation. Consequently, success at the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) remains the crucial step that may lift our rural students from the deprivation and poverty that their parents suffer.

During my eight years as a graduate teacher of English and Religious and Moral Education in St. Joseph's Technical School, Saboba I had the opportunity to serve as a member of the District Education Planning Team (DEPT). I therefore participated in few inspection tours of some of the Junior High Schools (JHSs) in the Saboba District.

Although poor funding and lack of resources are a major factor limiting the performance of our schools my observations indicate that the JHSs where students perform well are those that had effective principals/headmasters. I therefore wish to find out what actually has been done or is being done by those headmasters/principals to promote effective teaching and learning and higher achievement of their students. Tapping the knowledge and experience of these principals/headmasters together with insights from relevant literature might lead to the development of possible suggestions for resolving academic underperformance in the Junior High Schools of the district and also help to sustain higher achievement of students in other deprived rural schools.

Please note that this research project is a qualitative one in which the Researcher will work with four JHS principals/headmasters and some teachers, students and parents from these schools principals/headmasters in improving the achievement of their students.

The project will involve:

- Two separate interviews of one to two hours with four principals/headmasters
- Two separate interviews of one to two hours with some Education officials (Education Circuit Supervisors, District Director and his/her Deputy)
- One focus group meeting of one to two hours with six JHS teachers (Maths, Science and English) at each of the four schools
- One focus group meeting of one to two hours with six current JHS students at each of the four schools

- One focus group meeting of one to two hours with six immediate past JHS students at each of the four schools
- One focus Group meeting of one to two hours with six parents (including the school's PTA chairman) at each school
- One focus Group meeting of one to two hours with six community opinion leaders associated with each school

•
The research data will be gathered through digital audio recording of interviews and focus group discussions, brief observation notes on lessons and other school activities/events by the Researcher, photographs of school environment and document analysis. All data will be confidential and transcripts, observational notes and electronic files will be stored securely and will be destroyed five years after completion of this study. No teacher, principal, student nor school will be identified in any research reports.

The written report on each interview or focus group will be made available to participants so that they can check that the reports fairly represent their views.

The outcome of this research will provide recommendations for improving schooling in rural schools.

I am happy to discuss any question you may have about the project and you may contact me, Erasmus K. Norviewu-Mortty, on 0242608494 or by email using enorview@student.ecu.edu.au. This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Edith Cowan University. If you have any concerns about the project or would like to talk to an independent person, you may contact my research supervisors:

Associate Professor Glenda Campbell-Evans

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Edith Cowan University
270 Joondalup Drive
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g.campbell_evans@ecu.edu.au

Associate Dean Professor Mark Hackling

School of Education
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270 Joondalup Drive
JOONDALUP, WA. 6027.
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m.hackling@ecu.edu.au

If you are happy to participate in this study, could you please sign the consent form attached to this information letter and return it to me. Please note that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Regards

Erasmus K. Norviewu-Mortty
(PhD-Education Candidate)

Principals' Strategies for Improving Students' Academic Achievement in Rural Junior High Schools in Ghana



JOONDALUP CAMPUS
270 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup
WA 6027
AUSTRALIA

October 2009

I have read the attached information letter and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

I give my consent for the four nominated schools in the Saboba-Chereponi District to participate in this research study and I understand that their participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

Yes

No

I give my consent to participate in interviews with the Researcher and I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

Yes

No

Name of District Director:

Name of the District: |

Signature:

Date: 08/02/2010

**Please return the signed consent form to Erasmus K. Norviewu-Mortty at:
St. Joseph's Technical School, Saboba by hand**

Or by mail to:
Erasmus K. Norviewu-Mortty,
St. Joseph's Technical School,
P.O. Box 3, Saboba, N/R.

Appendix E: Letter to Principals - Saboba Junior High Schools

Principals' Strategies for Improving Students' Academic Achievement in Rural Junior High Schools in Ghana

July 2009



Dear Principal (Headmaster/Headmistress),

I am Erasmus Norviewu-Mortty a candidate of PhD in Education at the Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia. I am undertaking an educational research project that aims to develop ways of improving and sustaining better academic performance of our Junior High School students in the Saboba District by tapping the expertise and experience of some of our best headmasters/principals. This is to complement the efforts of the District and the Ghana Government in resolving underperformance in our JHSs.

Formal education is the best tool to fight the cycle of poverty and deprivation. Consequently, success at the Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) remains the crucial step that may lift our rural students from the deprivation and poverty that their parents suffer.

During my eighth years as a graduate teacher of English and Religious and Moral Education in St. Joseph's Technical School, Saboba I had the opportunity to serve as a member of the District Education Planning Team (DEPT). I therefore participated in few inspection tours of some of the Junior High Schools (JHSs) in the Saboba District.

I had observed that while most of the JHSs are performing poorly the students in few others were performing well. What could explain this disparity? Some of my colleague teachers and education officials alluded that poor funding and lack of resources are the main factor of the low achievement of students in the JHSs in the District.

My initial observation in the district has indicated that the JHSs where students perform well are those that had effective principals/headmasters. I therefore wish to find out what actually has been done or is being done by those headmasters/principals to promote effective teaching and learning and higher achievement of their students. Tapping the knowledge and experience of these principals/headmasters together with insights from relevant literature might lead to the development of possible suggestions for resolving academic underperformance in the Junior High Schools of the district and also help to sustain higher achievement of students in other deprived rural schools.

Please note that this research project is a qualitative one in which the Researcher will work with some of you who are principals/headmasters/headmistresses of JHSs in the district to garner your skills, strategies, plans and visions in improving the academic achievement of your students.

The project will therefore involve:

- Interviews with some principals/headmasters/headmistresses like you
- Interviews with some Education officials (Education Circuit Supervisors, District Director and his/her Deputy)

- Focus group meetings with some JHS teachers (Maths, Science and English)
- Focus group meetings with some JHS students (current and past)
- Focus Group meetings with some parents (including the school's PTA chairman)

The research data will be gathered through digital audio recording of interviews and focus group discussions, brief observation notes on lessons and other school activities/events by the Researcher, photographs of school environment and document analysis.

Should any incidents occur in the audio recording of interviews and focus group discussions that might cause embarrassment to you, your students, teachers or school; these will be erased from the digital record. The written report on each interview or focus group will always be given back to those who would participate to member check for accuracies and for approval or rejection of any passage/material. This is to ensure that only what each participant says or intends to say is reported.

The outcome of this research will serve as possible suggestions for educational entities in Ghana that wish to improve the academic achievement of rural school students.

The project will provide you writing materials and snacks when necessary.

I am happy to discuss any question you may have about the project and you may contact me, Erasmus K. Norviewu-Mortty, on 0242608494 or by email using enorview@student.ecu.edu.au. This project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Edith Cowan University and has the support of AISWA and your District Director of Education. If you have any concerns about the project or would like to talk to an independent person, you may contact my research supervisors:

Associate Professor Glenda Campbell-Evans
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Associate Dean Professor Mark Hackling
 School of Education
 Edith Cowan University
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g.campbell_evans@ecu.edu.au

If you are happy to participate in this study, could you please sign the consent form attached to this information letter and return it to me. Please note that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Regards

Erasmus K. Norviewu-Mortty
 (PhD-Education Candidate)

Appendix F: Summary of Key Findings – Aarie JHS

Number	Key findings
4.1	Arrack's personal and professional attributes which comprised friendliness, love for school, warm human relational skills and accessibility to students, teachers and parents, resourceful supervisory leadership, exemplary conduct and arbitration skills were well attested by teachers, students, parents and by himself.
4.2	Arrack had distinct vision and mission for the School and prevailed upon his teachers and students to understand them and to support and work towards their realisation. The vision was the commitment to maintaining the School as a top academic achieving school and the mission, preparing Aarie students to be BECE examination confident and ready.
4.3	The Principal's instructional leadership was demonstrated through his supervision of teachers' work. Elements worthy of note in Arrack's actions were: the correction of lesson notes, direct coaching of some teachers and the random check of students' work as well as the conduct of academic and staff meetings to evaluate students' learning.
4.4	Extra-tutorials, student group studies, regular supervised class tests, debates and quizzes, instruction by expert tutors and teachers as well as multiple practice examinations and teacher improvisation in Science and ICT were employed as standard practices for improving teaching and learning and preparing students to be BECE confident and ready.
4.5	Arrack developed a collegial working relationship with his teachers and students through participatory decision making processes that focussed on regular teaching-staff meetings, consultation with implementation committees and Heads of departments and regular dialogue with students
4.6	Another significant aspect of Arrack's collegial leadership was his specific pragmatic acts of occasional classroom teaching, sharing of his personal teaching resources and his speedy respectful arbitration of conflicts
4.7	Principal conscientiously engaged and partnered with the local community through the promotion of an active Parent Teacher Association to recruit local resources to support teaching and learning, teachers' welfare and to enhance student discipline.
4.8	Principal ensured the respect of local ethos by teachers and students and regularly paid courtesy visits to the traditional chief and elders, local government and education officers and some parents, including PTA executive members.
4.9	The efforts of Arrack, the teachers and students to make Aarie a top-achieving school had been built from the School's cherished values of

discipline, punctuality and orderliness, commitment and perseverance and pride in Aarie as a top school.

4.10

Aarie had to grapple with a number of challenges to the School's progress. The most taxing ones were inadequate library facility, text books, Science and ICT equipment and materials. Other challenges were difficult management of un-cooperating parents as well as parents' interference in students' disciplinary issues and students' complaints about rigorous academic life.

Appendix G: Summary of Key Findings – Baarie JHS

Number	Key findings
5.1	Barrack influenced positively his teachers, students and parents by his simplicity, his spirit of dialogue and consultation, his deep respect and support for his teachers and students alike.
5.2	Barrack and staff identified lack of teacher professionalism, absence of sustained supervision of teaching and learning, lack of motivation among teachers, lack of discipline among students and challenging academic environment for students, as well as a dysfunctional PTA and school's apathy towards parents and community, as the factors responsible for persistent low academic achievement.
5.3	Baarie's vision of improving its reputation by becoming a top-achieving school at the BECE and a leader in healthy lifestyles was to be achieved through its mission of revamping teaching and learning towards higher achievement that is sustained by discipline, good sanitation and physical fitness.
5.4	In order to overhaul the teaching and learning landscape of low-achieving Baarie and improve academic standards, Barrack and staff took three crucial action-oriented strategic decisions, namely: to restore teacher professionalism and teachers' welfare support; to re-establish student discipline and provide an academically challenging learning and healthy environment; and to revamp school resourcing through School, parent and community partnership.
5.5	In the short-term, Barrack undertook multiple teacher supervision activities and promoted benchmarking of teacher performance. Barrack also provided welfare and support to teachers. This invigorated cordial relationships among teachers and Principal and strengthened teacher instructional confidence and responsibility, discipline and motivation. In the long-term, the School was lobbying the local education authorities for the recruitment of more experienced trained teachers and active parent teacher cooperation in supporting teachers.
5.6	Barrack and his teachers implemented their second strategic decision, which was to restore student discipline, create an academically challenging and healthy environment that sustain learning as a short-term plan. They instilled strict discipline among students through deterrence measures (punishments) and through positive means (rewards) such as awards for hard work, academic excellence and good conduct, and encouraged cleanliness and healthy lifestyles. These measures resulted in four positive transformations. First, teachers recommitted themselves to teaching effectively and students responded positively to disciplinary measures and showed renewed enthusiasm for studies. Second, disciplinary measures reduced absenteeism and lateness to school. Third, students did not only become sanitation and health conscious, but also took their studies more seriously and actively participated in all academic activities. Fourthly, academic work and students' achievement improved. As a long-term strategy, Baarie advocated partnership with parents and teacher cooperation to enhance student discipline, cleanliness and healthy lifestyles that sustain learning.

- 5.7 By renewing regular meetings with PTA executives and parents Barrack had helped to revive interest of parents in school affairs. Parents began to pay levies to fund school programs and cooperated with the School on students' disciplinary issues. Also, through his visits and sustained involvement with the local chiefs, elders, politicians and education officers, he procured further assistance in the form of text books, repair of school furniture, wiring and electric installation in classrooms. His cooperation with teachers to supervise students at school farms resulted in good harvests that generated additional income to support teaching and learning.
- 5.8 Concerted and focussed positive leadership initiatives and practices introduced by Barrack in form of dissuasion, persuasion and supervision to improve Baarie's academic environment engendered and promoted certain values. These values were team spirit, dialogue, hard work, positive competition, pride in school, and studiousness, as well as discipline and commitment to good sanitation and healthy lifestyles.
- 5.9 Certain challenges that seemed to be related directly to the system of rural schooling in Saboba, and were beyond the reach of Barrack and his staff remained unresolved. These were the use of untrained teachers and inadequate infrastructure, including insufficient teaching and learning materials and lack of ICT equipment. Others were poor preparation of candidates admitted to the School, students' premature departure from school at weekends to return home to look for foodstuffs, teenage pregnancy, and absence of a female teacher on staff. Nevertheless, Barrack's efforts to sustain an effective learning environment for better student performance received support from teachers, students and some parents.

Appendix H: Summary of Key Findings – Caarie JHS

Number	Key findings
6.1	Carrack demonstrated much interest, sympathy and concern for the welfare of teachers and students.
6.2	Teachers, students and parents acknowledged Carrack's perseverance and commitment.
6.3	Although Carrack's attributes of commitment, sympathy, perseverance and dialogue were acknowledged and admired they had not been harnessed to improve standards.
6.4	Carrack, the Principal of Caarie JHS stated that her personal vision for the School was to improve standards by leading the School to become a school where students achieve a 100% pass rate at the BECE and qualify to pursue further education in Senior High Schools.
6.5	Her mission to realise this vision was to establish a family environment in which extra-tutorials are used to cover uncompleted syllabuses, instil general discipline among students and teachers and raise teacher professional commitment and student studiousness.
6.6	Although Carrack made allusions to her vision and mission for the School in her interactions with students, teachers and parents; she failed to formally inform them about this and as a result, she could not rally her teachers and students towards achieving that vision and mission.
6.7	Carrack had poor communication with parents and PTA and thus could not collaborate with them effectively.
6.8	The Principal and parents knew of the academic problems of Caarie but the lack of effective collaboration between them prevented active cooperation to resolve these challenges, and it also dissipated the Principal's personal efforts.
6.9	Carrack and the parents acknowledged student and teacher absenteeism and lateness as cause of ineffective teaching and learning and failure to complete syllabuses.
6.10	Carrack's inability to curb the problem of lateness despite her many initiatives to do so, rendered the introduction of extra-tutorials to cover the syllabuses ineffective.
6.11	In spite Carrack's introduction of extra-tutorials to compensate for student and teacher lateness and improve learning, teachers' continuous use of tutorials to teach new concepts, and their failure to correct and give feedback on practice examination scripts deprived students of any revision prior to sitting the BECE.

- 6.12 Carrack coached some teachers and organised some professional learning workshops but this made little improvement to students' learning as lack of commitment of many teachers and students persisted. However some students were self reliant and took their own responsibility to improve learning.
- 6.13 Carrack's acclaimed good sense of collegiality and cordial relations did not gain the collaboration and commitment of her staff, students and parents and thus, failed to improve teacher professionalism, student discipline and cooperation of parents.
- 6.14 Parents, like the Principal, were open to being involved in resolving the low standards of the School. However, neither Carrack nor the PTA were able to partner towards effective resolution of the School's low standards which both parties acknowledged, deplored and wanted to change.

Appendix I: Summary of Key Findings – Daarie JHS

Number	Key findings
7.1	To sustain order and discipline and to enhance teaching and learning, the Assistant Principal of Daarie, after having consulted his colleagues, took the initiative without any formal approval, to act as Principal in the protracted absence of the official Principal.
7.2	Daarie had infrastructure challenges such as inadequate library facility and insufficient and poorly-furnished classrooms which caused classroom congestion.
7.3	Darrack's personal vision and mission to make Daarie an outstanding institution of high academic achievement with top BECE results, through improvement of teaching and learning and with aid of school partners, remained unknown to the School community. This hindered a coordinated action in addressing school problems.
7.4	The informal acting Principal, staff, students, parents and education officers acknowledged that there was a leadership vacuum in Daarie which was affecting school authority, and effective teaching and learning. Yet, no one took action to resolve the situation.
7.5	Principal Darrack lacked full authority over his volunteer teachers. Teachers' acts of disobedience and disrespect for authority and their undisciplined conduct of absenteeism, alcohol abuse, and inappropriate relations with female students remained unchallenged and negatively affected teaching and learning.
7.6	Darrack, through advice and use of punishments, had helped to reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy in the School but failed to halt other student undisciplined behaviour such as habitual lateness to school, long absence from school and noisy disorderly behaviour in classrooms.
7.7	Darrack's personal teaching capability and efforts to help students' learning through his English Language extra tutorials were acknowledged by students and teachers. However, he could not rally teachers to do the same as the teachers remained uncooperative and participated poorly in scheduled extra tutorials for the core subjects.
7.8	Daarie's ineffective teaching and learning environment was partly caused by the lack of teaching ability and unprofessional conduct of helper teachers. Yet, Darrack did not acknowledge how socio-economic challenges of unsalaried helper teachers negatively influenced their commitment to teaching; hence he failed to garner teachers' cooperation in addressing the School's academic problems.
7.9	Students lamented the ineffectiveness of teaching by Darrack and the French teacher who were overloaded with more teaching subjects and too many teaching lessons.

- 7.10** Students deplored the acute scarcity of trained teachers in their School and earnestly requested more to be recruited. Students, who were determined to pass the BECE in spite of all the odds against them, took both individual and group initiatives to do away with irresponsible behaviours in class. They decided to make maximum use of their time at school and at home with or without the involvement of their teachers in order to improve their chances to pass the BECE.
- 7.11** In spite of Darrack's personal efforts to consult his teachers even through casual meetings, his inability to conduct regularly formal staff meetings and to delegate prevented him and his staff from charting a common course of priorities and strategies in addressing Daarie's academic problems.
- 7.12** Darrack's inability to effectively dialogue with parents hindered consensus building on which infrastructure problems should be prioritised, and on which means to be sought in resolving them.
- 7.13** The parents and community did not give any support to the helper teachers of Daarie; and Darrack and parents were also unable to collectively resolve the problems affecting low achievement of students.

Appendix J: Data Audit – Number and Categories of Participants

DATA AUDIT FOR EACH OF THE FOUR CASES AT SABOBA (NOV 2009 TO APRIL 2010)									
JHS AARIE	JHS BAARIE	JHS CAARIE	JHS DAARIE						
INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS
NO OF PARTICIPANTS	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	NO OF PARTICIPANTS	NO OF PARTICIPANTS
Principal	1		1						1
Saboba town schools Circuit Supervisor – Ghana Education Service (G.E.S)									1
Saboba District Director of Education (Acting)									1
Saboba District Director of Education (out-going)									1
Saboba District Education Office (Deputy Director – Supervision)									1
Total No of Interviews	8		Total No of Interviewees	8					8
Focus Groups	No of Participants	Focus Groups	No of Participants	Focus Groups	No of Participants	Focus Groups	No of Participants	Focus Groups	No of Participants
Focus Group Community & Opinion Leaders									4
Teachers of Maths, Science & English	6	Teachers of Maths, Science & English	3	Teachers of Maths, Science & English	4	Teachers of Maths, Science & English	5		
Focus Group - Parents	4	Focus Group - Parents	6	Focus Group - Parents	6	Focus Group - Parents	4		
Focus Group – Current JHS-3 Students	6	Focus Group – Current JHS-3 Students	6	Focus Group – Current JHS-3 Students	6	Focus Group – Current JHS-3 Students	6		
Focus Group – Ex-JHS-3 Students	6	Focus Group – Ex-JHS-3 Students	6	Focus Group – Ex-JHS-3 Students	6	Focus Group – Ex-JHS-3 Students	6		
Focus Group Ex-Principals	2		0		0		0		
Total No of Interviews	8	Total no of focus group participants	92 (18 groups)	Total No of all participants	100				