

Teacher Preparation and School Safety Measures in Ghana

Dr. Anthony Kudjo Donkor
University for Development Studies
Faculty of Education
P. O. Box TL 1350
Tamale Campus
Ghana

Abstract

This paper examines school safety preparedness of institutional level practice with focus on basic school teachers in Ghana. The analysis of documents on teacher training or teacher preparation curriculum, one-on-one and focus group interviews with teachers and school leaders revealed that in all the thirty-eight teacher training institutions in Ghana where teachers are prepared for the nation's basic education system, school safety is not taught as a full course. Thus, teachers are ill-equipped on school safety in basic schools. In addition, the educational system in Ghana does not have well-defined school safety policy for basic schools. The study confirmed the inadequate attention that policy makers and teacher training institutions in Ghana give to basic school safety. The bottom line is that basic school teachers and leaders in Ghana need to be equipped with some basic knowledge and skills in the management of school safety issues. The paper hopes to serve as a wake-up call for policy makers and educational agencies on the need to equip teachers with basic knowledge and skills in school safety, since safety inside the school is ultimately the responsibility of teachers and other school staff.

Keywords: School safety, teacher training, teacher preparation, college curriculum, basic schools

Introduction

Though accidents seem inevitable they are avoidable in some circumstances. The focus of the study was on the latter. It was precipitated by personal observation at some basic schools in the Tamale Metropolis during a monitoring exercise. The researcher in his capacity as the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Education, University for Development Studies, Ghana, was mandated to oversee the activities of students of the Faculty, specifically, the Basic Education Students (Teacher Trainees), who were undergoing their off-campus teaching practice as a requirement for their training as professional teachers. In the process of monitoring the activities of the Teacher Trainees, fifteen (15) basic schools in the Tamale Metropolis were visited. They include 10 primary schools and 5 junior high schools. The Teacher Trainees were from the Departments of Early Childhood Education and Basic Education categories. Therefore, the pupils in the schools that were observed include: Preschoolers, Primary and Elementary school pupils.

Though the main goal of the researcher was to observe and assess Teacher Trainees in their classrooms, the environment of the schools visited attracted his attention and became a matter of concern that needs to be dealt with as soon as possible. Research has revealed that lack of safety in schools affects learning. Cornell and Mayer (2010) commented that the complex interplay of school disruption, academic achievement, and prevention approaches is not well understood. It was observed that though the role of prevention is so crucial, it is relatively neglected in developing countries such as Ghana (RTI International, 2013). The commonest scenes in almost all the schools visited were: overcrowded classrooms, dilapidated structures, inaccessible roads to the school compounds, single exit points for classrooms, eroded school compounds, etc. On the average most of the classrooms had a population of about 60-90 pupils in classrooms built for about 25-30 pupils. Dilapidated school buildings had cracked walls extending from top to bottom to the extent that one could even see through the openings leading to another classroom. It was amazing that roads leading to some of the schools were not accessible by vehicles as a result of structures such as houses that were constructed by community members. Some of the classrooms had single entrance or exit points. Those that have two doors of entrance or exit points were even not wide enough to accommodate the incidence of stampede.

The soils or grounds of school compounds have been washed away, leaving behind wide and deep pot holes and gullies, thus impeding movement by all, especially the minors. Children, as the asset of every nation need more protection to survive and develop. Cornell and Mayer (2010) stated that to date, relevant research on school safety in developed countries has far outweighed that in developing countries. In a nutshell, research on the linkages between school safety and educational achievement in developing countries is sparse and patchy, making reliable comparisons among location or analyses of trends impossible. Despite this knowledge gap, there is evidence to support the hypothesis that unsafe school has a negative impact on educational achievement in developing countries.

Problem Statement

Research showed that a lot of danger looms in schools in developing countries such as Ghana, with relatively neglected preventive measures (RTI International, 2013). Most of the basic school buildings in Ghana are over aged or in dilapidated shape. The increase in population has resulted in the increase in enrolment as well, which has given rise to overcrowded classrooms. Compounds are occupied with gullies created by erosion. Most of the schools are not accessible as a result of community members' encroachment on school land. There seems to be a lack of the culture of maintenance and safety measures in the basic schools, especially in the rural areas of Ghana. In view of the challenges mentioned above, there was a need to assess the teachers' level of preparedness on school safety measures since safety inside the school is ultimately the responsibility of teachers and other school staff.

Purpose of the Study

Many structures as well as the environments where pupils study in basic schools in Ghana are nothing to write home about. They are in deplorable conditions. Thus, there was the need for a wake-up call and constant reminders or warnings to stakeholders of basic schools, where the bulk of the younger generations are found. It is expedient to hammer home the principle of "prevention is better than cure" or "safety first."

Goal/Objectives

The goal of this study was to lay bare the need to provide or equip basic school teachers with some basic knowledge and skills in School Safety.

Research Objectives:

1. To determine the level of knowledge and skills of basic school teachers in school safety.
2. To identify safety challenges in basic schools.
3. To determine safety precautions available in basic schools.
4. To provide recommendations that will prevent or minimize casualties in basic schools.

Research Questions:

1. What is the level of knowledge and skills of basic school teachers in school safety?
2. What are the safety challenges in basic schools?
3. What are the safety precautions available in basic schools?
4. What school safety measures should be introduced in basic schools?

Significance of the Study:

The study hopes to serve as a wake-up call for policy makers and educational agencies on the need to equip teachers with knowledge and skills in school safety, since safety inside the school is ultimately the responsibility of teachers and other school staff.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

What is a Safe School?

The conceptualization of school safety or safe learning environment is broad and complex. Prinsloo (2006) stated, that a safe school may be defined as one that is free of danger and absence of possible harm; a place where non-educators, educators, and all learners may work, teach, and learn without fear of ridicule, intimidation, humiliation, or violence.

In response to a growing recognition of the scale and severity of unsafe schools, the concept of school safety has been developed and promoted by education theorists as an integral element of a good quality education.

Milam et al. (2010) study on the linkages between perceived school and neighborhood safety and academic achievement in Baltimore, MD (United States) suggested that it was students' fear of and anxiety about violence or disaster that affected their academic performance, rather than their actual experiences of violence or disaster. Chen and Weikart (2008) commented on the importance of students' perceptions where school safety was concerned. They stated that if students believe their school is unsafe, it affects attendance.

Quality Education Model/EdQual Model

School safety has been included as a dimension of educational quality in several school climate models, including the Child-Friendly Schools Initiative by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2012). In addition, there is a quality education model developed by EdQual, an academic research programme funded by the UK's Department for International Development for developing country contexts. In EdQual's model, school safety is viewed as part of an enabling school environment (RTI International, 2013). In Pinheiro's report (2006), the Secretary-General of the United Nations sets forth policy recommendations for the creation of safe schools and provided governments with a platform for action.

Impact on Attendance, Achievement and Completion in School

There is a gap between the average achievements of children in schools identified as "safe and orderly" and the average achievement of children in schools judged to be either "somewhat safe and orderly" or "not safe and orderly" (Mullis et al., 2012b). On the average, the safer the school (as reported by the teachers), the higher the students' average mathematics achievement (Mullis et al., 2012a). In a study of New York City (United States) elementary schools, Chen (2007) found that school disorder directly and indirectly affects students' achievements. School disorder indirectly affects achievements through students' attendance rates. Poor attendance accounted for 45 percent of the reduction in academic achievement. In addition, elementary school children and teachers in a suburban elementary school reported being unable to concentrate in class because of fear of unsafe school environment (Hazel, 2010).

Accounts of School Accidents

A stampede at a primary school in central China left two children dead and 20 injured as a result of students crowded in a toilet during a morning break when others began pushing their way in. The toilet's wall collapsed from the pressure of the crush. This happened at the Number Three Experimental Primary School in Puyang County in Henan province. Similar deadly incidents have happened before where six children died and 25 were injured in a stampede on a school staircase in South West China in 2014 (Today Newspaper, March 22, 2017).

On March 23, 2016, five people including three Australians were injured when an under construction building of Mandali Higher Secondary School collapsed in Phulkharka, Dhading district. The building was damaged by the massive earthquake of April 25, 2015, and was being reconstructed. A French citizen, Thomas Waladrust had invested in the reconstruction of the school without the approval of the District Disaster Management Committee where the three Australians were the designers (Kathmandu, 2017). In Ghana, six kindergarten pupils were killed by a collapsed school building in Breman Jamera in the Odoben-Brakwa District of the Central Region. The six were part of a group of KG pupils who were sitting behind their classroom at break time when the building collapsed on them. A teacher in the school claimed that the structure had developed deep cracks but it was not given the needed attention resulting in the collapse. However, the District Education Coordinating Director said he ordered the demolition of the building after he realized it was in a dangerous state. The Minister of Education visited the victims with a team from the Ministry and the Ghana Education Service (GES) and said that the government will pay the hospital bills of the injured pupils and also that of the funeral (Amoh, 2017).

Safety Measures in Schools

In Oregon in the United States of America, when the gymnasium roof collapsed at Highland Magnet School at Kenwood Elementary on Bend's Westside, all Bend-La Pine schools were closed down for two days in order to conduct roof assessments. The remains of the building were demolished. Redmond closed its schools out of caution as roof leaks were on the rise and inspections were underway. The Sisters School District also closed its buildings for further structural assessment and snow removal until buildings have been deemed structurally safe. In all three school districts, athletic contests and other activities were also canceled. Redmond closed M.A. Lynch Elementary as a precautionary measure to assess the snow load on the roof. School authorities said they did that out of caution for student and staff safety.

It had been determined that it was best to remove staff and students from the buildings even if students were not in immediate danger, because it was better choosing to err on the side of caution and safety (Lerten, 2017). In the wake of the death of the six pupils who died at the Breman Jamra KG Methodist in the Central Region of Ghana, the Ghana Education Service (GES) ordered an immediate audit of all school buildings under the service in the country. According to the service, the audit was to assess all public school buildings to prevent another tragedy. The Director General of Ghana Education Service gave the order to all the District Directors and Regional Directors to liaise with the District Assemblies since education is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders and not only Ghana Education Service. It is believed that the District Assemblies have technical personnel who are the planning officers who can help get all the necessary information needed for meaningful action. The exercise was to take stock of all school buildings and statistics of all things to make sure that the incidence mentioned above does not happen again to any community in the country. There are several schools in Ghana where pupils are studying in dilapidated buildings, some of which are death traps. In other cases, some children are also learning under trees (Ansah, 2017).

According to Canady (2015) is a common phenomenon that it does not take very long for others to forget the shock and the pain that tragedies bring. But one cannot afford to forget that the families of the victims will never forget. Thus, Authorities in-charge or those responsible owe it to the families of the victims to remain diligent and to do everything that one can do to prevent these types of tragedies in the future. Lack of oversight on safety issues can cost districts millions of dollars in the damages awarded each year to families of children injured at school. Studies showed that students who do not feel safe at school stay home. And when students are not in school, they do not perform academically (Chen, 2007). The Center for Public Education's Data First project was of the view that keeping students safe should be a top priority and that now is the time to begin reviewing and preparing a safety plan (NSBA, 2017).

A wall collapse at a city primary that led to the closure of 17 schools was due to structural defects. The Edinburgh schools scandal was said to be a matter of timing and luck that there were no fatalities or injuries in the incident at Oxgangs Primary in January 2016 (Nicholson, 2017). The Oxgangs' wall collapse was believed to be an avoidable incident. A 250-page report criticized the City Council, construction firms and Edinburgh Schools Partnership (ESP) - which runs the schools on the local authority's behalf - for poor construction, inadequate supervision and inefficient record keeping.

Causes of building collapse

Structural Failure
 Poor Supervision /Workmanship
 Use of sub-sub-standard materials
 Carelessness
 Faulty Design
 Rainstorm/Natural Causes
 Excessive loading
 Conversion & Disregard for approved drawings
 Ignorant Client
 No structural drawings/design available
 No proper drainage
 Hasty Construction
 Greedy Client
 Dilapidated Building
 Collapsed Ceiling
 Source: Windapo et al. (2012)

The Role of the Teacher in School Safety

The primary responsibility of every school district is to ensure a safe and secure environment for students, staff and visitors. Schools should take an all-hazards approach that considers the best responses to a variety of emergencies. Disasters come in many forms, both natural and manmade, but school districts that are prepared for the worst are better able to get back up and running in the aftermath. Though safety inside school is ultimately the responsibility of teachers and other school staff, some of them know very little about the steps to take to ensure a safe school experience.

According to Canady (2015), it is very important for students and school staff to know what to do in the event of emergency. He recommends schools' commitment to maintaining solid school safety teams, that would be prepared to respond to crises in an effective manner. That school safety teams should comprise of school administrators, teachers, mental health professionals, nurses, students, school resource officers and members of the fire service. This team should meet on a regular basis to discuss school safety issues, review safety plans, and to conduct table-top exercises in order to be properly prepared to respond to a crisis.

A principal's first job is to keep students safe. School safety starts with strong leadership, taking precautions to prevent crises in a school building, developing a plan for disasters, and acting decisively if the unthinkable does occur (Patschke, 2017). It is believed that schools are an excellent site for the delivery of supportive services to grieving children and families. School personnel might be the only professionals in a position to offer timely advice on funeral attendance, recommendations on how to help children understand death and cope with difficult feelings such as guilt. School staff can also help parents find supports within the community. Reinforcing safety is important for young children. They need to hear that their parents or caregivers will do everything they can to keep them safe and that they will be working to ensure that their school is a safe place for learning and having fun with friends and classmates. It is expedient to talk to students about the people who are helping to ensure that schools are safe, and share admiration with them about the great work these people are doing (Patschke, 2017).

The manner in which an adult expresses emotions may influence the reaction of students. One needs to be in emotional self-control when addressing anything related to accidents, grieve, guilt or lost of loved ones. Be honest with students and age appropriate with the topic. All children benefit from concrete information presented at the proper level of understanding, and maturity. Explain, but do not provide unnecessary details. Clearly, children need to know the truth, but they do not need to hear about all of the consequences. Give them only facts that they need to know at that moment, but do not share with them your fears about the future. Young children interpret very literally, therefore one needs to choose words carefully to ensure the child will not misinterpret. Children will react to information differently (Patschke, 2017). Schools are investing more in cameras and safety technology, but awareness and training are still primary. Many schools are going beyond security cameras in their efforts to prevent school shootings and other threats to students and faculty. For example, police arrested a student at Burncoat High School in Massachusetts after they were called to respond to a report of a loaded gun found in the student's locker. It was not a security camera, metal detector or a tip from social media that alerted school officials to the potential threat. Rather, a teacher overheard the student talking about shooting a police officer. The teacher brought the student to the principal's office, as other administrators searched the locker and located the gun. It was the first time in at least two decades a gun was found in the Worcester Public Schools district, and the situation could have turned out quite differently (Bidwell, 2015).

The human element of making sure that teachers and other personnel in school buildings have their ears to the ground as well as eyes widely opened every single day are the most effective way of knowing there could be potential problems in the school building or environment. According to Bidwell (2015) a significant portion of schools do not have basic protections in place such as walkie-talkies to staff. Despite the need for school personnel to be aware of potential threats, schools do not provide training on discipline policies and practices related to violence. Few schools train classroom teachers and aides to recognize early warning signs of students likely to be violent. There is a belief that the more information one has in context, the better decisions one would be able to make about how to respond to some particular incidents. Although schools are doing better jobs with getting their sensors in place, the most important thing they can do to address safety issues, is to find a way to better manage the increasing amount of information that comes in from existing school structures, primary threats to schools, vulnerabilities and crime statistics, as well as reports of actual incidents occurring in school grounds. It is obvious that technology does not provide the whole solution to school safety issues, but also needs the human element. A group of Republican state lawmakers in the United States of America proposed allowing school districts to spend education funds to train teachers, administrators and janitors in gun use. This proposal was made as a response to the mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. The lawmakers said arming school personnel would help protect campuses against violent intruders and also create essentially an invisible line of defense around pupils (McGreevy, 2013). The lawmakers claimed that teachers are injured at work in one way or the other, thus they need training in order not to compromise school safety.

Research Methods

The research design is qualitative. The rationale for selecting a qualitative research design for the study was that qualitative studies are important for theory generation, policy development, improvement of educational practice, illumination of social issues, and action stimulus (McMillan and Schumacher 2014).

Researcher as Instrument

The researcher acknowledged himself as the primary research instrument. The researcher's interest in the study was as a result of his position as the Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Education in the University for Development Studies, where he oversees the training of pre-service teachers. The researcher had easy access to schools and participants of the study. The participants cultivated a high level of trust toward the researcher, based on his previous contacts with many of them. The researcher continuously questioned his personal disposition and experience in order to mitigate or avert any possible influence on data analysis and interpretations. This procedure enhanced the credibility of the data findings and their reports.

Data Collection

Participant interviews served as one of the primary data source for the study. The researcher used two types of interviews that Creswell (2003) views as acceptable in conducting qualitative research studies. They include, individual or one – on – one interviews, and focus group interviews. The researcher audio taped focus group and individual interviews as well as made handwritten notes. Interviews were transcribed as soon as practicable after the interview session. Documents pertaining to teacher training college curriculum or courses related to school safety were also analyzed. The researcher selected a representative sample of fifty (50) professional teachers in the basic schools, who served as key informants. The teachers formed 5 focus groups of 10 members each. Ten (10) basic school leaders or administrators were interviewed individually. Five (5) respondents from the Ministry of Education (MoE) and five (5) respondents from the Ghana Education Service (GES) were also interviewed individually. Approximately 70 participants took part in focus group and individual interviews.

The two main sources of data of the study were interview and document analysis. These sources provided reasonable quantity of narrative data. Analysis of pertinent documents proceeded concurrently with focus group and individual interviews and that facilitated triangulation of data and added to confidence in its accuracy. A multi-method, multi-source data collection strategy was used to assist the researcher to understand the phenomena under investigation, as well as provide an opportunity to corroborate data through triangulation to ascertain the accuracy and thus the reliability and validity of the data collected (Stake 1995, Merriam 1998, and Glesne 1999). The researcher reviewed teacher training documents, including course textbooks. The interview design involved orally questioning participants and recording their responses. The researcher used the informal conversational interview, and the standardized open-minded interview method (McMillan & Schumacher 2014).

The following questions were addressed during the focus group and individual interviews:

- What subjects are taught in the teacher-training colleges in Ghana?
- Is school safety taught as a subject in the teacher training college you attended? If yes, explain.
- What roles do teachers play in school safety in basic schools in Ghana?

Population of the Study

The population of participants of the study was made up of professional teachers in basic schools, basic school head-teachers or leaders (i.e. administrators), tutors of teacher training colleges, personnel of the Ministry of Education and personnel of the Ghana Education Service. Five focus groups of ten (10) members each were formed. All participants of the five focus groups attended teacher-preparatory colleges in Ghana (i.e. they are trained/professional teachers). In all fifty (50) trained teachers of basic schools in Ghana, were selected at random for the study. They represented 25 of the 38 (i.e. about 66%) of the post-secondary teacher training institutions in Ghana, who prepare professional teachers for the basic schools in Ghana. Participants' years of college completion ranges from 2000 –2016.

Analysis

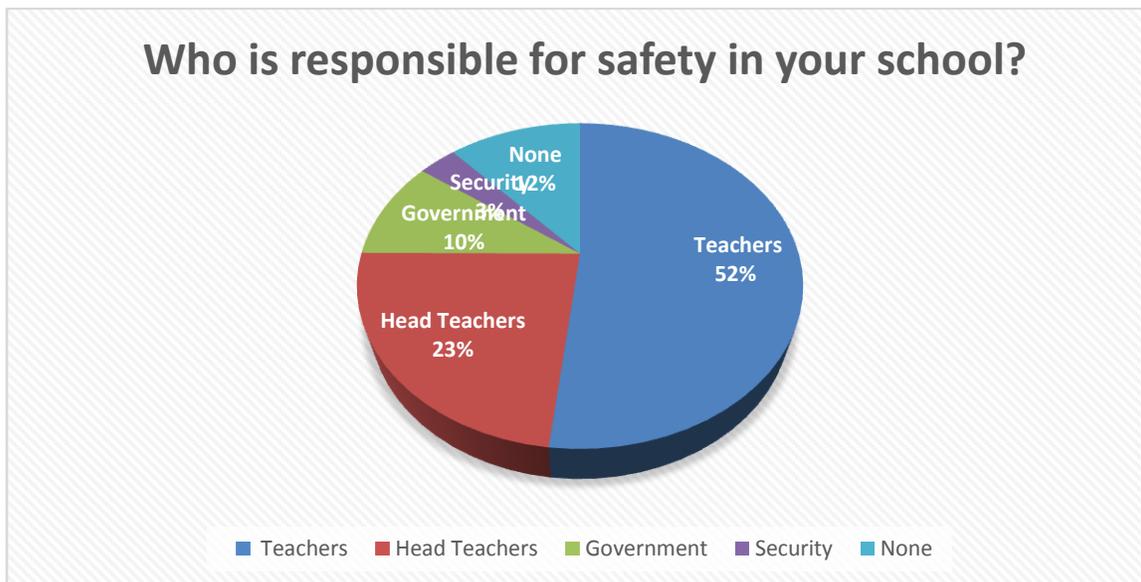
The researcher used a cross-sectional indexing to categorize data throughout the conduct of the study. This system used codes and categories that emerged from initial data analysis. Data analysis was both literal (i.e. involving data), interpretative (i.e. what meaning the researcher ascribes to the data), and reflexive (i.e. the researcher's engagement with the data in the interpretive process) (Mason 1996). Individual and focus group interviews complement the information gathered through analysis of teacher training institution documents. Data analysis

identified major categories and prominent themes that emerged from the data (Yin 2003) that are associated with teacher preparation in school safety in Ghana. The study was directed toward understanding the level of attention given to the preparation of teachers in school safety in Ghana.

Results and Discussions

Responses from sixty (60) professional teachers and head teachers as participants of the study yielded results for the first part of the discussion. In addition, responses from ten (10) personnel of the Ghana Education Service (GES) and the Ministry of Education (MoE) were also addressed. Finally, data collected was used to write a descriptive narrative of the study events associated with teacher preparation in School Safety in Ghana. Events reflected experiences and perceptions of participants of the study and presented a holistic (Creswell 2003) picture of teacher preparation in school safety in Ghana.

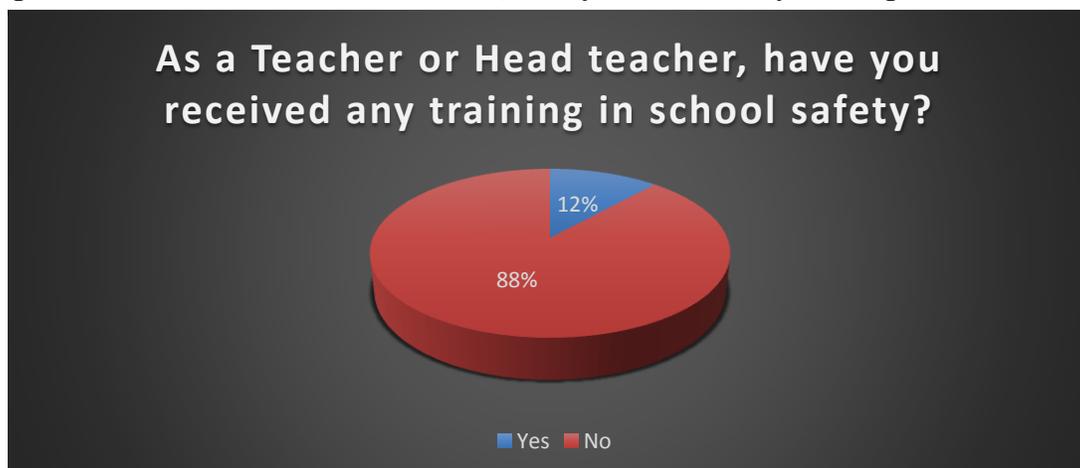
Figure 1.0: Who is responsible for safety in your school?



Source: Researcher’s Construct (2017)

In figure 1.0 thirty-one (31) respondents from a total sample of sixty (60) teachers and head teachers representing 52% said that teachers were responsible for school safety, while fourteen (14) participants representing 23% believed that head teachers were responsible for school safety. Six (6) respondents representing 10% claimed it was the government that was responsible, seven (7) respondents representing 12% said none and two (2) respondents representing 3% said security respectively.

Figure 2.0: As a Teacher or Head teacher, have you received any training in school safety?



Source: Researcher’s Construct (2017)

In figure 2.0 seven (7) respondents from a total sample of sixty (60) teachers and head teachers representing 12% said they have received some training in school safety, while fifty-three (53) participants representing 88% claimed they have never received any training in school safety.

Figure 3.0: What threats or safety challenges do you have in your school?



Source: Researcher’s Construct (2017)

In figure 3.0 twelve (12) respondents from a total sample of sixty (60) teachers and head teachers representing 20% mentioned fire as a threat to their school, fourteen (14) respondents representing 24% said flood, fifteen (15) respondents representing 25% said rainstorm, eight (8) representing 14% said inaccessible roads and ten (10) respondents representing 17% believed that possible stampede was a threat to their schools.

Figure 4.0: As a teacher/head teacher what will you do to protect yourself and pupils of your school in a disaster?



Source: Researcher’s Construct (2017)

In figure 4.0 nine (9) respondents from a total sample of sixty (60) participants representing 15% said what they would do to protect themselves and their students or pupils in case of disaster was to call emergency line, ten (10) representing a percentage of 17% said they would evacuate the area, fifteen (15) respondents representing 25% said they would run to safety, one (1) respondent representing 2% said he/she would seek government intervention and twenty-five (25) respondents representing 41% said that they have no idea as to what to do.

Figure 5.0: Do you think you need training in school safety?

Source: Researcher's Construct (2017)

In figure 5.0 responses to the question as to whether participants of the study needed training in school safety yielded an overwhelming 100% positive or affirmative response, stating that they seriously needed the training.

Responds from 10 personnel of the Ghana Education Service (GES) and the Ministry of Education (MoE)

Q1: Do you have any idea of safety in basic schools?

All ten (10) respondents stated that they have ideas about school safety.

Q2: Are there any plans for safety in the basic schools?

Forty percent (40%) said that the plans for basic schools include minor repairs, 15% said the provision of emergency exits, 30% said seeking government and NGO support and 15% said the provision of fenced walls for the schools.

Q3: How often do you implement safety plans in basic schools?

While ten percent (10%) of the participants said they always implemented school safety plans in basic schools, another 10% also said that it was rather done on termly basis. However, 25% of the participants said it was done annually. Moreover, 55% of the participants said that nothing was being done at all.

Q4: Do you have any concerns on safety in the basic schools?

Fifty-five percent (55%) of the participants were concerned with weak structures and 20% were concerned with poor drainage. Another 20% were worried about lack of maintenance and 5% were concerned with lack of fenced walls and watchmen.

Q5: Do you have any suggestions for safety in basic schools?

Ten percent (10%) of the participants suggested the construction of speed rumbles to check over speeding and careless drivers from running over pupils. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the participants suggested the renovation of school structures and 5% the construction of proper drainage systems. Another 5% suggested the engagement of qualified electricians, while 40% of the participants mentioned the orientation for teachers on school safety and 5% provision of fenced walls and watchmen.

During the focus group discussions, participants unanimously agreed that school safety was never taught as a course or subject in their respective teacher training colleges attended. It was rather taught as a sub-topic in other courses or subjects in the teacher training colleges, thus it did not cover details on school safety. Participants of the study came to a general consensus that there was no course as School Safety for basic school teacher trainees in Ghana.

During the data collection process the curricular of four (4) of the public universities that run teacher preparation or training courses in Ghana were consulted and analyzed. The results were as follows: The University of Ghana, College of Education had a safety course, but it was only in the department of Sports Education. It was basically in field work in relation to the welfare of players and their coaches. In the University of Education Winneba, various educational programmes were being offered but none of the departments offered School Safety as a subject. The trend was the same with the courses in their distant education programmes across their various campuses of operation in Ghana. In the University of Cape Coast, the arc teacher training tertiary educational institution in Ghana where many courses are offered for basic, secondary and tertiary level teachers, none of the departments offered School Safety as a course for teacher trainees. Furthermore, the University for Development Studies, with the youngest Education Faculty in Ghana is also without School Safety as a subject in its curriculum. Moreover, all the thirty-eight (38) Teacher Training Colleges in Ghana offered general programmes, but the focus was on Mathematics, Science, English Language, Ghanaian Languages and French. None of these institutions offered School Safety as a course in their curriculum. The study supports literature that safety inside school is ultimately the responsibility of teachers and other school staff (Canady, 2015). For instance, in response to the question, "Who is responsible for safety in your school?" 23% of the sixty (60) participants said head teachers, while 52% said teachers. Ten percent (10%) said the government and 12% said none. In sum, 75% of the participants were of the view that teachers and head teachers were responsible for safety inside schools. It is no wonder that all sixty (60) teachers and head teachers (participants) of the study have shown interest to undergo training in School Safety.

The study revealed that teachers, head teachers and education leaders had knowledge of dangers looming in basic schools in Ghana. Nonetheless, the perceptions of participants and analysis of documents from teacher preparation institutions in Ghana indicated that not much attention was given to safety issues in basic schools. The study therefore confirmed research that though the role of prevention of accidents in schools is so crucial, it is relatively neglected in developing countries such as Ghana (RTI International, 2013).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis of documents on teacher training or teacher preparation curriculum, one-on-one and focus group interviews with teachers and school leaders revealed that in all the thirty-eight (38) teacher training institutions in Ghana where teachers are prepared for the nation's basic education system, School Safety was not taught as a full course. Thus, teachers are ill-equipped on how to handle safety issues in their schools. In addition, the educational system in Ghana does not have well-defined school safety policy for basic schools. The study confirmed the inadequate attention that policy makers and teacher training institutions in Ghana give to basic school safety. The bottom line is that basic school teachers and leaders in Ghana need to be equipped with some basic knowledge and skills in the management of safety issues in order to allow confidence to prevail in the school environment. The teaching of school safety should be given much attention in the teacher training institutions in Ghana. It should be integrated into the teacher training college curriculum. Students taking a school safety course for at least one semester or more will be helpful than taking it as a sub-topic as described by participants of the study. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education and Ghana Education Service should set up a School Safety Unit (SSU) to oversee safety issues in the basic schools in Ghana. It is expedient to enforce frequent auditing of school structures. The school safety unit should encourage safety awareness campaigns in schools and communities. They should also partner with community leaders as well as members in dealing with school safety issues. For example, school compounds should be well maintained to avoid or minimize the effects of erosion. Also, communities should be sensitized to desist from constructing houses that may render school compounds inaccessible to hazard prevention organizations such as fire service, police service etc.

Tertiary institutions like polytechnics should join the crusade in organizing short courses and frequent seminars on School Safety for educational administrators and teachers. In addition, sandwich courses should be organized for incumbent, aspiring and potential basic school teachers and head teachers. The government of Ghana and Ministry of Education should make it a policy for all basic school teachers to obtain certificates in school safety from accredited tertiary institutions. This will boost up the motivation of the tertiary institutions to introduce school safety programmes that will also attract large amounts of patronage like other courses. The government, NGOs and communities should Endeavour to construct more school buildings in order to mitigate the problem of overcrowding in classrooms.

Teachers and head-teachers should assume a leadership role in this important, but relatively neglected field by raising awareness about the impact of school safety on educational achievement among national education policy makers and other donor agencies. It is imperative to assist the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service to investigate the impact of school safety on educational achievement. Unless head-teachers and teachers are well equipped with knowledge and skills in school safety, they would not be able to manage or improve unsafe school conditions. It will be helpful to review programmes that will reduce unsafe school climates in developing countries, disseminate evidence-based best practices, and support a wider roll-out of effective interventions. A healthy and conducive atmosphere for effective teaching and learning in the schools will be realized if the above recommendations are taken into consideration.

References

- Amoh, A. (February 02, 2017). Available at: Adomonline.com, Ghana.
- Ansah, M. (2017). GES orders audit of school buildings after KG collapse/#sthash.cfcZXzOB.dpuf. Available at <http://citifmonline.com/Ghana>.
- Bidwell, A. (May 21, 2015). Staff Writer. U.S. News and World Report. Available at: <https://www.usnews.com/topics/author/allie-bidwell>.
- Chen, G. (2007). School disorder and student achievement. *Journal of School Violence*, 6, 27-43.
- Chen, G. & Weikart (2008). Student background, school climate, school disorder, and student achievement: An empirical study of New York City's middle schools. *Journal of School Violence*, 7, 3-20.
- Cornell, D. G. & Mayer, M. J. (2010). Why do school order and safety matter? *Educational Researcher*, 39, 7-15.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003) *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, (2nd edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Glesne, C. (1999) *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (2nd edn). New York: Longman.
- Kathmandu Post (2017). Kantipur Publications Pvt. Ltd, Nepal. Available at <http://www.ekantipur.com/>
- Lerten, B. (January 13, 2017). Available at: KTVZ. Barney.lerten@ktvz.com.
- Mason, J. (1996) *Qualitative researching*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- McMillan, J. H. and Schumacher, S. (2014) *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry*, (7th edn). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- McGreevy, P. (January 30, 2013). Los Angeles Times, Sacramento, CA.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998) *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Milan, A. J. Furr-Holden, C. D. M., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Perceived school and neighborhood safety, neighborhood violence and academic achievement in urban school children. *The Urban Review*, 42, 458-467.
- Mullis, I.V. S., Martin, M. O., Foy, P., & Drucker, K. T. (2012a). TIMSS 2011 *International Results in Mathematics*. TIMSS and PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.
- Mullis, I. V. S. Martin, M. O., Foy, P., & Drucker, K. T. (2012b). Progress in International Reading Study (PIRLS). 2011 *International Results in Reading*. TIMSS and PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.
- Nicolson, K. (February 09, 2017). STV News, Edinburg & East, UK.
- Patschke, M. (2017). National Association of Elementary School Principals – NAESP, Alexandria, VA.
- Pinheiro, P. (2006). *Report of the Independence Expert for the United Nations Study on Violence Against Children*. Geneva: Secretary-General of the United Nations.
- Prinsloo, S. (2006). Sexual harassment and violence in South African schools. *South African Stake*, R. E. (1995) *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. *Journal of Education*, 26, 305-318.
- Today Newspaper (March 22, 2017). Today Newspaper. Designed by Qualtek, Ghana.
- UNICEF (2012). Basic education and gender equality; Child-friendly schooling approach.
- Windapo, A. O. & Rotimi, J. O. (2012). Contemporary issues in building collapse and its implications for sustainable development. Available at www.mdpi.com/journal/buildings. ISSN 2075-5309.
- Yin, R. K. (2003) *Case study research: Design and methods*, (3rd edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.