

# Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Learning Context of Government-Assisted Adventist Secondary Schools in Ashanti Region, Ghana

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## Abstract

This paper is a subset of a more extensive study. The study explored stakeholders' perceptions of the learning context in relation to the academic performance of five government-assisted Adventist SHSs in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. Tom Sticht's Functional Context Learning Theory was conceptualized to guide the study by applying diagnostic, formative, and summative performance assessment modes. Through a descriptive research design, a sample size of 196 comprising management/teachers, pastors/church elders, parents (Adventists and Non-Adventists), and former students participated in the study. Open-ended questions were used to collect stakeholder data, which were processed using frequency and percentage analysis. Secondary data on student performance were analyzed using a meta-proportional technique. The study's outcomes confirmed low standard infrastructural facilities, ineffective monitoring, limited funding, and their adverse effect on academic performance in the less endowed Senior High Schools Furthermore, the results showed that using the three modes of performance assessment reveals the deficiencies and strengths of the learning context more than a single test result would. The researchers recommend improved infrastructural standards, funding and effective monitoring of the less-endowed SHSs by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to make them more competitive.

**Keywords:** Learning context, academic performance, stakeholders, government-assisted Adventist secondary schools, Ghana

## Introduction

Academic performance and school selection are fundamental driving forces behind school competition in contemporary education. The trend of affairs has resulted in cream skimming, leading to the segregation of Senior High Schools (SHS) in Ghana into well-endowed and less-endowed. Owing to imbalanced resource allocation, the learning context of less-endowed SHSs is deficient in promoting high academic performance. Meanwhile, research on academic performance is usually premised on high-stakes examination results without recourse to the school learning context.

To bridge this gap in research, the researcher conceptualized Functional Context Learning Theory as an alternative approach for a fair and reliable assessment by a combination of diagnostic, formative, and summative modes of

evaluation. This investigation was conducted in government-assisted Adventist senior high schools in the Ashanti Region of Ghana to ascertain how stakeholder perceptions of the learning context relate to student performance. The objective was to identify the challenges, strengths, and weaknesses of government-assisted Adventist senior high schools and to recommend strategies to revamp educational inputs, processes, and academic outcomes.

The Seventh-day Adventist® Church applies the biblical threefold ministry of disciple-making: preaching, teaching, and healing. In its global ministry, education is integral and serves as a source of personnel development (Coria-Navia et al., 2017). The Adventist Church needs to develop its members' capital knowledge through education.

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As one of its key objectives, Adventist education is intended to develop God-fearing, competent, innovative, and dedicated leaders to defend the truth and manage Church institutions (Thayer et al., 2017). According to the Seventh-day Adventist® Church Manual (2015, updated edition, p. 28), the Church establishes schools to “transmit to students the Church’s ideals, beliefs, attitudes, values, habits, and customs.” The objective is to instill the youth with the proper knowledge of God for an intimate relationship, good character, and selfless service.

The hybrid system, adopted by some Adventist churches in some parts of the world, including Ghana, limits schools from fully implementing the fundamental features of Adventist education. Depending mainly on limited state funding, Ghana’s Seventh-day Adventist senior high schools are prone to inadequate educational resources, adversely impacting their competitiveness.

In Ghana, West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) applicants to the university must obtain a minimum of C6 in three core subjects—English, Mathematics, and Integrated Science—plus three elective subjects of the student’s specialty. Student assessment is based on a 30% score in continuous assessment of classroom tests and 70% BECE scores (Clark, 2015). Academic performance grading is based on a 9-point criterion-referenced (A1, B2, B3, C4, C5, C6, D7, E8, and F9), with A1 and F9 being the highest and lowest performance scores, respectively.

This mode of academic assessment serves as the criterion for qualifying candidates for further study in both secondary and tertiary institutions. In addition, student scores in WASSCE constitute the basis for evaluating the academic performance of their schools. Effectively, the conduct of examinations has a bearing on the learning context and is directly linked to student academic performance.

According to Roach (2019), in 1918, 38% of WASSCE candidates obtained the minimum grade for admission to tertiary education. Worse

still, the majority of the few qualified candidates constitute students from the upper and middle classes who are privileged to train in well-resourced institutions.

### **Research Objectives**

This study explored the relationship between learning context and academic performance in government-assisted Adventist senior high schools in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The objective is to establish:

1. Stakeholders’ perceptions of the standards of academic resources, physical infrastructural facilities, and spiritual nurturing and their implication on students’ academic performance.
2. Stakeholders’ perceptions of the learning context of government-assisted Adventist SHSs regarding governance, management, and church funding.
3. Relationship between stakeholders’ perceptions about learning context and academic performance.

### **Functional Context Learning Theory (FCL)**

The current study involved a hybrid system of education, which is neither purely the Seventh-day Adventist nor the Ghana education system. Accordingly, a fair and reliable evaluation of the academic performance of the system must be conducted in the context of the unique environmental features that characterize its educational delivery. In light of the unique learning context, the researchers have conceptualized Tom Sticht’s (1979) Functional Context Learning Theory (FCL) to guide this investigation.

The FCL theory is based on cognitive learning (learning new things by applying acquired knowledge), skills development and problem-solving (linking learning to real-life situations), and information processing and communication. The FCL application in the army improved literacy learning performance four or five times more than the rote learning literacy approach. By designing instruction about

the experience specific to the military's training needs, Sticht found that soldiers learned better in applying literacy and skills (Sticht, n.d.). Davtyan (2014) argues that context learning enables learners to connect academic content to real-life situations, making learning meaningful in both the immediate and long-term.

Functional Context Learning Theory shares some attributes with the current study; hence, its application is relevant. The subject matter "Context learning" reflects the prevailing factors in the learning environment of the hybrid system, which is a blend of both the Adventist and Ghana Education systems. Therefore, establishing an association between learning contexts and academic performance in a hybrid system requires a conceptualization approach. Such an approach considers the learning conditions of the schools, the learning characteristics of the students, and an appropriate assessment method that considers the actual performance of the schools, students, and teachers.

### Literature Review

This section discusses learning context in relation to academic performance. The learning context encapsulates the environmental conditions, climate, or circumstances that prevail in a school and influence students' academic performance. It relates to the quality of academic inputs and processes and the resulting impact on academic outcomes. From the perspective of the current investigation, the learning context constitutes the standard of academic resources, physical infrastructural facilities, and spiritual and social nurturing of government-assisted senior high schools in Ashanti Region Ghana.

These learning indicators constitute the characteristic features of the Adventist philosophy of education, which embraces the harmonious development of the learner's mental, physical, and spiritual faculties in service to God and society (White, 1903). Based on the study by Thayer et al. (2017), Adventist Education's learning context positively influences students' academic performance and spiritual lives (see

Coria-Navia et al., 2017).

The significance of the learning context is the teaching and learning processes, which depend on the learning characteristics of the students, teacher quality, motivation, supervision, availability of teaching and learning materials, and the conduct of examinations (Mulford, 2003; OECD, 2009).

The learning context is also about the entities' social life the relationship quality between the administrators, teachers, staff, and students. Another attribute of the learning context of the hybrid system is defined by the school culture, beliefs, values, and practices, of which spirituality is prominent in government-assisted Adventist SHSs.

Invariably, the physical environment, such as the availability of infrastructural facilities and the attractiveness of the compound, plays a significant role in distinguishing the learning context (Baafi, 2021; Usman & Geraldine, 2019). In a comparative study of the effect of school physical environment on the academic performance of SHSs in Ghana, Baafi (2020) found that students in schools with attractive physical backgrounds performed better than those with unpleasant physical learning environments.

In a quantitative study conducted in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia among 377 students, Usaini et al. (2015) found that students with access to teaching and learning materials, quality teachers, and a pleasant environment performed better than those who lacked such resources. Asano (2021), in an inquiry into the mass student failure of Integrated Science, established that the key contributing factors are stereotyped teaching methods and a lack of teaching and learning resources.

A case study at Oda Senior High School in Ghana by Otchere et al. (2019) confirmed a significant relationship between adequate and high-quality school facilities, teacher motivation, and academic performance. Using secondary data, Usman and Geraldine (2019) evaluated the

effect of learning context on student academic performance in Nigeria. The study outcomes revealed that adequate teaching and learning facilities, high physical infrastructure standards, and a conducive learning environment in the learning context significantly influence students' academic performance.

### **Methodology**

This section discusses research design, population, sampling, data collection, and data analysis techniques.

### **Research Design**

The study used a descriptive research design to determine stakeholders' perceptions of the learning context and its reflection on students' performance in the hybrid system. This paper is a subset of a more extensive study used embedded mixed methods. For the study outlined in this paper, the descriptive design enabled the researcher to examine qualitative data from unstructured open-ended questions, and student academic records. Open-ended questions embraced academic performance, physical facilities, spiritual nurturing and school management. The documentary analysis involved three consecutive years of student academic assessment: Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE), Continuous Assessment, and West Africa Senior School Certificate Examinations (WASSE). These two methods were applied to establish the relationship between stakeholder perceptions of the learning context and academic performance.

### **Participants**

The study was conducted in five schools with a population of 27,388 students and parents. Thus, 200 stakeholder participants were considered, out of which 196 responses were obtained. The 196 respondents comprised 38 School Board members, administrators, and teachers; 20 former students; 35 Seventh-day Adventist church pastors and elders; 34 Adventist parents; 34 non-Adventist parents; and 35 Adventist parents who did not patronize

church schools. Using different categories of respondents was meant to achieve a balanced opinion.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

The secondary data on student performance were analyzed by proportional meta-analysis. The approach involved processing 200 students' raw scores in their entry, continuous and final examinations through calculations and graphical representation. Each school's data was processed in terms of their proportional sample, followed by the analysis of combined performance of the target population (see Table 1). Data on the open-ended questions were analyzed using percentages and frequencies.

### **Ethical Consideration**

We obtained formal ethics clearance from the Ethics Committee of the University of Eastern Africa Baraton (UEAB) and research license clearance from the Ghana Education Service, Adventist Educational Unit. Permission for data collection was also secured from the participating institutions. In addition, orientations were organized for the research participants to explain the study's objective, the research's benefits, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of the data and participants before data collection. Research objectivity and honesty were ensured.

### **Results**

The analysis outcomes are discussed in harmony with student performance trends in the three modes of assessment, stakeholder perceptions, and a review of the literature and other studies.

**Research Question 1:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of the standard of academic resources, physical infrastructural facilities, and spiritual nurturing in relation to the student's academic performance?



### Stakeholders' Perceptions of Academic Resources

Stakeholder respondents rated the academic performance of government-assisted Adventist SHSs as excellent, high, or good, totaling 118(60.21%). In contrast, 49(25%) and 24(12.24%) stakeholders, totaling 73(37.24%), viewed student performance as either average or weak. Performance appraisal indicates that student performance, in general, is average, as the best ranking is 60%, which is just above average. This implies that the learning context of government-assisted Adventist senior high schools does not promote high academic performance.

On the standards of Academic Resources, 17(8.67%) stakeholders rated it as high 75(38.27%) good, 86(43.88%) average 16(8.16%) low and 2(1.02%) poor. From the distribution, the high-ranking and good constitute 46.98%, while the average and below comprise 53.06%. The results show that academic resources in government-assisted Adventist SHSs do not contribute meaningfully to academic performance.

Teacher motivation received the lowest ranking among the learning context indicators. Only 49(25%) stakeholder respondents ranked teacher motivation in government-assisted Adventist SHSs as effective. In contrast, 145(73.98%) participants rated teacher motivation as ineffective or low. The role of teachers in teaching and learning processes is critical; hence, education providers and administrators should prioritize teacher motivation. Raveloharimisy (2017) emphasizes the invaluable role of teachers in academic delivery and spiritual nurturing.

### Stakeholder Perception of Infrastructural Standards

Regarding the standard of physical infrastructural facilities, 2(1.02%), 8(4.08%), and 62(31.63%) stakeholder respondents perceived it as excellent, high, and satisfactory, respectively. In contrast, 62(31.63%) and 61(31.12%) respondents appraised the standard as average and low, respectively. A difference of 0.05%

represents a blank space. Relatively, 123(62.75%) ratings of the physical infrastructural standard compared with 72(36.73%) high/satisfactory indicate that the ranking is skewed toward average or low.

### Stakeholder Perception of Spiritual Nurturing

One hundred and 56 (79.5%) stakeholder participants described discipline in government-assisted Adventist SHSs as impactful. At the same time, 39(19.9) rated it as average or poor. The findings affirm the effectiveness and influence of spirituality on students' academic lives at the secondary level. However, this impact does not translate into high academic performance, as reflected in the results of the documentary analysis (see the discussion on Table 1 and Figure 1 below).

**Research Question 2:** What are stakeholders' perceptions of governance, management, and church funding in relation to the standard of the learning context?

### Stakeholder Perception of Governance, Management and Funding

Stakeholder respondents were divided in terms of governance and management effectiveness. While 94(47.96) respondents rated governance and management of government-assisted Adventist SHSs as effective, 99(50.51%) perceived it as ineffective. The divided stance of respondents on governance and administration on a virtually 50/50 rating portrays a lack of effectiveness which has severe implications for the quality of academic inputs, processes, and outputs. The study's output corroborates Vernez's (2016) finding, which affirms the importance of effective governance and administration for school efficacy and high academic performance (Ministry of Education, 2019).

While 56(28.57%) stakeholder respondents opined that monitoring and evaluation of government-assisted Adventist SHSs were effective, 91(63.78%) believed that monitoring and evaluation were ineffective. This appraisal

is linked to low governance, management, and funding ratings. Ineffectiveness in governance, management, monitoring, and evaluation will likely adversely affect the quality and competitiveness of government-assisted Adventist SHSs, as explained above.

Regarding Church funding, 52(26.53%) stakeholder respondents viewed church funding of government-assisted Adventist SHSs as effective, whereas 121(61.74%) stated that funding was ineffective. The shortfall represents 23(11.73%) who failed to respond to a lack of information. The findings revealed that the Church’s financial support for government-assisted Adventist SHSs in Ghana is inadequate. Similarly, Gechiko’s (2016) study underscored that inadequate Church funding led to the failure to implement the holistic curriculum project of Adventist Education in Nyamira County, Kenya.

The challenges faced by government-assisted Adventist SHSs revolve around inadequate

funding and monitoring. The low infrastructural standard, insufficient academic resources, and lack of teacher motivation can all be traced to inadequate funding and monitoring. These deficiencies have plausible implications for schools’ attraction of low-performing applicants with the resulting average academic performance. Hence, the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to set up an educational fund to revamp the schools’ infrastructural facilities and meaningfully support its Educational Unit for effective monitoring and supervision to make the SHSs competitive.

**Research Question 3: What is the Relationship between Stakeholders’ Perception on Learning Context and Academic Performance?**

Table 1 illustrates the combined data of the academic performance of the five SHSs for three consecutive years. The diagnostic, formative, and summative modes of assessment were applied.

**Table 1**

*Combined Performance of G-AASHSs for 3 Consecutive Years*

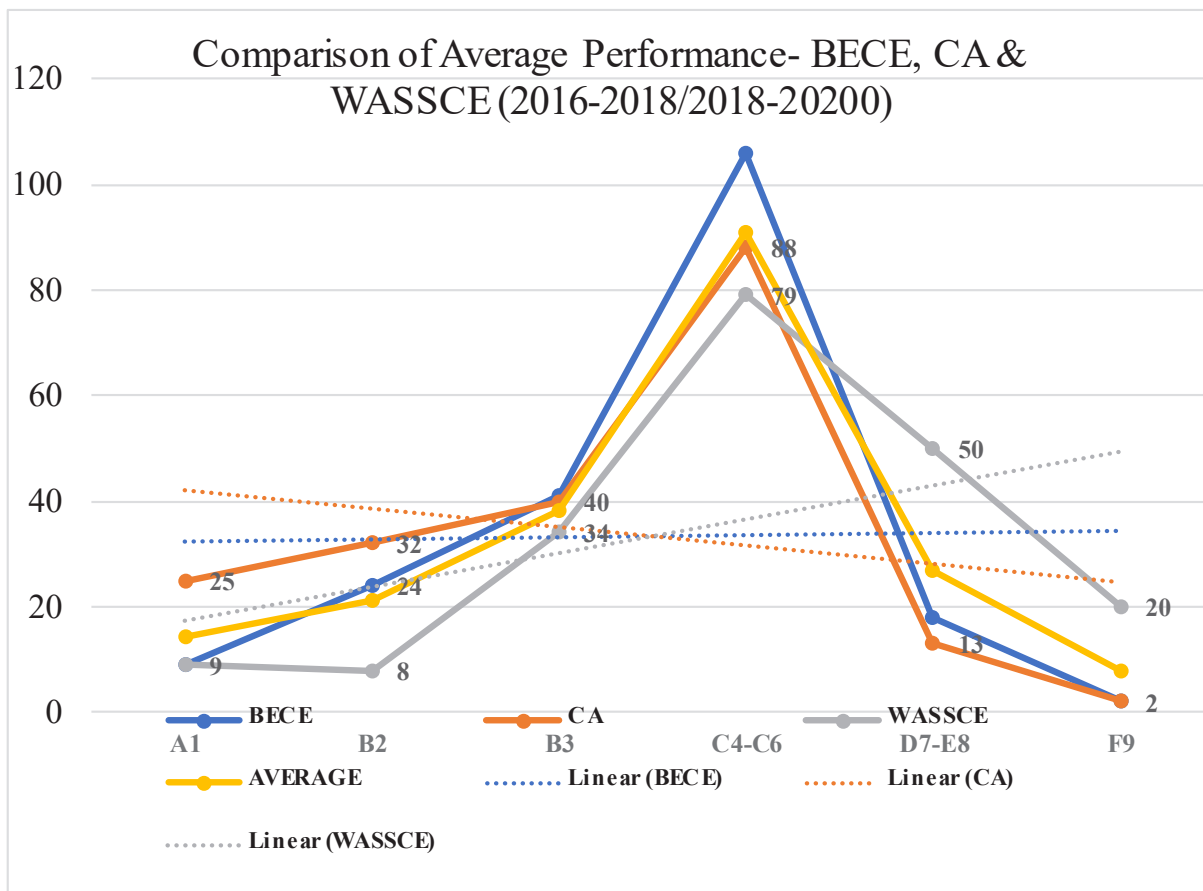
Exams	Year	A1	B2	B3	C4-C6	D7-E8	F9	Candidates
BECE	2016-2018	9	24	41	106	18	2	200
CA	2018-2020	25	32	40	88	13	2	200
WASSCE	2018-2020	9	8	34	79	50	20	200
Total	-	43	64	115	273	81	24	600
Average	-	14.33	21.33	38.33	91	27	8	200

*Note. BECE =Basic Education Certificate Examination; CA = Continuous Assessment; WASSCE = West Africa Senior School Certificate Examinations; A1, B2, B3, C4-C6, D7-E8 and F9 represent the students’ average grades or grade range. The raw data was obtained from the Heads of the five SHSs under investigation.*

Figure 1 below constitutes a graphical presentation of the data, comparing the three modes of academic performance assessment. The documentary analysis are discussed relative to findings of the stakeholders’ perceptions of the learning context to establish a plausible link between the two.

**Figure 1**

*Comparison of Student Average Performance in BECE, CA, and WASSCE*



*Note: BECE = Basic Education Certificate Examination; CA = Continuous Assessment. WASSCE = West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination. A1, B2, B3, C4, C5, C6, D7, E8, and F9 = WASSCE grade scores, with A1 being the highest (70% -100%) and F9 the lowest (below 40%).*

The graphic illustration in Figure 1 indicates that student performance in Government-Assisted

Adventist SHSs is relatively low in the BECE. The documentary analysis of three consecutive years of student academic performance also reveals that government-assisted Adventist SHSs mainly attract average- or low-performing BECE candidates. However, while student performance was appreciated on their internal exams, it did not translate into high performance in their WASSCE results. More significantly, as the trend lines indicate, the entry scores in BECE are better than their final output in WASSCE. The results raise questions about the adequacy of teaching and learning resources, teacher quality, student learning characteristics, Senior High School program duration, and the standard

of internal examinations. The study outcomes affirm the observations of Usman and Geraldine (2019), who found that adequate academic resources and quality infrastructure facilities significantly affect academic performance. The findings of the documentary analysis corroborate the results of stakeholder appraisal. For example, stakeholders' appraisal of academic performance standards is 60%, which suggests that the schools are not academically competitive. Significantly, the low rating of the standard of physical infrastructure is indicative that students are not satisfied with the quality of the facilities, which could adversely affect their academic performance.

Baafi (2021) found that students in schools with attractive physical backgrounds perform better than those with unpleasant physical learning environments. Noteworthy, too, is the low stakeholder rating for teacher motivation, which may negatively contribute to high academic performance. Raveloharimisy (2017) emphasizes the invaluable role of teachers in academic delivery and spiritual nurturing.

### Conclusion

The study findings confirmed the low ratings of infrastructural facilities, funding, teacher motivation, governance, and management by stakeholders. These factors also reflect the average performance of the hybrid system of Adventist SHSs in Ghana. Besides ranking spiritual nurturing and discipline as the highest among the other indicators of the learning context, stakeholders affirmed their effectiveness and influence on students' academic lives. The results also revealed a relationship between funding, governance, management, and school effectiveness. More significantly, using three modes of performance assessment reveals the deficiencies and strengths of the learning context more than a single test result would.

### Recommendations

The researchers recommend the following:

1. Revamp infrastructural standards, funding and monitoring of the less-endowed Government-Assisted Adventist SHSs to make them more competitive.
2. Policymakers should integrate spiritual nurturing into secondary curricula to promote character development.
3. Integrate a combination of diagnostic, formative and summative modes in student academic assessment for effective and fair evaluation of Senior High Schools.

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