



Research Article

Teacher's Higher Education and Students' Achievements: A Research of the Perception of the Second Cycle Teachers in the New Juaben Area, Ghana

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Abstract: The study's goal was to gather data on the perception of Social Studies teachers on whether higher educational background or qualification of teachers results in higher students' academic achievements in the New Juaben Senior High Schools in the Eastern Region. In this investigation, the researcher employed a semi-structured interviewer's guide to obtain qualitative data. The researcher utilised a simple random sampling precisely the lottery method to choose 24 respondents (24 teachers) for the study. This study looked at the perception of teachers teaching the subject within New Juaben Municipality, Eastern Region on whether the teacher's higher qualification leads to higher students' achievements. The majority of the social studies experts agreed with the school of thought that says the teacher's higher education or qualification would lead to students' academic achievements. A few social studies teachers disagree with the saying that the teacher's higher education or qualification leads to students' higher achievements.

Keywords: teacher's perception, higher education, students' achievements

1. Introduction

Defining perception is thought to have started first in philosophy by Locke and Hume in the early 18th century (Despagne, 2010). The concept since then has continuously been used in several areas of learning, sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics and sociopsychology just to mention but a few. Because of these, there are numerous definitions of perception, with different meanings of the term. In view of the research mission, perception can relate to several human emotions among others. Some old meanings of the concept clarified what perception means; however, for a straightforward definition to be understood, the researcher defined perception as the recognition and interpretation of sensory stimuli based on our memories. In other words, it is the way we interpret the data around us. Examples of these types of data are sight, touch, smell and hearing. Many researchers argued that the making of perceptions an area of study, is a relevant area of study because human perception controls and dictates their views and actions. Therefore, this research seeks to identify teachers' perceptions on the question of whether teachers' higher education may aid students' academic achievement or not within the New Juaben Area.

A teacher's educational background or qualifications are very important in the whole educational enterprise and this is also true for social studies teachers. Basically, the educational background or qualifications of social studies teachers

include all forms of schooling successfully completed that qualify them for a teaching certificate. This background begins at the foundation level and continues through to secondary and tertiary levels. Akiri and Ugborugbo (2009) argue that effective teachers with higher educational qualifications produce better-performing students.

Many studies have revealed that teachers' higher education correlated with students' achievements. For example, Betts et al. (2003) indicated a teacher's higher education was reliably associated with students' higher academic records. A study conducted by Rice (2003) indicated that anytime teachers had higher education in the subject they were teaching, it reflects on students' higher achievements. According to Hill et al. (2008), no curriculum teaches itself, meaning that teachers must have appropriate content knowledge, subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge in order to teach effectively in their various classrooms. They mention that these backgrounds of the teacher will enable him or her to make appropriate pedagogical decisions (i.e. appropriate materials, presentations and sequencing) in order to be able to anticipate and respond appropriately to learners' misconceptions. Similarly, Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) conducted an additional assessment of the impact of teachers' higher education and concluded that those teachers with higher education in their area of specialization were positively associated with improved student's achievement.

And they also conducted research on teachers who have been teaching for a long time and those who just joined the profession and indicated that, those who have been teaching for a long time perform better than those that have just joined the profession. However, Taylor and Tyler's (2012) studies found no substantial benefits of advanced degrees on students' or learners' performance, except that those teachers with master's degrees and above had a negative impact on the test scores of fourth graders. The US Education Officials again acknowledge that the critical thing that brings about learners' underachievement is instructors who are not qualified. (NCLBA states that children in the USA should have highly qualified instructors and that by ending of the 2005-2006 school year, District's responsibility of ensuring all learners are taught by highly qualified instructors are paramount). The above indicates that teachers are very important when it comes to higher achievements of the learner. For example, instructors are supposed to attain some level of educational credentials before they are qualified to be engaged as a teacher. Also, existing teachers could be required to participate in external intervention and training programmes in order to retain their jobs (Ye, 2000). Based on the same vanity, Obonyo et al. (2018). found that teachers' advanced degrees were a statistically significant predictor of students' science achievement in Kenya.

Ogbonnaya and Osiki (2007) noted that in Lesotho, an important correlation between teachers' qualifications and student's achievement was detected. In other words, students with high teacher educational credentials may attain higher achievement than students with low teacher educational credentials. The above indicates that any time teachers in Lesotho have higher educational credentials, then student's achievement begins to rise. Therefore, if the above is true, then student achievement in social studies is likely to rise as teacher's qualifications increase. There is also a school of thought that argues that high teacher qualifications do not necessarily lead to high student's achievement. Teacher qualifications have been condemned by value-added research, which suggests that improved student achievement is a result of teacher's behaviour in the classroom, as the classroom is the place where the teacher presents whatever he or she has in terms of the content which would lead to meaningful learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000). According to Wenglinsky (2002) and Greenberg and Jonas (2003), the highest education such as master's level does not necessarily result in student higher performance. In addition to this, Slater et al. (2012) mentioned that teacher's higher academic qualifications may not necessarily result in students' performance.

When it comes to teachers' perceptions of the subjects they teach in order to bring about student achievement, several writers have written about this. Some researchers suggest that teachers have more effects on student academic achievement and that they influence a greater percentage of learners' academic performance. According to Elder et al. (2007), the teacher's positive attitude in the classroom has greater effects on their decisions regarding the use of particular teaching methods. This means that in Elder et al.'s view, student achievement is heavily dependent on teachers' attitudes, behaviours and the policies developed by stakeholders to guide teaching and learning but not necessarily his or her higher qualification. In addition, the Policy Studies Association (2005) mentions that effective teachers have many characteristics that confirm their quality. These characteristics include mastery of content, just to mention a few. In support of the above, Whittle et al. (2015) stated that teachers in Australia perceive their mastery of content and needs, just to mention but a few as significant personal effects on student's learning outcomes in physical education.

The paper seeks to inform and educate society on the perception of the Senior High School teachers, on whether

the teacher's higher qualification has a positive impact on students' achievements in the New Juaben Municipality, Ghana.

1.1 The research was guided by this question

How do teachers perceive higher qualifications in relation to students' academic achievements in the New Juaben Municipality?

2. Literature

The literature is reviewed along two schools of thought. Those who believed that the teacher's higher qualification leads to higher students' achievements and those who believe the teacher's higher qualification does not necessarily lead to students' higher academic achievements.

2.1 School of thought that believed that the teacher's higher qualification leads to higher students' academic achievements

The school of thought that believes the teacher's higher qualification has the ability to enhance students' academic achievements are numerous. It includes Hattie (2008), who indicated that there is evidence to prove that teachers' higher qualification is very significant when it comes to learners' academic achievements.

Attitudes, particularly that of teachers, has a great impact on personal, society, surroundings and programmes of the government, just to mention but a few, which affect teachers' decisions in terms of the teaching methods they adopt. The aim of a high school social studies course is to acquire relevant knowledge, positive attitudes and values in a demonstrated and concrete exhibition of skills context. According to Thorburn (2003), in looking for the best approach to an ongoing problem on student's achievement, teachers' effectiveness should be considered, if high school social studies teachers want to influence students' achievements. The above indicates that a teacher's effectiveness is closely tied with learners' performance. Other researchers such as Cruickshank and Haeefe (2001) argued that students' academic achievement forms just an aspect of proper teacher delivery. High school learners' performance is seen as a measure of learners' academic achievements which may be used by society for the future of the learner's carrier that allows for his or her future engagements in life. The quality of instructions that results in learners' comprehension, has already been investigated by experts. Thus, in high school, it is an undeniable fact that learners' performance is a way of evaluating the instructional quality. Hattie (2003) indicated that an increase in the academic performance of learners may be accepted as the result of the teacher or instructional effectiveness. According to Stronge (2007), the general behaviour of teachers or instructors that brings about improvements in learners' achievements, has been exposed by researchers. These includes mastery of subject content including language proficiency, teacher educational programs, certification, organization and organizing, just to mention but a few. Ward (2013) indicated that some teacher's behaviors are found to be common in instructional settings. Literature, especially that of Hattie (2003), Kyriakides et al. (2013) and Rowe (1978), indicated that instructional activities, particularly teachers' knowledge, have a significant impact on learners' achievements. One research carried out in schools in Australia (Rowe, 1978), indicated that the influence of teachers is responsible for a greater percentage of residuals in students' achievement. According to Dinham (2013) and Witte and Jansen (2015), in recognition of the importance of quality teaching resulting in learners' performance, the government with other stakeholders in education has developed programmes aimed at improving instructors' effectiveness. According to Wang and Eccles (2012), in a broader school context, the concept of effective instruction becomes difficult to explain. Effective instruction differs in each subject and each grade level cohort of students. There is no agreement on the concept of effective instruction, perhaps a lot of speculation about it exist. Research results kept contradicting each other across different subjects, grades and schools, just to mention but a few. According to Wang et al. (2011), when high-quality instructions are considered critical to improving students' achievement, effectiveness might be understood in a different context. The differences in comprehension help understand effective instruction and learning may be the reasons that the concept of effectiveness may be widely explained in records.

In the opinion of Akiri and Ugborugbo (2009), teachers with higher educational backgrounds produce better-

performing students. Therefore, the need for research into the perception of the social teachers on the subject under study and the relationship between these backgrounds and the academic performance of students in New Juaben High Schools. Many researchers agreed there is a correlation between teacher's qualifications and learner's performance. For example, researchers, such as Betts et al. (2003), argued clearly that a teacher's qualification was linked with learners' achievement. Also, according to Rice (2003), when highly educated degree teachers in a subject teach, they are likely to produce high student achievement. According to Hill et al. (2008), teachers must have the appropriate content knowledge, subject matter knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge to bring about satisfactory performance in teaching mathematics. They mentioned that these backgrounds of a mathematics teacher will enable him or her to make appropriate instructional decisions (i.e., appropriate materials, presentations, and sequencing) in order to be able to anticipate learners' misconceptions and respond appropriately. Similarly, Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) conducted an additional assessment regarding the impact of teachers on learners' results. His research indicated that those with degrees who have been teaching for a long time were positively associated with the improved students' achievement.

Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) conducted nonparametric research on the knowledge of new, and teachers who have been teaching for a long time. Their findings indicated that teachers who have been teaching for a long time had better results than those who had recently joined the profession. However, according to Taylor and Tyler (2012), with the exception of higher education holders, for example degrees, including higher ones produced negative results in the math test scores of Texas fourth graders. Higher educated teachers did not produce any beneficial results in their field of teaching. The explanation given by Taylor and Tyler (2012) is that teachers with high levels of education always prefer to teach students who have high achievements and innate abilities. United State of America Department of Education again acknowledged that one of the reasons for learners' underachievement may be attributed to teachers without higher education as cited by Goldhaber and Anthony (2004). The No Child Left Behind Act indicated that communities should ensure only highly educated teachers teach the learners that "at the close of the 2005-2006 academic year, some districts would be responsible for quality teachers in the classroom teaching future leaders". For example, one needs to acquire some level of knowledge before qualifying for job acquisition, or existing teachers may be required to participate in external intervention and training programmes in order to retain employment (Ye, 2000). In the same vein of vanity, Duke et al. (2018) found that in Kenya, a teacher's advanced degree in chemistry was an important means of enhancing students' achievements in science.

Ogbonnaya and Osiki (2007) noted that in Lesotho, an important correlation between teachers' qualifications and students' academic work in mathematics was observed. That means in the case where most mathematics teachers in Lesotho had higher education, then students' achievement may start rising.

2.2 School of thought that does not believe the teacher's higher qualification can lead to higher student's academic achievements

In contrast, there is a school of thought that argues that high teacher qualifications do not necessarily lead to high students' achievement. Teacher qualifications have been condemned by value-added research who argued that improved student's achievement is a result of teacher behaviour in the classroom, as the classroom is the means by which teachers share their knowledge and behaviour with students and the classroom environments leading to meaningful student's learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Other researchers, such as Wenglisky (2000), states that there is no significant relationship between postgraduate qualifications at Master's or higher levels and student's achievement. In addition to this, Slater et al. (2012) also mentioned that teacher's mastery and other features do not necessarily lead to his or her higher performance in the classroom. Similarly, a second view is that higher teacher qualifications do not necessarily lead to higher academic standards for students, and they also argue that improved student achievement is a result of teacher behaviour in the classroom, as the classroom is the pathway through which teachers interact with students in the learning environment which leads to meaningful student's learning outcomes. (Darling-Hammond, 2000). For them, it is not about the high qualifications of teachers, but rather the attitudes and behaviours of teachers in the classroom. They mention that if teachers with higher qualifications decide to adopt negative attitudes and behaviours such as lateness, absenteeism and laziness, this does not lead to higher academic achievement of students.

2.3 Theoretical framework

The research utilises 'Gestalt school of psychology', developed by a group of German psychologists, which

arose in 1890 as an action on a popular psychological theory of the time. The theory states that the whole is more important than the sum of any different parts and that people perceive objects, problems and phenomena better when they are characterised as a whole or integral rather than parts. For them, things are influenced by where they are and what surrounds them, so things are best described as more than the sum of their parts. They also believe that context is important to perception. The implication of this theory for social studies teachers is that they need to give appropriate stimulus to the question of whether a teacher's higher education will improve student's achievement. This decision and belief of the teacher will motivate him or her to pursue further education in order to improve his or her teaching skills or not to do so.

Clearly, Gestalt perception theory is thought to be potentially useful in understanding sociology teachers' perceptions of the issue of teachers' higher education and its impact on sociology education.

3. Methods

The research design of this study is a descriptive study with qualitative elements. The selected design assists in generating more knowledge on the topic as cited by Höpfl et al. (2004).

Specifically, the main influence for this study was the works of Marshall and Rossman (1989), who referred to the design as a research design that requires access to the social context of our life, where informants' perspectives are valued and attempts are made to discover these perspectives in their world. The objective of the research was not only to investigate respondents' perception, but also to discover how they perceive, desires which would give clarifications about respondents' perceptions (Aggrey, 2013). This study wasn't only aimed at searching for the truth, but also seeks the perceptions of the respondents on the topic under study (Aggrey, 2013).

3.1 Sample and sampling technique

Twenty-four (24) social studies respondents were required for the study. Sampling demands a manageable size of twenty (20) or more (Kwabia, 2006). The manageable number can produce data for generalisation. Participation in such a number is needed because their contributions were important to help answer the research questions.

The technique involved in selecting the respondents was Simple Random Sampling through the 'Lottery Method'. Simple random sampling is a type of probability sampling in which the researcher randomly selects a subset of participants from a population. It can also be said to be a type of probability sampling in which the researcher randomly selects a subset of participants from a population. Each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected. Data is then collected from a percentage as possible of this random subset. The researcher visited the various schools under the study. The selection was made by random sampling, by lottery to be precise. Depending on the number of teachers in the school, pieces of paper on which written 'Yes' or 'No' were obtained which were folded and given to the teachers to choose from. Teachers with "yes" were selected for the sample unit.

All twelve (12) second cycle schools in the area were considered for the research. Teachers teaching Social Studies were forms targeted respondents in the research, however, both government and private senior high schools were considered. The Senior High Schools that are included in this study are Ghana Senior High, SDA Senior High, Pope Johns Senior High, Koforidua Secondary Technica, High, Bright Academy, Koforidua Technical, New Juaben Senior High, Pentecost Senior High school and Holly Believe Senior High school just to mention but a few.

Table 1. Population for the study

Respondents	Target	Size	Method
Teachers	60	24	Simple random (Lottery method)
Total	60	24	

A sample is part of a population consisting of individuals, objects or events that have been selected to represent the population (Kwabia, 2006; Agyedu et al., 2011). With this in mind, this study interviewed 24 individuals from a sample of 60 sociology teachers in the city (See Table 1).

3.2 Data analysis

As regards the interview schedule, the data collection produced essentially qualitative data. This data was analyzed using qualitative content, thematic and visual analysis. Qualitative content analysis is a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. It is an approach to empirical analysis of texts considering their context of communication. This analysis goes beyond counting the words; it is rather focused on the examination of meaning occurring within a particular context.

In using this strategy, the researcher organized the data gathered and got immersed in the data while transcribing it. After this was done, an examination of meaning occurring within a particular context was identified. The first stage was preparatory where the interview data for presentation began with the organisation and transcription of the audio-tape recordings.

The transcription involved listening to each tape repeatedly to familiarize me with the conversations and carefully writing them down in the words of each interviewee. The interview data was then categorized into themes of responses for effective management and comparisons. The next stage involved intensive and repeated reading of the data with the aim of immersing myself in it and determining analytical categories or themes (Schmidt, 2004; Creswell, 2005) using my professional judgment (Babbie, 1990).

The development of the themes was guided by the research questions and the literature review. The coding process began after determining the themes. The respondents were coded to avoid identification. Contributions, responses and comments made were not attached to names but to the codes. Brief quotations from the data were used to add realism to the description (Creswell, 2005). Since the data was collected from different categories of respondents, it was analyzed from their perspectives in order to build some kind of complexity into the study (Creswell, 2005).

4. Findings and discussions

4.1 Personal data

The age of the social studies teachers is indicated below (Table 2, Figure 1).

About 42 % of the social studies teachers have attained the 21-30 age group. The above indicates that most of them are young. About 29 percent fell within the 31-40 and 41-50 age groups with none of them below 20.

4.2 Teachers' qualification

To find out the academic qualification of teachers in the area, the following responses have been given by teachers, as presented in Table 3 and Figure 2 below.

About 92 percent of the respondents in the municipality hold a first degree in social studies education. Only 8 percent hold Master's degree in the subject.

With the background of the respondents, in the Second Cycle Schools in the area, the researcher found from the respondents whether the background of teachers in terms of higher education has an effect on the academic achievements of students. The following were the responses (Table 4, Figure 3).

On the question whether the Social Studies teachers' background in terms of higher education may result in higher academic achievements or not, 20 respondents representing 83.3 percent agreed with the notion that higher education in Social Studies can result in higher students' academic achievements in the Municipality. On the other hand, 4 teachers representing 16.7 percent disagree with the notion that the higher education of the Social Studies teachers may result in higher academic achievements of students in the municipality. Below are some of the responses from field interviews collected in 2022. For the purpose of this research, pseudonym names were used in place of the real names of the interviewee.

Table 2. Age of respondents (Social Studies teachers)

Age of respondents	ABS	%
Less than 20	0	0
21-30	10	42
31-40	7	29
41-50	7	29
Total	24	100

ABS: stands for Absolute number

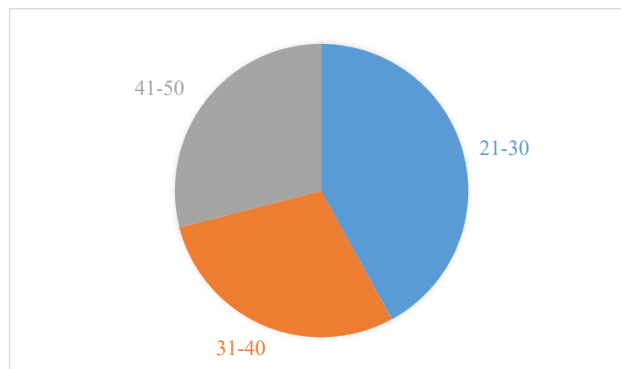


Figure 1. Age of respondents (Social Studies teachers)

Table 3. Qualification of teachers teaching Social Studies in the New Juaben Municipality

Academic qualification	Number of despondence	Percentages
Degree in Social Studies	22	92
Masters degree in Social Studies	2	8
PhD	0	0

Table 4. Responses the teachers gave on the background of teachers and impact on students' achievements

Impact of teachers' background	ABS	%
Teachers' higher education affects students' achievements positively	20	83.3
Teachers' higher education may not affect students' achievements	4	16.7
Total	24	100

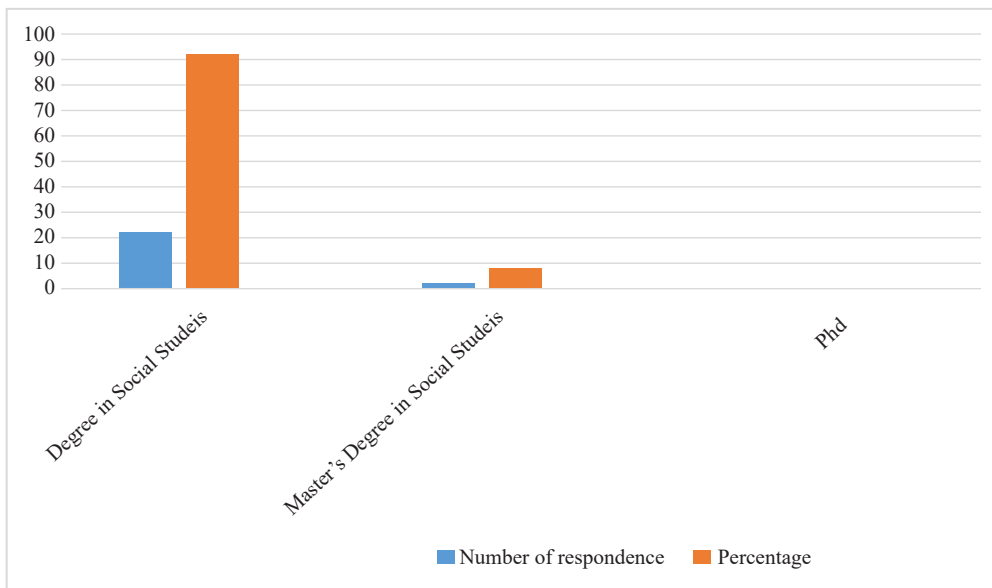


Figure 2. Qualification of the respondents in the New Juaben Municipality

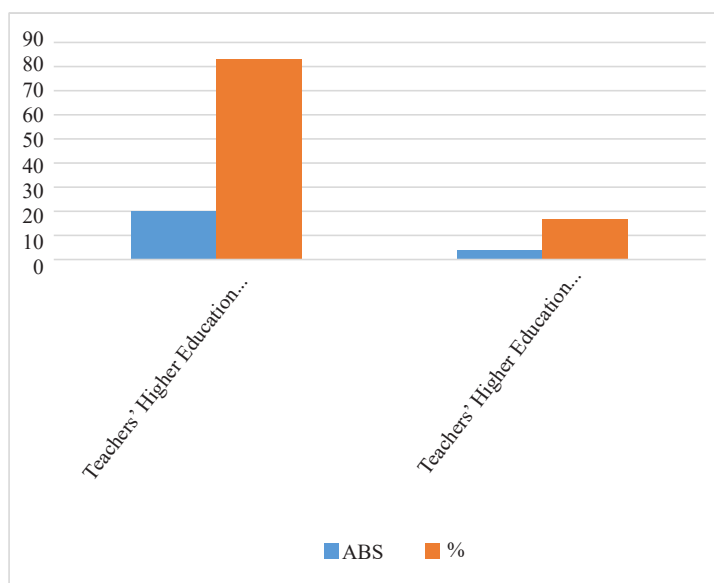


Figure 3. A bar chart indicating responses of teachers on the background of teachers and impact on students' achievements

Owas, A Social Studies teacher at OPASS Kukurantumi said:

Higher education BY Social Studies teachers will help learners earn higher academic achievements because higher education would enable the teacher to improve upon his or her knowledge in the subject matter as well as the methods and techniques of teaching the subject (Field interview February, 2022).

Cotey of Bright SHS Kukurantumi said:

Higher education of every Social Studies teacher should result in higher students' academic achievements because it enables him or her to improve on his or her teaching skills and experiences (Field interview February, 2022).

Yaovi, A Social Studies teacher at GHANASS Koforidua indicated that:

The higher education of the Social Studies teacher should impact positively with the achievements of learners

because higher education means upgrading one's knowledge, skills, approaches, methods and techniques of teaching the subject (Field interview February, 2022).

Owuo of KOTECH Koforidua said:

If being able to upgrade me to the master's level in this subject, Am sure I will be able to impact and transmit this subject far better than a currently doing. I should be able to achieve drastic academic achievements for my students (Field interview February, 2022).

Aku of Oti Boateng SHS said:

Every Social Studies teacher who has the chance for further education should be able to improve upon the academic achievements of his or her students. This is because such a teacher would be exposed to various new methods, techniques and strategies of teaching the subject, which would enable him or her to help students achieve enhanced academic achievements in the subject (Field interview February, 2022).

Jojo of the SDA SHS said:

Further education is the surest means by which Social Studies teachers can help students achieve better grades in the subject. Higher education exposes the Social Studies teacher to the best methods, techniques and strategies and modes of transmitting content. This is the surest way of improving students' academic achievements in the subject (Field interview February, 2022).

On the other side, some of the respondents think, the mere attainment of higher education by the teacher does not lead to the academic achievements of the students. They argued that it is the higher qualification coupled with positive attitudes of the teacher that leads to the higher academic achievements of students in the subject. They cited examples such as if the highly qualified teacher decided not to teach the students, the qualification alone would not lead to higher students' achievements. Therefore, it is the teacher's higher education coupled with his or her positive attitude that leads to higher academic achievements of students.

May of Oti Boateng SHS said:

The higher education of the Social Studies teacher alone is not the panacea for the higher academic achievements of students because if he or she decided not to put whatever he or she studied into practice, it would not help the students to achieve anything (Field interview February, 2022).

Jah of KOTEC said:

It takes positive attitudes coupled with higher knowledge of teachers to achieve higher students' academic achievement Therefore, higher education in Social Studies alone does not bring improvements in students' academic achievements. So I think higher education of the Social Studies teacher alone would not help improve upon the performance of students (Field interview February, 2022).

4.3 Research question answered

On the question whether the Social Studies teachers' background in terms of higher education may result in higher academic achievements for students or not, it was found that 83 percent of the teachers were of the notion that higher education in Social Studies can result in higher students academic achievements in the Municipality. The above is in line with Akiri and Ugborugbo (2009) and Betts et al. (2003), who indicated that teachers with higher educational qualifications produce better performance. Also, Hill et al. (2008) indicated that no curriculum teachers themselves, thus teachers must have appropriate content knowledge, subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge in a subject to be able to bring about satisfactory performance among students. Again, Hanushek and Rivkin (2010) indicated teachers possessing higher degrees and experiences were positively associated with students' achievement gains. The above indicates that most of the Social Studies teachers in the area appreciate the fact that, the teacher's higher education has a positive impact on the achievements of learners. Significantly, they would appreciate pursuing further education themselves to help improve their students' academic achievements in the area.

On the other hand, it also found that about 16 percent of the teachers disagree with the notion that the higher education of the Social Studies teachers may result in higher academic achievement gains of students in the municipality. They are on the side of the school of thought that thinks that the teachers' higher qualification may not lead necessarily lead to students' higher academic achievement gains, but rather when those teachers show positive attitudes towards the teaching of the subject. Their argument is also in line with Darling-Hammond (2000), who said teacher qualifications have been condemned by value-added research, which suggests that improved student achievement is a

result of teacher behaviour in the classroom, as the classroom is a conduit for teacher interest and classroom contextual variables that lead to meaningful and measurable student learning outcomes. Similarly, Slater et al. (2012) mention that knowledge givers require higher education for effective delivery.

5. Conclusions

The research was based on the Gestalt school of psychology, which states that the whole is more important than the sum of any different parts and that people perceive objects, problems and phenomena better when they are characterised as a whole or integral rather than component parts. The phenomenon under study is the teachers' perception of whether the teacher's higher education may or may not lead to learners' higher academic achievements. Therefore the implication of this theory for social studies teachers is that they need to give appropriate stimulus to the question of whether a teacher's higher education will improve students' academic achievements. The majority of them favorably perceived that the teacher's higher qualification can lead to students' higher academic qualifications. It was a few Social Studies teachers who believed teacher's higher education does not necessarily enhance students' achievements. To them much depends upon their attitudes to the teaching and learning process. The above implies that most of the respondents have the desire for further education to be able to help students in the municipality achieve more in their education.

6. Recommendations

The researcher recommends that the National Social Studies Teachers Association of Ghana (NASSTAG), the subject experts, Ghana Education Service, Ministry of Education, Headmasters, NGOs, Opinion leaders and chiefs in the area should help educate and sensitize the few teachers in the municipality who do not appreciate the higher qualification of teachers, to come to terms that the teacher's higher education or qualification is an important component of quality education of the future leaders in the New Juaben Municipality.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no competing financial interest.

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