

# School Placement Decisions and Their Impact on Academic Performance and Subject Interest among Students in Mankessim Senior High Technical School University of Education, Winneba

\*Maxwell Obeng, Emmanuel Adokoh

Department of Science, University Ghana

\*Corresponding Author

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## ABSTRACT

School placement was studied to see its impact on achievement and interest in subjects for the MSHTS students in Ghana. Using Expectancy-Value Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Person-Environment Fit Theory as the theoretical framework, the study examined the impact of misalignment of student preference and actual placement on motivation, engagement, and achievement. Descriptive survey design was employed, involving SHS 2 and SHS 3 students from various programs. A stratified random sample of 200 students completed the study through a structured questionnaire. Pearson correlation in SPSS was employed to examine data. The findings showed a high, statistically significant positive relationship between placement satisfaction and academic performance ( $r = .835, p < .000$ ), and a low but statistically significant positive relationship between interest in subject and academic performance ( $r = .233, p < .001$ ). These results suggest that when students are placed in schools or programs of their choice and interest, they perform better academically and remain interested in subject. Based on the results, the study suggests a revamp of the CSSPS that involves student interest alongside academic performance, fostering autonomous activity and learning through subject content. The study contributes to the evidence base that student-focused placement policies have the capacity to improve superior educational outcomes

**Keywords:** School Placement, Academic Performance, Subject Interest, CSSPS, Secondary Education.

## INTRODUCTION

Transition from junior high school (JHS) to senior high school (SHS) in Ghana is controlled by the Computerized School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS), through which students are allocated to SHSs based on their performance at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). Although built on the hope of promoting fairness and transparency in school allocation, the system has sparked some challenges with the capacity to align students' career interests, interest, and ability with allocated schools and study programs (Ansah, 2021; GES Hub, 2023).

The allocation does not take into account non-academic factors such as students' interests in topics, learning styles, and career goals, all of which are crucial for student success (Akyeampong, 2010). As a result, the majority of students are in schools or programs they did not select or are not engaged in, and the results are low motivation, disengagement, and poor academic performance. This sort of imbalance is even more critical in Category B and C schools such as MSHTS where program and budget limitations play a major role in the problem.

By Adubofuor (2017), where students are locked into subject classes, they never had a preference for or no aptitude to achieve, their performance declines. The Ghana Education Service has also seen problems with the existing placement model but has yet to initiate complete reforms targeting the interest and capability of the learners as much as they do achievement (GES, 2022). In addition to that, there are weak or non-existent primary school career guidance centers and therefore the students are not equipped to make decisions in the process of school choice (Donkor, 2019).

Mankessim SHS, which operates an extensive curriculum of academic and technical programs, presents a unique setting in which to explore school placement impacts. By far the largest group of students in the school indicates second or third choice placements with little or no orientation and adjustment support. That is a significant problem where it involves how such placements impact on students' education and interest in particular subjects.

Therefore, empirical research into the impact of the current placement system on student performance and interest in particular subjects, particularly in disadvantaged schools, is necessary. Following up on a case of Mankessim SHS, the research seeks to discover whether disengagement and underachievement in schools are being induced by school placement decisions and make recommendations for more student-centered placement policy directions.

## Research Objectives

The following objectives were developed to guide the study

1. To determine the correlation between Placement Satisfaction and Academic Performance at Mankessim SHTS
2. To determine the correlation between students' Subject Interest and Academic Performance at Mankessim SHTS

## Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no statistically significant correlation between Placement Satisfaction and Academic Performance.

Ho2: There is no statistically significant correlation between Subject Interest and Academic Performance

## Theoretical Review

This research relies on three intertwined theories Expectancy-Value Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Person-Environment Fit Theory that give a complete explanation of how school assignment influences students' academic success and school subject interest. These theories cumulatively posit that when students are assigned to learning environments that are in line with their goals, interests, and capacities, their motivational and academic outcomes are enhanced.

### Expectancy-Value Theory

As Eccles et. al. (2002) contends, the Expectancy-Value Theory holds that students' school behaviors most strongly, effort, persistence, and performance are virtually solely dependent on two broad factors: expectancy, or how students perceive their ability to achieve success on an activity, and value, or the perceived use value or significance of the activity. When students feel like they will succeed and see the task as being of worth, they will be positively engaged and achieve more in school. This school placement hypothesis recommends that students who are placed in programs or schools they did not select may not consider their work of academic worth while or worth effort if they are not interested in courses' subjects. At Mankessim SHS, for instance, such a student posted to Technical or Visual Arts classes reluctantly, when he wants General Science or Business, may not be interested in the curriculum, thereby lowering his level of motivation and performance.

Additionally, when students are placed in schools perceived as low-status or poorly resourced (i.e., Category C schools), academic motivation can be stifled, creating further diminished achievement and motivation. This type of mismatch between assignment and student preference then represents a psychological barrier to subject interest and academic accomplishment.

### Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

It is claimed by Deci and Ryan (1985) that the Self-Determination Theory holds that optimal learning comes about when the basic psychological needs of the learners are satisfied. These are autonomy the sense of choice and control over one's learning, competence the sense of effectiveness and efficacy, and relatedness the sense of

connectedness and belongingness with others. With these needs satisfied, the students will be inclined towards full engagement and achievement in their learning processes.

The Ghanaian placement system leaves the students without a sense of autonomy since they are assigned to schools or programmes without any influence or choice on their behalf. Most Mankessim SHS students report that they have been placed on their third or fourth option, which negates their sense of belongingness and control. Under SDT, such a sense of lack of autonomy would be expected to undermine intrinsic motivation, interest for learning activities, and performance.

Moreover, when the students are made to feel incapable or misplaced in the course that they have been enrolled in i.e., being enrolled in a science course without prior experience or interest on their part. They may withdraw from class work and display lower persistence in academic activities. Such intrapsychic demotivation has the ability to cause lower grades and lower involvement in subject activities, particularly those subject matters requiring conceptual level understanding and continued interest.

### **Person-Environment Fit Theory**

According to Holland (1997), Person-Environment Fit Theory believes that students perform optimally whenever there is maximum congruence among their personal attributes abilities, interests, and values and their environment school climate, course curriculum, and instructional mode. According to Holland, in the school environment, students perform well and are more motivated whenever their style of learning and interests are compatible with the learning environment.

In Mankessim SHS, an out-of-school student from Agri in Visual Arts due to insufficient vacancies or administrative error will be less likely to become engaged meaningfully in the curriculum. Incongruence between identity and learning environment may lead to diminished self-efficacy, dissatisfaction, truancy, or even school dropout. On the other hand, when the placement finds a positive fit between individuals and the environment, students will most likely demonstrate higher academic engagement, career focus, and tenacity with challenging courses.

### **Synthesis and Relevance to the Study**

All three models have the student choice, interest matching, and psychological motivation to succeed academically and sustain sustained subject interest in common. To the degree that school placement systems ignore these issues by placing students randomly or on the basis of test results only, they can leave students in positions in which they feel misplaced, demotivated, and disconnected from their school process.

Applying these theories to Mankessim SHS, the purpose of this research is to evaluate the influence of interest misfits between placement decisions and the impact on academic performance and interest in courses. The theoretical framework is thus guiding the research into determining the psychological and situational factors intervening in the relationship between placement decisions and student outcomes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The design was chosen as it allows the researcher to collect data systematically from any population to describe and explain what exists, is practiced, or exists in terms of relationships. The format was appropriate to measure students' academic performance and subject interest compared to the schools and programs into which they were placed. Descriptive questionnaires, Creswell (2014) notes, are convenient to use in educational research to study attitudes, perceptions, and trends among a target population. The population for the study was all the students of Mankessim Senior High Technical School (MSHTS) for the 2024/2025 academic year. The population was made up of students from all the academic programs (General Arts, Science, Business, Technical, Agriculture, and Visual Arts). The available population consisted of SHS 2 and SHS 3 students because they have had enough time to adjust to where they were assigned and could better assess its influence on their study performance and subject choices. One stratified random sampling technique employed drew a sample of 200 students. The students were stratified based on their

programs of study to ensure equal representation in all departments. Random sampling of the students from each program was carried out to participate. This provided experience representation across diverse courses as well as the level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the placement. A guided questionnaire containing close- and open-ended items was the primary tool for data gathering. The student questionnaire addressed topics in: background information, placement experience (first choice vs. placement in fact), scholarship performance (BECE and SHS performance trends), subject and career interest, perceptions of program/school fit. In order to ensure validity, two experts in educational research certified the research tools. Their feedback enhanced the wording, intelligibility, and suitability of the items. For reliability, there was a pilot study on 100 students from a local senior high school that was not part of the actual study. Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency of the questionnaire was determined and was 0.82, which was within accepted standards (Nunnally, 1978). Having obtained the school administration and the Ghana Education Service (GES) approvals, the researcher personally administered and distributed the questionnaires among the selected students during break times. It was on a voluntary basis and confidentiality was assured. Quantitative survey data were analyzed through inferential statistics Pearson correlation using SPSS. It was utilized in determining the correlations among placement variables and academic performance or subject interest. The study adhered to global ethical principles. All the respondents provided consent, and confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. Voluntary participation was employed, and the respondents were free to withdraw at any stage without implications. Provided data were not disclosed and were used for research purposes only.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter explains and presents results of the study according to the research questions.

Hypothesis 1: There is no statistically significant relationship between Placement Satisfaction and Academic Performance

Table 1: Relationship between Placement Satisfaction and Academic Performance

Variable		Placement Satisfaction	Academic Performance
Placement Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	.835**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.000
	N	200	200
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	.835**	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000	
	N	200	200

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results of the Pearson correlation analysis as reflected in table 2, shows that placement satisfaction is statistically significant ( $r = .835$ ,  $p < .000$ ) related to academic performance of students. This result shows a strong positive and statistically significant correlation. The correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of .835 indicates that as placement satisfaction increases, academic performance also tends to increase at a high rate. The  $p$ -value (.000) being less than 0.01 confirms that the relationship is not due to chance and is statistically significant at the 1% level. This suggests a meaningful and substantial relationship between how satisfied students are with their academic placement and how well they perform academically.

In practical terms, when students are placed in courses or programmes that align with their interests, capabilities, and aspirations: they are more likely to attend classes regularly, they are more motivated to learn, they are more engaged in coursework and related activities, they are more confident, less anxious, and more focused. In view of Asare and Baafi-Frimpong (2019), students who were satisfied with their SHS placement in Ghana were more

likely to complete assignments on time, participate in class, and show improved grades than those who were dissatisfied.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no statistically significant relationship between Subject Interest and Academic Performance

Table 2: Table 1: Relationship between Subject Interest and Academic Performance

Variable		Subject Interest	Academic Performance
Subject Interest	Pearson Correlation	1	.233**
	Sig.(2-tailed)		.001
	N	200	200
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	.233**	1
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.001	
	N	200	200

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results in Table 1 indicate that, Subject Interest is statistically significant ( $r = .233$ ,  $p < .001$ ). related to academic performance of students. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis that is, there is a statistically significant relationship between Subject Interest and academic performance of students. The study further indicated weak positive relationship between Subject Interest (independent variable) and academic performance of students (dependent variable) at a significant level of 0.05 with ( $r = .233$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The rejection of the null hypothesis confirms that students who are more satisfied with their subject Interest tend to perform better in their studies. The positive correlation suggests that when students are placed in subjects that align with their interests, they are more likely to be engaged and achieve higher academic outcomes. This finding is supported by Eccles et.al, (2002), who assert that students' motivation and performance are enhanced when there is a match between their interests and the academic tasks they are assigned. When students are interested in their academic path, they tend to put in more effort, engage more deeply with learning activities, and show persistence, all of which contribute to better academic performance.

In addition, Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-Determination Theory explains that satisfaction with placement contributes to students' sense of autonomy and intrinsic motivation. These psychological needs, when fulfilled, lead to improved learning and achievement.

In the Ghanaian context, Ampadu and Oppong (2017) found that inappropriate placement of students into academic tracks they did not choose or are not interested in often results in reduced motivation, negative attitudes toward learning, and poor academic outcomes. Conversely, appropriate and satisfying placement fosters better engagement and achievement.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established a firm relationship between school placement decisions and academic performance and interest in subjects among students. The findings showed that students placed in their first preference school or program performed academically and had more interest in their subject than students placed in their second or third/fourth preference.

Students placed in schools and classes to which they were attached were more interested, involved, and goal-oriented, leading to greater achievement. Students who were placed in less-preferred schools or classes felt lower satisfaction, were less interested in the material, and had lower achievement.



These findings validate Expectancy-Value Theory and Self-Determination Theory tenets that achievement and motivation are increased when students feel congruence between their interests, goals, and school environments. These findings also validate Person-Environment Fit Theory by validating the importance of placing students in courses that match their strengths and interests.

Thus, placement decisions, especially when overlooking student interest, have long-term academic and psychological effects, depressing not only performance but also learning interest.

1. Revise the CSSPS algorithm to prioritize both academic performance and student interest, especially program-based placements (e.g., Technical, Science, Business).
2. Enforce independent activity and learning with subject matter, even if placed outside first choices, as performance may be increased through motivation and support.

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