

Importance of non-achievement variables to student performance.

In the minds of many, higher test scores are often associated with better performing students, schools and districts. In reality however a thorough diagnostic of the quality of an education system requires going beyond outcome indicators like test scores at the National Test and examining the characteristics of the education system which tend to be strong determinants of learning. In other words, there are numerous factors that can affect the results that were reported.

It has been observed that schools do vary in terms of average student performance; the question then arises as to why this is so. Postlethwaite and Ross (1992) advanced four different reasons as explanations.

Firstly some schools are located in privileged areas where the students come from homes where parents care about their children's education, ensure their children are well fed, show interest in school work, provide ready access to books in the home and so on. On the other hand there are schools which serve less privileged communities where the students come from homes in which the above characteristics are absent.

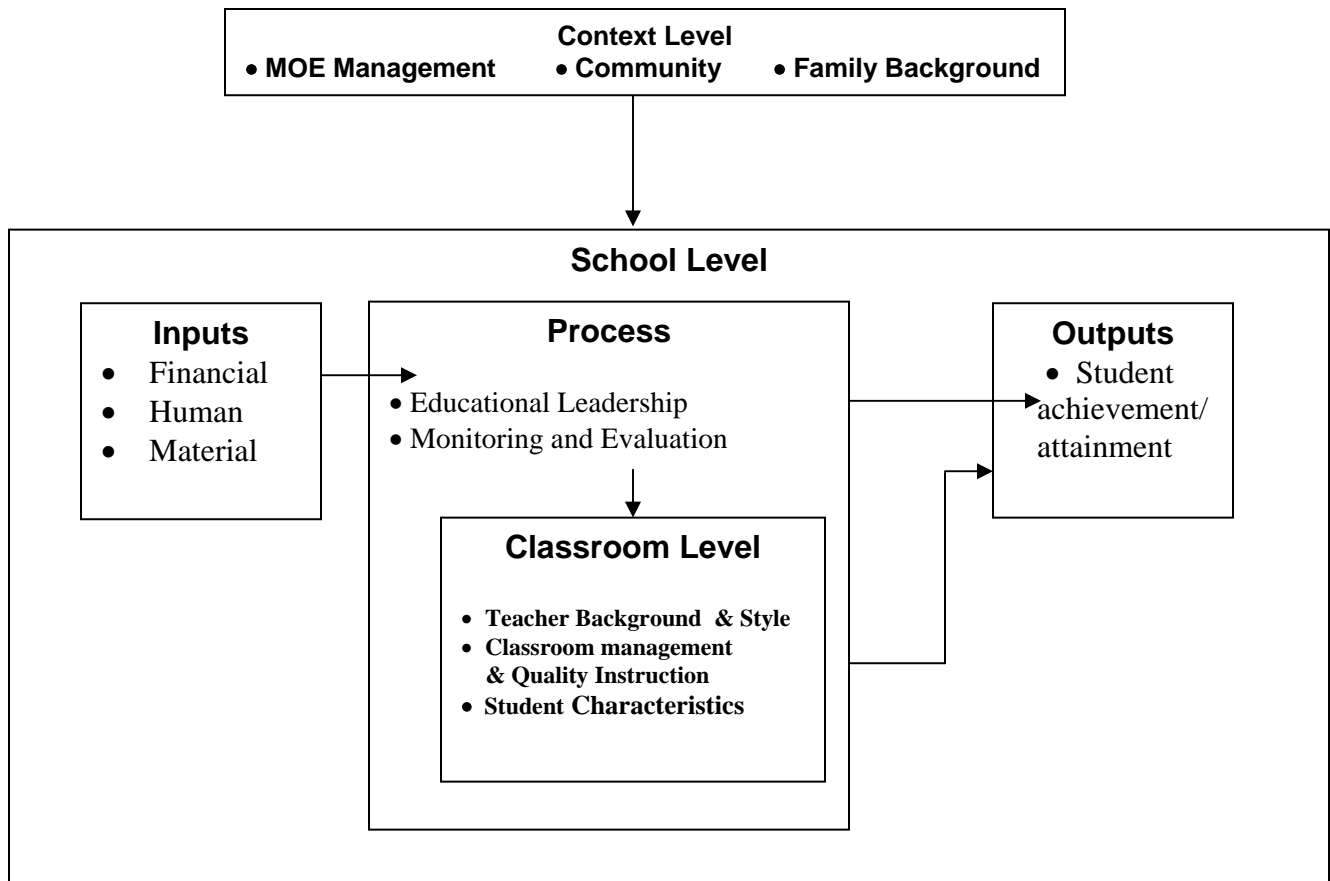
Secondly schools that have high achievement are better equipped than schools with low achievement. For example there is ample space, small class size, school libraries, and appropriately designed classrooms.

Yet a third reason is that schools with high average scores have good teachers. It is often claimed that these good teachers will have a superior grasp of an education system's aim and a better knowledge of which teaching strategies are most likely to address these aims.

Finally, a fourth reason is that schools with high average scores are those that are well managed. These schools have Principals who help the teachers by showing enthusiastic and creative leadership in terms of school pedagogy and educational and social climate. However, as with many social processes, the most likely answer is that the explanation lies in some kind of complex combination of all four reasons.

If we are to fulfil our responsibilities as the Ministry of Education we need to provide effective schools. (Meier) 2002, offers a school effectiveness model, which allows for a better understanding of what goes into making an effective school.

Figure 1. School Effectiveness Model



Source: School Effectiveness Model Meier, 2002

The school effectiveness model shows that at a contextual level there must be the right blend of involvement between community, family and the Ministry of Education if we are to have effective schools. At the school level adjustments made to inputs and processes will give the desired effect we want to improve student achievement.

Pioneers of the effective school movement are of the firm belief that every school can improve educational quality for all its students by incorporating a set of essential research identified characteristics present in successful schools. It is against this backdrop that for the first time in 2004, apart from collecting data on the actual test in the two subject areas, data were also collected from principals, teachers and students as the Ministry of Education sought to identify the non-achievement factors that affect student performance.

A sample of twenty percent of all school districts was selected. At least one school from each denomination was included. Private primary schools were also included. Three questionnaires were developed and administered to each school Principal, one Standard 1 Teacher and one Standard 3 Teacher, one Standard 1 class and one Standard 3 class. The classes were randomly selected.

Some of the indicators examined were as follows:

Principal questionnaires:

- School's human and physical resources
- Facilitating policies
- Quality of instruction in the school
- Teaching time in Mathematics/Language

Teacher questionnaires:

- Quality of instruction in the class
- Teachers' qualifications
- Job satisfaction and motivation
- Teachers' perception of their efforts and their perception of the public on their efforts.

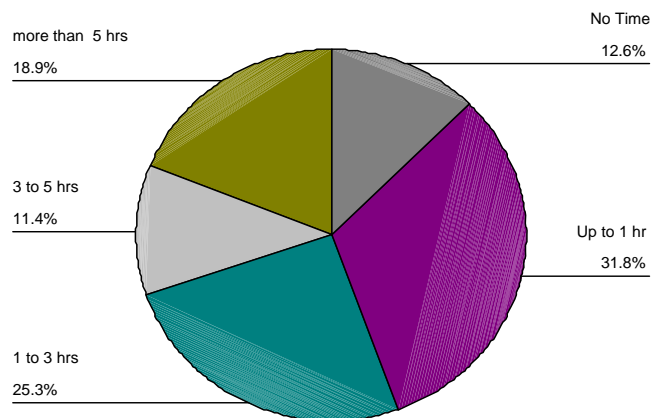
Student questionnaires:

- Time spent in Reading/Language Arts at home
- Language and Mathematic resources at home: Books- Magazines-Newspapers-Computers.
- Students' perception of their school
- How safe students feel at school

The following are some of the preliminary findings of the data collected on non-achievement variable affecting student performance.

The sample included 756 males and 806 females in Standard 1 and 862 males and 931 females in Standard 3. Figure 2 gives information on one such factor; time spent by students watching television on a normal school day.

Figure 2. Time Spent watching Television by Standard 3 Students



Source: Division of Educational Research and Evaluation 2005

In order to get an insight into anti-academic behaviours in the classroom, students were asked respond to the items listed in Table 1 below.

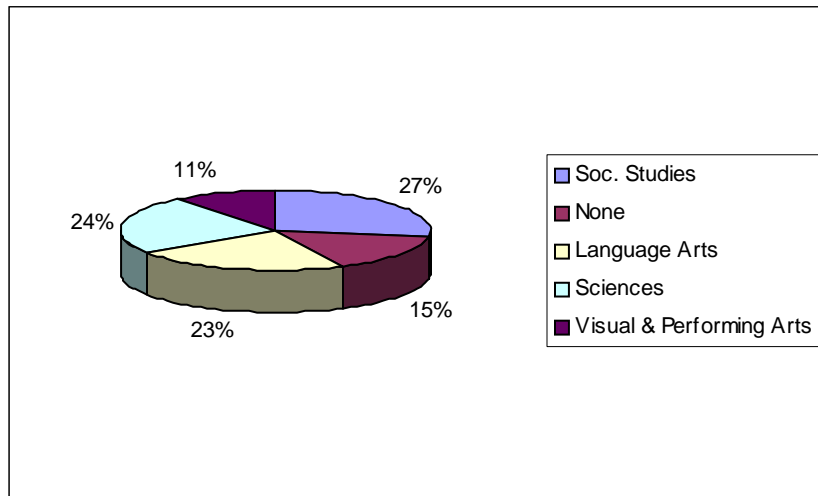
Table 1 Anti-academic Behavoiurs in the Classroom

Items	Yes	Yes
	Standard 1	Standard 3
Something was stolen from me	654 (44.4%)	819 (55.6%)
Something was stolen from someone in my class	965 (43.3%)	1264 (56.7%)
I was bullied by another student	548 (45.4%)	659 (48.8%)
Someone in my class was bullied by another student	803 (40.5%)	1180 (59.5%)
I was hit or hurt by another student	727 (45.7%)	865 (54.3%)
Someone in my class was hit or hurt by another student	971 (42.8%)	1297 (57.2%)

Source: Division of Educational Research and Evaluation 2005

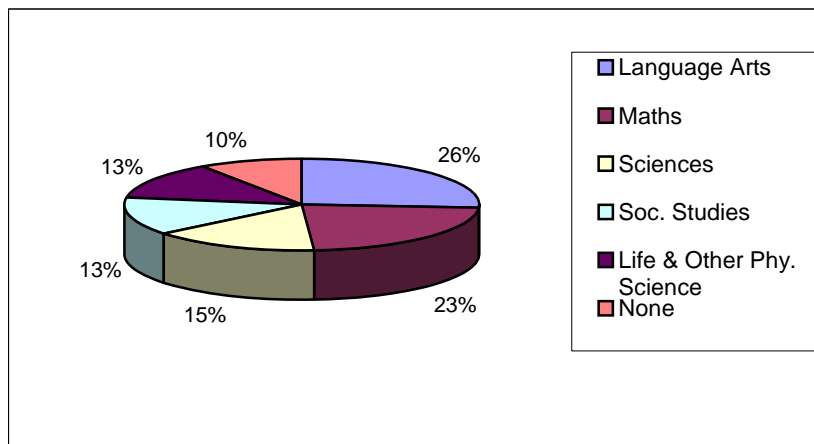
The teachers in the sample included 632 males and 567 females in Standard 1as well as 495 males and 451 females in Standard 3. Teachers were asked to indicate workshops attended

Figure 3 Workshops attended by Std.1 Teachers



Source: Division of Educational Research and Evaluation 2005

Figure 4 Workshops attended by Std.3 Teachers



Source: Division of Educational Research and Evaluation 2005

Finally the sample included a total of 147 Principals of which 54 were males and 93 were females. Principals were asked to state their qualifications. Table 2 below highlights the qualifications of Principals in the sample.

Table 2 Principals qualifications by gender

Principals' Qualifications	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Teachers Diploma	29	43	72
Cert.Ed.	9	18	27
B A	4	8	12
M. ED	2	2	4
Other	10	22	32

Source: Division of Educational Research and Evaluation 2005

The National Test will be administered again on 28th June 2005 to all primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago. In addition to the test, information will again be collected from principals, teachers and students. According to Greaney & Kellaghan (1996), data from national assessment can contribute to policy and public debate, the diagnosis of problems, and the formulation of reforms and improved efficiency in the education system. In 2005 the Ministry will make a greater effort to collect data from a larger sample and also to make the link between student performance and non-achievement factors so as the better understand why schools perform at different levels. Having collected this information it will then be possible to contextualise students performance. The Ministry of Education will then be in a better position to implement additional programmes to assist students and schools in all educational districts.

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