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Assessing Home Environment on Literacy and Numeracy Competencies of Basic Schools Pupils in Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District of Northern Region

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Abstract **– Home environment is very critical for children socialization, education and development. It is an important place for children literacy and numeracy skills development because children spend a maximum of 8 hours in school and the rest of their day at home. If children learn only in school, it may affect their literacy and numeracy acquisitions skills. The paper employed quantitative techniques mainly the use of questionnaires to collect the appropriate information after testing the children with a set of literacy and numeracy questions of their standards. It also made use of interviews and observations in schools and in homes of the children. The paper found that if parents have no formal education it has negative effects on their children education because children are not given attention at home to study. They tend to engage children more in domestic chores than academic work. Furthermore, homes with poor social amenities such as water, electricity, toilet, overcrowding tend to negatively affect children learning at home.**

Keywords **– Competencies, Home Environment, Literacy, Numeracy, Quality Education.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Right to Education received considerable impetus during the last decade as a result of the concerted efforts of many groups and agencies that made determined efforts to ensure that all children in Ghana receive at least basic education irrespective of their socioeconomic, cultural and religious status. Quality education throughout life is the birthright of every child. In turn, education, particularly that of girls and women, aids progress across all development goals [8].

To ensure that every child has access to quality education, Ghana has adapted a number of legal and policy frameworks. For instance, Ghana has ratified key international treaties and the right to free and compulsory basic education is guaranteed by the constitution and supported by a number of policies. Politically, Ghana also committed itself to actively promote the right to education by fully endorsing the 2000 World Education Forum (Dakar) and the 2000 Millennium Development Goals

In addition, a substantial part of the national budget appears to be devoted to education, in line with international recommendations. Ghana is often quoted as a model in Western Africa for its efforts in favour of education. Above all, Article 25 (1) the 1992 Constitution of Ghana states "All persons shall have the right to equal educational opportunities and facilities and with a view to achieving the full realisation of that – (a) basic education shall be free, compulsory and available to all" [5].

In Northern Ghana, however, many marginalised and poor communities are unable to access quality basic education despite the Directive Principles of the State Policy on education as stipulated in the 1992 Constitution. Article 38 (1) of this Constitution states "The State shall provide educational facilities at all level and in all the Regions of Ghana, and shall, to the greatest extent feasible, make those facilities available to all citizens". Despite this constitutional requirement, the majority of the people in Northern Ghana do not have access to quality basic education [1], [2], [4] and [7]. This is attributable to poor numeracy and literacy skills which consequently translate into their inability to progress on the educational ladder. This category of people may end up being illiterates and cannot contribute meaningfully to the development of the state, and may thus become a burden on the state and the society.

To arrest the poor numeracy and literacy situation in Ghana, the National Literacy Acceleration Program (NALAP) was implemented in 2009/2010 school year to improve Ghana's very low rates of pupil literacy and numeracy. The philosophy behind the programme was that pupils are attempting to learn to read in a language (English) which they do not understand well or speak with fluency. They argued that children are cognitively crippled in school by their inability to access and use text as a tool of understanding. They concluded that schooling without literacy becomes more a matter of memorization than comprehension. They further argued that the large proportion of Ghana's children and youth who cannot comprehend well, and learn from, text is a major constraint on the quality of upper primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary education, as well as on Ghana's overall social and economic development.

Despite all the impressive progress in policies reforms, access and enrolment in basic education, one cardinal question that hangs on the lips of many is whether children's numeracy and literacy skills have been improved to commensurate their level or stage in school. It is also not clear whether the considerable investments by government, parents, non-governmental organizations (NGOs,) etc, in primary education yield the desired return.

This paper examines the effects of home conditions on the numeracy and literacy achievement of basic school children between the ages of 6 and 16 years in Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District (STKD). The assessment of home condition becomes necessary in the light of accusations and counter accusation between teachers and parents over the poor performance of pupils at the basic education level. The paper describes in detail certain home conditions such as parents' education, availability of certain facilities at home as some of the contributing factors to pupils performance.

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II. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District (STKD) of the Northern Region. In all, the study covered 472 children/respondents from 200 households in 20 communities. The study involved the use of direct assessment tools, which consisted of a series of items that measured competencies in literacy and numeracy. The development of these assessment instruments was a complex task, and needed careful implementation. To achieve this, research assistants were recruited and trained to carry out the data collection. This was to ensure some degree of reliability and validity.

Background information on the demographics of the individual surveyed was critical for cross tabulations to be made in the data analyses. To this extent, useful background items in the household surveys such as personal data: age, gender, location/district, (e.g., urban-rural), family data: size, educational status of parents, occupational status of parents, income, languages spoken at home, availability of literacy resources in house, education data: prior schooling, type of school attended, educational/training experiences (English and numeracy level) and type of households and facilities at home, including lighting system, sources of water, etc.

A. Geographical Location and Size of the Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District

The District is a young one carved out of the then Bole District in 2004. It was one of the twenty-eight (28) newly created districts in addition to the then existing one-hundred and ten (110) districts in the country. As one of the twenty-six (26) districts in the Northern Region, the district is located in the western part of the Northern Region, between latitudes 8 40º and 9 40 º North and longitudes 1 º 50' and 2 º 45 º West. The District shares common boundaries with Wa West District and Wa East to the North, Bole District to the South, West Gonja District to the East La Cote d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso to the West. It has a total land area of about 4,601 square kilometers out of the total area of 74,984 kilometers of the Northern Region, representing six point fourteen percent (6.14%) of the total land mass of the Northern Region. Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District capital (Sawla) is about 189 kilometers North West to Tamale, the Regional capital in the Republic of Ghana [6].

B. Population Distribution

In the Sawla-Tuna-Kalba District, the population is heterogeneous and has major tribes like Gonja, Vagla, Brifor, Safalba and Waala, [6]. The total population of the District, according to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, the district has a population of 99,863 [3]. This population is made up of 51,504 female and 48,269 males. Out of the total population, eighty-six percent (86%) of the people lived in the rural area and fourteen percent (14%) lived in the urban area. The report further indicates that 55% of the population constitutes the economic in active group [6]. It must be noted that, Sawla, Tuna, Kalba and Gindabou are the settlements, which be, qualifies as urban areas since their population are above 5000. The population of the district is evenly distributed with the population density increasing from eight (8) persons per square Km in 1984 to fourteen (14) persons per square km in 2000. The growth rate of the district is 3.1%, which is slightly higher than the Notional Growth rate. There are 289 settlements in the district with varying populations.

Table 1: Number of Basic public/private schools 2011/212

Category	Public				Private			
Institution	Sch[2]. Total	School With Toilet	Sch. With Drinking Water	Classroom Total NMR	Sch. Total	Sch. With toilet	Classrooms Sch. With drinking water	Classrooms Total NMR[3]
Crèche/Nursery	0	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2	1(50%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Kindergarten	55	25 (45%)	11 (20%)	25 (52%)	4	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	1 (0%)
Primary	91	32 (35%)	17 (19%	297 (17%)	5	1 (20%)	0 (0%)	6 (50%)
JHS	30	13 (43%)	7 (23%)	84 (21%)	0	0 (0%)	0 (0 %)	0 (0%)
Total	176	70 (40%)	35 (20%)	406 (20%)	11	3 (27%)	1 (9%)	7 (20%)

C. Educational Facilities

The District has eight (8) educational circuits units namely Sawla East, Sawla West, Tuna, Kalba and Gindabou. There are three (3) senior high schools, 57 primary schools; 17 (17) Junior High Schools including a model girls school, and twelve (12) pre-school or day Nurseries in the District, [6]. High School enrolment has exacerbated much pressure on the few educational infrastructures in the district in all school in the District due to the introduction of the capitation grant and the New Partnership for Africa's Development

(NEPAD) school feeding programme in the district[1]. The tables below present data on educational resources in the STK district.

III. FINDINGS

A. Education of Mothers

Mothers' education is very critical and influences the education of the child. It is often argued that, when a woman is well educated, it is likely that the children will be educated because the woman will have time to teach the children. The results showed that only 10% of the children's mothers have formal education; 7.6% have

[1]DEO STK 2011 Annual report

[2]School
[3]Class rooms needing major repairs

primary education, 1.9% have Junior High School Certificate/Middle School Leaving Certificate, while 0.5% have secondary and above education.

One of the benefits of increased education is that educated parents are likely to have more educated children. Analysis of household surveys from 56 countries finds that, for each additional year of the mother's education, the average child attains an extra 0.32 years, and for girls the benefit is slightly larger [9].

B. Fathers' Education

Concerning the educational attainment of fathers of the children, the results showed that the majority (78.8%) have no formal education. Compare with the mothers' education, two times men have formal education (21.2%) than women (10%) in the district.

However, the majority (92%) have primary education, while 8% have attained Junior High School level or higher level of education. With regards to the age of the father, the results show that the minimum age of the father was 27 years the maximum was 75 years, while the mean age was 49.1 years.

C. Schooling Status of Children

The schooling status of the children ranged between Kindergarten (KG) and Junior High School (JHS) Form 3. The majority (44.7%) of the children was in Upper Primary; Class 4 was 15.7%, Class 5 was 14.6% and Class 6 was 14.45%. About thirty eight percent (38%) were in Lower Primary; Class 1 was 11.2%, Class 2 was 12.5%, while Class 3 recorded 14.2%. The rest of the children, 14.8% were in Junior High School (7% in JHS Form 1, 4.2% in JHS Form 2, while 3.6% were in JHS Form 3.

Type of School

This was necessary because the type of school a child attends has influence on the nature of socialization, the amount of resources spent on education, the amount of teaching and learning, etc. The results showed that the majority 98.3% attend public schools. Only 1.7% indicated that they attend private schools. In the towns, the situation was not significantly different. In the rural communities, 97.4% attend public schools while 2.6% attend private schools.

Management unit

Regarding the type of management unit children attend schools; the results showed that 39.5% of the children attend District Assembly Schools, followed by Catholic (31.2%) and Islamic Unit (20.8%). Almost 9% either are under Presbyterian Unit or did not identify their schools management units.

Settlement type breakdown showed that more than half (57.8%) of the children in rural communities attend District Assembly/Government schools. On the other hand, more children (37.9%) in rural communities attend Catholic schools. Islamic Unit schools are not common in rural communities, as only 1.7% in the rural communities attend Islamic Unit Schools.

Schooling status extra tuition

Ninety nine percent (99%) of the children covered in this study were still attending school, while 1% have completed JHS. When asked whether they go for paid tuition or extra classes, only 7 children representing 1.5% indicated they go in for tuition classes. The rest of the 98.5% do not go in for extra classes. For those who indicated they attend extra tuition, all of them are in JHS. Three of them were in JHS Form 3, while 1 each in JHS Form 1 and 3 and 2 other children in Form 2. It implies that, paid tuition classes are not popular in the district.

D. Basic Learning Status: English literacy

Children between the ages 6-16 years were given reading test in English. Their reading skills were evaluated using an incremental method that had letters, words and stories. The results showed that 13.3% could not identified anything, 27.8% could identify only letters, 28.2% could identify words, while 30.7% could read story.

Concerning the gender breakdown, those who could not identify any letter, word or read the story, at the lower primary level, there was no significant deference in terms of performance between boys and girls. Thirty one (31) boys could read nothing as compare to 34 girls. At the lower primary level, children are too young and not engaged in serious domestic work. This might be the reason where there is no significant difference between girls and boys performance. Apart from this, more girls (141) than boys (123) could identify letters and words. For those who could read a story, there were more girls (47) in town schools than in rural schools (19), but in rural schools, more boys (33) than girls (13) could read. The level of exposure in towns is more than rural areas. There could be more role model women in towns than in rural communities and that explain why more girls are doing better. Additionally are a number of interventions for girls in town schools. These include separate toilet and urinary facilities for girls and boys, distribution of pads to girls who are in their menstrual periods, distribution of incentives such as books, school bags, etc to girls. All these mighty have gone a long way to motivate them to learn

E. Comprehension test

The results showed that only 38% of the children could understand what they read. Generally, in the rural communities, for every one child, almost two children cannot comprehend what they read. In the rural communities, teacher absenteeism, lateness, insufficient teacher and unqualified teacher are some of the features of rural education. These could contribute to the children's inability to comprehend what they read. General, there is poor quality of teaching and learning in rural schools.

For those who were in Kindergarten (KG), for every 1 child, 3 could not comprehend what they read. The difference was insignificant for children in P1. For those in class two, for every 1 child 2 could not understand what they red. For those in class 3, for every 1 child who could read and comprehend, 4 children could not comprehend what they red. For those in class 4, for every 1 child, 3 could not comprehend what they read. The situation was however better for those in JHS Form 2, where for every 4 children who comprehended what they read only 1 could not comprehend.

Table 2: Children level of comprehension

Class of Child	Comprehension				Total
	Can do		Cannot do		
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	
KG	3	25%	9	75%	12
P1 to P3	58	32.4%	121	67.5%	179
P4 to P6	65	30.8%	146	69.2%	211
JHS 1	23	70%	10	30%	33
JHS 2	16	80%	4	20%	20
JHS 3	11	65%	6	35%	17
Total	**176**	**37.2%**	**296**	**62.7%**	**472**

With regard to private and public schools, the results showed that the public schools are rather doing better than the private schools. In the private schools, for every 1 child who could read and comprehend, 3 children could not comprehend, but in the public schools, for every 1 child, almost 2 could not comprehend. Contrary to the general feeling that private schools are doing better than public schools, the situation was different. However, these private schools were owned b individuals and were not well established.

Concerning management units of schools, the Catholic schools were doing better than the rest. In the Catholic schools, for every 1 child who could read and comprehend, less than 2 could not comprehend as compare to the Islamic unit, where for every 1child who could read and understand, more than 2 children could not understand. In the Islamic schools, part of the learning time is used in learning Arabic or the Qu'ran and that might explain where the majority of the pupils are not doing well.

Mothers' education also has a little impact on the child's ability to learn and comprehend in both rural and town schools. Perhaps, most of the mothers have only basic education. The results showed that for every 1 child whose mother has formal education, almost 2 (1.1) could not read and understand compare to 2 of those whose mothers have no formal education.

However, fathers' education has strong impact on the children's' ability to read and understand. The results showed that, for every 1 child whose father has been to school could read and understand was almost as those who could not read and understand. But for those whose fathers have not been to school, for every 2 children who could not read and understand, only 1 could read and understand.

With regards to those who attend extra tuition, the results show that out of 6 children who could read and understand, only one could not read and understand as compare to only 1 child for every 2 children for those who do not have paid tuition.

F. Numeracy

The numeracy test was designed in such a way as to test children's ability to recognize numbers on incremental levels. Children were tested in the following areas: counting and matching, number recognition, addition, subtraction, division and multiplication. The results showed that generally, 5.7% of the children could not identify anything. Specifically, 8.4% were girls in KG and lower primary could not identify anything as compare to 3% in boys in the same levels.

Almost 70% of the children in this study could not do basic subtraction (71.8% in towns and 67.3% in rural). The figures are worse for multiplication, were only 12.7% of the children could do (7.6% in town and 12.8% in rural).

Gender breakdown showed that girls are doing badly in numeracy than boys. For those who could identify any number, the results showed that for every 1 boy, almost 3 girls could not identify anything. Similarly, for those who could do counting and matching of numbers, the results boys (9 %) are doing better than girls (4.8%).

G. Household size

The study examined the size of the household and its impact on children's literacy and numeracy skills. Here we defined a household as a family unit which shares common things together especially eating from the same pot. The minimum household size was found to be 3 and the maximum was 27 people. The mean household size was 11 people.

The results showed that there is an inverse relationship between children's performance and the size of the house. Children from smaller families tend to be doing better in literacy than those from larger households. In households of between 1 -5 members, for every one child who could comprehend what he/she red, almost another child cannot understand. The ratio is almost 1:1. However, in a bigger household size between 6 and 10 persons, for every child who could comprehend what he/she red almost 3 children could not understand what they red.

Table 3: Household size and comprehension ability

Household size	Comprehension				Total
	Can do		Cannot do		
3-5 persons	35	47.2%	39	52.8%	74
6-10 persons	54	26%	151	74%	205
11-15 persons	34	32%	73	68%	107
16-20 persons	22	35.5%	40	64.5%	62
21 and persons	8	33.3	16	66.7%	24
Total	**153**	**32.4%**	**319**	**67.6%**	**472**

H. Nature of House Structure

The majority (60%) of the houses in the study communities are made up of mud and sticks, especially in the rural communities. Only 39% of the respondents indicated that their houses are made up of bricks and block, while 1% is made up of timber.

The results showed that to some extent, the nature of the house structure has some impact on the children's literacy abilities. Almost all the pupils in living in houses made with timer and thatched could not comprehend what they read. However, for every 1 child living in houses made up with mud and sticks can comprehend what he/she reads compare to almost 2 children who cannot comprehend what they read in the same environment.

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I. Lighting Situation in the House

The results showed that 57% of the houses have electricity, 3.8% used kerosene, while 39.4%, used gas, firewood, solar, lanterns, flash lights, etc (39.4%). The results showed that more houses in town schools (76%) have electricity than rural (37.4%). Children staying in house with regular supply of electricity are doing better in literacy than those without electricity. For every child who could comprehend what he/she red but lived in a house where they use kerosene, 3 children could not comprehend what they read in the same environment. The ratio is almost 1:1 in houses where there is regularly electricity, and 1:3 in homes with electricity.

Table 4: Lighting condition of the household

Lighting regularly used	Comprehension				Total
	Can do		Cannot do		
Electricity	122	45.5%	146	54.5%	268
Kerosene	3	16.7%	15	83.3%	18
Others	53	28.5%	133	71.5%	186
Total/%	178	37.7%	294	62.3%	472

J. Availability of Water for household use

Regular water supply to homes is very important for academic work. It saves the children from traveling long distances to search for water before and after school. Consequently, pupils will have time for their assignments and also attend school on time. Eighty per cent of the households did not have water in them. It implies that only 20% have water in their homes. Time spent searching for water daily is also important. Over 50% of the children spent 30 minutes or more time searching for water daily, especially those in the rural communities. Only 46.2% used less than 30 minutes to get water for their daily use.

Less than 40% of the children in town schools spend less than 30 minutes to get water, compare to 53.6% in the rural communities. However, the results do not show any significant correlation between time spent searching for water and children literacy level.

K. Meals taken per day

Concerning meals taken per day, the results showed that almost 60 of the children take three meals per as compare to 32% and 8.3% who claimed they take 2 meals and 1 meal per day respectively. There seems to be an inverse relationship between those who take three meals and the literacy levels. For every 1 child who takes 3 meals daily and can comprehend that he/she reads, almost 2 children cannot comprehend.

Table 5:Number of meals per day

Number of meals per day	**Comprehension**				**Total**
	Can do		**Cannot do**		
1 meal per day	25	64%	14	36%	39
2 meals per day	57	37.7%	94	62.3%	151
3 meals per day	97	34.5%	185	65.5%	282
Total	179	38%	293	62%	472

L. Household gadgets /appliances

The survey found that the common household machines are radios and bicycles. They reported that over 51% households have radios and almost 65% have bicycles. However, 2.5% reported having cars and 3.8% reported having computers.

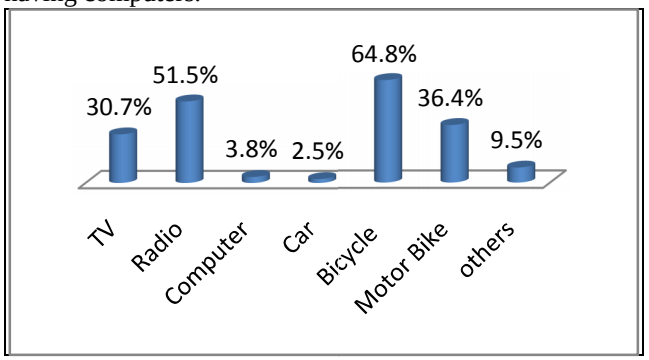

Fig.1. Household gadgets

M. Animals

The survey also delved into household wealth in the form of animals, especially cattle and donkeys. These two categories of animals are sources of wealth to the family but at the same time could take children away from their studies to be used as shepherds.

The results showed that about 80% of the respondents, families do not keep cattle. Only about 20% have cattle. Out of this 20% who keep cattle, 14.6% do not have more than 10 cattle. (See Figure 2 for details).

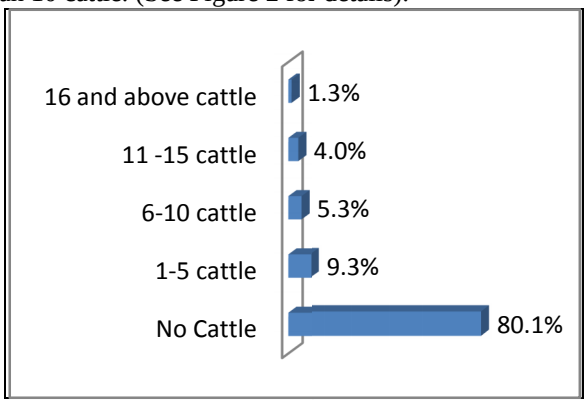

Fig.2. Household Cattle

The results do not show any significant difference between the performance of children whose family keep cattle and those who do not keep cattle or have smaller herd of cattle. From Figure 2, it clear that even in families which keep animals up to 20 or more, their children performance in literacy was the same as those who could not comprehend anything in the same category. Furthermore, even in families who keep smaller number of cattle, (1-5 cattle), the children who could not comprehend what they red were two times more than those who could understand what they red.

N. Households with toilet facilities

The results showed that 94.3% of the households do not have toilet facilities. Children and their parents either use public toilets facilities or use the near bushes. The district breakdown also showed that there is no significant

difference between town households (94.1% without toilet facilities) and rural (98.5% without toilet facilities).

O. Time children take to reach school

The results showed that 80.1% of the children use less than 30 minutes to walk from their homes to their school. Almost 14% used between 30 minutes and 1 hour, 5.1% used between 1 hour and 2 hours, while 1.1% claimed they used between 2 hour to 3 hours.

IV. Conclusions

The paper presents some key findings on literacy and numeracy skills acquired by children between the ages of 9 and 16 in town and rural communities in Sawla District. The communities selected for the study were a mixture of rural and urban. They are also among the poorest and the most vulnerable. The study revealed a number of important findings.

Overall, the results showed little or low educational attainment for the children' mothers and fathers. Only 10% of their mothers have formal education. Specifically, 88.7% of the mothers in town have no formal education compared to 89.8% in rural communities in the STK District. Similarly, the educational attainment of the respondents' father's was low, with only 21.2% had been to school.

Children's literacy and numeracy skills are generally poor, but vary according to the school management type, parents' level of education, availability and regular supply of electricity, etc.

There are some broad conclusions to be made, as follows:

1) Less than 50% of the basic schools in the two districts are under District Assembly management unit. Similarly, private schools are not popular in the two districts as only 1% of the children in town schools and 2.6% in rural are attending private schools.
2) Drop out from school incidence are very minimal in the two districts. The results showed that an insignificant proportion (1.1%) of the children never attended school, as compare to 1.7% who has dropped out. It means that, for every 59 children, 1 is out of school in town schools.
3) Generally, only 13.3% of the children could not identify anything, 27.8% could identify only letter, 28.2% could identify words, while 30.7% could read story.
4) In comprehension, generally the results showed that for every 1 child, almost 2 children cannot comprehend what they red. For those in KG, for every 1 child, 3 could not comprehend what they read. For those in class two, the ratio is 1:2. For those in class 3, for every 1child 4 could not comprehend what they red. For those in class 4, for every 1 child, 3 could not comprehend what they read. The situation was however better for those in JHS Form 2, where for every 4 children who comprehend what they read only 1 could not comprehend.
5) The results showed that generally, 5.7% of the children could not identify anything in the two districts. Specifically, 8.4% in town could not identify anything as compare to 3%

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Author's Profile

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Before his PhD programme, he worked as a Coordinator for Education Quality for All, an NGO that worked in complementary basic education in Northern Ghana. Since 2011, he has worked as a Research Fellow at the Institute for Continuing Education and Interdisciplinary Research (ICEIR), University for Development Studies, Tamale.

Dr. Abdulai Abubakari was a Chairman of an 8 member Steering Committee for the Action for Children's Rights in Education (ACRE) Project, Action Aid Ghana/ Centre for Active Learning and Integrated Development (CALID), a member of Steering Committee, Centre for Democratic Development-Ghana, The Northern Democratic Debate project, Chairman of planning committee, University for Development Studies Interdisciplinary Annual Conference and Board member of Eagle FM, Walewale. His main research areas include Non-State actors contribution to education, women and children health, and conflict and inter-ethnic relations in Ghana.