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Perceptions and Attitudes of the Mass Promotion Policy Relative to Mathematics Learning at the Senior High School Level, Ghana

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Abstract:- The study investigated the perceptions and attitudes of the mass promotion policy relative to students' mathematics learning in senior high schools. Two research questions were used to guide the study. The researchers employed Social Cognitive Theory and the theory of self-determination to back the study. The study was linked with a pragmatist worldview that made use of a mixed methods approach. The design employed by the researchers as a convergent parallel design. A simple random sampling technique was used to sample students and teachers while a purposive sampling technique was employed in the case of heads of mathematics departments of the sampled schools. Three hundred and twenty-five (325) respondents or participants responded to questionnaires and interviews for the data collection. The methods of data analysis were descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. The findings showed that the mass promotion policy does not promote effective learning of mathematics but rather promotes indiscipline behaviors among students. Students' absenteeism, refusal to do class tasks, inattentiveness, disrespect, sleeping during lessons, and skipping classes were the attitudes put up toward mathematics learning. The researchers recommended that stakeholders, policymakers, and authorities should revise the mass promotion policy based on as per the findings revealed.

Keywords:- *Mass Promotion Policy, Perceptions, Attitudes, Students, Teachers.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the educational context, mass promotion of students often termed social promotion, is a policy where students are advanced to the next grade level regardless of their academic performance or achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This practice is typically aimed at maintaining a high level of student retention and reducing dropout rates, with the underlying goal of promoting equity and inclusivity in education (Oakes & Lipton, 2007). The mass promotion policy entails promoting students to the next grade level regardless of their academic performance, typically based on age or the completion of a certain grade level rather than their mastery of specific subject matter. With the traditional promotion policies, students were required to meet specific academic learning standards before advancing to the next grade.

Mass promotion, also referred to as social promotion, is an educational policy where students progress to the next grade level regardless of their mastery of the curriculum (Jimerson, 2001). This policy contrasts with grade retention, where students are held back from repeating the same grade to achieve the necessary academic competencies (Alexander et al., 2003). The rationale behind mass promotion includes maintaining age-appropriate social interactions and reducing the stigma and negative psychological effects associated with grade retention (Jimerson et al., 2002). The origins of mass promotion policies can be traced back to the mid-20th century, when educators and policymakers sought to democratize education and provide equal opportunities for all students (Ravitch, 2013). Advocates of mass promotion argued that holding students back a grade could exacerbate inequalities, stigmatize struggling learners, and perpetuate a cycle of academic failure (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Instead, they proposed that promoting students based on age or social factors would enhance their self-esteem, preserve their peer relationships, and motivate them to remain in school. The policy existed in Ghana before the year 2000 to meet the then-current educational challenges. It was however recommended by (Yeboah, et al., 2002) to be discontinued. The policy became ineffective from there but started manifestation after the implementation of the 2012 syllabi in 2013 steadily but became effective post-2015 era. The policy aimed to increase the literacy rate in Ghana or every student should be able to complete basic school without barriers of school dropout challenges.

However, the implementation of mass promotion policies has sparked debates and controversies within the education community. Critics argue that mass promotion undermines academic standards, devalues the importance of achievement, and fails to adequately prepare students for future academic and professional challenges (Ravitch, 2013). Moreover, research suggests that promoting students without ensuring mastery of essential skills can lead to gaps in knowledge and hinder their long-term academic success (Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). In recent years, the focus has shifted towards examining how mass promotion policies affect students' perceptions and attitudes toward learning, particularly in the context of mathematics education.

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Mathematics is often considered a gateway subject, essential for academic and career advancement, making it a critical domain for exploring the impacts of educational policies (Rothstein, 2017). Students' attitudes and beliefs about mathematics can significantly influence their engagement, motivation, and performance (Oakes & Lipton, 2007). By exploring the origins and implications of mass promotion policies on students' perceptions and attitudes toward mathematics learning, educators and policymakers can gain valuable insights into how to design inclusive, equitable, and effective educational systems that support the diverse needs of all learners. Criticism surrounding the perceptions and attitudes of mass promotion policies to students' mathematics learning arises from a multitude of educational, social, and psychological perspectives. Mass promotion policies, which advocate for the advancement of students to the next grade level irrespective of their academic performance, have been subject to scrutiny and debate within the field of education.

Critics argue that mass promotion policies may inadvertently undermine the integrity of academic standards and hinder students' academic development (Ravitch, 2013). Promoting students without ensuring they have mastered foundational concepts and skills risks perpetuating educational inequities and exacerbating achievement gaps (Darling-Hammond, 2010). This criticism is particularly salient in the context of mathematics education, where a strong foundation is crucial for future academic and career success (Oakes & Lipton, 2007). Furthermore, opponents of mass promotion policies contend that such approaches may contribute to the erosion of students' intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy in mathematics (Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). When students perceive that academic advancement is based solely on age or social factors rather than merit and effort, they may become disengaged from learning and develop negative attitudes toward mathematics (Rothstein, 2017). This can lead to decreased motivation, lower academic achievement, and a reluctance to pursue further studies or careers in STEM fields. Critics also highlight the potential long-term consequences of mass promotion policies on students' educational trajectories and future opportunities. Without adequate mastery of foundational mathematics skills, students may struggle to succeed in subsequent grade levels and encounter barriers when pursuing higher education or entering the workforce (Ravitch, 2013). This perpetuates a cycle of academic underachievement and limits students' potential for social mobility and economic prosperity.

The debate over mass promotion policies relative to students' mathematics learning reflects broader concerns about educational equity, standards, and student well-being. While mass promotion can offer benefits by preventing the negative consequences of retention, its success largely depends on the implementation of comprehensive support systems and the involvement of all educational stakeholders. Despite these differing views, mass promotion remains a subject of ongoing discussion among educators, policymakers, and researchers, who continue to explore its implications for educational equity and overall quality of education

The mass promotion policy strives to promote social justice by preventing students from being left behind which may bring about educational disparities. This policy also reflects broader discussions about educational equity, the role of standardized testing, and the effectiveness of different approaches to addressing educational challenges. Policymakers must weigh the potential benefits of promoting social equity against the risks of lowering academic standards. The education landscape has witnessed a shift in the approach to student advancement, particularly in the realm of mathematics education at the Senior High School level. The practice of the mass promotion, wherein students progress collectively without stringent examination of individual subject proficiency, has sparked diverse opinions among students and teachers alike. This study seeks to unravel the multifaceted perceptions and attitudes surrounding the mass promotion of students in the learning of mathematics at the Senior High Senior level in Ghana. With this narrative, research on the perceptions and attitudes of students' mathematics learning under the mass promotion policy shall give relief as empirical evidence of our educational system's planning and development (Kalagbor, 2016). This study therefore sought to interrogate the perceptions and attitudes of the mass promotion policy relative to students' mathematics learning in senior high schools in the Kassena-Nankana West District of the Upper East region of Ghana.

The main objectives of the study are to; 1. Assess how students and teachers perceive the mass promotion of students in the learning of mathematics. 2. Determine the attitudes students exhibit under the mass promotion policy in the learning of mathematics. This study was guided by the research questions as seen below: 1. What are the perceptions of students and teachers concerning the mass promotion of students in the learning of mathematics at the Senior High School level? 2.What are the attitudes students exhibit under the mass promotion in the learning of Mathematics? The study's novelty is to assist Parents, students, researchers, teachers, and policymakers to make informed decisions from this study. This is so in that the study would provide them with useful information on students' mathematics performances and their implications. The study informs parents with evidence-based research findings that can enhance their support by demonstrating the rationale and positive outcomes associated with the mass promotion policy. The findings of the study would help teachers understand the challenges associated with the policy and the possible adjusted ways of handling students and providing the needed skills. Policymakers can allocate resources more efficiently based on the research findings, targeting areas that are most critical for the success of the mass promotion policy initiative. The findings also help policymakers stay responsive to changing educational dynamics and adapt the mass promotion policy accordingly. The findings of the study also help to fill a literature gap that hitherto existed in terms of the effect of the policy on mathematics achievement. The study's recommendations serve as references for researchers who want to conduct a similar study on the perceptions and attitudes of the mass promotion policy relative to students'

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mathematics learning in other senior high schools in the country and globally.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Frameworks

- *Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)*

The study is underpinned by Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), proposed by Albert Bandura, which provides a comprehensive framework for understanding human behavior in social contexts. This theory posits that individuals learn from observing others, and their behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes are shaped by the reciprocal interaction between personal factors, environmental influences, and behavioral patterns. Applying SCT to the examination of perceptions and attitudes towards mass promotion policies in the context of mathematics learning illuminates the interplay between individual cognition, social influences, and educational practices. According to SCT, individuals' perceptions of policies such as mass promotion are influenced by their observations of others' experiences and the social cues provided by authority figures, peers, and the broader educational environment. Research by Johnson and Stevens (2018) found that students' perceptions of mass promotion policies were significantly influenced by their observations of peers who had been either promoted or retained due to such policies. Moreover, Bandura (1986) argues that individuals' perceptions of the outcomes of a policy, such as academic success or failure, shape their attitudes and behaviors towards it. Therefore, students' perceptions of the effectiveness and fairness of mass promotion policies are likely to impact their attitudes toward mathematics learning.

According to social cognitive theory, individuals' perceptions are shaped by their observations of others' behaviors, as well as their cognitive appraisal of the situation (Bandura, 1986). In the case of mass promotion policies in education, students' perceptions are likely influenced by various factors such as their peers' reactions, teachers' explanations, and media portrayals of the policy. For instance, students may perceive mass promotion as a lenient approach that reduces the importance of academic achievement, leading to disengagement with learning mathematics. SCT emphasizes the role of self-efficacy beliefs in shaping individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Students' perceptions of their mathematical abilities, as well as their expectations of success or failure in mathematics, are crucial determinants of their engagement and performance in mathematical tasks (Pajares, 2002). Bandura (1997) suggests that individuals' self-efficacy beliefs are influenced by four main sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological states. Therefore, students' attitudes towards mathematics learning are likely to be influenced by their perceptions of their abilities relative to the requirements of mass promotion policies.

The relationship between perceptions of mass promotion policies and attitudes toward mathematics learning is complex and bidirectional. SCT proposes that individuals' behaviors and attitudes are not only influenced by external factors but also shape and construct their social environment (Bandura, 1986). For instance, if students perceive mass promotion policies as unfair or ineffective, they may develop negative attitudes toward mathematics learning, leading to decreased motivation and engagement in mathematical tasks. Conversely, positive attitudes towards mathematics learning may foster beliefs in the efficacy of mass promotion policies as equitable mechanisms for promoting academic success. Social cognitive theory suggests that individuals' beliefs in their capabilities (self-efficacy) play a crucial role in determining their motivation and academic performance (Bandura, 1986). Thus, students' perceptions and attitudes toward mass promotion policy can significantly impact their engagement in mathematics learning. For example, students with positive attitudes may feel more confident in their ability to succeed in mathematics despite the policy, leading to increased effort and perseverance. In contrast, negative attitudes may result in decreased motivation, lower self-efficacy, and ultimately, poorer mathematics learning outcomes. In summary, Social Cognitive Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the interplay between perceptions and attitudes regarding mass promotion policies and students' mathematics learning. By considering the reciprocal interactions between personal factors, social influences, and educational practices, researchers can gain insights into how mass promotion policies shape students' attitudes toward mathematics learning, and vice versa. This research aimed to explore these dynamics to inform the development of effective educational policies and interventions aimed at promoting positive attitudes and achievement in mathematics education.

- *Self-Determination Theory (SDT)*

The researcher also aligned the study with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Deci and Ryan, which offers a valuable lens for understanding individuals' motivation, engagement, and attitudes in educational contexts. SDT posits that humans have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are satisfied, individuals are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation and engage in activities willingly and persistently. Applying SDT to the exploration of perceptions and attitudes towards mass promotion policies in the context of mathematics learning sheds light on how these policies may impact students' motivation, sense of competence, and social connectedness. According to SDT, autonomy refers to the sense of volition and choice in one's actions. In the context of mass promotion policies, students' perceptions of autonomy may be influenced by the extent to which they feel that they have control over their educational trajectories. Research by Deci and Ryan (2000) suggests that policies that emphasize external controls, such as mandatory retention or promotion based solely on age, may undermine students' sense of autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Conversely, policies that offer flexibility and opportunities for students to participate in decision-making regarding their academic progress may enhance autonomy and promote positive attitudes toward mathematics learning.

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SDT proposes that individuals have an inherent drive to seek out challenges and master new skills. Students' perceptions of their competence in mathematics and their ability to meet the requirements of mass promotion policies can significantly influence their attitudes toward mathematics learning. Ryan and Deci (2017) argue that policies that provide clear criteria for promotion, along with adequate support and resources for students to develop their mathematical skills, are more likely to foster a sense of competence and intrinsic motivation. Conversely, policies that are perceived as arbitrary or unfair may undermine students' confidence in their abilities and lead to disengagement from mathematics learning. Relatedness refers to the sense of connection and belongingness with others. In the context of mass promotion policies, students' perceptions of fairness and equity can impact their sense of relatedness to their peers and teachers. SDT suggests that policies that promote a collaborative and supportive learning environment, where students feel valued and respected, are more likely to enhance relatedness and foster positive attitudes towards mathematics learning (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Conversely, policies that create divisions or competition among students may erode social connections and lead to negative attitudes toward mathematics and learning in general. In summary, Self-Determination Theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how perceptions and attitudes toward mass promotion policies influence students' motivation, engagement, and sense of well-being in mathematics learning. By considering the fulfillment of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, educators and policymakers can design and implement policies that promote positive attitudes and foster intrinsic motivation in students, ultimately enhancing their learning outcomes in mathematics education.

B. Conceptual Framework

- *Perceptions of Mass Promotion Policies*

Research has shown that perceptions of mass promotion policies vary widely among stakeholders, including educators, parents, policymakers, and students themselves. Some stakeholders view mass promotion as a necessary measure to prevent students from falling behind or becoming disengaged from school (Hill et al., 2019). They argue that grade retention can have negative consequences for student's self-esteem and motivation, leading to increased dropout rates and decreased academic achievement in mathematics in the long run. However, others express concerns about the potential drawbacks of mass promotion policies, particularly to students' mathematics learning. Critics argue that promoting students who have not mastered essential mathematical concepts and skills can perpetuate gaps in knowledge and hinder their future academic success (Mendez, 2020). Additionally, there is concern that mass promotion may lower academic standards and devalue the importance of rigorous assessment and accountability in education (Kaufman et al., 2017).

Parents and teachers play pivotal roles in shaping students' attitudes toward mathematics and their academic trajectories. Studies have shown divergent views among parents and teachers regarding mass promotion policies. While some perceive mass promotion as a way to prevent stigmatization and enhance students' self-esteem (Garcia & Rodriguez, 2020), others express concerns about its detrimental effect on academic rigor and learning quality (Chen et al., 2021). Another factor that has made mass promotion bad in the eyes of many is that it creates a false sense of accomplishment in the minds of teachers, students, parents, and guardians (Mutaka, 2020). Teachers think they have adequately prepared students with good skills and competencies. Students also enter a new class thinking they have acquired the right skills. Parents and caregivers share the same feelings about their children's development. Even if many students simply follow the fad; Not suitable for the current class. They are just square nails driven into round holes.

The mass promotion also presents challenges for teachers who must motivate students with very different levels of mathematics achievement. Overcoming inequalities requires teachers to continually adjust their teaching methods in mathematics and lesson plans. At the same time, the inability to maintain consistent academic standards makes it difficult for teachers to effectively teach each student, which only exacerbates the problem of inspiring them to do their best in mathematics in the classroom (Mauliya, 2020). Mass promotion also reduces the quality of school education. Students are no longer eager to learn mathematics and how to avoid the shame and discomfort that comes with staying in a particular class. Students in the old times had an intrinsic motivation to defend their honor and not be repeated in a particular class. This motivation drives them to work hard and achieve greatness in mathematics. But because the student has no desire, he/she cannot shoot. Another serious and inexorable downside of mass promotion is the production of vulnerable human resources (Mutaka,2020). The future of every country depends on its human resources. This is because it is a human resource that manipulates other available resources for the development of the country and its people. However, in this situation, human resources will be functionally limited, and it must be expected that poorly trained personnel will inevitably lead to poor results.

- *Attitudes Toward Mass Promotion Policies*

Attitudes toward mass promotion policies are influenced by various factors, including cultural norms, educational philosophies, and experiences. Research suggests that attitudes toward mass promotion may differ depending on the fairness and effectiveness of the policy implementation (Jones & Smith, 2016). For instance, stakeholders may be more supportive of the mass promotion policies if they are accompanied by additional support mechanisms, such as targeted interventions for struggling students in mathematics or alternative pathways to academic advancement in mathematics. Moreover, research by Johnson (2019) explored students' attitudes toward mathematics under mass promotion policies. Johnson's qualitative study revealed that students often perceive mathematics as irrelevant or unimportant when faced with automatic promotion, leading to disengagement and disinterest in the subject. In some contexts, there is a prevailing belief that retaining students

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based on academic performance is detrimental to their self-esteem and overall well-being (Brown et al., 2018). Conversely, proponents argue that promoting students regardless of their academic proficiency fails to address underlying learning gaps and hampers their long-term academic success (Garcia, 2020).

However, negative attitudes toward mass promotion policies may emerge if stakeholders perceive them as a "quick fix" solution that fails to address underlying issues related to instructional quality, student engagement, and resource allocation (Rodriguez & Smith, 2018). Moreover, concerns about the equity implications of the mass promotion policies may lead to skepticism among stakeholders who believe that these policies disproportionately impact marginalized students and perpetuate systemic inequalities in mathematics education (Choi & Kim, 2019). Teachers' attitudes toward mass promotion policies are generally negative, particularly concerning its impact on mathematics learning. Teachers report feeling pressured to promote students who are not academically ready, which they believe compromises educational quality and student preparedness (Witmer et al., 2004). Additionally, teachers express concerns about classroom management and the increased difficulty of teaching students with varying levels of understanding (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999). Students' attitudes towards mass promotion are complex and often influenced by their academic self-concept and peer relationships. While some students appreciate advancing with their peers, those who struggle academically may experience increased anxiety and frustration in higher grades, where the academic demands are greater (Roderick, 1994).

- *Implications for Mathematics Learning*

The perceptions and attitudes surrounding mass promotion policies have significant implications for students' mathematics learning outcomes. Research suggests that the implementation of mass promotion policies can affect the quality and depth of mathematical instruction, as educators may feel pressured to prioritize grade-level promotion over comprehensive content and skill development (Lee & Lee, 2021). This can result in a "teach to the test" mentality that prioritizes rote memorization and procedural fluency over conceptual understanding and critical thinking skills. Furthermore, the stigma associated with grade retention and the fear of being held back may impact students' attitudes toward mathematics and their willingness to engage in learning activities (Wang et al., 2020). Students who perceive mathematics as a barrier to academic advancement may develop negative attitudes toward the subject and experience heightened anxiety, which can further hinder their mathematical development. Additionally, several studies have investigated the impact of mass promotion policies on mathematics learning outcomes. Smith et al. (2018) conducted a longitudinal study examining the effects of mass promotion on students' mathematical achievement. They found that students who experienced mass promotion exhibited lower mathematics proficiency levels compared to their counterparts who underwent grade retention.

III. METHODOLOGY

- *Research Design*

A strategy special design to collect and analyze data based on the choice of the researchers' approach is a research design as posited by (Dawson, 2019). Creswell (2014) nails it that it is a shaping plan for collecting and analyzing data. To gain a deeper understanding of the study, the researchers used a convergent parallel design, a mixed methods design. Convergent parallel design is a mixed method design where both quantitative and qualitative data are collected independently and then analyzed separately, with the results compared or integrated during the interpretation phase. The design is useful since the researchers want to provide a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of the mass promotion policy. The process can be thought of as both qualitative and quantitative (QUAL + QUAN; (Demir & Pismek, 2018)) Convergent parallel design means that the researchers concurrently collects quantitative and qualitative data independently of each other, in the same step process, weights the methods equally, analyze the components independently, and interpret the results together (Creswell & Clark, 2017).

This design has enabled the researchers to give accurate generalization, contextualization, and credible information to the study. The researchers obtained data on the perceptions of both students and teachers about the mass promotion policy and the attitudes students exhibit toward mathematics under the mass promotion policy. This design allows the researchers to collect, analyze, and interpret both the quantitative and qualitative data concurrently (Creswell & Creswell, 2006). With this design quantitative data and qualitative data are both collected independently and analyzed separately. This design is represented diagrammatically as seen below in Figure 1.

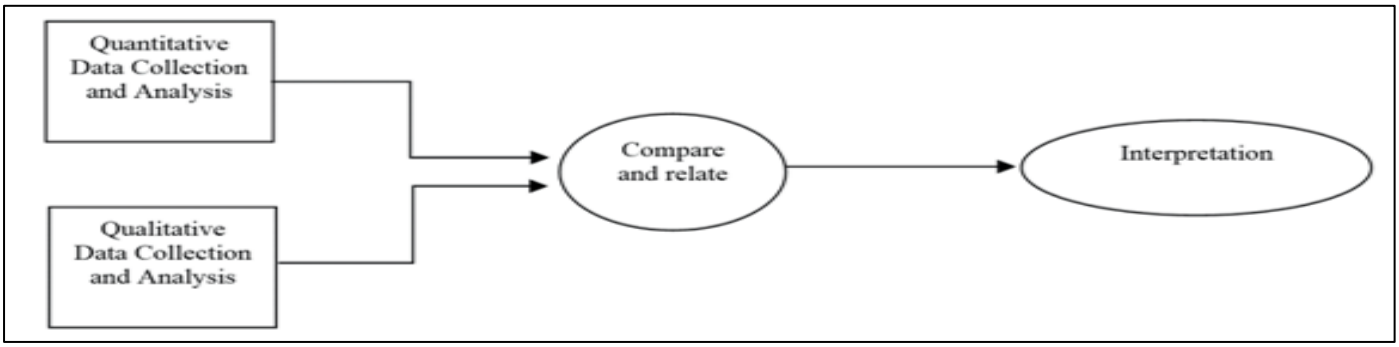

Fig 1 Adopted Research Design Layout (Demir & Pismek, 2018)

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➢ *The Population of the Study*

The population of the study was Senior High Schools within Kassena Nankana West district in the Upper East Region of Ghana. This population comprised students, teachers, and Heads of Departments in the Senior High Schools. The population that was accessible to the researchers during the study were first-year students and teachers who taught them mathematics. The breakdown is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Breakdown of Population of the Study

Schools	Students	Teachers	Total
Chiana SHS	400	35	435
Sirigu SHS	353	28	381
Mirigu SHS	340	35	375
Paga SHS	260	16	276
Nabango SHS	250	28	278
Total	1603	142	1745

The accessible population was made up of 1603 students and 142 teachers which gave a total estimated population of 1745 from the various senior high schools in the district.

➢ *Sampling Technique and Sample Size*

In this study, both the probability and non-probability sampling procedures were used in sampling the population. With the probability sampling technique, equal chances are given to the accessible population (Plonsky, 2017). Specifically, a simple random sampling technique was used in sampling both classes and respondents. The researchers used this technique to give equal opportunities or chances to all students to be included in the study. For the non-probability sampling, no equal chances are given to the accessible population. Specifically, purposive sampling criteria were used in sampling both mathematics teachers and heads of the mathematics department for the study. The purposive sampling technique was the best for the researchers at this phase because second-year mathematics teachers were on vacation and the third-year mathematics teachers were busy preparing the final-year students and both could not take part in the study.

In the quantitative phase, the researchers employed both simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Out of the five (5) Senior High Schools, a total of 325 first-year students and teachers were simply randomly selected from the accessible population of 1745. It was executed using YES or NO written on a piece of paper and put in a container for students to pick to justify their inclusion in the study. The scenario used is to ensure fairness and removal of bias and give a justifiable and valid conclusion of the sample which may reduce errors likely to emanate (Ofori & Dampson, 2012). In the qualitative phase, the researchers adopted the purposive sampling technique where all mathematics department heads were selected for the study in the five Senior High Schools.

The part of the population of interest in the study is the sample size. The population of a study is too large and needs to be reduced to a sizable one with the same characteristics so that the nature of the research will inform the researchers of the size that will be suitable for the study. This idea was postulated by Creswell (2014) and Plonsky (2017) that the sample size should be part of the population and must be accessible to the researchers with the same characteristics and traits as the population especially if the study includes a survey. In this study, Yamanes' formula was used in calculating the sample size. The accessible population stood at 1745. In using the Yamanes' formula;

Yamanes' Formula;

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where

n=sample size,

N= targeted population and

e=marginal error

N = 1745 and e = 0.05

$$n = \frac{1745}{1+1745(0.05^2)}$$

n= 325 students.

A total of 320 respondents were used in the data collection from both teachers and students. In the qualitative phase, 5 participants were selected purposively, these comprised mathematics department heads from each school. In conclusion, a total sample size of 325 was used in conducting this study.

➢ *Data Collection Instruments*

Data collection tools were a questionnaire and an interview guide. The researchers designed the questionnaire and the interview guide based on the research questions. Peer review was done before pretesting the instruments and amendments were made before main data collection.

➢ *Questionnaire*

Mcleod (2023) defines a questionnaire as a bunch of inquiries alongside possible answers for the respondents to choose from options to gather valuable data. Nardi (2018) supported this idea by stating that the questionnaire contains a wide range of questions that help researchers collect data

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from respondents throughout the study. One set of questionnaires was used in this study. Respondents to the questionnaire were students and teachers. The researchers opted for this instrument based on its numerous advantages which are identified as the instrument being cost-efficient, easy to respond to, yielding quick results, having greater coverage of the research questions, being easy to plan and execute, and sustaining anonymity of the respondent. Also, the questionnaire used in the study is a closed-ended type of question. Closed-ended questionnaires were used because they are relatively code-based and limit respondents' ability to provide answers within the confines of the researcher's intent.

The questionnaire was organized into five parts of which PART I is the biographic data of the respondents. PART II to PART III were developed using five Likert scales of which **strongly agree** (1), **agree** (2), **uncertain** (3), **disagree** (4), and **strongly disagree** (5). And a few open-ended questions for all the research questions. However, this instrument comes with some limitations as identified by Mcleod (2023). Students cannot clarify anything they do not understand in their response process. Most of the feelings and opinions cannot be provided as part of the data since they only choose from the options issued by the researchers. In solving the above limitations, the researchers integrated multiple sources of data that were used to validate or cross-verify findings, enhancing the credibility and reliability of the study.

- *Interview Guide*

An interview guide was used in the qualitative phase where the researcher met with the participants face-to-face and interacted with them to elicit the information needed. Interview as a data collection instrument as described by Manson and Morrison (2012) is a distinctive research technique. It reveals hidden information that cannot be ascertained by a questionnaire. Certain information about the perceptions and attitudes exhibited under the mass promotion in our educational system can be obtained from the feelings, likes, and dislikes of the department heads. Given these, the researchers used the interview guide for heads of departments to answer based on their thoughts and the practice in their schools. The responses from the interview enabled the researchers to give a vivid explanation of the perceptions and attitudes students exhibit under the mass promotion in the learning of mathematics at the senior high level. For the researchers to assure participants of their anonymity, codes were used to represent participants' identities and their schools. The codes were P1, P2, P3 P4, and P5 which are the various schools and individual identities.

This research instrument was suitable for data collection based on the following advantages outlined: It helps the researchers to collect complete information with greater understanding. The interview also helped the researchers to observe feelings, gestures, and expressions made by participants. It is also more personal, as compared to questionnaires, allowing higher response rates. The researchers also controlled the flow of questions. Even though the instrument has gained several successes for its usage in data collection, it still has the following shortcomings. The skills of the interviewer are likely to affect the responses from the participants. The immediate atmosphere where the interview has taken place either a conducive or a tense environment is also likely to affect the results. Some participants may also look at the appearance of the interviewer and alter their responses. Shohel et al (2015) also itemized the following as challenges in using interviews as a research instrument: assume that participants know the answer; to overcome the challenges proper wording should be given to avoid ambiguity. The other challenge was the physical appearance of the interviewer also gave participants certain impressions in their minds; to address that challenge the interviewer should act professionally.

Generally, the above challenges were addressed by interviewing participants in a serene environment to prevent uninterrupted circumstances for both the interviewers and interviewees. Precise and simple straightforward questions were used to prevent ambiguity among participants. In the case of tension, the interviewers created a cordial relationship with the participants and explained to the participants that their anonymity would be upheld and that whatever they say is confidential, and should feel free to answer the questions the way they perceived them.

- *Testing for Reliability and Validity of Data Collection Instruments*

Silverman (2015) holds the view that the degree to which studies produce the same results when repeated over and even if by different researchers is always reliable. The main idea of reliability is reproducibility under various conditions (Kusi, 2012). The instruments for the data collection were pretested at Awe Senior High School in Kassena-Nankana Municipality. The quantitative sample for the pretesting of the instrument was seventy-five (75) respondents which consisted of forty-five (45) students and twenty mathematics teachers. One hour thirty minutes (1hr 30mins) was spent on collecting the quantitative data. On the qualitative aspect, three mathematics teachers including their HOD were interviewed. The necessity of pretesting the instrument was to check for consistency, accuracy, and applicability of the instrument. With the qualitative aspect, the researchers granted interviews at the schools of the participants. The interview session lasted for 30-45 minutes. The average duration for each participant in the interview was 35 minutes. The interviews were guided by research questions. Before conducting the interview, the researchers obtained consent from the participants and explained to the participants the nature and purpose of the study, the types of participants, the methods of collecting data, and how they would be kept private and confidential. Testing for reliability and validity was crucial to ensure that data collection instruments were accurate and trustworthy.

The reliability and validity of the instruments were considered a factual assessment of what was being measured as supported by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2011). This was done as expert knowledge and suggestions were sought on the instruments, and the feedback was partially modified to fit the contents of this study. The validity of the instruments was ascertained by supervisor review and other experts from

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CKT-UTAS. The instruments were satisfied for collecting data for the study by the supervisor and the experts from CKT-UTAS. The questionnaire was administered and then collated for similarity checking of the instrument for consistency, accuracy, and applicability of the instrument. The Cronbach's alpha value was used to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The following alpha values were recorded in pretesting of the questionnaires in each of its parts: **Part II** 0.89 and **Part III** 0.86. However, the overall alpha value of the two parts is 0.8750. This was done by summing up each part's alpha value and then taking the average of the total sum. An alpha value of 0.8750 showed the instrument was reliable and proven worth for the study. The researchers addressed reliability and validity by the confidence that the data collection instruments produced consistent and accurate results, thereby strengthening the overall quality of the study.

IV. RESULTS OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

In answer to the research question one which aimed at investigating the perceptions of students and teachers of the mass promotion policy relative to students learning in mathematics in the Kassena-Nankana West District in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The questionnaire data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as the mean and standard deviations.

Table 1 captures the responses as can be seen below

Table 2 Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of the Mass Promotion Policy toward Teaching and Learning Mathematic

	Student			Teacher		
	N	**M**	**SD**	**N**	**M**	**SD**
Mass promotion makes students not serious about learning mathematics	300	2.21	0.3	20	1.01	0.04
Students who do not pass mathematics should not be promoted to the next grade	300	2.17	0.42	20	2.08	0.35
Students who are promoted to the next grade without passing in mathematics cannot improve their mathematics learning	300	2.04	0.86	20	3.47	0.39
Mass promotion does not encourage remedial classes for students who do not do well in mathematics	300	2.33	0.69	20	2.11	0.83
Students who fail in mathematics but are promoted to the next grade always waste their time in school	300	2.34	0.57	20	3.06	0.1
Mass promotion does not encourage students to learn mathematics effectively	300	2.28	0.9	20	2.07	0.4

Source: Field data, (2023)

From Table 2, both students and teachers expressed that mass promotion does not make students serious about learning mathematics. That was deduced by the analyses that were made in their responses with (M =2.21 SD=0.30, M=1.01 SD=0.04) respectively. Both have the same sentiments but the teachers were very strong with the perception that mass promotion does not make students serious about learning mathematics. Their standard deviations were less than 1 showing a homogeneity of responses since they clustered around the means. Another unarguable perception by both respondents was the policy does not encourage students to learn mathematics effectively. This point was unabated because both teachers and students saw that the policy does not ensure quality in learning mathematics and their responses confirmed with a (M =2.28 SD=0.90, M=2.07 SD=0.40) in both categories. A mean of less than 2.5 indicates that respondents have agreed with the statement that mass promotion does encourage effective learning of mathematics. The standard deviations showed homogeneity in responses in both cases as they hovered around the means.

Students and teachers also perceived that the mass promotion policy is not the best policy for learning mathematics in its current form. This point was supported by the means and variability of response obtained in the statements that students who fail in mathematics should not be promoted to the next class which was seen as such in both types of responses with a (M=2.17 SD= 0.42, M=2.08 SD=0.352) in each case. The mean of 2 showed that they both agreed and were subjected to the statement that students who fail in mathematics should not be promoted with a homogeneity of standard deviations less than 1. However, students have the opinion that those who fail in mathematics yet were given promotions waste their time in schooling with a response of (M=2.34 SD=0.57). Under this point, the teachers have a different view where they were not decisive on either side but chose to be uncertain of its impact on students learning in mathematics with a (M=3.06 SD=0.10). Students did agree with the statement but the teachers were uncertain with their responses as indicated by their means yet their standard deviations in both cases clustered around their means. In conclusion, perceptions regarding the general mass promotion policy, both students and teachers are of the view that it hurts the learning of mathematics and must be given a quicker review to aid effective learning of mathematics in the classroom. These deductions were made possible due to the overall responses of means and standard deviations obtained from the analysis of both types of respondents.

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Table 3 Students and Teachers views on the Mass Promotion Policy

	Frequency	Percent
It makes students not take their studies seriously	283	88.4
Non-respondents	37	11.6
	320	100.0

Two hundred and eighty-three (283) representing 88.4% of the respondents expressed their views that most students do not take their studies seriously due to the mass promotion policy from Table 3. Only 11.6% representing 37 respondents were not able to give their opinion on their perceptions.

➢ *Research Question Two*

In answer to research question two (2), statements from **Part III** of the questionnaire were used to elicit responses to address the research question. Table 4 captures the responses as can be seen below

Table 4 Students' Attitudes toward Learning Mathematics under the Mass Promotion Policy

	Student			Teacher		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Mass promotion instills laziness in students toward learning mathematics	300	2.38	0.97	20	2.12	0.85
Some students skip mathematics classes because there is no repetition	300	2.27	0.78	20	2.08	0.54
Most students do not pay attention in class during mathematics lessons because of mass promotion	300	2.36	0.81	20	2.67	0.92
Most students do not do mathematics exercises and assignments because of mass promotion	300	2.44	0.83	20	2.15	0.25
Students do not take mathematics examinations with all seriousness because it does not determine their movement to the next grade	300	2.29	0.77	20	1.07	0.09

Source: Field data, (2023)

Table 4 indicates that students do not take examinations with seriousness because it does not determine their enrollment in the next class. Teachers are of a highly strong view that students exhibit such attitude towards examinations because most students don't even write the examination nor talk of seriousness. The teachers responded to that attitude with a (M=1.07 SD =0.09) which shows a very noticeable attitude exhibited by students. The students also held the same view that most students exhibit that attitude toward learning mathematics due to the mass promotion policy with a (M=2.29 SD=0.77). The standard deviations of less than 1 showed homogeneous responses by teachers and students as their responses hovered around the means with the view that students' low performance in mathematics is a result of unseriousness towards examinations because of the notion that they can be promoted to the next class irrespective of what they got in the examinations.

It was also pointed out from the responses of both students and teachers that mass promotions inculcate laziness into students relative to the learning of mathematics with a (M = 2.38 SD = 0.97, M = 2.12 SD = 0.85). The means showed unarguable attitude from both perspectives of respondents and the standard deviations of less than 1 indicates the responses are evenly spread around the means showing a homogeneity of views on the attitude shown. Table 4 has identified students' laziness, skipping classes, inattentiveness, and not doing assignments and exercises were the attitudes students exhibit while learning mathematics in the classroom. Both students and teachers could pinpoint the above attitudes harmoniously as glaring attitudes shown in the classroom toward learning mathematics.

➢ *Students' Attitudes towards Mathematics Learning*

Table 5 Students' Attitudes towards Mathematics Learning under the Mass Promotion Policy

	Frequency	Percent
Showing no interest in Mathematics lessons	148	46.3
Reluctant to participate in solving questions	172	53.7
Total	320	100.0

Source: Field data, Samuel (2023)

Students reluctant to attend lessons, and do exercises and assignments constituted 53.8% of the respondents' responses while 46.3% also suggested that students' absenteeism, skipping of lessons, and inattentiveness were the result of no interest in learning mathematics under the mass promotion policy.

V. RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

➢ *Research Question One*

In response to the research question one of students' and teachers' perceptions of the mass promotion of students relative to the learning of mathematics at the Senior High School, participants' responses were analysed thematically. Most of the participants held the view that the mass promotion policy does not encourage students to learn mathematics effectively since they were aware that their

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promotion does not depend on their seriousness. Below are the responses of the participants:

P4 said, *it does not support teaching and learning and it needs to be revised if I have the authority. You see, some of the students needed to be repeated to enable them to grasp the mathematical concepts better; but, in a situation where they are pushing through learning, a gap has been created which makes learning difficult for the students because they are not mature to learn the things we are pushing them to learn.* P2 also added that *it does not encourage students to do their best because they know that their promotion is not dependent on their performance. Why will they work hard for what? They rather enjoy being in their comfort zones.*

P1 also expressed the same sentiments that "*it has made teaching and learning mathematics very difficult because those who are not at a particular grade are pushed there and their understanding of things is very low. Those who are also qualified for the grade have a high understanding of mathematics concepts which puts the teacher at the center of not knowing where to concentrate. This is because if you prepare for an hour-long lesson, the kind of students in that class will not permit you to use that hour because of unnecessary wasting of time on students who are not supposed to be there if not for the mass promotion policy. You, most of the time, you teach and no one is there to ask you a question or challenge you to know whether you are teaching or not, they are silent and sitting quietly*."

P3 did agree with the views of the other participants but added that not only in mathematics but also in all other areas in the teaching and learning of other subjects. He supports his view by saying that "*if students fail and are made to repeat the course before they are allowed to be promoted, it will motivate the students and eliminate the laziness component in them to learn because if they know without passing, they won't be promoted, they will put up their best to be able to learn mathematics very well"*. P5 did not also have a contrary view but further added that "because of the mass promotion policy *majority of the students do not attend mathematics lessons so what will they write finally when it comes to WASSCE? I think garbage in garbage out",* he said. The majority then held the view that mass promotion is a disincentive to teaching and learning mathematics and the development of a competitive spirit. It also reduces the quality of mathematics performances and creates all forms of indiscipline in Senior High Schools.

- *Research Question Two (2)*

Generally, the participants identified students' absenteeism, disrespect for authorities, inattentiveness, refusal to perform academic tasks, and skipping classes as the attitudes shown by students under the mass promotion policy. The thematic analysis below was made on the interview conducted based on research question two (2). The following were the comments of the participants.

P1 said that "*the mass promotion policy promotes gross disrespect because students' awareness of their promotion is not dependent on their mathematics performance, making them do whatever they want".* He added that *"others don't come to class and lack seriousness towards learning mathematics, they have no time for revision and most of the times absent from classes, and even some students don't do exercises and assignments. What will the mere teacher do? Nothing else can the teacher do".* P2 further added that

"*Students do not complete their exercises and those who even complete them feel reluctant to do them well and they are not bothered. Others are absent from classes and those who are in class get themselves engaged in other activities aside from paying attention to the teaching and learning of mathematics because students think it is their right to be promoted."*

P3 concluded with the view that "*Some students do not sit in mathematics class, and have indiscipline behaviors such as sleeping during lessons, not paying attention in class, and skipping mathematics lessons with the excuse that they are going to the bush to free themselves"*. Laziness, refusal to learn when in class, absenteeism and not being serious about learning, rude behaviors toward mathematics teachers, disrespect and not having an interest in learning mathematics were the other attitudes mentioned by P4 and P5 that hurt teaching and learning of mathematics under the mass promotion policy. From the analyses made, the majority were of the view that students' refusal to do class tasks, skipping classes, inattentiveness, disrespecting teachers, and students' absenteeism were the unnoticeable attitudes students exhibit toward teaching and learning mathematics under the mass promotion policy.

VI. DISCUSSION

- *Research Question One*

Research question one was to assess the perceptions of students and teachers concerning the mass promotion policy on students' mathematics learning. Analysis from Table 2 indicated that mass promotion makes students not serious about learning mathematics. The teachers' responses recorded a (M=1.01 SD =0.04) indicating strong agreement in their responses. The SD of 0.04 shows that their responses were clustered around the mean and not widely spread off. That view was also posited in the student's responses with a mean of 2.21 and an SD of 0.30. The standard deviations of both types of responses were homogenous since they hovered around the means. They both perceived most students lost seriousness toward learning mathematics. Table 3 also indicates about 88.4% of students lack seriousness toward learning mathematics. P5 added that "*most students do not even attend classes*." P5 further added that "*students prefer to sit and chat with peers to attend lessons*." Lack of seriousness on the part of students in learning their books as indicated by P1. From the analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data, similar views were expressed that students lack seriousness toward learning mathematics. P2 said *the policy does not encourage students to put out their best therefore a criterion should be used to disaggregate performing and non-performing students.*

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Another theme that got the attention of the respondents and participants was students who fail in mathematics should not be promoted to the next class. Analysis from Table 2 indicated that a unanimous agreement decision was taken from both students and teachers that students who fail in mathematics should not be given promotion with a (M=2.17 SD=0.42, M=2.08 SD=0.35) respectively. The mean of 2.17 indicates students held the view that students who fail should not be promoted with all other students' responses revolving around the mean with a mere distribution of 0.42. The teachers' mean of 2.08 also showed an agreement with the statement with a standard deviation of 0.35 which clustered around the mean. P3 supported that idea by *saying, "it will motivate students to learn hard since they want to be promoted"*. P4 added that *those students should be repeated to enable them to grasp the mathematical concepts well.* When students are pushed through, a learning gap has been created that makes students find it difficult to understand mathematical concepts in the classroom. P1 added that *those students are not prepared to be promoted but so far, we forcefully promoted them which makes the teacher uncertain about how to teach students in their new class.* Mutaka (2020) posited that we are driven square nails into a round hole. Students who were not supposed to be learning certain concepts are placed before those concepts to learn them by all means. From the above analyses, it was made clear that similar views were expressed both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Table 2 analysis also indicated that students' responses to the statement that students who fail in mathematics but are promoted to the next class always waste their time in school with a (M=2.34 SD=0.57). The mean of 2.34 showed an agreement to the statement and the standard deviation of 0.57 indicated that all other responses were clustered around the mean. Their point of view was refuted by teachers with a (M=3.06 SD= 0.10) because they were not satisfied with whether those students waste their time in school or not. P1 supported the assertion that *students' and teachers' time is wasted when undeserving students are given a promotion to new classes*. Different views were expressed during the quantitative phase. Still, in the qualitative phase unanimous and unabated views were expressed on the statement students waste their time in schooling when given promotion yet fail in mathematics. Nevertheless, in the varied views expressed above, there was a unanimous view that mass promotion does not encourage effective teaching and learning of mathematics with the means and standard deviations indicated in Table 2. P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 have all expressed the same thought that mass promotion does not encourage students to give their best toward learning mathematics. Gaytos et al. (2019) study indicated that about 91% of mass promotion affects students learning negatively.

- *Research Question Two*

Research question two (2) was to identify the attitudes students exhibit toward learning mathematics under the mass promotion policy. Analysis from Table 4 indicated a response from both students and teachers a (M=2.44 SD= 0.83, M=2.15 SD=0.25) that most students do not do their assignments and exercises. The means of 2.44 and 2.15 posited that both students and teachers agreed to the fact the statement was true. The SDs of 0.83 and 0.25 were also less than 1 indicating all responses were not widely scattered. The responses show the situation is seen at all the senior high schools within the Kassena-Nankana West district. P1 and P2 also indicated majority of students do not do their exercises and assignments.

Analysis from Table 4 indicated a lot of students developed an attitude of laziness due to mass promotion. Students and teachers expressed those views with a (M=2.38 SD=0.97, M=2.12 SD=0.85) respectively. Both students and teachers expressed similar views of responses since their means were almost the same and standard deviations hovering around their means. P4 and P5 pointed out that most students feel reluctant to revise their mathematics materials due to laziness. Table 5 also indicates that 53.7% of students feel reluctant to solve trial questions given by mathematics teachers. 46.3% of respondents also indicated that students do not show interest in learning mathematics. When students intentionally refused to revise their learning materials and preferred to have a lot of chats with their peers during instructional periods due to laziness and lack of interest in learning because their promotion was not dependent on what they produced during assessment. P3 added that *most students do not sit in mathematics class, sleep during lessons, do not pay attention in class, and skip mathematics lessons with the excuse that they are going to the bush to free themselves.* P2 said, *it is an attribute of gross disrespect towards mathematics teachers and does not motivate mathematics teachers to put up their best*. Table 4 indicated the expression of related responses from both students and teachers such that those attitudes were not rare in their senior high schools

However, Mazana et al. (2019) studies revealed that students had positive attitudes toward learning mathematics from the lower level but diminished as they rose to higher education. The researchers looked at their findings and related to students learning mathematics under the mass promotion policy and observed a varied relation between the two. The studies signified that skipping classes, refusing to perform class tasks, absenteeism, sleeping during instructional, inattentiveness, and gross disrespect for mathematics were some of the attitudes exhibited by students under the mass promotion policy.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The mass promotion policy has a telling effect on students' performance in mathematics at the senior high school level. Students' lack of seriousness toward learning mathematics and the creation of learning gaps and inefficient acquisition of mathematical skills among others, are the perceptions of the internal stakeholders of the schools towards the policy. Additionally, the negativity of the policy includes students attentiveness in class, refusal to do class tasks, absenteeism, skipping classes, and disrespect. Therefore, this study recommends that policy makers in the field of education in the country should have a second look at the policy so as to make it more acceptable to all relevant stakeholders in that regard. Also, the laydown discipline

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measures should be strictly followed to ensure students attend classes, be attentive in class, and submit all class tasks given to them. Failure to obey these disciplines, students should be punished for such offenses

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