

LEADERSHIP ROLES OF HEADTEACHERS IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN GHANA: “DIRECTING” AND “CONTROLLING” VIEWPOINT

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the leadership roles of headteachers in SHS in Ghana. The study specifically set out to explore the directing and controlling function of headteachers and as find out whether gender differences exist in the directing and controlling function of headteachers in SHS. A cross-sectional survey was employed in the study. Using a multi-stage sampling technique, 577 and 249 teachers in urban and rural schools respectively were involved in the study. A questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale was administered to the respondents, taking into consideration ethical issues as well as validity and reliability issues. The study revealed that headteachers in SHS, in general, were rated high on the directing and controlling function. Independent t-test analysis discovered significant differences in the directing function, $t(824)=33.7$, $p<.001$, and controlling, $t(824)=29.63$, $p<.001$, of headteachers in urban and rural SHS in Ghana. The study recommends that headteachers, especially those in rural areas, should be given training intermittently through workshops and seminars. Again, the Ghana Education Service should do well to support headteachers in the rural SHS in terms of finances and also provide much infrastructure.

Keywords: Leadership, Directing, Controlling, Urban, Rural, Headship

INTRODUCTION

Public schools, especially Second High Schools (SHS) in Ghana are expected to prepare students academically so that they can compete on a global level as well as be held accountable for the huge investments made by both parents and the government (Ankoma-sey, 2014). In order to achieve this objective, heads of SHS are appointed to perform certain leadership roles which are intended to oversee the day to day running of the schools. Headteachers of schools play a central role in the success of the school. Headship in the Ghanaian educational system is a well-established position. The Heads are the chief executives who provide administrative leadership by co-ordinating both curricular, and co-curricular programmes, and also responsible for the general administration of the school. It is in this context that Gamage (2005) argues that it is necessary for them to understand where they stand along the leadership continuum in leading, and managing schools toward improving students' achievement. Towards this end, Gamage explains that heads of schools need to have a clear understanding of the major dimensions of their position. It has been suggested by Chitiavi (2002) that effective heads develop school climates and cultures that help to motivate both students and teachers leading to the creation of better teaching and learning environments, which are more conducive to higher levels of student achievements. Besides, in most school systems, school heads are required by the systemic authorities to improve student learning and are held accountable for it by building commitments in developing a shared vision for motivating and energising the teachers and students (Mulford, 2003; Gamage, 2005; Ross & Gray, 2006).

A number of studies have underscored the relationship existing between leadership roles of school heads, and teaching and learning in schools (e.g., Ankoma-Sey, Dawson-Brew & Ahiatrogah, 2012; Ankoma-Sey & Maina, 2016; Fabunmi, Brai-Abu & Adeniji, 2007; Waters, Marzona, & McNulty, 2004; Quinn, 2002). Quinn (2002), for instance, examined impacts of the leadership of principals on instructional practices in schools (Elementary, Middle and High Schools) in the United States. Quinn's finding indicated that headteachers' leadership is crucial in creating a school that value and continually strives to achieve exceptional education for students. Waters, Marzona and McNulty (2004), in line with Quinn's findings, also indicated that headteachers' effective leadership can significantly boost student's achievement. The headteacher is expected to communicate expectations for the continual improvement of the instructional programme, engage in staff development activities and model commitment to school goals. It may be argued that a headteacher who do not engage in actions consistent with instructional leadership, has a wrong perspective of the school's goals (Ankoma-sey, 2014). Effective leadership is critical in increasing productivity and in transforming unpromising circumstances in a school. This is evident in research findings as reported by Barker (2001), which portrays the headteacher as an individual capable of creating the climate needed to arouse the potential motivation of staff and students. The study indicates that an effective headteacher can turn around a school that lacks direction and purpose to a happy, goal-oriented and productive school.

The directing and controlling functions is a significant aspect of headteachers role in the administration and management of schools. Fayol (as cited Ankoma-Sey, 2014) referred to directing as a "command". Thus, in order to direct human effort towards set objectives, administrators should think in terms of issues related to orientation, communication, motivation and leadership. In directing the affairs of particular organisation leaders gain control over such activities (Frase, 2005). From Fasasi's (2011) view, controlling is a process of ensuring that educational activities are conducted as already planned. Fasasi further stated that controlling involves regulating, curbing and checking the excesses of members of the organisation, so that things are done in accordance with established rules. It is, therefore, important to emphasise that the directing role of headteachers in SHS cannot be divorced from the controlling role. Studies also have provided evidence on the influence of the directing and controlling functions of headteachers on instruction and academic performance of students (e.g., Ankoma-Sey et al., 2012; Fabunmi et al., 2007; Linstead, Fulop & Lilley, 2004; Waters, Marzona, & McNulty, 2004). Ankoma-Sey et al. (2012), in their study, found that headteachers in Ghanaian SHS rated the directing function as one of the roles which significantly predict the academic performance of students. In a study by Fabunmi et al. (2007) both directing and controlling functions of headteachers were found as a significant determinant of academic performance of students in secondary schools in Oyo State, Nigeria. These studies, however, failed to explore the directing and control roles of headteachers, even though these functions were found to be significantly related to academic performance. It is quintessential to explore the directing and control function of headteachers in SHS in Ghana.

The disparities in academic performance of students in rural and urban schools have been established by several studies (Oduro, 2003; Jencks & Mayer, 1990). From Oduro's perspective, rural schools perform poorly because headteachers in rural schools are left unsupported. It is also likely that since headteachers in the rural schools are neglected it would become challenging in discharging their leadership roles. Findings of other surveys suggest there are different challenges faced by principals in different types of schools, citing, as an example, that different skills are required to lead a small, suburban or rural primary school from those needed to lead a large urban primary school (Davis, Hammaond-Darling,

La Pointe & Meyerson, 2005). In particular, the same demands of legislation and central educational policy whilst having fewer resources than their colleagues in larger schools, and thus fewer funds for development (Pont, Nusche & Moorman, 2008). This is also confirmed for the local context.

According to Tsiakkiras and Pashiardis (2002), small rural primary schools in Cyprus have small budgets and limited resources. Also, in some rural schools, some principals spend more of their time either teaching in classes or replacing colleagues than principals in other types of schools. This can overload principals and reduce the effectiveness of their school units (Pont et al, 2008). Finally, a possible explanation for this difference lies in the fact that in small rural communities, school leaders are ranked among the most important community leaders. This place more pressure on school leaders to respond to complex roles and responsibilities by undertaking major initiatives in their communities (Hargreaves, Halaz, & Pont, 2008). Based on the different perspectives given by the various authors on the disparities in the workload of headteachers in the rural and urban schools, this study seeks to find out whether difference exists in the directing and controlling role of headteachers in Ghana.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of directing role of headteachers in SHS in Ghana?
2. What is the level of controlling role of headteachers in SHS in Ghana?

Hypotheses

H₁1: There is a statistically significant difference in the directing role of headteachers in the rural and urban SHS in Ghana.

H₁2: There is a statistically significant difference in the controlling role of headteachers in the rural and urban SHS in Ghana.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a survey using the cross-sectional approach in the collection of data. Using the cross-sectional survey is appropriate in measuring current practices of headteachers in directing and controlling activities of their schools (Creswell, 2012). According to the Ministry of Education (2014), there are currently 519 SHS in Ghana. Through the multi-stage sampling technique, 150 SHS were selected for the study. All teachers within the 150 schools were involved in the study. The total number of teachers in the selected SHS was 931. Out of this number, a total of 826 were completely responded to and returned the instrument. About 577 (69.9%) respondents were sampled from teachers in the urban schools whereas 249 (30.1%) respondents were teachers in rural schools. The questionnaire used measured the construct of interest on a five-point Likert scale to examine the extent to which the respondents agreed or disagreed to a number of statements. The items on “directing” had a Cronbach alpha reliability estimate of .78 (10 items) whereas items on “controlling” had reliability estimate of .79 (10 items). Means and standard deviations were used to analyse data collected on the research questions. Both hypotheses one and two were tested using independent t-test analysis with a confidence level of 95%.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the level of directing role of headteachers in SHS in Ghana?

The mean values of the individual items were compared with 3, such that items with mean values less than 3 showed disagreement to the statement whereas items with mean values

greater than 3 indicated stronger agreement to the statement. The result, as shown in Table 1, revealed higher ratings of the directing role of headteachers in Ghana. This is evident as the mean scores on the item ranged from 3.75-4.41. The majority of respondents, for example, reported that their headteacher encourages staff to make use of professional programmes such as in-service training, workshops, seminars, conferences (M=4.41, SD=.81). The respondents further stated that their head uses the most effective means of communication regularly and fully with staff and unit heads (M=4.26, SD=.80). It was also reported that headteachers admonish staff who fall foul to professional ethics (M=4.00, SD=.86).

Table 1. Level of directing role of headteachers in SHS in Ghana

Statements	Mean	SD
My head encourages staff to make use of professional programmes such as in-service training, workshops, seminars, conferences	4.41	.81
My head holds regular formal and informal discussions with staff	4.40	.78
My head ensures that all staff discharges their professional responsibilities	4.32	.81
My head uses the most effective means of communication regularly and fully with staff and unit heads	4.26	.80
My head directs the implementation of educational activities	4.25	6.3
My head communicates important information on new educational policies to staff and unit heads	4.17	.804
My head gives direction to the use and supply of resources to all units	4.11	.78
My head admonishes staff who fall foul to professional ethics	4.00	.86
My head holds regular workshops on new educational policies	3.85	1.01
My head directs activities on postings and transfers of staff	3.75	.98

Research Question 2: What is the level of controlling role of headteachers in SHS in Ghana?

In this section, the mean values of the items were compared with the benchmark which is 3. Mean scores greater than 3 indicates that majority of the respondents agreed to the statement and vice versa. The mean score ranged from 4.17-3.97 which shows that the level of controlling role of headteachers in SHSH in Ghana was high. For instance, it was reported that headteachers control duties delegated to ensure checks and balances (M=4.16, SD=.77). It was evident that headteachers ensure clear and achievable appraisal system to determine quality performance (M=4.13, SD=.78). The majority of the respondents indicated that their headteachers ensure effective controls to meet the demands of change in policies (M=4.04, SD=.70).

Table 2. The level of controlling role of headteachers in SHS in Ghana

Statement	Mean	SD
My head controls actions to achieve set goals	4.17	.67
My head controls duties delegated to ensure checks and balances	4.16	.77
My head controls all activities with fairness and firmness	4.16	.87
My head ensures a clear and achievable appraisal system to determine the quality performance	4.13	.78
My head takes action to correct deviations after comparing the actual performance with prescribed standards	4.10	.72
My head uses an effective control system to define boundaries for effective performance of staff	4.06	.79
My head controls in order to define boundaries for effective performance	4.04	.70
My head ensures effective controls to meet the demands of change in policies	4.04	.71
My head prescribes standards for effective controls	4.01	.70
My head establishes standards against results which can be measured	3.97	.76

Hypothesis Testing

H_1 1: There is a statistically significant difference in the directing role of headteachers in the rural and urban SHS in Ghana.

An independent t-test analysis was used to test whether significant differences exist in the directing role of headteachers in the rural and urban SHS in Ghana. The result revealed a statistically significant difference, $t(824)=33.7$, $p<.001$, in the directing role of headteachers in the rural and urban SHS in Ghana. Further analysis discovered that headteachers in urban schools ($M=41.41$) were rated high in terms of their “directing” function as compared to those in the urban areas ($M=29.28$).

Table 3. Independent t-test Analysis of the Differences in Directing Role of Headteachers in the Rural and Urban SHS in Ghana

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-value	p-value	Remark
Urban	577	41.41	5.13			
Rural	248	29.28	4.56	33.7	.000*	Significant

*significant at 0.05

H_1 2: There is a statistically significant difference in the controlling role of headteachers in the rural and urban SHS in Ghana.

To determine whether there is a statistically significant difference in the controlling function of headteachers in the rural and urban SHS, independent t-test analysis was conducted. It was discovered that there is a significant difference, $t(824)=29.63$, $p<.001$, in the controlling function of headteachers in the rural and urban SHS in Ghana. Headteachers in urban schools ($M=40.86$) were rated high on the controlling function than those in rural schools ($M=28.97$).

Table 3. Independent t-test Analysis of the Differences in Controlling Role of Headteachers in the Rural and Urban SHS in Ghana

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-value	p-value	Remark
Urban	577	40.86	5.40			
Rural	249	28.97	5.03	29.63	.000*	Significant

*significant at 0.05

DISCUSSION

As earlier indicated, leadership roles of headteachers generally impact on teaching and learning activities in the various educational institutions (e.g., Ankoma-Sey, Dawson-Brew & Ahiatrogah, 2012; Ankoma-Sey & Maina, 2016; Fabunmi, Brai-Abu & Adeniji, 2007; Waters, Marzona, & McNulty, 2004; Quinn, 2002). This study revealed a good trend of results where the respondents rated the directing and controlling function of headteachers in SHS in Ghana. In this sense, headteachers in SHS in Ghana effectively and consciously direct human effort towards the institutions set goals in terms of motivation, communication and orientation. It is of the essence to state that school head's leadership roles are critical in the creation of school which value and constantly strive for the attainment of educational objectives (Quinn, 2002). The result of this study by implication suggests that SHS in Ghana are more likely in achieving their institutional objectives. That is, once SHS headteachers in Ghana continue to effectively direct and control the schools' activities, teaching and learning are likely to improve day by day. But is this the case in SHS in Ghana although headteachers are on top of their leadership roles? If so, then the majority of SHS in Ghana should be seen having better academic achievement. Previous studies, however, have found the otherwise – schools in urban areas performing better than those in the rural areas (Oduro, 2003; Jencks & Mayer, 1990). Aside discrepancies in infrastructure in rural and urban schools in Ghana, Oduro (2003) highlighted that head in rural SHS were not unsupported. This, according to Oduro, contributes to the differences in the academic achievement of students in the rural and urban areas. This study also found disparities in the leadership roles (directing and controlling function) of headteachers in the rural and urban SHS in Ghana. School heads in urban SHS, rather than those in rural schools, were rated high in the performance of the “directing” and “controlling” function. This is also likely to significantly contribute to the reasons why urban schools perform better than rural schools in Ghana.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study, in effect, provides evidence of the state of leadership roles of SHS headteachers in Ghana. It is clear that SHS headteachers are rated high in “directing” and “controlling” the affairs of their schools. However, headteachers in rural schools were rated poorly in performing their leadership roles. This gives an indication that headteachers in rural SHS are faced with challenges in steering the affairs of the school. These challenges could range from unsupportiveness of teachers and other stakeholders to inadequate funding to the schools. The study recommends that headteachers, especially those in rural areas, should be given training intermittently through workshops and seminars. Again, the Ghana Education Service should do well to support headteachers in the rural SHS in terms of finances and also provide much infrastructure.

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