



Junior High School Head Teachers' Leadership Practices that Influence Teachers' Effectiveness in the Teaching and Learning Process

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Abstract

This study adopted constructivists philosophical assumptions to examine junior high school head teachers' leadership practices that influence teachers' effectiveness in the teaching and learning process in the Sagnarigu North Circuit, Tamale, Ghana. The study employed a case study design and a qualitative approach. The study's population comprised all the head teachers and teachers in the ten (10) junior high school under the Sagnarigu North Circuit. The convenience sampling technique was used to select twenty (20) teachers and ten (10) head teachers, making a sample size of thirty (30) participants. Permission to conduct the study was sought from the Municipal Education Office. Data were collected through face-to-face in-depth individual interviews using the Pen-and-Paper Personal method. The collected data were analysed using an inductive thematic analytical method. Findings were that for teachers to be effective in the teaching and learning process, school heads leadership practices should be based on high-quality of knowledge and skills in school leadership, instructional leadership practices and professional support for teachers do contribute positively to teacher effectiveness, inspirational leadership practices and heads' adoption of teacher motivational strategies do impact on teacher effectiveness, concerns for teachers' well-being and happiness as leadership practice enhances teachers' effectiveness and productivity, and the benefits of effective leadership practices include high level of teacher morale, increased teacher classroom effectiveness, improved students' academic performance, adequate teacher motivation, and increased teacher commitment to work. Recommendations made include the Ghana Education Service (GES), in collaboration with experts in Educational Leadership and management organising training workshops for school heads to enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities in appropriate leadership practices and the Municipal Director of Education to organise in-service training for all school heads on leadership practices that will include participatory leadership practices, democratic leadership practices, instructional leadership practices, and inspirational and human relations practices.

Keywords: *Effectiveness, Inspirational, Leadership, Practices, Influences*

Introduction

In recent times, leadership has received attention in both scholarly and policy circles because it has a strong impact on teachers' attitudes, effectiveness, and happiness, and because leadership practices bring about school functionality and success (Harris, Day, Hopkins, Hadfield, Hargreaves & Chapman, 2013; Sun & Leithwood, 2015; Al Khajeh, 2018; Ebrahim, 2018). The success of schools as organisations depends on the important roles leadership plays (Ramos, 2014; Ebrahim, 2018). Furthermore, a key element impacting school performance and teacher effectiveness is the leadership style of the school head (Gawaza, 2016).

Leadership is the process by which a school head influences teachers and students to achieve educational goals (Northouse, 2016). In everyday parlance, leadership refers to the act of providing instructions and guiding people to perform work. In the context of organisational management, leadership refers to the process of instructing, guiding, counselling, and motivating employees to achieve organisational objectives (Adu, Akinloye, & Olaoye, 2014). Leaders in organizations are not defined by their position, job title, traits, or behaviours, but by their influence and motivation, which impact teachers' effectiveness and overall school functioning (Northouse, 2016).

Writing about leadership practices in schools by school managers in Pakistan, Sarwar, Mumtaz, Batool and Ikram (2015) claimed that leadership practices by effective leaders in schools include providing directions, mentoring, showing the way, and motivating teachers to be effective in the teaching and learning process. When effective



leadership practices are exhibited by the head of a school, such practices lead to teacher satisfaction, teacher effectiveness, and subsequently school functionality and higher academic performance of learners (Sarwar et al., 2015; Valentine, Godkin, Fleischman & Kidwell, 2011).

In Australia, Silins and Mulford (2007) categorically listed the following leadership practices that school heads and managers should exhibit in order to increase their teachers' effectiveness in carrying out assigned duties: building and nurturing a trusted school environment, stimulating staff intellectuality, and providing individual teacher support. In Virginia, Crum and Sherman (2008) claimed that leadership practices that bring about teacher satisfaction and effectiveness are: school heads providing professional development for teachers, showing teachers the way and expressing clear objectives, supervising teachers' work, and delegating reasonably. In the Philippines, Ramos (2014) opined that quality leadership practices in schools include proper direction that give teachers the needed satisfaction to be effective in achieving desired school goals.

The quality of leadership provided by school heads remains a critical determinant of teacher effectiveness in the teaching and learning process and overall school effectiveness. Junior High School head teachers in the Sagnarigu North Circuit, Tamale, Ghana are expected to provide instructional guidance, motivate and inspire teachers, promote collaborative decision-making, and create an enabling environment that supports effective teaching and learning. Despite these expectations, concerns continue to be raised regarding variations in teachers' effectiveness in the teaching and learning process. These concerns suggest that the leadership practices adopted by some Junior High School heads may not be sufficiently fostering teacher effectiveness in the teaching and learning process and the overall professional growth in schools.

Although considerable research has examined school heads' leadership practices and teacher effectiveness in the teaching and learning process or in different contexts, there is limited empirical evidence focusing specifically on the kinds of leadership practices Junior High School head teachers adopt that influence teachers' effectiveness in the teaching and learning process in the Sagnarigu North Circuit. The absence of such empirical evidence creates a knowledge gap for educational stakeholders in designing interventions aimed at strengthening leadership practices and improving teacher effectiveness in the teaching and learning process. The objective of the study therefore was to investigate the junior high school heads' leadership practices that influence teachers' effectiveness in the teaching and learning process in the Sagnarigu North Circuit.

The study was guided by the Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT), which was brought into prominence by James MacGregor Burns in the late 1970s. In Transformational leadership, school heads connect with their teachers in ways that raise the teachers' motivation and morale (Northouse, 2016; Wanjiru, 2016). School heads who possess transformational leadership traits are said to always encourage their teachers to build good interpersonal relations, adhere to school values and beliefs, and be motivated and carry out school goals (Ebrahim, 2018).

When appropriately applied in schools by heads, transformational leadership can bring about teacher effectiveness and happiness, and can bring about their commitment to school values (Nguni, Slegers, & Denessen, 2006; Amussah, 2020). According to Bouchamma (2012), leadership practices exhibited by school heads for teacher and school effectiveness include the adoption and usage of transformational leadership theory. Transformational leaders support their teachers to be effective in the teaching and learning processes; they also support their teachers to be innovative, familiar with school environmental issues, and to be protected from any school-related issues (Berson & Avolio, 2004).

In the application of Transformational Leadership by school heads to motivate and increase the morale of both teachers and learners, Northouse (2016) states that such a school head should apply the following factors:

- Idealized influence, or charisma: School heads as transformational leaders should have that special ability and power to make teachers follow their established vision.
- Inspirational motivation: School heads as transformational leaders should have that special ability and power to use communication as a vehicle to choose appropriate words to encourage and inspire teachers.
- Intellectual stimulation: School heads as transformational leaders should have that special ability and power to stretch teachers and students to think more deeply, challenge assumptions, and innovate.

- Individualized concern: School heads as transformational leaders should have that special ability and power to show care and concern for teachers and learners.

Methodology

To construct knowledge from the experiences of the school heads and teachers in the schools on leadership practices that influence teachers' effectiveness in the teaching and learning process in the Sagnarigu North Circuit, Tamale, Ghana, the interpretivist paradigmatic position was taken (Paudel, 2024). For the study to focus on exploring and comprehending the central phenomenon, and to gather the comprehensive opinions or ideas of the school heads and teachers on the central phenomenon, a case study research design was employed along with the qualitative research approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Creswell, 2014). The study's population comprised all the junior high school head teachers and teachers in the ten (10) junior high schools under the Sagnarigu North Circuit. The convenience sampling technique was used to select twenty (20) teachers and ten (10) head teachers, making a sample size of thirty (30) participants. Permission to conduct the study was sought from the Municipal Education Office. To survey a single respondent at a time and to record each response, face-to-face in-depth individual interviews were conducted using the Pen-and-Paper Personal method to record the detailed responses (Kumar, 2019; Creswell, 2012). The collected data were analysed using an inductive thematic analytical method.

Results

The results based on the objective and questions of the study are: (i) leadership practices based on knowledge and skills, (ii) instructional leadership practices and professional development support, (iii) inspirational leadership practices and teacher motivation, (vi) leadership concerns for teachers' well-being and effectiveness, and (v) benefits of effective school leadership practices.

Discussions

Leadership Practices Based on Knowledge and Skills

The study revealed that, for teachers to be effective in the teaching and learning process, school heads' leadership practices should be based on high-quality knowledge and skills in school leadership. A head teacher asserted that: *Our leadership practices are based on the knowledge and skills of leadership we practice daily that influence teachers' effectiveness and productivity.* The study again revealed that when school head leadership practices are linked to the possession of knowledge and skills about what leadership is all about, the impact will include: increased teacher effectiveness in the classroom, excellent academic performance of students, effective school administration, and a school environment free from riots and disturbances. One of the head teachers mentioned that *the quality of a head teacher's leadership practices depends on their knowledge and skills in how to lead, which can contribute to effective school administration without disturbance from either pupils or teachers.* To confirm these findings, Silins and Mulford (2007) claimed that there is bound to be teacher effectiveness when school heads have adequate knowledge of leadership practices that include building trust and good relations with teachers and helping teachers develop intellectually.

It was also revealed that school heads whose leadership practices are based on the knowledge of democratic leadership style and practices will have the chances of working with teachers who are committed, hardworking, and effective, have high morale, and feel good all the time. A teacher's voice had it that: *Not all, but some school heads are actually putting up their best, and they are of a good quality; they use a democratic leadership style which results in high teacher morale and effectiveness.* This is why Iqbal (2010) mentioned that teacher and school effectiveness are ensured when a democratic leadership style is well understood and used appropriately by school heads. While Nsubuga (2008), Wanjiru (2016) claimed that with democratic leadership practices, teachers feel belonged as such, they feel more productive. Another voice from a school head was that: *As a head, what I can say is that knowing democratic leadership practices can contribute to teacher commitment and school effectiveness.* To confirm these findings, Lesomo (2013) claimed that democratic leadership practices give the school head the chance to use his or her abilities to enhance teachers' effectiveness in most situations.

Instructional Leadership Practices and Professional Development Support

The study also found that instructional leadership practices and professional support contributed positively to teacher effectiveness in the schools. It was revealed that school heads whose leadership style and practices are based on showing teachers how things are done, supervising, and monitoring teachers are capable of producing effective teachers for their schools. It was also found that school heads who support their teachers in the instructional process and in lesson delivery are capable of making these teachers effective in the teaching profession and in all matters of the school. A teacher asserted that: *For me, my effectiveness comes from school heads that shows teachers how effective teaching and learning should be and monitor classroom activities.* A school head claimed that *proper supervision and professional guidance to teachers are a good leadership style that ensures teachers' motivation and effectiveness.* To corroborate these findings, Sherman (2008), Ramos (2014) have mentioned that instructional leadership includes giving teachers proper direction, guiding teachers on how to teach effectively, expressing clear objectives to teachers, and supervising their work in school.

It was revealed that there are signs of improved teachers' love for the profession, increased dedication, a high level of knowledge and skills acquisition in the teaching and learning process when school heads adopt leadership practices and styles that support teachers' in-service training and professional development initiatives. A teacher asserted that: *The best leadership style or practice is the one used by school heads that adds knowledge and skills about teaching and learning to their teachers.* This is why Goldhaber (2006), Glanz, Sallis, Saelens and Frank (2007) corroborate that for teacher effectiveness and school functionality, school heads' leadership practices should include supervisory practices that are integral parts of teacher professional development initiatives, which are aimed at improving the pedagogical competence of teachers. A school head was also found stating that: *My best style of leadership is about empowering teachers and developing them professionally in educational policies and pedagogy on teaching and learning.* Sherman (2008) and Ramos (2014) have confirmed these findings by stating that, to ensure teacher effectiveness, school heads' leadership practices should support teachers' professional development in curriculum matters.

Inspirational Leadership Practice and Teacher Motivation

The next theme that emerged from the study was leadership practices that inspire and motivate teachers to be effective in carrying out their assigned teaching and learning activities. It was revealed that teachers who are effective in schools are those led by school heads who inspire and motivate them. The study revealed that through heads' inspiration, teachers learn how to teach, how to lead, are always in motivational moods to teach, and have greater chances of influencing their students' learning outcomes. A teacher stated that: *On a scale of 1-10, the head of my school is a 9 on inspiring teachers to be effective in the teaching and learning process.* To confirm these revelations, Sarwar, et. al (2015), Sarwar et al. (2015), Valentine et al. (2011) think that good leadership practices are built on teachers' motivation and job satisfaction; as such, leadership practices by effective school leaders include ensuring teacher job satisfaction and adequate motivation to be effective in the teaching and learning process. A school head mentioned that: *I always inspire the teachers to motivate them to do more and to have the dreams of also becoming a school head one day.* Another teacher highlighted that: *School heads are doing their best in inspiring and motivating teachers to be effective and efficient in making sure the students perform well academically.* According to Gawaza (2016), a good school head understands the importance of motivating teachers in achieving the set goals. Ramos (2014), Northouse (2016), Wanjiru (2016) opined that quality leadership practices include giving teachers the needed job satisfaction and connecting with them to raise their motivation and morale in achieving desired school goals.

Leadership Concerns for Teachers' Well-Being and Effectiveness

Again, the study raised concerns about teachers' well-being and effectiveness, as leadership practices used by school heads ensure teachers' effectiveness and productivity. The study revealed that a good number of the school heads have concerns for teachers' well-being and effectiveness and also practice integrity, self-awareness, courage, respect, empathy, and gratitude when dealing with their teachers. A teacher stated firmly that some of the school heads are *usually concerned about teachers' well-being and about making teachers feel a sense of belonging, which makes them effective in the teaching and learning process.* To corroborate these revelations, Nguni et al. (2006), Amussah (2020). Berson and Avolio (2004) claimed that when appropriately applied in schools by heads, transformational leadership

can bring about teacher effectiveness and happiness, can enhance teacher well-being, and can also be used to protect teachers from any school-related issues. A head teacher asserted that: *Head teachers do sometimes have empathy for teachers and sometimes serve as a source of comfort for some of them, which makes these teachers committed to teaching as expected of them.* In relation to these findings, Northouse (2016), Wanjiru (2016), and Ebrahim (2018) claimed that good leadership practices should have concern for teachers' well-being that raises the teachers' motivation, morale, and good interpersonal relations, to carry out school goals.

It was added that when school heads' administration and quality leadership practices and styles are effective, they develop concerns and positive feelings for their teachers' happiness and again support and defend their teachers against wrongful attacks from superiors or community members. When these concerns and positive feelings are discharged by the school heads, the end results include teacher effectiveness in the teaching and learning process and teacher satisfaction. What a school head said was that: *We use effective administrative skills that include supporting teachers' well-being and defending them in terms of conflict and misunderstanding with supervisors and parents.* A teacher claimed that: *I think good leadership for teacher effectiveness is feeling and being concerned for teachers' well-being and happiness, which enables them to teach effectively in class.* This is why Northouse (2016) states that a school head who wishes to increase teachers' effectiveness and productivity should be prepared to show individualized teacher concern, which includes having the specialized ability and power to show care and concern for teachers' well-being and happiness.

Benefits of Effective School Leadership Practices

Finally, the study revealed the following as the benefits when school heads use effective leadership practices. These benefits are: high levels of teacher morale, increased teacher classroom effectiveness, improved students' academic and classroom performance, adequate teacher motivation, and increased commitment to work by the teachers. A teacher responded that: *In this school, good leadership practices by the head and other teachers have made us love the work, and so motivated to teach effectively.* A head teacher also mentioned that: *These benefits are a lot, but include classroom effectiveness and positive student academic performance.* Based on the findings, Northouse (2016), Wanjiru (2016) corroborate that with effective leadership practices, school heads connect with their teachers in ways that raise the teachers' motivation and morale. While Adu et al. (2014) claim that there is bound to be school effectiveness, achievement of goals, and increased academic performance when school heads use appropriate leadership practices in schools.

It was also revealed that teacher regularity and punctuality, increased spirit of volunteerism by teachers, a level of sense of direction in the schools, sense of appreciation and readiness to do more by the teachers, working under a safe environment devoid of threats, and cordial relations among teachers and school heads were some of the benefits derived from good leadership practices by school heads. A teacher mentioned that a *school head with good leadership skills will make teachers appreciate their work as they work in a conducive working environment.* While a school head claimed: *We make our teachers committed to their duties, teach effectively, volunteer in activities, and give their best when our leadership styles are effective and democratic.* To corroborate these findings, Harris et al. (2013), Sun and Leithwood (2015), Al Khajeh (2018) and Ebrahim (2018) are of the view that effective leadership practices from school heads will surely bring about positive teacher attitude, happiness, and overall school effectiveness and success.

Conclusion

In conclusion, school heads' leadership effectiveness depends largely on their knowledge, skills, and their ability to apply appropriate leadership practices, particularly democratic and participatory leadership, to foster positive teacher attitudes and effective school management. Instructional leadership practices characterized by effective supervision, professional guidance, and continuous instructional support significantly enhance teachers' effectiveness and performance in the classroom. School heads, who inspire and motivate teachers, create a positive work environment that enhances teachers' commitment, confidence, job satisfaction and effectiveness in the teaching and learning process. School heads who demonstrate concern for teachers' well-being through empathy, integrity, respect, and



supportive leadership foster greater teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and effectiveness. Therefore, effective leadership practices by school leaders generate positive outcomes for both teachers and schools by enhancing teacher commitment, morale, motivation, punctuality, competence, instructional effectiveness and productivity, improved students' academic performance, stronger teacher-head relationship, and overall school effectiveness.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the study came out with the following recommendations. The Ghana Education Service (GES), in collaboration with experts in Educational Leadership and management at the universities and in the industrial sectors, should put more emphasis in organising more training workshops for school heads to enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities in appropriate leadership practices. In this training, the inclusion of aspects of democratic and participatory leadership characteristics would be paramount. The Municipal Director of Education should intensify the relationship with Circuit managers in organising in-service training for all school heads, which is geared towards empowering each school head on participatory leadership practices that are characterised by enhanced teacher effectiveness, commitment, improved students' academic performance, and overall school functionality.

Also, the GES should establish more professional relationship with experts in teacher supervision in organise more seminars for school heads as instructional leaders, where these school heads are again educated and trained on effective instructional supervision in schools that should include various professional guidance and instructional supports that teachers need from their school heads to be effective. Furthermore, Municipal managers in meetings with school heads as been done, should remind them to include in their leadership practices aspect of professional development support to teachers, implementation of mentorship activities in their schools and the offer of pedagogical development and support to all teachers in their schools.

It is also recommended that school managers should periodically be assisted by experts in employee motivation to be impacted and developed on strategies to keep teachers highly inspired and motivated, on how to enhance teachers' commitment, confidence and job satisfaction aimed at increasing their effectiveness in the teaching and learning process. The GES should intensify their working relationship with educational psychologists to support all school heads with leadership practices and strategies that can be employed to demonstrate a high level of support and concern for their teachers' well-being and happiness.

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