ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS PERFORMANCE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF HEADS OF ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN GHANA

Vera Rosemary Ankoma-Sey

College of Distance Education,
University of Cape Coast,
Cape Coast, Ghana

Abstract:

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 stipulates Quality Education for all. The effectiveness of heads of departments (HoDs) contributes to achieving this goal. There is, however, a growing concern in recent times by stakeholders on the effectiveness of HoDs in discharging their duties. This study examined the administrative tasks performance of HoDs in Senior High Schools (SHSs) in Ghana. The study further examined the extent of professional development needs of HoDs in SHSs. A cross-sectional survey with a quantitative approach was employed. Through a multi-stage sampling technique, questionnaire was administered to 310 HoDs and 620 teachers in 155 selected Public SHSs. The study discovered that planning, organising, and controlling functions of HoDs were highly rated. However, supervision, evaluation, and directing functions of HoDs were rated low. It was further revealed that although HoDs were given professional training before they assume office as heads, they are rarely given any training after assuming office. The HoDs reported they greatly need professional development on management and communication skills, as well as training on assessment and evaluation competencies. HoDs need training on supervision, evaluation and directing function to be effective in the management of their respective departments. Unless frequent training programmes are organised for HoDs, the quality of education as well as the achievement of SDG 4 in Ghana would be jeopardised. It was suggested that together with HoDs, Ghana Education Service (GES) should regularly organise professional training programmes through workshops and seminars for HoDs in line with their duties as heads.

Keywords: administrative tasks performance; heads of department; professional development; sustainable development goals

---

1. Introduction

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Four (4) completely captures the "Education 2030" agenda. The goal, together with its corresponding targets, ensures inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UN ESCAP] (2015) reiterated that governments across the world, in the adaptation of the 2030 sustainable development agenda, should aim at:

> "*Providing equitable and inclusive quality education at all levels – early childhood, primary, secondary, tertiary, technical and vocational training. All manner of individuals, irrespective of age, race, ethnicity, sex, disabled persons, migrants, indigenous peoples, youth and children, especially those in vulnerable conditions, should have access to life-long learning opportunities that help them attain the skills and knowledge required to exploit opportunities and to participate fully in society. Children and youth should be provided with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their capabilities and rights, helping our nations to reap the demographic dividend, including through safe schools and cohesive communities and families*" (p.1)

It is important to state that school leadership plays a significant role in the realisation of SDG4. Effective leadership in schools is quintessential to the improvement of the equity and efficiency of schooling (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). School leaders play a vital role in providing conditions for effective teaching and learning. No educational institution sustainably improves the quality of education in the absence of effective school leadership (Vvob, 2018).

Touching on the 2030 SDG Agenda achievements, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations UNESCO (2016) highlighted that education is the major key to the achievement of the 2030 development agenda. This suggests that efforts must be directed towards ensuring that the SDGs are provided with operational tools to support implementation success. At the 2016 World teacher's Day, the head of UNESCO in her speech stressed that the road map for the new agenda (The Education 2030 Framework for Action) should highpoint the fact that teachers are central for quality and equitable education and, as such, they must be *sufficiently trained, recruited and remunerated, supported and motivated within well-resourced, efficient and effectively governed systems*" (p. 1).

Mirunde (2015) also alluded to the fact that school leadership has been found as a crucial factor for the success of any school and to the achievement of SDG 4. Aside heads of schools, Heads of Departments (HODs) play a significant role in the overall performance of the school by providing chances for teachers to be creative in their practice in order to initiate change in both internal and external school environment (Gay, 2010). Therefore, improving the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning in schools also demands quality management and leadership by HoDs. In the

Senior High School (SHS) setting, HoDs act like the middle manager because of the hierarchical nature of the school system. Thus, they act as communicators between the department and the higher administrative structure (Nguyen, 2013).

From Hayat, Abdollahi, Zainabadi, and Arasteh's (2015) view, HoDs need to have some pre-requisite skills and competencies (like work routine organisation, leadership skills, and managing crisis) before occupying the position. For a person to be appointed as HoD, the individual should partly have knowledge in the subject area and also administrative competencies which are needed to enhance the effectiveness of the department (Hussin & Al Abri, 2015).

Notwithstanding the competences needed by HODs to be fully functional, studies have revealed that appointment of people into this position in Ghana does not take into consideration official leadership training as a criterion for the selection (Amakye & Ampah-Mensah, 2015; Donkor & Asante, 2016; MacBeath & Swaffield, 2009). This suggests that leadership/management training is not an official requirement for one to be qualified in countries like Ghana and this questions the kind of leadership in our various SHSs.

Whereas people in HoD positions are expected to carry out so many responsibilities, Stephenson (2010) and Borole (2010) discovered that HoDs in most African countries are insufficiently trained professionally. It appears the situation is not different in Ghana. Adjei (2016), for example, found most HoDs in SHS's in Kumasi (Ghana) as having limited skills and competencies needed for them to lead effectively. Most of them, in this regard, learn while on the job whereas other work by intuition. How then do HoDs carry out their roles and responsibilities? What training opportunities are there for their capabilities to be developed knowing they have limited skills in discharging their duties?

There is a growing concern in recent times by stakeholders on the effectiveness of HoDs in discharging their duties (Mirunde, 2015; Hayat et al., 2015; Adjei, 2016). The majority of studies in school leadership have focused on headteachers at the basic and secondary education level (e.g. Agezo, 2004; Ankoma-Sey, 2014; Brown & Owusu, 2014; Zame et al., 2008) While some authors have found that headteachers effectively carry out their responsibilities (e.g., Ankoma-Sey, 2014; Atakpa & Ankomah, 1998), others have revealed that headteachers are ineffective (e.g., Brown & Owusu, 2014; Donkor, 2015; MacBeath & Swaffield, 2009; Zame et al., 2008). Little, however, is known about the effectiveness of the role of HoDs in Ghana. In this line, the study examined the administrative tasks performance and professional development needs of heads of academic departments in SHSs in Ghana.

In recent times, the education system in Ghana has seen major transformation particularly in the Senior High Schools. In 2017, there was the introduction of free SHS across the country allowing citizens to have access to secondary education without paying for anything. This increased the level of enrolment in the schools. With this, heads of academic departments need to be effective in managing these large numbers of population. It becomes a worry if SHS heads of academic departments in Ghana are not

matching up to expectation. Again in 2018, another policy reform was introduced- the double track system- due to the increased enrolment which posed a threat to teaching and learning activities. The double track system groups the students in two batches and consequently, they attend classes on shift basis. Although different teachers have been assigned to each group, heads of academic department stay on both tracks/groups to steer the affairs of the departments. This has increased the workload of departmental heads in SHS. Are departmental heads effective enough to head the affair of the department? Have there been any training for heads of academic department of the school in the face of major reforms introduced? Due to this, the researcher was motivated to conduct such a study in SHS rather than basic schools.

Specifically, this study sought to: 1) examine the level of administrative tasks performance of HoDs in SHSs in Ghana 2) find out the extent of professional development needs of HoDs in SHSs in Ghana. Although, the study was conducted in Ghana, the results have grave implication for countries with similar educational structure and procedures. A study of this nature is necessary in providing relevant information about the effectiveness and needs of HoDs in Ghanaian SHSs in the midst of the new policies implemented. This will provide pertinent information to the government and educational stakeholders on whether head of academic departments have developmental training needs which are required to be addressed.

2. Methodology

A cross-sectional survey was conducted to collect data in order to achieve the aim of the study. The study was quantitative in nature. The study covered HoDs and teachers selected from 155 public Senior High Schools across the country. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed due to the cluster of sub-groups within the population and this provided an avenue for every sub-group to be represented. The study sampled 310 HoDs and 620 teachers. The study was dominated by male respondents (HoD-65.2%; Teachers-62.7%), probably because there are more male teachers than female teachers at the SHS level. The majority of the respondents had over 10 years teaching experience (HoD-83.2%; Teachers-53.4%). Greater percentage of the HoDs who participated in this study had been in the position for over 2 years (99.6%).

Two self-designed questionnaires were utilised for the data collection- one for HoDs and another for teachers. The instrument for the teachers was made up of 29-items measured on a 4-point Likert Scale (Strongly disagree, Disagree, Agree, and Strongly agree) geared towards investigating the administrative task of their HoDs. The administrative tasks comprised planning, organising, directing, supervision, evaluation and controlling. The instrument for the HoDs had 7-items which measured professional development. Cronbach alpha and Kuder-Richardson reliability estimates were used to compute for the internal consistency of the instruments for teachers and HoDs respectively. A reliability estimate of .839 and .772 were found for instruments for teachers and HoDs respectively. Prior to the data collection, a pilot-testing was

conducted to ensure that all ambiguities are resolved and that the instruments are free from errors. Copies of the instruments were sent to an expert to vet for its content and construct validity.

Research Assistants were recruited and trained to help in data collection in the various schools. Issues of confidentiality, informed consent, protection of vulnerable participants and anonymity, were not overlooked. Descriptive statistics such as percentages, frequencies, mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data.

3. Results

3.1 Level of Administrative Tasks Performance of HoDs in SHSs in Ghana

Teachers rated the extent to which their HoDs performed their administrative tasks using a four point Likert scale of agreement (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly disagree) items. Twenty-nine items were posed to respondents which were categorised under six dimensions: planning, organising, directing, supervision, evaluation and controlling. Table 1 presents the overall levels of administrative tasks performance under the six dimensions.

Table 1: Level of administrative tasks performance of HoDs in SHSs in Ghana (n=620)

Dimensions	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Planning	3.21	.408	1.50	4.00
Organising	3.26	.409	1.60	4.00
Directing	2.10	.819	1.00	4.00
Supervision	2.29	.856	1.00	4.00
Evaluation	2.21	.909	1.00	4.00
Controlling	3.24	.411	1.40	4.00

The result revealed that planning (*M*=3.21), organising (*M*=3.26), and controlling (*M*=3.2) functions were highly rated. However, directing (M=2.10), Supervision (M=2.29) and Evaluation (M=2.21) function were rated low. Low rated functions gives an indication that those functions are not performed so well by the HoDs and vice versa.

3.2 Professional Development Needs of HoDs in SHSs in Ghana

Information on professional development needs were provided by the HoDs. The professional development needs of HoDs in SHSs focused on whether HoDs were given prior training and issues pertaining training after assuming office as well as the skilled areas they need much training.

Results, as reported by the HoDs, revealed that they were given training before they assumed office as HoD (100%). A follow-up question was asked to examine the form which the training took. Further analysis revealed that this training is usually in the form of workshops (65.8%, n=204), even though sometimes it is organised as a seminar (19.7%, n=61) or conference (14.5%, n=45). The details of the analysis of this responses are shown in Figure 1.
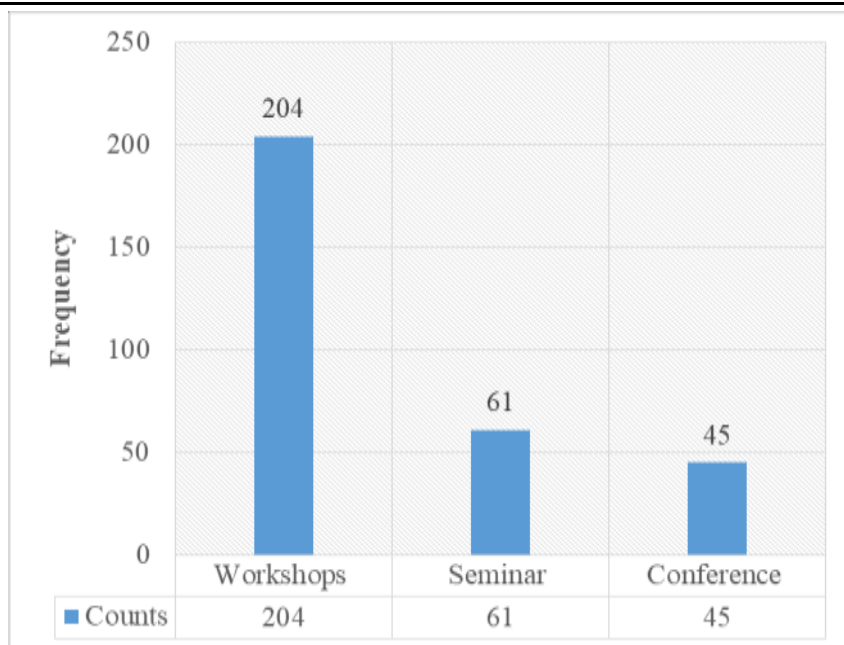
Figure 1: Nature of training prior to assuming office as HoD

Table 2 presents information on how often professional development programmes are organised for HoDs after assuming office.

Table 2: How often professional development programmes had been organised after assuming office

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Frequently	4	1.3
Once in a while	101	32.6
Scarcely	205	66.1
Total	310	100.00

Results, as shown in Table 2, indicate that professional development programmes are rarely (66.1%) organised for HoDs in Ghana after they assume office. Some respondents also indicated that such programmes are organised once in a while (32.6%).

In line with the fact that training was rarely organised, 92.9% (n=288) of the HoDs were of the view that they need adequate training if they are to function effectively. The respondents were further asked which areas they think training is needed for their work. Their responses are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Areas in which skills are needed (n=310)

Training Areas	Not Needed	Needed	Greatly Needed
Leadership behaviour	2(0.6)	251(81.0)	57(18.4)
Management skills	1(0.3)*	131(42.3)	178(57.4)
Instructional leadership	279(90.0)	6(1.9)	25(8.1)
Interpersonal skills	52(16.8)	208(67.1)	50(16.1)
Communication skills	1(0.3)	111(35.8)	198(63.9)
Assessment and Evaluation	6(1.9)	120(38.7)	184(59.4)

It was reported by the HoDs that training in the following areas is greatly needed: management skills (57.4%), communication skills (63.9%), and assessment and evaluation skills (59.4%). Other areas like leadership behaviour (81%), and interpersonal skills (67.1%) were also reported as needed skills.

4. Discussions

It is clear that although HoDs in SHS in Ghana do well to perform their administrative tasks, some functions are ineffectively carried out. In specific terms, HoDs effectively planned, organised and controlled the activities within their departments as they discharged their duties. Nonetheless, there appeared to be poor directions, evaluation and supervision on their part. Out of the six functions surveyed, three were properly carried out whereas the rest were poorly done. This is an indication that administrative tasks of HoDs were not carried out in wholesome because some stones were left unturned. This becomes a concern if effective leadership is to be achieved in schools. This finding is supported by that of Adjei (2016) who revealed that HoDs in Ghana had challenges in supervising their own colleagues. This is seen in most schools where HoDs are friends and so close to their colleagues that they are unable to supervise and direct their activities. These findings reflect the saying that "*familiarity breeds contempts*". It is not out of way to state that HoDs are likely to perform poorly on their job since not all functions were effectively carried out.

The school structure is a system such that defects in any part of the system affect the whole structure. In this sense, HoDs can highly organise their activities but if supervision is poor, the organising function would be in jeopardy. I would agree with Borole (2010) that these are part of the challenges faced by HoDs and emanates from inadequate training given to people appointed to act as HoDs. This was supported in this current study as HoDs felt they greatly needed to be trained for them to function effectively. It was made known that predominantly workshops were organised for people appointed as HoDs before they assumed office. Are these workshops enough for the required skills to be attained? The situation makes it prudent for frequent training programmes to be developed for HoDs while on the job. The opposite rather seems to be happening. It was evident that although HoDs were given some form of training, hardly do management organise training programmes for them after assuming office. This was also the case in New Zealand when Stephenson (2010) discovered that HoDs in New Zealand were not given any professional training when they assumed office. It is important to state that new challenges and issues arise during the course of working as a head of a particular department. Hence, the need for on-the-job training to address some of these challenges will be in the right direction. This explains the reason why the HoDs in this study pointed out that they needed training in management skills, communication skills, and assessment and evaluation skills. This aligns to the earlier finding that supervision, evaluation and directing functions were poorly carried out. It

is important to state that if HoDs are given the training on the needed skills, they would perform highly on all dimensions of administrative tasks.

In effect, it appears that the quality of administrative task and professional development training of HoDs are questionable. What then is the assurance of the full realisation of the "Education 2030 Agenda" (SDG4). It is true that if HoDs continue to poorly execute some aspects of administrative tasks as well as are not trained frequently, then the realisation of the vision of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education will be in jeopardy. This is because school leadership plays a significant role in the realisation of this agenda (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2018). The absence of effective leadership can be detrimental to effective teaching and learning (Vvob, 2018). It is, thus, in a right direction for effective departmental leadership to be promoted by training HoDs and equipping them with the skills they need to be effective.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

It can be concluded that HoDs in SHS in Ghana do not completely and effectively perform their administrative task. This is worrying in the midst of policy reforms currently introduced. It is obvious the new policy reforms in the education sector (i.e. free SHS and double track system) would be under threat if heads of departments continue to under-perform their administrative tasks. This is likely to affect the overall performance of their various schools as well as the achievement of the SDG 4. Therefore, Ghana as a country, has a lot to do in terms of ensuring quality leadership at the departmental level in order to realise the Education 2030 Agenda. The poorly functioning of the HoDs can be attributed to inadequate training and development they receive before and during their tenure as departmental heads. It appears, surprisingly, that these HoDs are aware of the areas which they lack expertise. There is a higher probability that if school management are to liaise with departmental heads in planning training and development programmes, HoDs would perform their functions effectively. It must be emphasised, however, that reports on the level of administrative task performance were solely the perception of teachers. It is likely that this may not reflect actual practices of the HoDs even though this gives stakeholders some rich information for further decisions. It is acknowledged that leadership is not the only indicator for the realisation of the SDG 4 but the researcher believes leadership has a significant contribution to the achievement of this agenda, as some scholars have alluded to this fact.

It is recommended, based on the findings, that:

1. Ghana Education Service together with the management of various schools should organise intense development training for HoDs before they assume office as departmental heads. While they are on the job, it is also important for frequent training programmes to be organised for them.

2. School management should do well to consider leadership background of potential HoDs before they are selected to the position.
3. School management should also liaise with various HoDs on the particular expertise and/or training that should be organised for them.
4. HoDs are also encouraged to personally build their leadership capabilities through reading of materials on leadership.

References

Adjei, J. (2016). *The role heads of department in promoting visual art programme in Senior High Schools in Kumasi*. Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Masters' Thesis.

Agezo, C. K. (2000). Effective headship in the delivery of quality education at the basic level: what the head should do. *The Oguaa Educator, 12*(2), 114-27.

Amakyi, M., & Ampah-Mensah, A. (2013). Preparation of school heads in Ghana: Making a case for theoretical knowledge. *Journal of Education and Practice, 4*(23), 154-159.

Ankoma-Sey, V. R. (2014). *Evaluation of the administrative task performances of male and female heads in urban and rural Second Cycle Schools in Ghana*. Thesis submitted to Department of Educational Foundations and Curriculum, Ahmadu Bello University. Zaria-Nigeria.

Borole, T. B. (2010). *Management and leadership functions of Heads of Department in technical high schools*. Potchefstroom: North-West University Press.

Donkor, A. K. (2015). Basic school leaders in Ghana: how equipped are they? *International Journal of Leadership in Education Theory and Practice, 18*(2), 225-238.

Donkor, A. K., & Asante, J. (2016). Instructional leadership of basic schools in Ghana: The case study of schools in Kwaebibirem District. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research, 6*(4), 65-75.

Gay, G. (2010). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Hayat, A., Abdollahi, B., Zainabadi, H. R., & Arasteh, H. R. (2015). A study of the professional development needs of Shiraz high schools' principals in the area of educational leadership. *Journal of Advances in Medical Education & Professionalism, 3*(3), 99-104.

Hussin, S., & Al Abri, S. (2015). Professional development needs of school principals in the context of educational reform. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies, 7*(4), 90-97.

MacBeath, J., & Swaffield, S. (2009). *Leadership for Learning: The Ghana Programme Report*. Cambridge: Centre for Commonwealth Education, University of Cambridge.

Mirunde, A. (2015). *Training and professional development needs for effective secondary school management in Nachingwea District*. Open University of Tanzania. Master's Thesis.

Nguyen, T. L. H. (2013). Middle-level Academic Management: A case study on the roles of the Heads of Department at a Vietnamese university. *Tertiary Education and Management, 19*(1), 1-15.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018). *School leadership*. Retrieved from www.vvob.com.

Stephenson, A. (2010). *An examination of the issues facing Heads of department in New Zealand Secondary Schools*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Unitec Institute of Technology.

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UN ESCAP] (2015). Statistical Yearbook for Asia and Pacific 2015, SDG 4. Retrieved from www.unescap/statistical/yearbook/sdg4.com

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisations [UNESCO] (2016). *Education solutions-initiative for the era of Sustainable Development Goals*. New York: UNESCO Center for Global Education.

Vvob (2018). Putting SDG$ into practice. *Technical Brief, 1*, 1-11.

Zame, M. Y., Hope, W. C., & Respress, T. (2008). Educational reform in Ghana: The leadership Challenge. *Journal of Educational Management*, *22*(2), 115-128.

Vera Rosemary Ankoma-Sey
ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS PERFORMANCE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF
HEADS OF ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN GHANA