

The Leadership Styles of Basic School Head Teachers: What Teachers Say

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to find out how basic school teachers differ in their perception of the leadership styles of their head teachers within the context of communication, decision-making, instructional leadership. The study adopted descriptive survey and stratified random sampling procedure to sample 269 teachers from 94 public basic school teachers in the South Tongu District. Questionnaire was the main research instrument used to collect data from respondents and its reliability coefficient of the questionnaire was .85 which was deemed to be reliable. The data was analysed using independent t-test with Predictive Analytical Software (PASW) version 18. The study revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the ways male and female basic school teachers perceive their head teachers' leadership styles in the South Tongu District. It was also found out that teachers perceived favourably the leadership styles of their head teachers. It was recommended that basic school head teachers be given workshops to improve upon their decision-making skills since they were perceived less by respondents in that area. Also, it was recommended that head teachers should be encouraged to peer reviewed their colleagues so that those who are not doing well could learn from those who are performing creditably.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Leadership in every human institution is very important in that where there is no leader, there is likelihood of chaotic situation; everybody does what he or she likes. Leading people is of course, a tremendous challenge, a great deal of opportunity, and a serious responsibility (Nahavandi, 2006). According to him, today's world, more than ever, needs leaders who are effective and can understand the complex nature of our ever-changing global environment, who will have the intelligence to face the complex problems and be sensitive as well as the ability to empathize with their followers in order to challenge them to strive for excellence. Pierce and Newstrom (2000) could not have put it better when they asserted that being a leader is a very difficult job – a great deal of information has to be gathered and processed, a constant series of problems must be solved and decision made, followers have to be convinced to pursue specific course of action, set backs have to be overcome, competing interests have to be satisfied and finally risks have to be taken in the face of uncertainty.

Educational institutions like any other institutions need leaders with substance who know what to do and how best to do it. Around the world, education is viewed as the most important strategy for the development of society especially in a resource-deficit country like Ghana (Aikaman & Unterhalter, 2005). Studies have shown that it is the human capital that determines the development of a country and not the natural resources a country has (Nsubuga, 2003). Nsubuga argued that the principal institution mechanism by which human capital is developed is through formal educational systems.

In Ghana, the formal education system comprises basic school (kindergarten, primary and junior high school), senior high school and tertiary, comprising colleges of education, polytechnics and the universities. The concern of the study however, is the basic level which is the bedrock of formal education in Ghana.

The growing nature of school enrolment at the basic level as a result of free and Compulsory Universal Basic Education (fCUBE), introduction of capitation grants, and school feeding programmes in 2005 and 2006 respectively, as well as high demand for better improvement in education delivery, call for a second look at those at the helm of affairs and who are supposed to render account. This is so because a study conducted by EdQual (Quality Education) in Ghana and Tanzania in the late 2000s indicated that 25 per cent and 40 per cent of head teachers respectively, did not take part in any leadership training. This means that most of them rely on try and error in the discharge of their legitimate duties (Oduro & Dachi, 2010).

The study also indicated that majority of head teachers of primary schools in the study area did not recognize themselves as leaders who must adopt strategies as change agents in their schools. On the contrary, they see their positions as administrators whose main responsibility is to take custody of school property, attend meetings and implement directives from the district office. It is said that these head teachers lack the courage to take initiatives in their various schools as leaders who are entrusted the human, capital and physical resources to achieve the desired goals. This definitely does not sound good if the head teachers are expected to manage the human capitals at their disposal for the improvement of quality education in Ghana.

Leadership at work in educational institutions is a dynamic process where the individual is not only responsible for the group's tasks, but also actively seeks collaboration and commitment of all members in attaining the objective of the group (Cole, 2002). Maicibi (2005) says that without proper leadership style of principals, effective teaching and learning cannot be achieved in schools. He concludes that even if a school has all the required institutional materials and financial resources, they will not be effectively used if the teachers are not motivated by the leadership style of the principal. The literature on leadership reveals that effective leadership is an important component of securing and sustaining school achievement. There is enough evidence that consistently show that effective leaders can exercise a strong influence on students' performance (Liethwood, Jantzi & Steinbach, 1999).

It is believed that for a school to achieve effectiveness and improvement in academic achievement, school leadership should no longer reside in a single person or certain administrators; it needs to be distributed among the major educational players across all levels (Jackson, 2002; Day et al., 2006; Fullan, 2001, 2006; Gronn, 2002; Harris, 2003; Lambert, 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003; Spillane, 2006). This implies that the head teacher who is the leader of the school should not be the sole figure who wields a lot of power to effect policies and programmes in the school. It is in agreement of this that Fullan (2001) says that the teacher is the key to change in a school. Again, Pellicer and Anderson (1995) found that in most effective schools, leadership is a shared responsibility between teachers and head teachers. Other researchers (Jenkins, Zimmerman, & Jenkins, 2001) believe that when that happens the school can continually be transformed and improved through nurturing the leadership capacities of teachers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is believed that the kind of relationship that exists between the leader and the follower affects the institution, more especially if the leader is perceived as being a dictator. Lord, Brown and Freiberg (1999) wrote, "the interpersonal relation of the superiors to subordinates affects subordinates' identification and self-concepts, which in turn, are critical determinants of social and organizational process" (p. 170). Put into the language of schools, the relationship between principal and teacher affects how the teachers perceive their roles in the school and that perception, in turn helps to influence the success or failure of the school. Other researchers have also supported this view by saying that leader- follower relationship from the point of view of the follower is a major determinant of the effectiveness of the leader (Blasé, 1988; Liethwood & Jantzi, 1997; Lord et al 1999; Shum & Cheng, 1997). Again in the language of education, how teachers perceive the relationship they have with their principals influence the effectiveness of principal leadership.

Leadership problems in schools affect teaching and learning seriously. If teachers are not motivated by the styles of their heads, they cannot deliver the curriculum in the class. The school leader's ability to manage the financial and human capital is a great asset if the school is to function well. In the words of Atta (as cited in Entsuah, 2005), the head master/mistress is the chief executive officer of the school and for the school to succeed or fail depends on him/her. This means that the ways teachers perceive the environment in which they are operating affect how they deliver the curriculum. Based on comments and observations from the teachers in the study area to the effect that some head teachers practice autocratic leadership styles and are not concerned about their welfare would necessarily trigger a research in order to ascertain the scientific fact. One wonders which leadership styles are the best for educational institutions especially at the basic school level. Again, it is important to find out whether male and female basic school teachers perceive leadership styles as the same.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to find out how basic school teachers differ in their perception and how they perceive the leadership styles of their head teachers within the context of communication, decision-making, instructional leadership and staff concern.

Research Question

1. How do basic school teachers differ in their perception of the leadership styles of their head teachers?
2. How do basic school teachers perceive the leadership styles of their head teachers?

Review of Related Literature

This section of the article discusses literature relating to the topic on the following;

COMMUNICATION AND LEADERSHIP

Communication is the process of conveying information and meaning (Lussier & Achua, 2001). They say that true communication takes place only when all parties understand the message (information) from the same perspective. At all organisational or institutional levels, it has been estimated that at least 75 percent of each working day is consumed in communication. Communication is a major powerful tool for leaders because effective communication is part of leadership style. Empirical research proves the statement that effective leaders are also effective communicators; there is a positive relationship between communication competency and leadership performance (Pheng & Lee, 1997; Bass, 1999).

Good interpersonal as well as communication skills drive effective leadership (Cullen, 1999; Mitchell & Winkleman, as cited in Lussier & Achua, 2001). Organisations or institutions with effective communication systems are more likely to be successful. This implies that institutions or organisations with poor communication channels are more prone to failures. One important aspect of organisational communications is to convey the mission, vision and the values so that all the members understand the big picture of what the group is trying to attain. However, a research conducted in 10,000 firms indicates that leaders are not doing effective job in that area (Lussier & Achua, 2001).

In leadership, how well you give instructions directly affects your ability to motivate your subordinates as well as their job satisfaction with your supervisory leadership (Klimoski & Hayes, 1980).

DECISION MAKING AND LEADERSHIP

The uncertainty, ambiguity, and the ever-changing circumstances of today's world means that head of institutions have the guts to make difficult decisions (Lussier & Achua, 2001) that positively affect the institutions. Decision making are of two types; individual and group (team) decision making. Some people relied on both individual and group (team) decision making when it comes to solving problems. It is evident that group decision making is preferred over individuals when; one, relevant information and expertise are scattered among different people; two, when participation is needed to obtain necessary commitment; three, when concentrating power in a single individual hurts group cohesion and finally, when controversial decision need to be made (Lussier & Achua, 2001).

It is important to note that group decision making improves decision quality, allowed responsibility to be diffused among several people, help people appreciate the nature of the problems and the reasons for the final choice of solution, and it is likely to result in higher commitment by all in the group. However, group decision making usually takes a longer time than decision taken by the leader alone. It may also end up being a poor compromise rather than an optimal solution, when team or group members cannot agree among themselves about the group's objectives and priorities. Several factors have been associated with effective team decisions. Some of these factors are; group size and composition, members' status, group cohesiveness, traits and values of group members and quality of leadership (McGath, 1999).

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

As instructional leader, the principal is the pivotal point within the school who affects the quality of individual teacher instruction, the height of students' achievement, and the degree of efficiency in the school functions. According to Findley and Findley (1992) "if a school is to be an effective one, it will be because of instructional leadership of the principal" (p. 102). Research on effective school showed that the principal plays an essential role in bringing about conditions that characterise effective schools (Flath, 1989).

In the study of instructional leadership, (Kroeze, as cited in Flath, 1989) has identified some qualities such as; goal emphasis (set instructional goals, high expectations and focus on students achievement), coordination and organisation, power and discretionary decision making and human relation. Moreover, Anderson and Pigford (1987) have identified five qualities of effective instructional leadership. These qualities are:

1. Have vision: Work toward a shared understanding of the goals, progress toward their achievement and coordinate curriculum, instrument and assessment.

2. Translate the vision into action: Work as a team, emphasise school wide goals and expectation.
3. Create supportive environment: Promote an academically-oriented, orderly, and purposeful school climate.
4. Know what is going on in the school: Find out what teachers and students are doing and how well they are doing it.
5. Act on knowledge: Intervene as necessary accommodating different teacher personalities, styles, and teaching strategies (p. 67–68)

Fulan (1991) in his studies also found out that schools operated by principals who were perceived by their teachers to be strong instructional leaders exhibited significantly great gain scores in achievement in reading and mathematics than did school operated by average and weak instructional leaders. Thus, perception could be included as a strong determinant of effectiveness.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Broadly speaking, a study design refers to the plan and schedule of work, or a process of creating an empirical test to support or reject a knowledge claim (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). The descriptive survey was the design used for the study. The descriptive survey is which describes the nature of a phenomenon and finds answers to research questions. Since the study involves collecting data in order to test research questions concerning the current status of the teachers' perception of their head teachers' leadership style, descriptive survey design was appropriate (Gay, 1992). For the purpose of this study, cross-sectional survey type was used. A cross-sectional survey collects information from a sample that has been drawn from predetermined population (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006).

Population

The larger group to which one hopes to apply the results of a study is the population (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). There are about 122 schools in the South Tongu District. Teachers in these schools constituted the target population. Ninety-four schools with teacher population of 919 (accessible population) out of which samples were selected for the study.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The researcher selected 179 males (30% of 611) and 90 females (30% of 308) in the 94 basic schools (63 primary and 31 J.H.S) (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970).

A proportional stratified random sampling technique was employed to select the sample for the male and female. The proportional stratified random sampling is a technique in which certain subgroups, or strata, are selected for the sample in the same proportion as they exist in the population (Gay, 1996). The study was to find the difference in the perception of male and female basic school teachers' of their heads, so it was necessary to have their representation in the sample. As many as 179 males and 90 females in the 94 basic schools were selected.

Research Instrument

Closed-ended type of questionnaire was used. Highly structured closed-ended items are useful in that they can generate frequencies of response amenable to statistical treatment and analysis. They also enable comparisons to be made across groups in the sample (Oppenheim, 1992).

Data Analysis

A software known as Statistical Package for Service Solution (SPSS) was used to analyze and show results of the study. The first research question was analysed using Statistical Package for Software Solution (SPSS) to run the frequency distribution while the research question two was analyzed using independent sample t-test since the researcher wanted to find out the differences in the perception of males and females with regard to the leadership styles of their head teachers and the fact that the variables are nominal. The demographic data was used in computing the differences in the perceptions of male and female respondents. This was also done with the help of SPSS.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question: How do male and female basic school teachers differ in their perception of the leadership styles of their head teachers?

The research question focused on the gender differences among basic school teachers regarding their perception of the leadership styles adopted by the head teachers. In order to achieve this objective, an independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the perception of basic school teachers regarding the leadership styles adopted by their head teachers. Four dimensions of leadership styles were used. Each of the styles was made up of many items. These items were pulled together to form each of the styles. The styles or variables used were communication, concern, instructional leadership and decision making. The descriptions of the measurement of these variables have been done in the preceding discussion. As discussed earlier, these items were pulled together with the help of Test Analytics for Surveys (TAFS), a tool of Predictive Analytic Software (PASW) Version 18.0. The results are presented in the Table 1.

Table 1: Differences in the Perception of Male and Female Basic School Teachers regarding the Leadership Styles of their Head teachers (N = 258)

Leadership Styles	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t-values	p-values
Communication	Male	167	3.190	.605	-.166	.868
	Female	91	3.203	.617		
Concern	Male	167	3.093	.469	-.663	.508
	Female	91	3.133	.459		
Instructional leadership	Male	167	3.093	.469	-.663	.508
	Female	91	3.133	.459		
Decision making	Male	167	2.661	.797	-.267	.790
	Female	91	2.689	.819		

Source: Field Data, 2013

Table 1 contains finding on the gender differences regarding basic school teachers' perception of their head teachers leadership styles used in their respective schools. The results in the table show that there were no statistically significant gender difference in the perception of basic school teachers regarding the use of communication by their head teachers as leadership style for male teachers (Mean = 3.190, SD = .605) and female teachers (Mean = 3.203, SD = .617), [t =

-.166, $df = 256$, $p = .868$]. Even though there was no statistically significant gender difference regarding basic school teachers' perception on the communication style used by their head teachers as leadership style, female teachers seem to perceive it more positively than male teachers.

The finding supports the views of Newcomb and Ashkanasy (2002) who posited that leaders use communication as the basis for goal attainment focusing on the final desirable result. Expressing the importance of communication, Newcomb and Ashkanasy further indicate that how a leader delivers a message can be more important than the content of the message. In a school setting, school leaders do the right thing by promoting educational restructuring and innovation, focusing on building vision, encouraging collaborative participation and raising the role of followers to that of leaders.

Similarly, the results in the Table 1 show that there were no statistically significant gender difference in the perception of basic school teachers with regard to show of concern by their head teachers as leadership style for male teachers (Mean = 3.093, SD = .469) and female teachers (Mean = 3.133, SD = .459), [$t = -.663$, $df = 256$, $p = .508$]. The results again indicate that there were no statistically significant gender differences regarding basic school teachers' perception of the instructional leadership and decision making styles used by their respective head teachers in the various schools. Even though there were no statistical significant gender difference regarding basic school teachers' perception of the concern, instructional leadership and decision making styles used by their head teachers as leadership styles, female teachers seemed to perceive them more positively than male teachers.

The findings that teachers perceived concern, instructional leadership and decision making leadership style positively regarding the adoption of these styles by their head teachers are in line with the comments of Fulan (1991) who indicated in his studies that schools operated by principals who were perceived by their teachers to be strong instructional leaders, decision makers, communicators and show concern to their fellow workers exhibited significant gain scores in achievement than school operated by average and weak instructional leaders, decision makers nor weak communicators. However, the findings are incongruent with the work of Brailsford (2001) who found that teachers' gender, age and level of education had a significant influence on their perception of the kind of leadership styles of their principals. The same findings were reported in the study of Lee (1995).

The findings that there are no statistically significant gender difference regarding teachers perception of the kind of leadership styles used by their head teachers contradicts the work of Entsuaah (2005) that was carried out in Shama Ahanta East Metropolis of the Western region of Ghana. The findings of Entsuaah was that male and female teachers showed some differences in their perception of their head teachers' leadership style and behaviour in terms of decision-making, supervision, school community relations, material and financial resources and maintenance of interpersonal relations.

Research Question 2: How do basic school teachers perceive the leadership styles of their head teachers?

Based on the four-point scale, a theoretical mean ranges based on the recommendation of Cohen (1988) were derived and used to segregate respondents into strongly agree (3.5 – 4), agree (2.5 – 3.4), disagree (1.5 – 2.4) and strongly disagree (1 – 1.4). The relevant mean values are presented in Table 2. They were calculated with the help of Test Analytics for Surveys

(TAfS), a tool of Predictive Analytic Software (PASW) Version 18.0, which is used for coding data and analysing verbatim responses to close and open-ended questionnaire and produces tables and charts directly to enable data interpretation.

Table 2: Basic School Teachers' Perceptions of the Leadership Styles of their Head teachers (N = 258)

Leadership Styles	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Skewness
Communication	3.195	3.250	.608	-.265
Concern	3.107	3.143	.465	-.145
Instructional leadership	3.107	3.143	.465	-.145
Decision making	2.671	2.833	.803	-.179

Source: Field Data, 2013.

As contained in Table 2, basic school teachers agreed (mean > 2.4) to all the leadership styles used for the study. In other words, they perceived the four leadership styles positively and that their head teachers used these styles. However, the basic school teachers perceived communication (Mean = 3.195, Std. Dev. = .608) more positively than any of the leadership styles followed by concern (Mean = 3.107, Std. Dev. = .465) and instructional leadership (Mean = 3.107, Std. Dev. = .465). The table further depicts that decision making (Mean = 2.671, Std. Dev. = .803) was the least leadership style that the basic school teachers indicated that their head teachers practiced. The work of Gyansah (2000) is consistent with this finding that respondents were not comfortable with decision-making style of their head teachers. However, it is inconsistent with the earlier finding of Arku (2007) who found out that most (77%) respondents were satisfied with the decision-making style in their respective schools. This aspect of the finding is not good for the purpose of teaching and learning. Curricular activities would suffer if everybody is not brought on board in the management of schools.

Communication is a major powerful tool for leaders because effective communication is part of leadership style. The finding that teachers perceived their head teachers to be using communication in their style of leadership is consistent with the submission of Bass (1999) who indicated that effective leaders are also effective communicators and that there is a positive association between communication competency and leadership performance. This result is a good sign for the country's quest for quality education because according to Mitchell and Winkleman (1999) good interpersonal as well as communication skills drive effective leadership. Mitchell and Winkleman further posited that schools with effective communication systems are more likely to be successful. This implies that schools with poor communication channels are more prone to failures.

The finding further corroborates the views of Achua and Lussier (2001) who commented that one important aspect of leaders effective use of communication is to convey the mission, vision and the values so that all the members understand the big picture of what the group is trying to attain. However, a research conducted by Achua and Lussier in 10,000 firms indicates that leaders are not doing effective job in that area of communication. Similar finding was made by Bampo-Addo (2006) who said that majority (87.5%) of respondents were dissatisfied with the communication style of their leaders. The findings of Achua and Lussier as well as Bampo-Addo are incongruent with the results of the current study.

The finding that basic school teachers perceived the instructional leadership style of their head teachers positively support the views of Findley and Findley (1992) who commented that as instructional leader, the principals or head teachers are the pivotal points within the school who affect the quality of individual teacher instruction, the height of students' achievement, and the degree of efficiency in the school functions. According to Findley and Findley, if a school is to be an effective one, it will be because of instructional leadership of the principal. The finding of Entsuah (2005) also gave evidence to the fact that teachers perceived their head teachers as instructional leaders. Research on effective school showed that the principal plays an essential role in bringing about conditions that characterise effective schools (Flath, 1989). This finding implies that any curriculum implementation would succeed since the head teachers are seen to be leading the change in that direction. It is highly a good sign that need to be encouraged in all educational endeavours

KEY FINDING

1. It was revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the perception of male and female basic school teachers in the South Tongu District with regard to their head teachers' leadership styles. What this means that leadership is no more the preserve of men as it used to be.
2. Basic schoolteachers perceived favourably the leadership styles of their head teachers in the four domains – decision-making, instructional leadership, concern for staff and communication. It indicates that any curriculum implementation programme in the district would be successful since teachers perceive positively their head teachers leadership styles.

CONCLUSIONS

The outcome of the finding was important as far as leadership issues in our educational institutions is concerned because it was in contrast to the long held view that leadership is the preserve of men. There is no doubt that if equal opportunities are created for both males and females, there would not be much difference in terms of achievements in the area of academics.

Finally, it can be said that the issue of leadership is a dicey one because it appeared that there is no single style that is appropriate in all situations. What it therefore means is that, different situations call for the particular leadership styles to be used. The inability of head teachers to adopt situational leadership would not augur well for the educational enterprise since it could seriously undermine the efforts by various stakeholders to improve teaching and learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is therefore recommended that equal platforms be created for both female and male teachers to assume leadership positions. It is also suggested that everybody be involved in the decision-making process. Workshops and seminars should be organised for head teachers to improve upon their decision-making skills since they seem not to be doing well in this area.

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