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Voices of Ghanaian Head-Teachers Working in Low Fee Private Schools

Corinne Brion, PhD

Introduction

The year 2000 was pivotal for the developing nations of the world. During the Millennium Summit, 189 member nations of the United Nations and 23 international organizations came together to adopt the United Nations Millennium Declaration and to commit to help achieve eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Those goals were to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development. These ambitious goals had specific targets to be achieved by 2015 (United Nations, 2016).

Although some progress between 2000 and 2015 was made, the second Millennium Development Goal—Achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015—was particularly challenging for most developing countries. Due to weak public-school systems, lack of infrastructure, a dearth of student data, and a paucity of trained teachers, many countries have not been able to provide universal primary education for all. In order to build upon the Millennium Development Goals, 193 countries came together and created the Sustainable Millennium Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030.

With 17 goals and 169 targets, The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to eradicate poverty in all its forms by 2030. The SDGs are universal goals involving all stakeholders in developed and developing nations equally. These goals promote and leverage interconnections for an integrated approach of development by focusing on the social, economic, and environmental

well-being of the planet and its people. In education, Goal # 4 reads: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.

This article describes the findings of a study conducted in Ghana exploring Goal 4 target 4 c. Target 4 c aims to achieve the following: By 2030, increase by X% the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (United Nations, 2016).

To date, there does not appear to be any published empirical studies examining the perspectives and the roles of head-teachers in Low-Fee Private Schools (LFPSs) in Ghana. Hence, the focus of this study was to understand the perceptions and the roles of eight Ghanaian head-teachers in four LFPSs located in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. This four-part paper begins with an overview of the theoretical framework. The second part is a brief literature review on the role of head-teachers in schools, LFPSs, and the Ghanaian context. The third section presents a description of the methodology while the fourth part covers the findings followed by a discussion. The concluding section offers recommendations for policymakers in LFPSs. The article ends with a brief conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

Adaptive Leadership

Heifetz (1994) defines leadership as the ability to mobilize people to tackle challenging problems, which the author calls adaptive challenges. The author posits that there are two types of challenges: technical and adaptive. Technical challenges offer a clear definition of the problem. As a result, a leader or expert can provide a solution that is likely to solve the issue. For example, if the roof of a school is leaking, the principal would hear about the issue, call a roofer, and with time and resources, the roof would be fixed. This example shows that technical challenges do not

require new learning, adaptation to change, or the mobilizing of a team in order to solve the issue at hand.

On the other hand, adaptive challenges are ill-defined problems, for which the definition, solution, and implementation require new learning. Adaptive problems are difficult to resolve. Tackling adaptive challenges requires that leaders adapt to change and learn new skills and competencies to solve the issue. Additionally, adaptive challenges necessitate that leaders mobilize and inspire others to learn new skills. For instance, if a school leader realizes that there is a need to change the hiring process of the organization, the principal might write new policies, write a handbook, and create a hiring committee. The principal would then have to educate and train all stakeholders on these changes. Because changing an existing hiring process requires a change in mindsets, habits, values, and behaviors, this would be considered an adaptive problem. It is easier to repair a roof than to change people's mindsets and beliefs.

According to Heifetz (1994), adaptive leadership is comprised of four components. First, the author asserts that relationships are key to successful leadership. Heifetz advocates for a shared model of leadership, in which the leader is the chief learner and motivates others to continually learn. Second, leaders need to think politically by developing alliances and keeping those with opposing ideas close in order to organize change. Third, adaptive leaders acknowledge loss and difficulty rather than hiding them, and accept casualties in order to make progress. Fourth, leading adaptive work means taking responsibility for one's part of the mess. In this study, school-heads were not leading adaptively because they had not been trained on adaptive leadership concepts and strategies.

Because educational leaders set the tones for their schools, hire and train teachers, budget professional development, and set up strategic goals, it is imperative that they be adequately

prepared to meet the changing demands of today's schools and students. This is particularly important for principals in the developing world and in the least developed countries where there are little to no systematic preparation programs for public and school private principals whose challenges are numerous and varied (Zame, Hope & Repress, 2008). These authors assert that, without trained head-teachers, systemic reform and progress for quality education remains elusive and the SDGs unachievable.

Literature Review

Head-teachers As School Leaders

“Education is an important tool for the development of an individual, society and the nation at large” (Edet & Ekegre, 2015, p 1). Many researchers affirm that head-teachers, also referred to as principals or educational leaders, play a crucial role in school improvement, teacher morale and retention, and student learning (Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Ingersoll, 2001; Marzano, Walters & McNulty, 2005; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990).

Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) suggest that leaders empower the more effective teachers who can help to influence student learning. Other researchers maintain that leaders create cultures of learning that positively affect student learning (Amedome, 2016; Donko, 2015; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). Bush and Glover (2016) describe leadership as the second most important factor influencing school and student outcomes after having quality teachers in place. According to these authors, leadership accounts for 27% of variation in student learning outcomes.

Despite the important role principals play, there is a lack of preparation for school leadership in the developing world (Lumby et al., 2008). Moreover, when preparation exists, it is ill-suited for the demands of the job because leaders are often not sufficiently prepared to tackle adaptive challenges such as creating cultures of learning or creating equitable outcomes for all

students, teachers and families (Bush & Glover, 2016; Naidoo, Naidoo & Mutukrishna, 2016; Kitavi & Van der Westhuizen, 2006). Due to this lack of leadership preparation programs, professional development events and leadership standards, there are no other criteria to appoint head-teachers in Africa (Bush & Glover, 2016; Donkor, 2015; Ngcobo & Tilky, 2010).

Head-teachers in public schools in South Africa, Ghana, and other African countries are not selected because they have the skills and competencies necessary to lead schools. Rather, head-teachers are typically selected because of their years of service, political, religious, or tribal affiliations. In West Africa, the mindset of people remains that teachers can do the job as principal (Bush, 2014; Bush & Glover, 2016).

Because West Africa is rooted in a patriarchal culture, teachers in public schools are more accountable to male elders such as village chiefs, than to their head-teachers. This mindset perpetuates the notion that educating principals is not a priority and that women are not welcome in position of leadership (Bush, 2014; Bush & Glover, 2016; Ngcobo & Tilky, 2010). The patriarchal culture also affects the head-teachers' leadership styles. Head-teachers in West Africa generally lead with a top down approach because of traditional beliefs, traditions and norms, preventing them from developing the leadership within the school.

The paucity of preparation programs and workshops for principals results in head-teachers being managers rather than leaders. Head-teachers, who often view themselves as guardians of resources such as books and maintaining registers of teachers instead of being focused on student learning and supporting teachers (Malakolunthu, McBeath & Swaffield, 2014; Naidoo, Naidoo & Mutukrishna, 2016), are typically not ready to tackle the challenges they face. Donkor (2015) affirms that Ghanaian head-teachers leading public primary schools now need to be taught about fundraising, human resources, management, leadership for learning among other topics. In this

study, the researchers sought to understand whether head-teachers in LFPSs in Ghana faced similar challenges by examining their roles and perceptions.

LFPSs

The non-state sector has played an essential role in the educational systems of low and medium-income countries for years before and after the decolonization process. Faith-based organizations and community-based formal and informal programs have a long history of supporting educational offerings (Rose, 2009). More recently, “Non-government schools for the poor have become a distinct reality in nearly all developing countries” (Heyneman & Stern, 2014, p.1). Non-government schools serving disadvantaged children are referred to as Low-Fee Private Schools (LFPSs), Low-Fee Independent Schools (LFISs), Low-Cost Schools (LCSs), Affordable Private Schools (APSs) and Faith Inspired Schools (FSIs). In this study, the researchers use the term LFPSs. The researchers also interchangeably use “state” or “public” schools to refer to government institutions.

The cost of education is often a significant factor for parents in determining school choice (Akugari, 2014). Consequently, LFPSs are becoming a universal phenomenon in low and middle-income countries (Heyneman & Stern, 2014, Rose, 2009). LFPSs are independently operated and funded. As a result, tuition costs vary according to the area, neighborhood, competition, and the quality of the perceived service, which is largely perceived based on infrastructure and teachers (Day et al., 2014). LFPSs can be run by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations, or commercially oriented private entrepreneurs (Härmä, 2011). Although taking a loan to start a LFPSs is not a requirement, the majority of the schools’ owners take loans to build classrooms, toilets, and purchase the necessary educational materials. In this study, the four

schools were privately owned and operated, and all four were Christian schools. All four schools had taken one or more loans from local micro-lending institutions.

LFPSs have been the focus of controversial debates. Seminal authors wrote about the perceived advantages and drawbacks of LFPSs (Akaguri,2014; Day et al., 2014, Härmä, 2011; Heyneman & Stern,2014; Lewin; 2007; Nishimura and Yamano, 2012; and Woodhead, Frost & James, 2013). Härmä (2011) postulates that one of the perceptions people have about LFPSs is that they operate for profit only and cut corners to maximize profit. Other criticisms include the fact that parents sending their children to LFPSs drain down the community's wealth because instead of spending money in the community, they spend a large part of their income on tuition (Heyneman & Stern, 2014). Additionally, these authors further stipulate that school entrepreneurs may be taking advantage of uneducated parents by charging them high fees and promising them better educational results than if their children were to attend public schools. In this study, the tuitions ranged from \$75 and \$130 annually, and the students attending these schools were considered poor as most families lived under the poverty line, estimated at \$142 a year per person (Ken Appenteng, personal communication, April 24th, 2017).

Akugari (2014) and Rose (2009) suggest that the most disadvantaged households may take loans from friends, family, and community members or cut on basic needs such as food, and other commodities in order to afford the tuition and hidden costs that are incurred in LFPSs. This increases their debts and makes schooling their child or children unsustainable. The authors affirm that the most educated parents tend to spend more on education for their children, thus possibly increasing the gap between the economic classes. Additionally, the number of children in families, the order of birth, and gender are factors that affect parents' choice in making decisions about schools for their children. This often penalizes girls and reinforces social and cultural divisions

(Härmä, 2011; Lewin, 2007; Nishimura & Yamano, 2012; Woodhead, Forst & James, 2013).

Another argument in regard to equity has to do with the fact that LFPSs expel students who cannot pay their tuition, leaving them without an education until they are able to pay (Akugari, 2014). Day et al., (2014) postulate that there is not enough evidence to suggest that LFPSs are able to serve the poorest children, hence perpetuating inequities among economic classes. Finally, opponents of LFPSs argue that financial sustainability is a crucial challenge for these schools, as they depend on tuition and are more expensive than their public counterparts (Day et al., 2014).

The current literature has identified some perceived advantages to LFPSs. Adoho, Tsimpo and Wodon (2014) argues that since the inception of the MDGs, there has been an insufficient number of public schools to serve all children. LFPSs have been critical to fill this gap and provide families with choices (Day et al., 2014; Dixon and Tooley, 2012; Heyneman and Stern, 2014; Ohara, 2012; Nishimura and Yamano, 2012; and Tooley & Dixon, 2006). For example, often times, and more so in rural areas, public schools are miles away, and children have to walk long distances to get to school, which increases the risks of dropouts, accidents, and assaults against girls in particular (Ilboudo, 2006).

LFPSs provide alternatives and choices to parents who may not be satisfied with the quality and academic results of local public schools (Day et al., 2014; Heyneman & Stern, 2014). Parents chose LFPSs for various reasons, such as teaching religion. The Christian schools in this study provided three hours of Christian instruction per week, which attracted parents who believed that religious instruction mattered. In addition, parents believe that the discipline is better in LFPSs and these schools offer better future possibilities and promotion to secondary schools (Day et al., 2014). Moreover, parents trust that the teaching is more personalized, child centered, and differentiated in LFPSs partly due to the fact that class sizes are smaller and the teacher-student

ratio more reasonable (Akaguri, 2014). Furthermore, authors such as Day et al., (2014) postulate that there is more accountability for teachers in LFPSs. Teachers tend to be more engaged, have fewer absences because of the close supervision provided by the school operator, and parents are able to have close relationships with both the teachers and administrators (Tooley & Dixon, 2006). In this study, teachers were closely monitored by the principals and were expected to remain at school the entire day.

Ghana's Background and Context

Ghana means “warrior king” in the Akan language, which is the language used by the Akan ethnic group of Western Ghana. Ghana was created when the British colony of the Gold Coast and Togoland Trust Territory merged (Mendonsa, 2002). The country claimed its independence from the British in 1957, becoming the first territory of Sub-Saharan colonial Africa to gain its independence. Ghana experienced several coups before reaching stability in 1981 (CIA, 2016). Ghana is slightly smaller than the state of Oregon. It shares borders with Cote d’Ivoire on the west, Burkina Faso in the Northwest, and Togo on the West. Ghana has approximately 27 million people on 92,099 square miles.

As far as economy is concerned, Ghana’s agricultural sector counts for 25% of its GDP. The agricultural sector also employs half of the work force. The service sector accounts for half of the GDP (CIA, 2016). Ghana holds the 140th position out of 188 on the Human Development Index (HDI, 2016). The HDI measures the average capabilities that people have to live long healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, and to have decent standards of living (HDI, 2016). In Ghana, the language of instruction is English because, as a former British colony, it follows the British educational system. While the Ghanaian constitution has allowed the recognition of private schools since 1992, they do not receive governmental support. Consequently, anyone can open private

schools in accordance with the law. With the freedom given to these private schools, the quality of education provided varies (Akyeampong, 2009).

Ghana has a literacy rate—defined as people over 15 years old who can read and write—of 76.6% (CIA, 2016). The school life expectancy is 12 years and 8.1% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is dedicated to education. The students pass through two years of Kindergarten (KG1 and KG2); six years of Primary School (from grades 1 to 6 referred to as P1-P6); three years of Junior High School (JHS 1 to JHS 3); and, three years of Senior High School (SHS 1 to 3).

Methodology

This qualitative study used a longitudinal design that allowed the researchers to study in-depth four LFPSs over 13 months between September 2016 to October 2017. This study is part of a larger investigation in which the authors gathered data to understand the perceptions of teachers and parents towards Christian LFPSs. This paper reports the findings related to understanding the perceptions and roles of head-teachers. In this study, the researchers explored three research questions: How do head-teachers become leaders in their schools? What do leaders perceive as challenges in their schools? And What are the leaders' dominant leadership styles?

Selection Sites and Participants

The researchers drew participants from the database of a San Diego based Non-Government Organization (NGO) called Edify. Edify has been partnering with private schools in the developing world by providing capital to local microlenders who work with LFPSs. Edify's mission is "to improve and to expand sustainable Christ-centered education globally" (Edify, 2016, para. 1). Edify is a faith-based institution and works exclusively with Christian low-fee private schools. Edify provides capital to micro-finance institutions, which in turn provide loans to LFPSs in Ghana, Liberia, Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Uganda. In order to identify study

participants, Edify's Ghanaian education specialists and the researchers created a questionnaire that allowed the possible head-teachers to understand the scope of the study and commit accordingly. The Edify Ghanaian team assisted the researchers in getting access to head-teachers, but did not conduct or participate in the study beyond that. All schools were located in the Greater Accra region, Ghana's capital.

This research design relied on a purposive and criterion sampling of eight schools' head-teachers in four LFPSs, two leaders per school. Selection criterion included the willingness of school leaders to participate in the study, schools that served children from pre-school to Junior High also known as middle schools. Moreover, schools had to be in existence for at least three years and serve at least 200 students. Having schools that are at least three years old and served at least 200 students meant that they went through the initial growing pains of new businesses. Other criteria included that the schools were not involved with any other pilot or aid programs. Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to select four cases from which to learn the most and establish productive relationships that best enable answering the study's research questions (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

Data collection

Data collection consisted of interviews, observations, and document analysis.

Interviews

"Interviewing as an art involves intuition, creativity, improvisation and breaking the rules" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p.86). The in-depth interviews were the primary source of data for this study. The researchers created a semi-structured interview protocol for each set of interviews. The interviews consisted of Grand Tour questions (Spradley, 1979) such as "Can you tell how you

became a head-teacher in this school?” or “Tell me about your challenges as a school head-teacher.” The interviews lasted about 60 minutes each for a total of over 24 hours of recording.

As noted, data collection, which started in September 2016 and ended in October 2017, included three one-on-one in-depth interviews with eight school head-teachers over the course of 13 months. The first set of interviews occurred in September 2016. During the initial meetings, each principal signed a research consent form and helped the researchers fill out a Basic Information Sheet. This information sheet included details on personal items such as age and educational background of the head-teachers. The second set of interviews took place in January 2017, the last ones in June 2017. These time frames were chosen based on the school calendar examination dates and availability of the school leaders. The researchers conducted the interviews in English, recorded and transcribed them verbatim.

Observations

The researchers spent 12 days in each of the four schools, 48 days in total, allowing for ample observations of students, teachers, and head-teachers (Patton, 2002). Both researchers also kept a journal, wrote field notes, and memos after each day they collected data. The researchers used the journals, field notes, and memos to compare observational notes and corroborate their interpretation of the data.

Document Analysis

In addition to interviews and observations, the researchers analyzed documents (Creswell, 2013). The investigators took hundreds of photographs throughout the school year and collected documents such as handbooks, teacher contracts, communication with teachers, newsletters, and loan agreements. The loan agreements helped the researchers understand the financial challenges

head-teachers faced. The other documents provided understandings as to the head-teachers' leadership styles and the tone they used to communicate with their teachers.

Data Analysis

Coding is the base of the analysis (Saldaña, 2009). Due to the large amount of data to code, the data were pre-coded by highlighting significant participants' quotes or passages relating to the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Analysis of qualitative data took place over two cycles of coding. In round one, the investigators used in vivo coding to develop codes for each key point emerging from the interviews, documents, analytical memos, field notes, and journal. In round two, using axial coding, the researchers grouped the preliminary codes into overlapping categories to create themes such as the challenges school leaders face, or the fact that these schools are often run by the family rather than individuals who are not related.

Positionality

Both researchers consulted on various occasions for Edify. They have led training sessions, conducted research, and visited hundreds of schools. At the time of the research study, both investigators were university employees working with Edify.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the ultimate goal in qualitative research (Wolcott, 1994). The aim for researchers is to be "balanced, fair, and conscientious in taking account of multiple perspectives, multiple interests, and multiple realities" (Patton, 1990, p. 575). Because the investigators were obligated to forthrightness in relating to the participants (Wolcott, 1994), they engaged in daily reflective practices such as journaling throughout the process to manage their own subjectivities (Peshkin, 1988). Further, the journals allowed the investigators to understand the influence they had on the participants as well as the impact the participants had on them (Saldaña, 2009).

In conducting this study, the researchers took four precautions to preserve its integrity and to avoid validity threats. First, there were two researchers for this study allowing them to verify each other's data. Second, triangulation was used with different sources of data such as the in-depth interviews and the three site visits. Third, the use of photographs, as well as the analysis of documents also provided corroboration between the data sources by confirming what participants had shared during the interviews (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Fourth, the researchers went back to the local Educational Specialists to ask them to check the accuracy of their findings, a process referred to as a form of member checking (della Porta, 1992).

Limitations

Conducting research internationally presents challenges. First, due to financial constraints and the cost of leading research internationally, the researchers spent 12 days in each school for a total of 48 days in the four schools. While they could have spent more time in the schools, the researchers reached data saturation spending 12 days in each of the four. Second, and for access reasons, this research took place in four districts of the Greater Accra Region, in four low-fee private schools serving children from preschool to Middle school. This sample did not allow to examine the perspectives of high school leaders or primary and middle school leaders in other regions of Ghana.

Findings

The researchers organized the findings by research question. The first research question sought to understand how the principals became leaders at their schools. In order to preserve the integrity of the findings, the researchers used the participants' comments verbatim.

“It is a Family Affair”

As one participant shared, “it is a family affair.” All four schools were started and operated by families. Two schools were built by the parents of the current head-teachers and two were started by the existing head-teachers themselves. Principals often held other positions in life or at their schools such as religious leader, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), or accountant. Head-teachers all supervised and evaluated staff members and teachers. In all cases, the schools were started to meet a need for having a school in a neighborhood. Two principals spoke about their schools started “in their garage” or “in their personal kitchen.”

The researchers next briefly describe the stories of the four schools. The researchers used pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the schools.

King of Peace International School

The head-teacher and proprietor of the school was a religious leader, educated with a Masters’ degree in theology from a Bible College. He started the school in 2006 as an after-school program with only eight students. At the time, his first employee was a teacher who is now his wife. As the demand for more programming increased, so did the after-school program which ultimately became a full-fledged school. The principal’s wife was the head-teacher of the preschool as well as bursar who collected and accounted for tuition monies. The head-teacher’s sister-in-law was an attendant, responsible for students’ payments in the morning and other logistical aspects of the school.

Because the family of the school’s principal owned the land and building, they all lived on the premises. On Sundays, the partitions that divided the classrooms were opened, the classrooms decorated, and the school became a community church with the head-teacher as the religious

leader. The family also owned a school supplies shop near the school. As the head-teacher proclaimed, “It is a family affair here because we believe that the school is family for others too.”

St. Michael’s Academy

The current principal’s mother and another woman started the school in 1993 with one room at its current location. The family owned the land. The school’s head-teacher had a Bachelors’ in Business Administration and a post graduate certificate in Education, taking it over at her mother’s request. The head-mistress felt the need to explain the meaning of her school’s name:

The school name is important here, it is like a symbol. It is composed of the three first letters of my mother’s first name and her friend’s first name. I say that to you because many people expect us to have a religious name, but the school’s name is part of our heritage here, I will not change it.”

The head-mistress hired another woman head-teacher to assist her with the high school students to help her due to the increase in enrollment. The school was under construction and was hoping to add new classrooms and a library to attract more students.

Grace School

The CEO and main head-teacher was a religious leader and former medical assistant. His wife was the accountant and his in-laws were the school’s founders. They owned the land and the school. The family started the school in 2000 with two female students in their private garage. The current primary school head-teacher, the school’s first teacher, remembered “I started with the school, I did not know much and was taking care of the two students in the garage. Now, I am one of the head-teachers and the school has grown to a four-story building.” The CEO was planning to renovate the building by adding a library and additional toilets.

Hope School

The head-teacher was a religious leader who also served as the school's accountant. He used to work in a large company but decided to stop to help his wife with the school because she dreamed of having her husband working along with her at the school. His wife, the head-mistress, had three degrees in education and was pursuing her master's in Early Childhood Education. The school was founded in 2004 and started in their own home with a few students who did not pay any tuition at the time. The head-mistress stated: "I just wanted to help the children in the neighborhood because I saw children in the streets helping their parents crush the stones." The school building was also under construction. Still, the head-mistress complained about the lack of space.

As noted, all schools were family businesses started to fulfill a need in their communities. All principals led the schools along with having other responsibilities such as being the accountant, bursar, or CEO. Three leaders out of eight were also religious leaders. The second research question examined the perceived challenges of the current head-teachers.

"The challenges Are There"

As the quote indicates, head-teachers faced challenges. All eight head-teachers shared three areas of difficulty related to finance, human resources, and parent engagement.

Financial difficulties

All head-teachers had taken loans to improve their school facilities. As a result, they unanimously spoke about the challenges they faced in repaying their loan. One principal said, "the loan is heavy when having to repay the loan monthly." All principals also mentioned the financial burden as it related to the tuitions not being paid on time by the parents. One principal explained:

The delay in parents' payment affects our cash flow, you see I need to repay my loan and if they do not pay me, I am in default with the loan officers. When parents are late, I also have a hard time paying the teachers on time and that is not fair, but I try to manage.

Connected to the lack of finances, all participants mentioned the lack of space. At the time of the researchers' visits, all head-teachers were in the process of either building new classrooms, libraries, or computer labs. In one case, the school principal was in the midst of asking for permits to build an entire new school on a different lot. One of the head-teachers declared: "We have small classrooms and barely enough space to accommodate current students, let alone students for the following academic year." He concluded "so that is our biggest challenge, it has been a headache, but we are praying and trusting God to open that avenue for us."

The loan repayment and the parents being late paying their tuitions caused the new constructions to be stopped, forcing principals to become creative with finding new spaces for students. As one leader expressed: "We turned our former kitchen into a classroom, so the meals are prepared in our house next door now." Another head-teacher talked about not having enough toilets for the number of students, "And also, when I mean we need more infrastructure, you know we do not have the best of the janitor area, the washrooms but we cannot finish the project now."

An additional difficulty connected to finances that all leaders faced was the lack of educational resources. School leaders stated that they needed more teaching and learning materials such as books for children and books plus teacher guides for teachers to prepare their classes. One principal commented, "Children do not always have money to buy books so we need to have more ready to lend them so they can learn. We also need books to put in our library."

None of the schools had teachers' guides or enough supplemental materials for teachers to prepare their lessons. The researchers occasionally saw teachers guides but not for all topics. As a

result, teachers bought their own supplies when they could afford to do so or went online to locate assistance. A head-teacher confided that teachers were complaining about having to buy credit with their own monies to have WIFI access. She said: “The teachers complain because we cannot buy their credit for WIFI access and they say they need more materials to prepare.” In addition to these struggles, principals spoke of the difficulties to find and retain quality teachers.

“Teachers Need to Sit Up”

All the principals spoke about the difficulty finding quality teachers, a common theme shared being that “teachers leave the school or the profession for more money.” The researchers often heard leaders talked in these or similar terms: “Once you train the teachers, they pack up and leave to go to another school with a better pay or a public school when they can.” As a result, school heads often had to hire teachers lacking qualifications and train them on the job. Principals shared that they were giving the new teachers orientations and some training. One principal mentioned: “We give our teachers some orientations, some in-service training, so that they will be up to the task.” Another principal proclaimed: “Teachers receive training every quarter, may be sometimes twice, it depends.”

Principals noted that despite the trainings received, the teachers were, at-times, off tasks, not motivated, and made mistakes. One leader complained:

As a teacher, you need to sit up and be much committed to work. That is why here we check on teachers frequently, regular check on teachers also put you on your toes, put you on the right path. We need to check on the teachers constantly. That discipline is there in this school. Every time it is 20 minutes we must move in the class, let's go and stand and look at what is going on, go around with the children and check on what they are doing.

Three other principals spoke about conducting “surprise visits in the classrooms” to make sure that the teachers “were doing the right thing.” In one case, the head-teacher had promoted one of his teachers to check on his colleagues, check their lessons plans, and make sure that the lesson “is happening quietly with discipline.” According to these principals, this practice helped to provide quality teaching.

Two leaders brought up the idea of purchasing cameras to check on teachers. One head-teacher said: “The idea of the camera came up, and we plan on adding those when the money is there.” Whether leaders conducted unannounced classroom visits, thought about purchasing cameras, or offered training and orientation, they all agreed that finding quality teachers who committed to stay at their schools was a significant struggle.

Parents Need to Monitor their Children

The final hurdle mentioned by two of the school leaders was the lack of parental engagement. While all principals faced similar challenges in terms of finance stability, infrastructure, tuition payments, and educational materials, leaders in only two schools mentioned the lack of parent involvement as being an issue. One head-teacher pointed out:

The challenges actually is about parents. Monitoring children at home when there are assignments to be checked in the house. When the children go home parents maybe because of their jobs they have that challenge of helping their children at home, so when there is an assignment, the child comes back unable to do it or not doing it at all.

Another leader at the same school added: “We want parents to be much involved in their children's learning. Children's education is not their priority.” A third principal, at a different school said: “At times, parents do not read English, so it makes it hard to help their children, and

they cannot afford tutors.” The next segment presents the findings of the third research question: What are the leaders’ dominant leadership styles?

Top Down It Is

Based on their observations and the analysis of documents such as teachers’ handbooks, newsletters, contract letters, and teacher communications, the researchers determined that the head-teachers were leading from the top, rarely allowing teachers to freely speak or to bring up ideas or items for discussion. On multiple occasions, the investigators witnessed head-teachers elevating their voices with teachers and gave them stern looks. The researchers observed discussions between teachers and head-teachers in which the principal often used words such as “must” or “don’t.” Handbooks were written in a top down manner as well. For example, a handbook was written in these terms: “You must arrive at 7am, you cannot leave the classroom, you must not call the parents, under no circumstance can you...” The researchers also noted that most of the written communications were signed “The administration” rather than by the principal’s name. This type of communication reinforced the top-down leadership style and the understanding that head-teachers were leading highhandedly.

Discussion

Head-teachers and Adaptive Challenges

Based on this study’s findings, Ghanaian school leaders in LFPSs faced three adaptive challenges that necessitated that they engage in new learning. The head-teachers were confronted with financial challenges, human resources difficulties, and not knowing how to engage their parent communities.

Heifetz (1994) affirms that in order to solve serious problems such as adaptive challenges, leaders need to be chief learners and need to embrace and adapt to change. At the time of this

study, principals lacked the necessary skills to tackle the adaptive challenges they faced, namely leading teachers in their growth and learning, raising monies as a way to palliate their financial difficulties, and engaging parents. These findings concur with Donko's study (2015) of Ghanaian public schools principals in which he said: "The function of school leadership in Africa today is increasingly defined by a demanding set of roles which include financial, human resource management and leadership for learning" (p. 231). Further examination and interpretation of the findings revealed that head-teachers should be trained on instructional leadership because instructional leadership focuses on impact on student learning by seeking to develop quality teachers.

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership focuses on student learning. Specifically, it deals with how teachers can promote student learning outcomes (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2013; Hoy & Hoy, 2013). Instructional leadership examines the teaching and learning process from the perspective of those charged with the responsibility for designing and delivering educational opportunities for all students in classrooms, school buildings, districts, training centers, or other learning environments.

Topics usually covered in instructional leadership courses or trainings include various theories of learning and teaching, classroom management, motivation, student abilities, culture and climate and assessing student learning. The findings of this study revealed that principals lacked the skills and competencies taught in the just mentioned activities necessary to focus on teaching and learning in order to become effective instructional leaders. Instead, head-teachers spent a considerable amount of time scrutinizing and micro-managing their teachers rather than giving them the tools they needed to improve their practice. That is because the principals were not trained on instructional leadership and on how to lead learning among teachers.

Studying how to apply principles of instructional leadership in schools is an adaptive challenge for all head-teachers, teachers, and policy makers because it requires new learning, changing, and adapting to different needs. Other adaptive challenges included the need for head-teachers to learn how to motivate their teachers rather than “checking on them constantly.” This finding corresponds to what Zame, Hope and Respress (2008) found in their study of Ghanaian public schools’ principals. Motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic (Hoy & Hoy, 2013). For teachers who are not naturally motivated, head-teachers could provide bonuses, gifts, professional development and leadership opportunities, mentors and a supportive attitude.

Top Down Leadership

Ghana is one of Africa’s patriarchal societies (Bush, 2014; Ngcobo & Tilky, 2010). As seen in this study, teachers were told what to do or not to do and were monitored frequently. Bush (2014) stipulates that the top down leadership and the chain of command hinders people from exercising their capabilities and freedoms. Top down leadership stifles creativity and demotivates people. Instead, and to lead adaptively, Heifetz (1994) recommend a leadership model that is shared, inclusive, and based on strong relationships and trust. This new learning represents a significant change for current principals in Ghana because the cultural norm is to lead autocratically. Insofar as the top down leadership is culturally embedded in Ghanaian society, this change may require time, patience, expertise and mindsets to be altered. Building the capacity of school leaders and educating them on other leadership styles such as adaptive or servant leadership could be a first step towards a more inclusive and collaborative culture and society.

Challenges Remaining

Kitavi and Van der Westhuizen (2006) pointed out challenges that principals faced in Kenya. These challenges were shortage of equipment, inadequate facilities, lack of phones,

students traveling long distances, paucity of playgrounds, lack of clean water, and, particularly in rural areas parents, who are illiterate. This study demonstrated that in 2017, these similar challenges existed in LFPSs in Ghana, pointing to the need to train head-teachers to be adaptive leaders. Thus, the next section offer recommendations for head-teachers policy makers.

Recommendations

To achieve goal 4c of the SDGs, the authors offer five recommendations to practitioners and policy makers for head-teachers working in LFPSs in Ghana. Based on the existing literature and the researchers' experience working in other countries in Africa, these recommendations could be relevant and applicable in all schools where head-teachers face similar adaptive challenges.

First, head-teachers in LFPSs should learn skills in leadership and management to respond effectively to schools' needs (Amakyi & Ampah-Mensah, 2013). The findings of this study revealed the principals led autocratically. Hence, it is important to teach principals different models of leadership. Heifetz (1994) recommends shared leadership models. Additionally, because principals faced adaptive challenges in matters of finances and human resources, it would be beneficial to provide professional development opportunities on such topics as fundraising and human resources (Donkor, 2015). Finally, this study demonstrated that principals should be taught about instructional leadership, which focuses is on promoting student learning, supporting teachers' growth and learning, and creating cultures of learning in which everyone is engaged, parents included.

These activities could be part of principal preparation programs offered at Universities, continuing professional development offered by the Ministry of Education, or a combination of the two. Amakyi & Ampah-Mensah (2013) argue that because of the culture in Ghana, it would,

for instance, be most beneficial for part of the workshops to occur in context, whereby head-teachers would be able to practice in their own setting with mentors or coaches. One way to achieve this would be by using Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory of situated cognition. Situated cognition posits that learning is inseparable from doing by arguing that all knowledge is situated in activity bound to social, cultural and physical contexts. Situated cognition focuses on what Lave and Wenger call legitimate peripheral participation (LLP).

In LLP apprentices learn from experienced practitioners by first learning and practicing basic tasks. Through these activities, and with further collaboration with experts, apprentices should become familiar with their duties and better understand the community and its needs. Learning in context would not only allow principals to link theory to practice and learn from others with more experience, but also enhance the transfer of learning as active learning is one of the enhancers of the transfer of training (Brion & Cordeiro, 2018). Training content could also be delivered using technology or blended learning, combining face-to-face and online learning.

Second, in order to ensure that schools are led by qualified head-teachers, there is a need for the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with universities, to create a set of leadership standards based on evidence-based criteria (Donkor, 2015). These standards should be based on best practices around the world and should be adapted to the Ghanaian context and reflect the local culture by offering local languages and handcrafts classes. The standards could be used to evaluate and hire head-teachers in public schools and could be used as a blue print for private schools' head-teachers. The ministry of education could use these standards to provide workshops for all school principals and could expect private schools head -teachers to attend these professional development events as part of a yearly professional development plan.

Third, the researchers recommend partnerships between private, NGOs, and public schools in order to fund professional development initiatives in schools. For example, principals who have attended professional development events could help other schools in their neighborhoods by becoming mentors to other head-teachers. Additionally, NGOs that fund professional development initiatives could make their materials available to schools around the country so that more educators benefit from the knowledge shared.

The fourth recommendation applies to working with banks or micro-lending institutions in Ghana and other low or middle-income countries. Whenever possible, micro-lending institutions should establish creative ways to serve their clients so that the loan repayment matches their clients' activities and challenges. For instance, in the second semester, because parents who are farmers do not have any more crops to sell, they do not have the financial means to pay tuition. Lenders could have a flexible repayment options such as paying more in the first semester and less when parents have lesser incomes. Tiered pricing could also be instituted, a flexible model of financing based on the needs and capacity to repay of each school proprietor.

Fifth, policies should be written by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with local universities and NGOs. These policies should be reviewed annually by the government officials, professors in educational leadership and local educational experts after student data has been reviewed and new needs identified to ensure that they are consistent with the country's and SDGs educational goals.

Conclusion

This study aimed to understand the roles and perceptions of head-teachers in LFPSs in the Greater Accra region of Ghana by seeking to comprehend how they became principals, what challenges they faced, and what leadership style they used in their schools. The findings revealed

that all schools were family businesses whose challenges were related to finances, teachers, parents and top down leadership style. This study is significant because schools are key drivers in the move towards development and poverty reduction and head-teachers play a critical role in improving student learning outcomes. If Ghana is to reach Goal number 4, target 4c of the SDGs by 2030, which aims at increasing the number of quality teachers, head-teachers need to learn about, and apply, instructional leadership, leadership, and management skills. This study also contributes to the body of literature on educational leadership in Ghana.

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