THE INFLUENCE OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL HEADS' LEADERSHIP STYLES ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: THE CASE OF EAST AKIM MUNICIPAL, GHANA

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Abstract:
Knowing the leadership styles of heads of Senior High Schools (SHS) helps to improve quality educational delivery. The aim of this paper was to assess the leadership styles of heads of Senior High Schools and its influence on academic performance. The concurrent triangulatory mixed method, involving both qualitative and quantitative was adopted for the study. Data was collected from a total of 460 respondents using a 24-item questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The qualitative data were analysed thematically while the qualitative data was processed using Statistical Package for Social Science Students (SPSS version 22.0). The results show that most of the respondents (72.1%) agreed their heads style of leadership was democratic. In addition, it was revealed that involvement of teachers and students in decision making, collaborating with subordinates as well as provision educational resources were the top most factors leading to increased students' performance. It was also found that only democratic leadership style had significant relationship with students' academic performance (p=0.003). The study recommends periodic organization of capacity building workshops to enhance the skills of heads on how to collaborate and involve subordinates more in decision making.

Keywords: leadership style, academic achievement, authority, teachers, senior high school (SHS), collaboration

1. Introduction

Leadership can be defined as the process by which an individual influence another individual or a group to achieve a common goal (Bass & Bass 2009). They implied that

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leadership involves the use of interpersonal approaches or techniques with the intention to persuade followers to accept a goal. The definition of leadership suggests that the process involves a transition from the current state or condition of the followers, to a future state desired by the leader that can be accomplished by achieving the goal. In the context of a school, the headmaster/mistress is the designated leader of the institution. He or she forms relationships with followers, which includes teachers and students. Although the fundamental goal of the school is education of students, the specific tasks necessary to accomplish this goal may vary depending on the environment within the school and the recognition of authority by followers. While the head has inherent authority from position in the school hierarchy, the willingness of teachers, other staff and students to accept the heads authority is also an aspect influencing leadership approach and leadership style.

A major factor that separates a good school from an average school in all over the world is the calibre of the head's leadership qualities and styles (Okogun, 2012). As suggested, a bad headmaster/mistress can ruin a good school; similarly, a good headmaster/mistress can turn around a bad school. According to Hills & Matthews (2010), to achieve the desired turnaround, a school leader should possess the following; a sense of vision, a strong communication skill to imbibe in all staff and students the vision of the school, a high moral standard, concern for task completion, resilience, inner strength, risk-taking, creativity and originality, self-confidence, coping with stress, influence in or out of school, and harnessing people's skills for the attainment of set goals (p. 63).

The leadership capabilities of school heads impact on the performance of students (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Harris, 2004). The head's leadership approaches and styles influence factors in the school environment such as organisational culture (Maslowski, 2006), organisational learning, and management of resources to improve the professional skills of teachers (Mulford & Silins, 2003). These factors contribute to the educational accomplishments of students. Again, Marzano, Waters & McNulty (2005), report that effective school leadership substantially boosts student achievement. Effective leadership increases an organisation's ability to meet all challenges, including the need to obtain a competitive advantage, the need to foster ethical behaviour, and the need to manage a diverse workforce fairly and equitably (McColumn, 2010). The fact that the leadership styles heads adapt to a great extent influence students' academic performance and school climate implies that building the leadership capacities of heads will need to be incorporated into designed programmes and workshop in the schools. It is imperative that heads of Senior High Schools in Ghana develop effective leadership styles that enhance students' academic performance. School heads therefore, find themselves in the spotlight as they are held accountable for student achievement. As a result, leadership styles exhibited by heads are an important factor affecting academic performance of students in schools.

1.1 Research Questions of the Study

The study focused on the following research questions based on the purpose of the study:

1. What types of leadership styles do heads exhibit in Senior High Schools?
2. How does the head's leadership influence students' academic performance?

1.2 Hypothesis of the Study

There is statistical significant difference between Senior High School heads' style of leadership and students' academic performance.

2. Literature review

2.1 Types of leadership styles

Leadership is a complex process involving the interaction of numerous variables. The style of the leader can also influence the way in which the leader executes a particular approach. Leadership styles involve the behaviours of leaders in their relationships with followers. Mosadeghrad (2003) as cited in Dahar, Faize, Niwaz, Hussain & Zaman (2010) have identified leadership styles to include; bureaucratic, autocratic, laissez-faire, participative, charismatic, transformational, situational and transactional. The most common being the autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire.

A. Autocratic leadership

The autocratic leadership style is also referred to as the authoritarian style of leadership, where the leader assumes power and decides on the duties of his followers. This leadership style can be directive or autocratic as the leader informs the followers of the objectives and the way in which the objectives should be achieved (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015). In this style of leadership, Dahar, et. al (2010) opines that the autocratic leader uses threats as a way to ensure subordinates comply always with his directives. He/she has little interactions with his/her subordinates or followers and does not encourage team work.

B. Democratic leadership

Another type of leadership style, known as the democratic style is a more participative approach. The leader here establishes the objectives or goals of the organisation, but encourages his/her followers to get involved in determining the best ways to achieve the set objectives. Democratic leadership style have the following attributes: policies are determined by all, everyone is involved in discussion technical and job performance measures for all to understand, leaders play the advisory role where members are implementing organizational tasks, members are at will to choose persons to work with, determination of distribution of tasks rest on all group members and leaders try to minimize biasness when offering criticism or praises to followers (Goldman, 2002).

C. Laisser-faire leadership

Laissez-faire, which literally in French implies 'let people do what they want' invariably tends to give followers more freedom to operate. In this style the leaders rarely intervene. The head of the institution exercises little or no authority and gives complete

freedom to the subordinates to do something for the school or organization at their own desire. This style of leadership is most effective when the followers or subordinates are matured and highly motivated to work (Hackman & Johnson, 2009).

2.2 Leadership Style and Academic Performance

Knowing the impact of leadership style on students' academic performance guides headmaster or headmistress as administrators to discharge their duties effectively and efficiently. This is because Edwards (2009) as cited in Gyasi, Xi & Owusu-Ampomah (2016) states that good leadership practices leads to positive influence, growth and development of individuals and institutions. Dahar et al. (2010), investigated leadership styles and their relationships with students' academic performance at the secondary stage at Punjab in Pakistan. The study at Punjab was a quantitative approach which used only questionnaire to gather data from 2,400 teachers. The results show that democratic and autocratic styles of leadership had significant impact on students' academic performance while laissez-faire style of leadership was found to have insignificant impact on student's academic performance. The findings of Dahar et al. (2010) are consistent with the wider research on the subject of leadership. Rautioala (2009) also conducted a study to determine the effects of leadership styles on students' academic performance. It was demonstrated in the study that the implications of school leadership could be either direct or indirect, where each was found to have led to students' increase in academic performance.

Similarly, Gyasi, et al. (2016), examined the effects of leadership styles on students' performance at Asonomaso Nkwanta in the Kwabre District of the Ashanti Region of the Republic of Ghana. The study was a mixed method employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative data was collected from 63 respondents and analysed with frequencies and percentages while the qualitative was done using content and thematic analysis. The findings indicated that majority of the respondents were satisfied with their heads' style of leadership and also agreed that the leadership styles supported academic work. The study also established a significant relationship between leadership styles exhibited by the heads and students' academic performance. This research obviously made some significant findings in spite of the fact that its generalizability is limited to the participants in the study.

Arguably, the sample size of sixty-three (63) used in the Gyasi et al. (2016) study can be said to be relatively too small. Hence, it will be problematic to generalize its findings to cover a large and heterogenous population, such as students in Senior High School in the East Akim Municipality of Ghana. Ultimately, a head's leadership style sets the tone for the school's environment which may in turn lead to increased student academic performance. Witziers, Bosker & Kruger (2003) suggested that the head's behaviour might affect student performance through school climate and organisation. Hence, if a heads' way of leadership, affects student academic performance even indirectly, it is important to identify the head's leadership styles that positively affect the academic performance of students.

In view of the above-mentioned, the current study set out to assess the leadership styles of heads and its effect on academic performance in Senior High Schools in the East Akim Municipality of Ghana. In order to achieve this aim, the triangulatory mixed method research design was employed for the study. Again, an assessment of head's leadership styles may present a clearer understanding on how the headmaster/mistress style of leadership may influence students' academic performance. It is therefore, the belief of the researchers that many heads within the East Akim Municipality of Ghana may not realize how their leadership styles impact on a high-quality educational performance and therefore the need for this study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research design employed for this study was a concurrent triangulatory mixed method. This design was most appropriate for the study because, according to Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2007), triangulation helps to explain more fully the richness and complexity of human behaviour by employing both quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. Thus, a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena is achieved as one set of data helps to compliment the other, by overcoming shortfalls associated with each other approach (Sedofia, Antwi-Danso & Nyarko-Sampson, 2018).

3.2 Population

The population consisted of all 11,290 students and 520 teachers (this included the headmaster/mistress, assistant heads, departmental heads and "ordinary" teachers) in the eight Senior High Schools (SHS) in the East Akim Municipal for the 2016/ 2017 academic year (Ghana Education Service, East Akim Municipal, 2017).

3.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

Considering some factors such as the large size of the population, finance and time, it was practically impossible to access information from all the target population. Therefore, a total of 460 respondents from four (4) out of eight (8) SHS were purposively selected for the study based on Krejcie & Morgan's Table for sample size determination (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). As deduced from the table, at confidence level of 0.005 (5 per cent) a sample size of 460 was appropriate for a population of 11, 810.

Hence, two schools headed by females, namely; Abuakwa State College (ABUSCO) and Saviour SHS (SASH) and two other schools headed by males, namely; St. Stephens SHS and Ofori Panin SHS (OPASS) were purposely selected for the study. In all, four Headmaster/Mistress, eight Assistant Heads, 20 Departmental Heads and 48 School prefects were purposively selected from the four schools for the study. The purpose for using purposive sampling technique was because those individuals held key positions in the school and were directly involved in administrative matters with the head. In addition, 100 other teachers and 280 ordinary students (non-prefects) made up of 25 teachers and 70 students from each of the four selected Senior High Schools

were randomly selected for the study. The choice of the simple random sampling was to afford the students and teachers equal opportunity to be selected for the study.

3.4 Research Instrument

The main instruments for the study included a questionnaire and structured interview guide. The Headteacher Leadership Style Adaptation and Usage questionnaire (HLSAUQ) was used for the students while the self-designed interview guide developed from the HLSAUQ was used for the Assistant Heads and departmental heads. The questionnaire consisting of 24 items measured five main areas, namely; the heads adoption of leadership styles, owing to his value for its importance, involvement of the staff in decision-making, management of cases and adoption of most valuable leadership styles to achieve high academic performance and extra-curricular goals of the schools. After pre-testing the instrument at Osino SHS on 30 students and 15 teachers, a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.744 was realized. The pre-testing also made it possible to for the researchers to discover and address problems such as ambiguity and inadequacies in the instruments before the main study.

3.5 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was delivered personally to the respondents in the various schools. One working week interval was given for the questionnaires to be completed while the interview was done alone side. After the one week, a follow up was made by the researchers for collection of the questionnaire.

3.6 Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), version 23.0 was used in analysing the quantitative data from the field. The Open-ended questions and the interviews conducted were analysed thematically using content analysis, and later integrated with the quantitative data obtained. This integration of both the quantitative and qualitative results helped the researchers to delve more deeply into the leadership styles of the heads of the Senior High Schools.

4. Results

The results are presented as follows:

Research question 1: What types of leadership styles do heads exhibit in Senior High Schools?

This question sought to find out the differences in leadership styles exhibited by heads of Senior High Schools in East Akim Municipal of Ghana. The results are presented on table 1.

Table 1: Respondent's Opinion on Leadership Styles adopted by Heads of Senior High Schools

Leadership Style adopted by principals		Senior High Schools				Total
		OPASS	ST. STEPHENS	ABUSCO	SASH	
Democratic	Frequency	80	70	109	70	329
	Percent	17.4%	15.3%	23.6%	15.3%	71.5%
Autocratic	Frequency	26	41	6	26	99
	Percent	5.6%	9.0%	1.4%	5.6%	21.5%
Laissez-faire	Frequency	9	4	0	19	32
	Percent	2.0%	0.7%	0.0%	4.2%	6.9%
Total	Frequency	115	115	115	115	460
	Percent	**25.0%**	**25.0%**	**25.0%**	**25.0%**	**100.0%**

The results in Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents 329 (71.5%) indicated the heads adopted democratic style while 21.5% said the heads adopted the autocratic style. However, only 32 (6.9%) of the respondents indicated the heads adopted the laissez-faire style of leadership.

The qualitative data gathered from the interview conducted confirm that majority of the heads adopted the democratic style of leadership. Most of the respondents said the heads were democratic in their dealings with them as the following comment from a head of department in school M suggests:

> *"Our head is patient, caring, considerate, compassionate and he listens to us. We very much always need something like that to work hard. … the main reason why we all came to this place is for the students' academic excellence and for that matter, I believe that the head involving all of us in decision making is the best style of leadership. You know you have to be democratic to succeed."* (AAK1-N)

This view was unanimously shared by the heads of department and assistant heads of SHS N. In the other SHS, the interviewees expressed similar views and stated that in only a few instances will you find the head being autocratic and lazier fair attitude hardly seen.

The heads believed that they needed to warm, caring, accommodating and accept the diverging views of their subordinates to make the work go on smoothly. headmaster K advanced the following:

> *"… when you want the work to go on well* you need to be free, fair and firm. *You have to call for the views of the people you are working with because wisdom is not in one person's head or you alone were not born with all the wisdom in the world. When you involve them in the process they see the decision to be coming from them and are committed to execute them."* (WWE-K)

Headmaster M also stated that heads needed to be flexible but stamp their authority on the ground in order not to be taken for granted.

"When you are too flexible too, they (teachers) will see you to be weak. I mean they will relax, take you for a ride and will not be serious with the work. So, you need to be balanced with your approaches." (CCC-M)

Thus, both the quantitative and qualitative data suggest that the head's style of leadership was mostly democratic.

Research question 2: How does the head's leadership influences students' academic achievement?

The essence of this research question was to determine how the leadership styles of the heads influences the academic work of the students at the various SHS sampled. The decisions of Heads ultimately impact on academic achievement either negatively or positively. The respondents were therefore made to state their views on the extent to which they agree or disagree with some leadership styles that impact on students' academic performance. A chi-square analysis was also done to determine the relationship. The results are shown in table 2 and 3;

Table 2: Leadership practices and styles of heads in SHS that can lead to increase
Students' Academic Performance (N=460)

Statement	Mean	SD
My head considers students' views when taking decisions on academic issues	2.91	0.91
My head works in collaboration with college representative to ensure effective continuous assessment	2.81	0.91
My head provides the necessary resources for academic work	2.53	0.85
My head sets high academic standards	2.78	0.85
My head ensures effective instructional supervision	2.70	0.85
My head has put facilities in place to enable students research towards higher academic achievement	2.53	0.91
The leadership style of my head makes campus academic work easy	2.85	0.82

The data presented in Table 2 show that for all the seven items, respondents' scores on the specific statement have met the cut-off point of 2.0 on the likert scale. The response categories were "Always", "Often", "Occasionally", "Seldom" and "Never". Each response was weighted accordingly with value from "Always" = 4 to "Never" = 0. This results shows that their style of leadership has positive effect on academic performance. It can be seen from the table that respondents agreed that the heads considered students' views when taking decisions on academic issues (M=2.91, SD=0.91). Again, respondents stated that the leadership styles of their heads made campus academic work easy (M=2.85, SD=0.82). Collaboration between heads and school representatives to ensure effective continuous assessment was also indicated by the respondents to be high (M.2.81, 0.91).

During the interview with the assistant heads and departmental heads, they indicated that the heads were very democratic. In SHS M, the heads of department said unanimously that their head mostly consulted them on matters relating the school 's academic performance. A male head of department from SHS N explained:

"Oh …for this our head, she is very serious with academic work, when our students' results are in, she will call all of us and say my people, this subject our students did not do well, so what can we do. Bring your ideas." (FFT1-N)

An assistant head from SHS N, a female, remarked:

"My head is very committed and wants students to always pass with flying colours … anything these children want for their practical work, you just tell her and she will let you go to the accountant for the money." (FFT1-N).

Two heads of department were of the view that the heads usually provided them with resources to make their work easier. In College T however, the head of department said he did think the head was interested in providing resources to enable the school research. According to departmental head B,

"For our head, he always wants to buy new books and provide internet facilities for the students to make research. Whenever you raise this matter, oh within some few weeks you will see him trying to do something about it. For now, he is doing his best."
(AAC1-M)

The issue of ensuring effective instructional supervision also dominated the discussions in all four SHS. With respect to this, an assistant head in College N indicated that the heads were flexible in terms of supervision with the following comment:

"You see, we are all human and I believe the head also understands the teachers small if they are not able to come to school. And also, avoids talking to teachers harshly when they are late for class or miss classes. She will encourage you to try your best next time." (AAC1-N)

All the interviewees in the four SHS agreed on the issue of heads collaborating with them to improve academic standards. The respondents made comments that seem to suggest that they worked together with the heads as a team to plan effective academic work and how to help academic challenges of students. For example, Assistant head D affirmed that:

"Surely, Yes, he (the head) calls us together as one body to think through effective ways to impact knowledge to the students. So, when we realize some of our students have academic challenges, we devise ways to help them improve." (KKK-M)

Assistant Head E also said:

"When they [students] *perform we take the praise together… when they fail we take the blame together. So, we collaborate to ensure the students get the best."*

(KKK-M)

These comments suggest that the heads and the teachers collaborate on most important areas of the student's academics.

4.1 Hypothesis

H0: There is no significant difference in the male and female opinion on the leadership styles of heads of Senior High Schools.
H1: There is significant difference in male and female opinion on the leadership styles of heads of Senior High Schools.

To determine whether significant difference exists in the styles of leadership adopted heads and the influence on students' academic performance, the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Leadership Style and Level of Influence on Students' Academic Performance

Leadership styles	Respondents n=460 Pearson Chi-Square (R)	P-values at 95% CI (Asymp. Sig. at $p \leq$ 0.05 (2 – tailed)
Democratic	0.943	0.003
Laissez-faire	0.101	0.072
Autocratic	-0.546	0.081

As shown from Table 3, democratic style of leadership had influence on student's academic performance, as the Chi-square R-value was determined to be 0.943. This implies that there is a strong and positive influence of democratic style of leadership on students' academic performance, since the R-value nearly equals to 1. Additionally, the relationship between Democratic style and students' academic performance was also significant at p=0.003 level. With respect to Laissez-faire style of leadership, the results revealed that it is also positively influence students' academic performances as the R-value was found positive (R-value=0.101). However there was no significant relationship between Laissez-faire and students' academic performance (p=0.072). Again, the findings revealed that autocratic leadership style strongly (R=0.546) influence students' academic performance but the relationship is insignificant with p value = 0.081.

5. Discussions

The study found that majority of the respondents viewed the leadership styles of the heads as democratic. Stated differently, most respondents agreed the heads are democratic in their style of leadership while a few maintained that the heads demonstrated autocratic and Laiser faire styles of leadership. The current result is consistent with the finding of Stoeberl, Kwon, Han, & Bae, (1998), which revealed that

head at the high school level are more democratic in their leadership approach. Similarly, the current finding agrees with the result obtained by Hassan & Silong (2008), that most heads are flexible in consulting their subordinates for their opinion, thereby exhibiting the democratic style of leadership. The current finding also confirms the finding of Dahar et al. (2010), whose study found that most heads adopted the democratic style of leadership and had a positive effect on students' academic performance. The current finding is not surprising. This is because the frequent involvement of the staff and students in the decision making, planning projects and activities for the school made them felt an integral part of the school community and also a major stakeholder. This would save a lot of agitation, complains, riot and demonstrations among the staff and students which is common with leaders who are autocratic. The current result implies that most heads now understand that creating a friendly school environment that enabled students and staff to contribute and also share their concerns is the right way to manage schools.

The study also found that heads' attitudes positively influenced the students' academic performance. For instance, they indicated that the heads consider students' views when taking decisions on academic issues. Again, respondents stated that the heads worked in collaboration with school representatives both staff and student leaders to ensure effective continuous assessment, hence making campus academic work easy. The current finding is not different from the study of Witziers, Bosker & Kruger (2003) who found that heads with favourable attitude towards staff and students promoted academic performance as compared to heads who are hostile towards their staff and students. The current finding also tallies with the results obtained by Gyasi et al. (2016), that respondents preferred heads who set higher academic standards and provided facilities that enabled students to make research. Other reasons that could account for this finding is the provision of teaching and learning resources and ensuring effective supervision by the heads. Therefore, the impact of the heads' attitude towards students and staff in the school environment promotes higher academic performance.

From the study's findings, the autocratic style of leadership of SHS head has a negative effect on students' academic performance. Many arguments were advanced in the interview with respondents including the fact that, autocratic school heads tend to be too strict and harsh which discourages their subordinates from performing to the best of their ability and sometimes protesting against some of the decision of the head. It is therefore recommended that school head teachers avoid the use of the autocratic leadership styles in the management of schools. This style of leadership does not only demotivate staff, but also discourages students and hence affecting their academic performance.

This study has established that there is a very low correlation between the laissez-faire leadership style and students' performance in SHS in East Akim Municipal of Ghana. The qualitative data revealed that laissez-faire leaders do not delineate the problem that needs to be solved and as the heads practicing this style tend to over

delegate their duties which leads to poor performance because most of the work remains undone at the end of the day.

This study also found that students' academic performance in SHS in East Akim Municipality of Ghana is positively related to the democratic style of leadership employed the by school head and that the democratic leadership style is the most used style in schools. The democratic leadership style encourages everybody to participate in the affairs of the school as a whole. The staff feels they are part of the school, and hence they are part of the leadership of the school. This motivates teachers, students and other staff to work hard and consequently all programs in the school are implemented and the overall academic performance of the school rises.

6. Conclusion

The study explored the leadership styles of heads of SHS and its influence on student's academic performance within the East Akim Municipal of Ghana. The findings showed that the democratic style leadership was dominantly used among Heads thereby affecting students' academic performance positively. On the other hand there was no significant relationship between autocratic or laissez-faire leadership style and academic performance. Conclusion can further be drawn from the study that the involvement of teachers and students in decision making, collaborating with subordinates as well as provision educational resources are key benchmarks for enhancing academic performance of students. Hence, periodic organization of capacity building workshops to enhance the heads' skills of heads that still practiced the autocratic style, on how to collaborate and involve subordinates more in decision making. The paper would therefore be useful to school administrators, counsellors, policy makers and other stakeholders in education when selecting and training new school heads.

6.1 Recommendation for future research
This study only tried to explore the heads' leadership styles and its effect on academic performance of students. The study did not identify the preference for male or female heads and its impact on school climate. Future research should therefore examine this aspect.

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