

## MAKING SCHOOLS EFFECTIVE FOR IMPROVEMENT IN JOMORO MUNICIPALITY (GHANA): WHAT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL HEADTEACHERS DO

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### Abstract

This study investigated school effectiveness practices of headteachers in the Jomoro Municipality. A sequential explanatory mixed-method design, underpinned by pragmatism, was employed in the study. Census frame was used to involve all 52 headteachers in the quantitative phase of the study, whilst maximal variation was employed to select 10 headteachers for the interviews. A closed-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide were used to gather data for the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study respectively. The quantitative data was analysed using mean and standard deviation, whilst the qualitative data was used to support the discussion when necessary. The study revealed that the strategic planning and leadership practices of the headteachers included encouraging staff self-evaluation and developing improvement plans to guide schools' activities. It also emerged that the instructional leadership practices of the headteachers included organising regular meetings to review instructional progress and regular visitation of classrooms to observe teaching and learning. The study concluded that the instructional leadership roles of the headteachers contributed immensely to improving the professional practices of teachers and overall school improvement efforts. However, most of the headteachers hardly organise continuous professional development programmes on instructional leadership due to inadequate funding. The study, therefore, recommends, among others, that the Jomoro Municipal Education Directorate should reinforce instructional leadership practices and policies in the schools for improvement to occur. The Directorate could also supplement the government's effort by writing grant proposals to funding organisations, both within and outside Ghana, to raise funds for the organisation of in-service training programmes for teachers.

**Key terms:** Headteacher, instructional leadership, school improvement, school effectiveness, strategic planning.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Education is recognised as a key instrument for the overall development of every nation. It is also a means of change and development. Adu (2016) argues that education is a cornerstone of economic and social development. It improves the productive capacity of societies and their political, economic and scientific institutions. Therefore, quality education is the base for the all-rounded development of any nation that has a dream of change. Improving schools in a well-designed manner is the only alternative for nations in a globalised world. It enables individuals and society to make all-rounded participation in the development process by acquiring knowledge, ability, skills and attitudes (MoE, 2016). Schools play a central role in realising the purposes of education, as they are the institutions where formal teaching and learning activity takes place. Hence, schools should carry out their role to achieve their goals and fulfil the needs expected of them by society and individuals.

Educators around the world have been trying to make changes in schools to make schools more efficient and effective. Throughout the mid and late 1970s, school effectiveness and improvement efforts were directed at improving students' basic skills. The rapid growth and change of the needs of society force schools to update their system following the growth and varying necessities of society. Such an increasingly competitive environment in which schools operate forced them to raise standards and improve the quality of their service (Harris, 2002).

Globally, schools are experiencing increasing pressure for improvement from governments, parents and civil societies, specifically associated with the perennial poor performance of students. In Sub-Saharan Africa, a major concern has been the persistence of students' low learning achievements where, in some cases, students who have spent over nine years or more in basic level schooling lack adequate basic literacy and numeracy skills (Adu, 2016). As a result, the need to create a school environment that is conducive to effective teaching and learning, leading to high student' learning achievement, is imperative.

Ghana, like many other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, has adopted several international conventions such as "Education for All (EFA)", "Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE)" and "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)" as part of the country's efforts at improving basic education delivery. Since the introduction of "Education for All" as a strategy for improving access to education and the subsequent abolition of school fees at the basic level by the introduction of FCUBE, Ghana has made and continues to make great strides to increase access to education in the country. This high enrolment growth, however, appears to outweigh the growth in quality learning as the performance of students in schools remains low. UNESCO indicated in its Global Monitoring Report (2013) that Ghana has made significant strides in relation to access and participation of children at the primary level, but the literacy rate in the country remains low (UNESCO, 2013). This emphasises the need for improvement in teaching and learning.

Headteachers' leadership roles and practices are at the core and very critical in improving the status of schools and how students perform. Anderson and Seashore (2004) argue that headteachers are responsible for the success of a school. They shape the vision for the success of all learners. Daft (2005) believes that headteachers create a sense of purpose and direction, which guides strategy formulation and implementation within a school. Rowe (2001) avers that strategic leadership focuses on the specific activities and behaviours of headteachers that enhance the success of the school. The headteacher is the decision maker, a leader and the central focus around which many aspects of the school revolve and is the person in charge of every detail in the running of the school; academic or administrative (Sushila, 2004).

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Headteachers set up a framework of where the school needs to be in the future by translating the moral purpose and vision into reality. They translate strategy into action. Davies (2002) indicates that headteachers develop strategic perspectives of what the school might become.

Headteachers determine how and why the school should follow a certain administrative direction. They acknowledge the shortcomings within the school and turn them into something positive. Headteachers develop theoretical models to support strategic developments and share the model with others in the school. They initiate new ways of thinking and use new ideas to challenge their teachers to think in different ways. Davies (2002) asserts that the headteacher should provide strong leadership for effective academic performance. The headteachers set the culture of the 'school' characterised by strong administrative leadership, an up-to-date network of communication, high expectations for students, and a disciplined school community. He/she is the supervisor of the school programmes and bears the responsibility for the overall school performance. Headteachers oversee the implementation of the school curriculum, school finances, and school resources and maintain good public relations between the school and stakeholders (Okumbe, 1999), as well as implementing government policies in the school. This study explored the school improvement practices of headteachers in creating an environment conducive to effective teaching and learning.

Improving schools has been a latent concern of the government and educational institutions in Ghana. The ultimate target of effective and efficient delivery of education services to the satisfaction of parents, students and other stakeholders has remained elusive (Adu, 2016). The quality of education delivery is a challenge for many countries, especially in developing countries, including Ghana. Undertaking different educational initiatives is an important dimension to assure the quality of education. Hence, school effectiveness and improvement have become the major educational initiatives that many countries have developed and implemented to realise the provision of quality education (Adu, 2016).

Ghana has adopted a number of international conventions such as "Education for All", "Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education", and "Sustainable Development Goals" as part of efforts to improve basic education delivery. However, Chapman (2005) noted that externally driven reform can only work when the right conditions are in place. In this regard, any approach or strategy adopted should not consider schools globally as a homogeneous group but instead should take the singular context and cultural capacities of these schools into consideration (Fertig, 2000; Harris, 2002; Hopkins, 2001). In 1998, the Teacher Education Division of Ghana, as part of its strategies to improve schools and pupil's learning through a holistic and coordinated approach, also introduced the "Whole School Development" (WSD) programme. Unfortunately, the realisation of changes espoused by the adoption of international conventions, education commissions and other policy documents at the national level in Ghana has often been a doleful expectation. They have not been utilised as expected -they have been ignored totally or implemented only in part.

Despite the considerable effort made by the Ministry of Education (MoE) to improve basic education, it has been observed that pupils' performance in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), especially in the Jomoro Municipality, has been on the low side over the past five years. The trend is worrying to education stakeholders as to what might be the cause of the deteriorating academic performance. The challenge of poor students' learning outcomes is confirmed by the results of the BECE, where more than

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one-third of candidates in the Jomoro Municipality who sit for the BECE each year score an aggregate of 30 and above. This is evidenced in Table 1.

**Table 1: BECE Performances of Pupils in the Jomoro Municipality (2014 – 2018)**

Year	No. of cand. present	No. of cand. pass	No. of cand. fail	% pass	% Fail
2014	1941	1043	897	54.0 %	46.0%
2015	2005	1092	913	54.5%	45.5%
2016	1827	1192	635	65.2%	34.8%
2017	2015	1233	782	61.2%	38.8%
2018	2217	1182	1035	53.3%	46.7%

**Source: Statistics Office, GES, Jomoro Municipality (2019)**

Poor performance is evident in the data presented in Table 1. According to the data in Table 1, in the year 2014, the municipal presented 1941 candidates. Out of these numbers, 1043 candidates had between aggregates 6-30, representing (54.0%) while the remaining 897 (46.0%) candidates obtained aggregates above 30. In 2015, the municipal presented 2005 candidates. Out of this number, 1092 students obtained between aggregate 06-30, representing 54.5 per cent, while the remaining 913 candidates (45.5) obtained aggregates above 30. Also, in 2016, the Municipality presented 1827 candidates. Out of this number, 1192 candidates, representing 65.2 per cent, obtained aggregates 6-30, while the remaining 635 candidates (34.8) obtained aggregates above 30. In 2017 and 2018, the percentage of passed was 61.2 per cent and 53.3 per cent, while the percentage of failures was 38.8 per cent and 46.7 per cent, respectively. For at least 35 per cent of candidates to fail, each year raises serious concerns. This trend in the decline of BECE performance in the Jomoro Municipality is a worry to key stakeholders in education in the Jomoro Municipality.

Some studies (Akyeampong, 2010; Ampiah, 2010) on school improvement in Ghanaian basic schools appear to have concentrated on factors accounting for the low learning achievements. These studies reveal findings such as the existence of high teacher absenteeism, low time on task, poor supervision, weak or non-existent leadership, lack of parental support, inadequate infrastructure and other learning facilities in Ghanaian schools today. These factors are vital to help find solutions to the low performance of students in schools. At the Junior High School (JHS) (post-primary three-year education system) level in the Jomoro Municipality, it appears that headteachers' initiatives towards school improvement have, to a large extent, been guided by some personal experience and undefined individual ideological considerations. Yet, knowledge from the educational research literature that could have informed practice by specifically bringing to the fore the experience of headteachers of public JHSs in the Jomoro Municipality is glaringly almost missing. This study sought to fill this gap to shed light on how the headteachers were making their schools effective to bring about improvement in their schools.

The growing concern that public basic schools in the Jomoro Municipality are failing and, as a result, creating a sense of disillusionment with these schools remains a major concern. There is high expectation from the civil society for improvement in the public basic schools in Ghana as many parents have

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embraced the importance of education and are willing to access quality basic education for their children so that these children can further their education (Centre for Democratic Development, 2008).

Headteachers, however, have been linked to the realisation of changes in educational delivery. Akyeampong (2004) opined that it is those managing the school from within who are critical agents of change, making the internal conditions in terms of management, ethos, and support systems important for motivating and sustaining the school improvement efforts. MacGilchrist (2000) also advocates that for school effectiveness and improvement efforts to be successful, teachers, parents, community, civil society, education authorities, students, and all partners must share in the improvement process under the leadership of the headteacher. There is a great interest in headteachers' efforts to bring about improvement in schools because of the widespread belief that the quality of leadership makes significant differences in school and student success (Hoadley et al., 2009). This study investigated school effectiveness practices of public JHS headteachers in the Jomoro Municipality of Ghana. Specifically, the study explored the practices of the headteachers concerning strategic planning and leadership, and instructional leadership in the study area.

This study is significant in diverse ways. Firstly, the findings could form the basis of training on strategic planning and leadership issues, such as the creation of mission and vision statements and the development of strategic plans for the schools. The findings could further help the headteachers evaluate their instructional leadership practices and build their capacities in areas that need improvement. Last but not least, the study contributes to the extant literature on school improvement, particularly in the Ghanaian educational context.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Luyten et al. (2005) argue that understanding the characteristics of effective schools allows for school improvement by adopting these features. This study is anchored in Lezotte's (2010) Effective Schools Model, which outlines seven key correlates of effective schools: strong instructional leadership, a clear and focused mission, a safe and orderly environment, high expectations for success, frequent monitoring of student progress, positive home-school relations, and opportunity to learn/time on task.

Lezotte (2010) emphasises that strong instructional leadership ensures a shared school vision, with leaders actively fostering a culture of learning. A clear and focused mission aligns school programmes and activities with targeted goals. A safe and orderly school climate fosters positive relationships, fairness, and inclusivity, ensuring that students feel valued. High expectations for success require teachers to believe in their students and persist in helping them achieve high standards. Frequent monitoring of teaching and learning involves assessing student progress and refining instructional practices accordingly. Family and community involvement strengthens student learning by encouraging support beyond the school environment. Finally, the opportunity to learn and time on task highlights the importance of structured, focused instruction for all students, regardless of background. The model is highly relevant to this study, as it underscores the critical role of headteachers in ensuring effective leadership and strategic planning for school improvement. This aligns with Sullivan and Glanz's (2000) assertion that school leaders must provide instructional leadership that fosters a shared vision and successfully manages change.

Over the past two decades, several concerns have been expressed by key stakeholders in education in Ghana about poor academic performance among pupils in basic schools, which leads to overall poor

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academic achievement. The situation has attracted the attention of researchers in the country to school effectiveness and improvement research after efforts were made to understand the causes of the phenomena. In most of the studies conducted in the country, the correlates of Lezotte's (2010) Effective School Model are being used as the basis for understanding the efforts being made by key stakeholders, particularly school heads, to bring about school improvement. For example, using the correlates proposed by Lezotte, Appianing (2024) explored school improvement practices of basic school headteachers in a district in the Central Region of Ghana, whilst Golver's (2024) work focused on the same phenomenon in a District in Volta Region. Thus, school effectiveness and improvement research is gradually attracting a lot of interest among researchers in the Ghanaian educational context, this makes this current study on school effectiveness efforts of headteachers to bring about improvement in schools very significant.

## Schools Effectiveness

Hernes (2000) makes it clear that "school effectiveness is a difficult concept to define and, once defined, is of a nature that is difficult to measure" (p.7). From a "raw definitional view", as Townsend (1994) contends, an effective school is one that "produced a result" (p.127) by undertaking certain actions. However, as most schools genuinely strive to achieve their objectives in an efficient way, the term "effectiveness" seems to be the benchmark against which it is possible, given certain criteria, to compare schools in a given educational system.

Research posits that it is difficult to define school effectiveness as schools differ in performance (Scheerens, 2000). Strands of research within the field of school effectiveness did not necessarily focus on the same variables and factors to determine the extent to which a given school is effective. The variables contributing to the effectiveness of schools in a given country might not be totally applicable to another. Though Scheerens (2000) admits that there is a true linkage between school effectiveness and its output, that is, the average achievement of the pupils at the end of a period of formal schooling, he draws our attention to another interesting question: why does school A do better than school B if the differences are not due to the variance in the student population of the two schools?

Emerging from the school effectiveness research are lists of characteristics that are identified with effective schools. These include strong instructional leadership, high expectations for pupil achievements, positive reinforcement, safe and orderly climate conducive for learning, and frequent evaluation of pupils' progress which have become a recipe for implementing school improvement initiatives (Boissiere, 2004; Lee et al., 2005).

Many arguments have, however, been raised by researchers such as Fertig (2000) and Creemers and Reezigt (2005) about schools being designated effective or ineffective based on characteristics of school effectiveness research. According to researchers such as Fuller and Clarke (1994) and Creemers and Reezigt (2005), school effectiveness research does not provide a blueprint or recipe for the creation of effective schools and should, therefore, not be applied mechanically without reference to the particular contexts of a school. Generally, school effectiveness research aims to identify what works in education and why it works. School effectiveness is often linked to school improvement, but the latter is based on an understanding of what contributes to the former.

## School Improvement

School improvement has evolved over the years in many different contexts, all in an attempt to define school improvement strategies based on the assumption that students' learning achievements are influenced by a range of different factors, including the school, the community and home factors (Borman et al., 2000). According to Barth (1990), school improvement is "an effort to determine and provide from within and without conditions under which the adults and youngsters who inhabit schools will promote and sustain learning among them" (p.45). Hopkins (2001) looks at school improvement as a distinct approach to educational change that aims to enhance pupils' outcomes as well as strengthen the school's capacity for managing change. He adds that school improvement efforts should make schools better places for students to learn and also provide a strategy for educational change that enhances pupil outcomes as well as strengthens the school's capacity for managing change. According to Akyeampong (2004), these two statements, as indicated by Hopkins, are based on the assumption that it is those managing the school from within who are critical agents of change and that the internal conditions in terms of management, ethos, and support systems are important factors to motivate and sustain the school's effort to improve.

As indicated by Akyeampong (2004), school improvement has come to stand for how schools can improve their effectiveness over some time and are particularly concerned with activities that bring about change. Harris (2002) perceives school improvement from two dimensions: as a way of schools achieving organisational development and growth; and, the moral dimension linked to the life chances and achievement of all students (Harris, 2002). Harris (2002) is of the view that school improvement should involve some form of reform and educational change, which can be small or large scale, centralised, decentralised, and externally or internally initiated.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

A mixed methods research approach, underpinned by pragmatism, was considered for the study. Specifically, the study employed the sequential explanatory mixed-method design, which involved two phases: quantitative followed by qualitative. The quantitative data was first collected and analysed to provide a general understanding of the research problem studied, which was the school effectiveness efforts made by the headteacher to bring about improvement in the basic schools in the Municipality. Then, the qualitative data and their analysis helped to refine and explain those statistical results by exploring participants' views in more depth, providing a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the problem studied.

The population of the study comprised 52 JHS headteachers (44 males and 8 females) in the Jomoro Municipality of Ghana. All 52 headteachers were involved in the quantitative phase of the study through a census frame, which is often used when a simple random sampling technique would yield a smaller sample size from a relatively small population. The strategy gives all members of a population the same opportunity to participate in the study, and it is better at yielding representative results.

The qualitative phase of the study involved interviews with 10 headteachers (1 Experienced Female Headteachers, 1 Newly-appointed Female Headteacher, 4 Experienced Male Headteachers, and 4 Newly-appointed Male Headteachers) who had already responded to the questionnaire. The headteachers who had served in their post for five (5) years and above were categorised as Experienced headteachers, and

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their counterparts who had served below five (5) were categorised as Newly-appointed headteachers. The interviewees were selected through the maximal variation sampling technique. According to Creswell (2005), as cited in Kusi (2012), the maximal variation sampling strategy is:

*.....A purposive sampling strategy in which researchers sample cases or individuals that differ on some characteristic or trait. The procedure requires that you identify the characteristics and then find sites or individuals that display different dimensions of the characteristics (Creswell, 2005) cited in (Kusi, 2012: 83).*

The maximal variation sampling allows researchers to categorise participants using their demographic data such as sex, rank and level of experience in their profession (Kusi, 2012) with the aim of building multiple perspectives into a study.

A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide were used for data collection. In the quantitative phase, a structured questionnaire was employed to gather data from all 55 headteachers to provide a general understanding of the phenomenon under study. The instrument was appropriate for gathering data from all the headteachers for statistical analysis. According to Kusi (2012), a structured questionnaire is appropriate when a researcher intends to gather data from a relatively large sample size for statistical analysis. The questionnaire gathered data on the school effectiveness practices of the headteachers in relation to strategic planning and leadership, and instructional leadership. It was developed on four-point Likert-scale items (Never (N) = 1, Occasionally (O) = 2, Frequently (F) = 3, and Always (A) = 4). According to DeVellis (2012), a four-point scale can provide more nuanced responses than a binary or three-point scale, allowing for a more accurate capture of respondents' attitudes and opinions. A semi-structured interview guide was used to gather data in the second phase of the study. Wragg (2002) notes that this instrument allows an interviewer to ask initial questions, followed by probes meant to seek clarification of issues raised. The interview data was used to clarify, elaborate on and explain some key initial quantitative findings, as stated earlier.

Before administering the questionnaire and the interview guide, they were face-validated by some colleague lecturers at the School of Education and Life-Long Learning at the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana, whilst two experts in educational leadership and management helped to establish the content validity. To establish the reliability of the questionnaire, the researchers pre-tested it with 30 headteachers in Ellembelle district, which is closer to the context of this study and shares some characteristics with it. Using the Cronbach alpha model, a reliability coefficient ( $R = 0.89$ ) was obtained for the overall instrument. According to George and Mallery (2003), Cronbach's alpha values greater than 0.8 show that the instrument is good.

Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the quantitative data. Specifically, the mean and standard deviation scores and frequencies were generated through the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The interview data was transcribed and used to support relevant quantitative data when necessary. To attribute statements to the interviewees, the 8 male headteachers were assigned serial numbers MHT-1 to MHT-8, where "MHT" denotes Male Headteacher. Similarly, the 2 female headteachers were designated as FHT-1 and FHT-2, with "FHT" representing Female Headteacher.

## 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative and qualitative data sets collected were presented under two themes: strategic planning and leadership and instructional leadership practices.

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## Strategic Planning and Leadership Practices of the Headteachers

The first dimension of the purpose of the study was to determine the strategic planning and leadership practices of the headteachers. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Strategic Planning and Leadership Practices for School Improvement**

Statement	Never		Occasionally		Frequently		Always		M	SD
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
As the headteacher, I set personal and professional examples for staff and pupils	0	0.0	0	0.0	16	30.8	36	69.2	3.69	0.47
The school has a year and events calendar	0	0.0	7	13.5	17	32.7	28	53.8	3.40	0.72
As the head, I relate to staff in such a way that they feel valued as members of the school with important contributions to make	0	0.0	8	15.4	19	36.5	25	48.1	3.33	0.73
A school self-evaluation (SSE) takes place annually	8	15.4	13	25.0	17	32.7	14	26.9	2.71	1.04
A school improvement process is integrated into the school calendar	11	21.2	23	44.2	11	21.2	7	13.5	2.27	0.95
I develop a school improvement plan that guides my activities	15	28.8	19	36.5	10	19.2	8	15.4	2.21	1.04
The vision and mission statements are displayed for all to see in the school building	13	25.0	24	46.2	9	17.3	6	11.5	2.15	0.94
I ensure the school has a vision that is current and provides the school with a clear direction	15	28.8	23	44.2	7	13.5	7	13.5	2.12	0.98
The school has a clearly defined mission statement	17	32.7	19	36.5	10	19.2	6	11.5	2.10	1.00
The school vision and mission statements are well known to	19	36.5	21	40.4	7	13.5	5	9.6	1.96	0.95

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and supported by the school community										
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**Source:** Field Data (2019) **Key:** [N–Never, O – Occasionally, F–Frequently, A–Always, M–Mean, SD–Standard Deviation]

The survey items attracted a range of mean scores and standard deviation of 1.96 to 3.69 and .47 to 1.04, respectively. The results indicated that setting personal and professional examples for staff and pupils was identified as the most frequent strategic leadership and management practice (mean = 3.69, std. deviation = .47). This relatively small standard deviation suggests that respondents' scores were relatively consistent and clustered around the mean. All 52 headteachers, 100 per cent (69.2% always and 30.8% frequently), responded positively. The interview data also confirmed that the majority of the participants set personal and professional examples for staff and pupils.

*"I try to be a servant leader in all I do. I never ask anyone to do something I would not do myself. When we have staff meetings, I always start with a review of the norms, share what we will do, and seek feedback. I practice 'coaching methods' in hopes that teachers will do this with their students in the classroom." (MHT-2)*

*"To inspire others, you must be inspired yourself and show this outwardly with enthusiasm and a positive, can-do attitude by setting the pace." (MHT-5)*

*"I would not ask my staff to do anything that I would not be willing to do. I arrive at school early and mostly stay late for many of the same reasons teachers do. I set the tone by being on time and prepared." I set a personal example by being positive, present, and open to staff opinions and ideas." (FHT-1)*

These results agree with Sigford (2005) who found out that one of the most fundamental responsibilities of a school leader is to set the focus and direction of a school. Additionally, as reported by Fiore (2009), "school administrators must regularly exhibit positive leadership characteristics," (p. 7) while they "make dozens of decisions daily on a multitude of issues" (Mason, 2007).

Most headteachers ensure that schools have structured calendars for the academic year and events, with 53.8 per cent reporting they always have such schedules, while 32.7 per cent do so frequently (M = 3.40, SD = 0.72). This indicates a relatively high level of adherence to structured planning and an effort to maintain organisation and ensure effective time management. A standard deviation of 0.72 indicates that there is some variability in the responses, with about 68 per cent of headteachers' responses falling within a range of 2.68 to 4.12 (i.e.,  $3.40 \pm 0.72$ ).

Furthermore, headteachers demonstrate positive relationships with staff, as 48.1 per cent always relate to their staff in ways that make them feel valued, and 36.5 per cent do so frequently (M = 3.33, SD = 0.73). This finding suggests that many headteachers recognise the importance of staff morale and motivation in achieving school improvement goals. However, despite these strengths, the study reveals critical weaknesses in strategic planning processes.

The data in Table 2 indicates a weak implementation of the school's vision and mission statements. While these elements are crucial for providing clear direction, only 11.5 per cent of schools always display their vision and mission statements, whereas 46.2 per cent do so occasionally or never (M = 2.15, SD = 0.94). Moreover, only 13.5 per cent of headteachers ensure the school vision is current and well-communicated

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(M = 2.12, SD = 0.98). Alarming, 32.7 per cent of headteachers reported that their schools do not have a clearly defined mission statement (M = 2.10, SD = 1.00). This lack of clear vision and mission communication can hinder school improvement efforts by creating ambiguity in objectives and priorities. The interview data also pointed out the failure on the part of the school heads to create a clearly documented vision and mission statements for the schools:

*"My vision for our school is ... okay ... I think that we need to work on our school vision. I did not come to meet a school vision when I started to work here. However, I think we should have now. For me, vision is wanting to see all the children being successful. All of the children being able to read and write and being at the same level as everyone else in Ghana and not having students to drop out and I ultimately want everyone to be successful."* (MHT-2)

*".....Frankly speaking, most of us do not prepare vision and mission statements. This is caused by a poor system of the education sector. You cannot blame school heads for not preparing [the vision and mission statements]. School heads have not attended any leadership course on this vision and mission something, how can we understand and prepare?"* (FHT-1).

In explaining why there was no vision and mission statements, one of the headteachers interviewed reported that he had a vision of the school but had failed in its documentation and implementation. He pointed out he had many priorities for the school but had not communicated to stakeholders for implementation, due to shortage of funds.

*".....Of course, I have the vision to improve the school, but the problem is lack of funds. So, I find it useless to tell people something that I understand I can't afford. I just keep quiet, which does not mean I don't have any vision for my school."* (MHT-4).

These comments suggest that the headteachers had varying concerns about their strategic planning and leadership practices for school improvement. The data suggested a lack of strategic planning skills and leadership capacity among headteachers, making it difficult for the headteachers to fulfil their school improvement efforts. This deficiency contradicts Lezotte's (2010), in his School Effectiveness Model, argued that a clearly articulated school mission is fundamental to instructional goals, priorities, and accountability, helping staff share a unified understanding and commitment to school improvement efforts. Haberman (2003) indicates that an effective headteacher must create a clear school mission by establishing a common vision, building strong teams, and fostering commitment. However, the findings showed that many schools lacked vision and mission statements, let alone making them visible and actionable within their institutions.

The quantitative data identified the 'lack of integration of school improvement processes into the school calendar' as a major challenge to the school improvement efforts of the headteachers. Only 13.5 per cent of headteachers reported always doing this, while 44.2 per cent do so occasionally, and 21.2 per cent never integrate school improvement processes (M = 2.27, SD = 0.95). The qualitative data gathered attributed the failure to plan for school improvement to lack of knowledge about the concept, as shown in the comment below:

*'...the truth is that I have not received any training in school effectiveness and improvement. These are new to me! I have attended so many training programmes but none of the focused on what you are talking about.'* (FHT-2)

This comment points out the need for a well-planned training programme in the concepts of school effectiveness and improvement, which would enable the heads to plan strategically for their schools. MacGilchrist (2000) posits that successful efforts towards school improvement require a well-defined

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vision, a shared institutional mission, and a structured approach to identifying areas for development. The study found that many headteachers did not develop or implement strategic school improvement plans, reflecting a lack of deliberate effort to align school activities with broader goals. School improvement initiatives should not only enhance pupil outcomes but also strengthen the institution's capacity for managing change (Hopkins, 2001). The absence of structured planning in the Municipality suggests that the headteachers struggle to act as "planning giants" (Williams, 2006) who lead their schools toward well-defined goals.

Additionally, the study highlighted that many headteachers did not conduct formal self-evaluations to assess whether qualitative and quantitative targets were being met. Data in Table 3 suggests that only 26.9 per cent of headteachers reported conducting SSE annually, whilst 32.7 per cent do so frequently, and a significant 40.4 per cent conduct it occasionally or never ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ). Effective school improvement requires continuous assessment, and the inconsistent implementation of SSE suggests gaps in quality assurance and accountability. This lack of self-evaluation denies schools the opportunity to reflect on and enhance their quality standards, which could negatively impact school effectiveness. Rowe (2001) emphasises that strategic leaders must have the ability to anticipate and enact necessary change while maintaining flexibility and empowering others. The failure to engage in continuous evaluation and reflection, as suggested by Kutsyuruba et al. (2008), indicates a shortcoming in strategic leadership, as teachers perceive school leaders as more supportive when they foster collaboration and self-assessment opportunities.

Moreover, the data in Table 2 showed that whereas some of the headteachers demonstrated positive leadership traits, such as setting personal and professional examples for staff and students, others lacked the ability to clearly define and communicate a strategic vision. This shortfall contradicts the assertion by Lezotte (2010) that a well-articulated school vision and mission provide a clear direction for school activities. The inability of the headteachers to develop and promote strategic plans may weaken the overall effectiveness of school improvement initiatives. Williams (2006) argues that schools must add value to students' potential by creating the right conditions for effective learning, which requires strong leadership and planning.

Last but not least, the study reveals that community awareness and support for school vision and mission are notably weak. Only 9.6 per cent of headteachers reported that the school vision and mission are well known and supported by the community, whilst a significant 36.5 per cent indicated that this is never the case ( $M = 1.96$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ). This suggests a gap in stakeholder engagement, which could limit the effectiveness of school leadership in fostering a shared commitment to educational goals.

Generally, the data in Table 2 suggest that a clear strategic plan has the potential for improving school performance in the Municipality. The lack of clearly defined and well-implemented vision and mission statements, school improvement plans, and internal evaluations indicates a weakness in leadership practices that could hinder school effectiveness. Aligning with best practices in strategic leadership, as suggested by scholars like Lezotte (2010), MacGilchrist (2000), and Hopkins (2001), could enhance school management and drive improvements in student learning outcomes. Therefore, capacity-building programmes focusing on strategic planning, leadership training, and continuous evaluation should be considered to strengthen the leadership capabilities of headteachers in the region.

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## Instructional Leadership Practices of the Headteachers

The second objective was to establish the instructional leadership practices demonstrated by junior high school headteachers in the Jomoro Municipality of Ghana to enhance school improvement. The results regarding the instructional leadership practices of headteachers are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Headteachers' Instructional Leadership Practices for School Improvement**

Statement	Never		Occasionally		Frequently		Always		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
I conduct meetings regularly with teachers to review instructional progress	0	0.0	7	13.5	30	57.7	15	28.8	3.15	0.64
I provide clear criteria for judging staff performance	2	3.8	6	11.5	32	61.5	12	23.1	3.04	0.71
I visit classrooms to observe teaching and learning activities	3	5.8	8	15.4	30	57.7	11	21.2	2.94	0.78
My observations and evaluations help teachers to identify their weaknesses and strengths	3	5.8	10	19.2	27	51.9	12	23.1	2.92	0.81
I provide frequent feedback and offer suggestions for instructional improvement	4	7.7	10	19.2	26	50.0	12	23.1	2.88	.86
I encourage peer coaching	5	9.6	7	13.5	30	57.7	10	19.2	2.87	0.84
I conduct in-service training programmes to improve the performance of teachers	7	13.5	28	53.8	9	17.3	8	15.4	2.35	0.91

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I demonstrate teaching techniques in classrooms	5	9.6	31	59.6	9	17.3	7	13.5	2.35	0.84
I set improvement targets for students with teachers	5	9.6	29	55.8	14	26.9	4	7.7	2.33	0.76
I help teachers to develop action plans based on feedback I provide on their instructional practices	4	7.7	34	65.4	7	13.5	7	13.5	2.33	0.81

**Source: Field Data (2019)** Key: [N–Never, O – Occasionally, F–Frequently, A–Always, M–Mean, SD–Standard Deviation]

The survey items attracted a range of mean scores and standard deviation of 2.33 to 3.15 and 0.81 to 0.64, respectively. Table 15 shows that 7 (13.5%) of the respondents indicated occasionally the statement that "I conduct meetings regularly with teachers to review instructional progress", whereas 30 (57.7%) responded frequently. Also, 15 (28.8%) of the headteachers always indicated that assertion, with a mean score of 3.15 and a standard deviation of 0.64. These responses suggest that the majority of the headteachers believed that conducting meetings regularly with teachers to review instructional progress could have positive implications for school improvement efforts. Kuvaas (2006) argues that the effectiveness of the performance appraisal process can only be made possible if the ratings of the appraisal are accurate and unbiased. Any form of bias in performance appraisal could create problems among staff and their organisations.

The headteachers were asked if they visited classrooms to observe teaching and learning activities. The data, with a mean score of 2.94 and a standard deviation of .777, pointed out that 11 of the headteachers representing 21.1 per cent responded they always visit, 30(57.7%) frequently visit, 8(15.4%) occasionally visit, while 3(5.8%) never visit classrooms to observe teaching and learning activities. Classroom visitation as an instructional leadership role of the headteachers was confirmed by the interviewees:

*"I notice a 70 per cent improvement in teachers' performance after classrooms' observations, especially after meeting with them to discuss what I noticed in the classes. I usually start with the positive sides and then talk to them about their weaknesses, so they can accept criticism. In the end, I am there to help them". (MHT-1)*

*"I always visit my classrooms to see what is happening. All of my observations are based on information a gather from the headteachers' handbook, so a lot of the assessments involve teaching and learning, progress, classroom environment, the relationship that the teacher has with the students, are the students interested?" (MHT- 10)*

Blasé and Blasé (1999) found that visiting classrooms is the most common supervision strategy that positively affects teachers. The interview data suggested that almost all of the headteachers make efforts

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to visit classrooms to offer support to teachers, when necessary. According to Panigrahi (2012), classroom visits enable school heads to learn what teachers are doing, assess whether sound instruction is being delivered and interact with teachers. Classroom visits are also used as a communication tool for headteachers to share various issues affecting learning in particular classrooms.

The quantitative results further indicate that 12(23.1%) headteachers always provide frequent feedback and offer suggestions for instructional improvement, 26(50.0%) frequently provide frequent feedback and offer suggestions for instructional improvement, 10(19.2%) occasionally did, while 4(7.7%) never provide frequent feedback and offer suggestions for instructional improvement. This implies that the majority of headteachers provide feedback to their teachers and offer suggestions for instructional improvement. The interview data confirmed the quantitative findings, but variations in the form of the given feedback.

*"On the same day, I meet with the teachers to discuss how they think the lesson went and then I will go through how I think the lesson went and together we come up with some targets which they need to focus on before the next lesson observation".(MHT-9)*

*"Teachers' evaluation depends on formal and informal visits to the classroom and also on discussions between school leaders when we meet to rate teachers". (FHT- 2)*

On the contrary, the data suggested that most of the headteachers did not help teachers develop action plans based on feedback they provided on their instructional practices. With a mean score of 2.33 and a standard deviation of .810, 7 of the headteachers representing 13.5 per cent responded always, another 7 also representing (13.5%) responded frequently, 34(65.3%) indicated occasionally, whilst 4(7.7%) never helped teachers develop action plans based on feedback they provide on their teachers' instructional practices. Failure to support teachers in developing action plans has the tendency to affect teaching and learning negatively, hindering school improvement efforts.

Peer coaching was further identified as an instructional leadership practice adopted by headteachers in the Mmunicipality. Ten (10) of the headteachers, representing 19.2 per cent, always encourage peer coaching, 30(57.7%) frequently encourage peer coaching, 7(13.5%) occasionally, whilst 5(9.6%) never encourage peer coaching. The qualitative data confirmed the use of peer coaching in the schools, highlighting the importance of the strategy:

*"Providing a friendly atmosphere where teachers work in groups is truly important and through interaction, teachers exchange ideas, experiences and peer-coaching occurs not model teaching. It is peer tutoring, feedback and self- regulation that leads to a great impact on teachers' performance". (FHT- 2)*

The quantitative data suggested that most of the headteachers did not conduct in-service training programmes to improve the performance of teachers. Whilst 53.8 per cent of the headteachers responded they occasionally do, 13.5 per cent responded they never do (mean = 2.35, std. deviation = 0.91). On their failure to organise in-service teacher training programmes for teachers, the headteachers attributed the situation to a lack of funds, as a comment by one of them suggests:

*"In fact, organising in-service training requires a lot of money. You have to purchase TLMs, get resource persons, provide water and food for teachers and so on but there is no money. The capitation grant that comes is nothing to write home about and cannot do anything" (MHT- 7)*

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The lack of funds for the organisation of in-service training could be attributed to inadequate budgetary allocation by the government, making some foreign organisations offer support. However, such organisations often give quotas regarding the number of participants they can support (Kusi, 2017). Contrary to the view of MHT-7, MHT-3 rather underestimated the value of in-service training programmes, making him adopt other innovative practices to develop teachers:

*“Workshops and training are hardly useful. I believe they are 30 per cent beneficial, we prefer self-learning and being innovative in learning new teaching skills”. (MHT- 3)*

Other factors that recorded fewer positive responses included ‘setting improvement targets for students with teachers’ where 65.4 per cent responded occasionally or never and ‘demonstrating teaching techniques in classrooms’ where 69.2 per cent indicated occasionally or never (Mean = 2.33, std. deviation = 0.76).

Thus, it emerged that the headteachers carried out their instructional leadership roles through classroom observation, promoting peer coaching, and giving regular feedback on teaching and learning to teachers, among other practices. However, they hardly organised in-service training to equip teachers with relevant knowledge, skills and competencies to improve their performance owing to financial challenges.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusions:** The study concluded that although vision and mission statements provide strategic direction of organisations, most of the schools in the Municipality did not have such statements or school improvement plans, implying that they were not being managed from a strategic perspective. This could be attributed to limited vision and mission creation as well as their implementation. Therefore, it is recommended that continuous professional development programmes that focus on vision and mission creation, and how they are implemented should be organised by the Jomoro Municipal Education Directorate to broaden the knowledge of the headteachers and to create awareness of the importance of such practices in the schools. The study further concluded that the instructional leadership roles of the headteachers contributed immensely to school improvement efforts. The instructional leadership roles of the headteachers in the form of monitoring teaching and learning and organising relevant continuous professional development activities help improve the professional practices of teachers. However, most of the headteachers hardly organise such programmes due to inadequate funding.

**Recommendations:** Therefore, the study recommends that the Jomoro Municipal Education Directorate should reinforce instructional leadership practices and policies in the schools for improvement to occur. The Directorate could also supplement the effort of the government by writing grant proposals to funding organisations, both within and outside Ghana, to raise funds for the organisation of in-service training programmes for teachers in the Municipality.

### Limitation of the Study

The sample of the study comprised 52 headteachers for the quantitative phase and 10 headteachers for the qualitative phase. This sample is unrepresentative of the JHS headteacher population in the Western Region of Ghana, in which Jomoro Municipality, the setting of the study, is located. Therefore, the findings are not generalisable beyond the Municipality. However, they could be transferred to other contexts that share similar characteristics with the context of this particular study.

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