




INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES OF HEADTEACHERS: ACQUIRING KNOWLEDGE OF CURRICULUM AND PROMOTING CURRICULUM INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

The primary aim of this study was to examine how headteachers in Asante Akim North Municipal of the Ashanti Region acquire curriculum knowledge and promote instruction, as well as the challenges they face in delivering instructional leadership. Headteachers play a crucial role in instructional leadership for effective school functioning. Research indicates that their leadership significantly impacts student performance when properly implemented. A qualitative study involving 18 headteachers, 12 lead teachers, and 4 School Improvement Support Officers (SISOs), totalling 34 respondents, was purposively selected using maximum sampling variation. Data was gathered through semi-structured interview forms and analyzed using interpretative analysis. Findings revealed that while headteachers recognize the importance of staying updated on the curriculum, additional responsibilities limit their capacity. To enhance curriculum knowledge, professional development and timely resource provision are necessary. The study also highlights the need to recruit trained teachers with curriculum expertise to reduce headteachers' teaching load, allowing them to focus on leadership roles. Lack of training on the curriculum emerged as the key factor in promoting the practical application of the curriculum. Proper time management is essential to bridging the curriculum knowledge gap and improving school instructional leadership. Given the introduction of a new curriculum in 2019, understanding their instructional leadership is necessary for improving basic education in Ghana.

Key terms: Challenges of headteachers, curriculum, instructional leadership, implementing curriculum, promoting curriculum instruction.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Headteachers often encounter instructional leadership challenges from inadequate training and limited access to current curriculum knowledge. The fast-paced evolution of curriculum reforms creates a gap between policy expectations and headteachers' preparedness to lead instructional change (Cheung & Wong, 2011). Competing administrative responsibilities further constrain their ability to focus on curriculum leadership and teacher support (Palestina et al., 2020). As a result, their effectiveness in promoting high-quality curriculum instruction and fostering teaching excellence is significantly hindered. Public concern for better education has necessitated paying attention to measures that improve students' learning outcomes and performance. Since schools in the contemporary world are required to produce measurable results, instructional leadership is moving to the centre stage. Headteachers are, in recent times, being held accountable for pupils' performance. (Anwar et al., 2022) Stakeholders' quest for reforms in addressing poor pupil performance and promising educational reforms worldwide, especially at the basic school level, is commendable (Kabonu, 2013). One of the key elements in most of these reforms is the instructional leadership (IL) of headteachers (Murphy et al., 1986). Instructional leadership (IL) can be defined as a blend of several tasks, such as supervision of classroom instruction, staff development, and curriculum development (Smith & Andrews, n.d.; Othman & Busari, 2024; Shaked, 2023).

It seems that head teachers' instructional leadership in schools is weak, and this may probably be due to weaknesses in their knowledge of instruction and curriculum.(Santelli & Grissom, 2025) Unsuccessful performances by headteachers are due to a lack of knowledge, especially in coordinating curriculum, promoting instructional improvement, and evaluating instruction. (Cohen & Miller, 1980). According to the Ghana New Educational Reform Committee, in 1987, the introduction of the Reform Committee brought adequate school supervision to ensure strict adherence to the newly introduced curriculum; through the processes, learners' academic performance would improve. Because education is not static but dynamic, introducing a new curriculum in 2019 and other interventions calls for on-the-job training for all supervision personnel and the Lead teachers to aid the smooth implementation of new curriculum, inventions, and programmes.

Teachers are expected to teach meaningful content that helps students meet learning goals in authentic activities. They must also address the needs of diverse learners and ensure that all students are successful (Davis & Krajcik, 2005). According to Davis and Krajcik (2005), it is relatively straightforward to design teaching materials that could help teachers add new ideas to their curriculum knowledge and connect the ideas of the curriculum to improve students' performances. Research studies in the educational system focusing on challenges facing instructional leadership are instrumental to the different development of remedies to address the challenges, instructional leadership practices in acquiring curriculum knowledge, and curriculum development in the schools.

The Education Sector Medium-Term Development Plan (2018-2021) highlighted key issues that need further attention. In the report, the basic school education performance from 2004-2017 situational analysis revealed poor school leadership and management from headteachers, of which acquiring curriculum knowledge and curriculum development in the schools was considered part of the significant issues for consideration. The Situational analysis revealed poor school leadership and management practices from headteachers. In this document, a positive objective was made to improve the instructional leadership of headteachers, curriculum leads, school improvement support officers, and district inspectors

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to support improved practices of teachers. (Education, 2021) All basic school headteachers should not be excluded from the discussion on instructional leadership. Malik and Saeed recommended that educational leaders in Ghana should be supported and encouraged to further their education.

This study is essential as it explores headteachers' knowledge of the curriculum and their role in promoting effective instruction in basic schools. It highlights how headteachers update their understanding of new curricula to integrate traditional and modern teaching approaches. The findings offer valuable insights to guide future educational policies and teacher training programmes adapting to evolving curriculum demands.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Many instructional leadership researchers use Hallinger and Murphy (1985) as their main frame of reference. This model looks at instructional leadership: Acquiring curriculum knowledge and promoting the acquisition of curriculum knowledge and instruction to promote professional development and provide incentives for learning. Based on this model, the lack of instructional leadership activities on the part of many headteachers is their weak knowledge base about instruction and curriculum. When knowledge of curriculum and instruction is considered when selecting headteachers, their functions positively impact pupils' performance (Bottoms, 1978).

Selection based on strong knowledge of curriculum and instruction to promote high performance of students is very important in addressing the weakness in institutional leadership (Karakus, 2021). Unsuccessful performances by headteachers are due to a lack of knowledge, especially in coordinating curriculum, promoting instructional improvement, and evaluating instruction. Associate effective schools with principles promoting curricular coordination to promote learning. (Cohen & Miller, 1980) Again, curriculum content should be consistent with instructional objectives, and the test used in measuring the curriculum objectives should be graded for all levels of learners. This helps to improve students' achievements. Finally, it draws attention to the fact that there is a need to constitute programmed evaluation procedures to ensure evaluation is done regularly (Hallinger, 1985).

Teachers are expected to teach meaningful content that helps students meet learning goals in the context of authentic activities while addressing the needs of diverse learners and ensuring that all students are successful (Davis & Krajcik, 2005). According to Davis and Krajcik (2005), the effectiveness of educative curriculum materials in promoting teacher learning will be limited by the design of the curriculum. Curriculum materials must be of high quality in terms of content and pedagogy, and their effectiveness is limited (or enhanced) by the characteristics of the teachers themselves, such as their knowledge, beliefs, and dispositions toward reflection and improving their practice (Remillard, 1999; Schneider & Krajcik, 2002).

Data suggest that the presence of multiple sources for professional development is more effective than any one source. A study on the role of instructional leadership in successfully executing curriculum: headteachers' perspective. This qualitative research study is designed to get headteachers' perspectives on the role of instructional leadership in successfully executing the curriculum. Summing up the reported challenges headteachers faced during the successful execution of curriculum, it was found that abrupt changes in curriculum or textbooks create problems for them because their teachers were not trained for these changes; they had observed rapid changes in the medium of instruction in previous years, which

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caused frustration for teachers and students. The professional training was limited and almost ineffective for senior teachers who could not change easily. They further commented that administrative tasks and frequent reporting to higher authorities hindered them from visiting classrooms frequently and thinking about effective course implementation (Nader et al., 2019).

Summarizing the above discussion, instructional leadership entails setting strong objectives, implementing curriculum, conducting content observations, facilitating teaching, providing resources, and appreciating teachers' consistency to promote student learning and growth. The quality of instruction of teachers is the top priority for the instructional head. Instructional leadership is devoted to teaching, learning, and knowledge in curriculum and promoting curriculum implementation. It is worth seeking this goal, which, when primarily implemented, allows the students and teachers to control their destiny in making a more meaningful learning environment. Therefore, it was essential to explore the challenges headteachers face in acquiring knowledge in the curriculum as instructional leaders and promoting curriculum instruction in Ghanaian settings. The study was designed to answer the following research questions: What are the challenges of headteachers in acquiring curriculum knowledge? What are the challenges of headteachers in promoting curriculum instruction?

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The philosophical underpinning of this study was the qualitative paradigm. An interpretative approach in which data emerged from the ground reality of different individual participants. They reported their various experiences about the phenomenon to be studied in detail. This interpretive approach facilitated the researchers to accommodate different perceptions of individual participants in a specific setting.

Population

All headteachers (69), SISOs (8), and Lead teachers (52), totalling 129 Government Basic Schools in Asante Akim North Municipality, were the population of the study.

Sampling Technique

Purposively, 18 headteachers, 12 lead teachers, and 4 SISOs, totalling 34, having more than 10 years' experience in the service, were selected to conduct interviews. Among them were 24 females and 10 males.

Instrument

The interview protocol was developed after reviewing the literature and discussing the challenges headteachers face in acquiring knowledge of the curriculum and promoting curriculum instruction in the schools. After obtaining consent at their convenience, headteachers, SISOs, and Lead teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and the required information was gathered through interviews. Each interview was recorded, then transcribed and coded.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data represented in this study shows geographic data as Urban being defined as "U" and Rural being represented as "R". All nine schools selected in the urban area were described in alphabetical order from "A to I," and all nine selected rural schools were categorized in "J to R". The heads of schools and lead teachers for Urban and Rural areas were numbered 1 to 9 and 1 to 9, respectively. The SISOs for Urban and Rural areas were numbered 1 or 2. The urban headteachers were coded as UHSA1, UHSB 2 to UHSI 9, and

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rural headteachers as RHSJ 1, RHSK 2 to RHSR 9. The urban lead teachers were coded as ULS A 1, ULSB 2 to ULSI 9, and rural lead teachers were coded as RLSJ 1, RLSK 2 to RLSR 9. The SISOs were coded as USCA 1, RSCA 2, USCB 1, and RSCB 2. All the interviews were transcribed, and open coding was conducted to generate patterns and themes from the data. Representative themes were collected under the following two categories:

Challenges Headteachers face in acquiring knowledge of the curriculum

The headteacher's responses are given below:

RHSP 7

I do not have a sufficient understanding of the content of the current curriculum.

RHSQ 8

I will say inadequate training programs. Short training time leads to difficulty in getting to understand some areas of the training. The government's inability to provide enough funds for training programs is also a problem.

UHSF6 said that:

The challenge in the acquisition of knowledge is insufficient training done on the new curriculum, inadequate supply of curriculum materials, and lack of commitment on the part of teachers.

UHSI9 said that:

The inability of schools to promptly procure textbooks and instructional resources for the new curriculum, lack of support from the parents and government in acquiring textbooks and instructional resources for the new curriculum

(UHSH8)

Since I assumed my position as a head, I haven't been given any training on the national curriculum.

Challenges Headteachers face in acquiring knowledge of the curriculum

The lead teachers' responses are given below:

RLSJ 1 added that:

Lack of training and retraining of headteachers in the curriculum

ULS A 1 emphasizes that:

Inadequate instructional manual. There is too much focus on administration issues than instruction. Inadequate guide and instructional manual for heads. Insufficient continuous training for head teachers

RLSV9

Yes, please. One of the challenges is, I will say, inadequate in-service training for school heads. For example, we have started a new curriculum, and JHS [Junior High School] teachers do not know the curriculum. Timely in-service training is to be organized regularly for teachers.

Challenges Headteachers face in acquiring knowledge of the curriculum

The SISOs' responses are given below:

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USCA2 disclosed that:

Most heads don't have time to upgrade themselves

RSCD1 indicated that:

The duration at which the headteachers were trained was too short. The curriculum was rushed, and they didn't get it well. Laxity on the part of the teachers to learn

RSCE2 lamented that:

Lack of in-service training for the headteacher and materials to study. The curriculum was rushed, and they didn't get it well.

RSCD1

I will say that the headteacher's knowledge of the curriculum is about 45 per cent . So, they don't have absolute control of the curriculum. In the creative arts, the creative arts teachers are not even teaching as expected, and when you ask them why, they tell you that they don't have adequate knowledge in that area.

RSCE2

Most Heads find it challenging to organize in-service training to upgrade teachers' curriculum knowledge: no research, no finance, and no in-depth knowledge to promote instruction.

RSCE2

The introduction of the 2019 curriculum was rushed, and they[headteachers] didn't get it well

In summary, the study has shown factors affecting Headteachers' acquisition of curriculum knowledge. Some of the factors revolved around too much focus on administrative issues rather than instruction, a lack of in-service training for the headteacher, and materials to study. Headteachers were rushed through the curriculum, and they didn't get it well. The limited number of teachers who carry out duties in schools and inadequate exposure and training are directed toward curriculum knowledge acquisition and usage. In addition, a lack of relevant curriculum materials to implement the curriculum, a lack of training, time management challenges, and an over-emphasis on administrative activities hinder the promotion of curriculum instruction.

Challenges Headteachers face in promoting curriculum instruction.

The headteachers' responses are given below:

UHSA1 highlighted that:

No mastery over the subject matter, i.e., there is no total understanding of the content of the curriculum by the teachers. Inadequate teachers to help teach the content of the curriculum.

UHSB2 suggested that:

There should be a provision for textbooks and a commitment level for teachers. Lack of textbooks for learners. Lack of books for teachers.

UHSC3 added that:

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Lack of New Curriculum Resources. Lack of assessment tools. Lack of retraining for new teachers

UHSE5 mentioned that:

The National Curriculum, as it stands, is just a framework with very scant information, which makes it difficult to gain in-depth knowledge. Promoting curriculum instruction comes with other relevant materials like textbooks and teachers' handbooks, but none of these are available.

UHSA1

As the headteacher, there is a need to be abreast with the new curriculum, yet there are other duties I have been assigned to perform, so instead of going around for supervision, there is another work waiting to be completed, but we manage to get some time to do whatever is expected of us.

Challenges Headteachers face in promoting curriculum instruction.

The lead teachers' responses are given below:

ULSG7 mentioned that:

Lack of complete understanding of the national curriculum

The only book given is the resource pack, so headteachers have to return to the Internet and print resources for use

RLSQ8 shared that

Most of the strands were not understood during the curriculum workshop

The national curriculum is too packed and unstable, thereby making it very difficult to acquire knowledge from it.

ULSA1 commented

I think the curriculum was changed two years ago, and I'm not conversant with it.

ULSH8 stated that:

Inadequate training from their superiors. Poor communication channels/ no flow of information. Teachers' inability to perform some tasks. No or inadequate reference materials

RLSK 2 indicated that:

Lack of skilled and trained professionals to handle the curriculum

ULSC 3 further stated that:

Headteachers have little time due to too much work from the kindergarten to the JHS, so they don't observe lessons frequently, and Students and teachers are absent. Inadequate textbooks for curriculum instruction

ULSE5 echoed that:

The lack of textbooks makes headteachers use the Internet and google to print materials for teachers instead of textbooks.

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Okay, the curriculum was changed, I think, two years ago, and I'm not conversant. I believe they have been downloading the lesson notes and what they are supposed to teach on the Internet, they will collect them and check whether it is up to standard or not; where they needs to make corrections and add something to it they will direct the teachers to do so before they bring it for verification.

ULSE5 added

Unqualified personnel to carry out the instruction make it difficult to understand the curriculum, and students do not understand what they are taught.

Challenges Headteachers face in promoting curriculum instruction.

The SISO's responses are given below:

USCB 2 expressed that:

No research was done on the new curriculum by heads, no finance, and no in-depth knowledge to promote instruction

RSCB 2 said,

Inadequate teachers to help teach the curriculum content is one of the challenges that headteachers face in promoting curriculum instruction. Apart from that, the teaching-learning materials they should use become a challenge. And then because the headteacher is not all that versatile, too. So, it affects the evaluation and monitoring of that particular subject.

RSCD1 added

Most of my teachers are newly trained, and they know nothing about the curriculum structure.

RSCB1 opined that

Teachers are unable to master the subject matter in their attempt to implement the curriculum because the supporting teaching and learning resources are not available.

UHSB 2 stated that:

- Financial constraints
- Lack of expertise or personnel
- Limitations of standardized testing
- Lack of time for planning
- Insufficient resources to be used by the teachers and pupils

Summing up, the respondents pointed out the challenges faced by headteachers in promoting curriculum instruction. It came out that there is a need for textbooks to complement the use of the curriculum and reliance on Internet sources for information instead of textbooks. Also, the limited number of teachers was noted as a factor impeding the full use of the content of the curriculum. Some salient factors respondents mentioned were the low commitment of the teachers, lack of curriculum resources, and absence of training for the newly posted teachers on the new curriculum. Navigating curriculum updates amidst multiple responsibilities, adapting to curriculum changes, Implementation challenges of the incomplete national curriculum and lack of approved textbooks,

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Curriculum knowledge gap and impediments to effective subject oversight, resource scarcity and financial constraints in educational provision, impediments in training programs and funding allocation, and obstacles impacting educational dynamics and commitment are fundamental negative factors for a successful academic program. The findings of the study indicated that the challenges that headteachers face in acquiring knowledge of curriculum are insufficient understanding of the content of the new curriculum, inadequate in-service training or workshops for school heads, lack of new curriculum resources, lack of training of headteachers about the national curriculum, deficiency in content knowledge, and inadequate resource for proper research. In addition, the findings of the study showed that the challenges that headteachers face in promoting curriculum instruction are financial constraints, inadequate teachers to help teach the content of the curriculum, lack of assessment tools, lack of teaching and learning resources and materials to aid the headteacher in promoting curriculum instruction, inadequate qualified personnel to carry out the instruction, inadequate funds to provide the needed teaching aids and lack of textbooks for the new curriculum in basic schools.

Concerning financial constraints, Zame et al. (2008) found that Ghana faces leadership challenges related to headteachers' professional development in curriculum promotion. (Zame et al., 2008) In enacting the curriculum, headteachers meet funding challenges (Zame et al., 2008). The impact of the lack of training on the curriculum cannot be underestimated as this potentially leads to rejection and weak application of the curriculum. The absence of training and poor uptake of the curriculum were found in this current study to be significant limitations to the acquisition and promotion of knowledge of the curriculum.

It is worth noting that Oduro & Macbeath explored challenges facing new principals in Africa and found that the principals are faced with daunting challenges, including inadequately trained staff and limited resources required to support the teachers' training level (Oduro & Macbeath, 2003). These challenges affect the morale and job satisfaction of employees. Imoro and Iddrisu identified similar challenges in the north. Headteachers faced challenges that included inadequate physical infrastructure, TLMs, computer labs, sewing machines, basic carpentry tools, and basic tools for BDT practicals. (Imoro & Iddrisu, 2018) In their study, Nadar et al. (2019) found similar challenges and different challenges that headteachers face in promoting instructional leadership. The results brought to bear the lack of training and multiple tasks that hindered the headteacher's instructional leadership responsibilities. The areas that Nadar et al. found were not revealed in this study relating to issues headteachers face in promoting instructional leadership. Some key differences were abrupt changes in curriculum and rapid changes in the medium of instruction in previous years, which caused frustration for teachers and students (Nader et al., 2019). Aligning the curriculum with contemporary educational demands, in conjunction with the effective leadership of the school headteacher, is a key determinant in improving the overall quality of student learning outcomes (Bilgiler et al., 2024). It is worth noting that the abrupt changes in curricula, even though not cited by the headteachers, lead teachers, and SISOs in the study, are worth noting. Ghanaian curriculum changes and academic problems are a matter of concern coupled with the factors identified in the study. The GES should have a well-organized approach in the curriculum introduction and allow enough time for the assimilation of the content of the curriculum, as indicated by the interviewees.

There was no training to introduce them to the curriculum. This is a significant setback affecting the acceptance, cooperation, and use of the curriculum. Overall, the curriculum is the key tool to direct teaching instruction. Teachers are expected to teach meaningful content that helps students meet learning

goals in authentic activities while addressing the needs of diverse learners and ensuring that all students are successful (Davis & Krajcik, 2005).

Collopy (2003), Remillard (1999), and Schneider & Krajcik (2002) reiterate that the effectiveness of educative curriculum materials in promoting teacher learning will be limited by at least three factors in addition to those related to the design of the educative elements. First, the "base" curriculum materials must be of high quality regarding content and pedagogy. Second, their effectiveness is limited or enhanced by the teachers' characteristics, such as their knowledge, beliefs, and dispositions toward reflection and improving their practice. Educative curriculum materials are not likely to support learning for every teacher. Thirdly, educational curriculum materials represent just one factor in altering the academic performance of the pupil and the teacher. Data suggest that the presence of multiple sources for professional development is more effective than any one source, and paying attention to these factors in relation to the findings of this study is critical to addressing the subject of acquiring knowledge of curriculum and Promoting Curriculum Instruction (Collopy, 2003; Remillard, 1999; Schneider & Krajcik, 2002). Given the introduction of a new curriculum in 2019, understanding their instructional leadership is essential for improving basic education in Ghana (GhanaWeb, 2019).

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: Headteachers face challenges in acquiring knowledge of the curriculum and promoting curriculum instruction in rural and urban schools. Results of the study showed that headteachers face challenges in acquiring knowledge of the curriculum and promoting curriculum instruction. Some of the difficulties that headteachers face are insufficient understanding of the content of the new curriculum, inadequate in-service training or workshops for school heads, and lack of new curriculum resources. In addition, the findings of the study showed that the challenges that headteachers face in promoting curriculum instruction are financial constraints, inadequate teachers to help teach the content of the curriculum, lack of assessment tools, lack of teaching and learning resources and materials to aid the headteacher in promoting curriculum instruction. Inadequate qualified personnel to carry out the instruction, insufficient funds to provide the needed teaching aids, and lack of textbooks for the new curriculum in basic schools.

Recommendations: To ensure that headteachers acquire the requisite knowledge of the curriculum, educational leaders should provide curriculum materials, employ the services of curriculum experts, and organize in-service training and workshops for headteachers and teachers to have adequate knowledge of the curriculum.

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