

Principals under the Microscope: A harmonious chorus or discordant melody on their Leadership Styles in Colleges of Education, Ghana

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Abstract

This study examined the leadership styles being used by principals in colleges of education in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The study was underpinned by the pragmatism paradigm and was guided by Theory X-Y by McGregor (1960). With the utilisation of descriptive survey research design, data was gathered from the respondents, and through the use of a multi-stage sampling technique, a sample of 210 staff was selected to fill out questionnaires while five principals were chosen through purposive sampling for interview. In total, 215 respondents were selected from a population of 443 for the study. A descriptive statistical tool (mean and standard deviation) was used to analyse the statistical data with the support of Statistical Product for Service Solution (SPSS), whereas thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data. The study found that the principals exhibited transformational leadership style (mean of means = 4.25), even though some principals were perceived as transactional leaders (mean of means = 3.45). Principals were perceived as least exhibiting a laissez-faire leadership style (mean = 2.45). On the whole, the male principals were perceived more as transformational (democratic) leaders whilst the female principals were seen more as transactional (autocratic) leaders. Based on the outcome of the study, it is recommended that the Government of Ghana (GoG), through the Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC) should organise periodic seminars and workshops to re-orient principals and other college officials on the importance of the various leadership styles, especially, transformational leadership style and when to apply them.

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Introduction

Over the years, humanity has been guided by fellow humans across various spheres of life, including politics, education, the military, family, business, sports, and religion, to plan, organise, direct, motivate, and control affairs. This has provided a sense of direction and coordination in all endeavours, making leadership an instrumental tool for influencing and enhancing controlled direction and progress (Ampofo, 2014). In the realm of business and enterprises, organisations rely on the abilities, competencies, and expertise of their leaders to navigate the constantly changing environment in order to



thrive and achieve their desired visions and missions. Educational organisations and institutions are no exception, as their efficient achievement of goals also heavily depends on the effectiveness of their leaders.

Leadership Styles

Leadership is a process through which an individual inspires and motivates a group to achieve a common goal, ultimately leading to the success of an organisation (Northouse, 2007; Rowe, 2007). Conversely, leadership style refers to the behavioural models and patterns employed by leaders when collaborating with others to reach a specific goal (Amirul & Daud, 2012). Josanov Vrgovic and Pavlovic (2014) align with Amirul and Daud's viewpoint, defining the leadership styles of a principal as the behavioural patterns exhibited by the principal in a working relationship and process, which influence all activities and performances within the school, as well as those of individuals working for and alongside the school, including staff, students, parents, and other stakeholders.

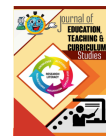
Brobbey (2016) asserted that there is no universally accepted leadership style. Various leadership styles can lead to different changes within institutions, with some leaders perceived as more competent and results-oriented than others. Nevertheless, Goldberg (2003) noted that, regardless of how a leader guides their subordinates, the style employed can be classified as either transformational or transactional.

Transformational leadership emphasises the use of incentives, teamwork, support, and other positive influences to facilitate desired change in employees, leading to the achievement of goals (Khan, Aslam & Riaz, 2012). Transformational leaders are inherently democratic, actively listening to and sharing ideas with their followers, providing a purpose that transcends short-term objectives while also influencing, inspiring, stimulating, and mentoring their subordinates. This approach has a significant impact on attitudinal change (Jay, 2014). According to Kane and Patapan (2010), duties and authority are delegated from the leader to their subordinates, enabling group members to learn and enhance their knowledge, skills, and competencies. These elements encourage followers to trust, admire, respect, and align with the leader's vision.

Conversely, transactional leadership utilises exchange techniques, where both the leader and the follower trade something of significance to achieve the goals of organisations (Lucey, 2017). It entails clarifying how followers should execute a task in exchange for a promise of rewards upon successful completion. The transactional leader first establishes the link between performance and reward, and then offers incentives for satisfactory outcomes that motivate subordinates to enhance their performance (Trottier, Van-Wart & Wang, 2008). In instances where an employee fails to meet the established performance standards for their assigned duties, they incur a punishment.

Concerning laissez-faire leadership, it embodies a passive style in which the leader is indecisive, indifferent, and at times avoids involvement in organisational matters. In this context, subordinates are granted the freedom to work autonomously and act as they choose (McColl-Kennedy & Anderson, 2005). The laissez-faire leader tends to delegate tasks and responsibilities more frequently, adopts a hands-off approach to leadership, and shows little authority, which often leads team members to seek assistance elsewhere when decisions need to be made (Allen, 2022). Nevertheless, in certain instances, the laissez-faire leader does provide the necessary support and resources for followers to carry out their duties (Kurubone, 2018).

Some studies have indicated that certain heads of institutions employ the leadership styles currently under discussion. For instance, Baffour-Awuah (2015) concluded in a study that heads of departments at



Cape Coast Technical University in Ghana demonstrated transformational leadership (33.3 percent), transactional leadership (34.0 percent), and laissez-faire leadership (33.7 percent) styles.

College principals employing any of the aforementioned leadership styles will attain varying degrees of development and progress within their institutions.

Theoretical Framework

Douglas McGregor's (1960) Theories X and Y informed the study. Theory X leaders believe that people are inherently lazy and may not find the idea of working enjoyable; therefore, it is necessary to keep them under direct pressure and control to motivate them to work well and proficiently. Typically, Theory X leaders perceive their subordinates as lacking creativity, innovation, and intelligence, viewing them as indolent individuals. Consequently, these employees must be closely supervised using an autocratic style and intimidation to ensure they work efficiently and effectively (Greenberg & Baron, 2008).

However, Theory Y leaders believe that workers are not lazy but eager to work. They are convinced that their subordinates are diligent and capable individuals who view work as natural, like rest or play. Therefore, with proper motivation, resources, and a supportive environment, they will work willingly and often exceed expectations (McGregor, 1960).

The implication is that in colleges where the principals are Theory X leaders, they will be transactional leaders who assume their subordinates are lazy and less intelligent. Consequently, they may delegate less authority to fewer employees and make autonomous decisions that could influence the college's development.

However, in colleges where the heads adopt a Theory Y approach (transformational leaders), the workforce is seen as creative, responsible, and competent. Such heads involve their subordinates in the decision-making process, delegate greater responsibilities to staff members, and interact with them respectfully.

Method

Research Design

The current study employed a descriptive survey research design to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data from a relatively large number of cases concurrently. It used a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide for data collection, analysis, and generalisation. This design provided an opportunity to collect data to answer the research question regarding the types of leadership styles exhibited by principals in the studied institutions.

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The target population for this study included all principals, teaching staff, and non-teaching staff members at the seven public colleges of education in the Eastern Region of Ghana. However, the accessible population comprised the principals, teaching staff, and non-teaching staff from five colleges in the area, namely Abetifi Presbyterian College, Kibi Presbyterian College, Presbyterian College, Presbyterian Women's College, and Seventh-day Adventist College (SDA). Consequently, the accessible population totalled 443. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), if a population is 440 in a quantitative study, a sample size of 205 is sufficient. However, to enhance the generalisability of the study, a sample size of 210 was chosen. Table 1 presents information about the sample selected for the quantitative study.

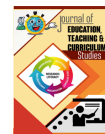


Table 1: A Summary of the Sample for the Quantitative Study

Colleges of Education	Members of staff		Grand Total
	Male	Female	
Abetifi Presby College	28	13	41
Kibi Presby College	27	11	38
Presbyterian College	29	22	51
Presbyterian Women’s College	22	15	37
SDA College	27	16	43
Total	133	77	210

Source: Field Data, (2022)

The multi-stage sampling technique, which included simple random sampling, proportionate sampling, and stratified random sampling, was employed to select the respondents for the quantitative aspect of the study. In this context, the simple random sampling technique was used to obtain samples from the five colleges. The study sample was distributed among the colleges using the proportionate sampling method. Subsequently, stratified random sampling was utilised to select the departments. Finally, the simple random sampling method (the lottery approach) was employed to select samples from the departments in each college.

For the qualitative component of the study, 5 principals (one from each college) were selected using purposive sampling, resulting in a sample size of 215.

Data Collection Instruments

The instruments employed to collect data included a questionnaire and an interview guide. Statistical data were gathered using a closed-ended questionnaire, while qualitative data were obtained through a semi-structured interview guide. In this research, a considerable number of teaching and non-teaching staff were consulted for statistical data to address the research question, which aimed to explore the various leadership styles adopted by principals from the perspectives of staff members in colleges of education in the Eastern Region of Ghana. A five-point Likert-type scale for the questionnaire was scored as follows: “Not Sure” = 1; “Strongly Disagree” = 2; “Disagree” = 3; “Agree” = 4; and “Strongly Agree” = 5. Qualitative data for the study were collected using the semi-structured interview guide.

Data Processing and Analysis

The statistical data were analysed using means and standard deviation, while the qualitative data were transcribed and analysed through thematic analysis. Because the data were measured on an interval scale with a normal distribution, the means and standard deviation were used, and the responses were quantified numerically. According to Amedahe and Asamoah-Gyimah (2018), when observations are measured on interval or ratio scales, it is appropriate to employ the mean alongside standard deviation to describe them.

Results

The various Leadership Styles being used by Principals from the perspectives of Members of Staff

Both quantitative and qualitative data were used to address this objective. Means and standard deviations, along with thematic analysis, were employed to analyse the responses of both respondents and participants. In the analysis, mean values above 3 ($(1+2+3+4+5)/5 = 3$) indicate that the majority of respondents agreed with the statement, whereas a mean value below 3 signifies that the majority of respondents disagreed. The results are shown in Table 2.

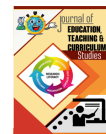
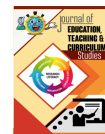


Table 2: Leadership Styles of Principals

Statement	Mean (n= 210)	Std Dev.
TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE		
Idealised Influence		
The principal:		
Talks about his/her most important values and beliefs.	4.31	.66
Instils pride in me for being associated with the college.	4.12	.77
Goes beyond self-interest for the good of the group/ college.	4.30	.71
Considers the moral and ethical consequences of decisions.	4.28	.64
Lays emphasis on the importance of working together to achieve a common goal.	4.57	.61
Works with members of staff in a satisfactory way.	4.26	.71
Displays a sense of power and confidence.	4.35	.56
Is effective in representing members of staff to higher authority.	4.28	.70
*Overall Mean	4.31	
Inspirational Motivation		
The principal:		
Talks enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished.	4.50	.57
Talks optimistically/ positively about the future of the college.	4.52	.56
Articulates a compelling/convincing vision of the future of the college.	4.54	.57
Expresses confidence that goals will be achieved.	4.46	.61
Uses methods of leadership that are satisfying.	4.23	.79
Gets me to do more than I expected to do.	4.08	.85
Heightens my desire to succeed.	4.20	.77
Increases my willingness to try harder in executing my duties.	4.23	.77
<i>Table 2 Cont.:</i>		
Specifies the importance of having a strong sense of purpose and aim.	4.27	0.64
*Overall Mean	4.34	

Intellectual Stimulation

The principal:



Empowers members of staff to re-examine the norms and values of the college to question if they are appropriate.	4.20	.66
Gets members of staff to look at problems from many different angles.	4.07	.72
Creates challenging conditions that enable members of staff to explore new ways of looking at how to complete assignments.	4.20	.71
Helps me to develop my strengths in order to become effective in delivering my duties.	4.22	.73
Encourages members of staff to find solutions to challenges confronting the college.	4.22	.68
*Overall Mean	4.18	

Individualised Consideration

The principal:

Treats me as an individual rather than just as a member of a group/college.	3.79	.97
Considers members of staff as having different needs, abilities, and aspirations from each other.	4.03	.84
Delegates duties to members of staff to perform.	4.36	.64
Is effective in meeting my job-related needs.	4.20	.74
Acts in ways that build my respect.	4.24	.71
Is effective in meeting the college's requirements.	4.38	.65
Involves members of staff in decision making process of the college.	4.27	.83
*Overall Mean	4.18	

TRANSACTIONAL LEADERSHIP STYLE

Contingent Reward

The principal:

Communicates performance expectations to members of staff.	4.19	.71
Specifies in clear terms who is responsible for performing certain duties.	4.25	.62

Table 2 Cont.:

Makes clear what one can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved.	3.92	.89
Expresses satisfaction when I meet expectations.	4.20	.78
Provides members of staff with assistance/rewards in exchange for our efforts.	3.99	.94
*Overall Mean	4.11	



Management by Exception- Active

The principal:

Monitors performance of staff.	4.24	.62
Focuses attention on irregularities, mistakes, exceptions, and deviations from standards by members of staff.	3.48	.92
Concentrates his/her full attention on dealing with mistakes, complaints, and failures on the part of staff.	3.30	.97
Keeps track of all mistakes committed by members of staff.	3.24	.94
Ensures strict compliance with work standards.	4.19	.68
*Overall Mean	3.69	

Management by Exception- Passive

The principal:

Fails to interfere in the problems of the college until problems become serious.	2.65	.69
Waits for things to go wrong before taking action.	2.46	.69
Shows that he/she is a firm believer in “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.	2.68	.75
Demonstrates that problems must become chronic before taking action.	2.39	.64
Delays in responding to urgent questions/issues.	2.60	.70
*Overall Mean	2.56	

Table 2 Cont.:

LAISSEZ- FAIRE LEADERSHIP STYLE

The principal:

Avoids getting involved when important issues arise.	2.47	.62
Avoids making decisions.	2.47	.60
Is absent when needed.	2.50	.64
Is ineffective at issuing orders and authority.	2.46	.66
Is ineffective at leading the college.	2.35	.63
*Overall Mean	2.45	

Source: Field Data, (2022)



Table 2 revealed that, in the area of idealised influence under the transformational leadership style, principals of the colleges of education in the Eastern Region, laid emphasis on the importance of working together to achieve a common goal (Mean = 4.57, SD = .61), displayed a sense of power and confidence (Mean = 4.35, SD = .56), and talked about their most important values and beliefs (Mean = 4.31, SD = .66). Judging from the overall mean (4.31), principals prioritised idealised influence whilst exhibiting transformational leadership style.

The findings on inspirational motivation depicted that, in the lens of workers in the colleges of education, principals articulated a compelling/convincing vision of the future of their colleges (Mean = 4.54, SD = .57), and were optimistic about the future of the college (Mean = 4.52, SD = .56). With an overall mean (4.34), one can attest to the fact that principals utilised inspirational motivation, to a large extent.

With regard to intellectual stimulation, it was perceived that principals had the skill of encouraging members of staff to employ creative, innovative and long-lasting solutions to emerging problems confronting the colleges (Mean = 4.22, SD = .68), and build the capacity of members of staff to be effective and efficient in handling those problems while exercising their work roles and responsibilities (Mean = 4.22, SD = .73). Similarly, respondents perceived their principals as intellectually stimulating considering an overall mean of 4.18.

As far as individualised consideration was concerned, principals were effective in meeting the college's requirements (Mean = 4.38, SD = .65) and most often delegated duties to members of staff (Mean = 4.36, SD = .64). From the overall mean (4.18), workers viewed their principals' actions fitting within the individualised consideration.

In the domain of transactional leadership style, especially on contingent reward, principals specified in clear terms who were responsible for performing certain duties (Mean = 4.25, SD = .62), and expressed satisfaction when staff met expectations (Mean = 4.20, SD = .78). Considering the overall mean (4.11), it can be observed that principals used contingent reward.

In the area of management by exception-active, the study found that principals monitored performance of staff (Mean = 4.24, SD = .62), and ensured strict compliance with work standards (Mean = 4.19, SD = .68). The overall mean (3.69), indicates that principals displayed management by exception-active.

The findings on management by exception-passive revealed that respondents disagreed that principals exhibited such leadership style, due to the fact that the overall mean of (2.56) is less than the standard mean of (3.00).

The study's results on laissez-faire leadership style indicated that college principals were not laissez-faire leaders, as the overall mean of 2.45 is lower than the standard mean of 3.00.

During the interviews on the leadership styles of their principals, participants from different colleges expressed divided opinions. Some staff members viewed their principals as transformational leaders, while others considered them to be transactional leaders. The findings from the interviews corroborated earlier results from the quantitative data, indicating that some principals are transformational leaders, whereas others are transactional leaders. Staff members who perceived their principals as transformational leaders opined as follows:

The principal is a genuinely good person who listens to others, demonstrating his role as a democratic leader. He never acts alone and always consults the staff before making decisions. The principal collaborates with us, values our input, and implements the best choices. For instance, when he aimed to develop infrastructure, he sought our opinions on the matter (51-year-old male teaching staff of College B).



Participants who regarded their principals as transactional leaders articulated:

There are various leadership styles; however, when I consider the fundamental types we have – democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire – I would say my principal leans more towards the autocratic style (laughs).

Being an autocratic leader means not involving your staff in the institution's affairs. This implies that the principal views everyone as non-knowledgeable and inferior, thus believing they cannot contribute significantly. The principal remains the central focus concerning decision-making. It might surprise you to learn that many committees are merely white elephants; they exist in name only and do not truly function, as all decisions are made by the top figure, who is the principal. (44-year-old male tutor in College A)

Principals were also interviewed on the types of leadership styles they employed in managing their colleges. In response, principals characterised their leadership styles as primarily transformational. A principal remarked on his leadership style as:

Ahh...I have always said that I have been using a transformational democratic style. I have termed it transformational democratic because my vision is to transform both the human beings and the institution I am leading to a desired point. And I am not doing it alone as a principal; I am doing it with all. Together, let us transform. Let's bring our views together to change. It's better than we met it.

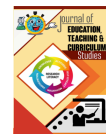
I met a school without any PhD holders. As I talk to you right now, I have two staff members who have finished their Ph. D.s and hold them. About five are in the process of finishing their PhDs, and many others have embarked on their PhD programmes. Those who were not even having their M.Phil. are almost done. Students' engagement in the college has also enhanced.

Discussion

Overall, the results thus far indicate that principals in the colleges of education in the Eastern Region of Ghana have a stronger inclination towards transformational leadership styles, characterised by inspirational motivation, idealised influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration. This is followed by transactional leadership styles, evidenced by contingent rewards and management by exception-active. However, principals were perceived as least likely to exhibit a laissez-faire leadership style. Baffour-Awuah (2015) found in a study that heads of departments at Cape Coast Technical University demonstrated transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles.

A critical examination of the interviews with participants regarding the leadership styles of their principals reveals that male principals are perceived as more transformational (democratic) leaders, while female principals are regarded as transactional (autocratic) leaders. One might question why female principals adopt a transactional style of leadership. Is it because, in our part of the world, few women occupy leadership positions, necessitating a transactional approach to assert their authority, or do they believe that if they are not stern, they will be overshadowed? The current study's findings, which suggest that male principals are more transformational leaders and female principals are transactional leaders, contradict previous research that has shown female leaders to be democratic, transformational, relationship-oriented, and more inspiring (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Antonakis, Avolio & Sivasubramaniam, 2003; Pounder & Coleman, 2002). However, Babiak and Bajcar (2019) discovered in their study that women tend to view themselves as more structuring (task-oriented) leaders than men, challenging the stereotypical belief that a relationship-oriented leadership style is typically associated with women.

Although the statistical analysis indicates that principals in the colleges of education were predominantly transformational leaders, the participants' subsequent responses in the interview suggested that various



situations existed across different colleges. Some colleges had transformational leaders as principals, whereas others had transactional leaders.

Theories X and Y correspond effectively with these findings. According to Theory X, leaders (transactional leaders) view their subordinates as lazy and less intelligent, thus necessitating an authoritarian management approach (Greenberg & Baron, 2008). In contrast, Theory Y leaders (transformational leaders) believe their subordinates are creative and eager to work; therefore, they should be provided with a supportive environment (McGregor, 1960).

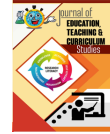
The study recommends that principals adopt the appropriate leadership style, particularly the transformational leadership style, when interacting with staff members. Furthermore, it is suggested that the Government of Ghana (GoG), through the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), organise periodic seminars, workshops, and conferences to reorient principals and other college officials on the significance of the various leadership styles, especially the transformational leadership style, and when to apply them. This will enable principals to be highly effective in their administrative and leadership roles. Principals may also switch to transactional leadership when necessary.

Conclusions

The study concludes that, generally, the principals of colleges of education in the Eastern Region of Ghana exhibit a transformational leadership style, as these principals are perceived as selfless and prioritising the welfare of the group or college over personal interests. However, some principals are also seen as transactional leaders because they establish performance expectations for staff and focus their attention on mistakes, deviations, and failures for the purpose of punishment. These differing leadership styles may result in varying feelings among staff members.

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