

Psychological Factors That Influence Teachers' Perception of Head Teachers' Leadership Styles in the Dormaa East District

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Abstract

The activities in the schools as well as the interactions that took place in the schools influenced teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles the most. The purpose of the study was to investigate the psychological factors that influence teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles. The study adopted an exploratory approach using a descriptive survey design. The study was carried out in 50 basic schools with a sample size of 217 teachers. The proportional random sampling method was used to select the respondents. The study showed that situation-specific factors namely; school culture, relationship with other teachers, interpersonal relationship with the head teacher, head teacher support, and GES policies being implemented influenced teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles. The study found no statistically significant difference between males and females in terms of factors influencing teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership style. It was recommended that the training of head teachers should include how to build healthy school culture in the schools.

Keywords: Headteacher, Leadership style, Perception, Situation-Specific Factors

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"Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues but the parent of all others" (Cicero, a philosopher). It is on the premise of the above quotation that we would like to express our appreciation to all who in diverse ways contributed to the success of this study.

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1.0 Introduction

Perceptions are fundamental to forming opinions about ourselves, others, and reality which involves the interaction of the outer world with our inner world (Brown, 2005). The way people perceive an object influences their behaviour. The manner, in which teachers perceive, understand, and interpret the conditions of their workplace, including their relationships and interactions with head teachers, colleague teachers and students is an important part of understanding how efficacious they are, which directly affects their job performance (Cubukcu, 2008; Gordon, 2001; Osborne & Walker, 2006).

Several studies have demonstrated that new teachers, those without job experience, have higher expectations of themselves and their head teachers (Day, Stobart, Sammons & Kington, 2006; Rogg, Schmidt, Shull, & Schmitt, 2001). As these teachers progress and receive praise for their work from their head teachers, their job performance increases (Doran, McCutcheon, Evans, MacMillian, Hall, Pringle, Smith, & Valenta, 2004).

However, today's teachers are under unprecedented pressure to change classroom practices and improve student learning and achievement (Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley, & Beresford, 2000). Teachers are asked to teach a classroom full of students with a wide range of learning abilities, as well as a varied range of learning disabilities (Nelson, Slavitt, & Deuel, 2012). Students come to the classroom from stable, traditional, supportive home environments as well as from unstable, broken, and homeless situations. Some students are ready to learn and others are resistant to learning (Margolis & Doring, 2013). It becomes imperative that teachers do not perceive the head teacher's role as the cause of these problems as these perceptions can lead to substantial differences in outcomes.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

Head teachers face many daily challenges and responsibilities as they strive to effectively manage their schools,

and enhance teachers' job performance and students' achievement. Headteachers' time is taxed by essential leadership responsibilities and excessive management demands. Head teachers need to understand the relationships between what they do and its impact on teachers' perception of their leadership styles (Hipp & Bredeson, 1995).

According to Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins (2006), much of the literature on school leadership focuses on head teachers' values, beliefs, skills, or knowledge that someone thinks head teachers need to act effectively. A search through the related literature showed some amount of academic work on teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles from various perspectives (Gyansa, 2000; Darko, 2008; Effiong, 2006; Rozi, 2012; Chen & Cheng, 2012). Despite the well-documented teachers' perception of leadership styles, psychological factors that influence teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles, to some extent appear neglected.

One of the researchers participating in this study also observed that it is relatively uncommon for school teachers to share their classroom practices with their head teachers in a formalized setting. This setting is meant to recommend changes for improvement in the practice of teaching. However, this is not happening because of a high sense of mistrust between the teachers and head teachers. As result, some teachers engage in self-fulfilling prophecies to please head teachers. Asare (2015) adds to Blase and Blase's (2002) report that head teachers' leadership behaviours are more of voluntary compulsion as teachers with dissenting views are expelled from the school. As a result, teachers have no choice but to do as the head teachers demand. Taking a cue from the research gap prompted the researchers to conduct the recent study.

3.0 Research Question

The main research question is:

What are the situation-specific factors that influence teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles?

3.1 Hypothesis

In addition to the main question, the following research hypothesis was formulated to guide the study:

Male and female teachers do not differ in factors influencing teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership style.

4.0 Factors Influencing Perception

Several factors have been identified as influencing teachers' perceptions. Yeager (2001) argues that there are several contributing factors to perception and some factors may be more influential than others. To him, these influences are likely to combine in an unknown way and even have some cumulative effect. Lane (2008) adds that it is best to think of factors that influence perception as a matter of degree.

A decent amount of academic literature suggests that there are three different perspectives of psychological factors that influence our perception of other people: perceiver-specific, target-specific, and situation-specific factors (Aquinas, 2008; Mishra, 2009; Rath, 2010; Robbins, Millett, & Waters-Marsh, 2004). The next part focuses on the relative influences of situation-specific factors on teachers' perceptions.

4.1 Situation-Specific Factors

Several situation-specific factors influence teachers' perception of head teacher leadership style. These include time, school culture, the context of interaction, culture, district policy, and head teacher support. These are factors that affect the impression that is formed about head teachers by teachers. Some recent research points to the conclusion that the whole process of interpersonal perception is, at least in part, a function of the group (or interpersonal) context in which the perception occurs. Perrett (2010) opines that motivational factors such as the nature of the relationship being sought influenced people's perceptions.

The research result of Tang (2011) suggests that school culture affects leadership style. A leadership style that includes transformational leadership influenced school cultures that exist in the private high school city of Malang. This result is corroborated by other studies which contend that the better the school principal used his power to manage the school, the better the culture or atmosphere created (Mutmainah & Troena, 2013; Rovegno & Bandhauer, 1997b). It is contrary to the result of research by Lumbanraja (2009) which showed that leadership style does not affect the school culture.

Wang and Ha (2012) as cited earlier revealed three situation-specific factors that influenced pre-service teachers' perception: district policy, teacher support, and professional culture. Teacher support, support that pre-service teachers received was the second situation-specific factor that influenced their perception of the TGfU model. Two sub-themes emerged: support from teacher educators and support from peers. Interview data from several pre-service teachers showed that teacher educators' support greatly influenced the pre-service teachers' learning about the TGfU model because these educators introduced them to TGfU.

District policy and school culture are major factors influencing teachers' learning and implementation of

new pedagogical approaches (Rovegno & Bandhauer, 1997a; Bechtel & O'Sullivan, 2007). For example, Bechtel and O'Sullivan (2007) found that district policy inhibits teacher change in the district. The PE teachers involved felt that the district did not meet their professional development requirements because of the lack of a professional development programme. This is perceived as a key barrier to teacher change. The support from principals, colleague teachers, students, and university courses contributed to the success of teachers' implementing change in their programmes (Cothran, 2001; Ha, Lee, Chan, & Sum, 2004; Wright, McNeill, Fry, Tan, Tan, & Schempp, 2006).

Wang and Ha (2012) concluded that perceiver-specific factors such as teachers' knowledge, beliefs, learning, and teaching experience, as well as situation-specific factors such as district policy, headteacher support, and school culture positively or negatively influenced pre-service teachers' perception. They further indicated that perceiver-specific factors and situation-specific factors interplay with each other.

4.2 Gregory Constructivist Theory of Perception

This study was based on the constructivist theory of perception as propounded by Richard L. Gregory (1970). The theory suggests that perception is determined by psychological processes and termed the process top-down processing. Top-down processing is the use of old knowledge to make sense of what we are perceiving. What we see is largely based on what we already know (Gordon, 2004; Hatfield, 2009; McLeod, 2007).

The theory argues that we create perceptual ideas when trying to recognise an object and that stored knowledge is used to fill in the missing pieces. This implies that perceptual processes are not direct, but depend on the teachers' expectations and previous knowledge as well as the information available in the stimulus itself. Perception is influenced by a wide range of individual factors that can lead to an inadequate interpretation. The context, the motivation, and the expectations are some of the key propositions of the theory (Eysenck & Keane, 2010).

The theory asserts that teachers' personal experiences, motivation, expectations, and emotional state and context influenced their perceptions of head teachers' leadership styles (Eysenck & Keane, 2010). The question of how much influence one of these psychological factors has on the others may vary depending on the teachers' preferences and beliefs and the intensity of usage of a particular head teacher's leadership style.

Gregory's constructivist theory of perception is the most appropriate theory for studying the psychological factors that influence teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles in the school. It is suitable in the sense that it directs attention to the whole top-down perceptual processes involving teachers' expectations and previous knowledge as well as the information available in the stimulus, interaction between stimulus and internal hypotheses, motivation, emotions, feelings, and mindset as important factors influencing teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles.

5.0 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Design

The study adopted an exploratory approach using a descriptive survey design to study the psychological factors that influence teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles in basic schools in Dormaa East District of Ghana. The survey design was employed because the study sought to collect data from a sample out of a large population on the psychological factors that influence teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles.

5.2 Population

The target population consisted of school teachers in all the 72 basic schools (46 primary and 26 junior high schools) in the Dormaa East District of Ghana. The entire teacher population was 700, consisting of 413 male teachers and 287 female teachers (GES, EMIS-Wamfie, 2021). The accessible population was 511 teachers from selected 50 basic schools in the district.

5.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample size involved in the study was 118 male teachers and 99 female teachers. In all, a total of 217 participants (teachers) were selected for the study. This included teachers from Kindergarten (KG) 1 to JHS 3. The simple random sampling technique was used to select 50 schools out of 72 basic schools in the district. In selecting the schools, a sampling frame was constructed. Subsequently, the names of all the basic schools in the district were written on pieces of paper and put in a container. They were mixed up very thoroughly after which the researchers picked the papers one after the other until the 50 schools were finally selected.

Proportional random sampling was used in selecting teachers in the various schools for the study due to the unequal number of teachers in the various schools. In the selection of the schools, simple random sampling was employed in selecting the individual teacher participants. The number of respondents from each school ranged from two to five.

Instrument

The questionnaire was designed respectively for school teachers on psychological factors that influence their perception of head teachers' leadership styles. The questionnaire involved a four-point Likert rating scale (strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree respectively). In all, 11 items made up of 4 respondents' background information (Gender, Age, professional qualification, years of teaching experience) and 7 for situation-specific factors respectively were developed. The Cronbach's alpha was established for situation-specific factors 0.75.

5.4 Data Analysis

Several data analysis techniques were used to analyze the research question of the study. The researchers used simple percentages in describing the respondents' background information. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were used to analyze data on the research question. The independent samples t-test statistic was employed to analyse responses related to the Hypothesis. The hypothesis was tested at the 5% level of significance.

6.0 Results and Discussion

Table 1- *Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Teachers by Gender*

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	118	54.4
Female	99	45.6
Total	217	100

Source: Field data, 2021

From Table 1, out of the 217 teachers who were involved in the study, 54.4% were males, while 45.6% were females. These results show that a greater number of teachers in the study area were males. With a small difference in the male and female respondents, it shows that both males and females are adequately represented.

Research question: What are the situation-specific factors that influence teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership style?

Table 2- *Situation-Specific Factors*

	M	SD
The way things are done in the school influence my perception of the head teacher's leadership styles.	3.16	.75
The head teacher's handling of the issue of safety and well-being of teachers influences my perception of his/her leadership style.	3.16	.78
The support I received from the head teacher influenced my perception of the head teacher's leadership styles.	3.07	.99
The relationship with other teachers in the school influences my perception of the head teacher's leadership styles.	3.04	.87
The GES policies being implemented influence my perception of head teachers' leadership styles.	3.03	.93
The interpersonal interactions between myself and the head teacher influence my perception of his/her leadership styles.	3.01	.91
The support I receive from other teachers influences my perception of the head teacher's leadership styles.	2.46	.91

Mean of Means= 2.99, Average standard deviation= 0.88

From Table 2, the factor, the way things are done in the school (school culture), had the highest mean of 3.16 and the smallest standard deviation of 0.75. This mean score suggested that teachers unanimously believed school culture influenced their perception of head teachers' leadership styles. It confirms Martin's (2009) and Tang's (2011) position that the environmental context of the school must be considered when determining which style of leadership is required. It is contrary to the results of research by Lumbanraja (2009) which showed teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership style was not influenced by the school's culture.

From Table 2, the factor, handling of the issues of safety and wellbeing, had the next highest mean of 3.16 and a standard deviation of 0.78. This mean score indicated that the majority of the teachers believed that head teachers' handling of the issues of safety and wellbeing influenced their perception of leadership styles. This confirms Stoll and Fink's (cited in Robinson, 2011) proposition that creating an enabling learning environment influences teachers' perception of leadership styles.

From Table 2, the factor, headteacher support had a mean score of 3.07 and a standard deviation of 0.99. This mean score revealed that the teachers somewhat agreed support they receive from the head teacher influences their perception of head teachers' leadership styles. This finding supports Wang and Ha's (2012)

assertion that head teacher support influenced pre-service teachers' perception.

From Table 2, the factor, relationship with other teachers, had a mean score of 3.04 and a standard deviation of 0.87. This mean score indicated that the teachers unanimously agreed their relationship with other teachers in the school influenced their perception of head teachers' leadership styles. This is not surprising as Perrett (2010) opines that motivational factors such as the nature of the relationship being sought influenced people's perception.

From Table 2, the factor, GES policies, had a mean score of 3.03 and a standard deviation of 0.91. It follows that the teachers somewhat agreed that GES policies being implemented influenced their perception of head teachers' leadership styles. This confirms Wang and Ha's (2012) assertion that district policies being implemented by the head teacher influenced pre-service teachers' perceptions.

From Table 2, the factor, interpersonal relationship with the head teacher, had a mean score of 3.01 and a higher standard deviation of 0.91. It indicated that teachers agreed their interpersonal relationship with head teachers influenced their perception of head teachers' leadership styles. Additionally, this factor had a higher standard deviation indicative of a disagreement in the responses for this factor. The result supports Perrett's (2010) view that motivational factors such as the interpersonal relationship being sought influenced people's perceptions.

Finally, from Table 2 the factor, peer teachers' support had the lowest mean score of 2.46 and a standard deviation of 0.91. It indicates that the majority of teachers disagreed to some extent that the support they received from their fellow teachers influenced their perception of head teachers' leadership styles. The higher standard deviation indicated that there was a great deal of variation in the responses for this factor. This finding contradicts Wang Ha's (2012) assertion that support from colleague teachers influenced pre-service teachers perceptions.

Table 3- *Independent Samples T-test Analysis of Factors Influencing Teachers' Perception of Head teachers' Leadership Style by Gender*

Gender	M	SD	t-value	df	p-value
Male	64.57	8.30			
Female	63.39	8.50	1.033	215	.633

From Table 3, the test was not statistically significant, $t(215) = 1.03, p < 0.05$). The results suggest that factors influencing teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles are not dependent on teachers' gender (whether male or female).

Summary of Key Findings

The following were the main findings of the study:

1. Situation-specific factors namely; school culture, relationship with other teachers, interpersonal relationship with the head teacher, head teacher support, and GES policies being implemented influenced teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles. Teachers, however, disagreed that support from colleague teachers influenced their perception of head teachers' leadership style.
2. The study found no statistically significant difference between males and females in terms of factors influencing teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership style.

Conclusions

This article explored the psychological factors that influence teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles. It is important to state that the activities in the schools (school culture GES policies being implemented) as well as the interactions (relationship with other teachers, interpersonal relationship with the head teacher, head teacher support) that took place in the schools influenced teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles the most. Again, both male and female teachers are likely to exhibit the same attitude and behaviour towards their head teachers as there was no significant difference in their perception of head teachers' leadership styles.

Recommendations

Results from the study underscore the relevance of getting empirical data on the psychological factors that influenced teachers' perception of head teachers' leadership styles. We can therefore submit that the Ghana Education Service/National Teaching Council in the training of head teachers should include how to build healthy school culture and collaboration since teachers are influenced by these factors in the school environment.

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