

Leadership instability of a school and its consequences: Research evidence

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Recommended Citation: Ahulu, D. K., Kuranchie, A., & Kusi, H. (2026). Leadership instability of a school and its consequences: Research evidence. *African Quarterly Social Science Review*, 3(3), 209–224. <https://doi.org/10.51867/AQSSR.3.3.19>

ABSTRACT

The study investigated leadership instability of a senior high school, where this situation has perpetuated for close to three decades. The qualitative study adopted a case study design to gauge the stakeholders' perspectives on the problem embedded in the study. This study was anchored on the Systems Theory as the theoretical lens. Multiple participants who were privy to the phenomenon provided data to broaden the understanding of the enormity of the research problem. The necessary ethical protocols and trustworthiness were observed in the conduct of the study. Thematic analysis was employed for the analysis of the data generated from the participants. The study unveiled that the triggers of the unstable leadership of the school are attributable to both internal and external currents such as community interference, inadequate contextual orientation and induction, setting and size of the school, low student numbers, and discouraging academic performance. The inquiry also unearthed the following as consequences of the leadership instability of the school: lack of continuity of projects and programmes, dwindling student numbers, poor student performance and behaviour, bad school image, and high staff turnover. The study, therefore, recommends that the school needs to improve on its relationship with the community recognising that the school is in and for the community; the municipal education officers need to offer context-specific orientation to in-coming heads to make them abreast of the school and its peculiar situation prior to their assumption of office; and posting of experienced and long-serving staff to head the school. The study extends Systems theory applications to educational leadership stability research.

Key words: Educational Leadership, Leadership, Leadership Instability, Senior High School, Systems Theory

I. INTRODUCTION

Education has become a vital tool of providing competent citizens to contribute the growth and development of nations. It equips people with the competencies and skills required to serve as the spine for countries' development and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Donkoh, Lee & Donkor, 2019). Isa et al., (2022) regard it as a tool to foster growth and development of individuals and societies. That underscores the enormous investments at all levels of education by individuals, families, organisations, and countries (Kuranchie, 2013). When these investments are made, leaders of schools are expected to exquisitely execute their leadership responsibilities towards accomplishment of the individual, family, and national goals of education. Senior high school education is fashioned to prepare students to feed the higher education institutions and/or entry into the workforce by providing students with specialised knowledge and skills, which require long, medium, and short term plans under a long-term serving heads. The head, as the administrative manager of the school organisation, provides leadership to ensure that all stakeholders of education fully participate in the running of the affairs of the school to achieve positive results. They are very crucial for providing strong educational opportunities, directions, and guidance to improve school outcomes such as students' academic achievement. Heads of schools are able to attain these through the enhancement of teachers' practices, motivation of staff, and maintaining a positive school climate over time. The school as an educational organisation is a complex one, which requires a strong and stable heads' leadership to achieve positive results. As Kusi (2017) opines, the success or failure of every organisation depends primarily on the nature of leadership provided for the organisation. Hence, schools that experience frequent changes in leadership at short intervals risk experiencing subpar performance.

Leadership involves making an effort to influence a group of people interactively to achieve set goals of an organisation (Kusi, 2017). Leadership in senior high school is, therefore, the influencing agent of activities of staff, students, and other stakeholders to achieve the educational goals. At this level of education in Ghana, the head is the



leader assisted by two or three deputies or assistants, as the case may be. The head performs both administrative and instructional leadership responsibilities to help promote teaching and learning. Given the nature and enormity of the responsibilities of the heads, it takes time to achieve good results, necessitating the need for schools to have heads for a relatively long time. It is the expectation that when leaders of schools are appointed, they remain at post to provide leadership till retirement or they go on transfer after a long period of time. This means that school heads ought to hold office for several years to be able to influence teacher productivity positively, augment student achievement gains, and promote positive externalities on the community. Although there is no specific number of years for heads to hold the position to achieve a lot for schools and their stakeholders, Edwards, Quinn, Fuller, and Pendola (2018) postulate that heads need to hold the office for, at least, five years to successfully implement organisational change. This position is consistent with Van Cleef (2015) suggestion that it takes heads an average of five years to put a vision in place for a school to improve instructional quality and fully implement policies and practices that positively affect the school's performance. Five-year period is normally used to implement short and medium term plans of organisations highlighting that if heads of school stay in office for this relatively long time, a lot can be achieved.

School leadership has increasingly been emphasised as a critical driver and decisive factor on improved instructional quality, learning outcomes, and educational improvement (Khun-Inkeeree et al., 2023). Effective and stable leadership enhances both instructional delivery and student learning, which culminate in improving students' academic gains which is a confirmation of Van Cleef (2015) discovery that principals account for about 25 percent of a school's total influence on students' academic performance. Appiah (2020) also reports that school leadership has become a priority in the education policy agenda internationally in view of their quintessential role in the work of educational institutions. Heads' actions aid in maintaining a positive school climate, motivating staff, and enhancing teachers' practices (Levin et al., 2019; Afram et al., 2024) and hence regarded as a major determinant of improved students' learning outcomes (Leaver, Lemos, & Scur, 2019; Grissom et al., 2021, Kin & Kareem, 2021, Amakyi, 2022). Edwards et al. (2018) add that heads play an important role in determining school effectiveness, developing organisational capacity, and improving student learning. Heads do these by enhancing teachers' practices, motivating school staff, and maintaining a positive school climate. Realistically, building these conditions takes time and requires continuity of strong leadership (Levin & Bradley, 2019) making heads' short stay in office unproductive and non-profitable. These admonitions attest to the vital role leadership plays in improving school outcomes. Leaver et al. (2019) contend that effective school leadership does not only contribute to positive student learning outcomes but also good teacher behaviour. A relaxed school leadership motivates teachers to approach their work lackadaisically which leads unfavourable whereas effective leadership makes teachers perform their work helping improve student learning outcomes supporting Amakyi (2022) contention that leadership plays pivotal role in school success. Sequel to the critical roles of school heads' leadership in ensuring holistic student success is the need to have stability in leadership in schools.

Leadership instability does not occur without causes. Lankford and Wyckoff cited in Pendola and Fuller (2018) enumerate reasons such as access to support; the complexity of the job; the amount of time needed to complete necessary activities; relationships with colleagues, parents, and students; and disciplinary climate as triggers of leadership instability in schools. It has also been realised that social and workplace pressure, disrespect, and disconnectedness are causes of leadership instability in schools (Goldring et al., 2014, Battle & Gruber, 2010). Other factors that have been attributed to leadership instability in school are accountability standards that are seen as unreasonable or unreachable (Pinto, 2015 as cited in Pendola & Fuller, 2018). When the expectations are very astronomical and seem unachievable, heads tend to bow out of the position. Heads who experience resource constraint and inadequate support tend to view stakeholders' expectations as unrealistic. When essential factors are unavailable to prosecute schools' agenda to achieve their visions and missions, heads may feel perplex and decide to exit. Pendola and Fuller (2018) also postulate that a head's background and experience have a significant bearing on how long he or she would remain in a school and that more experienced heads are better able to understand, navigate, and surmount challenges inherent in the execution of their functions far more than the novice heads. The necessary backgrounds and experiences aid heads to galvanise support, handle stakeholders, and utilise available resources to effectively and efficiently administer their schools. On the contrary, novice and inexperienced heads are likely to be swayed by the least challenges they encounter and with the least opportunity, they leave the schools. These imply that heads with several years of experience in teaching and administration would probably be able to stay longer in the position to handle challenges they encounter than their inexperienced counterparts. Consequently, if a school tends to continuously have inexperienced heads, it would not be well for it.

Literature unveils that both anecdotal and empirical evidence evinces that leadership instability brings about unfavourable ramifications on diverse aspects of schools. As Alenezi (2020) indicated, schools require long-term commitment and persistent efforts from stakeholders coupled with long serving school leaders to improve learning outcomes and that changing school leadership often undermines attempts to make improvements in standards of education. Frequent change in leadership derails school improvement initiatives, making it difficult to build schools' capacity for development (Levin, et al., 2019). Frequent changes in school leadership result in lower teacher retention,

which negatively impacts student achievement gains suggesting that heads of school affect two important indicators of school quality: student achievement and teacher retention as opined by Edwards et al. (2018). It is also observed that frequent leadership changes have the potential to interrupt or even terminate the school improvement process, resulting in failure to achieve schools' goals and missions as well as the efforts to improve learning outcomes (Miller, 2013). Curiously, there are little studies on leadership instability of schools in the West African sub-region (Ankeli, 2024) as opposed to the other parts of the world (Battle & Gruber, 2010, Miller, 2013, Goldring, et al., 2014; Van Cleef, 2015; Ruto, Kapkiai, & Kipropo, 2016; Pendola & Fuller, 2018; Grissom et al., 2021; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Levin et al., 2019; Alenezi, 2020; Karareba & Clarke, 2019; Morrision, 2025).

Research notes that heads' turnover can be disruptive to school progress, often resulting in higher teacher turnover and, ultimately, lowering student achievement gains (Levin et al., 2019). Fuller, Hollingsworth and Pendola (2017) argued that when a head leaves a school, there is often a negative effect on school outcomes due to the disruptions in organisational culture, information structures, interpersonal trust, and faculty agency. In supporting this standpoint, Van Cleef (2015) contends that a high rate of principal or head "churn" is disruptive to the school community. This stems from the fact that succeeding heads may not continue previous ones' initiatives and may want to come up with their own, which does not inure to the benefits of the school and its stakeholders. A study conducted by Cruickshank (2017) supported this idea when it uncovered that unstable leadership significantly influenced the quality of teaching and learning in schools, which consequently affected student achievement. Frequent change in school leadership also negatively affects the pace of improvement in the working conditions of teachers and the school climate and environment. School leadership instability is particularly disruptive for schools that lack the administrative structures, personnel, and resources to handle succession (Pendola & Fuller, 2018).

Decreased capacity building is also associated with leadership instability as new heads have less time to enact capacity-building efforts that directly target teacher improvement. New heads of school who need adequate time to settle and put things in place for their administrative work would not have ample time to deal with staff capacity issues thereby contributing less to teachers' effective instructional delivery. Edwards et al. (2018) postulate that heads need to be in school for, at least, five years to successfully implement organisational change such as staff capacity building. The authors add that leadership instability has effect on teacher turnover as when some heads leave, some teachers also either follow them or move to other schools. The simultaneous departure of school leaders and teachers has the tendency to erode the quality of school climate, culture, and ethos with their attendant negative effects. The challenges associated with unstable leadership are a cause of worry as leadership is vital in the school improvement agenda. It is incumbent, therefore, on stakeholders of education to strive hard to ensure stability in leadership of schools to propel school improvement.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Ghana, like many other countries, has a structured educational system purposed to offer a comprehensive and accessible education to its citizens, from pre-school through basic school to the tertiary level. Ghana operates a 6-3-3-4 system of education, primary school (6years), junior high school (3years), senior high school (3years), and tertiary (4years). The educational system is fashioned to promote personal, social, and intellectual development, and trains students for the requirements of the modern world. The objective of the senior high school education is to prepare students for higher education and/or entry into the workforce by providing specialised knowledge and skills (MoE, 2019). Thus, the secondary education serves as the intermediary phase between the basic and tertiary levels, which prepares students for either the job market or higher education institutions (Buabeng et al., 2024). For the secondary education to attain its goals, heads need to lead the schools for long in order to prosecute their short, medium, and long-term plans and strategies.

In the Ghanaian educational system, heads of senior high schools are appointed via competitive process. They are assisted by two or three assistant heads (Assistant head academics; Assistant head administration; and Assistant head domestic), depending on the schools' enrolment numbers. The head and the assistants are obligated to shepherd the schools to achieve their goals. In the contemporary times, heads are appointed to provide leadership for the schools to help achieve the country's goals of education as well as the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education). It takes time and also requires the continuity of strong heads' leadership to make a positive impact on students' academic achievement as leading change effort in a school requires stability and a multi-year investment (School Leaders Network, 2014). So heads are supposed to hold office for a long time to enable them develop short, medium, and long-term plans that feed into the national agenda of education to achieve both national and global goals of education. This implies that if heads of school do not hold the position for a long time prior to leaving and if heads attrition continuous, there is leadership instability, which has innumerable repercussions on the various aspects of the school's development including teacher retention, student performance, and schools' corporate image.

Unfortunately, however, the idea of heads of school needed to remain in a school for a long time in order to help promote the development of schools has eluded a senior high school in Ghana necessitating the need to investigate what

accounts for the situation and the consequences it has on the school and its stakeholders. For almost two decades, a senior high school in the country has experienced leadership instability, which has become more or less a norm. The persistent headship instability commenced in the year 2011 and between then and the year 2022, the school experienced nine (9) leadership transitions, excluding the oversight leadership responsibilities by the Municipal Directors of Education prior to the appointment of substantive heads. The table below shows the period of heading in the school between the 11 year period.

Table 1

Leadership transition from 2011 to 2022

S/N	Pseudonym	Gender	Period	Duration	Experience at Appointment
1.	Head 1	Male	September, 2011 - March, 2012	6 months	Novice
2.	Head 2	Male	March, 2012 - December, 2013	21 months	Experienced
3.	Head 3	Male	December, 2013 - July, 2015	21 months	Novice
4.	Head 4	Female	July, 2015 - September, 2015	3 months	Novice
5.	Head 5	Male	September, 2015 - April 2016	6 months	Novice
6.	Director of Education 1	Male	April, 2015 - January, 2017	20 months	-----
7.	Head 6	Female	January, 2017 - March, 2018	15 months	Novice
8.	Director of Education 2	Female	March, 2018 - September, 2018	6 months	-----
9.	Head 7	Male	September, 2018 - June, 2020	21 months	Experienced
10.	Head 8	Male	July, 2020 - January, 2022	17 months	Novice
11.	Head 9	Male	January, 2022		

Source: The School's Administration

The data in the table discloses the short periods that the various heads including the two directors of education headed the school clearly demonstrating instability of leadership of the school. Within the 11 year period under review, none of the heads spent up to two years or 24 calendar months as heads of schools are required to implement even a short term plan and 5 years which heads are to spend in a school (Van Cleef, 2015; Edwards et al., 2018). The leadership instability has the capacity to disrupt the school's development, harm the school's image, stifle its effectiveness, and reduce student achievement gains. Additionally, the leadership instability can erode trust in leadership and make it extremely difficult to retain top talented heads who have the where-withal to bring about development to the school. Although the situation has persisted for a long time, scientific inquiry had not been made to uncover its diverse unpleasant consequences. Karareba and Clarke (2019) contend that leadership is context-bound and that studies need to be conducted to comprehend how leadership is influenced by the context within which it operates. There is also dearth of knowledge, understanding, and studies on leadership instability in schools that experience this situation. Based on the foregoing gaps, the study aimed at generating an understanding of the leadership instability of the school and how it could be improved to bring about improvement in its outcomes. The rationale for undertaking this research, therefore, was to unearth the triggers of the frequent changes in leadership of the school and the consequences of the situation on its stakeholders. The study outcomes are stakeholders' contextual knowledge of the leadership instability phenomena of the school and their repercussions. This knowledge ought to be known to elicit urgent actions from those who matter to halt the unpalatable and unpleasant situation.

1.2 Research Questions

- Why has the school been experiencing leadership instability for a long time?
- How is the leadership instability affecting the school and its stakeholders?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is anchored on the Systems theory, which is a theoretical lens usually used by researchers to comprehend the wholeness of scientific and social problems (Bridgen, 2017) such as leadership instability of a school. Systems theory was originally propounded by Von Bertalanffy (1950) to study phenomena in Biology and other natural sciences. However, after its introduction, it has been applied in studying social science issues as well (Bridge, 2017) as those phenomena also have interrelated and interdependent parts that ought to work harmoniously towards achievement of common goals. To the propounder of the Systems theory, it is not enough to understand the components of organisations or institutions but also the relationships among the components. The theory is based on the idea that the component parts of organisations can best be comprehended in the context of the relationship with each other sub-system rather than isolation (Wilkinson, 2011).

According to Harney (2024), Systems theory aids in understanding the behaviour of organisations and their actors. The school is a complex social system with various components that function as a whole and so when some components become dysfunctional, other parts would be affected. That accounts for Skyttner's (2005) admonishing that the internal forces of schools need to interact harmoniously to ensure leadership stability. It is when the various parts of the school interact effectively that the school would enjoy stability for work to proceed well (Meadow, 2008). The theory, therefore, offers a strong basis to explore the dynamics of organisations and the context in which they operate (Harney, 2024). Consequently, in this study, Systems theory was used to help comprehend leadership instability of the school. The usage of the theory aided in exploring the perspectives of different stakeholders such as the school's authority, staff, community members, and education officers on the school's leadership instability and its consequences. The school is a social system comprising of stakeholders who perform different functions for the school's survival, growth, and development. The theory therefore aided in garnering diverse perspectives to holistically elucidate the phenomena covered in the study.

III. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative study relied on a case study design to enable a comprehensive analysis of the leadership instability of the school. Case studies are an empirical approach to assessing a case in an authentic world situation (Yin, 2018). Case study researchers methodically examine a real-life phenomena within their environmental settings. In this research, the design offered the participants the chance to gain insights into the leadership instability of the school and its consequences on the school and stakeholders.

The target population of the study was composed of diverse multiple stakeholders who were familiar with the affairs of the school. The diverse stakeholders included education officers, management members, staff (teaching and non-teaching), and community members. These stakeholders were information-rich and had experience in the case investigated. Additionally, they were available for data collection, enabling the use of convenient and maximum variation sampling techniques. We deliberately selected the information-rich participants to offer in-depth knowledge of the circumstances of leadership instability of the school. Three (3) Education offices including a Director of Education, three (3) management members, eleven (11) staff (6 teaching and 5 non-teaching staff), and nine (9) community leaders, making a sample size of 26 who participated in the study. Table 2 depicts the demographic information about the participants.

Table 2
Participants' Demographic Information

S/N	Role Category (Pseudonym)	Gender	Years Affiliated with the School	Number of Heads Served Under
1.	Municipal Director of Education (MDE)	Male	4 years	4 heads
2.	Municipal Education Officer (MEO1)	Male	10 years	11 heads
3.	Municipal Education Officer (MEO2)	Female	7 years	6 heads
4.	School Management Member (SMM1)	Male	6 years	6 heads
5.	School Management Member (SMM2)	Male	9 years	10 heads
6.	School Management Member (SMM3)	Female	4 years	4 heads
7.	Teaching Staff (TS1)	Male	5 years	5 heads
8.	Teaching Staff (TS2)	Male	6 years	5 heads
9.	Teaching Staff (TS3)	Male	7 years	6 heads
10.	Teaching Staff (TS4)	Female	5 years	5 heads
11.	Teaching Staff (TS5)	Male	3 years	3 heads
12.	Teaching Staff (TS6)	Female	8 years	8 heads
13.	Non-teaching Staff (NTS1)	Male	9 years	10 heads
14.	Non-teaching Staff (NTS2)	Female	6 years	5 heads
15.	Non-teaching Staff (NTS3)	Female	7 years	6 heads
16.	Non-teaching Staff (NTS4)	Male	10 years	11 heads
17.	Non-teaching Staff (NTS5)	Male	11 years	11 heads
18.	Community Leader (CL1)	Male	7 years	6 heads
19.	Community Leader (CL2)	Male	10 years	6 heads
20.	Community Leader (CL3)	Male	10 years	11 heads
21.	Community Leader (CL4)	Male	6 years	5 heads
22.	Community Leader (CL5)	Female	10 years	11 heads
23.	Community Leader (CL6)	Male	5 years	5 heads
24.	Community Leader (CL7)	Female	7 years	6 heads
25.	Community Leader (CL8)	Male	7 years	6 heads
26.	Community Leader (CL9)	Male	8years	8 heads

The data in the table clearly demonstrates that the participants had various years of affiliation, in different capacities, with the school. They had also served under a reasonable number of heads (including directors of education), making them information-rich for the study of leadership instability of the school and its repercussions. The participants then had the capacity to share diverse insights and perspectives essential for understanding the phenomena studied. In view of the focus of the study, a semi-structured interview guide was relied on to generate research data from the study participants. As Kusi (2012) contends, one of the common tools, instruments, or techniques employed to gather data in qualitative studies is semi-structured interview guide. The interview guide comprised questions designed to provoke detailed answers based on the participants' experiences on the issues and also offered the participants an opportunity to convey their viewpoints within a particular scope, enabling the researcher to generate interesting and precise data (Li et al., 2019).

We collected the data through face-to-face interviews to uncover the factors accounting for the situation of the school and its repercussions. The interview timeline was between 40 to 60 minutes. Field notes were taken in addition to the recorded audio of the interviews as they were very important facets of the data collection process. We created and maintained a case study database for the participants' responses. The database included copies of the audio recordings, field notes, and transcripts of the recordings, which was securely protected.

We adopted a thematic analysis to analyse the data collected for the study. One of the commonest approaches to qualitative data analysis is undertaking a search for themes in transcripts or field notes (Bryman, 2012). The method enabled us to read through the transcript data severally looking for patterns in the meaning of the data for themes. The procedure followed included familiarization with the data by transcribing the audio-recorded interviews into words while glancing through to get familiar with the data; coding the data by highlighting phrases or sentences to describe their content in different colours; identifying patterns among the codes created to generate themes; reviewing the themes to make sure that they were very accurate and useful representations of the data, and lastly, writing the analysed data and comparing it with the documentary evidence showing heads' tenure of service, transitions, and successions to increase trustworthiness of the study.

A key criterion for assessing qualitative studies' rigour is trustworthiness and the rational connection between the data and the diagnostic claims (Tate & Happ, 2018). As Kusi (2012) asserts, one of the most popular criteria for judging the quality of a study within the interpretive-qualitative framework is the 'trustworthiness criteria'. Guba and Lincoln cited by Kuranchie (2021) suggested a comparable concept of trustworthiness involving four aspects, namely credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability for qualitative research. Credibility ensures the establishment of trustworthiness as it guides researchers to link the research findings with reality to demonstrate the truth of the research findings. We clearly described and documented all the research processes to enable replication of the study. In addition, we gave a rich and thick description of the research setting, participants, and the context of the research to ensure readers could conceptualise the findings. We kept a detailed documented report of the study process. We did these recognising that doing thick description would enable our research findings to be transferred to other settings with similar contexts and issues. To ensure confirmability, we studied documents such as history and staff minutes and cross-checked with the interview responses to increase trustworthiness and offset any biases that could have cropped up as a result of using one method. We also allowed participants to read through the transcripts to ascertain if they were a true reflection of the information provided for feedback.

As a qualitative study, which included human participants, ethical considerations were deemed imperative. The participants were made to sign an informed consent form, which entailed information about the research topic, procedures, processes, right to participate, and withdrawal. Also, the participants' names were not solicited to ensure anonymity in the report. The participants' confidentiality was ensured and their right to privacy was also guaranteed. Besides, to avoid betrayal, we ensured that the participants' rights were respected. We made the purpose of the study transparent to the participants and were very open to feedback and willingly made changes to the study based on the feedback. To offset deception practices, we gained permission from the participants to record the sessions prior to conducting the interviews. We also explained to the participants that their privacy was secure during and beyond the study's completion.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The study sought to establish the reasons for the school experiencing leadership instability. The school, since its establishment, has experienced a number of heads and particularly between 2011 and 2022 the school had experienced as many as 13 heads including municipal directors of education. It was deemed imperative to unravel the factors that account for the leadership instability of the school, by eliciting shared evidence-based information from relevant and ideal participants. The themes that emerged from the analysis are community interference, inadequate contextual information, location and size of the school, poor accommodation and other working conditions, poor enrolment, academic performance, and inexperience. These factors are categorised into internal and external factors.



Internal factors: *Setting and size of the: school*. The data analysis revealed that the location and population of the school also play a significant role in the leadership instability of the school. Thus, the setting and size of the school are contributory factors to the leadership instability of the school as they do not appear attractive to new heads. When some heads get to know where the school is located with its attendant challenges such as physical limitations and limited resources including infrastructure, they become disturbed. As the school lacks basic amenities such as good road network, potable water supply, recreational grounds, and good health care service, new heads do not feel comfortable working there. Also when they search for opportunities to get these amenities for the school and their efforts prove futile, they become discouraged and begin to initiate a change to relocate to attractive schools. Some participants indicated,

“The poor nature of the road network connecting the community to the municipal and regional capitals makes mobility very difficult for the heads” which does not motivate them to stay (Community Leader (CL2), 15, April, 2025, Palace; Community Leader (CL6), 18, April, 2025, Community Centre).

“There are not standard basic amenities in the community making it very difficult for heads to move their families with them and live happily. This makes life difficult and boring for them” (Teaching Staff (TS4), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

“Heads who want standard schools for their children do not get them in the community. Also, the heads don’t get good mobile network of their choice since only one network is available in the community. These do not motivate them to stay” (Non-teaching Staff (NTS3), 9, April, 2025, School Premise).

The small size of the school with inadequate student enrolment is also a push factor. Heads usually want to manage schools with high student numbers as it has a lot of advantages. The participants held the view that when the heads come to realise the low enrolment of the school, they make moves to get re-posted to big schools with high student numbers.

“The heads use our school as a preparation field to garner knowledge and momentum for heading bigger schools” (Teaching Staff (TS4), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

“Our school is not a small school because so many people pass through for training but it is poor management that makes it look a small school” (Community Leader (CL5), 18, April, 2025, Community Centre).

“The previous heads who left are heading big schools in the region. Which means they consider to be small” (Teaching Staff (TS2), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

The community leaders corroborated that the heads leave the school because they consider it too small in terms of student population and infrastructure. They added that the heads consider the school as small and rural in nature so they are unhappy to stay and work and that accounts for their relocation to bigger schools with larger populations. They had these to say,

“The head and those appointing authorities do not take our school very seriously. They consider the school as a village small school and for that reason, they do not attach any importance to its leadership” (Community Leader (CL3), 15, April, 2025, Palace).

“The head masters seem to consider our school as a village school so they do not want to work here. But this our school has trained big men and women” (Community Leader (CL1), 15, April, 2025, Palace; Community Leader (CL7), 18, April, 2025, Community Centre).

However, from the perspectives of core management, it was obvious that the size of the school was not the cause of the leadership instability. The school management members argued that, left to the size of the school alone, the heads would remain and embark on enrolment drive to boost the student population. Apparently, they attribute the leadership instability of the school to different factors as opposed to what the staff and community stakeholders proffered.

“I don’t think the size of the school should be an enough reason for head turnover. The heads’ proper management of the school can change the school from a small to a big school” (School Management Member (SMM2), 25, March, 2025, Private Residence).

Generally, it is agreed that the setting of the school is a factor that accounts for the leadership instability, which is confirmed by Levin, et al. (2019) that heads leave their schools more frequently when they are located in rural areas. This development stems from the fact that in rural schools, the physical, social, and professional isolation adds to the challenges and demands of the work, which many heads are unable to accommodate and hence leave the schools. Poor accommodation and other working conditions: It emerged that poor accommodation for the head and assistants was a cause of leadership instability of the school. The officers needed a comfortable place to rejuvenate after a hard and stressful working day. They also need good offices to carry out their daily administrative work. Good working conditions provide the head rest and happiness to work comfortably and efficiently to increase their productivity. As the school is poorly resourced, instructional leadership is very difficult for the heads, thereby making them feel frustrated and stressed up. Some participants lamented:



"The head's accommodation lacks a lot of things including a place of convenience which does not make life comfortable for them and their families to carry out their duties expected of them" (School Management Member (SMM1), 25, March, 2025, Private residence).

"Even the two assistant heads have rented in town due to the poor state of the Bungalow which was shared by the two of them. There was no staff accommodation". It's only the senior housemaster and housemistress who have accommodation on campus" (Teaching Staff (TS3), 27, March, 2025, School premise).

"For the staff to support the head in terms of student discipline, they must have accommodation on campus" (Community Leader (CL1), 15, April, 2025, Palace).

"There were no offices for department heads and proper and safe keeping of school resources" (School Management Member (SMM2), 25, March, 2025, Private Residence).

"The classrooms were not enough due to which some classes were combined yet the twelve-unit classroom block that was started in 2012 is left at roofing level without partitioning and nick-named skeleton block" (Teaching Staff (TS4), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

"There are no technological teaching aids such as projectors to promote 21st-century lesson delivery for students to be able to compete with their sister schools. These frustrate the work of the head." (School Management Member (SMM2), 25, March, 2025, Private Residence).

Working conditions play a vital role in heads' decisions to change schools and there is the need for improvement in working conditions to make work life less stressful and satisfying to reduce heads' turnover. From the participants' viewpoint, poor working conditions in the school were disheartening and demotivating and therefore called for government's intervention of provision of befitting bungalows and other facilities to serve as a motivation to increase productivity and a high head retention. As said by Pendola and Fuller (2018), working conditions are vital to motivating staff to give off their best. They also have the potential to retain staff at work (Leaver, et al, 2019, Morrison, 2025). This factor may account for the differences in the performance of staff in resource-rich and resource-poor educational institutions.

Poor academic performance: The study revealed that students' academic performance was low and also not stable. The poor resources in the school does not help in teaching and learning which makes it difficult for students to do in their final examinations. The poor working conditions at the school lead to poor teacher productivity, which is reflected in poor students' academic performance and lower student enrolment. This observation gives a pictorial view of a cycle that never ends until a prescribed antidote is administered to address the leadership instability. Some participants' viewpoints are;

"Student academic performance has decreased over the years, making the heads strive for bigger schools" (Teaching Staff (TS5), 28, March, 2025, School Premise).

"Our colleagues in other schools get more money from government intervention but we get something small due to our small student population. This also affects our work and students' performance" (Teaching Staff (TS2), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

The low academic performance of students is attributed to inadequate national resources allocated to the school. Heads are unable to attract adequate resources to boost teaching and learning which invariably affect students' academic performance. The school does not get enough resources to run its affairs and this demotivates heads to lead the school for long.

External factors: Community interference: The responses provided indicate that there have been community interference in the running of the school's. The school's community seems to interfere in the leadership of the school due to ignorance, perceived negative beliefs and customs, perceived lack of transparency and accountability, cultural differences, and mismatch of expectations of the school and the community. Although the community has a stake in the school and is expected to be involved in its running via structured means such as Parent-Teacher-Association and School Management Committee (PTA/SMC), members of the community seemed to transcend their legal bounds amounting to interference in the affairs of the school, which has detrimental effects. Due to the overbearance of some community leaders and members, heads did not seem to be allowed the free hand to operate, take decisions, and perform their duties alone. This situation influences the heads' decision to leave the school.

Some participants had these to say,

"The major factor accounting for the persistent leadership instability of the school is the behaviour of some community members who want to have a major say in the day-to-day administration of the school" (School Management Member (SMM1), 25, March, 2025, Private residence; Municipal Director of Education (MDE), 25, March, 2025, Education Office).

"Since the school started only the head who allowed the community to have a greater say in the school's administration spent long time in the school. The rest who did not allow that, did not spend more years in the school. This is an interference" (Teaching Staff (TS2), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).



The community members seem to believe that as the school belongs to them, heads have to consult them on everything the school does and every decision it takes. As a result, when their expectations are not met, they tend to put pressure on the heads, which makes the latter decides to leave the school.

A participant asked,

How can the head always consult the community before a decision is taken in the school? (Community Leader (CL1), 15, April, 2025, Palace).

Another participant contended that,

Sometimes, external stakeholders prevent major changes in the school administration to be implemented by the head. There is excessive external influence over school leadership, which demotivates and disempowers school leaders to adopt innovative strategies and practices directly responsive to the challenges of the school.

A participant explained that,

Sometimes, external interference puts fear in school heads, causing them to wait for directives from their superiors on the strategies and actions to take (School Management Member (SMM2), 25, March, 2025, Private Residence).

However, some of the community members who participated in the study had a dissenting view and posited that their involvement in the affairs of the school is not an interference but rather a means to have their fair share in the administration of the school that belongs to them.

Some of them had these to say,

"When we are consulted on issues that concern the school's development, we can also give our support in acquiring land for the school's expansion and other things. That is what we request the school to do" (Community Leader (CL2), 15, April, 2025, Palace; Community Leader (CL9), 18, April, 2025, Community Centre).

"The headmasters don't let us know what goes on the school. We are part of the school leaders, so they should inform us the school's resources for" (Community Leader (CL7), 18, April, 2025, Community Centre).

"We are not coming to the school to take up the leadership position but to support the head anytime we are called on" (Community Leader (CL3), 15, April, 2025, Palace; Community Leader (CL5), 18, April, 2025, Community Centre).

"This is our college that trains big men and women. We don't want our school to collapse. So they have to do what we want from them. They should also respect our culture" (Community Leader (CL1), 15, April, 2025, Palace).

Whereas the school management members and teaching and non-teaching staff held the view that community interference is a major factor accounting for the leadership instability of the school, the community members had a dissenting view, arguing that they only want to be consulted in making major decisions for the school. The school management members and staff regard the frequent visit to the school by the community members demanding for accountability, reasons for the school taking some decisions without their inputs and consent amount to interference. These actions of the community are regarded as an interference, which contributes to the leadership instability that the school has been experiencing. The staff believe that the community's involvement in the school's administration needs to be moderate to allow the heads perform their administrative responsibilities. It is rather unfortunate the community leaders do not recognise their demand for active involvement as interference. They hold the view that since the school is for them they every right to take part in everything that the school does.

From the two sides, the heads and staff need to reckon that the school does not exist in a vacuum but in the community, which makes it imperative to garner community stakeholder support to adopt good practices to achieve educational goals. However, it is essential for boundaries to be set so that community members know the limits of their roles as stakeholders, recognising that leadership requires independence to make informed decisions for school improvement and that too much interference delays policy implementation for achievement of educational goals. To improve the situation, there should be a meaningful school-community collaboration in the common interest of the schools' improvement. It is through this means that the community's involvement would improve the quality of education by increasing the sense of ownership, resource mobilisation, and building institutionalising capacity (Amutabi & Ogada, 2021).

Inadequate induction and orientation for heads: emerged that inadequate contextual induction for newly appointed heads deprives them of accurate information about the context-specific realities of the school and its immediate community. It seems to suggest that the heads appointed to head the school are not furnished with adequate credible information about the school and its peculiar circumstances and when they report and meet a different situation, they experience shock, which deters them from staying in the school for long. Some participants indicated that,

"Apart from the financial resources, the school is located in a rural area that has its own peculiar challenges relating to basic infrastructure and sanitation. New headmasters do not know this and when



they report and get to know, they become discouraged and dislike the school” (Non-teaching Staff (NTS2), 8, April, 2025, School premise; Teaching Staff (TS6), 28, March, 2025, School premise; Municipal Education Officer (MEO2), 20, March, 2025, Education Office).

“Physical resources, electricity, information and communication technology, water, roads, and transport are inadequate in the school and its community. Inadequate context-specific information renders newly appointed heads lack in-depth knowledge of their new school. And when they get know of it later, they take a decision lead the school for a short period (Teaching Staff (TS6), 28, March, 2025, School premise).

“Every school has its peculiar characteristics which must be made known to new heads to help them adopt appropriate leadership style based on the situation as soon as they are appointed” (School Management Member (SMM2), 25, March, 2025, Private residence; Teaching Staff (TS3), 27, March, 2025, School premise).

“Some headmasters use to say, the information I received about the school is not really what I am experiencing here” (Non-teaching Staff (NTS5), 9, April, 2025, School Premise).

The accounts by the participants indicate that when the heads realise the peculiar issues about the school, they begin to think of leaving. The situation of the school and its community, which is not made known to newly appointed heads serves as disincentive to them. Immediately they realise the realities on the ground, they commence moves to get re-posted to new and attractive schools as their expectations are not met. Besides, for some heads, upon assumption of duty, they receive unpalatable information about the school, which makes them start their work with a negative notion and consequently adopt authoritative leadership style. When they hear that some stakeholders are difficult, the new heads report to duty with iron hands. Some participants indicated that,

“New heads were given wrong information about the school, staff, and the community when they are appointed hence they lead the school with the pre-conceived wrong information” (Teaching Staff (TS3), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

“The wrong information they are given prior to assumption of duty reflects in the daily speeches of the heads such as, ‘I was told already before coming’. This prior information negatively influences the heads’ leadership style and practices in a form of ‘witch-hunting’” (Teaching Staff (TS1), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

“Heads always report negative issues of the school to their appointing authorities in a form of confirmation to what they were told already before accepting posting to the school to gain favour for transfer to bigger schools” (Non-teaching Staff (NTS3), 9, April, 2025, School Premise).

The community leaders also acknowledge this fact that some new heads do not get good information about the school prior to assumption of office. The leaders however demonstrated willingness to divulge all relevant information pertaining to the school to heads or education officers, if they require from the community stakeholders.

“We are willing to do the work, if they give to us and provide all information concerning the school and the community anytime we are invited” (Community Leader (CL1), 15, April, 2025, Palace).

It is observed that furnishing heads with relevant and adequate information about the school prior to assumption of duty is quintessential to avoiding shocks and associated challenges guaranteeing long stay of the heads in the school. As heads of school work with education authorities, teachers, students, communities, and other relevant bodies, it is prudent that newly appointed heads be adequately fed with the right information on the school to enable them prepare for effective leadership. This idea finds expressions in the Systems theory which stresses the need for all internal forces to work harmoniously to promote stability of leadership of institutions (Skyttner, 2005, Bridgen, 2017, Harney, 2024). Knowing the peculiarities of the school would also make heads adopt contingency or situational leadership approach to handle the situation they come to meet. Adequate context-specific induction and support to new heads would aid them to adopt pragmatic leadership approaches towards issues for the school’s growth and development. The context-specific information provided to new heads needs to be accurate to make avoid having negative pre-conceived ideas about the school and its stakeholders; but commence the headship with an open-mind.

Inexperience: Novice school heads encounter a “responsibility shock” upon entering their new working environment, which affects their ability to adapt to the new situation. It is assumed that novice heads will ‘learn the trade’ of leading a school in a small school context in preparation for taking on a leadership position in a larger school (Meyer et al., 2016). The study found that most of the heads who had been posted to the school were novice leaders. Some participants contended,

“Some of the heads lack experience and are not able to cope with the challenges they were confronted with in their day-to-day discharge of duties” (Teaching Staff (TS5), 28, March, 2025, School Premise).

“They use the school as a preparatory ground to gain experience and look for bigger schools” (Non-teaching Staff (NTS2), 8, April, 2025, School Premise).

The evidence was very clear. Novice heads have inadequate interpersonal skills to deal with challenges faced by human resource management. Therefore, they focus on technical leadership over social awareness and relationship management” (Teaching Staff (TS4), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

“Most of the heads appointed to head the school are inexperienced. Of the nine (9) different leaders I have worked with in this school, six (6) were novices and three (3) were somehow experienced who were transferred from other schools” (School Management Member (SMM2), 25, March, 2025, Private Residence).

“Novice heads complain and report any challenge that needs to be solved administratively to their superiors to gain sympathy for transfer to bigger schools” (Non-teaching Staff (NTS3), 9, April, 2025, School Premise).

Most of the heads who have headed the school were novice, who did not have the needed experience. There is the need to post heads who have headship experience for, at least, five years to head the school as suggested by Edwards et al (2018). The domination of novice heads of the school was a major factor influencing the leadership instability. This resonates with a study which reported that novice principals were less successful in managing institutions than expert heads do (Levin, et al, 2019). A study also found that novice principals were less successful in using interpersonal skills to manage the stakeholders they work with (St. Germain & Quinn cited by Meyer et al., 2016). Pendola and Fuller (2018) similarly posit that principals’ background experience has a significant bearing on how long they would remain in schools and that experienced heads stay longer in schools than novice ones.

How is the Leadership Instability Affecting Stakeholders of the School? This question was meant to uncover and understand the extent to which the leadership instability of the school has affected the stakeholders. This is very critical to create awareness of the impact that the frequent leadership changes have had on its stakeholders. The following themes emerged: discontinuity of projects and programmes, bad school image, dwindling student enrolment, students’ indisciplinary behaviour and poor academic performance, staff lukewarm attitude, and high teacher turnover.

Discontinuity of projects and programmes: The study disclosed that the frequent changes in the school leadership have many ramifications including discontinuation of strategic plans, non-completion of projects and programmes, among others. The participants expressed views that when headship changes, new ones fail to implement the strategic plans of the previous administration, however good they may be. The new heads tend to come up with their own strategies and plans for the school. Excerpts of some participants are,

“Every head brings new ideas on board but he or she does not stay to monitor implementation” (TS6).

“All strategic plans of the school are left hanging due to the frequent changes in leadership” (TS4).

“There were no systems and services in place to continue projects started by past headmasters concerning buildings, power, and water supply for the development of the school” (TR2).

“Unstable leadership disrupts continuity in the implementation of strategic plans of the school. Because no two heads think alike, projects started by former heads were halted as a result of a change in leadership. This happening does not promote development and achievement gains for students” (TS1).

Continuity is a key factor in leadership stability so when heads remain in office for a long period of time, they can implement planned policies as well as the school’s vision and mission. A head may draft a ten (10) year strategic plan for a school but if that headship changes within a year or two, it may not be implemented. The frequent changes in leadership of the school were hindering continuity in developmental projects. The participants shared that many a times, school projects become standstill as new heads failed to complete them. New heads did not continue projects started by their predecessors as they would want to start their own to prove their effectiveness. Some participants indicated,

“Every head brings new ideas on board but he or she does not stay to monitor implementation” (Teaching Staff (TS6), 28, March, 2025, School Premise).

“All strategic plans of the school are left hanging due to the frequent changes in leadership” (Teaching Staff (TS4), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

“There were no systems and services in place to continue projects started by past headmasters concerning buildings, power, and water supply for the development of the school” (Teaching Staff (TS2), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

“Unstable leadership disrupts continuity in the implementation of strategic plans of the school. Because no two heads think alike, projects started by former heads were halted as a result of a change in leadership. This happening does not promote development and achievement gains for students” (Teaching Staff (TS1), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

The narrations portray that frequent changes of leadership are causing the school to fall behind in terms of developmental projects. When leadership instability occurs, it can disrupt the continuity of initiatives, erode trust of staff, and undermine teacher motivation and job satisfaction (Yılmaz & Jafarova, 2019). The systems theory framework emphasises that the understanding of these components and how they interact among themselves (internal factors) and with their environment (external factors), is critical for the proper functioning of the organization (Wilkinso, 2011,

Harney, 2024). The various components of the school were not functioning well to stabilize the system for development. The situation is retarding the progress of the school.

Poor school image: The participants disclosed that the persistent instability in leadership has created a bad name and poor image for the school. They claimed that the name of the school is associated with bad issues which cut a slur on the staff, students, and the entire community. The staff indicated that they were always asked questions concerning the frequent changes of heads of the school anytime they attended an interview for promotion, a development they felt was embarrassing. They were of the belief that the development portrays that the staff had a bad attitude towards the heads. Excerpts of the: participants are,

"I was trolled at the interview I attended for promotion. A panelist asked, 'Why? Are you always troubling your heads.' I was very embarrassed" (Teaching Staff (TS2), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

"The bad school image created by the persistent change in the school's leadership makes it very embarrassing to say you are a worker in the school" (Teaching Staff (TS1), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

"The community is tagged with a bad name and that we are hostile to staff appointed to head the school" (Community Leader (CL5, CL8), 18, April, 2025, Community Centre).

The bad image of the school is very destructive to the school's progress as well as stakeholders' reputation. Parents, for instance, feel reluctant sending their wards to the school. Undoubtedly, responsible parents would desire to send their wards to schools that have good name and positive image. The bad image affects the community as well as portrays that the people in the community are hostile towards the heads, which has the potency to scare away visitors, investment, and development.

Dwindling student enrolment: The study revealed that due to the instability in the leadership of the school, student enrolment keeps dwindling. As has been noted earlier, the situation negatively affects teacher productivity, which reflects in low student achievement gains and lower student enrolment. As parents do not want to send their wards to low-performing schools, student enrolment declines. It is when there is improvement in student academic performance that enrolment increases. Some participants averred that,

"In the current year, students' enrolment this is student enrolment: Form three: 511, Form two: 397 and Form one was 244. This shows a reduction in student enrolment" (Teaching Staff (TS1), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

"We embarked on student enrolment drive during the former heads time but now we have stopped because the new heads were not much interested in that" (Teaching Staff (TS5), 28, March, 2025, School Premise).

"Those days that we didn't have students' beds, student enrolment was above 1000 but now that we have beds for students, we are struggling to get more students". This is all because heads keep leaving the school" (Teaching Staff (TS3), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

It is evident that the leadership instability of the school negatively affects student enrolment. The differing leadership styles and practices by different heads affect enrolment; a head may bring on board a good policy to boost students' enrolment while others may not continue it. When good policies and practices become short-lived, the schools suffer.

Indisciplinary behaviour and poor academic performance: Student indisciplinary behaviour emerged as a consequence of leadership instability of the school. The study revealed that the situation causes student indiscipline. The unstable leadership contributed to students' behaviour that deviates from expectations. The students in the school tend to exhibit behaviours and actions that disrupt the learning environment and hinder effective teaching during periods when there were no substantive heads. When municipal directors of education step in, they would not be in the school always due to their principal official duties at the education office, which some students take advantage of and misbehave. Some excerpts are,

"Student indiscipline was very low when we had substantive heads but when they leave, the indiscipline of student becomes very difficult to contain" (Teaching Staff (TS6), 28, March, 2025, School Premise).

"The current head is very strict with student discipline. He empowers teachers to take interest in student discipline. Due to which student discipline is coming back to normalcy it" (Teaching Staff (TS4), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

"Indiscipline among students is better controlled when the leadership is stabilised, as together we are able to build" (Teaching Staff (TS3), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

The participants' viewpoints clearly show that instability in leadership promotes indisciplinary behaviour among students. Meanwhile, student discipline is crucial for school development and productivity. The study also showed that leadership instability of the school had negative effects on students' academic success. Academic achievement of the students was not stable and below average as a result of the persistent change in the leadership of the school. Some excerpts are,



“In the year 2020, WASSCE result was very good. The school was first in mathematics in the region but when the head left and the mathematics teacher left the school, results have been very bad and are affecting students’ enrolment negatively” (Teaching Staff (TS4), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

“Heads come with different agenda; while some heads are much more interested in academics, others like co-curricular activities. These inconsistencies in the school’s agenda bring about poor academic performance” (School Management Member (SMM3), 25, March, 2025, Office).

“It is very difficult for academic activities be fully implemented to improve students’ academic achievement due to the frequent changes in the school leadership” (Teaching Staff (TS6), 28, March, 2025, School Premise).

“In the year 2020 the students’ performance in the WASSCE was very good but 2021 and 2022 the results were very bad due to the change in leadership” (Teaching Staff (TS5), 28, March, 2025, School Premise).

The results show that students’ achievement decreases following a head’s departure. The drop may persist for many years if the situation is not rescued. This stems from the fact that while some heads are interested in academic work and direct their attention and resources in that direction, others focus more on different things. As Miller (2013) indicated, student achievement declines when principals leave schools and thus, heads’ turnover negatively impacts student achievement. When a school experiences continuous change in leadership, teachers and communities are less likely to support new heads and if that persists, it derails school improvement initiatives, making it difficult to build a school’s capacity for effective instructional delivery. Similarly, Fuller, et al (2017) noted that, when a principal leaves a school, there is often a negative effect on students and school outcomes due to disruptions in organisational culture, information structures, interpersonal trust, and faculty agency. This reflects the main thrust of the Systems theory that when sub-systems of an organisation are dysfunctional, the others stand affected (Meadow, 2008, Harney, 2024).

Staff lukewarm and high turnover: The study found that due to the leadership instability of the school, some staff exhibit a lukewarm attitude towards work. Some teachers take advantage of the situation to exhibit a lazy attitude towards work especially during periods when Municipal Directors of Education act as heads. As the directors are not at the school all the time, some teachers fail to come to work to diligently discharge their duties expectedly. Excerpts of some participants are,

“A gap is created when a head leaves the school. This paves the way for some teachers to absent themselves from work due to lack of effective supervision” (Non-teaching Staff (NTS4), 9, April, 2025, School Premise).

“This happens because some staff know that before the head settles down and starts serious supervision, he/she will leave and a new head will come” (Non-teaching Staff (NTS2), 8, April, 2025, School Premise).

“Different heads come with different leadership styles and practices. This influences staff attitude differently hence frequent change in leadership destabilises staff attitude towards work.” (School Management Member (SMM2), 25, March, 2025, Private Residence).

“There were different occasions when the municipal directors had to take up an oversight leadership responsibility of the school until new substantive heads were appointed”. During those times, some teachers do not work hard (Teaching Staff (TS3), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

The systems theory emphasises the fact that the components of the school need to interact effectively to bring stability to the school organization (Meadows, 2008, Harney, 2024). When the headship is disrupted, it leads to staff’s lukewarm attitude towards work. It also emerged that when heads leave the school, some staff follow suit especially those who were used to the heads’ leadership styles and practices as well as those who were close to them. The school has witnessed persistent staff turnover as a result of the leadership instability of the school. Excerpts of the participants are.

“This happening disrupts school progress. This simultaneous departure of heads of the school and staff erodes school climate and culture. When heads leave the school, some staff follow suit” (Teaching Staff (TS1, TS3), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

“This turnover affects both teaching and non-teaching staff. But the teacher turnover rate is higher than that of the non-teaching staff in the school” (Teaching Staff (TS6), 28, March, 2025, School Premise).

“The staff mostly affected are those who worked closely with the departing heads. As such, the departure turns to hurt them” (Non-teaching Staff (NTS3), 9, April, 2025, School Premise).

“Some heads create a divide and rule system in the school (thus, they have their favourite staff they work with neglecting others) and when they are changed, their favourite staff tend to leave as well” (Teaching Staff (TS2), 27, March, 2025, School Premise).

“The frequent turnover of school heads was very disruptive to teacher retention and student achievement. It was very difficult to replace the teachers” (Teaching Staff (TS5), 28, March, 2025, School Premise).



“Frequent turnover of effective heads disrupts school progress, often resulting in higher staff turnover and, ultimately, lower gains in student achievement” (School Management Member (SMM1), 25, March, 2025, Private Residence).

The narratives indicate that when schools experience a change in leadership, it negatively affects staff retention. The staff who are considered or referred to as “face glory” in the school do not remain when heads leave. In the school, some staff were in the good books of some heads, who usually reported other staff or pretended to be angels in the eyes of those heads. Such staff are unable to stay and work in the school, when the heads are changed. They then have no option but to follow them or seek for transfers to other schools. This is consistent with Edwards et al. (2018) revelation that frequent turnover of school leadership results in lower teacher retention, which negatively impacts student achievement gains.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

It is asserted that leadership is very vital in the running of schools so leadership instability of schools is a concern. The realisation of leadership instability of a senior high school attracted our attention to investigate its causes as well as consequences. Intrinsically, the study explored the underlying currents of the instability of headship of the school, which is an albatross hanging on the neck of stakeholders of education in the municipality and the consequences of the unusual development. The case study disclosed that community interference, inadequate induction and orientation, location and size of the school, poor accommodation and other working conditions, poor student enrolment and academic performance, and inexperience are the causes of the leadership instability of the school. Deductively, both internal and external forces are attributed to the instability of leadership of the school, which needs the attention of all stakeholders. The situation requires all-hands on deck approach to garner solid solutions to bring the incessant change of leadership of the school need to a halt to pave ways for school improvement, progress in students’ academic and social development. The systems approach theory ought to be critically applied in bringing stability into headship of the school to make the educational institution run smoothly and effectively. The school’s positive relationships with internal and external stakeholders of the school which permits engagement of all to part major decisions making is a means that can aid over the challenge the school has experienced over the period. Stakeholders need regular update on issues that concern the school to enable them feel part of the running of the school to aid the smooth implementation of the school’s agenda.

The study also unraveled that the leadership instability of the school has many consequences including discontinuity of school projects and programmes, bad school image, dwindling student enrolment, students’ indiscipline behaviour and poor academic performance, staff lukewarm attitude to work and staff turnover. The leadership instability has repercussion on all aspects of the school’s development as well as stakeholders. The study outcomes drum home the point that there is the urgent need for stakeholders to take steps to bring stability in the school’s leadership to foster teacher productivity, augment student performance and other school outcomes, bring positive externalities to the community as well as enhancement of national development.

The study makes practical, policy, and knowledge contributions including the fact that it has unveiled the triggers of the leadership instability of the school and its consequences on stakeholder, which draws attention of the education authorities in the municipality to take steps to address the situation. The knowledge gained from the study would contribute to deciding on how to improve on school-community relationship to inure to the benefit of the school and its actors. The study also contributes to global leadership literature leading to increase in knowledge on high school leadership and its concomitant issues. Additionally, the study contributes to global policy retention on heads’ retention and school improvement. Very little research has been executed on leadership retention and school improvement in under-resourced context in the West African sub-region and hence this study contributes to filling this knowledge gap. Finally, the study contributes to extension of the Systems theory applications to educational leadership stability research and also in a West Africa sub-region context. The study, however, has the following limitations. The research was conducted in a single senior high school that has been experiencing persistent leadership instability which necessitated the need to elicit views and perspectives of individuals who are affiliated with the school. However, the nature of the study did not permit the use of a large sample size denying a quantitative view of the peculiar situation of the school.

5.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that the Ghana Education Service should appoint heads with a barrage of years of experience to head the school. Such professionals would have the capacity to build rapport and effectively work with the staff, community members and other stakeholders to improve the productivity and image of the school. It is also recommended that the Municipal Directorate of Education needs to provide induction and orientation to new heads who would be appointed to head the school. The orientation should include context-specific information about the school and its

community, school administration and school-community relationship. During such intensive orientation, newly appointed heads need to be briefed, guided, and coached on contextual realities on the grounds to make them abreast of the issues about the school to enable them adopt positive measures to handle them. These would help heads to appreciate the need to engage relevant stakeholders in making major decisions and implement policies for school improvement. The Municipal Directorate of Education also needs to allocate adequate resources to the less-resourced school to enable heads manage the school effectively. These steps would go a long way to help improve students' learning outcomes and achieve the goals of the school.

Future research needs to adopt a mixed methods approach to enable more varied stakeholders to participate and provide comprehensive data to address the research problem. Another equally important issue to consider in future research is equal representation of the various stakeholders in the study to aid triangulation of insights and perspectives that would be shared. The current study did not address this lapse. It is also important to acknowledge the fact that observational data could have been gathered especially on stalled projects and visible effects of the heads attrition to complement the interview data to enrich the study findings. This requires that future research should utilise multiple data collection tools to generate comprehensive data to tighten the study findings. Considering the alluded to limitations of the study, it is prudent that readers ought to exercise caution in interpreting the findings.

Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they do not have any known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Funding Declaration

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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