

Change Dispositions in Leading School System in Ghana: Perceptions of Directors of Education

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Abstract— A correlational research design was conducted to examine the association between change dispositions and leading school system effectiveness as perceived by metropolitan, municipal, and district directors of education in Ghana. Data were collected using a closed-ended Likert type items from a defined population of all the metropolitan, municipal, and district directors of education in Ghana. Data were analyzed using Spearman's correlation coefficient. The study revealed that the change dispositions of being strategic and a learner have strong associations with improved student achievement, continuous professional development, and sustained partnership development. The study further revealed that change dispositions of being courageous has small association with leading school system effectiveness.

Keywords— Educational change, school leadership, school system.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education systems are designed to facilitate the attainment of educational goals. The systems serve as means to an end. According to Hanson (2003), education systems can be explored from different perspectives, nevertheless, all the varied perspectives point to how schools are organized to attain educational goals. Kowalski (2010) classifies education systems in terms of how power is exercised and distributed in the organization of schools and interaction with the school public. Kowalski (2010) describes how schools are organized as modeled according to three main systems of organizing institutions. First, when the school is organized in a highly centralized manner and bureaucracy is promoted, the school system is said to be modeled on the classical system of organizing institutions. Ferdous (2016) posits that the classical system of organizing institutions is based on the concept of planning work to achieve efficiency, standardization, specialization, and simplification. Second, when the organization of the school provides for interconnectedness that shapes the culture of the school, power is shared and distributed, and there is shifting coalitions for decision making, the school system is said to be modeled on the open system of organizing institutions. Lunenburg (2010) points out that when the school functions as the open system model, there is dependency relationships and exchanges between the school and its external environment.

Third, when the organization of the school allows for identification and exploration of the forces that facilitate change or constrain the institution from changing, supporting for fluid participation such that participants vary in the amount of time, involvement, and energy they are willing to expend on an issue

in the school, the school system is said to be a modeled of the institutional theory system.

Amakyi (2017) argues that schools are organized and modeled not based solely on one system, but organized as a hybrid of the various systems. Providing basis for the argument of Amakyi, Bryk (2010) posits that schools are organized for school improvement and it behooves on the school leader to integrate the systems to achieve results. Bryk further proffers five elements that must be present in any school system: coherent instructional guidance system, professional capacity, strong parent-community-school ties, student-centered learning climate, leadership that drives change.

The need to organize a school system that facilitates school improvement cannot be overemphasized in a knowledge society. In a changing world, schools are to engage in continuous improvement to produce the calibre of students who will have the knowledge and skills needed to not only survive but to impact their society. According to Duke (2004), school improvement results in the alteration of the goals of education and to enhance what students are expected to learn, how students are instructed and assessed, and how educational functions are organized, regulated, governed, and financed. Organizing the school system for improvement enables the school to fulfill its mandate as an efficient institution - utilizing resources from society to transform learners into citizens who contribute to the growth of the society.

Whitaker (2018) recommends strategies for school leaders to adopt that shape their disposition towards leading a school system. Whitaker's strategies include setting realistic goals, planning change approach, overcoming resistance, gaining widespread acceptance, and tracking and evaluating progress. The Institute for Educational Leadership's (IEL) Task Force on the Principalship in 2000 posited that school leaders may successfully lead a school system when they have a disposition that inspires others with a vision to influence the work of teachers in a way that will improve student achievement, demonstrates energy and conviction to attain the vision, and increases the commitments and capacities of school staff to work together for the vision. Carmeli, Tishler, and Edmondson (2011) identify school leader disposition of being relational and strategic as essential for leading school systems. Branson and Marra (2019) highlight relational disposition of the school leader as key in leading school improvement. Kowalski (2015) describes school leader disposition for success as being a (a) communicator (i.e., promoting shared vision and having quality presence), (b) learner (i.e., engaging in continuous learning and facilitating intellectual discourse), and (c) courageous (i.e.,

unwavering in the face of opposition and obstacles). Kowalski posits that such disposition is critical in engaging in quality planning, pursuing continuous staff professional development, attaining high student achievement, strengthening partnership development, and facilitating accountability. Cotton (as cited in Amakyi, 2017) noted that school leader disposition includes establishing a clear focus on student learning, building interactions and relationships to promote visibility and accessibility for collaboration, manifesting behaviors such as shared leadership and decision-making, and upholding accountability through calls for monitoring progress and using student progress data for school improvement.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Discussions about education system in Ghana point in the direction of the metropolitan, municipal, and district directors of education. The directors of education in Ghana are entrusted with the responsibility of leading the school system. The emergent leading role of metropolitan, municipal, or district directors of education in Ghana have been guided by the policy on decentralization in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana. The policy provides legislation to establish a decentralized administration in the transfer of power from centralized governance to sub-national governance, that is, the metropolitan, municipal, or district assemblies. The key goal of the legislation was to deconcentrate and devolve administration, development planning, and implementation to the assemblies. The responsibility for the leading and managing pre-tertiary education system was transferred to the assemblies. Concurrent to the creation of the metropolis, municipality, or districts was the prominence given to the position of the metropolitan, municipal, and district director of education. The metropolitan, municipal, or district director plays a major role in leading education system through educational planning and implementation. The metropolitan, municipal, or district directorate of education has the responsibility to draw up medium-term District Education Strategic Plan and set district education sector priorities and monitor the implementation of the district education plan. The directorate provides input for the preparation of the Annual Education Sector Operational Plan (AESOP), and prepares the Annual District Operational Plan (ADEOP) and the Annual District Performance Report (ADPR). The ADEOP is a rolling three-year annualised work plan. It forecasts educational progress in support of the strategic mission, goals, and objectives. The director is expected to take the lead in developing the plans and to use them as vehicles for implementing long-term improvements in the education department. It is in the performance of these key functions to bring about change in the education system that the change disposition of the director becomes pronounced. The change disposition of the director plays a key role in determining how the preparation and implementation of the plans result in system wide changes. Change dispositions in leading school system refer to behaviour and attitudes that define the readiness of school leaders to embark on change initiatives. Kowalski (2015) avers that certain change dispositions are necessary to effectively lead school systems. The ability of a director to

assume a disposition that facilitates change gives indication to the director's effectiveness in leading school systems. Discussions relating to educational change have assumed centre stage in the wake of public dissatisfaction with student test scores in recent times. Stakeholders are demanding excellence and are calling on school authorities to improve the performance of the schools. The public is raising enquiries about who leads the school system: *do the school leaders have what it takes to transform schools into high performing schools?* The stakeholders are questioning why in the midst of several educational change efforts in the country, schools are failing to perform to the expectations of the stakeholders.

Educational change is intended to improve educational outcomes and if there seem to be "business as usual" then the situation raises several issues. Of prime concern as to why educational change is not achieving the intended outcomes is who is leading the school system. Various researchers, such as, Duke (2015), Fullan (2015), Kowalski, 2010, and Trautlein (2013) have suggested any meaningful educational change requires the active participation of the leader. The change disposition of the leader will set the course, stimulate, and inspire others to interrogate the existing conditions and move beyond the status quo. various approaches to implement educational change. This study sought to examine the relationship between change dispositions of directors and leading school system effectiveness.

The study was underpinned by the main research question: to what extent do change dispositions of directors account for leading school system effectiveness?

The findings and conclusions reported in this study will provide data about the relationship between change dispositions of directors of education and outcomes for leading school system in Ghana. The findings and conclusions will provide baseline information to assist school leaders to improve on attitudes and behaviors that will enhance their dispositions to lead change in the school metropolis, municipality, or district. The findings constitute an important addition to the professional knowledge base on change dispositions of school leaders that bring results.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The correlational research design was adopted for this study and it was deemed most appropriate choice since the study examined relationships between two sets of variables; change dispositions and leading school system effectiveness. Correlational research uncovers variables that show systematic relationships with each other, in this study, the relationship between change dispositions and leading school system effectiveness.

A defined population of metropolitan, municipal, and district directors of education constituted the study population. The study population consisted of 216 metropolitan, municipal, and district directors in the country. A census sampling was adopted and all the directors who were present for the Conference of Directors of Education annual meeting were solicited to participate in the study. Heiman (2013) posits that using the entire population for the study increased the potential

power of the study by providing the largest possible *N* size, thereby, strengthening the data analyses.

The instrumentation used for the study was a questionnaire made up of 32 closed-ended items consisting of Likert-type statements describing elements of change dispositions (*n* = 20) and leading school system effectiveness (*n* = 12). The works of various researchers over the years (e.g., Duke, 2015); Fullan, 2015; Kowalski, 2010; Spady, 2001; Trautlein, 2013) on elements of change disposition and leading school system effectiveness served as the primary sources for the development of the questionnaire items and assured content validity. The statements on the questionnaire elicited responses from participants who selected from one of four response choices for elements of change disposition that were coded and ranked as: *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *agree* (3), and *strongly agree* (4). Also, the participants selected from one of four response choices for elements of leading school system effectiveness that were coded and ranked as: *never* (1), *sometimes* (2), *often* (3), and *always* (4).

The researcher received 158 completed surveys out of the 216 surveys distributed. The final returned survey used for the data analyses was 158, constituting a response rate of about 73%.

The researcher conducted correlation analyses using Spearman’s correlation coefficient, (*r_s*) to ascertain the association between elements of change disposition and elements of leading school system effectiveness as perceived by respondents. The decision rule to determine strength of association was established as follows:

1. $r_s < .20$, negligible association
2. $.20 \leq r_s \leq .35$, small association
3. $.35 < r_s < .65$, moderate association
4. $r_s \geq .65$, large association

A quantitative measure, the coefficient of determination, was used to indicate the proportion of variance in the elements of change dispositions accounted for or explained by the variance of scores of elements of leading school system effectiveness. To determine significance throughout the study, the standard *p* < .05 was used.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Spearman’s correlation coefficient was computed to measure the association between change dispositions as predictor variables and leading school system effectiveness as criterion variable.

Complete correlation information is provided in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Association of change dispositions and leading school system effectiveness

	Leading School System Effectiveness							
	Improved Student Achievement		Continuous Professional Development		Sustained Partnership Development		Strengthened Accountability Measures	
	<i>r_s</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>r_s</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>r_s</i>	<i>p</i> -value	<i>r_s</i>	<i>p</i> -value
Change Dispositions Being:								
Strategic	.72	.003	.68	.014	.84	.000	.55	.041
Communicator	.49	.035	.63	.005	.75	.000	.44	.037
Relational	.36	.043	.37	.038	.75	.000	.36	.024
A Learner	.77	.004	.80	.000	.65	.021	.32	.022
Courageous	.30	.044	.32	.033	.32	.041	.34	.031

The findings showed eight large associations, out of which four were found in the relationship with the criterion variable of *sustained partnership development*. The associations were statistically significant. The findings revealed that the change disposition of *being strategic* had the strongest, direct relationship to *sustained partnership development*, followed by the relationship between *being a learner* and *professional development*. The findings also revealed that the predictor variable of *being courageous* had small associations with all the criterion variables of leading school system effectiveness. Computation of the coefficients of determination large associations revealed that

1. A variation in the change disposition of *being strategic* accounted for about:
 - (i) 52% of the variation in improved student achievement.
 - (ii) 46% of the variation in continuous professional development.
 - (iii) 71% of the variation in sustained partnership development.

2. A variation in the change disposition of *being a communicator* accounted for about 56% of the variation in sustained partnership development.
3. A variation in the change disposition of *being relational* accounted for about 56% of the variation in sustained partnership development.
4. A variation in the change disposition of *being a learner* accounted for about:
 - (i) 59% of the variation in improved student achievement.
 - (ii) 64% of the variation in continuous professional development.
 - (iii) 42% of the variation in sustained partnership development.

Change dispositions of being strategic and a learner were the prevalent dispositions of directors of education. These prevalent dispositions correlate strongly with improved student achievement, continuous professional development, and sustained partnership development. Kowalski (2015) and Trautlein (2013) posit that change disposition of being strategic, which calls on the leader to engage in environmental scanning

and take specific actions to respond to sector needs should be promoted and reinforced in the pursuit of improved student test scores in particular and school improvement in general. The postulates of Kowalski and Trautlein are shared by Kouzes and Posner (2013) who argued that some leaders are unable to lead and manage change because they do not exhibit the behaviours and attitudes, such as, being strategic and a learner, that will bring results.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study concludes that metropolitan, municipal, and district directors of education in Ghana perceive change dispositions of being strategic and being a learner as having strong associations with improved student achievement, continuous professional development, and sustained partnership development.

This study was conducted with metropolitan, municipal, and district directors of education as one group. A further study may be conducted to ascertain if there are significant differences in the association between change dispositions and leading school system effectiveness among the three groups. Also, a study may be conducted to ascertain if there are significant differences in the association between change dispositions and leading school system effectiveness across professional years of practice.

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