CHALLENGES FACING HEADTEACHERS OF PUBLIC EARLY GRADE SCHOOLS IN THE AWUTU-SENYA WEST DISTRICT, GHANA

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Abstract

Literature indicates that most Early Grade schools in Ghana are managed by people who have not undergone relevant training as there are no pre-service training opportunities in the county for them. People who are untrained for assigned tasks may encounter challenges in task execution. The purpose of this paper was to examine the challenges confronting heads of public Early Grade schools in the Awutu Senya West District. Mixed methods approach underpinned by pragmatism was employed for the study. Specifically, sequential explanatory mixed methods design was used. The population was 120, comprising 60 headteachers and 60 assistants headteachers, who were all involved in the study through census frame at the quantitative phase of the study, to respond to a questionnaire. while maximal variation technique was employed to select 12 participants (6 headteachers and 6 assistant headteachers) for interviews at the qualitative phase. The quantitative data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation with the aid of SPSS v.24. The qualitative data collected in the second phase of the study was used to explain, clarify or expand the initial quantitative findings, when necessary. It emerged that inadequate teaching staff and material resources, low level of motivation among staff, teacher retention, and large class-sizes, among others, constituted the administrative-related challenges confronting the Early Grade headteachers in the study area. The study also found out that inadequate funding by the government, budgetary constraints, and delay in releasing funds constituted the financial-related challenges of the headteachers. The study concluded that the

financial challenges posed a threat to effective management and development of the schools. Therefore, to augment the effort of the government, it was recommended that the schools should engage in income generating activities and organise events such Speech and Prize-Giving Days, and 'Back-to-school weeks', where efforts could be made to invite parents and business leaders and encourage them to donate funds and materials resources for the development of the schools.

Key-words: *Early Grade; Headteachers; Challenges; Leadership; Administration*

Introduction

An Early Grade school headteacher is a legitimate and policy implementer of the Ghana Education Service. The vision statement of the Ghana Education Service is to provide relevant education to all Ghanaians at all levels to enable them acquire skills that will assist them to develop their potentials, to be productive to facilitate poverty eradication and to promote socio-economic growth and national development. The early grade headteacher is responsible for the daily activities carried out in the school to make these skills acquirable. He or she as a manager determines the success or failure of the school. To achieve the goals of the school, the headteacher has to perform certain duties known as management tasks (Sakyi, 2015). Headteachers in their quest to perform their duty for the achievement of school goals are confronted with numerous challenges especially at the Early Grade level. Over the years, the early grade school has been seen as a dumping ground of children to enable parents and guardians go about their normal activities (Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015) and this has led to the neglect of most parents in playing their role in supporting the child's education at this level. Supporting a child's education at the early grade level is very important to the development of the child.

According to Sakyi (2015), education at this level offers the exposure and quality knowledge which empowers educatees with valid knowledge so that they (school children) have critical thinking skills and faculties enhanced to make informed, better and quality decisions which will add value to the quality of their own lives, and the lives of others, and in the end, help solve socio-techno-politico-economic (PEST), and national problems in the long-term. Thus, early grade education is the foundation upon which higher level of education is built hence it has been included in the Basic Education under the new education reform in Ghana (Sekyere, 2016).

The Sustainable Millennium Development Goal (SMDG) target for universal primary level enrolment and the Education Strategic Plan (ESP) 2010-2020 stipulate 100% net enrolment for early grade schools. To achieve 100 per cent access to education, the nation would need to provide the requisite manpower and other relevant resources. The quality of early grade education determines the number of pupils moving into the primary stage and even to higher levels of education (GNA September 25, 2012).

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) is also committed to ensuring that all children regardless of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic background or circumstances realize their right to a quality education. UNICEF, the world body which works directly with children defines education as a single initiative that has the capacity to foster development, awaken talents, empower people and protect their rights (UNICEF, 1994). It further states that the best way a country's people's welfare can be promoted and also lay a foundation for

a democratic society is by investing in education. Thus, government has a role to play by ensuring that policies are enforced, materials and other resources are provided for the smooth running of the early grade schools. The headteachers are also to be innovative and skilful in the management of the early grade level of the basic school so that the academic standard of the early grade school will improve to ensure a firm educational foundation for the child.

The headteacher is influential in the school setting and his leadership roles are necessary components of the process of school improvement. An effective school leadership by headteachers have significantly improved the performance of all learners at the school (Branch, Hanushek & Rivkin, 2013). However, Harber and Davies (2002) postulate that, in most developing countries including Ghana, headteachers of early grade schools are confronted with many problems managing the school. Bush and Oduro (2006) add that even though efforts are being made to support these school heads, these attempts have not been enough to make the headteachers succeed on the job. This study therefore examines the challenges confronting headteachers in the management of early grade schools in Awutu Senya West District of Ghana.

Statement of the Problem

Early grade stage is fundamental in the education system of every country (Sakyi, 2015). This is because, all the educational levels or stages depend on early grade school. Therefore, when managed properly, it has positive impact, whereas when not properly managed, it leads to negative impact on its beneficiaries (Wang & Fawzi, 2020). This suggests that the success or failure of every educational system depends on how they are managed by the heads of the school (Dangara, 2016).Thus, the contributions that heads of early grade schools make to the development of such schools cannot be underestimated.

The government of Ghana and the Ministry of Education recognize the key role played by heads to the development of early grade schools. However, little emphasise has been laid on the development of leaders of such schools as there are no formal tailor-made leadership and management programmes for them. Practising heads of early grade schools in the country are sometimes given some leadership and management opportunities through workshops and seminars, but such training opportunities seem to have little impact on the professional practices of the heads. In most cases, the contents of such programmes are ineffectively delivered (Kusi, 2017). Natia and Al-hassan (2015) argue that some efforts have been made by various governments in Ghana to improve the quality of education in terms of access, content, structure and developing the managerial skills of headteachers in the basic schools, including the early grade level, but it seems there are still impediments to be cleared .

Awutu Senya West District harbours many early grade schools as compared to many in the adjoining districts. However, 80% of these early grade schools are located in the remotest area (Awutu-Senya West Education Directorate, 2020). Observation made by the researchers in some early grade schools within the Awutu Senya West District show that the headteachers of these schools face many challenges as little emphasise is laid on their training. Inadequate training programmes for the headteachers has the tendency to affect their ability to manage schools effectively, which could also affect children's learning outcomes However, it appears that no empirical studies have been conducted to explore these challenges. It is against this backdrop that this study is conducted to examine the challenges confronting the headteachers of the public early

grade schools in the Awutu Senya West District. Specifically, the study examines the administrative, financial and parent related challenges confronting the headteachers.

The findings of this study is significant in some ways. Firstly, the findings would help the headteachers develop a better understanding of the challenges in managing the early grade schools and to identify strategies that they could employ to address the challenges. Secondly, the study contributes to existing literature on leadership of early grade education in the Ghanaian context. Last but not the least, the study could form the basis of large-scale studies on challenges of early grade leadership in Ghana.

Theoretical Framework

The bioecological theory of human development by Bronfenbrenner (2001a) explains the drivers of human development as the interactions that occur between an individual (their biological being) and the interconnected systems surrounding them (their ecology). There are four inter-related components in the Bioecological Theory of Human Development. Together these four components constitute the 'process–person–context–time model (PPCT) for conceptualising the integrated developmental system and for designing research to study the course of human development' (Lerner, 1995).

The processes encompass the dynamic bidirectional interactions between the person and other people and between them and their ecology. Proximal processes are the primary mechanism through which human potential is actualised. To be successful in stimulating effective continuous development, proximal processes need to be reciprocal, progressively complex, and occur regularly over an extended time period. These interactions are the most powerful forces determining human development and learning outcomes. The person is endowed with genetic, physical, psychological and behavioural characteristics necessary for development and learning. The context of human development incorporates the interacting systems and social characteristics (family, school, neighbourhood, or peers) surrounding the person. Together these components are the ecology of a learner, which consists of all the processes, relationships and external influences that impact on learning and human development (Spencer, 2006).

As proximal processes are strengthened and as the environment improves developmental outcomes are enhanced as seen in the person's phenotype. The bioecological theory proposes that by enhancing human interactions and environments, it is possible to increase the extent of potential realised into positive developmental outcomes for example enhanced learning (Bronfenbrenner, 2001b). This review of bioecological theory has highlighted the importance of relationships (person–person and individual–context) and how these relations influence the individual's quest for development and learning at the early grade level.

School Leadership Roles

The meaning of school leadership is an area of debate and contestation, since schools differ in characteristics, making school leaders differ in diverse ways (Miller, 2018). Spillane et al (2001) argued that school leadership is distributed among formal and informal leaders, making the associated roles very complex. Predominantly, the role of the headteacher in the early grade school is in four broad categories as human resource management, professional development, curriculum implementation and parental involvement, management and learning achievement (Ganira, Paul, & Muriithi, 2016). These roles are explained in detail below. The human resource

management role involves staff recruitment and motivation, including remuneration and changing the way teachers/staff are paid. Springer, Matthew and John (2012) opined that incentivized teachers will work harder and produce better results. However, studies that estimate relations between learning achievement and teacher remuneration have produced little consistent evidence that students perform better when teachers have high salaries, (National Research Council and National Academy of Education, 2010). Besides, if teachers do not increase learning achievement, then motivation may have negative impact on achievement. Despite contradictory research findings that link remuneration to learner achievement, there has been a growing enthusiasm among educational reforms and policy makers around the world to link learning achievement and teacher motivation,

Another key role performed by leaders of Early Grade schools relate to professional development of staff. Professional development is a continuing and rigorous approach to improving teacher's and manager's effectiveness in raising learner achievement in early grade school. For managers and teachers to be effective in school leadership, they should constantly expand knowledge and skills to implement best educational practices. In this regard, Githae et al. (2015), opined that since professional development is a key indicator to teacher's potential towards solving problems, preschool teachers require financing for capacity building through refresher courses that improve skills for curriculum implementation. Hence effective professional development should influence team building, quality instruction, leadership and mentoring skills, curriculum development and efficacy.

Curriculum implementation is another aspect of the role of an Early Grade School Teacher. Curriculum implementation entails putting into practice officially prescribed courses of study, syllabuses and subjects. Consequently, teachers with a sense of efficacy tend to show high levels of planning and organization, are open to new ideas and exhibit enthusiasm for teaching (Tschanen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). Conversely, if a teacher fails to implement curriculum effectively then instruction suffers which in turn impacts negatively on learning achievement. Akyeampong, Lussier, Pryor and Westbrook (2013), emphasized that headteachers should manage the process of teaching and learning within the school in accordance with curriculum documents and policies. Given that adequate facilities such as classrooms, libraries, halls and playing fields are prerequisite for successful curriculum implementation, Hopkins, and Higham, (2007), put forward that Preschools need adequate classrooms to alleviate overcrowding since success of curriculum implementation is dependent on provision of necessary resources and facilities to ensure enthusiasm of teachers and children.

Promoting parental involvement in education provision in Early Grade Schools is another responsibility of an Early Grade headteacher. Effective parental involvement occurs when an appropriate partnership exists between schools and families. Children with parents who are concerned with school tend to have less behavioural problems; experiences enhanced academic performance and are likely to complete schooling than those whose parents are not involved. In a study on effects of parental involvement on achievement for a sample of 3-7 year olds in Washington DC, Hill, & Tyson (2009) revealed that parental involvement is a major factor for success. Vaden-Kierna and McManus (2005), emphasized that teachers of children with highly involved parents tend to give greater attention to the children and are more likely to identify at earlier stages problems that might hinder learning. Therefore, if children are to maximise potential from school then parental participation is vital in providing training skills, financial support and advice for learner achievement.

Concept of Early Childhood Education

The definition of the term early childhood education depends on the angle one picks it from. In terms of the child's life, early childhood education is considered as the period from birth to eight years of age (Miles & Browne, 2004). Grotewell and Burton (2008) also shared this definition as they elaborated it accordingly as the time between the zero and eight years of age. However, by school terms, early childhood education incorporates the group settings for infants through elementary school grade three (Miles & Browne, 2004). In other words, early childhood education

is a special branch of education serving with children from infancy to elementary grade level of three (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008). Early Childhood Education in early years is about the growth of children, focusing on their physical and physiological development, the stimulation of intelligence, personality formation and the instillation of positive social behaviour (Report of the President's Committee on Review of Education Reforms in Ghana, 2002). As definitions of these authorities imply, it is believed that early childhood education brings or exposes children (birth to eight) into the world.

Early childhood is defined as the period from birth to eight years. It is a time of remarkable brain development where foundations are laid for subsequent learning (UNESCO, 2011). It also refers to any organized educational provision outside of the home for children in the age range of one to seven years. Other frequently used terms include pre-school, early years, kindergarten, playgroup, nursery, pre-grade one, preparatory year, 'zero year' etc. (International Bureau of Education, 2006). According to the Regional Bureau for Education in Africa (BREDA), early childhood education refers to a holistic and integrated approach to health, nutrition, protection, and education needs and services (Regional Bureau for Education in Africa, 2010).

According to the World Bank (2001), early child development includes services designed for the physical and intellectual growth of children in their early years (ages 0-6). These services incorporate day care, pre-school, home visits by trained professionals, health and nutrition services, and parental education. Bowman (2000) states that Early childhood education does not refer to a single entity; rather, the term covers a variety of programmes for young children between birth and age 8. These programmes take place in children's own homes and in public schools, private pre-schools, and child-care homes and centres. Each of these settings may have quite different characteristics (adult/child ratios, group sizes, age ranges, cultural practices, and adult training and teaching styles) that in turn affect what and how children learn. UNESCO (2007) indicates that the majority of children in early childhood education are between the ages of three and six years. In Ghana, pre-school education refers to the type of education given to children from ages 0 to five years, after which they enroll in the formal primary school (Report of the President's Committee on Review of Education Reforms in Ghana, 2002).

Objectives of Early Childhood Education

Enhancing the quality of young children's lives is now a national and international priority, expressed through research and policy initiatives, programme development and advocacy (Woodhead, 2006; Keely 2007). Early education gives individuals a head start and an advantage to both enjoy high earnings and to get into the pathway of lifelong learningg (Papatheodorou, 2008). Papatheodorou (2008) further reports that these arguments have now become the cornerstone of international policies and commitments for the provision and expansion of early years care and education. Early child development yields high returns in physical, mental, and economic well-being during the life of the child and adult (World Bank, 2001). According to UNESCO (2002), research studies of early childhood education support the importance of licensing and regulating services of providers, their qualifications and the commitment of providers in taking care of children and also learning about children's development and care. As noted by Magnuson et al. (2004), recent comprehensive reviews of experimental evaluations of high-quality early childhood education programmes provided to children from at-risk groups conclude that these programmes improve children's short-term cognitive and language

development and long-term academic achievement and reduce special education placement and grade retention.

Methodology

This was mixed methods research underpinned by the programmatic paradigm. Specifically, the explanatory sequential mixed methods design was employed for the study. This design allows researchers to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, but priority is given to the former data set. The design allowed us to collect and analyse quantitative data in the first phase of the study and then collect qualitative data in the second phase to explain, clarify and explain the key quantitative findings.

The population of the study was 120 leadership of Early Grade Settings in the Awutu-Senya district, comprising 60 Headteachers and their 60 Assistant headteachers. The population for the quantitative phase comprised 86 males and 34 females. Census method was employed to involve all the 120 leaders in the quantitative phase of the study. Census is the enumeration of the entire population (Bryman 2012) and it allows for the study of every participant or unit in the population. For the qualitative phase of the study, maximal variation sampling technique was employed to select 12 headteachers and assistant headteachers, using their academic qualification and length of experience as the basis. Kusi (2012) asserts that maximal variation sampling technique allows researchers to categorise participants according to their different academic and professional qualifications and gender, among others, so as to build multiple perspectives into data collection and analysis.

A structured questionnaire was employed for data collection at the quantitative phase of the study. The questionnaire contained a Five-point Likert-scale items with Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Uncertain (3), Agree (4) and Strongly Agree (5) for respondents to choose from. The questionnaire generated data on administrative, financial and parent related challenges that confronted the Early Grade leaders. For the qualitative phase of the study, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to collect qualitative data from selected participants who had responded to the questionnaire at the quantitative phase to expand, clarify or explain some of the key qualitative findings. Denscombe (2010) postulates that conducting interviews help to reflect on emotions and experiences, and to explore issues with greater focus. A semi-structured interview guide gave, the researchers, room to seek explanations and clarifications, and the participants freedom to express themselves in their own perspectives and choice of words (Bryman 2016).

Before we administered the questionnaire to the participants, we established its validity and reliability. Two forms of validity, face and content validity were established. The face validity of the instrument was established by giving the instrument to some postgraduate students in the Department of Educational Administration and Management of the University of Education for their comments, while experts in the same field assessed the instrument to establish its content validity.

To establish the reliability of the instrument, it was per-tested with 20 headteachers and assistant headteachers in the Effutu municipality, which is closer to the setting of the study and shares some similar characteristics with the study settings. A reliability analysis test was ran run on the SPSSV.24 to determine Cronbach's alpha co-efficient of which 0.85 was abstained, implying the

instrument was good for data collection. Mohsen and Reg (2011) indicate that a Cronbach's alpha co-efficient of which 0.85 and above means the instrument is reliable to be used for a study.

The quantitative data generated through the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics such as simple percentage, frequencies, mean and standard deviation. The qualitative data collected in the second phase of the study was used to support, explain, expand, and clarify the quantitative findings, when necessary. To attribute comments to the interviewees, the 6 Headteachers interviewed were given the serial numbers HT-1 to HT-6, where HT represents Headteacher. The Assistant Headteachers interviewed were assigned the serial numbers AHT-1 to AHT-6, where AHT represent Assistant Headteacher.

Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Administrative-related Challenges that the Headteachers in Early Grade Encounter

The descriptive statistics table below presents the responses of participants in mean and standard deviation on the administrative-related challenges that headteachers encounter in early grade schools.

Table 1: Administrative-related challenges in managing Early Grade schools

Administrative-related challenges	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lack of motivation	4.49	0.834
Inadequate teaching staff	4.29	1.022
Lack of school resources and facilities	4.23	1.020
Work overload	4.18	1.062
Large class size	4.02	1.171
Teacher retention	3.92	1.003

Source: Field survey (2021)

Under this section, the study sought to find out the administrative-related challenges in managing early grade schools. In Table 1, participants strongly agreed to the following statements: lack of motivation (M=4.49, SD=834), inadequate teaching staff (M=4.29, SD=1.022), and lack of school resources and facilities (M=4.23, SD=1.020). Furthermore, participants agreed to the following statement: work overload (M=4.18, SD=1.062), large class size (M=4.02, SD=1.171) and teacher retention (M=3.92, SD=1.003). The response from participants implies that, the above administrative-related challenges pertain to their schools and their operations in managing these early grade schools.

The first item in Table 1, which is lack of motivation was strongly agreed to by the respondents as an administrative-related challenge. Motivation of the human resource (especially teachers) is key in managing early grade schools. Thus, the role of the teacher in the teaching and learning process is very crucial. In this case, motivation of the teacher is very key. It is worthy to note that, one of the key motivations for the early grade teacher has to be on workshops and training on the emergency and changing academic curriculum to make the classroom interactive to the learner, as

well as strengthen their academic foundation. In relation to lack of motivation in this direction, one headteacher commented:

> *Not being able to motivate my staff has been one of my administrative challenges, especially with the emergence of the new curriculum. Some of my teachers have been complaining of not receiving much training on it, and therefore they wish I been able to organise some for them so that they can be happy and equipped to deliver in the classroom* (Interview transcript, HT-4).

The response by HT-4 suggests that with the introduction of the new educational curriculum, little attention has been given to the training of the teachers in the early grade schools, affecting their level of motivation. Mupa and Chinooneka (2015) argue that early grade teachers should be trained to develop a variety of activities and methods to enable children of different ages and backgrounds to acquire proper knowledge, skills, behaviour and attitudes. Lack or inadequate accommodation of appreciable standards seemed to have affected the motional levels of teachers in the rural areas, in particular. According to AHT-7,

> *…One of our challenges which has contributed to the lack of motivation, is the unavailability of accommodation for most of the teachers. This is very problematic because the school is situated in a rural area and therefore most of the teachers have to come to school from afar on daily basis* (Interview transcript).

Daft and Marcic (2004), are of the view that motivation is the force either within or external to a person that arouses enthusiasm and persistence to pursue a certain course of action. Sekyere (2016), explains that teacher motivation seeks to induce or make the teacher happy to remain at post and work harder to improve the academic performance of pupils thus raising the standard of education in the country. Lack of good standard of education could have a ripple effect on the work performance of the school heads and the learners in the end and the success of the Early Grade Settings. Kusi (2017) argued that the success of a school depends, largely, on the quality of staff, their commitment levels, as well as their performance.

The second item in Table 1 'Inadequate teaching staff' recorded (M=4.29, SD=1.022). Teachers, as human resource, constitute the most important asset of every educational institution. Therefore, not having adequate numbers, who were well-motivated for the Early Grade Settings in the rural areas constituted a serious threat to the success of the schools. The data suggested that the Early Grade settings in the rural areas were in dilapidated state, leading to high level of teacher attrition in the areas.

> *We don't have adequate [number of] teachers, Most of the teachers who are posted here seek for reposting because of location of the schools and poor state of the classrooms. As you can see, some of the classrooms are under trees and also there is not network coverage here, and this makes life here very bad* (AHT-3).

As mentioned by Daft and Marcic (2004) teachers play a crucial role in the teaching and learning process which can have either a positive or negative impact on learners. The teachers in the the Early Grade Settings could be compelled to combine multiple roles and responsibilities, making them over-burdened, which could affect their output of delivery.

Lack or inadequate materials resources and facilities emerged from the data as an aspect of the challenges facing the heads of early grade settings in the study area. It appeared this situation compelled the heads to employ self-support strategies to get the schools functioning as a comment from one of the headteachers suggests:

> *Even me as a headteacher, I do not have any computer or printer in my office to help with my administrative work. So, I always have to go to a nearby town, to get my official documents typed and printed. Meanwhile most of these documents ought to be confidential* (HT-5).

This comment highlights paucity of material resources for administrative functioning of the schools, requiring rigorous interventions by stakeholders, for the effective functioning and sustainability of the Early grade centres. The enormous and diverse needs of the centres also require the collaborative efforts of key stakeholders in education provision. Another category of resources, which emerged from the data as constituting a challenge to the heads of the Early Grade settings, were textbooks and the requisite teaching learning materials. Ntumi (2016) argues that when teaching aids are used in the classroom, it helps pupils to understand well the concept that is been treated and teachers to illustrate what they teach with little or no difficulty. Inadequate material resources pose a major threat to the implementation of the recent curriculum reforms in Ghana, which offer learners opportunity to practicalise concepts and ideas, and promote innovations.

The data in Table 1 suggest that large class size (M=4.02, SD=1.171) constituted a challenge to the leaders of the Early Grade centres. UNESCO (2006) puts it that increased large classes means teachers handle many students and therefore students hardly get the attention they deserve. This implies that many are not learning much, and this militates against quality education. A comment from a participant suggested that large class-size could be attributed to the inadequate number of teachers, especially in the rural areas, and inadequate classrooms.

> *We have large class-sizes in our rural areas. This situation is bad for both my teachers and the children! If you don't have enough teachers, what can you do? All you must do is to put the children together and teach them! There is a limit to what we can do! (AH-4)*

It appears that large class-sizes reduce the intensity of teacher-learner interactions and the support for the learners, affecting the quality of teaching and learning in the centres. Thus, the administrative challenges confronting the leaders of the early grade centres were related to low levels of motivation owing to the unavailability of standard accommodation for teachers, inadequate of teaching and learning resource and facilities, and management of large class-sizes, especially in the rural settings. The next section focuses on financial-related challenges for the early grade leaders.

Financial-related challenges confronting the headteachers of the Early Grade Schools

The descriptive statistics table (Table 2) below presents data in mean and standard deviation on the financial-related challenges that the leaders of the early grade schools encounter in managing those settings.

Table 2: Financial-related Challenges Encountered by the leaders in managing the Early Grade schools

Financial-related challenges	Mean	Std. Deviation
Delay in releasing funds (Capitation Grant)	4.83	0.463
Inadequate funding by the government	4.63	0.531
Lack of financial support from external agencies (NGOs)	4.41	0.724
Budgetary constraints	4.18	0.691
Inadequate knowledge on financial management	4.16	0.498

Source: Field survey (2021)

In this section, the responses to the financial-related challenges are presented. Data in Table 2 indicated that the respondents strongly agreed that delay in releasing funds (Capitation Grant) (M=4.83, SD=.463), inadequate funding by the government (M=4.63, SD=.531), and lack of financial support from external agencies (NGOs) (M=4.41, SD=.724) were some of the key challenges faced by the headteachers. Also, participants agreed that budgetary constraints (M=4.18, SD=.691) and inadequate knowledge on financial management (M=4.16, SD=.498) were other financial-related challenges that confronted the headteachers.

Although, funding of public early grade schools is one of the major functions of the governments (Hall, 2013), the data pointed out that the schools in Ghana were inadequately funded. Inadequate funding allocated by the government was a major challenge faced by the leaders in managing early grade schools (M=4.63, SD=.531). This could negatively affect the acquisition and procurement of teaching and learning resources needed by the schools. Ihe allocated funds were also not released on time for effective running of the schools. Table 2 highlights 'delay in releasing funds (Capitation Grant)' (M=4.83, SD=.463). The data pointed out that the Capitation Grant allocated to the schools was woefully inadequate to cater for the diverse needs in the schools, requiring the leaders to be innovative in generating additional funds internally to support teaching and learning. A headteacher expressed concern about the situation and attributed it to the bureaucratic processes involved in releasing funds.

> *The Capitation Grant money doesn't come. Even when it comes, it does not come on time. Before it comes it gets to this office and that office! And some higher quarters in the educational ladder will take what they call their percentage from the funds* (Interview transcript, HT-4).

The delay in releasing fundings has the tendency to affect the effective running of the schools. This supports the argument by Pajibo and Tamanja (2017) that the delay of Capitation Grant hinders effective running of schools, putting the headteachers in a very awkward position as school managers.

Furthermore, lack of financial support from external agencies (NGOs) also emerged as a financial-related challenge (M=4.41, SD=.724). With inadequate funding by the government (M=4.63, SD=.531), the role of the external agencies in financially supporting the early grade schools is very crucial. The leaders of the early grade schools expected the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to support the schools financially and materially for effective school management. However, the schools in the rural areas, particularly, lacked such support services.

> *Having NGOs coming to your aid is very vital. Unfortunately, at where we find ourselves as a school, it is very difficult to get into contact with any NGO unlike our sister schools in the urban centres* (Interview transcript, AHT 10).

The qualitative data gathered provided an explanation to the lack of financial access. HT-1 commented that:

> *To be able to access financial support from these NGOs is problematic since most of these NGOs in Ghana also rely on donor support to finance their primary projects. This translates that, until these NGOs become financially stable, they are in no position to provide early grade school the financial support or muscle they need to be stable.*

Although sourcing funds from NGOs is very crucial in effective school management, Brescoll (2016) argue that it is important for headteachers to possess knowledge about financial management as it influences the extent to which a school can go in achieving its goal(s) and objectives. Therefore, inadequate knowledge on financial management possessed by headteachers is a constraint to their handling on financial matters in the schools. According to Brescoll (2016), the headteacher is responsible for budgetary allocations in the school, and therefore the inadequacy of funds to the school leads to the inability of the headteacher to finance every aspect of the budget made. This inadequacy in funding is as a result of the limited financial resources available to the government who at the same time has to make financial allocations to the other sectors of the economy. The data on parent-related challenges is presented, analysed and discussed in the next section. on the parent-related challenges that headteachers encounter in early grade schools.

Parent-related Challenges Faced by the Headteachers of the Early Grade schools

This section of the paper presents data on the parent-related challenges that the heads encounter in early grade schools. The data is presented in descriptive statistics, especially in means and standard deviations.

Table 3: Parent-related challenges encountered by Headteachers Early Grade schools

Statement	M	SD
Failure of parents to visit the school to check on their ward's performance	4.75	0.439
Parents' poor response to teachers' call and misinterpretation of information received	4.70	0.564
Failure to attend PTA meetings	4.70	0.564
Parents failure to provide children with their basic needs	4.37	0.667
Lack of parental involvement in their children's education	4.30	0.608
Failure of parents and community members to assist with the provision of teaching and learning materials	4.02	0.800

Source: Field survey (2021)

The data in Table 3 points out that the respondents had differing opinions about some of the parent-related challenges. The respondents strongly agreed that the 'Failure of parents to visit the school to check on their wards' performance' (M=4.75, SD=.439), 'Parents' poor response to teachers' call and misinterpretation of information received' (M=4.70, SD=.564), 'Failure to attend PTA meetings' (M=4.70, SD=.564), 'Parents' failure to provide children with their basic needs' (M=4.37, SD=.667), and 'Lack of parental involvement in their children's education' (M=4.30, SD=.608) were the parent-related challenges they encountered in managing early grade schools. Also, the respondents agreed that 'Failure of parents and community members to assist with the provision of teaching and learning materials' (M=4.02, SD=.800) was a challenge to the early grade school leaders.

Table 3 points out that one of the major challenges facing the heads of Early Grade schools in the study area was parents' failure to visit the school to check wards performance (*M*=4.75, *SD*=.439). One of the interviewees expressed this concern and explained the reason for the parents' attitude.

> *Most of the parents just come and leave their wards at the entrance of the school. They, in most cases, do not even see their wards' teacher or the headteacher to find out how their wards are faring or performing in school. The school has become more or a less of "an arena where parents just dump their wards" and pick them later!* (HT-3)).

Parents are expected to participate in both classroom and outdoor activities their wards partake in. Therefore, the attitude of the parents had the tendency to affect the academic performance and achievement in the long run. According to Daft and Marcic (2004), parental involvement in their wards' education is a great incentive for their wards to thrive academically and positively affect their wards holistic development.

Table 3 shows that another item that was of concern to the school heads was 'Parents' poor response to teachers' call and misinterpretation of information received (*M*=4.70, *SD*=.564). This concern suggests that there was a poor communication between the schools, the parents and the

community as a whole. Conflict in most educational institutions in Ghana is attributed to poor communication (Kusi, 2017), which could affect the schools and the children's holistic development negatively. The poor attitude of parents in communicating with teachers could be attributed to their wrong perception of the mandate of the early grade education.

> *…..I have been here for many years and what I have observed is that most parents do not know exactly why they bring their wards here [the school]. So, they do not want to spend time with those supporting their wards! (AH-6).*
>
> *…If you know the reason for sending your wards to school, why won't you think about making time to interact with your wards' educators. This is the situation here! (HT-6).*

These comments indicate low engagement between the parents and the staff of the schools, calling for a strong need for sensitization efforts that focus on purposes and relevance of early grade education. Such engagement could disabuse the minds of the parents of the wrong perceptions held about early grade education.

Furthermore, 'Failure of some parents to attend PTA meetings (*M*=4.70, *SD*=.564) was a major concern to the school leaders. The response suggested that parents paid little attention to attending PTA meeting scheduled by the schools. HT-1 expressed this concern, attributing it to the parents' engagement in other businesses that are more of interest to them.

> *There are several times we call for PTA meeting which most parents fail to attend. The most recent one is when we called for a PTA meeting some few weeks ago, and the number present was so bad that, we couldn't form a quorum, and therefore we had to postpone the meeting to a later date……This place is a business environment, so everyone is doing business! That is their interest!* (Interview transcript, HT-1).

PTA meetings are opportunities to foster co-operation between parents and teachers, and meet regularly to discuss issues which promote the welfare of the pupils. Through PTA meetings, parents could be made to feel that the school belongs to them and thus visit it frequently to acquaint themselves with the activities and programmes, among others. Therefore, failure of parents to attend PTA meetings creates a setback for the purposes for which the PTA was set up. Kusi (2017) argues that parent's involvement in PTA meetings leaves a long-lasting positive effect on the children as major decisions are taken in the best interest of the child.

The respondents also identified the 'Failure of parents and community members to assist with the provision of teaching and learning materials' (*M*=4.02, *SD*=.800) as a major challenge. The response suggests that the schools' community failed to support materially although, it is enjoined to do so. This might be attributed to the notion among some communities in Ghana that the schools in the country are solely owned by the government and, therefore, it is its responsibility to provide various forms of support and resources for schools' sustenance (Kusi, 2017).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concluded that the heads of the early grade schools in the study area were confronted with some administrative-related challenges, which impeded the effective operations and functioning of the schools. These challenges were related to teacher management and material resources provision for effective teaching and learning. It is, therefore, recommended that the heads identify and liaise with potential NGOs and individuals who are interested and key partners in early grade education for support in the form of teaching-learning materials, and to construct basic housing facilities for the teachers in the rural areas to encourage their retention in the schools.

Another conclusion drawn from the study was that the headteachers encountered financial-related challenges such as inadequate funding and delay in the release of funds to schools, which was, largely, attributed to insufficient budgetary allocations to the education sector. These financial challenges posed a threat to the development of the schools. To augment the effort of the government, it is recommended that the schools should engage in income generating activities and organise events such as Speech and Prize-Giving Days, and 'Back-to-school weeks' (Kusi, 2017), where efforts could be made to invite parents and business leaders and encourage them to donate funds and materials for the development of the schools.

Last, but not the least, the study concluded that the leaders of the early grade schools encountered parent-related challenges, including their failure to involve actively in their wards' education. This could lead to a fundamental breakdown in the child's educational foundation and academic performance. Therefore, it is recommended that the heads liaise well with the PTAs to get the parents onboard in their wards' education through rigorous sensitization programmes.

Limitations of the Study

This paper has two key limitations. Firstly, the sample size of 120 early grade leaders for the quantitative phase, and 12 for the qualitative phase was unrepresentative of the population of the leaders in the country and, therefore, generalising the findings to a wider context is inappropriate. Secondly, we acknowledge that stakeholders in early grade education, such as the teachers and parents had a role in determining the challenges facing the early grade leaders in the study context, but they were excluded from the study. Their responses could have made some differences in the findings.

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