Assessment of the Contribution of Female Head Teachers to Academic Performance in Junior High Schools in Northern Ghana

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Abstract
The study assesses the contribution of female head teachers to pupils' preparation and their eventual performance in Basic Education Certificate Examination in selected Junior High Schools in Northern Ghana. Through cross sectional design, the study comprised 351 respondents from district, community and selected Junior High Schools in Northern Ghana. Data collected from questionnaire and interviews were analysed along common themes and strengthened by descriptive statistics. The study reveals that there are many factors accounting for few female heads in the basic schools in the Northern Region of Ghana. Among these includes the availability of females teachers who are qualified to take up headship positions, unwillingness by many available females to accept headship and in some instances discrimination against female teachers when it comes to headship positions because many of those doing the appointment are males. The study further showed that headship at the Junior High School level is male dominated and only 16.8% of head teachers were females. Characterized by varied perceptions and preferences for some leaders pupils under the few female heads demonstrated a more improved scores in their Basic Certificate Examinations compared with those under males headships. It is recommended that more females be recruited as head teachers and supported with in-service training in the areas of planning, budgeting and relationship building. Also female teachers should be targeted and supported to attend short courses on leadership all in a bid to motivate them to take up headship. Ministry of Education also needs to institute a policy which mandates that where female teachers have the minimum requirement they should automatically be made the assistant head teacher so that as soon as the headship becomes vacant they can be considered.
Keywords: Headship, Academic, performance, female, education

Introduction

Successful leaders are believed to have one thing in common which is to influence and drive those around them in order to reap maximum benefit for their organisations (Domfeh, Obuabisa-Darko and Asare, 2016). The primary responsibility of leadership is thus to achieve organisational goals. This responsibility often involves driving followers who may be employees, beneficiaries or both and resources through a process to their desired goal. While this act of leading such processes may be a shared responsibility Mensah & Mensah (2015) maintain that in transformational leadership individuals are often tasked with the primary responsibility for driving the rest. They may therefore delegate some of their responsibilities but the spotlight is on them and they are ultimately accountable for everything that takes place in the organisation.

Under situations where primary responsibility rest with the individual, the qualities they possess and their style of leadership become paramount as these reflect the nature of results that the organisation would achieve. Central to these qualities is their gender. Eklund, Barry & Grunberg (2017) argue that gender of those who drive institutions remain one key variable that requires critical examination if success in leadership is to be enhanced. As an often contested term Kruger (2008) had earlier maintained that though gender is socially constructed as being a male or female in leadership has come to be accepted as a central focus and that being tends to influence the ways one may approach their role. Beyond them, situations, needs and challenges around the role a male or female leaders and outcomes of their leadership tend to affect men and women, boys and girls differently. These differences reflect critical gender dimensions that impact organisation in their effort at achieving their goals (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016; UNICEF, 2017).

There exists a plethora of literature confirming vast gender differences in leadership (Johansen, 2007 and Kruger, 2008). These differences extend from the share of men and women in leadership positions, traits that male or female leader may exhibit to the extent to which they control and influence organizational performance. In particular, women's share in key sectors and their collaborative roles across generations in finding solutions to global problems continue to deepen (Kemp, 2020). Globally there are more women than men. In the last decade the number of women in senior leadership continues to witness phenomenal growth and diversity. At all levels but more specifically at formal pre-tertiary education systems one may anticipate that in their leadership a similar trend of majority females may be exist. On the contrary, and except in exceptional instances, leadership in secondary and higher levels has historically been skewed in favor of males (UNESCO, 2017). Globally, there are 27 states in which women account for less than 10 per cent of directors in the education system (Eurostat, 2019). Lativa with 85% of school heads being women, Bulgaria 80%, Austria 79% and Sweden 73% and United Kingdom, 65% reflect exceptionally as countries with more women in school leadership than men (Brands, 2015).

In Asia, Japan has 39% of all lower secondary teachers being females with only 6% of these assumed leadership positions. The extremes include Papua New Guinea with just 2.9% of all headship occupied by women. Subsaharan Africa reflects similar characteristics of low share of women in leadership. The UN Women (2019) maintained that only 24.3 percent of education directors across Africa are women. Rwanda ranks highest in female representation in most institutional leadership including education. However, this translates to only 30% females at primary and 19% at lower secondary level. Tanzania has 12.6% of women education workers in leadership roles implying the other countries in the subregion have far less than 10% (Mythili, 2017; Senadza, 2012). In Ghana, females dominate the teaching profession at least at the lower grades. This may be a positive precondition for their access to leadership. In the view of Sekluu and Gyimah (2016) this dominance is inversely correlated with women's leadership as only a few women occupy top level management positions at all levels of the education service.

Gender disparity in education leadership results from a range of factors. From policy perspective where educational systems and procedures are intentional about increasing the number of females in headship position, female share is higher (Harden, 2015). Effective human resource policies such as the 2010 Equality Act of the United Kingdom (Fuller, 2017) have provisions for affirmative action. In addition, conscious plans for promoting female participation as in the case of Uganda are understood to result in more women assuming headship (Myhili, 2017). The existence of a gender supportive context blended with interpersonal qualities such as willingness, perseverance and enduring effort are known to increase female participation in leadership. Naseer et al (2014) suggest biologically determined male–female differences might affect differences in the share and also influence leadership to a certain extent.

Social, religious and cultural norms and practices also impact female participation in school leadership (Mythili, 2017). Central to norms and practices which tend to affect one group negatively are discriminatory tendencies. As noted by Aly and Shields (2010) women in particular continue to face discrimination in almost all spheres of life including politics and managerial positions at both public and private corporations in Africa. In Ghana, Agezo and Hope (2011) observe that women were traditionally not perceived as leaders. In education Kusi (2019) maintains that the perception regarding management as a male notion is real and continues to impact women's representation. The widely held belief that women's best place is homemaking and that women are often discriminated upon may have been dimistified with time, but the effect on women's leadership remains.

Beyond their share, men and women in leadership positions are believed to influence those around them in ways that impact their organisational goals differently. In their

meta-analysis covering 95 studies, Paustian-Underdahl, Walker & Woehr (2014) concluded that no perceived differences in leadership effectiveness exist when all leadership contexts are considered. The dffierence only emerges giving women a more positive perception about effectiveness wheren only some other ratings are used and men an urge where self ratings are considered. Kent, Blair, Rudd & Scheule (2010) hold similar view maintaining that no significant difference in organizational results may exist attributable to the head being a male or female. Rather, the context within which the organization functions matters as this may shape the way the leader approaches their duties.

On the contrary, Folk (2017) stresses that being male or female are associated with some unique qualities, behaviors or traits and once in leadership position these act together to inform the ways one may approach their duties. Folk (2017) position is similar to Barber, Clark and Whelan (2010) who had earlier maintained that from gendered perspective differences exist and further espoused the ways these reflect. Women make great difference to organizational results due to their unique way of leading. Even though each leader may have something to impart, women often reflect more strength in collaboration and relationship building relative to a more instructive and controlling approach often exhibited by male leaders. Female leaders are also believed to demonstrate an open, more engaging approach with their employees, often manifesting in how they relate with their immediate followers who are mostly teachers, learners and to an extent parents and community members (Kruger, 2008; Fuller, 2017).

In the education sector, Folk (2017; Elias, 2013 and Hungi & Postlethwaite, 2009) maintain that while transformational leaders strive to improve learner achievements female school heads tend to have an edge in their unique contributions to student achievements. In their macro study involving over 3,000 managers of educational institutions globally, Hosie (2017) confirmed that women emerged as best in the depth and pace of reaching their organizational goals than their male counterparts. In Bangladesh primary students under female head teachers were found to perform significantly better than those under males (Elias, 2013). Across West Africa, evidence on whether women impact their schools relative to men remains limited (Oyeniran and Anchomese, 2018).

In Ghana, the strategic goal of pre secondary education is improved equitable access to and participation in quality basic education. Junior High Schools fall within this category and as at 2018/2019 academic year, 63% of these schools were public institutions (MOE ESPR, 2019). As public insitutions administered by Central government they have in recent times achieved appreciable success in terms of access, almost exceeding gender parity in enrolment particularly in the urban schools. Quality, as reflected in pupils' performance in examinations however remains poor. Grades, examination marks and scores of descriptive commentaries and how learners respond

to tasks assigned them, reflected in part in the scores they obtain therefore remain major ways of understanding academic performance (Odane, 2013). Since BECE scores point to the extent to which learners acquire the essential knowledge and skills, they constitute an important component of the goal of Junior High Schools and any difference in how male or female heads contribute to these outcomes is paramount.

In almost two decades Public Junior High Schools in Ghana fail to meet their goal improved performance in BECE as more than 30% of learners who write the examination often do not achieve the minimum grade of 36 or better to progress to senior high, technical and vocational schools (Iddi, 2016; Amuzu, Ankalibazuk & Abdulai, 2017). According to Ministry of Education (2016), there is a consistent trend of under achievement in deprived districts and their schools, particularly in the rural areas across Northern Ghana. Girls and children with disability also tend to achieve far lower BECE scores. For instance, in the 2010/2011 academic year, 59.7% of learners passed in the four core subjects nationally. This comprised 62% boys and 58% girls. In 2017/2018, the national average was 76%representing the highest in almost two decades. Boys achievement was 77.5% compared with 74.6% for girls. In the same year, the performance in deprived districts notably Jirapa was 48.5% with boys being 58.2% and girls at 38.6% (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Even though leadership becomes crucial in such situations of poor performance in Ghana less attention is still paid to research in gendered school leadership (Bimpeh, 2012). Their share and how females influence the preparation and actual performance of pupils in BECE relative to their male counterpart remains limited, at least within the context of Northern Ghana. The study has sought to answer the following questions;

Theoretical Bases

The study employed Gender Perspective Framework, strengthened by Social Perception in assessing the extent to which gender plays out in headteacher leadership at the Junior High School level. Under the perspective framework gender is viewed as a social construct and reflects the differences ascribed by society to men and women (United Nations, 2005). The extent to which societies and people would normally associate, classify and perceive being a male or female and how these influence their ascription of roles, actions, their own and relational response, opportunities, social roles and interactions impact leadership (Connell, 2020). Relatedly, Social Perception is concerned with how people form impressions of and make judgement about these socially ascribed roles, rules, relationshop or characteristics of others as sovereign personalities. Perceptions and judgements are made based on personal qualities, situations or behavior.

Practically distingtive, gender may be linked to sex and the latter may imply the permanent and immutable biological characteristics common to individual's gender

and these define traits forged throughout the history of social relations. Gender, although argued as originating in objective biological divergences, goes far beyond the physiological and biological specifics of the two sexes in terms of the roles each is expected to play. Gender differences are therefore social constructs, inculcated on the basis of a specific society's particular perceptions of the differences and the assumed tastes, tendencies and capabilities of men and women. Gender differences, unlike the immutable characteristics of sex, are universally conceded in historical and comparative social analyses to be variants that are transformed over time and from one culture to the next, as societies change and evolve (Kang, Hense, Scheersoi, & Keinonen, 2019).

Groups and individuals adapt to situations differently and may expect others particularly their leaders to do same due to the socially constructed perspectives. Individual differences therefore exist in the degree to which people hold and reflect varied perspectives on gender (Shannon et al., 2019)

Gender relations comprise specific mechanisms whereby different cultures determine the functions and responsibilities of each sex. To Fiske et al. (2007), these may involve the determination of access to material resources such as land, credit or even training. They also apply to more transient resources, such as power. The implications for everyday life are many, and include the division of labour, the responsibilities of family members inside and outside the home, education and opportunities for professional advancement and a voice in policy-making.

In organisational and policy context, gender perspectives come across as critical ingredient for consciously making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs. In the school context head teachers' duties vary. Their influence may be felt in the context, entire students, and or some sections of the school system. Their effect can also be more on both male and female employees and learners or a particular gender. By remaining aware about the differences that exist the tendency to perpetuate inequality may be minimised and positively women and men benefit fairly and equally (Johnson, Gerber, & Muhoza, 2019).

As public organisations, policy making and implementation of decisions around school leadership must be mindful of the varied perceptions of actors in any given system as well as these socially ascribed gender functions and the specific needs of men and women. If education policies and impact of leadership are to be sustained, they must consider effect of gender disparities and differences that exist particularly in the appointment, response by followers and management of all aspects of leadership at the school level. How stakeholders perceive each head in relation to their gender matters in how they may relate, support and cooperate with them.

Methodology

The study employed a cross sectional design in its approach. A cross sectional design is suited where a researcher seeks to establish relationship between phenomena, have indepth understanding about the characteristics of representative sample and most importantly, where a researcher seeks to establish a trend in both past and current occurrences (Creswell, 2015). Seeking to understand how a defined group of male and female leaders of Junior High Schools contribute to students' acadmic performance over a seven year period while dwelling on the current year when data as gathered therefore all fit within key elements of cross sectional design. A cross-sectional design also meant that the mixed method research strategy had to be adopted as this aid in the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data.

The study was conducted in Talensi, Jirapa and West Mamprusi, all rural districts in Northern Ghana. The choice of the study area was motivated by their rural nature and their high incidence of poverty; both pointers to a context whose need for strong leadership is greatest (Leithwood et al., 2004). The Poverty mapping report (Ghana Statistical Service, 2015) confirms that while incidence of poverty nationally in 2015 was 15% Jirapa was 74.1% while Talensi and West Mamprusi incidence was about 56.5%. There exist many decentralised and local insitutions in the study districts.These are public and private, formal and informal though the formal public instutuons are dominant. The most dominant institutions include district education offices, district directorates of health and Agriculture. Other key departments that provide social services include Social Welfare, Environmental Health, Community Development, Civic Education, and National Board for Small Scale Industries, Disaster Management. Other serive institutions are the police and Fire Service.

The lowest level of decentralised instituions of which leadership matters is the district level. The exception is the Ghana Education Service which has visible formal, defined physical structures which are pre, primary and Junior High schools. Educational institutions that provide access to basic education are generally limited and have very poor facilities. There were 124 public Junior High schools in the study districts. These comprised 38 from West Mamprusi, 48 in Jirapa and 38 in Talensi (Government of Ghana, 2016). These are inadequate relative to the number of learners who are expected to transit from primary to the next level. In terms of gender and headship, there were 124 head teachers across the study districts and only 14% were women. Overall the study districts have been ranked among the worst performing in terms of access to good snitation, security, governance, water, quality healthcar and average performance in Bbasic Education Certificate Examination (Government of Ghana/UNICEF/CDD/CSPS, 2019).

The target population for this study was limited to the key stakeholders of education in the three districts due to their centrality and indepth knowledge about the context, school development, processes involved in head teacher duties and learners'

performance in examinations. The population therefore comprised all headteachers from the districts, learners who were present in school, School Management Committee (SMC) members, Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), immediate past pupils of Juniro High schools in the study districts. District Directors of Education (DDE), Assistant Directors of Education (ADs), Circuit Supervisors and heads of other decentralised departments especially those that were represented on education related committees such as Social Services Subcommittee of the Districtr Assemblies, District Education Oversight Committee and District Education Planning Teams.

The sample size was 351 respondents drived mostly from multi-stage cluster sampling. According to Taherdoost (2016), multi-stage cluster sampling involves clustering diverse groups involved in the study and based on pre-defined characteristics. The first stage involved selection of the study schools. Out of 124 Junior High Schools 42 of them representing 33% were selected. Six (6) schools who experienced the same head teacher over the least 5 years were purposevily selected. These were considered drill down schools, as discussed in depth later. The rest were selected from 3 clusters based on their level of deprivation.

All headteachers from the Junior High schools were purposively selected as respondents. Bryman (2008) posits that purposively selecting cases is considered an acceptable and a standard practice as they are information - rich and capable of offering information relevant to the research questions.The headteachers were selected based on the fact that they were already demonstration some leadership in their respective schools. In the case of the drill down schools the 6 head teachers, comprising 3 females and 3 males were demonstrating leadership for periods where they have at least supported same cohort of learners from entry into their school to their BECE examination.

The next stage involved respondents from clusters of district education officials, community members and parents, learners who were in school and past students, mostly past prefects. From each school 25% of the teachers were randomly selected, yielding a sample size of 84 teachers. In the case of SMC/PTA and pupils in school, 7 respondents from 33% of the study schools were randomly selected. For past students, 33% of immediate past prefects of the study schools were selected through snowballing. These translated into 98 respondents each for SMC/PTA members and pupils in school and 14 past prefects. At the district level, all directors of Education Assistant Directors in charge of supervision and Human Resource as well as two Circuit Supervisors from each district were included as respondents as presented in the following table.

Table 1: Respondents

Respondents	Number
Head teachers (Drill down schools)	6

Head teachers (other schools)	36
Teachers	84
Learners in school	98
Past prefects	14
Community members (SMC/PTAs and parents)	98
District Education officers	15
Total	**351**

Source: Field survey, 2019)

Qualitative data comprised the socio-cultural and geo-charasteristics of the context within which headteachers function, leadership experiences including their testimonies as well as the perceptions and ways stakeholders respond to headteachers relative to their duties. Through questionnaire the study obtained very useful primary data from district officers, head teachers, teachers and past prefects. In addition, indepth interviews using semi structured interview guide provided more insight into the practical leadership experiences and realities of male and female heads. Focus group discussions were conducted in the drill down schools. Supported by simple guide with few questions the focus groups were the main method for obtaining data from pupils who were still in school and community members. In each school, seven learners from JHS1 to JHS3 formed the focus group. In addition to core members, two other members of SMc/PTA participated in the focus group in each school.
Quantitative data comprised school inputs, processes involved in preparing learners for examinations and their actual scores. These were obtained mostly from secondary sources notably Education Management Information System (EMIS), Ministry of Education Sector reports and other existing studies.

The Statistical Pakage for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and simple excel were used to enter, process and retrieve the processed data. Data, once analysed, was presented in descriptive and simple frequencies. Qualitative data was mostly presented along specific themes based on pre-determined and similar pattern. The study also extracted and presented verbatim key testimonies and quotes from particularly the head teachers and from focus group participants. In order to meet the standard and ethical requirement of anonymity, the study assigned codes to each district and school. The first district assumed letter A while the second and third districts assumed B and C respectively. Schools in each district then followed serially starting with 100. The outcome is that a school selected first from the first district assumed the code A101 while the last school in, say district C, and would assume C106.

Findings and Discussion
Factors accounting for the share of females in headship

From the 42 study schools, 83% were headed by men and 17% by women. Headship in these schools therefore is male dominated. From cross sectional perspective the

average number of female heads over the last seven years has been 14%. The share of female heads in the study schools reflects a general trend across the study districts as data from the Education Management Information Systems confirmed that out of 124 head teachers only 14% were women. This is consistent with Segkluu and Gyimah (2016) who found that in Tamale Metro, a more urbanized and cosmopolitan context in Northern only a few women serve as heads. The low share may therefore be no different across Ghana as a study by Abonyi (2017) in Ahafo Region found that 80% of school leaders at the basic level were males while only 20% were women. The gender imbalance is a reflection of the imbalances at many work places in Africa (Wendy, 2012).

Figure 1: Factors accounting for female share in headship in Junior High Schools
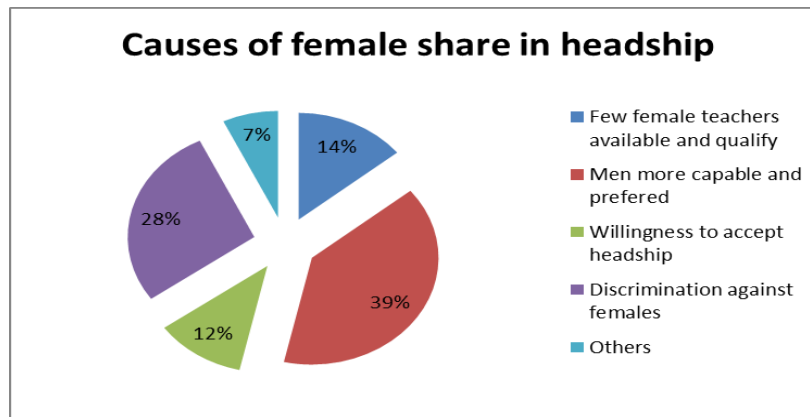
Source: Field survey (2019)

The figure above depicts responses from 155 stakeholders regarding the low share of women in headship. The responses were drived mainly from district education officers, teachers, headteachers and past prefects as these were considered to possess an appreciable level of experience related to the headteachers under study. The dominant reasons, according to these stakeholders are the perception that men are more capable and preferred when recruiting school leaders, discrimination against female teachers when it comes to leadership and the unavailability of of femlae teachers with the requisite qualification to be recruited. Others included the willingness of women in the school system in presenting themselves for leadership and others notably difficult terrian under which head teachers function and belief that headship is only a daunting task with no motivation.

The responses suggest that more than one-third considers capability and preferences as major factor. In view of this, the study conducted a follow up assessment in order to reveal the depth to which this applies, both in terms of policies and processes around recruitment and follower response. As immediate supervisors majority of district education officers perceived serving headteachers and their teachers who were males

as more capable and positioned to lead schools than women. Only a few prefer females. Heads and their teachers also demonstrated mixed preferences for either gender implying majority actually perceive neither difference nor a clear preference. On the contrary, two thirds of the past prefects indicated, based on experience during their Junior High School days that they prefer male head teachers.

From a gendered perspective Connel (2020) posits that the extent to which groups of people would normally associate, classify or perceive being a male or female and how these influence their ascription of roles and response has implication on their leadership. As to how their preference and perceptions may influence their decisions to reruit only men or women if given a limited option, 61% of the education managers and same proportion in the case of headteachers maintained they would opt for men only headship. The rest, representing 39% would give equal chance to both. It is worth noting that though all three directors of education were females, none demonstrated a preference for recruiting only females.

 In their contending reasons for a preference, District Directors and Circuit Supervisors who are superiors perceive male teachers as 'just ready' and willing to lead than females. In their daily routines, some education managers mostly perceive male teachers as exceptionally thriving in task assigned them implying they would not hesitate to recommend such teachers for promotion to headship role over their female counterparts. Teachers and some heads perceive male heads as leaders with great courage and confidence. Apart from majority of teachers, district directors of education contended that they perceive some female headteachers, inspite of their appreciable instructional experience and the spaces offered, as lacking confidence and so demonstrate no willingness to assume headship. The district director of education from District B summed her perception in the following statement,

"Most of the male head teachers I interact with appear more diligent and professional than the women. You come across many of the male heads who will openly demonstrate to you that they know what they are about and go about their work confidently and professionally. You also come across some female heads and you feel they have issues with confidence and also wonder if they understand what professionalism is". Director of Education, District B 26/09/2019

As both beneficiaries and followers the past prefects justified their preference male heads as due to their strict and effective manner of promoting discipline relative to their female counterparts. On the contrary, learners who were still in school preferred female heads based on a key fact that these come across more as mothers with a high level of care to them than the men. The perception of men as more suitable for school leadership based predominantly on these traits may not be uncommon. As has been argued, researches on gender differences have over time believed men are considered as possessing stronger leadership due to their early socialization experiences and

involvement in spaces that increase their vibility and team work (Rosener, 1990 cited in Elias, 2013).

Inspite of the perceptions and preferences, the study found no significant evidence of the role of gender in the appointment of the current head teachers. Education managers often consider professional qualification and considerable instructional experience when recruiting Junior High school head teachers. Irrespective of their gender once a teacher possesses the minium requirements they may be considered for appointement as head. From their perspective, 85.7% of heads affirmed that gender considerations played no part during their appointment.

At policy level, the only key reference document on the duties of the headteacher is the Headteaher Handbook (2010). Though its availability and use has been confirmed in most study schools it focuses more on the practice of the role. There are neither provisions related to the requirement and processes for appointing headteachers nor aspirations and practice of gender. In their study in Tano North in Ghana Lonyian and Kuranchie (2018) established that competitive interviews remain largely the mode of appointing head teachers particularly to urban schools.

Gender perspective framework provides an anchor for prioritising gender issues in organizational policies and strategies. The absence of any conscious provisions for gender in the Headteacher's Handbook may mask the needed attention relative to the unique needs of women during recruitment and actual performance of their duties. Similarly, variations in stakeholder perceptions and their preferences can promote or hinder headteachers' effectiveness. The perception of male heads as leaders with great courage and confidence and female heads as generally lacking confidence and full of self-doubt may negatively influence the extent to which they cooperate and support women who lead the schools. How leaders are perceived may also influence how they actually lead due to different expectations. In organisations that look up to leaders to drive change a leader that is positively perceived and accepted by followers, colleagues and even superiors would most likely achieve success in their role and the vice versa (Gorska, 2016).

With the nature of feedback from stakeholders and functioning among male dominated working force, the abilities and qualities of female heads could be underrated. In their examination of female leadership identities and development in Sweden and United States of America, Murakami and Tornsen (2017) assert that even when effective in their roles, female leaders particularly in secondary schools can be evaluated in negative and undesirable ways which can impede their confidence and effectiveness.

In gender perspective framework equity and equality in all aspects of development is key. The considerably low numbers of females in headship imply that as public institutions equity remain critical gender gaps requiring attention. Where majority of students, teachers and other followers within the value chain thrive largely on male

leadership with its concomitant qualities may, if even able to achieve its goal, miss out on other values that women possess. Learners in such public schools would gain optimally where the qualities from the male leaders tend to be the best. However, the risk in missing out on values that females possess and bring to impact on learners cannot be underestimated.

Examiniation scores of Pupils under female headship
Under this section, the study presents the extent to which the Junior High Schools are reaching their goal of improved learner performance. Stakeholders' perception on whether being a male or female head could may have influence on learners' performance is first presented followed by actual scores of pupils under female and then male headteachers. As leaders headfteachers of Junior High Schools in Ghana have a very broad and diverse mandate, extending from relationship building, managing resources to instructional duties (Duorinaah, 2020; Headteacher Handbook, 2010 & Kusi, 2012). The assessment was confined to only their duties related to pupils' prepration and their eventual scores in Basic Education Certificate Examination.

The dominant responses regarding any influence of learners' performance in examinations were from district education officers, headteachers, teachers and learners as School Management Committees and parents demonstrated a generally low awareness. All education officers and 60.7% of teachers differ in the view that being a male or female head leads to variation in learners' performance. In opposition, 31% of respondents believe some differences are possible. They argued that men and women are different and as a result may exert varied influence. Only 8.3% consider female heads as having the poteitnal for exerting significant and positive influence on pupils' performance.
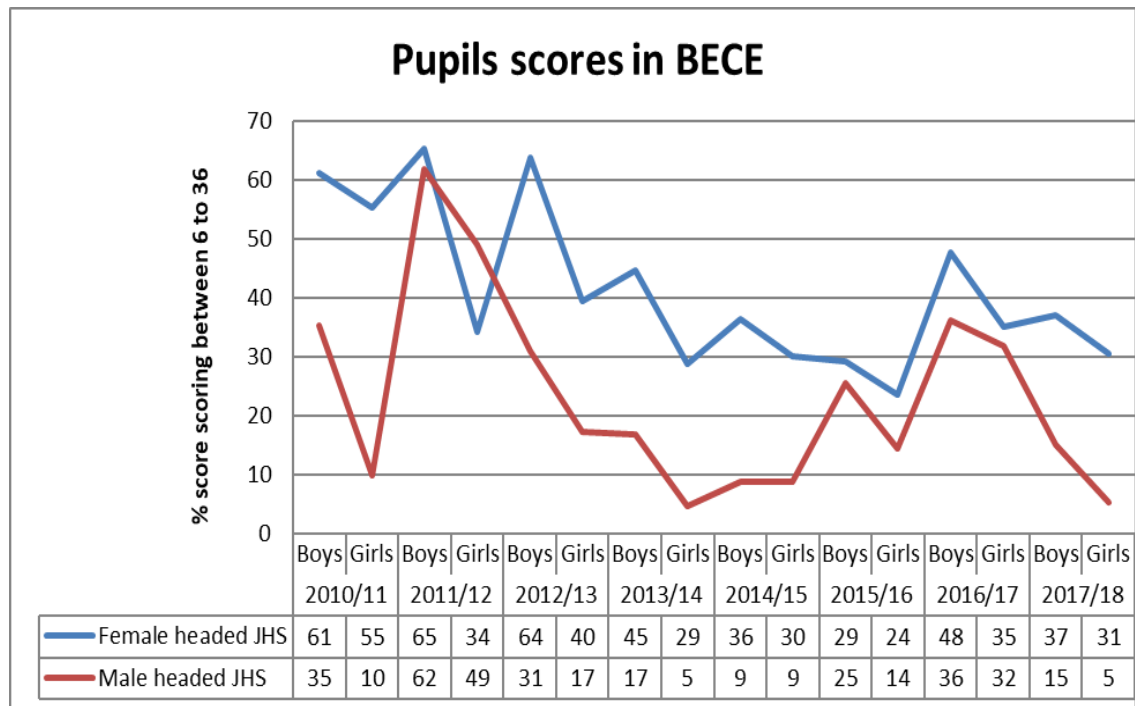
On their part, 82.9% of males and 85.7% of female heads did not support the idea that their gender has any influence on pupils' performance in BECE. Rather, their personal qualities and capabilities matter most. This position has been affirmed by their superiors, that is, education officers in addition to their position that the individual management style, knowledge and commitment and positive behaviors of head teachers are the key determinants and not their gender. Availability of the required school inputs and cooperation from stakeholders also emerged as strong ingredients of pupils' performance in BECE. In one Junior High School, one woman who has been head teacher of the same school for more than six years had the following to say.

> In this school it has not been easy. But thank God since I came here the students have been doing well in both end of terms examinations and also BECE. Not all of them pass BECE though but majority do. Actually I must say the performance of my students has nothing to do with my being a woman. My competence, my experience and influence of my work is what I think make them pass. Apart from that whatever we also need as a school to help our students learn if GES and the communities provide it for us our

students will perform very well''. Female headteacher, C118 JHS 19/09/2018.

Consequent to the perceptions the study mapped the actual grades of pupils against their male and female heads covering the period 2011/2012 to 2017/2018 in order determine whether any difference may exist. Only average scores and heads from the six drills down schools were used as these schools were managed by same head teacher over the period under consideration. In the following graph, results of mapping are presented.

Figure 2: Head Teacher Gender and pupils BECE Scores

Pupils scores in BECE

|	2010/11		2011/12		2012/13		2013/14		2014/15		2015/16		2016/17		2017/18	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Female headed JHS	61	55	65	34	64	40	45	29	36	30	29	24	48	35	37	31
Male headed JHS	35	10	62	49	31	17	17	5	9	9	25	14	36	32	15	5

Source: Field survey (2019)

The mapping revealed that between 2010/2011 and 2017/2018 academic years pupils' performance have been low and on a downward trajectory. From an average of 61% in most female headed schools and 35% in the case of males in 2010/2011 performance declined to 31% and 5% respectively by 2017/2018 academic year. The downward trajectory nothwithstanding and except in 2011/2012 academic year, pupils in all female headed Junior High Schools demonstrated more improved grades relative to their peers in male dominated schools. The best performing school over the period recorded an average score of 46.5%. Its head teacher is a female who has been in the same school for about eight (8) years. On the other hand, the least score over the study

period has been 22.5%, recorded by a Junior High School whose head is a male and has led this school since 2011/2012. Furthermore, variability was noted in the performance of boys and girls under each head as depicted in the ensuing graph.

Figure 3 Boys and Girls BECE Scores under Male and Female Heads
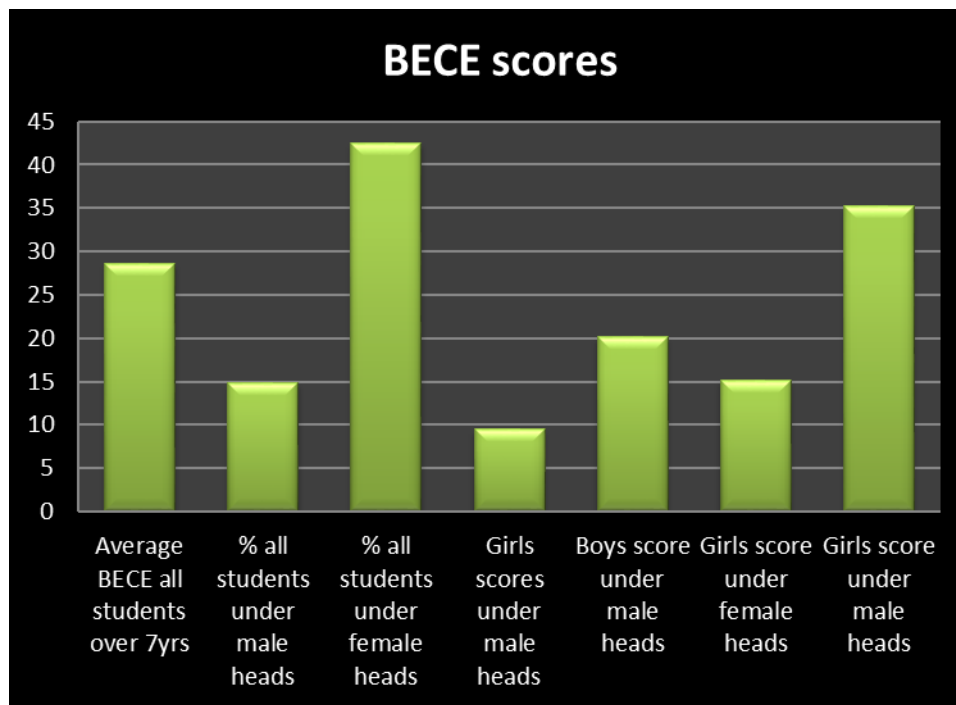
Source: Field Survey (2019)

The highest score for boys under male head teachers was 35.2%, recorded in 2010/2011 academic year. For girls, their highest score under male heads was 17.7%, recorded in 2011/2012 academic year. The highest score for boys under female heads was 64.4% which was recorded in 2011/2012 academic year, while the highest for girls under same female heads was 55.3%, recorded in previous year. These imply that while both boys and girls generally experience higher scores under female heads, boys' scores are marginally higher. The opposite occurs under male head teachers where girls have higher scores than boys. Low girls' scores are not consistent with Voyer and Voyer (2014) whose meta-analysis of 308 studies confirm the long held notion that girls struggle to attend school but once they do their performance exceed

boys . Reasons for the difference, according to the studies attributed in part to the perception that boys do better and as a result attention needs to be shifted to girls.

Contributions to pupils' preparation and performance in examinations
In response to practical ways they often contribute to learners' performance, nearly all the heads confirmed that their daya today duties blend to motivate, prepare and influence students' performance. Across all respondents, heads were mentioned as having an urge in terms of the possession of unique characteristics that JHS3 candidates easily related with. Direct material support and patience in dealing with the pupils were dominant values that responded associated with female heads. Their patience is often exhibited when attending to and listening particularly to vulnerable pupils in ways that make them feel comfortable and wanting to learn. On their part, majority of teachers and pupils in school often found all heads making great effort to support learners especially during the last half of their final year. However, the female heads were mentioned as exhibiting a more profound culture of bringing to the school and into the classroom motherly care, treating learners like their own children.
The outcomes of focus group discussion with pupils supported the caring quality that their female heads imparted. In their view female heads are likeable due to their *softness* towards learners. A JHS3 boy in one of the focus groups provided the following in support of their head teacher.

> Our headmistress is like a mother to us. She sees and feels us like her children. That makes us feel free, happy and not afraid to contact her" A learner from A108 JHS 28/11/2018

Majority of teachers and parents believe that female heads posted to their school are great role models to them. Across all female headed schools, women remain the only source of motivation and inspiration especially for girls. They share their life experiences with students and these motivate them to learn hard. They are a reliable source of direct material support and in matters relating to sexual reproductive health.

Pupils' perspective regarding the influences of their head teachers on their performance relates more to different tasks during preparations towards examinations. Majority of the past prefects (77.3%) maintained that their head teachers' consistent support and advice on the need to study hard greatly contributed to their performance. The advice comprised sharing practical life experiences, counseling on learning strategies, especially step by step review and discussion of past questions are some of the ways headteachers contributed to learners' preparation towards their examinations. In a number of the schools, both male and female heads mandated teachers to institute and moderate quizzes and discussions on how to answer BECE questions. As articulated by one past prefect below their madam (headteacher) would normally challenge pupils to compete among themselves as articulated by one past prefect below.

"*From JH2 till we completed she used to challenge us to learn and compete among ourselves. This encouraged me to work hard and ensure I am always ahead of all my mates*" Past prefect from C114 JHS 27/11/2018

The conduct of extra classes is a backup measure but identified as a major contribution to pupils' preparation towards BECE. Extra classes are remedial measures instituted by some schools particularly under conditions where the official time allocated for teaching and learning is considered inadequate or when learners miss the normal classes due to learner or teacher based reasons. Extra classes are considered a more urban and private school phenomenon, often assuming a more economic dimension. However, this emerged as common practice across majority of the study schools. In schools that conduct extra classes, female heads are positively perceived as displaying more interest and commitment in their organization. Alongside these remedial interventions, direct material support remains critical contributions that learners value in their preparation and participation in their examinations. Writing materials, out-of-pocket allowance and transport to and from examination centers are some of the ways headteachers support.

These observed qualities of female heads in the study schools are consistent with Folk (2017) who argues that women leaders tend to have strengths in listening, cooperation, motivation, and are more accessible to their followers. In broader terms, good leaders, irrespective of their gender may transform their schools in significant ways. But as noted by King& Winthrop (2015) and Eberechukwu & Nsan (2013) values such as gender friendly learning environment, retention especially of the girls and role modeling are among those observed to result from female leadership. This implies that schools with female heads stand to benefit more from such values. On the other hand, majority of these schools risk exclusion from these values since they are predominatnly male headed.

Karen, Murphy and Mark (2016) identified a more positive association between heads who adopt a caring approach to leadership, collective responsibility and positive student achievements. Oyeniran and Anchomese (2018) made similar conclusions in their study as they found that in Ivory Coast, female principals who often created learning environment much similar to students' actual life at home promoted their achievement. When learners in the Junior High Schools feel they are appreciated, nurtured and cared for, they feel safe in the learning environment and learn better. Within the context of Northern Ghana, learners in Junior High School are often at a stage of transiting from adolescents into adulthood. Their learning needs therefore transcend beyond just teaching in the classroom. Any related support that make them feel cared for and loved go a long way to improve their performance.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings confirmed that even though having women in leadership is importance female share in headship at Junior High school remains very low. This situation deprives learners of the positive attributes that women in leadership impart. There is the greatest recognition that to have more females assuming headship requires first an increase in the number of female teachers which in itself is a long term result. As is in the view of Glanz and Gross (2018), as women are critical partners in development their presence and influence in organizational goal should be a priority in all decisions. Women should be favored in the recruitment and selection of school principals if school systems are to improve their effectiveness and student results. Affirmative action that positively discriminates in favour of females is probably what is required in order to have more females in public Junior High Schools in Ghana.

Their fewer numbers notwithstanding, the study found that the average scores in pupils' BECE from female headed schools are relatively higher compared with their counterparts in males headed schools. In the ongoing search for solutions to the dwindling state of performance in examinations in the country it is worth considering the qualities associated women in school leadership as key determinants of learners' success in these examinations. Beyond an emphasis on physical inputs, soft skills and qualities such as listening, a nurturing behavior and attending to the individual needs of learners which are commonly associated with female head teachers require more attention in efforts to improve learners' performance.

While their impact may vary the study concludes that perceptions and preferences regarding   gender of the headteachers are real, at least in the basic schools. The perception of male heads as leaders with great courage and confidence and some female heads as generally lacking confidence and full of self-doubt influences can affect the extent to which teachers, learners and community members may cooperate and support the females to excel. Some headteachers reinforce this perception and relate the situation to lack of basic leadership skills of female heads.

- District directors of education, Circuit Supervisors and Assistant directors who directly support head teachers should intensify their direct encouragement and motivation for female teachers in Junior High Schools as a way of increasing their interest to stay on. Ghana Education Service should also allocate a quota of emerging vacancies for headship solely for females.
- In line with this, female teachers should be targeted and supported to attend short courses on leadership all in a bid to motivate them to take up headship. Ministry of Education also needs to institute a policy which mandates that where female teachers have the minimum requirement they should automatically be made the assistant head teacher so that as soon as the headship becomes vacant they can be considered. Where it may take a very long time for the post of head teachers to

occur in a Junior High School where the female teachers teach they could be supported to take transfer to other school where the opportunity exists.

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