

Challenges faced by headteachers in setting school goals and expectations in basic schools: A case study of Asante Akim North Municipality, Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study explored leadership barriers to goal framing and setting expectations in public schools in Ghana, focusing on headteachers' experiences and the institutional constraints they face. Public schools in Ghana are frequently characterized by unclear, multiple, or absent goals, hindering effective planning and learner achievement. Headteachers, as key leaders, are responsible for establishing school goals and expectations; however, heavy workloads, diverse stakeholder interests, and systemic constraints present significant challenges. Adopting a phenomenological approach and a qualitative research design, the study utilized purposive maximum variation sampling to capture a broad range of perspectives across junior high, primary, and kindergarten levels in the Asante Akim North Municipality. Schools were stratified by educational level and rural-urban setting, with participants categorized as headteachers, School Improvement Support Officers [SISOs], and lead teachers. From a population of 129 staff across 69 public schools, 23 headteachers, 5 SISOs, and 22 lead teachers were selected. Responses were obtained from 11 headteachers, 4 SISOs, and 10 lead teachers, each with over 15 years of professional experience. Data were gathered via semi-structured questionnaires and interviews. Guided by an interpretive philosophical approach, the responses were transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify emerging themes. Findings indicated that inadequate coaching and orientation limit teachers' ability to contribute to goal development. Additional challenges included unsustainable government policies, poor dissemination of school mission and vision statements, and difficulties in formulating Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound (SMART) goals. Financial constraints and limited expertise further undermined effective goal-setting. The study recommends targeted orientation programs on goal-setting policies, as well as workshops and seminars to enhance skills in developing school goals, objectives, mission, and vision statements. Furthermore, regular monitoring should be instituted to ensure that schools set and adhere to realistic, achievable goals.

Keywords: Expectations, Goal-Setting, Headteachers, Instructional Leadership, Leadership

I. INTRODUCTION

Institutions around the world have been working with unclear, vague, or some form of objectives without considering effective ways to use and rely on essential aspects of goals (Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2003a). Learners have the capacity to set achievable goals and use them to meet expectations, with support from diverse educational approaches and models at the school level. Salfi (2011) showed that success was achieved when a headteacher brought to bear a shared mission, vision, and collaborative effort of leadership practices and learning performance. Additionally, Shogren et al. (2024) explained that, in their study, secondary education provides learners with great opportunities to develop skills and abilities that promote self-determination in the school system when clear goals are set. Essential among educational success achievements are goal-setting and goal-attainment skills, which are developed to enhance learners' ability to take responsibility for their own learning activities and future outcomes. Cooney and Cohen (2024) are of the view that, clear goals set in schools positively affects and serves pupils with disabilities (Cooney, 2017). These findings highlight the global importance of goal-setting as a leadership and instructional tool (Cooney & Cohen, 2024; Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2003b; Salfi, 2011; Shogren et al., 2024). As stated by Locke and Latham (2019), the goal-setting theory posits that establishing clear and compelling goals and targets not only enhances focus but also provides a strategy that motivates individuals to work toward their objectives with high competence and self-confidence.

Locke showed that, for an individual to set practical goals, they must first identify and recognize the goal and its objectives, and, further, be willing to commit themselves to the goal until it is achieved. When applied in school settings, this theory has led to notable improvements in students' academic performance (Locke & Latham, 2019). In Kenya, a study demonstrated that goal-setting improved learners' academic performance in secondary schools by fostering independent learning. The study further suggested that these findings could guide policymakers and educational administrators in enhancing academic outputs and adopting new, effective motivational strategies in

secondary schools (Adede et al., 2025). Similarly, in Nigeria conducted a study that assessed the effects of goal-setting on learners' English performance. The study revealed that learners who were exposed to goal-setting and objectives performed better and advanced their education than those who did not set goals at all. The study also recommended goal-setting as a valuable approach for improving students' academic performance (Abe et al., 2014). Roebken's study in Germany, which examined the relationship between student goal orientation and academic achievement in secondary schools, disclosed that students who actively prioritized learning based on both mastery and achievement goals were more motivated and performed better academically than those who focused solely on mastery goals (Roebken, 2007).

In Kenya, Ong'uti et al. (2019) explored the relationship between goal-setting and mathematics performance among students in Kisii Central Sub-County and found a statistically significant positive correlation between goal-setting and mathematics performance (Ong'uti et al., 2019). The study found that learners who set goals achieved better results than those who did not and recommended that university and college authorities train teachers in goal-setting techniques. Collectively, these studies underscore the significant role goal-setting plays in enhancing learners' academic performance in diverse educational contexts. The clear knowledge gap is the challenge educational leaders face in setting school goals and expectations.

In Ghana, schools face persistent challenges in defining and implementing clear goals and expectations. Research shows that many basic schools lack formal mission and vision statements, or where they exist, orientation and alignment remain weak (Esia-Donkoh, 2014a). Headteachers often struggle to balance national education policy demands with community and parental expectations, leading to misalignment and resistance to goal-setting. Peculiar challenges that impair the headteacher in setting clear goals and expectations have not been explored or reported. The absence, therefore, leaves a gap in knowledge as to what the next steps should be in addressing the lack and absence of goals and expectations in Ghanaian schools and how Ghanaian headteachers can frame and sustain realistic, well-communicated goals that not only align with national directives but also respond to the unique needs of their school communities

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Ensuring Goal setting and clear expectations in schools provide adequate directions for teaching and learning, and improve school leadership. Research outcomes show that countless schools exist and operate with vague or unsettled goals, and in some cases, there are no prescribed mission and vision statements or set goals and objectives in place (Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2003b). Evidence exists that schools and headteachers who formulate well-defined goals have students who are more engaged and successful, and adopt leadership practices that improve school performance (Muriuki et al., 2022; Salfi, 2011). Despite this information, Ghanaian schools continue to encounter challenges in setting and implementing the set goals and expectations. Studies show that headteachers often struggle to align with national education policies amid diverse stakeholder aspirations (Esia-Donkoh, 2014b). The misalignment leads to conflicting expectations, ambiguous goals, and weak implementation structures in the schools.

Additionally, headteachers face institutional and contextual obstacles, including heavy administrative workloads, inadequate resources, limited professional development, and low teacher motivation (Barrios et al., 2024). Challenges like these not only undermine the effectiveness of establishing clear goals but also hinder the school's monitoring and evaluation processes necessary for proper implementation. Again, socio-economic constraints among students and varying parents' priorities further complicate the process, leaving many schools without coherent or shared direction. As established evidence from some contexts suggests that structures and collaborative goal-setting can positively enhance school performance (Bruhn, et al., 2016), the extent to which Ghanaian headteachers can effectively set and sustain school goals remains uncertain. This study, therefore seeks to investigate the challenges headteachers face in setting and implementing school expectations in Ghanaian basic schools.

1.2 Research Objectives

What are the challenges headteachers face in framing school goals and expectations in rural and urban schools in Asante Akim North Municipality of the Ashanti Region?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The theoretical framework underpinning the research was derived from the philosophy of instructional leadership by Hallinger and Murphy. According to Murphy and Hallinger, the Instructional leadership definition considers a framework that puts together various functions, processes, and activities. The key components of instructional leadership, according to Hallinger and Lee (2014) and Murphy (1983), include framing school goals and objectives, developing and promoting high expectations of staff for students, assessing and monitoring students' performances, protecting instructional time, Knowledge of curriculum and instructions, promoting curricular

instructions, promoting and supporting instructional improvement, and Supervision and evaluation of instruction (Mohamad, 2014). Setting school goals and expectations is a critical component of the philosophy of our current study, seeking to explore the challenges headteachers face in framing the goals and expectations of basic schools. In higher institutions, goals and expectations are clearly defined in developed and developing countries (Esia-Donkoh, 2014b; Martin et al., 2024). There is a sharp decline in the institutional adoption of the concept and its implementation in basic schools in sub-Saharan Africa, where very little is known about the challenges faced by headteachers, who are seen as managers of the institution (Zickafoose et al., 2024).

2.2. Empirical Review

Esia-Donkoh (2014a) examined the duties of headteachers in Ghanaian public basic schools and found that they are pivotal in aligning school goals with national education policies. The study identified challenges, including inadequate instructional resources, low teacher morale, and socio-economic barriers that affect students' ability to meet expectations. Dorado et al. (2024) studied school heads' competency challenges and found that limited professional development opportunities and high administrative workloads hinder effective goal-setting. These findings are directly applicable to Ghana, where non-instructional duties often consume headteachers' time. Martin et al. (2021) conducted a large-scale study on growth goal-setting in high schools, revealing that instructional support and structured goals positively influenced student engagement (Martin et al., 2021b). While not specific to Ghana, the findings suggest that, with adequate resources and professional support, similar positive outcomes could be achieved in Ghanaian basic schools. Muriuki et al. (2022) investigated Kenyan private primary schools and found that strategic goal-setting, when combined with collaborative planning and monitoring, enhanced academic performance. The parallels with Ghana indicate that structured and inclusive processes could help overcome some contextual challenges (Muriuki et al., 2022).

Finally, Bruhn et al. (2016) conducted a systematic review of goal-setting interventions for students with behavior problems, finding significant improvements in academic and behavioral performance. These insights suggest that integrating behavioral-focused goal-setting approaches could help address student-related barriers to goal attainment in Ghana. School goals and expectations are central to educational planning, guiding teaching, learning, and administrative functions. They outline the intended learning outcomes and set performance standards for students, teachers, and the institution (Smyth, 2020). In basic schools, these goals often encompass academic achievement, moral development, and social skills. However, in Ghana, school goals are shaped by both national education policy requirements and community aspirations, which can sometimes create competing priorities for headteachers (Esia-Donkoh, 2014b). Headteachers are key actors in formulating and implementing school goals, ensuring they align with curriculum requirements and local realities (Tahira, 2020). This role requires balancing administrative duties with instructional leadership, mobilizing stakeholders, and fostering a shared vision.

In Ghana, headteachers are expected to translate broad educational policies into achievable school-level objectives, a process that requires contextual awareness and strategic planning (Esia-Donkoh, 2014b). Goal-setting functions as both an administrative strategy and a motivational tool; therefore, clearly defined, challenging goals can enhance academic engagement and performance (Martin et al., 2021a). Growth goal-setting, in particular, encourages incremental progress and self-improvement. However, implementing such approaches in Ghanaian basic schools is often constrained by limited resources, varying teacher competencies, and inconsistent stakeholder commitment. While goal-setting is critical to school improvement, headteachers encounter multiple barriers. Barrios et al. (2024) identify professional development gaps, bureaucratic demands, and insufficient institutional support as major hindrances. In Ghana, Esia-Donkoh (2014b) points to inadequate teaching and learning resources, low teacher motivation, and socio-economic challenges among students as key obstacles. Conflicting demands from education authorities and community stakeholders can further lead to goal ambiguity and misalignment (Esia-Donkoh, 2014). Parental and community expectations strongly influence school priorities. Parents' and students' aspirations may differ from official curriculum aims, potentially creating tension for school leaders (Smyth, 2020).

In contexts where parents demand quick academic results or prioritize certain subjects, headteachers may struggle to develop balanced and holistic goals. This assessment is particularly challenging in under-resourced schools, where meeting diverse expectations is difficult. International research reinforces the importance of effective goal-setting. In Kenya, Muriuki et al. (2022) found that headteachers' goal-setting strategies significantly affected pupils' academic performance, particularly when goals were collaboratively developed and regularly reviewed. Similarly, Bruhn et al. (2016) highlight that targeted goal-setting interventions can improve both academic and behavioral outcomes, indicating that structured frameworks can help mitigate challenges encountered in diverse educational contexts.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methods

The study methodology has been described in a previous related publication (Ansong et al., 2025). The study adopted a qualitative research design, employing semi-structured questionnaires and interviews as the primary data collection tools. Anchored in an interpretive paradigm, the study sought to understand participants' lived experiences and perspectives regarding the phenomenon under investigation (Ansong et al., 2024). This approach enabled the researchers to capture and analyze participants' diverse views across both rural and urban contexts.

3.2 Population

All headteachers (69), SISOs (8), and Lead teachers (52), totalling 129, constituted the study population in the Asante Akyem.

3.3 Sampling Technique

A purposive maximum variation sampling strategy was employed to capture diverse perspectives across JHS, primary, and KG levels. A multistage procedure was applied in which schools were stratified by level, participants were categorized into headteachers, SISOs, and lead teachers, and schools were further classified by rural–urban location. From a population of 129 staff (69 headteachers, 8 SISOs, and 52 lead teachers) across 69 public schools in the Asante Akim North Municipality, 23 headteachers (18%), 5 SISOs (4%), and 22 lead teachers (18%) were selected. Out of the selected participants, (11) headteachers, (4) SISOs) and (10) lead teachers responded. All participants had more than 15 years of professional experience and provided data through semi-structured questionnaires and interviews

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires and interviews, which provided both breadth and depth of responses. Questionnaires captured demographic details and broad trends, and participants answered them. The questionnaire was responded to while interviews explored participants' instructional leadership practices and experiences in setting school goals and expectations. All interviews were conducted face-to-face at participants' schools, recorded, and transcribed with the aid of the Otter App, with participants' consent. The interviews were concluded after reaching saturation.

The data were analyzed through a manual, thematic process. Transcripts were coded using short phrases drawn from participants' own words and questionnaire responses. Overlapping codes were reduced, and related codes were clustered under broader themes to form the analytic framework. This process involved two steps: identifying dominant themes and refining codes in relation to those themes, ensuring consistency across participants.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

The primary ethical concern for this study was the confidentiality and privacy of the information. Additionally, autonomy, that is, the choice to participate voluntarily and withdraw, was given to the participants to make individual decisions. The study team ensured that all collected information remained private and confidential. Data was securely stored to prevent leakage and unauthorized dissemination. All participants were given full details about the study and an informed consent form to sign after they were allowed to ask questions. Special permissions to conduct the study were obtained from the Municipal Education Office of Asante Akim North in the Ashanti Region and the Akenten Appiah-Menka University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development (AAMUSTED).

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

Responses from the questionnaires revealed that some teachers lack the necessary coaching and orientation to develop school goals. Aware of the vision and mission statement, identified the challenges. Also, in situations where the vision and mission had been developed, they were not shared among the school community. Difficulty in setting Simple, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound (SMART) goals, mission, and vision statements was also cited as a challenge. Regarding expectations, the predominant factors were financial and the unavailability of the necessary textbooks. The following comments were provided to support the assertion:

USCB2 explained that:

Some of the headteachers needed coaching on how to write the goals of the school. The vision and mission statement is not shared among the staff. They cannot provide the needed textbooks for the teachers to use to teach

USCC3 added that:

The headteachers need orientation on how to set an achievable goal. The staff does not buy into the vision

USCA1 indicated that:

Few have the challenge of setting SMART goals for their school. Because some did not state SMART goal implementation became a problem for them

RSCD1 highlighted:

The difficulty is in setting realistic and achievable goals within a time frame. Lack of resources. Some teachers have biases against creative students. Lack of adequate funds to organize in-service training for teachers

Furthermore, the headteachers commented on the ambitiousness of the goals, willingness to adhere to the goals, unsustainable government policies, and inadequate teaching and learning material as some of the challenges facing the framing goal, and high expectations of the headteachers. They further pointed out the negative attitude of some teachers and stakeholders. The comments below were provided by headteachers UHSA1, RHSP5D, UHSH8 and RHSN3:

UHSA1 pointed out that:

Setting over-ambitious goals. Reluctance to change and adherence to the goals set. Challenges include financial indiscipline on the part of teachers and learners, and the availability of infrastructure, Difficulty in changing old ways of doing things

RHSP5 further stated that:

The unsustainable government policies that directly affect the set goal of individual schools. Inadequate teaching and learning resources

UHSH8 indicated that:

Goal creation has both external and internal factors. Dynamic and complex environment and improper reward system some of the teachers and stakeholders are not subject to change; this has become a challenge in implementing the goals and objectives of the school

RHSN3 opined that:

Involvement of stakeholders like the teachers, parents, and pupils was not encouraging. Finding clear, realistic, and futuristic purposes for the school

UHSJ10 remarked that:

It was a very new policy to the teachers and was a lot relevant, but knowing it is their own will makes them buy into it

In addition, the study revealed individual differences, a lack of teacher support, and a lack of technical expertise in setting goals. A lead teacher pointed out financial factors and, to some extent, the students' academic ability as challenges in setting high expectations. A lead teacher's opinion was that the headteacher lacked the scholarly capacity to set goals and expectations for the school. The lead teachers noted the comments below:

ULSI9 acknowledged that:

Some of the teachers sometimes do not give their full support to the headteachers due to the concept of individual differences. Financial constraints and limited human resources

ULSF6 expressed that:

Inadequate or a lack of expertise in goal-setting Resources for implementing the goals and objectives are limited

RLSO2 explained that:

Insufficient funds to achieve the goals and a lack of effective communication. Some parents and students were not ready to accept and go by these goals, vision, and mission

Responses from the interview suggested that, in some areas, the teachers have not yet received orientation on the mission and vision statements, and in other areas, they have framed them but haven't been able to abide by them. The comments of the individuals are as follows:

I am a new headteacher, and when I came here, there was no mission or vision statement. When I asked the teachers, they told me that they had not received any orientation on the mission and vision statement
(RHSR7)

We don't have any vision or mission statement, and have not framed any goals for the school, because we have not received any orientation on it, and we do not know how to go about it
(RHSS8)

Initially, they had a problem, but what we told them was that they should frame it following their vision statement of GES and the mission statement. With that of GES, there were some challenges, but we did our corrections, and it's normal, I may say, hopefully they are abiding by it. They are abiding by it, not 100% (USCC3)

We have because we are a mission school, we were able to frame our mission and vision outside of the church's own, and it was not too difficult (RHSQ6)

The results have demonstrated that some of the challenges headteachers face in framing school goals and expectations include parents' inability to participate in goal-setting and instability in students' performance. Some of the interviewees commented that

The school has a vision and mission statement, but as for goals and expectations, we don't have. One of the challenges that we have in framing goals and expectations is the lack of participation of parents (UHSD4)

One of the challenges that we envisage in framing goals and expectations is the noninvolvement of parents and students' unstable performance (ULSF6)

Another challenge was that, while some schools may have formal vision and mission statements, these statements are often neglected and not effectively communicated to teachers and staff. It was further illustrated by mentioning that if you were to ask a teacher if they know the school's vision, they would struggle to provide even a single word or sentence from it.

What I'm trying to say is that some schools have the vision, all right, they have the mission statement printed, but pasted in the headteacher's office. You ask a teacher. Do you know the school vision? Give me one statement, one sentence, or one line, just one word in your school vision? I did it in my school. You asked them just give me one statement, one word, and he cannot mention it, which means the vision statement is on the headteacher's table. (RHSU10)

Table 1

Thematic Analysis of the Challenges in Setting School Goals and Expectations (Questionnaire)

Participant Details	Quotes	Code	Profile of Participants
UHSA1	Setting overly ambitious goals. Reluctance to change and adherence to the goals set. Difficulty in changing old ways of doing things	Ambitious Goal Setting, Resistance to Change	Female head, 6 years' experience age bracket (40–49)
RHSP5	The unsustainable government policies that directly affect the set goal of individual schools	Government Policy Impact	Male head, 11 years' experience age bracket (50–59)
ULSI9	Some of the teachers sometimes do not give their full support to the headteachers due to the concept of individual differences. Financial constraints and limited human resources	Teacher Support, Individual Differences	Male lead teacher, 2 years' experience age bracket (20–29)
ULSF6	Some of the teachers sometimes do not give their full support to the headteachers due to the concept of individual differences. Resources for implementing the goals and objectives are limited	Resource Constraints	Male lead teacher, 4 years' experience age bracket (30–39)
RLSI9	Inadequate or a lack of expertise in goal-setting. Resources for implementing the goals and objectives are limited	Individual Differences	Male lead teacher, 7 years' experience age bracket (30–49)
RLSO2	Insufficient funds to achieve the goals and a lack of effective communication	Challenges in Effective Communication	Female lead teacher, 3 years' experience age bracket (30–39)
RLSO2	Some parents and students were not ready to accept and go by these goals, vision, and mission	Resistance from Parents and Students to Goals, Vision, and Mission	Female lead teacher, 5 years' experience age bracket (30–39)
USCB2	Some of the headteachers needed coaching on how to write the goals of the school. The vision and mission statement is not shared among the staff	Coaching on Goal Writing	Male SISO, 19 years' experience age bracket (50–59)
USCC3	The headteachers need orientation on how to set an achievable goal. The staff does not buy into the vision	Staff Unawareness, Goal-Setting Orientation	Male SISO, 5 years' experience age bracket (39–49)
RSCD1	The difficulty in setting realistic and achievable goals within a time frame	Vision Alignment Lack, Goal Setting Struggles	Male SISO, 7 years' experience age bracket (49–59)

Table 2*Thematic Analysis of the Challenges in Setting School Goals and Expectations (Interview)*

Participant Details	Quotes	Code	Profile of Participants
UHSD4	The school has a vision and a mission statement, but as for goals and expectations, we don't have. One of the challenges that we have in framing goals and expectations is the lack of participation of parents	Absence of Defined Goals and Expectations with Challenges in Implementation	Male head, 2 years' experience age bracket (30–39)
ULSF6	One of the challenges that we face in framing goals and expectations is the noninvolvement of parents and students in the school	Challenges in Framing Goals and Expectations: Parental Participation and Student Performance	Female lead teacher, 3 years' experience age bracket (30–39)
RHSR7	I am a new headteacher, and when I came here, there was no mission or vision statement. When I asked the teachers, they told me that they had not received any orientation on the mission and vision statement	Absence of Mission and Vision Statements with Limited Orientation	Female head, 2 years' experience age bracket (30–39)
RHSQ6	We have, because we are a mission school, we were able to frame our mission and vision outside of the church's own; it was not too difficult	Seamless Alignment of School Mission and Vision with Church Mission	Male head, 13 years' experience age bracket (50–59)
RHSS8	We don't have any vision or mission statement, and have not framed any goals for the school because we have not received any orientation on it, and we do not know how to go about it	Challenges in setting school goals and expectations	Female head, 3 years' experience age bracket (40–49)
USCC3	Initially, they had a problem, but what we told them was that they should frame it following their vision statement of GES, and that of the mission statement, with that of GES. So, there were some challenges, but we did our corrections, and it's normal, I may say. Hopefully, they are abiding by it? They are abiding by it, not 100%	Challenges in setting school goals and expectations	Male SISO, 5 years' experience age bracket (30–49)

4.2 Discussion

This study examined the challenges headteachers face in setting school goals and expectations across rural and urban schools in the Asante Akim North Municipality. The data, drawn from semi-structured questionnaires and interviews with headteachers, lead teachers, and School Improvement Support Officers (SISOs), revealed a consistent pattern of issues that hinder the formulation and implementation of school goals. These issues were categorized into the following major themes, as shown in Tables 1 and 2: ambitious and unclear goals, resource constraints, policy and curriculum instability, limited expertise and orientation, weak stakeholder engagement, and the absence or neglect of mission and vision statements. In schools where goals had been set, many were described as either overly ambitious or too vague. For instance, some schools aimed to achieve high performance standards without considering the lack of resources or time constraints. Others articulated broad aspirations such as "improving academic excellence" without identifying specific targets or strategies. Such goals created challenges in monitoring progress and hindered accountability. Headteachers acknowledged the difficulty in prioritizing goals and aligning them with broader institutional and community needs (Hallinger & Lee, 2014). The lack of mission and vision statements emerged as a significant barrier. While some schools had developed these statements, they were not communicated to teachers and integrated into daily practices. In other schools, especially those in rural areas, such statements were completely absent. Teachers reported that they were not oriented toward any school goals, leaving them without a shared sense of direction. The absence of mission and vision statements undermines not only the school's strategic focus but also its ability to foster a culture of accountability and ownership among staff (Godwyll et al., 2016).

The second dominant theme was the severe resource shortage. Headteachers consistently cited insufficient funding, poor infrastructure, and a lack of teaching and learning materials as obstacles to effective goal setting. Newly established schools were particularly disadvantaged, often operating without adequate classrooms, furniture, or instructional materials. The absence of ICT facilities was noted as a significant setback, given the increasing

integration of digital learning into national education policies. These deficiencies limited schools' ability to pursue ambitious targets, forcing headteachers to lower expectations or abandon plans altogether (Ellis, 2025). Headteachers also highlighted the destabilizing effect of frequent policy shifts and curriculum reforms. Rapid changes in government directives often disrupted the continuity of school planning (Ansong et al., 2025). For example, new curriculum frameworks were sometimes introduced without adequate preparation, training, or resources, leaving schools uncertain about long-term expectations. Respondents described these changes as "unsustainable," noting that schools often adopted goals in response to directives rather than through deliberate planning. This instability weakened confidence in goal-setting efforts and discouraged innovation at the school level (Shaked, 2021). Another significant barrier was the lack of expertise among headteachers in formulating effective goals. Respondents indicated that many headteachers had not received systematic training in goal setting and strategic planning. SISOs and lead teachers noted that headteachers often lacked the skills to frame realistic, measurable objectives, instead relying on general aspirations.

The lack of capacity-building opportunities, such as workshops or professional coaching, limited school leaders' ability to apply structured goal-setting frameworks, such as SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). As a result, school goals were often vague and time-bound (Hallinger & Lee, 2014). Stakeholder participation was also found to be weak. Many headteachers reported limited parental involvement in decision-making and insufficient support from School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). Teachers were often excluded from the process of setting school goals, leading to low ownership and inconsistent implementation. Urban schools reported parental disengagement, while rural schools struggled with a total lack of awareness of school vision and mission statements. This lack of collaboration reduced the collective commitment needed to achieve school objectives (Erasmus et al., 2014).

The findings of this study contrast with earlier research that reported greater effectiveness in school goal setting. For example, Erasmus et al. (2014) observed that headteachers in the Saboba locality formulated concise and measurable goals. Similarly, Hallinger and Lee (2014) and Shaked (2021) emphasized that effective instructional leaders typically frame clear, measurable, and time-bound goals. The divergence in findings suggests that time-bound factors such as resource availability, policy stability, and stakeholder engagement play a critical role in the success of goal-setting practices. At the same time, the results are consistent with Godwyll et al. (2016) who found that Ghanaian headteachers often lack the training and expertise to foster a shared vision among staff. Kennedy-Rogers and McClain (2020) further observed that the extensive expectations placed on school leaders requiring them to serve simultaneously as instructional leaders. Again, they discover that, the deficiencies of central office practices were school level goals and strategies. Similarly, Salfi (2011) noted that principals frequently face institutional and contextual constraints that impede the translation of vision into actionable objectives.

The study's findings also align with those of Palmer and Wehmeyer (2003), who found that the ability to set and achieve goals requires structured support, a condition often absent in Ghanaian schools. More recently, Shogren et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of scaffolding self-determination skills, including goal setting, in educational contexts, a gap mirrored in the lack of training for headteachers. Likewise, Cooney and Cohen (2024) emphasized that leadership effectiveness in schools is mediated by leaders' capacity to translate policy into practice, a skill hindered by frequent reforms and resource shortages. Tahira (2020) further stressed that sustainable school improvement depends on aligning institutional goals with contextual realities, underscoring the challenges headteachers face in the Ghanaian setting. Interestingly, some schools in this study demonstrated alignment between their goals and those of external bodies such as religious institutions.

These cases suggest that strong external monitoring and partnerships can help schools overcome some of the challenges of goal framing. The findings underscore several important implications for educational leadership and policy in Ghana. First, the lack of expertise in goal setting calls for targeted professional development for headteachers, lead teachers, and SISOs. Second, the absence of mission and vision statements suggests a need for systemic monitoring to ensure that all schools establish clear goals. Third, the instability of education policies points to the need for greater continuity and consultation in curriculum reforms. Fourth, the resource shortages highlight the importance of equitable funding and infrastructural support, particularly for new schools and those in rural areas. Finally, the weakness of stakeholder engagement emphasizes the need for stronger partnerships between schools, parents, and local communities.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study has shown that headteachers in the Asante Akim North Municipality face significant challenges in setting school goals and expectations. These challenges include the absence of mission and vision statements, inadequate resources, policy instability, limited expertise, weak stakeholder engagement, and overly ambitious or vague goals within the schools. Ensuring the success of every kind of curriculum, the setting of school goals and

expectations is indispensable. Headteachers' limited expertise in goal setting might affect the implementation of the curriculum. The Ghana Education Service, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, could organise in-service training, seminars, and workshops for headteachers on setting achievable goals for their schools. Resources should be budgeted to support schools' effort to set goals and expectations to improve daily school management. In conclusion, the study has identified reasons for the challenges Headteachers face in framing school goals and expectations. The reasons were resistance to change and difficulties in adapting to established practice by some teachers, government policies that impact on goals that are not sustainable, and the setting of over-ambitious goals that the school cannot achieve. On the contrary, it was identified that some teachers lack the expertise in setting goals and expectations for the school. Other reasons identified were financial constraints and a lack of resources to aid in the implementation of the goals and expectations

5.2 Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that there should be an orientation on policy for goal setting, and that workshops and seminars be organised on how to set school goals and objectives to address the deficiencies that exist. Monitoring activities should be established to ensure that all schools have achievable goals and objectives and abide by them.

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