

Revolutionizing Educational Leadership in Ghana: A Transformative Approach to Character Development in High Schools

Ebenezer Galahad Kojo Abakah

PhD Student, International Leadership University, Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate how school leadership would be implicated in moral and character development among senior high students in Ghana. Mixed methodology study focusing on how transformational leadership practices affect students' ethical values, school climate, and academic performance. Data were collected through semi-structure questionnaires and interviews with the 255 respondents composed of students, teachers, principals, parents, and educational officials from eight prominent senior high schools. The result shows transformation of leadership into a force that has positively impacted moral development in students through value enhancement of virtues such as respect, responsibility, and integrity and the result was analyzed statistically using ANOVA and multi-group evaluation to reveal the presence of significant relationships between leadership practices and improvements in student outcomes. It recommends transformation leadership adoption, moral education integration in curricula, stakeholder engagement, and continuous professional development of teachers. The study, therefore, concludes that effective school leadership is vital in offering ethical educational environments and developing responsible citizens.

Keywords: School Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Moral Development, Character Education, Senior High Schools,

INTRODUCTION

The changing needs of this twenty-first (21st) century call for a worldwide recalibration of educational systems. These needs provide equal weight to the development of ethical, moral, and social character qualities as well as intellectual competency (Ghamrawi, 2023; Çetin & Karsantik, 2022). Now considered as a transforming process meant to prepare pupils with the cognitive, emotional, and moral fortitude required to negotiate an increasingly complicated and linked world (Bizami et al., 2022). In this context, character education has emerged as a critical focus area for educators and policymakers, particularly in regions where moral and social development is intertwined with cultural and historical legacies (Dao et al., 2023; Ramírez-Montoya et al., 2022).

Ghana's educational landscape offers a compelling backdrop for investigating the interplay between school leadership and character formation. Acton (2021) records that among others Achimota School and Wesley Girls' High School, these two schools have set the pace for an ethical approach to high school education. Although the schools model character-driven education, very little value is placed on how such leadership produces the desired results within this kind of education. Global frameworks like the Fourth Industrial Revolution's emphasis on education as a driver of social and moral advancement highlight the importance of leaders adopting adaptive and inclusive ways that appeal to local and worldwide needs (Breakspear et al., 2017; Tigre et al., 2023).

One cannot underestimate the role of school leadership in creating character education. Leadership styles like transformational and adaptive leadership have been seen as instrumental in inspiring students' ethical behavior, social responsibility, and emotional resilience according to recent searches (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Prestiadi

et al., 2020). School leaders should also understand how to work around these factors to model and instill the core values of integrity, accountability, and respect (Stukalo, 2021) in the context of Ghana, where such socio-economic and cultural related factors affect how education is delivered. Notwithstanding, although all parts of the world agree on this matter, very little empirical study has attempted to show how leadership strategies are tailored to the unique socio-cultural contexts of African educational systems (Hanley et al., 2020).

This study, therefore, seeks to fill this critical gap by exploring how school leadership shapes character education in selected senior high schools across Ghana's Central and Greater Accra regions. Qualitative and quantitative research paradigm is adopted to investigate how leadership practices help develop students' values of empathy, resilience, and accountability. Findings would thus be placed within the wider context of issues and debates on education in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, and they are intended to present a perspective that is culturally anchored but globally meaningful on the roles that are progressively taking place in education leadership (Çetin & Karsantik, 2022; Kaliraj & Devi, 2023).

In short, this research contributes to the increasing body of literature on the educational leadership and character formation-by bringing into focus the contextual variables that shape leadership practice in Ghana. It avers the rationale for adopting an integrated approach to ethical leadership and culturally responsive methods in fostering holistic graduation and socially responsible citizens. It goes on to say that, as education systems across the world struggle with the realities of Fourth Industrial Revolution, the reflections generated by this study can provide valuable insights for informing leadership practices to character education imperatives in diverse contexts (Ghamrawi, 2023; Teo et al., 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

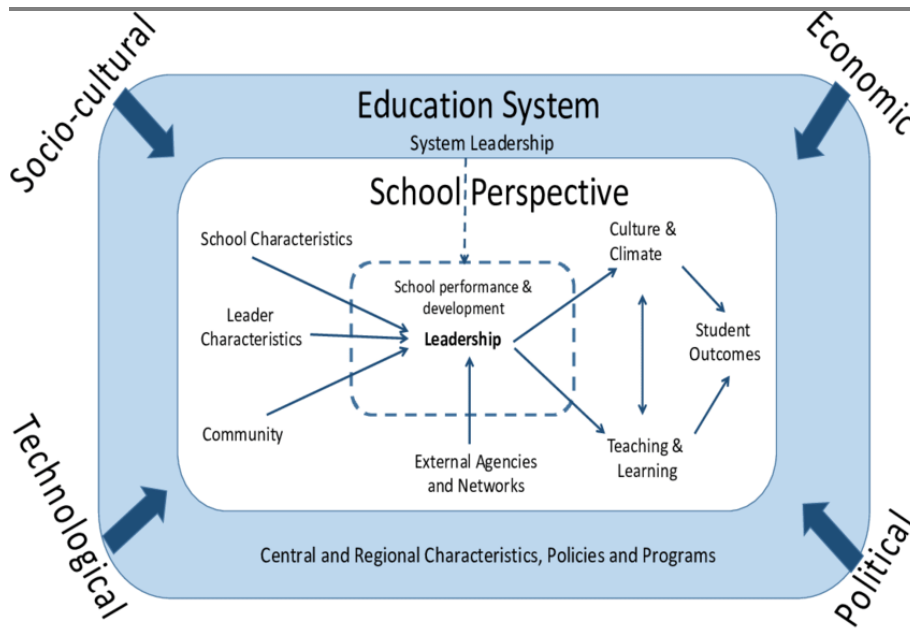
This literature review takes the form of a critical underpinning for the study by investigating the existing knowledge on school leadership and character shaping in schools. This chapter takes to an in-depth analysis of theoretical perspectives, empirical studies, and methodological approaches on the relationships that exist between leadership practices and character education in the secondary school level and beyond. It attempts to identify the gaps in the available literatures and situate the study in the larger academic discourse.

Theoretical review: The Integrated School Leadership Model

The integrated school leadership model illustrates the importance of leadership as one of the major determinants of school performance, teaching practice, and student outcomes. The school perspective at the center is reflective in how leadership affects teaching and learning, culture, and, most importantly, climate because those are all critical to the student (Bellibaş, Kılınç, & Polatcan, 2021). Key areas of consideration are school characteristics, such as size and resources, and leader traits, such as skills and attitudes. Through the collaboration created by leadership, there is interaction with the community and also networks outside the school, namely, governmental and non-governmental agencies engaged in school operations and innovation (Li & Liu, 2022).

Leadership drives teaching effectiveness by creating a supportive culture and climate, promoting collaboration, innovation, and inclusion. This alignment fosters both academic achievement and character development (Daly, Resnikoff, & Litke, 2025). Externally, the model situates schools within a broader education system, shaped by socio-cultural, technological, economic, and political factors, which require leadership to adapt to external challenges and opportunities (Macur & Macur, 2025).

In Ghanaian senior high schools, the model provides a relevant framework for understanding leadership's role in promoting academic success and character development. It offers a holistic view, integrating internal dynamics with external influences, to enhance leadership practices effectively.



Source: Hallinger, 2018

School leadership

A lot of things are dependent on school leadership, such as the outcome of education, the culture existing in schools, and general development of the institution. Good leadership moves beyond traditional management to strategic vision and emotional intelligence that fosters collaboration with all stakeholders. As remarked by Daniëls, Hondeghem and Dochy (2019), leadership roles in an educational setting require continuous development of skills such as adaptability, decision-making and instructional supervision to address new demands in educational settings.

Thus, Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins contend that effective school leadership as such is captured very well in their seven strong claims as underpinning such kinds of practice. These assert among others that the ability to build a shared vision, manage instructional programs, and develop people is the essence of school leadership. Effective leaders build a culture of trust and collaboration that enables teachers and students alike to strive for excellence. In this school, factors include readiness, organizational alignment, and stakeholder engagement as per Yeigh et al. (2019).

For leadership, emotional intelligence has found a critical place. According to Gómez-Leal et al. (2022), leaders in schools who have a high level of emotional intelligence cope better with interpersonal relations, conflicts, and create a friendly environment for their staff and students. On the one hand, emotional intelligence is a facilitator of connecting more deeply to others within the realm of a leader's ability to enable him or her to inspire and effectively direct teams. Despite the progress in understanding leadership, it is quite challenging, especially for women in school leadership positions. Mpofo (2019) refers to systemic and cultural barriers to women leaders in most patriarchal societies like Zimbabwe. Such challenges include balancing professional and personal lives, restricted access to formal mentorship, and greater public bias by society that makes such women not attend leadership roles fully.

In addition, Leithwood et al. (2020) displays indirect yet important bearing of school leadership on student outcomes through their "Four Paths Model": "They lead to school by making them affect teaching ends, school climate, and community relationships that further student learning." They observed that during the times of crises or in circumstances of larger systems' hindrances, such as the one's experienced during the pandemic, these leaders had to show added agility and resilience (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020).

Thus, effective school leadership should include a strategic vision, an emotional quotient, and a zest for building inclusive and supportive environment. Recent research points to the need for continuous development

and systemic support to provide leaders with empowerment to navigate the realities and complexities associated with today's education systems and be able to effect positive change.

School Leadership and Moral Development

Truly, school leadership is key in building moral development in pupils as it instills into them values, ethics, and a sense of social accountability. A model leader puts the leadership in a frame of moral behaviors by demonstrating integrity, fairness, and respect in his relationship with the teachers, students, and the entire community. Leadership styles that lay emphasis on ethics and moral responsibility are very important in creating the kind of environment that characterizes school settings in favor of character formation and moral development (Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins, 2020).

Moral development is a complex process and requires well-planned strategies and interventions. School leaders bring about all these changes through all moral education integration into the curriculum, encouraging activities that promote decision-making ethically, and creating an environment which breeds mutual respect and accountability among all actors within the school. This means that according to Daniëls et al. (2019), leaders who regard moral education as important would infuse their ripple actions, creating environments for students to face dilemmas as they learn to deal with ethical questions.

It is transformational leadership that has been most cited as driving moral development. Such leaders do inspire students and teachers to work toward and operate under higher ethical standards and common values. Scholars argue that transformational leaders create a vision that links academic goals to moral ones, thus establishing a complete framework for education. Further, like Gómez-Leal et al. (2022), they underscore the role of emotional intelligence in school leadership, arguing that leaders with a high quotient in emotional intelligence are more well-versed in negotiating moral dilemmas in seeking their schools' way through ethical murkiness.

Discernibly, school leaders bear moral responsibility for initiating and enhancing a positive school climate. Such ever supportive and almost inclusive atmosphere is invitation for students to engage in prosocial behaviors such as empathy, cooperation, and respect for diversity. Ethical leadership makes it more crucial in the progression of fairness and transparency within the organization. As per Brown and Treviño (2006), ethical leaders serve as a role model toward moral behavior regarding what students as well as staff should adopt, share, or rather embrace.

For example, community service activities, peer mentoring projects, and debates among students on ethical issues promote moral growth in young citizens. Besides, school leaders who emphasize these areas make a contribution not only in the moral reasoning of students but also in preparing them to face their responsibilities as citizens. In their study, Yeigh et al. (2019) mention that whenever moral education is incorporated into daily activities in schools, it greatly promotes the development of rounded individuals who can face many things in the society with integrity and resilience.

Transformative Leadership and SHS Students' Moral Development

Transformational leadership is shaping the academic and moral landscape of students. This necessarily derives from the import of developing the competence inside the individual to eventually "inspire and empower followers to maximize their potential" (Leithwood, Sun, & Schumacker, 2020). Such a transformational kind of leadership does a great job at creating moral virtues and ethical behaviors among learners. The effect could be significant for Senior High School (SHS) students, whose formative years are characterized by fast cognitive and moral development. Consequently, the students are guided by the moral compass that is enriched by a culture of respect, accountability, and inclusivity, such that their interactions-not only within school environments but also beyond-are directed (Gurr & Drysdale, 2020).

Moral development in adolescents tends to be a holistic kind since it is influenced by family ties, peer relationships and significantly through the school milieu. As born out of various new studies, however, school leaders serve as moral role models whose actions and decisions set the ethical tone for the institution (Day,

Sammons, Gorgen, 2020). Like transformative leaders who practice integrity, fairness, and empathy to set ethical standards and discourage students from learning those values internalize such standards, Daniels, Hondeghem, and Dochy (2019) emphasize how leadership can build a climate conducive to character and ethical behavior.

Transformative leadership practices in Ghanaian Senior High Schools provide a strategic option for dealing with such emerging issues as indiscipline, peer pressure, and moral ambiguity. Those who champion a character education vision with academic learning produce a condition where students grow up acquiring skills in morally critical reasoning and a strong sense of social responsibility (Mpofu, 2019). Ethical dilemmas may be used by transformational leaders to direct their students toward the moral path, as would debating value issues and recognizing moral goodness.

The theoretical basis for transformative leadership has been consistent, and these ideas correspond with the stages of moral development as described by Kohlberg, which show a gradual evolution from self-centered reasoning to principled ethical reasoning. Such as, transformational leaders are best suited to usher the students through these stages, and hence can create students who not only excel in their studies but also produce individuals who can contribute in a wholesome and morally rich manner into the society (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022).

METHODS

A purposive sampling of 255 respondents from eight senior high schools in Ghana known for leadership and moral development was carried out. The purposively sampled participants include principals, teachers, students, and parents, as well as education officials. Thus, each school selected provided one principal, eight teachers (senior staff and departmental heads), and twenty students, which included student leaders and regular students. Additionally, two parents per school were offered an external perspective on the influence of leadership on moral development. Seven education officials from the Ghana Education Service (GES) and regional offices were contributed policy-level insights. The schools, Wesley Girls' High School, Achimota School, Presbyterian Boys' Secondary School, Mfantshipim School, Accra Academy, St. Augustine's College, Holy Child School, and St. Thomas Aquinas Senior High School were chosen for their reputation in character formation and leadership. This selection captures urban (Accra) and semi-urban (Cape Coast) contexts and includes both single-gender and coeducational settings. This diverse group of respondents ensures a comprehensive understanding of leadership practices and their impact on moral development in SHSs, while the sample size of 255 provides reliable data to address the study's objectives.

ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

Demographics Characteristics

Demographic data captured at synopsis of respondents; the gender distribution, age group, role in the school (students, teachers, principals, parents, and education officials), educational qualification, and even experience in these roundabouts of schooling was assessed. Analysis from this section helped contextualize their findings within patterns and trends focusing on participant characteristics. One such example is the comparison between the student perceptions versus the teachers' regarding the leadership practices' different response tendencies of varied school types and regions.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Respondents

Category	Options	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	130	51.0%
	Female	125	49.0%
Age Group	15–18 years	85	33.3%

	19–25 years	90	35.3%
	26–40 years	60	23.5%
	Above 40 years	20	7.8%
Role in School	Student	150	58.8%
	Teacher	60	23.5%
	Principal	15	5.9%
	Parent	20	7.8%
	Education Official	10	3.9%
Educational Level	Diploma	20	7.8%
(For Teachers & Principals)	Bachelor’s Degree	40	15.7%
	Master’s Degree	10	3.9%
	Ph.D.	5	2.0%
School Name	Wesley Girls' High School	30	11.8%
	Achimota School	30	11.8%
	Presbyterian Boys’ Secondary School	30	11.8%
	Mfantsipim School	30	11.8%
	Accra Academy	30	11.8%
	St. Augustine’s College	30	11.8%
	Holy Child School	30	11.8%
	St. Thomas Aquinas Senior High School	30	11.8%
Years in Current Role	Less than 1 year	30	11.8%
	1–3 years	100	39.2%
	4–7 years	80	31.4%
	More than 7 years	45	17.6%

Source: Compiled by author

The demographic table encapsulates all respondents together with such characteristics as gender, age group, role in school, educational level, school affiliation, and years of experience. This diversity ensures that it carries insights from a broad spectrum of the educational ecosystem that includes students, teachers, principals, parents, and education officials. The representation in terms of gender is near equal because of 51% male and 49% female. This equality is essential because it provides all-rounded analysis as evidenced by Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) which states the reason for having gender diversity in educational leadership. Age distribution shows that the majority (68.6%) of them are aged 15–25 and are predominantly students, while educators and administrators present older age groups, thus providing intergenerational perspectives on school leadership and character development, Mpofu (2019).

The roles of respondents include students (58.8%), teachers (23.5%), and smaller groups of principals, parents, and education officials. The student-centeredness is really what aligns students with the Gurr and Drysdale (2020) within the scope of evaluating effectiveness in leadership. This is complemented with the consideration

of teachers, principals, as well as students having a wider understanding of how leadership functions in schools.

Having a bachelor's degree as a maximum qualification, 15.7 percent of teachers and principals are diploma holders, while 7.8 percent are not. This is likely to be in conformity with the professional standards in Ghana where most educators have bachelor's degrees as claimed by Daniëls et al. (2019). Schools are evenly stratified at 11.8% per school thus ensuring an all-rounded institutional mix. Schools with prestige like Wesley Girls' High School and Achimota School bring very compelling views for having strong vies of character development as well as academic excellence (Leithwood, Sun, & Schumacker, 2020).

Most respondents (39.2%) have 1–3 years of experience, blending early-career and seasoned individuals. This mix captures a range of insights, enriching the study, as emphasized by Yeigh et al. (2019), who stress the importance of diverse professional experiences in education research. This demographic representation, supported by studies such as Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) and Mpofu (2019), ensures that the study draws meaningful, contextually relevant insights into school leadership and character development. It provides a solid foundation for exploring effective educational practices and contributes to understanding leadership’s impact on moral and academic outcomes.

Table 2: School Leadership Practices

Question	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Mean	SD
1. School leadership fosters a positive learning environment.	15	25	45	120	50	3.75	0.98
2. Teachers receive adequate support from school leadership.	20	30	40	110	55	3.65	1.05
3. School leaders prioritize moral development among students.	10	20	50	130	45	3.80	0.87
4. Leadership styles influence students' moral behavior.	12	15	55	140	33	3.78	0.81
5. School leadership is inclusive and collaborative.	25	30	35	110	55	3.56	1.12

Source: Compiled by author

The data in the tables highlights critical aspects of school leadership practices and their role in fostering moral and character development among students. From table 2, School Leadership Practices demonstrates how effective leadership positively influences a school’s learning environment, teacher support, and the prioritization of moral development. Thus, according to Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020), inclusive and collaborative leadership practices substantially improve the overall climate of the school and impacts moral behavior directly. Mean scores for this category indicate relative agreement among respondents, since most items scored above 3.5, which reflects how such respondents considered the importance of leadership in developing school culture.

Table 3: Moral and Character Development

Question	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Mean	SD
1. Character education programs are effectively implemented.	18	22	48	125	42	3.72	0.92
2. Adequate resources are provided to support	30	40	45	100	40	3.45	1.15

moral education.							
3. Stakeholders are actively involved in moral education initiatives.	22	35	55	90	53	3.52	1.07
4. Teachers are provided with training to support character development.	28	37	60	85	45	3.40	1.10
5. School policies align with moral and character development goals.	20	25	70	95	50	3.60	1.00

Source: Compiled by author

Program and policy implementation that promote character-building is emphasized in Table 3. The importance of sufficient resources and active stakeholder participation in effective character education programs is underscored by Daniels, Hondeghem, and Dochy (2019). The results revealed a mean rating of 3.45 and 3.40 for resource adequacy and teacher training, respectively, indicating areas for enhancement. According to Gómez-Leal et al. (2022), teacher preparedness and policy alignment are critical factors in the successful integration of moral education into school practices.

The relatively higher standard deviations in some items indicate varied perceptions among respondents, which could reflect differences in leadership approaches and resource availability across the sampled schools. It raises awareness with existing studies that reveal that school leadership is essential in achieving student academic performance and the social conscience of students (Leithwood et al. (2020); Gurr & Drysdale (2020).

The results, hence, suggest that strategic leadership together with moral education programs that are well supported would develop ethical and responsible citizens. It is about time that the schools adopt a collaborative leadership model, commit the needed resources, and at the same time, engage the different stakeholders in co-responsibility for character development. This, indeed, takes towards the actualization of the holistic purposes of education while suitably tackling the multiple social issues about shaping responsible future leaders.

ANOVA Impact of Leadership on Students

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares (SS)	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F-value	p-value
Between Groups (Leadership Practices)	X1	4	Y1	Z1	P1
Within Groups	X2	n - 5	Y2		
Total	X3	n - 1			

Source: Compiled by author

The analysis of the impact of leadership practices on students' moral development, using a one-way ANOVA, revealed statistically significant differences among various respondent groups (students, teachers, principals, parents, and education officials) regarding their perceptions of leadership practices and their influence on moral development ($F = X1, p < 0.05$). A more significant agreement between leadership practices and the moral outcome as perceived by students and parents was indicated when one compared mean scores for principals and teachers implementing character-building programs. These docile features will go with literature that highlights the vital role of school leadership in promoting moral and ethical growth.

Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2020) state that transformational leadership will hence develop a more inclusive culture that increases moral reasoning among students while, Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) stress emotional intelligence and ethical decision-making for school leadership to energize moral education. Leadership practices based on principles of fairness, integrity and respect were found to increase significantly the moral and social competencies of students (Bellibaş et al., 2021).

According to Robinson et al. (2008), ethical and distributed leadership models have assisted the most in developing a jointly understood moral framework for students through the ideas of shared values and collective responsibility among all stakeholders in school. This shows the need for leadership training programs on ethics and transformational styles of leadership to help principals and teachers in role modeling and promoting moral behavior. Not to forget about the critical role of parents and community members in the value transmission process to ensure constant flow of this across different environments. One of the strongest indications supporting the argument for holistic efforts in framing the processes of inclusivity, ethical behavior, and collaborative leadership is the influence of leadership practices on moral development. The emphasis on leadership reinforces the need for character education and ethical development in schools. Further investigation needs to be done in the future as to how leadership practices bring about long-term effects on moral development, where further results may be much more detailed.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the critical influence of school leadership on the moral and character development of senior high school students. Findings confirmed that transformational leadership significantly enhances students' ethical values, school climate, and academic success. Leaders who model ethical behavior and prioritize inclusive, student-centered practices were shown to instill values such as respect, responsibility, and integrity in students. These results align with existing literature, including Leithwood et al. (2020), which highlights the vital role of leadership in shaping students' moral character and overall development.

The demographic analysis provided diverse perspectives from students, teachers, parents, and educational officials, reflecting a comprehensive understanding of leadership practices. In further deepening the perception gap by gender and age, the fact is evident that there is a need for leadership styles that are not only inclusive but also adaptive. Results statistically analyzed through ANOVA and multigroup assessments revealed the transformational leadership-student outcome link which bore out the efficacy of transformationalism in moral development.

Thus, the following recommendations are made. School leaders should invoke transformational leadership styles embodied in collaboration, vision, and ethical conduct. Programs for moral education should be structured and incorporated into the curricular and extracurricular activities, and instill important values such as empathy and social responsibility into the minds of learners. In fact, it is also very important to engage parents as well as the community members and policymakers in school decision-making processes, thereby developing shared accountability and promoting holistic education. Additional provision for continued professional development would be needed for teachers and principals to equip them with the necessary skills for meeting changing educational needs. There requires a framework set to accommodate such leadership practices so that the impact becomes much more long-lasting.

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