Managing Private Basic Schools in Ghanaian Context: Human Resource Management Challenges of Owner-Managers in Akuapem South Municipality

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the human resource management challenges facing the owner-managers of private basic schools in Akuapem South Municipality in the Eastern Region of Ghana. It was a qualitative study underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm and employed a case study design. The sample of the study comprised eight (8) owner-managers, selected through the maximal variation sampling technique. A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data, which was analysed thematically. The study revealed, among others, that the human resource management challenges facing the owner-managers included a high teacher attrition rate, parents' failure to attend meetings, and the failure of education authorities to perform their expected roles in private school management. The study concluded, among others, that the owner-managers of the private schools face a challenge of retaining teachers, whom they train after recruitment, because of unmet salary expectations. The teachers often move to other schools with relatively higher salaries offered after they are trained, requiring the owner-managers to regularly recruit new teachers. The study, therefore, recommended that the leadership of the private school associations in the municipality should structure the teacher salaries in the area. Making salaries equitable has the potential to ensure teacher retention. Teachers could also be offered promotional or advancement opportunities, which could be aligned with teacher qualifications and salary as a mechanism for their retention.

Key words: Human resource, leadership, management, owner-manager, private school.

INTRODUCTION

The most important asset of every organisation is its human resources. Without human resources, available material resources cannot be utilised for the achievement of the set goals of organisations (Kusi, 2017). It is therefore imperative that leaders of various organisations understand the people they lead by equipping themselves with relevant human resource knowledge, skills and competencies. Human resources may be defined as the top, middle and low-level personnel who possess relevant knowledge, skills, competencies, qualifications and experiences, which may be employed by an organisation to perform the relevant services or carry out its role and responsibilities to achieve set goals (Kusi, 2017; Adam, 2024). Managing human resources in the most effective and efficient manner has a positive impact on an organisation as it contributes towards an increase in performance. Adam (2024) points out that the success of an organisation depends on the quality, commitment, and performance of its workforce. This implies that managers of educational organisations must be well-trained so that they can get the best out of their workforce or human resources. Various tertiary educational institutions in Ghana and other parts of the world recognise the key role played by managers of organisations in ensuring their success and have developed programmes that include human resource management and development modules. It is envisaged that these courses will equip practising or would-be managers of organisations to handle their workforce more professionally and effectively.

Managers of educational organisations in Ghana, including private school owners, have the responsibility of recruiting staff, both teaching and non-teaching, and maintaining favourable conditions of work. The human resource/personnel functions of the private school owners, who in some cases are also leaders of the schools, include recruiting and assigning staff personnel, seeing to their welfare, supervising and evaluating staff performance, and providing opportunity for their personal and professional growth and development (Adam, 2024; Kusi, 2017; Esia-Donkoh, 2014). Performing these functions more effectively would require that the owners be well-trained. The available Annual Report from the Ghana National Council of Private Schools [GNACOP] (2024) (an association of private schools in the country) indicates that most of the private school owners have not undergone relevant professional training in school management, particularly in handling human resources. Many of them have low educational qualifications, yet, in some cases, they manage teachers with higher qualifications. This lack of academic credibility may pose a challenge to their effort to manage human resources. The argument is that without undergoing relevant professional training, the private school owners may face challenges in managing their staff to achieve set goals and, therefore, have to be supported in diverse ways. Abdullah et al. (2009) assigned many reasons for the failure of educational enterprises to achieve their objectives, including inappropriate management of human resources.

Abraham et al. (2018) asserted that the challenges encountered by educational organisations are primarily shaped by the pressures they experience. They further emphasised that managing human resources is a major challenge for all educational institutions. Although the private school owners in the study context seemed to be under-trained in human resource management (HRM), little is known about the challenges they face in such an effort and how they could be supported.

In Ghana, some studies have been conducted into HRM in the educational sector. For example, a study conducted by Abraham, Kusi, and Mensah in 2018 focused on HRM practices and challenges of the Catholic education unit in Kumasi Metropolis. Similarly, a study conducted by Adam (2024) looked at HRM practices and staff work performance in Sagnerigu municipality in the Northern Region, whilst Ampofo (2024) focused on the views and contributions of human resource managers in meeting teacher expectations in some education directorates in the Central Region. Generally, these studies focused on public institutions and directorates, not the private schools. Moreover, the contexts and samples of these studies were the education directorates and

staff, respectively, not the owners of private schools. Methodologically, the study conducted by Abraham, Kusi and Mensah (2018) employed a descriptive survey design, whilst that of Ampofo (2024) and Adam (2024) used a descriptive phenomenology. This present study employed a case study design to explore the challenges the private school owners in Akuapem South Municipality face in managing human resources. Specifically, the study focused on challenges the school owners encounter in managing teachers, parents and pupils, and in working with education authorities in the area.

The study is significant in diverse ways. Firstly, by identifying the challenges in managing human resources, the authorities of the Ghana Education Service in the study area, the GNACOPS, and other relevant agencies or institutions could collaborate to develop relevant training programmes for the owner-managers of the schools to equip them with relevant knowledge, skills and competencies to overcome these challenges. Secondly, the study contributes to the limited existing literature on leadership of private schools in Ghana and HRM in the private school sector in particular. Last but not least, the study could form the basis of a large-scale study on HRM in the private education sector in Ghana.

Akuapem South Municipality in Context
Akuapem South Municipality is located in the southern part of the Eastern Region of Ghana, about 58 kilometres north of Accra, the capital city of Ghana. The Municipality shares common boundaries with Nsawam/Adoagyiri Municipality, south-east by the Kpone Katamanso district; to the south by Ga East Municipality and north-east by the Akuapem North Municipality.

Geographically, the Municipality is characterised by hilly terrain and forest cover, noted for agricultural activities and tourism. The Municipality boasts of some tertiary educational institutions, and a number of public and private secondary and basic schools. Apart from the agricultural activities, some of the inhabitants, who are mainly Akuapems, operate in both the formal and informal sectors of the Ghanaian economy.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Stakeholder Theory (Created Value System)
Stakeholder theory can be defined as a theory that:
> (i) encourages organisations to acknowledge and consider their stakeholders, who exist internally or externally to the organisation; (ii) promotes understanding and managing stakeholder needs, wants, and demands; and thus (iii) represents a holistic and responsible framework that goes beyond the focus of shareholders in decision-making processes, which, in turn, (iv) enables organisations to be strategic, maximise their value creation, and safeguard their long-term success and sustainability (Freeman, 1984).

The theory emphasises the relevance of engaging with stakeholders, both internal and external, who are being affected by the activities of an organisation. In the context of this study, these categories of stakeholders are the staff, pupils and their parents, the education authorities and the private basic schools themselves. The theory emphasises the need to include stakeholders in decision-making and mutual benefits for the success and sustainability of organisations. For the private schools, if the stakeholders fail to participate in the activities and decision-making, there will be challenges, threatening their success and sustainability. Effective leadership and management of the schools involves balancing the interests of diverse stakeholders to ensure that they align with the policies and practices of the schools (Tahira & Haider, 2020).

The theory also highlights the importance of collaboration among stakeholders so that their inputs in the form of participation in the schools' activities, provision of resources, and regulatory guidance could generate meaningful educational outcomes (Mudzingwa, 2021; Tahira & Haider, 2020). These authors believe a collaborative approach to school management could lead to success and sustainability, and help meet the needs and expectations of various stakeholders. This implies that if the private schools in the study context fail to collaborate with stakeholders, there would be challenges that could threaten their success and sustainability.

The theory also highlights the need to consider the needs of various stakeholders in organisations (Narbel & Muff, 2017). It emphasises the need for organisations to generate multiple benefits for different stakeholders (i.e., groups and individuals who can affect or be affected by the organisation (Freeman, 1984). The profit in the form of knowledge and skills generated by the private schools benefits both internal stakeholders (teachers and learners) and external stakeholders (parents and education authorities). These stakeholders can affect and be affected by the school's policies and practices. The owner-managers of the private schools can work collaboratively with stakeholders to promote understanding and meet their diverse needs, make decisions, and strategise to maximise value and protect their long-term success and sustainability. These benefits might be lost if the teachers, learners, parents, and school authorities fail to support the school leaders or organisations. The schools may face challenges in managing the stakeholders, posing a challenge to their sustainability.

The Concept of HRM
HRM refers to the management of people in organisations. According to Anbuoli (2016), it comprises the activities, policies, and practices involved in obtaining, developing, utilising, evaluating, maintaining, and retaining the appropriate number and skill mix of employees to accomplish the organisation's objectives. HRM aims to ensure that the organisation obtains and retains the skilled, committed and well-motivated workforce it needs. This means taking steps to assess and satisfy future people's needs and to enhance and develop the inherent capacities of people – their contributions, potential and employability – by providing learning and continuous development opportunities. To Kusi (2017), the scope of HRM covers staff recruitment and selection procedures, induction, motivation, performance-contingent incentives, compensation systems, staff performance appraisal, as well as management, development and training activities linked to the needs of various organisations.

HRM has several aims, including maximising employees' contributions in order to achieve optimal productivity and effectiveness while at the same time achieving the objectives of individual employees and those of the society; supporting the development of firm-specific knowledge and skills that are the result of organisational learning processes; and enhancing motivation, job engagement and commitment by introducing policies and processes that ensure that people are valued and rewarded for what they do and achieve and for the levels of skill and competence they reach (Kusi, 2017; Anbuoli, 2016). To Dessler (2008), HRM aims to develop and implement policies that balance and adapt to the needs of its stakeholders and provide for the management of a diverse workforce, taking into account individual and group differences in employment, personal needs, work style and aspirations and the provision of equal opportunities for all.

The idea of HRM developed from traditional personnel management, or personnel administration, which was typically used to describe the work of the traditional personnel department (Redman & Wilkinson, 2001; Ampofo, 2024). This development implied an increased importance of strategic management of human resources as a way to success. The transition from personnel administration to HRM also implied integrating managers at all levels, especially line managers, in this process (Guest, 1991; Adam, 2024). HRM reflects the strategic vision of organisations and is fully integrated into the day-to-day management.

In theory, at least, HRM allows managers at all levels to provide customised individual responses to issues, to use positive motivation rather than negative control, to be proactive rather than reactive, and to resolve differences through purposeful negotiation without recourse to an external third party. Employers who are HRM orientated look at how to get the best and the most out of their staff (Adam, 2024; Ampofo, 2024). Educationists claim that effective HRM is the key to the provision of high-quality educational experiences, and those organisations depend for their success on the quality, commitment and

performance of staff who work there. (Kusi, 2017; Esia-Donkoh, 2019)

Basic Education System in Ghana
Ghana is considered a lower-middle-income country, located in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a total population of around 35 million. The country has been experiencing a fluctuating average annual economic growth from 2001 to 2011 of 4 per cent, although growth in 2011 reached over 14 per cent. However, efforts have been made by respective governments to sustain this relatively impressive growth and further the goal of poverty reduction. Ghana recognises the need to improve access to and the quality of basic education.

SABER (2015) reported that 'Education in Ghana is regulated by the Education Act of 2008 (Act 778), which requires all children to complete a free and compulsory cycle of basic education: two years of kindergarten, six years of primary, and three years of junior secondary schooling. Enrolment trends at the basic level in the country have been impressive since 2011, when over 3.8 million children enrolled in primary schools. This number has improved significantly due to numerous interventions put in place by the various respective governments and some non-governmental organisations operating in the country.

Ghana has made substantial progress in expanding access to basic education services due, in part, to the country's financial commitments to education (SABER, 2015). The private education sector has been contributing immensely to the governments' effort by absorbing over forty per cent (40%) of the school-going children in over 24,000 schools in the country, with over 150,000 professional and non-professional teachers (GNACOPS, 2024).

Private Schools in Ghana: Constitutional and Legislative Provisions
Ghana's education sector has undergone significant transformations over the years, with the private sector playing an increasingly vital role. The country's education system has evolved from a colonial-era model to a more inclusive and equitable system, with a growing emphasis on access, quality, and relevance. Within this context, private education has emerged as a critical component of Ghana's education landscape. Private schools in Ghana are equivalent to independent schools in other contexts, including the United Kingdom. Some of the schools in the country are owned and operated by non-government providers and are financed privately, typically through fees (SABER, 2015). Report indicates further that there are others that are government-funded, implying that they are owned and operated by non-government providers but receive government funding.

Constitutional Provision
The 1992 Constitution of Ghana and the Pre-tertiary Education Act 2020 (ACT 1049) provide the legal framework for private education in the country. These laws recognise the importance of private education in promoting access, innovation, and excellence in the education sector. However, they also emphasise the need for regulation and oversight to ensure that private schools meet minimum standards of quality and safety.
Article 25, Clause 2 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana permits any person to establish a private school:

> Every person shall have the right, at his or her own expense, to establish and maintain a private school or schools at all levels and of such categories and in accordance with such conditions as may be provided by law.

This provision is significant, as it recognises the right of individuals and organisations to establish private schools. However, it also emphasises that such schools must operate in accordance with the conditions provided by law. This means that private schools must meet minimum standards of quality and safety, and must be registered and accredited by the relevant authorities.

This article, therefore, gives every person the right to establishment and maintenance, leading to the influx of a number of different categories of private schools in the country. A number of people in the country have taken advantage of the emphasis on 'every person' in the constitutional provision to establish private schools irrespective

of their educational and financial backgrounds. Even people with low academic and professional qualifications have the right to establish their own schools and manage both human and material resources.

Legislative Provisions

The Pre-tertiary Education Act 2020 (ACT 1049) provides further clarity on the establishment and operation of private basic and senior high schools in Ghana. Section 38 of the Act outlines the requirements for establishing a private basic or senior high school. These requirements include obtaining approval from the National Schools Inspectorate Authority, incorporating the school as a corporate body, staffing the school with professionally qualified and licensed teachers, providing the requisite education and training for children, and meeting the standards set by the regulatory bodies of the Ministry of Education. Various sections of the act spell out how the private schools should be regulated. For example, Section 39 of the Act deals with changes in ownership or location of private schools; Section 40 provides for the transfer of private schools to the state; Section 41 outlines the procedures for closing down a private school, whilst Section 42 provides for the withdrawal of approval for private schools that fail to meet the required standards. These suggest that private schools in Ghana are not autonomous – their establishment and management are controlled and regulated by both constitutional and legal provisions.

Models of Private School Education

SABER Pilot Country Report (2015) points out that the private sector engagement in education provision, which is a vibrant mix of non-profit, for-profit and faith-based, has become very prominent in many countries across the globe, including Ghana: The Report identified four most common models of private school service delivery in Ghana, and these are:

1. Independent private schools: schools that are owned and operated by non-governmental providers and are financed privately, typically through fees.
2. Government-funded private schools: schools that are owned and operated by non-government providers, but receive government funding.
3. Privately managed schools: schools that are owned and financed by the government, but are operated by non-government providers.
4. Voucher schools: schools that students choose to attend with government-provided funding; these schools can be operated by the government, non-government providers, or both, depending on the system.

These categories of schools have made a significant contribution to the efforts made by various respective governments to expand access to education, especially at the basic school level. However, most of these private schools experience challenging leadership, as most of them have not received relevant leadership training to manage schools.

METHODOLOGY

This was qualitative research underpinned by the interpretivist paradigm. Specifically, a case study design was employed to explore the HRM challenges facing the owner-managers of the private basic schools in the Akuapem South Municipality so that relevant support systems could be put in place to enable them to manage schools more meaningfully. A case study is "*(a) the in-depth study of (b) one or more instances of a phenomenon (c) in its real-life context that (d) reflects the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon*" (Gall et al., 2007). This design was considered the most appropriate for the study as it allows researchers to explore a phenomenon in-depth and in its real-life context. Also, a case study design allowed me to access the multiple perspectives of the owner-managers with various educational backgrounds and varied professional experiences, ensuring triangulation of data for verification of the findings. This was an instrumental and a single case study.

The sample of the study was eight (8) private school owners-managers with various academic backgrounds and varied professional experiences. Specifically, three (3) of the participants possessed a First Degree and had 15-20 years of management experience; three (3) with a Diploma and with 6-10

years of experience in management, while the remaining two (2) possessed Certificates in Education and had managed for less than 5 years. In this study, the various categories of owner-managers were selected as the sample because my aim was to build multiple perspectives into the data collection and analysis. To achieve this, a maximal variation sampling technique was employed. The strategy is:

A type of purposive sampling technique in which the researcher samples cases or individuals that differ on some characteristics or traits. The procedure requires that you identify the characteristics and then find sites or individuals that display different dimensions of the characteristics (Creswell, 2005).

Data for the study were collected through semi-structured interviews with the owner-managers of the schools. In semi-structured interviews, the participant is required to answer a set of predetermined questions that define the line of inquiry and probing and clarification of answers are allowed in the conversation (Kusi, 2012). The method was flexible, allowing the participants to express themselves freely, but guided to prevent 'aimless rambling'. The method also allowed me to ask questions to seek clarification on the responses of the participants. The questions guiding the interviews were related to challenges the owner-managers faced in relation to working with teachers, pupils, parents and education authorities in the study areas.

The semi-structured interview schedule was validated before being used for data collection. To establish the face validity of the instrument, it was given to two (2) colleague lecturers at the School of Education and Life-Long Learning for their comments on the items as well as the structure of the questions. The content validity of the instrument was also established by experts in educational administration and management, especially those in human resource management in education. Thereafter, data were collected through a 40-minute one-to-one interviews with each of the participants in noise-free locations in their respective schools. The data collected was analysed thematically. The process began with

transcription of the recorded data for repeated readings so as to immerse myself in it (the data). Then, themes were identified based on issues in relevant literature and the purpose of the study. The data was then coded under relevant themes to form frameworks before description. In the descriptions, relevant quotes or comments from the participants were used to add realism to the analysis.

To attribute comments to participants, the three (3) owner-managers of the schools, who were Degree Holders, were assigned a serial number DH-1 to DH-3, where DH represents Degree Holder; the three (3) Diploma Holders were assigned DipH-1 to DipH-3 with DipH representing Diploma Holder; and the two (2) Certificate Holders were assigned a serial number CertH-1 to CertH-2, where CertH represents Certificate Holder. Assigning these serial numbers to the various participant categories helped to achieve respondent validation and to build multiple perspectives into the data analysis and discussions.

Positionality and Reflexivity
During the study, I positioned myself as an insider-researcher, drawing on my expertise in educational leadership and management as both a practitioner and lecturer. My area of specialisation offered me the opportunity to interact with leaders and managers of both public and private schools. This familiarity helped me in building trust and rapport (Berger, 2013), accessing hidden knowledge (Holmes, 2020), and ensuring interpretive accuracy. However, I was mindful of the potential for bias and the risk of overlooking critical insights, particularly during the presentation and interpretation of findings.

Engaging in reflexivity helps researchers to neutralise the influence of their subjectivity by acknowledging, explaining or capitalising on it (Gentles et al., 2014). My professional background implies that I started the research endeavour with my own assumptions, beliefs, values, initial understandings, and some preconceived notions about the challenges facing the owner-managers of the private schools, which could have a potential impact on the entire research process, leading to

subjectivity. Being mindful of this potential impact, particularly on the outcome of the study, I allowed the data collected to 'speak for itself' so that I could better appreciate the phenomenon under study or social reality.

Trustworthiness of the Study
Qualitative studies are often seen as lacking rigour, influenced by researchers' preconceived notions, initial understandings and biases. These concerns could be addressed through 'trustworthiness criteria' (Guba, 1981), which consist of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility refers to the confidence in the accuracy of research findings. It is akin to internal validity in quantitative research. Credibility of the findings was achieved through respondent triangulation, which involved the comparison of responses from participants with various qualifications and experience levels for common and contrasting issues before drawing conclusions.

Transferability refers to the extent to which findings can be applied in other contexts. It is analogous to external validity or generalisability in quantitative research. Transferability of the study was ensured through a thick description, which involves giving enough contextual information so that readers can understand the conditions under which the research was conducted and decide whether the findings apply to other contexts (Merriam, 2009). I did not intend to generalise the findings of the study to a wider context, but to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in the context of the study. However, if readers find similarities between their context and the context of my study, it is possible for them to apply the findings to those settings.

Several steps were taken to ensure the findings of the study were dependable. One of them was reflexivity. Finlay (2017) stresses the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research, where the researcher must continually reflect on their influence on the study and take steps to minimise bias. Peer review was another strategy employed to ensure the findings were dependable. Submitting this paper to peer reviewers allowed other experts in the field of educational leadership, administration and management to evaluate the study's rigour, methods, and interpretations.

Creswell (2014) notes that peer review is also an important step in ensuring the confirmability and overall trustworthiness of qualitative research. Although I started the study with some initial understandings and preconceived notions about the challenges the owner-managers of the private schools face in managing human resources, I ensured that these perceptions did not influence the research processes, especially data collection, presentation of findings, and the conclusions drawn. 'Audit trail' was used as a strategy to ensure that the findings and conclusions drawn were grounded in the data collected. Also, Denzin and Lincoln (2018) suggest that a well-documented 'audit trail' provides transparency, enabling other researchers to replicate the study or evaluate the dependability of the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
The purpose of the study was to explore the HRM challenges facing owner-managers of private basic schools in the Akuapem South Municipality, Ghana. To achieve this purpose, qualitative data were gathered through a semi-structured interview. Several themes emerged from the data, and these were teacher-related, parent-related, pupil-related, and education authority-related. This section of the paper presents the issues associated with each theme, relating them to relevant literature.

HRM Challenges Facing the Owner-Managers in Managing Teachers
The interview data highlighted some teacher management-related issues that posed a challenge to the owner-managers of the private schools in the Municipality. The issues were related to high teacher attrition or turnover rate, and poor professional status or background of some teachers. It emerged that the schools experienced high attrition or turnover rates as a result of low salaries being paid to the teachers, as the following comments point out:

> You train the teachers who are unprofessional, and they run away. Since the establishment of my school, there hasn't been a single term we don't conduct interviews. Some teachers even

run away from school before you know! (DH-3)

One challenge I face is high teacher turn-over. Most of them [the teachers] have their own career-path agenda, so before you realised they are already gone! (DipH-1)

Thus, the comments suggest that one major challenge confronting the owner-managers in managing human resources is related to the high teacher turnover rate. This situation has the tendency to disrupt pupils' academic performance and overall achievement (Tawiah, Opoku-Asare & Gyekye-Ampofo, 2023). The participants attributed the problem of the high rate of teacher turnover to low salaries paid to the teachers. It appeared that a significant number of the teaches were unqualified, having limited education and no professional training. As a result, they earned lower salaries.

Salary is the key issue that makes them leave. Most of them have low qualifications, but they have been accepted to teach. They are mostly senior high school graduates, who are unprofessional, and, therefore, receive a low salary. Anytime they notice a slight gap between what they receive [the salary gap] and what their colleagues receive in other schools, they leave (DipH-2).

Most of them are untrained, so we pay them based on their qualifications. The truth is that most of them are not happy about their salaries, so they easily leave for schools with better salaries (DH-2)

These comments suggest that low salaries made some teachers the leave schools, implying that low salaries lead to high teacher attrition or turn-over rates. People work for many reasons, among them, the expectation of a high salary. When rewarded with high salaries, there is a tendency for workers or employees to remain committed to fulfilling an organisation's set goals. Alternatively, a low salary could make people disloyal and uncommitted to organisations. However, one of the hygiene factors of the Two-Factor theory of motivation suggests that salary is a hygiene factor, implying that paying people a good salary would not necessarily make them satisfied, but paying them less would make

them dissatisfied (Kusi, 2008, 2017). A study conducted by Tawiah, Opoku-Asare and Gyekye-Ampofo in 2023 attributed high teacher turnover in their study context in Ghana to many factors, including poor working conditions.

On the contrary, two (2) of the participants indicated that their schools did not experience teacher turnover, citing reasons for the situation:

I engage the teachers on weekly basis, so for the past 7years, I have not lost any teacher, I build their capacity through relevant training programmes and pay them, at least Gh700 (about $41) a month. Therefore, they are happy to work with me (CertH-2)

My school is a mission school and what we do to retain our teachers is to issue contracts to them, when they join the school. This makes it difficult for them to leave anytime they want. We also pay teachers, at least Gh1000($59) a month (DH-1)

Thus, the comments suggest that some of the schools implement strategies such as capacity building, offering relatively competitive salaries to motivate teachers, and requiring them to sign bonds to discourage sudden exits. Such schools benefit from meeting teachers' needs. Their approach aligns with Stakeholder Theory, which emphasises the importance of considering all stakeholders to ensure long-term success and sustainability.

It also emerged from the data that one of the challenges confronting the owner-managers of the private schools in managing human resources was related to the cost of training the unqualified teachers to enable them to fulfil their teaching and learning expectations and mandates. The data suggested that most of them were recruited as unqualified teachers, requiring the schools to equip them with relevant knowledge, skills and competences to enable them to fulfil their professional duties.

Most of them are Senior High School leavers, who are untrained as professional teachers. When they join our schools, we have to raise funds to organise training programmes for them so that they can perform their assigned roles. But, how do we get money to train or

sponsor their programmes? This is always a challenge! (DH-3)

When we recruit them, we realise some of them do not know what teaching entails. They do not often know much about the teaching job. So, we have to raise funds to train or sponsor their programmes, and because a number of pupils don't pay fees on time, we struggle to support the teacher training programmes (DipH-2)

These comments point out that most of the teachers were recruited as unqualified/unprofessional teachers, making their continuous professional development a responsibility of the school owners. Yet, the owner-managers faced a challenge in raising adequate funds to support these programmes. Similarly, Kusi (2008, 2017) noted that funding of teacher and headteacher continuous professional development programmes in Ghana was a challenge, denying most of them access to such programmes. The inability of the schools to support the continuous professional development of the teachers implies that their professional needs were unmet, threatening the success and sustenance of the schools, according to the Stakeholder theory.

HRM Challenges Facing the Owner-Managers in Managing Parents

Issues relating to the management of parents also emerged from the interview data gathered. These issues were related to the failure of parents to attend Parents Association meetings organised, the withdrawal of wards from school without prior notice, and the failure to pay school fees. The data suggested that the private schools often use Parents-Association meetings as a platform for discussing relevant issues about the learners' social, educational and psycho-social development, but most of the parents/guardians often failed to attend such meetings.

The parents know the relevance of education for their wards. However, when you invite them for Parent Association meetings, most of them do not show up. Others come [for the meetings] but do not stay till closing times. This is a worry to me and my staff! (DipH-2)

The failure and the reluctance of the parents to attend Parent Association meetings suggest that they may lack relevant educational and psycho-social information about their wards, so as to offer relevant support. This situation could affect the academic performance and achievement of their wards negatively. Epstein (2010) highlights the need for parents to familiarise themselves with relevant information about their wards' academic performance at any level and ensure regular interactions with teachers so that they [parents] could work collaboratively to support their wards' education. Parents Association meetings could serve as an avenue to achieve this obligation, but the data suggested that parents showed low interest in such meetings. A study conducted by Kusi (2008, 2017) and Esia-Donkoh (2014) revealed that most parents in their study areas often failed to attend Parents-Teacher Association meetings because they were agrarians, constraining their commitment to such meetings. This study, however, attributed parents' failure to attend meetings to their preoccupation with business and other income-generating activities.

This place is closer to Accra [the capital city of Ghana], so they wake-up and travel to the city to do business. Most of them do not attend meetings, when we invite them! (DH-3)

Although the parents were preoccupied with income-generating activities, the data highlighted school fee collection as a major challenge for the school owners.

In my area, some of the challenges are related payment. They [parents] do not pay fees on time. The reason is that they do not have money. They are traders, but not earning enough to pay fees of their wards (DH-1)

Most of the parents do not have money. When they have, they do not put priority on fee payment; they cherish engaging in social activities like funerals (DipH-2)

The data suggested that the challenging financial circumstances of the parents made efforts to support their wards financially and materially difficult, negatively affecting academic performance. Epstein (2010) emphasised the strong need for parents to provide learners with relevant

material resources for improved academic performance.

On the contrary, one of the participants believed parents take a high interest in attending Parent Association meetings organised by the school.

> The parents love the school and are always ready to participate in meetings organised. They are always willing to do so! (CertH-2)

This participant, CertH-2, attributed the situation to the "philosophy" he adopted in working with the school community.

> My philosophy is that I make the community see the purpose of establishing the school. I make the activities of the school known to them always, so they come for meetings.

Engaging the community on the purpose and activities of the school fostered understanding among the community members, promoting collaboration, which is needed to enhance the academic performance of the learners (Epstein, 2010). The 'philosophy' of the participant also suggests the prevalence of a cooperative system of school-community relationship, limiting potential conflict in the administration of the school.

Another HRM challenge facing the owner-managers, which emerged from the data, was related to parents' decision to withdraw their wards from the schools to take advantage of the government's policy of Free Senior High School. The participants expressed concerns that parents, in their desire to seek better school placement and benefit from the Free Senior High School policy, often transfer their wards to public Junior High Schools. Such decisions are taken with the hope that, notwithstanding the performance of their wards in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), they will be placed in better-performing secondary schools with free meals and resources, opportunities not often available for graduates of the private schools.

> Most of the private Senior High School classrooms are empty because most of the children are taken to public schools so that they can enjoy free meals after placement, no matter their performance in the BECE. They

drop and join public schools because of government's Free Senior High School policy (DH-3).
> Most parents decide to withdraw their wards from private schools to public schools so that when such children are going to Senior High School, they can have placement and enjoy free meals and some resources (DipH-2)

These comments suggest that the desire of the parents to seek better placement for their wards in Senior High Schools for associated benefits influences the decision to withdraw their wards from the private schools, affecting enrolment negatively. This calls for the need of the government to re-examine the students' placement system, which disadvantages the private schools, so as to promote equity and equal opportunities among students.

Challenges Facing the Owner-Managers in Working with Education Authorities
The Ghana Education Service, through its directorates in various regions in the country, regulates and supervises education provision in both public and private schools. The directorates, through School Improvement Support Officers (SISOs) and appointed private school coordinators, work directly with the private schools in performing their regulatory, advisory and supervisory functions. However, the data suggested that these officers did not perform their expected roles, making the private schools self-supporting and self-reliant in addressing issues that may arise in managing schools.

> My challenge has to do with the unwillingness of the SISOs to supervise our schools. We expect them to work to support us, but they take their monies and spend a few minutes to advise teachers on best practices (CerH-1)
> There are conflicting issues among NaSIA [National Schools Inspectorate Authority] the Ghana Education Service staff [SISOs] and private school coordinators so no supervision, no training! They take data from us, but in terms of sharing their expertise, they do not remember us [the private schools] (DH-1)

27

These comments suggest a lack of support in terms of supervision and training for the staff of the private schools. The staff from the education directorates were expected to work collaboratively with the management of schools, both public and private, to ensure the personal and professional growth and development of teachers and administrators (Kusi, 2017; Ghana Education Service, 2010) for improved teaching and learning. However, the comments suggested that, in most cases, the education officers visit the school for the collection of data and levies. Supervisory responsibilities, including training, were not a priority to them, a situation which could affect the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

A participant, on the contrary, expressed the view that the school receives support from private school coordinators in the Municipality with NaSIA always collecting monies.

> The private schools' coordinator comes to support us, and NaSIA comes here for money. No training is organised at all. It's about paying and issuing certificate (DH-3)

The comments suggest the need for the education officers to re-examine their assigned roles in supporting the schools for growth and development. Teaching and learning in schools, as well as teacher morale and competence, will be affected negatively if the education officers neglect their supervisory and regulatory functions (Kusi, 2008).

Challenges Facing the Private School Owner-Managers in Managing Pupils
Challenges relating to the management of pupils also emerged from the data. These issues were related to truancy or absenteeism, lack of support for children with special needs, and sensitivity in handling those from affluent backgrounds. The data suggested that absenteeism was more prevalent among the children from challenging financial backgrounds, as their parents were unable to pay for feeding fees and transportation.

> A number of the pupils are not regular at school. The needy ones absent themselves because their parents do not have money to pay feeding fees and fee to convey the pupils to school (DipH-2)

In an attempt to reduce or prevent absenteeism and its consequent drop-out, the Government of Ghana is implementing a number of policies in the public basic (primary) schools. It appears that these policies do not cover the private schools, although some of the pupils in that sector are from very challenging financial circumstances. The perception held in many communities in Ghana that children who attend private schools come from relatively strong/better financial backgrounds than their counterparts in the public schools seems to be challenged here. The absenteeism among the private school pupils calls for the expansion of the scope of the government's policy interventions that aim to tackle or address the problem.

It also emerged that another challenge facing the owner-managers of the schools was related to pupils with special needs. The data suggested that the private schools lacked support in managing children with special needs, as a comment by DH-3 suggests:

> One of the challenges in my school has to do with impairment, but we do not have the resources to support them[the children with special needs]. Children with special needs are a problem to me, as a manager of the school. Some have eye problems and others are slow-learners. However, we do not get support for them (DH-3)

The inability of the schools to get support for the children with special needs raises questions about the education system's commitment to ensuring equity, which is based on distributive justice. Distributive justice theory argues that a pupil's personal circumstances should not affect the potential for academic success (Harris et al., 2022). Although the Government of Ghana is committed to implementing an inclusive education policy in the education system, it appears little attention is paid to the private education sector, raising questions about equity. Both the public and private education sectors have to experience equitable implementation of the Government's inclusive education policy for the academic success of pupils.

Epstein (2010)'s parental involvement theory requires parents and schools to collaborate to support children's education. An aspect of the collaboration is ensuring discipline among the children. However, the data suggested that, in the event of instilling discipline among some pupils to curb unacceptable behaviours, the owner-managers and teachers were often attacked by parents.

> There are some children that we have to be careful in handling, those from rich families! In cases, we mishandle them, we are often attacked by their parents (CertH-2)

Nonetheless, the data did not highlight the nature of the mishandling of the pupils. Antwi-Danso et al. (2018) indicated that parents attack teachers when they violently administer punishment to students in the setting of their study. This suggests the need for schools to expose teachers to modern methods and procedures for administering punishment to pupils so as to avoid being attacked by parents.

Generally, the data suggested a collaboration between the owner-managers and the stakeholders - teachers, parents, education authorities, and pupils - in managing the schools. However, the owner-managers found it difficult to enlist the maximum support of such stakeholders owing to the diverse challenges encountered. According to the Stakeholder theory, when organisations are unable to enlist the support of entities, their long-term success and sustainability are threatened. Therefore, the inability of the owner-managers to secure the maximum cooperation of the stakeholders implies that the long-term success and sustainability of the schools are insecure, to some extent.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The owner-managers of the private schools face a challenge of retaining teachers, whom they train after recruitment, because of unmet salary expectations. The teachers often move to other schools with relatively higher salaries after they are trained, requiring the owner-managers to regularly recruit new teachers. Therefore, it is

recommended that the leadership of the private schools' association in the Municipality should structure the teacher salaries in the area. Making salaries equitable has the potential to ensure teacher retention. Teachers could also be offered promotional or advancement opportunities, which could be aligned with teacher qualification and salary as a mechanism for their retention.

Lack of commitment on the part of the parents to pay fees on stipulated times makes it difficult for the owner-managers to generate adequate funds to pay teachers' salaries, and to support the development and management of the schools. The failure of the parents to pay fees on time was attributed to their low income levels. Therefore, to be able to generate adequate income through school fees collection, the leadership of the schools should offer manageable payment plans for the parents. Payment plans that offer parents the opportunity to pay fees weekly and/or monthly could be ideal for the owner-managers to generate income to support the management of the schools.

Limitations of the Study

Like other qualitative studies, the sample (8 participants) was relatively small. Therefore, I did not intend to generalise the findings beyond the context of the study. My aim for conducting the study was to help understand the HRM challenges of the owner-managers in-depth. However, it is possible for readers to transfer the findings to their respective contexts should they find similarities between their context and the context of this particular study. Moreover, the sample for the study comprised only the owner-managers of the private schools. I acknowledge that key stakeholders such as teachers, parents and education authorities in the study area have some level of knowledge and understanding of the HRM challenges facing the owner-managers of the schools. The exclusion of these entities from the sample represents a loss of vital information that could have contributed to a more in-depth understanding of the problem studied.

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