

Addressing Teacher Expectations: Challenges and Strategies for Educational HR Leadership in Ghana's Central Region

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Abstract: This qualitative, descriptive-phenomenological study examines the challenges faced by human resource (HR) managers in Ghana's Central Region schools and education directorates in meeting teacher expectations and the leadership strategies employed to address unmet needs. Through in-depth interviews with five HR managers and five teacher union representatives, analyzed using Maslow's Theory of Needs and Fayol's Administrative Management Theory, the study identifies 12 interconnected challenges, including centralized decision-making, resource scarcity, staffing shortages, and relational tensions. These contribute to teacher dissatisfaction, turnover, and strikes, such as the 2022 Cost of Living Allowance dispute. HR managers employ counseling, external support, and improvisation, but systemic constraints limit effectiveness. The findings underscore the need for decentralized HR policies, enhanced resource allocation, and strengthened HR leadership training to improve teacher retention and educational quality. Aligned with Ghana's Education Sector Plan (2018-2030), this study offers actionable insights for educational leaders and policymakers in resource-constrained settings, with implications for Sub-Saharan Africa. It contributes to scholarship on educational leadership by highlighting HR's pivotal role in fostering teacher motivation and system resilience.

Keywords: Educational Leadership; Human Resource Management; Teacher Expectations; Systemic Constraints; Teacher Retention

Introduction

Effective human resource management (HRM) serves as the backbone of a robust educational system, particularly in developing nations like Ghana, where teachers play a pivotal role in achieving quality education (Annan, 2020; Obeng, Amaning, & Addai-Amoah, 2022). In Ghana's Central Region, HR managers within education directorates grapple with meeting teachers' diverse expectations, including competitive salaries, professional development opportunities, equitable postings, and access to teaching and learning materials (TLMs). These expectations are critical, as teacher motivation, job satisfaction, and retention directly impact student learning outcomes and the overall quality of education (Kanwetuu, Brenyah & Obeng, 2020). However, systemic challenges—such as teacher shortages, inequitable distribution, low morale in rural areas, and frequent teacher strikes, like the 2022 indefinite strike by unions such as the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) and the National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT) over unmet demands for a Cost of Living Allowance (COLA)—highlight a significant expectation gap (Cobbold, 2015; Graphic Online, 2022).

Globally, unmet teacher expectations contribute to dissatisfaction and turnover, particularly in resource-constrained settings like Sub-Saharan Africa (Nguyen & Kremer, 2022; Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007). In Ghana, these issues are exacerbated by centralized decision-making, inadequate resources, and rural-urban disparities, which place HR managers at the forefront of addressing complex challenges (Cobbold, 2015). While research has explored teacher dissatisfaction and turnover (Owusu, 2021; Baffour-Awuah, 2020), the specific challenges faced by HR managers and the strategies they employ to manage unmet teacher expectations remain underexplored, particularly at the directorate level in Ghana's Central Region. Theoretical frameworks, such as Maslow's Theory of Needs (1970, as cited in Aruma & Hanachor, 2017), which links motivation to fulfilling physiological, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization needs, and Fayol's Administrative Management Theory (1916, as cited in Edwards, 2018), which emphasizes planning, organizing, and fair remuneration, provide a lens to understand these dynamics. In Ghana's context, unmet needs (e.g., delayed promotions, inadequate TLMs) and centralized systems often clash with these principles, leading to inefficiencies (Hartati, 2020; Ghana Education Service, 2021).

The justification for this study is threefold. First, it addresses a pressing policy issue in Ghana, where teacher strikes and turnover disrupt educational continuity, undermining national goals like the Education Sector Plan (2018–2030) for equitable, quality education. Second, it contributes to global scholarship on educational HRM in resource-constrained settings, offering insights relevant to other Sub-Saharan African countries like Nigeria and Kenya (Lange & Lange, 2016; Mulkeen, 2010). Third, by focusing on the Central Region, the study provides context-specific findings to inform targeted reforms, while its theoretical framework ensures broader applicability. This study aims to explore the challenges HR managers face in meeting teacher expectations in education directorates in Ghana's Central Region and the strategies they employ when these expectations are not met, using a qualitative, descriptive-phenomenological approach.

Methods

The following sections outline the research design, population and sampling, data collection, analysis, trustworthiness, and positionality, ensuring methodological rigor.

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative, descriptive-phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of HR managers and Teacher Union representatives in Ghana's Central Region. This approach, rooted in interpretivist philosophy, is ideal for capturing nuanced perspectives on complex social phenomena (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Open-ended, unstructured interviews provided in-depth insights into HR challenges and strategies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Thematic analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) framework: transcription, coding, categorization, and theme development. Manual transcription and inductive coding were used due to software unavailability, with codes grouped into patterns addressing the research questions. To ensure data saturation, interviews were conducted until no new themes emerged, which was achieved after the 10th interview, as confirmed through iterative coding and peer debriefing. This process verified that the sample size was sufficient to capture the diversity of challenges and strategies, with no novel insights arising in subsequent reviews of transcripts. To mitigate errors, transcripts were cross-checked, and peer debriefing ensured consistency in coding.

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised 46 HR managers and Teacher Union representatives across education directorates in the Central Region. Using convenience sampling, accessible directorates were selected due to logistical constraints. Purposive sampling ensured heterogeneity by choosing five HR managers and five Teacher Union representatives, achieving data saturation after 10 interviews. Participants varied in experience and directorate type (urban vs. rural), as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Characteristics of Participants

Participant ID	Role	Gender	Years of Experience	Direct-orate Type
HR 1	HR Manager	Male	8	Urban
HR 2	HR Manager	Female	5	Rural
HR 3	HR Manager	Male	10	Urban
HR 4	HR Manager	Female	7	Rural
HR 5	HR Manager	Male	6	Urban
TR 1	Teacher Union Representative	Male	12	Rural

TR 2	Teacher Union Representative	Female	9	Urban
TR 3	Teacher Union Representative	Male	15	Rural
TR 4	Teacher Union Representative	Female	8	Urban
TR 5	Teacher Union Representative	Male	10	Rural

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-person interviews conducted over five days in 2024, with each session lasting approximately 50 minutes. Two unstructured interview guides - one for HR managers and one for Teacher Union representatives - contained 11 open-ended questions aligned with the research questions. After securing permissions from regional and district directorates, participants signed informed consent forms outlining the study's purpose, confidentiality, and right to withdraw. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) framework: transcription, coding, categorization, and theme development. Manual transcription and inductive coding were used due to software unavailability, with codes grouped into patterns addressing the research questions. To mitigate errors, transcripts were cross-checked, and peer debriefing ensured coding consistency.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthy qualitative research ensures rigor and credibility (Guba, 1981). This study used Guba's (1981) four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, to validate findings on HR managers' challenges and strategies in Ghana's Central Region. For credibility, participants checked interview transcripts for accuracy. Triangulation combined views from HR managers and Teacher Union representatives. A research expert reviewed interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Transferability used detailed descriptions of the study context, participants, and settings. This helps apply findings to other Ghanaian or African contexts. Dependability relied on an audit trail, recording all steps from interview design to analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability used direct quotes, repeated coding checks, and a journal to reduce bias from the authors' outsider status (Stahl & King, 2020). Interview guides were pretested in another district. Ethical practices, like informed consent and pseudonyms, protected participants (Amin et al., 2020). These steps ensured the study's findings were robust and trustworthy.

Positionality

The first author, a primary school teacher, and the second, a university lecturer, were outsiders to the education directorates, reducing bias but potentially limiting access to sensitive information. Their educational backgrounds informed question design but were mitigated through objective data analysis and participant validation (Holmes, 2020).

Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings from a qualitative study exploring the challenges human resource (HR) managers face in meeting teacher expectations in education directorates in Ghana's Central Region, and the strategies they employ when expectations are unmet. Data from in-depth interviews with five HR managers and five Teacher Union representatives revealed 12 challenges, grouped into four themes, and three strategies to address unmet expectations. The findings are analyzed through the lenses of Maslow's Theory of Needs (1970, as cited in Aruma & Hanachor, 2017) and Fayol's Administrative Management Theory (1916, as cited in Edwards, 2018), with comparisons to global educational contexts to highlight their broader relevance.

Research Question 1: Challenges in Meeting Teacher Expectations

The study identified 12 challenges, categorized into four themes: systemic constraints, resource limitations, staffing issues, and relational dynamics. These challenges reflect structural and interpersonal barriers that hinder HR managers' ability to fulfill teacher expectations, such as competitive salaries, professional development, equitable postings, and access to teaching and learning materials (TLMs).

Systemic Constraints

Centralization within the Ghana Education Service (GES) emerged as a primary challenge, restricting HR managers' decision-making autonomy. All major decisions, including teacher postings, promotions, and resource allocation, require approval from GES headquarters in Accra, leading to bureaucratic delays. An HR manager explained, "I identify a school lacking a Chemistry teacher, but I must wait for headquarters to approve a posting, which can take months" (HR 3, ED 3). This delay frustrates teachers who expect swift action, aligning with Fayol's principle of decentralization, which advocates for localized authority to enhance efficiency (Edwards, 2018). Centralized postings also exacerbate inequitable teacher distribution, with urban schools overstaffed while rural ones suffer shortages. A Teacher Union representative noted, "A village school with 200 students has only five teachers from KG to JHS, while urban schools have surplus staff" (TR 1, ED 5). This mirrors findings from Nigeria, where centralized systems deepen rural teacher deficits (Ugolo & Onukwu, 2025; Adedjeji & Olaniyan, 2011), and contrasts with decentralized models in South Africa that improve teacher deployment (Du Plessis, 2019).

Delayed responses from headquarters further compound these issues. For instance, requests for professional development or salary adjustments often languish, eroding teacher trust. An HR manager stated, "Teachers expect prompt promotions, but I'm still awaiting clearance for files submitted six months ago" (HR 1, ED 1). This violates Maslow's esteem needs, as delayed recognition undermines teachers' sense of achievement (Aruma & Hanachor, 2017). Globally, bureaucratic delays in educational HRM are common in centralized systems (Lunenburg, 2021), such as in Uganda, where slow resource allocation hampers teacher support (Robert et al., 2021).

Resource Limitations

Inadequate logistics, including computers, printers, and vehicles, severely limit HR managers' operational capacity. With approximately 33,000 teachers and 2,000 non-teaching staff in the Central Region, the scale of administrative tasks is immense. A Teacher Union representative highlighted, "HR managers lack basic tools; they use personal funds to print documents because directorate printers are broken" (TR 5, ED 1). This resource scarcity impedes administrative efficiency and monitoring, critical for ensuring teacher performance. Another HR manager added, "Without vehicles, I can't visit rural schools to verify teacher needs, so problems go unresolved" (HR 4, ED 4). This reflects Maslow's safety needs, as an unstable work environment—lacking essential tools—lowers teacher morale and job security (Aruma & Hanachor, 2017). Similar challenges are reported in Kenya, where logistical constraints hinder educational supervision (Mulkeen, 2010).

Financial constraints also prevent HR managers from providing TLMs, a key teacher expectation. A Teacher Union representative noted, "Teachers request charts and models for science lessons, but directorates lack funds to supply them" (TR 2, ED 3). This forces teachers to improvise or purchase materials themselves, increasing their workload and frustration. The Ghana Education Service (2021) acknowledges inadequate facilities for in-service training (INSET), further limiting professional development opportunities. These resource limitations align with global trends in low-income countries, where underfunded education systems struggle to meet teacher needs (Tomasic, 2024; Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007).

Staffing Issues

Understaffing and excessive workloads burden HR management and development (HRMD) units. An HR manager reported, "I handle correspondence for 5,000 teachers daily, working from 7:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. because we're understaffed" (HR 5, ED 5). This overextension delays responses to teacher requests, such as reposting or promotion processing, violating Fayol's principle of order, which emphasizes adequate personnel for tasks (Edwards, 2018). A Teacher Union representative corroborated, "The HRMD unit has only three staff for an entire district, making it

impossible to meet teacher demands promptly” (TR 3, ED 4). This mirrors findings from a qualitative study in Nigeria, where understaffing hampers HRM effectiveness (Omebe, 2014).

Unfavorable postings from GES headquarters exacerbate staffing shortages, particularly in rural areas. Teachers are often assigned to urban schools despite vacancies in villages, creating imbalances. An HR manager stated, “Headquarters posts teachers to towns, ignoring rural needs, so headmasters pressure me for solutions I can’t provide” (HR 2, ED 2). Teachers’ reluctance to remain in rural postings further complicates this issue. After serving three to five years in deprived areas, teachers qualify for reposting or study leave but are often denied due to a lack of replacements. A Teacher Union representative explained, “A female teacher married and moved to the city, but without a replacement, HR refused her reposting, causing conflict” (TR 4, ED 2). This aligns with Annan’s (2020) observation that Ghana’s rural teacher deficit is a persistent concern, driven by geographical disadvantages (Azewara et al., 2021). Similar patterns are observed in Zambia where rural postings among other factors deter teacher retention (Zulu et al., 2024).

Relational Dynamics

Interference from influential figures, such as politicians or community leaders, disrupts HR managers’ work. A Teacher Union representative noted, “Some authorities demand that relatives be posted to urban schools, ignoring rural shortages” (TR 4, ED 2). This undermines Fayol’s principle of unity of direction, which prioritizes organizational goals over individual interests (Edwards, 2018). Such interference, also documented in Ghana’s Education Sector Review (Ministry of Education, 2018), contributes to urban teacher surplus and rural deficits, a problem echoed in Zambia’s education system (UNESCO, 2014, as cited in Acheampong & Gyasi, 2019).

Illegal promotions, where teachers unlawfully advance their ranks, pose another challenge. An HR manager reported, “Some teachers manipulate records to gain undeserved grades, and I’m held accountable for errors I didn’t cause” (HR 3, ED 3). This erodes trust and strains HR manager-teacher relations, aligning with Hartati’s (2020) assertion that unmet expectations lead to human relations issues. Poor working conditions, such as dilapidated classrooms or lack of housing in rural areas, further fuel teacher dissatisfaction. A Teacher Union representative stated, “Teachers in villages live in mud houses with no electricity, so they demand transfers, but we can’t replace them” (TR 1, ED 5). These conditions violate Maslow’s physiological and safety needs, driving turnover (Aruma & Hanachor, 2017).

Interconnections among the Challenges

The challenges are deeply interconnected, forming a cycle that perpetuates teacher dissatisfaction. Centralization delays resource allocation, limiting logistics and TLMs, which increases HRMD workloads and exacerbates staffing shortages. These systemic issues strain teacher relations, as unmet expectations (e.g., delayed promotions, rural postings) lead to conflicts and strikes. For example, centralized postings create rural teacher shortages, forcing remaining teachers to handle oversized classes, which lowers morale and prompts reposting requests. Without replacements, HR managers deny these requests, triggering relational tensions. This cycle aligns with Maslow’s hierarchy, as unmet physiological (e.g., salaries, housing) and safety needs (e.g., job security, resources) prevent progression to higher needs like esteem and self-actualization. Fayol’s principles of decentralization, order, and equity are similarly violated, highlighting the need for systemic reform.

Research Question 2: Strategies for Unmet Expectations

HR managers employ three strategies to address unmet teacher expectations: counseling and communication, seeking external support, and encouraging improvisation. Each strategy is evaluated for effectiveness and limitations, with theoretical and global comparisons.

Counseling and Communication

HR managers use counseling, advice, and transparent communication to manage teacher frustration. When reposting or promotion requests are denied due to staffing shortages, HR managers explain the situation and encourage patience. An HR manager stated, “I counsel teachers to stay in rural schools until we find replacements, ensuring they understand it’s not deliberate” (HR 1, ED 1). A Teacher Union representative added, “HR managers talk to teachers about understaffing, asking them to wait for new postings” (TR 2, ED 3). This aligns with Ansley et al.’s (2019) recommendation for clear communication to build trust, fulfilling Maslow’s belonging needs by fostering collegial support.

However, counseling addresses symptoms (e.g., frustration) rather than root causes (e.g., teacher shortages, centralization). Teachers may perceive it as a temporary placation, especially if systemic issues persist. For instance, a teacher awaiting reposting for two years stated, “Counseling helps, but I’m still stuck in a village with no progress” (TR 4, ED 2). In Botswana, similar communication strategies have limited impact without structural reforms (Badubi, 2015). Thus, while counseling mitigates immediate tensions, it is insufficient for long-term satisfaction.

Seeking External Support

When internal resources are inadequate, HR managers seek external aid, such as from philanthropists or NGOs, to address teacher needs. An HR manager noted, “For teachers with costly health issues, we write to philanthropists for support” (HR 3, ED 3). A Teacher Union representative added, “HR managers contacted an NGO to provide TLMs for a rural school last year” (TR 5, ED 1). This resourcefulness demonstrates adaptability, aligning with Fayol’s principle of initiative, which encourages creative problem-solving (Edwards, 2018).

However, external support is ad hoc and unsustainable, relying on unpredictable goodwill. If philanthropists decline, teachers’ needs remain unmet, potentially escalating dissatisfaction. In Tanzania, reliance on external aid for educational resources has led to inconsistent support, undermining teacher morale (Morgan, 2023). This strategy’s effectiveness is thus limited by its dependence on external factors, highlighting the need for systemic funding solutions.

Encouraging Improvisation

HR managers encourage teachers to improvise TLMs when resources are unavailable. An HR manager described, “A teacher used stones as a computer mouse to teach ICT, which we encouraged to maintain lessons” (HR 4, ED 4). This reflects practical problem-solving, as improvisation ensures curriculum delivery despite constraints (Frimpong, 2021). In Ethiopia, teachers similarly improvise materials to compensate for resource shortages (Tesfaw & Hofman, 2014).

However, improvisation places additional burdens on teachers, who may lack training or time to create effective materials. A Teacher Union representative noted, “Teachers feel overworked improvising TLMs without support, which lowers their motivation” (TR 3, ED 4). This aligns with Maslow’s esteem needs, as lack of institutional support undermines teachers’ sense of competence. Improvisation is a short-term fix that may exacerbate dissatisfaction if not paired with TLM provision, underscoring the need for sustainable resource allocation.

Effectiveness and Limitations

The strategies demonstrate HR managers’ resilience but are constrained by systemic issues. Counseling fosters trust but cannot resolve structural problems like centralization or understaffing. External support is innovative but unreliable, while improvisation burdens teachers, potentially lowering morale. These limitations reflect a broader challenge: HR managers operate within a constrained system that limits their agency. Globally, similar strategies in low-resource settings (e.g., Uganda, Malawi) have temporary benefits but require policy reforms for lasting impact (Mulkeen, 2010). Integrating these strategies with systemic changes, such as decentralization or increased funding, could enhance their effectiveness, aligning with Fayol’s principle of coordination and Maslow’s focus on meeting foundational needs.

Interconnections and Implications

The challenges are interconnected: centralization delays resource allocation, exacerbating staffing shortages and teacher dissatisfaction, which strains HR manager-teacher relations. These dynamics violate Maslow’s needs (e.g., safety, esteem) and Fayol’s principles (e.g., fair remuneration, decentralization), leading to low teacher morale and strikes. Addressing these issues could enhance teacher retention, reduce turnover costs, and improve student outcomes, aligning with Ghana’s Education Sector Plan (2018–2030). Globally, the findings resonate with studies advocating decentralized HRM to improve teacher satisfaction (Du Plessis., 2019).

The findings have significant implications for Ghana’s education system and beyond. Addressing HR challenges could reduce teacher turnover, saving GES recruitment costs and improving student outcomes, as satisfied teachers are more likely to stay and innovate (Baffour-Awuah, 2020). Decentralizing postings could balance teacher distribution, aligning with Ghana’s Education Sector Plan (2018–2030) goal of equitable education. Enhanced resources and professional development for HR managers could improve administrative efficiency, fostering

teacher trust. Globally, the study contributes to discussions on HRM in resource-constrained educational systems, offering lessons for countries like Nigeria and Kenya facing similar challenges (Adedeji & Olaniyan, 2011; Mulkeen, 2010). By linking findings to Maslow's and Fayol's theories, the study provides a theoretical framework for understanding and addressing teacher expectations.

Conclusion

This study reveals the complex challenges confronting HR leaders in Ghana's Central Region education directorates as they navigate teacher expectations within a constrained system. Centralized decision-making, inadequate resources, staffing deficits, and relational dynamics hinder effective HR leadership, perpetuating teacher dissatisfaction and undermining educational quality. Strategies like counseling, seeking external aid, and encouraging improvisation reflect adaptive leadership but are curtailed by structural limitations. Grounded in Maslow's and Fayol's theories, the findings advocate for transformative HR policies, including decentralized teacher postings, increased funding for logistics, and mandatory HR leadership training to enhance conflict resolution and strategic planning. These reforms align with Ghana's Education Sector Plan (2018-2030) and offer a roadmap for educational leaders to bolster teacher retention and student outcomes. While focused on the Central Region, the study's insights are transferable to other resource-constrained contexts, enriching global discussions on educational leadership and policy.

To address these challenges and align with the Ghana Education Service's (GES) goals for equitable, quality education as outlined in the Education Sector Plan (2018–2030), the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Decentralize Teacher Postings:** GES should pilot a regional posting system in the Central Region for 12 months, empowering HR managers to address local teacher shortages, particularly in rural areas, and evaluate its impact on equitable distribution.
2. **Enhance Resource Allocation:** The Ministry of Education should allocate dedicated funding for HR Management Division logistics, such as computers and vehicles, to streamline administrative processes and improve teacher support services.
3. **Strengthen HR Capacity:** GES should mandate HRM certification and induction programs for HR managers to build skills in conflict resolution, expectation management, and strategic planning.
4. **Foster Proactive Communication:** Human Resource managers should establish quarterly forums with teacher unions like GNAT and NAGRAT to address grievances proactively, minimizing the risk of strikes and fostering collaboration.
5. **Forge Partnerships for Resources:** GES should collaborate with NGOs to secure consistent supplies of teaching and learning materials (TLMs), reducing teachers' reliance on improvisation and enhancing instructional quality.

Future research should explore regional variations in HRM challenges across Ghana to broaden the applicability of findings. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess the sustained impact of decentralized HRM and proposed strategies on teacher satisfaction and student outcomes. Comparative analyses with other Sub-Saharan African countries, such as Nigeria or Kenya, could uncover best practices for managing teacher expectations. Additionally, investigating technology's role in optimizing HR processes, such as automated posting systems or digital communication platforms, warrants further exploration. These efforts collectively aim to strengthen HRM practices, enhance teacher retention, and advance Ghana's educational goals.

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