



## Research Article

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# School Heads' Practices Defined

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### Abstract

*This study is part of a project investigating school heads' practices and factors influencing them. The dearth of empirical research on school heads' practices, their perceived stressfulness and how enjoyable practices performed are necessitated this study. School heads' practices were examined using a convenient sample of senior high school heads and assistants in Ghana with appropriate statistical tools (exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis and multinomial logistics regression). The findings revealed 22 activities that defined school heads' practices. Regarding those activities, 'organising information sessions with parents' and 'cooperating with organisations' were least performed while activities related to counselling and administration, which were perceived as stressful, were performed equally. In total, practices perceived as stressful and enjoyable were performed more, while practices enjoyed significantly influenced the performance of practices in general. In practice, the knowledge of stressful and enjoyable practices guarantees the initiation of a suitable coping strategy than being ignorant, thereby improving school leadership and the health of school heads.*

**Keywords:** school heads; heads, principals; practices; job stress

## 1. Introduction

School heads perform important duties that are supposed to contribute to a successful outcome in schools (Juma, Simatwa & Ayodo, 2016; Wallace Foundation, 2013). However, the incidence of job stress has caused some heads to have low job satisfaction (Markow, Macia & Lee, 2013), others to lose interest in the job (Mbibi, Oluchi & Nwamuo., 2013) and some to opt for other occupations (Yambo, Kindiki & Tuitoek, 2012). Since school heads are key officers in school administration (Huber, 2016; Kukemelk & Ginter, 2016), it is worth making an investigation to define the practices they perform and their resilience in performing the practices.

It was previously observed that school heads' functions were not well defined (Huber, 2004), but the school leadership field is replete with syntheses of studies on improving leadership quality, performance and effectiveness of school leaders (Hallinger & Huber, 2012; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Huber, 2016; Huber & Muijs, 2010; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood & Anderson, 2010) and suggestions to limit their duties to reduce their workload (Bedi & Kukemelk, 2018). Some attempt was made to define practices of school heads in decentralised education systems (Huber et al., 2013; Kukemelk & Mikk, 2015) but none in a centralised one. For example, studies on job stress and performance among

school heads (Mbibi et al. 2013; Wadesango, Gudyanga & Mberewere, 2015; Yambo, Odhiambo & Odera, 2014) have concluded that workload and time pressure were stressors, but the duties that increased workloads were not identified. Another study, conducted in a decentralised education system where school leaders had power to hire and sack staff, concluded that practices perceived as stressful were most disliked while activities that were perceived as less stressful were more performed (Huber et al., 2013).

There have been inconclusive findings regarding practices of school heads and their resulting stress (Huber et al., 2013; Kukemelk & Mikk, 2015) and the acceptable practices performed by principals (Huber, 2004, 2007; Kukemelk & Mikk, 2015). Consequently, this study examined the practices performed by school heads in the framework of the World School Leadership Study (WSLS), a study on a global scale investigating the practices of school leaders (Huber, Skedsmo et al., 2016). The themes supported in this study were *teaching roles, counselling and communal roles and administration and management roles*.

### 1.1 School Heads Practices

The first theme was teaching roles (development of teaching practice). Promotion of quality teaching and learning in schools is largely dependent on school heads (OECD, 2008). Heads were thus expected to influence the organisation of teaching and learning through the allocation of teachers, their assessment and reflecting on teaching methods with teachers, among others. The second theme was counselling and communal roles (education and guidance). Schools not only provide the means to learn but also a platform for the total educational development and guidance of students (LePage et al., 2005; Simonsen et al., 2008). In this regard, school leaders are expected to provide support to students to work within the curriculum and to develop procedures that encourage appropriate behaviour from teachers and students. Furthermore, school leaders support students in handling learning and to deal with social challenges that might affect their academic progress.

The last theme was administration and management roles. The duty of school leaders is also to ensure that their schools were well organised and administered in an environment that promotes teaching and learning (Doş & Savaş, 2015). They are, therefore, expected to be accountable to stakeholders, sharing information to keep parents abreast with educational outcomes and developments in the school. Also, school leaders must communicate the school's vision and mission clearly to stakeholders (Wallace Foundation, 2014), resolving conflicts when they arise in the community and dealing with professional standards and general norms in the school.

### 1.2 School Heads Practices and Job Stress

Given the value placed on education and the fact that school leaders are major stakeholders in education delivery (Huber, 2016; Kukemelk & Ginter, 2016), there are high expectations and increasing demands on school heads from other stakeholders (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Consequently, research attention was focused more on means to improve their quality and the well-functioning of schools in general (ibid), while research regarding the development of comprehensive initiatives to address school leaders proficiencies to make their jobs less stressful has been lacking (Zame et al., 2008).

A greater proportion of studies examining job stress among school leaders has focused on identifying stressors that result from the environment and few on the direct activities of the school heads. Yambo et al. (2014), in examining the extent of job stress among Kenyan school heads, identified school and personal variables, increase in workload and family role conflict as stressors. Similarly, in a study among Zimbabwean school leaders, Wadesango et al. (2015) found that job stress was occasioned by the behaviour of teachers in the discharge of their duties. The teachers, the study reported, were coming to school late and sometimes came drunk; a situation which was stressful to the school leaders. Furthermore, using a sample of school heads in Nigeria and a regression analysis,

Mbibi et al. (2013) identified gender, qualification and experience as stressors among heads in Abia state. Also, Friedman (2002), in a summary of research reporting sources of stress, revealed work overload, career development, inadequate resources, organisational structure and climate, role in the organisation, role conflict and ambiguity and school leaders' relations with co-workers, superiors and clients to be stressors, among others. Most of these stressors were factors that were external to heads.

Darmody and Smyth (2011, 2016) studied occupational stress among primary school heads using the Growing up in Ireland data. The results show that though they were happy with their job, they reported a strong, negative impact of job stress due to the dual role school leaders perform as administrators and teachers. A related study to determine the level of job stress in Indiana identified specific stressful issues, such as increase in paperwork, preparation of reports and time pressure, as sources of stress which, in the long run, negatively affected performance (Boyland, 2011).

Huber et al. (2013), in a study among Germans, Austrians and Swiss school principals examined activities performed by school leaders on nine different factors. The study revealed that principals perceived practices related to organisational and administrative activities as stressful and disliked them the most, while activities related to teaching and education, like teaching classes and talking with students were well performed and perceived as slightly stressful. Similarly, Kukemelk and Mikk (2015) reported conflict resolution and providing counselling services to students as being stressful to perform for principals. The conclusions from these studies were that school heads who perceived an activity as stressful did not desire to perform such acts as much as activities perceived as not (or less) stressful (Huber et al., 2017).

In sum, studies related to job stress in education conducted in a nearly similar context to this study focused on identifying stressors that resulted from factors external to the school heads, while those that examined practices were conducted in different settings and with different participants – a decentralised educational system and school heads with pre-service training and the power to recruit, pay remunerations and sack non-performing teachers (Huber, Gördel et al., 2016). Therefore, it is of research value to investigate the practices of heads in another context to deepen knowledge on school leadership practices and their resulting stress. The research questions resolved in the study were the following:

- Which practices are performed by school heads?
- Which practices performed by school heads are enjoyable and which are stressful to perform?
- How well do stressful practices performed and perceived level of enjoyment influence the performance of such practices by school heads?

## 2. Current Study

### 2.1 Methodology, data source and instrument

This section presents an account of steps taken in this study and a description of the instrument used. The participants were drawn from among heads and deputy heads of different ages, rank, sex and experience in the Education Service from senior high schools in Ghana using convenient and purposive sampling techniques. The researchers visited 205 senior high schools in the summer of 2019 to seek their consent to participate in the study. School leaders from 145 schools consented and completed the survey questionnaire. A total of 195 respondents completed the questionnaire and were used in the analysis, representing a response rate of 67%. Stevens (1996) pointed out that for a reliable equation to be obtained in social science research about 15 respondents per predictor were needed. Also, Fidell and Tabachnick (2001) advised against using many cases as it has the potential risk of deriving significance from the slightest variance; therefore, a sample size of N = 195 was considered appropriate. Sample characteristics were gender (males 79%; females 21%), average age (males 49.5 years; females 49.8 years), experience (1–5 years 77.9%; 6–10 years 16.4%; above 10 years

5.7%).

Regarding the study instrument, the scale used by Kukemelk and Mikk (2015), pioneered by the Stephan Huber Research Group (Huber et al., 2013) was adapted for the current study. Unlike the previous studies (Huber et al., 2013; Kukemelk & Mikk, 2015), the questionnaire was administered on paper. Furthermore, in adapting the instrument, the researchers first reviewed the items to suit the study context. Next, the instrument was reviewed by five educationists working with the Ghana Education Service. Their comments resulted in the modification of five items, one deletion and two more items added. The final instrument was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = 'never performed' to 5 = 'always performed' to assess the performance of practices, and 1 = 'not enjoyed at all' to 5 = 'enjoyed very much' for the level of enjoyment of practices performed and 1 = 'causes no stress' to 5 = 'causes great stress' for the section measuring the stressful nature of practices. In scoring, high scores on each scale were an indication of frequent performance of practices (practices performed scale), high level of enjoyment in performing practices (practices enjoyed scale) and high stress level in performing activities (perceived stressful practices scale), while the reverse, low scores, meant the low performance of practices, low level of enjoyment in performing practices and low perceived stressfulness in performing practices.

### 3. Result

#### 3.1 Practices of school leaders

To determine the practices of school leaders an exploratory factor analysis was conducted using Mplus version 7 with maximum likelihood. Items that loaded significantly on the 3-factor model (see parallel analysis graph in appendix 1) with the appropriate approximate fit indices: chi-square ( $p < .05$ ), RMSEA = .07 and SRMR = .06 were selected (Asparouhov & Mathen, 2018). Next, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to test the 3-factor measurement model and 22 items were retained with fit indices:  $X^2/df = 1.83$ ,  $p < .05$ , RMSEA = .07, CFI = .90, TLI = .90 and SRMR = .06 (Asparouhov & Mathen, 2018; see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Factor analysis showing practices performed among school leaders

No. Items	Factor Loadings		
	1	2	3
<b>Teaching Roles</b>			
1. Performing subject/class allocation with the cooperation of teachers	.782		
2. Evaluating/assessing teachers' lesson notes	.713		
3. Assessing teachers' performance	.682		
4. Encouraging teachers to try out new teaching methods	.567		
<b>Administrative and Management Roles</b>			
5. Giving feedback to parents and students' council about evaluation results		.704	
6. Developing the school vision (Mission statement)		.703	
7. Conducting/chairing staff meetings		.692	
8. Conducting school evaluations		.678	
9. Negotiating with representatives of educational authorities		.668	
10. Representing the school's interests in meetings with superiors/educational authorities		.662	
11. Building partnerships with other schools		.660	
12. Organising parent information sessions		.596	
13. Developing a plan for the continuous professional development of staff		.594	
14. Cooperating with organisations (e.g. NGOs), companies and associations		.581	
15. Writing reports for educational authorities		.576	
16. Moderating meetings to resolve teacher conflicts		.564	
17. Maintaining contact with Old Students' Association		.535	
18. Communicating the school's vision (mission statement) convincingly		.509	

<b>Counselling / Communal Roles</b>	
19. Initiating teamwork	.650
20. Cooperating with the school management team	.597
21. Enforcing the agreed code of conduct related to interactions in the school	.533
22. Taking care of individual students if they have problems	.455

3.2 *RQ1. Which practices performed by school leaders are enjoyable and which are stressful to perform?*

### 3.2.1 *Practices performed*

The aim here was to identify the practices performed most by school leaders in their day-to-day school management. The frequency, means and standard deviations of the 22 items, with significant factor loadings, were computed and ranked. The mean scores for all the items were from 3.44–4.37, with a grand mean of 3.76. This implied that the performance level was from ‘often performed’ to ‘always performed’ in most cases. As reported in Table 2, the first to fifth highest-rated practices performed were ‘initiating teamwork’, ‘enforcing agreed code of conduct related to interactions in the school’, ‘taking care of individual students if they have problems’, ‘cooperating with the school management team’ and ‘communicating the school’s vision’. Whereas the five least performed practices were ‘developing a plan for the continuous professional development of staff’, ‘negotiating with representatives of educational authorities’, ‘cooperating with organisations’, ‘building partnerships with other schools’ and ‘organising parent information sessions’.

**Table 2:** Ranking of school heads’ practices performed

<b>Practices Performed</b>	<b>Mean (Scale 1–5)</b>	<b>SD</b>
1. Initiating teamwork	4.37	.79
2. Enforcing the agreed code of conduct related to interactions in the school	4.20	.92
3. Taking care of individual students if they have problems	4.10	.99
4. Cooperating with the school management team	4.04	.95
5. Communicating the school’s vision (mission statement) convincingly	3.87	1.03
6. Assessing teachers’ performance	3.84	1.07
7. Giving feedback to parents and students’ council about evaluation results	3.82	1.16
8. Moderating meetings to resolve teacher conflicts	3.80	.97
9. Maintaining contact with Old Students’ Association	3.76	1.10
10. Encouraging teachers to try out new teaching methods	3.74	.97
11. Performing subject/class allocation with the cooperation of teachers	3.73	1.34
12. Writing reports for educational authorities	3.72	1.12
13. Conducting/chairing staff meetings	3.70	1.16
14. Conducting school evaluations	3.66	1.10
15. Evaluating/assessing teachers’ lesson notes.	3.58	1.29
16. Developing the school vision (mission statement)	3.58	1.24
17. Representing the school’s interests in meetings with superiors/educational authorities	3.57	1.23
18. Developing a plan for the continuous professional development of staff	3.55	1.12
19. Negotiating with representatives of educational authorities	3.55	1.19
20. Cooperating with organisations (e.g. NGOs), companies and associations	3.52	1.22
21. Building partnerships with other schools	3.51	1.23
22. Organising parent information sessions	3.44	1.21

\*grand mean of practices performed = 3.76

### 3.2.2 *Practices perceived as stressful*

Regarding practices perceived as stressful to perform, the results are presented in Table 3. The results

report mean scores from 2.20 to 3.11, with a grand mean of 2.68. Matching this with the scoring scale, this implies that school leaders rated performing practices as ‘causing little stress’ to ‘causing some stress’. In terms of the stress level of the specific practices, ‘enforcing the agreed code of conduct related to interactions in the school’, ‘taking care of individual students if they have any problems’, ‘moderating meetings to resolve teacher conflicts’, ‘conducting school evaluations’ and ‘evaluating or assessing teachers’ lesson notes’ were the five most stressful practices. However, the following practices were rated the least stressful: ‘representing the school’s interest in meetings with superiors’, ‘cooperating with the school management team’, ‘cooperating with organisations’, ‘conducting or chairing staff meetings’ and ‘building partnership with other schools’.

**Table 3:** Ranking of school heads’ practices perceived as stressful

Practices Perceived as Stressful	Mean (Scale 1-5)	SD
1. Enforcing the agreed code of conduct related to interactions in the school	3.11	1.17
2. Taking care of individual students if they have problems	3.09	1.16
3. Moderating meetings to resolve teacher conflicts	3.05	1.12
4. Conducting school evaluations	2.97	1.12
5. Evaluating/assessing teachers’ lesson notes	2.91	1.08
6. Assessing teachers’ performance	2.84	1.14
7. Writing reports for educational authorities	2.84	1.26
8. Organising parent information sessions	2.77	1.13
9. Performing subject/class allocation with the cooperation of teachers	2.77	1.15
10. Developing a plan for the continuous professional development of staff	2.74	1.05
11. Negotiating with representatives of educational authorities	2.68	1.08
12. Developing the school vision (mission statement)	2.65	1.09
13. Communicating the school’s vision (mission statement) convincingly	2.64	1.01
14. Encouraging teachers to try out new teaching methods	2.62	1.12
15. Giving feedback to parents and students’ council about evaluation results	2.61	1.09
16. Maintaining contact with Old Students’ Association	2.57	1.14
17. Initiating teamwork	2.46	1.03
18. Representing the school’s interests in meetings with superiors/educational authorities	2.45	1.14
19. Cooperating with the school management team	2.38	1.18
20. Cooperating with organisations (e.g. NGOs), companies and associations	2.28	1.08
21. Conducting/chairing staff meetings	2.27	1.05
22. Building partnerships with other schools	2.20	1.04

\*\*grand mean of stressful practices = 2.68

### 3.2.3 Practices enjoyed

This section evaluates how participants enjoyed performing practices. The results presented in Table 4 report mean scores from 3.50 to 4.30, with a grand mean of 3.79, implying that school leaders enjoyed performing these practices. According to the ranking, performing practices related to ‘cooperating with the school management team’, ‘initiating teamwork’, ‘taking care of individual students if they have problems’, ‘enforcing the agreed code of conduct related to interactions in the school’ and ‘encouraging teachers to try out new teaching methods’ were most enjoyed, while the least enjoyed practices included ‘performing subject/class allocation with the cooperation of teachers’, ‘building partnerships with other schools’, ‘cooperating with organisations’, ‘organising parent information sessions’ and ‘writing report for authorities’ (see Table 4).

**Table 4:** Ranking of school heads' practices enjoyed

Practices Enjoyed	Mean (Scale 1-5)	SD
1. Cooperating with the school management team	4.30	.77
2. Initiating teamwork	4.10	.93
3. Taking care of individual students if they have problems	4.01	.95
4. Enforcing the agreed code of conduct related to interactions in the school	3.99	.96
5. Encouraging teachers to try out new teaching methods	3.92	1.00
6. Assessing teachers' performance	3.91	.99
7. Conducting/chairing staff meetings	3.88	1.09
8. Maintaining contact with Old Students' Association	3.86	1.12
9. Communicating the school's vision (mission statement) convincingly	3.82	1.00
10. Moderating meetings to resolve teacher conflicts	3.80	.96
11. Representing the school's interests in meetings with superiors/educational authorities	3.76	1.13
12. Negotiating with representatives of educational authorities	3.75	1.11
13. Giving feedback to parents and students' council about evaluation results	3.73	1.12
14. Evaluating/assessing teachers' lesson notes	3.72	1.19
15. Developing the school vision (mission statement)	3.71	1.13
16. Conducting school evaluations	3.68	1.11
17. Developing a plan for the continuous professional development of staff	3.65	1.04
18. Performing subject/class allocation with the cooperation of teachers	3.65	1.22
19. Building partnerships with other schools	3.63	1.23
20. Cooperating with organisations (e.g. NGOs), companies and associations	3.52	1.22
21. Organising parent information sessions	3.51	1.19
22. Writing reports for educational authorities	3.50	1.25

\*\*\*grand mean of practices enjoyed = 3.79

3.3 *RQ2. How well do stressful practices performed and perceived level of enjoyment influence the performance of such practices by school leaders?*

Multinomial logistics regression analysis was conducted to investigate the effect of perceived stressful practices and perceived level of enjoyment on practices performed. Practices performed (the response variable) were coded into three response levels as 1 = 'seldom/sometimes performed', 2 = 'often performed' and 3 = 'always performed'. See appendix 2 for the result of scale reliability and significance. The model assessed by a likelihood ratio chi-square test showed a significant improvement in fit over the null model [ $X^2(4) = 139.74, p < .001$ ]. However, the goodness of fit test showed mixed results on the deviance and Pearson chi-square tests. The Pearson's chi-square test showed the model did not fit the data well [ $X^2(368) = 484.76, p < .001$ ], whereas the deviance chi-square test indicated a good fit [ $X^2(368) = 232.07, p > .05$ ]; a non-significant test result showed that the model fit the data well (Field, 2018; Petrucci, 2009). Likelihood ratio tests of the overall contribution of each explanatory variable in the model showed that practices enjoyed contributed significantly to the model [ $X^2(2) = 136.52, p < .001$ ], whereas perceived stressful practices were not significant [ $X^2(2) = .77, p > .05$ ; see Table 3].

**Table 5:** Likelihood ratio tests showing the contributions of explanatory variables to the model

Effect	Model Fitting Criteria		Likelihood Ratio Tests		
	-2 Log Likelihood of Reduced Model		Chi-Square	df	Sig.
Intercept	340.24		104.01	2	.000
Practices enjoyed	372.75		136.52	2	.000
Practices stressful	236.99		.77	2	.681

\*The chi-square statistic is the difference in -2 log-likelihoods between the final model and a reduced model. The reduced model was formed by omitting an effect from the final model. The null hypothesis is that all parameters of that effect are 0.

When comparing the effect of practices enjoyed and perceived stressful practices on practices ‘often performed’ relative to practices ‘seldom/sometimes performed’ (the reference category), the results show that practices enjoyed was significant and positive in predicting practices performed ‘often’ in the model ( $B = .11$ , std. error =  $.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This shows that the enjoyment of practices resulted in a significant performance of such practices more ‘often’ as compared to performing the practices ‘seldom/sometimes’. The odds ratio [Exp (B) = 1.12] further shows that a unit increase in practices enjoyed will increase the likelihood of performing practices ‘often’ by a factor of 1.12. However, practices perceived as stressful were not significant in the model ( $B = .004$ , std. error =  $.018$ ,  $p > .05$ ). This means the practices had a statistically insignificant effect on how ‘often’ practices were performed. However, a unit increase in performing practices perceived as stressful would increase performing practices ‘often’ by an almost similar proportion [Exp (B) = 1.004].

The second set of coefficients represented a comparison between practices ‘always’ and ‘seldom/sometimes’ performed, relative to practices enjoyed and perceived as stressful. Again, practices enjoyed were significant and positive in predicting practices performed ‘always’ in the model ( $B = .33$ , std. error =  $.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This means that the enjoyment of practices significantly led to performing such practices ‘always’ more than performing practices ‘seldom/sometimes’. Furthermore, the odds ratio [Exp (B) = 1.39] revealed that for a unit increase in the level of enjoyment of practices, the practices ‘always’ performed increased 1.39 times. In contrast, practices perceived as stressful were not significant ( $B = -.007$ , std. error =  $.02$ ,  $p > .05$ ), meaning that perceived stressfulness of practices had no impact on performing practices ‘always’ by school leaders. The odds ratio of Exp (B) =  $.99$  further showed that a unit increase in the stressfulness of practices would result in a reduction of practices performed ‘always’ by a factor of  $.99$  (see Table 3).

Finally, the classification analysis showed the group memberships that were best predicted. Heads that ‘often performed’ were most correctly predicted (84.3%), followed by ‘always performed’ (76.1%), and heads that ‘seldom/sometimes performed’ were only 38.5% correctly predicted by the model. Overall, the model prediction rate was 75.4% (see appendix 3).

**Table 6:** Parameter estimates showing the impact of practices enjoyed and stressful practices on levels of practices performed

		B	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp (B)
Often Performed	Intercept	-7.300	2.050	12.681	1	.000	
	Practices enjoyed	.113	.027	17.042	1	.000	1.120
	Practices stressful	.004	.018	0.042	1	.838	1.004
Always Performed	Intercept	-25.786	3.618	50.809	1	.000	
	Practices enjoyed	.326	.043	58.363	1	.000	1.386
	Practices stressful	-.007	.021	0.115	1	.734	.993

\*The reference category is: seldom/sometimes performed.

#### 4. Discussion

In the assessment of Huber (2016) and Kukemelk and Ginter (2016), school leaders are a major human resource in the education delivery process. Furthermore, knowing that school leadership is central to guaranteeing a stable environment for academic work, especially in disadvantaged settings (Towers, 2020), it is important to have current knowledge on the practices of school leaders. However, not much effort has been made to identify these practices performed by school leaders. This study, therefore, built on the previous examination of school leaders’ practices (Huber et. al., 2013) sought to identify the popular practices school leaders perform in their day-to-day administration and to determine which of these practices were stressful and which were enjoyable. Also, the study aimed to find out whether perceived stressful practices and enjoyed practices predicted practices performed.

First, the study identified 22 practices grouped under three factors (themes) as popular practices



among school leaders. The three factors were teaching practice roles (4 items), administration and management roles (14 items), and counselling or communal roles (4 items). Practices under teaching practice roles were activities related to subject/class allocation, evaluating teachers and supporting teachers in developing new methodologies to make teaching interesting and engaging for learners. Practices under administration and management were related to school administration, school culture, human resource management and interactions within and outside the school with other stakeholders. Counselling/communal roles had practices like cooperation, initiating teamwork, taking care of individual students and ensuring that the code of conduct established in the school was enforced. Interestingly, though the practices congregated into three components, the items were associated with all the nine components earlier proposed by Huber et al. (2013). The significant variation in the current study was the reduction in the number of practices compared to Huber et al. (2013), who suggested 58 practices under nine factors.

Collaboration, students' welfare and rule enforcement were highly performed. This, according to Crum et al. (2010), promotes a good working environment and confidence in leadership as decisions are made with all stakeholders involved in the process. However, the low level of performing practices related to information sessions for parents and cooperation with organisations was against recommended practice. For example, Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) suggested that opportunities should be created for families and support providers for counselling services and to motivate students in their learning development process. This would be best achieved if schools share information with parents and engage corporate bodies who invariably would employ graduates of the school system.

Supporting prior studies (Kukemelk & Mikk, 2015; Huber, Tulowitzki & Hameyer, 2017), this study revealed school leaders perceive practices performed as moderately stressful. Furthermore, it identified specific practices school leaders perceived as stressful rather than simply labelling or attributing all stressful activities to workload as done in Friedman (2001), Damordy and Symth (2016), Mbibi et al. (2013), Steward (2014), Wadesango et al. (2015) and Yambo et al. (2014), for example. Another significant finding was that most perceived stressful practices were equally performed. Practices related to guidance and counselling, administrative and management roles, which were perceived as the most stressful, were also the most performed practices. This result negates the finding of Huber et al. (2017), in which school leaders who perceived an activity as stressful did not like to perform such activities, but supports the finding of Kukemelk and Mikk (2015), in which activities related to conflict resolution among teachers and supporting individual students were most stressful.

Next, the results show a high level of enjoyment of practices performed. Practices related to counselling and communal roles ('cooperating with the school management team', 'initiating teamwork', 'taking care of individual students if they have a problem' and 'enforcing the agreed code of conduct relating to interactions in the school') were more enjoyable than practices related to administration and management ('conducting/chairing staff meetings', 'moderating meetings to resolve teacher conflict', 'maintaining contact with Old Students' Association' and communicating the schools' vision') and teaching roles ('assessing teachers' performance' and 'encouraging teachers to try out new teaching methods'). Some practices, though performed, were the least enjoyable. These included the following: 'building partnerships with other schools', 'cooperating with organisations', 'organising parent information sessions' and 'writing reports for educational authorities'. These practices were classified under administration and management, thus supporting earlier studies in which school leaders rated performing practices related to administration less highly compared to others (Huber et al., 2017).

Enjoying practices performed was found to serve as motivation and contributed towards increased performance (Fernet et al., 2012), thereby preventing stress in the long term and promoting psychological health (Fernet et al., 2010; Lam & Gurland, 2008; Richer et al., 2002). It was, therefore, not surprising when the results revealed that practices enjoyed strongly predicted practices performed, rather than practices perceived as stressful. Separately, after analysing levels of practices

performed against practices enjoyed and practices perceived as stressful, practices enjoyed had a significant influence on how 'often' school heads performed practices whereas practices perceived stressful was not significant but was positive ( $B = .004$ ). Inferring from this result, it could be said that though a task might be challenging, the fulfilment or joy derived from carrying out such activities on a daily basis spurred them on to continually perform it, ignoring the threat of the inherent stressfulness.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) contended that stress results when an individual perceives a situation as a threat and is unable to cope with the stressful situation or event; however, when the individual possesses or can use adequate coping skills, the situation or event may not be a stressor. Hence, the finding that practices enjoyed significantly influenced school heads to 'always' perform practices whereas practices perceived as stressful made no significant impact and had a negative relationship exemplified the transactional model of stress (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) as school heads did not perceive performing practices as 'always' a threat. At the level of 'often' performed practices, school heads did not perceive performing the practices (the situation) as stressful; hence, performance increased 'often'. But, at the level of 'always' performed, the situation was assessed as a threat and hence the heads took to 'flight' and reduced performance at the 'always performed' level to maintain equilibrium in their system (Tonhajzerova & Mestanik, 2017).

## 5. Conclusion

As little is known about school leaders' practices in a centrally controlled education system like Ghana, this study aimed in part to identify practices performed by school leaders and determine which of those practices were enjoyable and which were stressful, to define the practices of school heads and to expand knowledge in school leadership improvement. Generally, providing leadership was described as being stressful (Steward, 2014) and in education – the teaching profession and, specifically, the job of school head was associated with moderate to high stress (Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Wadesango et al., 2015; Yambo et al., 2014), such that the tendency to avoid performing some practices was reported (Huber et al., 2017). Therefore, defining school heads' practices and having knowledge of stressful and enjoyable practices could to a great extent help them identify strategies to cope with the effects of stress resulting from such practices and thereby reduce the impact on their health.

The findings from this study can be used by present and prospective school heads and the central government to improve school management, policy formulation and students' learning outcomes in general. Knowing that heads take less interest in 'cooperating with organisations to interact with students' could influence them and governments to consider restructuring the curriculum to explicitly create collaborations between schools and industry where it is missing. This has the potential of orienting students to develop their career paths early.

Also, the knowledge of which practices are performed and which are perceived as stressful or enjoyable, as revealed in this study, can allay the fears of prospective heads and serve as a framework for current heads.

Given the findings of the study, the researchers suggest that school leadership and management courses should be introduced in colleges of education to prepare trainee teachers to build their capacity and to support them navigate well the related job stress and satisfaction associated with the job.

### 5.1 Study Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations to the study that have to be considered in future studies and before generalising the findings. First, the questionnaire was self-reported, thus there might be some desirability problems (Demetriou, Özer & Essau et al., 2015). Therefore, future studies could consider adding another data collection instrument to serve as a form of triangulation in investigating the

practices. Also, the data was collected from Ghana where the education system is centrally controlled. The findings, therefore, can only be generalised to countries with a similar culture to the study context.

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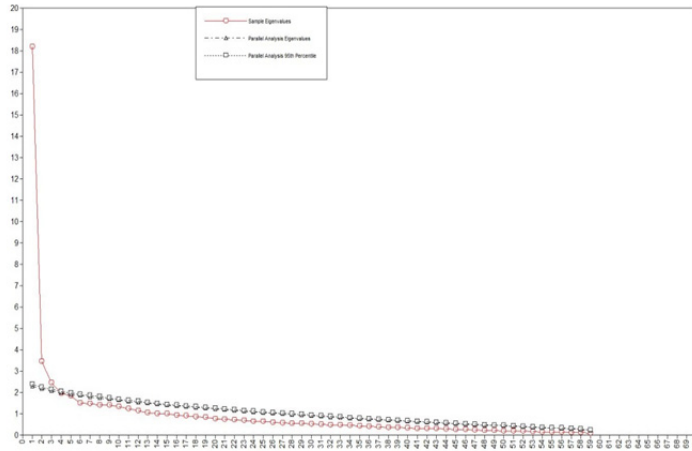
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**Appendix 1:**



**Figure 1:** Graph of Parallel Analysis

**Appendix 2:** Scale Reliability Values

Scale	No. of items	Alpha	Mean	SD	Item Mean	Sig.
Practices Performed	22	0.91	82.64	14.3	3.36	P < .001
Practices Enjoyed	22	0.90	83.38	13.36	3.79	P < .001
Practices Stressful	22	0.94	58.89	16.28	2.68	P < .001

**Appendix 3:** Classification Table showing correct predicted group membership

Observed	Predicted			Percent Correct
	Seldom / Sometimes Performed	Often Performed	Always Performed	
Seldom / Sometimes Performed	10	15	1	38.5%
Often Performed	3	86	13	84.3%
Always Performed	0	16	51	76.1%
Overall Percentage	6.7%	60.0%	33.3%	75.4%

**Appendix 4:** Model Fitting Information

Model	Model Fitting Criteria	Likelihood Ratio Tests		
	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi-Square	Chi-Square	Chi-Square
Intercept Only	375.967			
Final	236.231	139.736	4	0.000