

## Context within Context: Towards a New Understanding of Headteacher Leadership Enactment in Ghana

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### **Abstract:**

Ghana Education Service (GES) is hierarchically managed across all levels with Headteachers being the smallest unit of the leadership framework. As the smallest unit they are responsabilized for the school's everyday operations. Understanding how these Headteachers enact leadership within this hierarchy to support their practices in the context is not well understood. Recent literature shows the absence of formal Headteacher Leadership (HTL) training and recruitment programs. Empirical research also shows a prevalence of diverse leadership practices but predominantly transformational leadership with evidence it has been shaped by international training programs like Leadership for Learning (Jull et al., 2014; Swaffield, 2017). Yet Ghana's HTL is constructed and produced through the Headteachers' Handbook (GES, 2010). As a Handbook, it informs how Headteachers are to enact leadership. Little attention has been paid to how Headteachers navigate their leadership then within this context. Therefore, this study examined how Headteachers understand their leadership practices within this hierarchy and context of a handbook that details how leadership should be practiced. This study is one study within a larger PhD project that employed three methodologies: a rapid review of the literature, a critical discourse analysis of the Headteachers Handbook, and finally an interactive ethnography designed to explore the context-specific leadership practices of Six ECE Headteachers across Ghana. This paper reports on the preliminary themes emerging from this final phase of the PhD project. Thematic and ethnographic analyses of interviews, focus group discussions, and observation fieldnotes showed emerging themes point to Headteachers' practices as negotiating and navigating between policies, context, and culture to translate and interpret policies to commensurate the cultural value of school communities. While these themes suggest a significant impact on Headteachers' agency, notions of damaging-and-damaged culture and deculturizing self also surfaced. The emerging themes portray the voices of Ghana's Headteachers, establishing the contextual leadership realities of the West African nation. These findings provide a frame of reference for present and future Headteachers in the field and also point to the essential need for developing leadership frameworks tailored to Ghana's HTL context.

### **Keywords:**

Context, Ethnography, GES, Headteachers, Headteacher Leadership.