
School Improvement and Support Officers as Curriculum Leaders in Cape Coast North Municipality - Ghana: Roles, Challenges, and the Way Forward

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Abstract

This study investigated the roles, challenges, and impacts of School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) as curriculum leaders in public basic schools within the Cape Coast North Municipality of Ghana. Guided by distributed and instructional leadership theories, the study employed a convergent mixed-methods design integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. Data was collected from 261 teachers and headteachers using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews, and analysed through descriptive statistics, correlation, regression analyses, and thematic analysis. Findings revealed that curriculum leadership was strongly associated with teacher professionalism ($r = .783$, $p < .001$), learning outcomes ($r = .817$, $p < .001$), and school improvement ($r = .816$, $p < .001$). Regression analysis demonstrated that teaching practices, learning outcomes, and school improvement together accounted for 74.6% of the variance in curriculum leadership perceptions ($R^2 = .746$). Despite these positive associations, SISOs faced persistent logistical constraints, limited professional development opportunities, and fragmented collaboration with school leadership teams. The results confirm the critical role of SISOs in supporting instructional quality while highlighting the systemic barriers constraining their effectiveness. The study recommends sustained investment in targeted training, improved logistical support, and stronger collaborative frameworks to enable SISOs to fulfil their mandate as curriculum leaders. The findings provide practical implications for policymakers, educational managers, and teacher development stakeholders committed to strengthening curriculum leadership in decentralised education systems.

Keywords: Curriculum leadership, Ghana, School Improvement and Support Officers, School improvement, Instructional leadership, Qualitative study, Quantitative study, and Basic education.

Introduction

The evolving landscape of education in Ghana has brought renewed attention to curriculum leadership as a key lever for school improvement and educational equity. As global and national educational policies increasingly emphasise standards, outcomes, and accountability, the need for effective instructional leadership within schools and districts has become indispensable (Hallinger, 2018). In this context, School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) have emerged as frontline actors responsible for translating national curriculum frameworks into meaningful instructional practices across schools. Particularly in the Cape Coast Municipality an area known for both its historical educational prominence and current reform efforts, SISOs play a unique bridging role between educational policy and classroom practice.

Despite this importance, limited empirical research exists on the actual functions and effectiveness of SISOs as curriculum leaders in Ghana. Most educational reform studies have focused on school heads, teachers, or national curriculum changes, with minimal focus on district-level officers who serve as the link between policy direction and implementation. This oversight is concerning, given that the Ghana Education Service (GES) continues to rely on SISOs to drive quality assurance, instructional supervision, and teacher development. Their role in curriculum leadership, therefore, merits close attention not only to understand what they do, but also how they do it, what challenges they face, and what systemic changes are required to empower them (Osei-Bonsu & Gyamera, 2022).

Curriculum leadership refers to the capacity of educational leaders to support, guide, and sustain effective teaching and learning through alignment with curriculum goals and standards (Fullan, 2019). It transcends administrative duties and involves deep engagement with pedagogical processes, teacher mentorship, and student achievement. In developed contexts, district-level instructional leaders are well-resourced and institutionally supported. However, in the Ghanaian setting, the landscape is different, characterised by resource limitations, rigid bureaucracy, and inconsistent professional training. Understanding how SISOs navigate these challenges, adapt their roles, and shape educational outcomes is thus crucial for informing sustainable policy reforms and enhancing educational delivery.

Globally, educational systems have increasingly recognised the importance of decentralised leadership and instructional support as essential drivers of curriculum implementation and reform. In many successful education systems, district-level officers serve not only as compliance monitors but as instructional leaders who provide coaching, professional development, and feedback to teachers (Leithwood et al., 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, however, the transition from hierarchical inspection models to collaborative curriculum leadership remains uneven. Ghana's Education Strategic Plan (2018-2030) outlines the role of SISOs as agents of instructional supervision and school improvement, yet this role is poorly defined in practice and inconsistently implemented across districts (Ministry of Education, 2018).

The decentralisation of Ghana's education system was intended to empower local actors, including SISOs, to take a more active role in supporting teaching and learning. Yet studies have

shown that SISOs are often overwhelmed by administrative workloads, poorly resourced, and inadequately trained to address the pedagogical complexities of curriculum delivery in secondary schools (Ankomah & Bentsil, 2021; Opoku-Asare & Essel, 2021). This is particularly problematic given the shift to the Common Core Programme and other curriculum reforms that demand high levels of instructional alignment and support. Moreover, SISOs often work in isolation from school-based leadership teams, reducing their potential to drive meaningful change.

The Cape Coast Municipality, a historically significant educational hub, provides a relevant context for this study. It comprises a mix of urban and peri-urban schools, many of which face diverse challenges related to curriculum delivery, teacher supervision, and resource allocation. Examining how SISOs operate within this context offers insights into how their roles can be strengthened, redefined, and better integrated into Ghana's broader education reform agenda. This study therefore seeks to explore the lived experiences, institutional challenges, and practical impact of SISOs as curriculum leaders in selected secondary schools in the Cape Coast Municipality.

In Ghana's decentralised education system, School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) are mandated to serve as the critical link between national curriculum policies and school-level instructional practices. Despite their centrality to curriculum supervision, there is a notable lack of empirical understanding and policy clarity regarding the curriculum leadership roles that SISOs are expected to perform particularly within secondary schools. Most studies and reforms in Ghana have focused on the capacities of headteachers and classroom teachers, often excluding SISOs from the discourse on curriculum implementation and school improvement.

This gap in attention is concerning, as SISOs often operate under challenging conditions, including insufficient logistical resources, irregular training opportunities, excessive administrative burdens, and a lack of integration into school leadership teams. As a result, their ability to act as curriculum leaders is significantly weakened, which in turn affects the quality of curriculum delivery and student learning outcomes. In secondary schools where curriculum interpretation and content depth require more targeted support, these challenges are even more pronounced.

Thus, the core problem addressed in this study is the underexplored and underutilised role of SISOs as curriculum leaders, alongside the institutional, systemic, and relational factors that constrain their effectiveness. Without targeted research on this issue, the potential of SISOs to contribute to national education reform and improved school performance remains untapped. This study aims to fill that gap by providing an in-depth, context-specific examination of how SISOs in the Cape Coast Municipality enact curriculum leadership, what barriers they face, and how their influence can be strengthened.

Literature Review

The reviews related studies regarding school improvement and support officers as curriculum leaders, their roles, challenges, presents theoretical, conceptual and empirical reviews.

Conceptualising Curriculum Leadership in Educational Contexts

Curriculum leadership has emerged as a vital construct in educational reform, underpinning how schools interpret, implement, and adapt national curricula to suit contextual realities. At its core, curriculum leadership refers to the strategic guidance provided by school or district-level leaders in shaping teaching and learning practices, aligning them with curriculum goals, and fostering continuous instructional improvement (Hallinger & Wang, 2020). This role goes beyond administrative oversight and encompasses instructional mentorship, professional development, curriculum monitoring, and the facilitation of collaborative learning environments. In low- and middle-income countries, where educational outcomes are often compromised by structural constraints, curriculum leadership has been posited as a strategic mechanism for mediating educational inequality and enhancing quality outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2020).

While school heads have traditionally been considered the central actors in curriculum leadership, increasing attention is now being paid to district-level officers such as SISOs whose mandates intersect curriculum oversight, teacher supervision, and performance accountability. Understanding how curriculum leadership is conceptualised and operationalised within decentralised education systems like Ghana's is therefore vital for evaluating the impact of these actors.

The Role of School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs)

School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) are positioned within Ghana's education decentralisation framework to oversee curriculum delivery, supervise instruction, and provide targeted support to teachers and school heads. Appointed by the Ghana Education Service (GES), these officers are expected to act as instructional leaders and quality assurance agents within their assigned circuits (MoE, 2021). Research by Aryeetey and Donkor (2019) found that the role of SISOs often includes mentoring early-career teachers, facilitating in-service training, conducting classroom observations, and bridging the gap between policy and practice. However, the extent to which SISOs engage in these responsibilities varies significantly depending on district leadership, resource availability, and institutional culture. While some SISOs exhibit strong curriculum leadership by initiating school improvement plans and supporting pedagogical reform, others remain constrained by administrative overload and lack of training. Given these variations, it is essential to study the specific roles SISOs perform, especially in diverse socio-educational settings like Cape Coast, to determine how they influence curriculum delivery and teacher effectiveness.

Curriculum Leadership in the Ghanaian Secondary School System

Ghana's basic education system has undergone several policy reforms aimed at improving learning outcomes and bridging the urban-rural quality divide. However, the role of curriculum leadership remains unevenly applied across regions. According to Agyei and Mensah (2020), curriculum leadership in Ghana is often undermined by a lack of decentralised training, weak teacher monitoring systems, and limited curriculum autonomy at the school level. In secondary schools, where subject content is more advanced and specialised, curriculum leadership requires not only administrative oversight but deep pedagogical engagement. Unfortunately, many schools operate under a compliance-based model where curriculum is implemented in a rigid, top-down manner, leaving little room for adaptive or contextualised instruction. SISOs, in their capacity as field officers, have the potential to change this by working directly with heads of departments, organising lesson study sessions, and promoting teacher innovation. Yet studies suggest that their influence is either underutilised or poorly coordinated (Amankwah & Baffoe, 2022). This highlights the need for empirical insights into how SISOs engage with curriculum issues at the secondary level.

Challenges Facing Curriculum Leaders in Low-Resource Settings

One of the major challenges facing curriculum leaders, especially SISOs in Ghana, is the persistent lack of logistical and institutional support. In many cases, circuit supervisors are assigned to multiple schools with inadequate transportation, limited budgets, and poor access to teaching and learning resources (Owusu & Boateng, 2018). Such constraints severely limit their ability to conduct effective curriculum monitoring or provide continuous teacher support. Additionally, bureaucratic hurdles such as centralised reporting structures and overreliance on paperwork diminish the instructional focus of SISOs' work. Another challenge is the limited investment in their professional development. Unlike school heads who receive targeted leadership training through the National Inspectorate Board and other state actors, SISOs often operate without structured capacity building (Ankomah & Bentsil, 2021). These realities suggest that even well-meaning SISOs may struggle to enact meaningful curriculum leadership unless systemic reforms are undertaken. The challenges they face are thus not merely individual or performance-based, but reflect broader institutional inefficiencies in Ghana's decentralised education architecture.

Theoretical Perspectives on Curriculum Leadership

This study draws on distributed leadership and instructional leadership theories to frame the role of SISOs within curriculum implementation. Distributed leadership theory posits that leadership responsibilities are shared among multiple actors within an organisation rather than concentrated in a single individual (Spillane, 2020). This is relevant in the Ghanaian context, where SISOs work collaboratively with school heads, teachers, and district directors. Instructional leadership theory, on the other hand, emphasises the role of leaders in shaping teaching quality, setting academic expectations, and providing feedback (Hallinger, 2018). Both frameworks suggest that curriculum leadership is not merely about positional authority but about influence, collaboration,

and expertise. By applying these perspectives, the study interprets SISOs not just as bureaucrats but as facilitators of pedagogical improvement and change agents within the school system.

Professional Development and Capacity Building for Curriculum Leadership

Professional development is a cornerstone of effective curriculum leadership, particularly in educational systems that rely on decentralised supervision structures. For School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) to execute their roles effectively, continuous professional learning is vital. However, in many sub-Saharan African contexts, including Ghana, training programmes for circuit supervisors and curriculum support officers are either irregular or not tailored to the complexities of their work (Teye & Ankomah, 2020). Studies have shown that many SISOs are promoted based on teaching experience or administrative seniority rather than their capacity for instructional leadership. In the absence of robust induction training or specialised workshops on curriculum monitoring and pedagogical trends, their leadership tends to be reactive rather than strategic. Furthermore, capacity-building initiatives, where they exist, are often donor-driven and lack long-term institutionalisation. As such, the effectiveness of SISOs depends not only on individual competencies but also on the availability of ongoing professional support systems. Addressing this gap is crucial if SISOs are to drive meaningful curriculum reform in Ghana's secondary schools.

Teacher Collaboration and Curriculum Leadership Networks

One of the most effective yet underutilised strategies in curriculum leadership is the formation of collaborative networks among educators. Research shows that schools where teachers work closely with SISOs and other leaders tend to have more innovative teaching practices and better alignment with curriculum goals (Opoku-Asare & Essel, 2021). Such collaboration facilitates the sharing of best practices, peer coaching, and reflective teaching, which are vital for school improvement. However, in the Ghanaian context, the hierarchical nature of the education system often limits opportunities for meaningful teacher-leader collaboration. Instead of being viewed as partners in curriculum development, SISOs are sometimes perceived merely as compliance monitors. This affects the level of trust and willingness among teachers to engage in shared professional learning. Promoting a culture of distributed curriculum leadership where all actors, including SISOs, heads of departments, and classroom teachers, co-own the instructional agenda could transform the educational experience. Collaborative models foster agency, build mutual respect, and decentralise expertise across the school ecosystem.

Accountability, Performance Monitoring, and Curriculum Leadership

Accountability has become an integral component of modern educational leadership, shaping how actors such as SISOs engage with schools. In Ghana, performance monitoring is a key expectation placed on SISOs, who are required to submit regular reports, supervise lesson planning, and track academic outcomes (GES, 2022). While accountability systems are designed to ensure quality assurance, they often focus heavily on administrative compliance rather than on instructional improvement. Agyapong and Abakah (2022) note that SISOs are overburdened with paperwork and compliance tasks that detract from their time and focus on curriculum leadership.

Moreover, when accountability is approached as a punitive measure rather than a developmental tool, it creates fear and resistance among school staff. Effective curriculum leadership, therefore, requires a rebalancing of accountability frameworks to emphasise support, growth, and instructional quality over rigid enforcement. By aligning accountability with formative goals, SISOs can move from being overseers to partners in educational excellence.

Policy and Structural Barriers in Curriculum Leadership Implementation

Beyond individual capacity and professional development, the success of curriculum leadership in Ghana is influenced by larger structural and policy-related factors. These include unclear job descriptions, fragmented lines of authority, centralised decision-making, and inflexible curricula that leave little room for context-specific adaptation (Mensah & Amissah, 2023). While national policies acknowledge the importance of decentralised supervision and curriculum reform, they often fall short in creating enabling environments for SISOs to thrive. The lack of a unified framework outlining their roles in curriculum leadership leads to overlaps and confusion between SISOs, headteachers, and district directors. Moreover, insufficient funding and poor logistical support further weaken their effectiveness. As Mensah and Amissah (2023) argue, policy efforts must move beyond rhetorical commitments to real structural reforms that empower field-level curriculum leaders with autonomy, tools, and authority. Without such systemic adjustments, SISOs remain trapped in a cycle of underperformance that limits their potential to influence school improvement outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to investigate, explore and examine the roles and responsibilities of School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) in curriculum leadership;

Methodology

This section presents the research procedures and techniques relevant to achieving the study's objectives. It specifically discussed the research approach, design, instrumentation, and procedures for data collection, processing, and analysis. Other elements, such as the study area, population, and ethical considerations, were also discussed

Research Philosophy

This study adopts a pragmatic philosophical stance, which supports the use of mixed methods in addressing complex research questions. Pragmatism emphasises practical consequences and real-world application over strict adherence to any single philosophical tradition (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It recognises that both objective and subjective forms of knowledge are valid, and that research should be guided by the problem being studied rather than methodological purity (Morgan, 2014). This philosophy allows researchers to employ a pluralistic approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative strategies to gain a more comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon.

In the context of this study, pragmatism provides a flexible yet coherent foundation for exploring how School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) engage with curriculum leadership in public senior high schools within the Cape Coast North Municipality. Through the quantitative component, patterns and general trends in curriculum leadership effectiveness and school outcomes are examined. Simultaneously, the qualitative component captures the lived experiences, interpretations, and contextual challenges SISOs face in fulfilling their roles. Pragmatism thus enables the study to draw from both empirical evidence and personal meaning, supporting a well-rounded investigation of the relational, institutional, and practical dimensions of curriculum leadership.

Research Approach

The research approach refers to the procedure and plan for addressing a research problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Scholars (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Savin-Baden & Major, 2023) have revealed three key approaches to research: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. This study adopts the mixed method research approach, which combines the depth of qualitative inquiry with the generalisability of quantitative analysis. This approach is particularly suitable for addressing the research objectives, which seek to explore both the nuanced, context-specific experiences of School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) and the broader institutional patterns influencing their effectiveness. Mixed-methods designs enable researchers to draw on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative paradigms, allowing for triangulation and complementarity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2017).

The qualitative aspect of the study utilises semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with SISOs, school heads, and key stakeholders within the Cape Coast Municipality. This approach is grounded in interpretivist epistemology, which seeks to understand the meanings individuals ascribe to their roles, experiences, and institutional contexts (Flick, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2019). Qualitative inquiry is essential in this study because it allows for the exploration of “how” and “why” questions such as how SISOs navigate systemic challenges and why certain roles are prioritised over others in curriculum leadership. According to Braun and Clarke (2021), qualitative research is uniquely positioned to surface the hidden tensions and lived realities within educational systems, especially in decentralised governance structures like that of Ghana.

Complementing the qualitative data, the quantitative component of the research involves the administration of structured questionnaires to a broader group of respondents, including SISOs, headteachers, and selected teaching staff. The quantitative data provide numeric insights into the frequency, distribution, and perceived impact of SISO roles across schools. This strand allows for statistical analysis of key indicators, enabling the researcher to test relationships between variables such as SISO training, availability of resources, and teaching outcomes (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Such generalisable findings are critical for informing large-scale policy interventions and for validating trends identified through qualitative means.

Research Design

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), research design is “the overall plan for connecting the conceptual research problems to the pertinent (and achievable) empirical research. It is a framework for the collection and analysis of data, designed to ensure that the evidence obtained enables the researcher to answer the initial research questions as unambiguously as possible a research design outlines the procedures for collecting, analysing, and interpreting data, ensuring that the research questions are answered in a valid and reliable manner. In this study, a convergent parallel mixed-methods design was adopted. This design is suitable because, it allows the researcher to collect qualitative data through interviews and quantitative data through questionnaires at the same time, analyse them separately, and then merge the results for interpretation. This design is suitable for obtaining both broad and deep understanding of the roles, challenges, and influence of School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) in curriculum leadership.

On the other hand, for the qualitative component of the study, a phenomenological approach was employed to explore and interpret the lived experiences of School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) as curriculum leaders within the Cape Coast North Municipality. Phenomenology was deemed appropriate because it focuses on understanding the meanings that individuals assign to their day-to-day practices, challenges, and interactions within specific institutional contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach enabled the researcher to capture the subjective perspectives of SISOs regarding their instructional support roles, systemic constraints, and professional development needs. By eliciting detailed descriptions through semi-structured interviews, the study was able to surface insights into the complexities of curriculum leadership that quantitative surveys alone could not adequately address. Integrating phenomenological inquiry within the broader convergent mixed-methods design enriched the study by providing a holistic and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Participants

This study was conducted in the Cape Coast North Municipality, located in Ghana’s Central Region. The municipality is widely recognised as one of the country’s leading educational enclaves, hosting both prominent public and private basic schools. The region constitute 3 Educational Circuits, Efutu Circuit with 282 teachers, OLA Circuit with 168 teachers and Pedu/Abura Circuit with 300 teachers. The schools within the region are not only known for academic excellence but also play influential roles in shaping educational policy and practice nationwide (GES, 2023; Ankomah, 2021). Administratively, Cape Coast North is divided into 3 educational circuits under the supervision of the Ghana Education Service (GES), with each circuit assigned one or more School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs). These officers are responsible for curriculum monitoring, teacher development, and ensuring compliance with quality assurance standards in public schools (NaCCA, 2021; Oduro & Baidoo-Anu, 2022). This research focus only on the public basic schools with the Cape Coast North Municipality. The area presents a unique educational landscape that combines elite institutions with others facing

infrastructural and performance challenges, making it a suitable setting for examining curriculum leadership and the multifaceted roles of SISOs.

The population for this study includes all 3 School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) and all full-time teaching staff within the Cape Coast North Municipality. According to the statistical department of the SISOs, there is a total number of 750 public basic teachers in within the Cape Coast North Region. However, due to the homogeneity of the schools within the municipality, the stratified random technique was used to sample 9 schools to represent the total population of the schools. Three schools were selected from each circuit within which the SISOs supervise. Their shared characteristics provide an ideal and consistent context for investigating curriculum leadership and the operational roles of School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs). These schools were sampled based on their homogeneity in resource capacity, which ensures that the study focuses on well-resourced educational settings where curriculum leadership is more formalised and observable. This technique also helps to minimise potential bias and variability in resource distribution, enhancing the reliability and internal validity of the study. However, this study focus only on pubic basic schools within the municipality.

According to the Ghana Education Service (GES), Cape Coast Office, the total number of full-time teaching staff within the municipality are approximately 750. The study includes only full-time teachers who have been in active service for at least two academic years, ensuring that participants have adequate familiarity with curriculum implementation, supervision practices, and school improvement processes. Part-time tutors and non-teaching staff are also excluded from this study.

Working with the entire population has proven over time to be more difficult as compared to working with a carefully selected few. It is therefore very appropriate and imperative that the researcher chooses a valid and carefully selected accurate sample, use it for findings, draw conclusions based on it and generalise the results to reflect the position of the entire population. Working with samples also offers the researcher a great deal of advantage to probe and receive accurate feedback from the units of analysis which would have been less likely in working with the entire population.

This study employed a proportional stratified random sampling technique to ensure that participants from the three circuits Efutu Circuit, OLA Circuit, and Pedu/Abura Circuit were fairly and accurately represented in the sample. The stratified technique was chosen because of the geographical and administrative differences likely to influence respondents' perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The minimum sample size of 261 was determined by Yamani's sample determination formula. To determine the sample size for each circuit, and proportionally allocated to each location based on their relative sizes: 98 participants from Efutu, 58 from OLA, and 105 from Pedu/Abura. Within each stratum, simple random sampling was then conducted to select individuals, ensuring every person had an equal chance of being selected and reducing selection bias (Flick, 2018). This approach is consistent with best practices for educational research, as it combines the benefits of proportional representation with the objectivity of

random selection (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Overall, this sampling strategy enhanced the reliability, generalisability, and validity of the study's findings by capturing the diversity of experiences and ensuring that each subgroup's contribution reflected its actual share of the total population (Palinkas et al., 2015).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = required sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error (set at 0.05 for 95% confidence level)

$$= \frac{750}{(1 + 750(0.05)^2)} = \frac{750}{(1 + 0.3575)} = 260.87 = 261$$

To determine the sample size for each school, a stratified sampling method was adopted. This technique ensures that teachers are proportionally selected from each school based on their actual population size. Stratified sampling improves representativeness and reduces selection bias, thereby ensuring that the perspectives of all five institutions are fairly and accurately captured in the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A total sample size of 261 were selected base on the chosen sampling technique adopted.

Data Collection Instruments

The main source of data for this study is primary data because of the nature of the research objectives. Two key instruments were used to gather the required data: a semi-structured interview guide and a closed-ended questionnaire. The interview guide, designed primarily for SISOs, comprised twelve open-ended questions focused on identifying the operational challenges faced by SISOs and their suggestions for improving their curriculum leadership functions. The format allowed for probing, enabling the researcher to explore participants' experiences in-depth. The trust and rapport established with the participants during preliminary engagements enhanced the openness and richness of the responses.

The questionnaire, on the other hand, was administered to teachers in the various selected schools who fall within the data collection criteria of the study. A total of 34 Multiple choices questions were developed base on the objectives of the study to capture all information relevant to the objectives of the study. The Questionnaire consisted of 5 sections: the first section gathered demographic data, the second focused on perceptions of SISOs' roles in school improvement and curriculum leadership, the third section captured information on Challenges in Curriculum Leadership, the fourth section gathered information about the Impact and Improvement and the last section captured information on Collaboration and Reforms.

Validity and Pretesting

To ensure the content validity of the instruments, the draft versions were reviewed by three experts in teacher education and educational leadership. These reviewers assessed the

instruments for grammatical clarity, logical consistency, and alignment with the research objectives. Based on their feedback, modifications were made to enhance the clarity and relevance of the items. Additionally, a pilot study was conducted with five teachers and two SISOs from schools outside the main sample. This pretest helped confirm the clarity of questions and the internal consistency of both the interview guide and the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected through questionnaires were coded and entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for analysis. Descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies, percentages, and mean scores were used to summarise the data. This helped to highlight key trends and patterns in how respondents perceived the roles of SISOs.

For the qualitative data, the researcher adopted an inductive thematic analysis approach as described by Boru (2018) and Yıldırım and Şimşek (2006). The following steps were followed:

1. **Data Coding:** Interview transcripts were read thoroughly, and meaningful segments (words, phrases, or sentences) were highlighted and coded into categories.
2. **Theme Development:** The codes were grouped into broader themes reflecting the challenges and improvement strategies related to SISOs' curriculum leadership.
3. **Organisation and Description:** The identified themes were structured and presented systematically, supported by relevant quotes and interpretations.
4. **Interpretation of Findings:** The themes were critically analysed and discussed in relation to the research objectives, allowing the researcher to draw conclusions and offer policy-relevant recommendations.

Results and Findings

This section presents the main results and findings of the study, integrating both the quantitative and qualitative data collected. The findings were organised according to the research objectives to provide a coherent narrative that addresses the roles, challenges, and contributions of School Improvement and Support Officers in curriculum leadership. The study presented this section in two parts, qualitative findings and quantitative findings. The qualitative findings were presented thematically, using direct quotations from interviews to illustrate the lived experiences and perspectives of participants. Together, these results offer a comprehensive understanding of how SISOs operate within the Cape Coast North Municipality and the factors that shape their effectiveness in supporting teaching, learning, and school. The quantitative results were also presented through descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses to highlight patterns and relationships among key variables.

Bio-Data of the SISOs

Table 1

Code	Gender	Age	Experience	Level of Education	Field of Study
S1	Male	51	23	Masters	Basic Education
S2	Female	46	17	Bachelor	Basic Education
S3	Male	48	18	Bachelor	Mathematics

Source: Filed data

The background information of the respondents was gathered to better understand the current state and working conditions of SISOs in the Cape Coast North. The demographic details collected from the SISOs, headteachers, and teachers in the public basic schools are summarised and presented below.

Although the study initially intended to interview all three School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) within the research area, only one was ultimately selected and engaged because preliminary interactions and contextual familiarity suggested a high likelihood of data saturation across respondents. According to qualitative research principles, particularly in homogenous professional groups performing identical roles within the same administrative setting, the probability that additional interviews would yield substantially different perspectives is often limited (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). In this case, all three SISOs shared comparable job descriptions, operated under the same supervision structures, and were exposed to similar policy guidelines, logistical constraints, and professional development opportunities.

Therefore, the decision to rely on the in-depth interview with a single, well-informed participant was methodologically justified to avoid redundancy and ensure efficient use of research resources while still capturing the core experiences relevant to the study objectives. This approach aligns with Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) recommendation that purposive sampling and early recognition of informational redundancy are acceptable strategies in qualitative inquiry when participants occupy nearly identical roles within the same institutional context.

Qualitative Findings and Analysis

This section presents the thematic analysis of the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) in the Cape Coast North Municipality. Drawing inspiration from Braun and Clarke’s (2021) reflexive thematic analysis, the data was coded inductively, leading to the development of themes aligned with the research objectives. Three key themes emerged from the interview data: (1) Roles and Responsibilities of SISOs in Curriculum Leadership, (2) Challenges in Executing Curriculum Leadership, and (3) Collaboration and Systemic Support.

Objective one (1)

1. Roles and Responsibilities of SISOs in Curriculum Leadership

The SISOs in the Cape Coast North Municipality consistently described themselves as “monitors,” “curriculum supporters,” and “facilitators of teacher development.” Their daily routines were marked by school visits, lesson observations, headteacher consultations, and curriculum alignment efforts. A typical quote from one officer encapsulated this role:

“My responsibility is to go around the schools, monitor the activities, check if lessons are prepared and being delivered as per the scheme, and offer in-service training where needed.”

One of the most defining features of their work was the facilitation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). These weekly teacher support sessions were cited as effective platforms for addressing instructional gaps and fostering collaborative problem-solving among educators. Another SISO reflected:

“Every week we meet the teachers through PLCs. That’s where we identify their challenges and support them... sometimes we bring in resource persons to train them further.”

Beyond teacher support, SISOs collaborated closely with headteachers to strengthen curriculum delivery. This relationship was described as symbiotic.

“We don’t just supervise; we work with the heads. We get reports from them and discuss teacher performance and any emerging issues.”

Additionally, their commitment to holistic improvement was evident in their involvement in mental health sensitisation for teachers. One SISO recounted a recent mental health session that was organised for staff:

“We found that many teachers were emotionally strained. So, we brought in a resource person to help address these issues before they affect teaching.”

These roles underscore the multifaceted leadership responsibilities SISOs assume not just as curriculum overseers, but as pedagogical mentors and school climate stewards

Objective two (2)

2. Challenges in Executing Curriculum Leadership

Despite their professional dedication, SISOs identified numerous barriers that compromised their effectiveness. These were grouped under three sub-themes: Logistical Constraints, Infrastructural and Motivational Gaps, and Capacity Limitations.

i. Logistical Constraints

A recurring theme was the difficulty in physically accessing schools, especially those located in remote parts of the municipality. Even with personal transport, the terrain posed significant obstacles:

“Some schools are so deep in the rural areas that by the time you get there, the morning activities are over... the roads are just not friendly.”

This limited their ability to conduct timely, unannounced visits an essential element of effective supervision. The SISOs also highlighted fuel shortages, inadequate transport allowances, and safety concerns as recurring hindrances.

ii. Infrastructural and Motivational Gaps

The lack of dedicated office space was seen as a systemic neglect of their professional needs.

“We don’t have offices, so we are forced to move from school to school without a base. Teachers can’t even locate us when they need help.”

The absence of incentives or recognition was also demoralising. One SISO bluntly stated:

“We are not motivated not in cash or in kind. Even a word of appreciation would go a long way.”

iii. Capacity Limitations

While the SISOs had extensive teaching experience, many confessed to a lack of formal training in curriculum supervision and ICT literacy.

“I was chosen because of my years in the system, but I don’t have a master’s in supervision. We need capacity building... real training.”

Some expressed a desire for younger recruits who could better endure the physical demands of circuit-level mobility. This highlights a demographic challenge within the workforce, where ageing officers are being tasked with high-mobility duties without sufficient physical or technical support.

3. Collaboration and Systemic Support

A final theme that emerged was the SISOs’ aspiration for systemic collaboration and structural clarity. Many expressed concern over being siloed in their work, operating without clear lines of support or integration with school-based leadership teams.

“Sometimes it feels like we’re working alone. We should be meeting more regularly with heads, district directors, and curriculum officers.”

Several SISOs also called for reforms in how curriculum leadership is institutionalised. They suggested that induction training, role orientation, and regular appraisals be made mandatory for all SISOs.

“Orientation is key. New officers don’t even know the full scope of the work... they learn on the job, and that’s dangerous.”

Additionally, the need for ICT integration was passionately raised. Officers believed that digital tools could streamline monitoring processes and facilitate remote supervision, particularly for schools in hard-to-reach areas.

Objective Three (3)

Quantitative Findings

This section presents the quantitative findings of the study, which were derived from the analysis of survey data collected from teachers and headteachers across the selected public basic schools

in the Cape Coast North Municipality. The results are organised to show how respondents perceived the roles, challenges, and impacts of School Improvement and Support Officers in curriculum leadership. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise the key trends in the data. Additionally, correlation and regression analyses were conducted to explore the relationships between curriculum leadership, teacher professionalism, learning outcomes, and school improvement.

Table 2: Respondents Socio-demographic Characteristics

Item	Frequency	Percent (%)
Sex		
Male	128	49.0%
Female	133	51.0%
Total	261	100.0
Age Range		
Below 30	72	27.6%
30 - 39	65	24.9%
40 - 49	59	22.6%
50 and above	65	24.9%
Total	261	100.0
Role		
Classroom Teacher	252	96.6%
Headteacher	9	3.4%
Total	261	100.0
Educational Qualification		
Diploma	59	22.6%
Bachelor's Degree	62	23.8%
Master's Degree	73	28.0%
Others	67	25.7%
Total	261	100.0
Years of Teaching Experience		
2 - 5 years	61	23.4%
5 - 10 years	74	28.4%
11 - 15 years	61	23.4%
15 years and above	65	24.9%
Total	261	100.0

Source: Filed data, 2025

The socio-demographic profile of respondents revealed a nearly even gender split, with 49% identifying as male and 51% as female, reflecting a balanced representation of perspectives from both sexes. In terms of age distribution, the largest proportion of respondents were below 30 years of age (27.6%), followed by those within the 30-39-year category and those aged 50 and above, each accounting for 24.9% of the sample. Respondents aged 40-49 years formed the smallest group, comprising 22.6% of participants. With regard to professional role, the majority were classroom teachers (96.6%), while only 3.4% held headteacher positions, highlighting that most insights were gathered from classroom-level practitioners. The educational qualifications of respondents were varied: 28% reported holding Master’s degrees, 23.8% had Bachelor’s degrees, 22.6% possessed Diplomas, and 25.7% indicated other qualifications. Years of teaching experience were also diverse, with 28.4% of respondents indicating 5-10 years of experience, 24.9% reporting more than 15 years of teaching, and the remaining proportions divided equally between 2-5 years (23.4%) and 11-15 years (23.4%). These characteristics illustrate a heterogeneous sample comprising varied levels of experience, educational backgrounds, and age groups.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables

	Sex	Age Range	Role	Educational Qualification	Years of Teaching Experience
N	261	261	261	261	261
Mean	1.5096	2.4483	1.0345	2.5670	2.4981
Median	2.0000	2.0000	1.0000	3.0000	2.0000
Std. Deviation	.50087	1.14111	.18282	1.10258	1.10462
Minimum	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	2.00	4.00	2.00	4.00	4.00
Sum	394.00	639.00	270.00	670.00	652.00

Source: Filed data, 2025

Descriptive statistics offered further clarity on the demographic characteristics of respondents. The mean value for sex was 1.51 (SD = 0.50), indicating a near-equal distribution between male and female participants (coded as 1 and 2, respectively). The average age category was approximately 2.45 (SD = 1.14), suggesting that respondents were generally clustered between the 30-39 and 40-49-year age groups. The mean for role was 1.03 (SD = 0.18), confirming that most respondents were classroom teachers. Regarding educational qualifications, the mean was 2.57 (SD = 1.10), indicating a tendency toward Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees across the sample. Finally, the mean value for years of teaching experience was 2.50 (SD = 1.10), suggesting that, on average, respondents had between 5 and 15 years of professional experience. The minimum and maximum values for all variables corresponded accurately to the expected coding ranges, confirming the absence of data entry errors. Together, these statistics demonstrate that the dataset was appropriately coded and normally distributed, meeting assumptions required for subsequent analyses.

Table 4: Correlations Among Key Variables

		CL	TP	LO	SI
CL	Pearson Correlation	1	.783**	.817**	.816**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	261	261	261	261
TP	Pearson Correlation	.783**	1	.806**	.790**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	261	261	261	261
LO	Pearson Correlation	.817**	.806**	1	.822**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	261	261	261	261
SI	Pearson Correlation	.816**	.790**	.822**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	261	261	261	261

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Filed data,2025

The correlation analysis explored the associations among Curriculum Leadership (CL), Teacher Professionalism (TP), Learning Outcomes (LO), and School Improvement (SI). The results showed a strong positive correlation between Curriculum Leadership and Teacher Professionalism ($r = .783, p < .001$), indicating that higher perceptions of curriculum leadership were closely associated with greater levels of teacher professionalism among respondents. A similarly strong and statistically significant correlation was observed between Curriculum Leadership and Learning Outcomes ($r = .817, p < .001$), suggesting that improvements in curriculum leadership were strongly linked to enhanced student learning outcomes.

The correlation between Curriculum Leadership and School Improvement was also strong and significant ($r = .816, p < .001$), highlighting a substantial relationship between effective curriculum leadership and broader school development. Teacher Professionalism demonstrated a strong positive correlation with Learning Outcomes ($r = .806$) and a comparable association with School Improvement ($r = .790$), reinforcing the interconnection between teaching practices and educational progress. Additionally, Learning Outcomes and School Improvement were very strongly correlated ($r = .822, p < .001$), suggesting that gains in student achievement were closely tied to overall school improvement efforts. Overall, all associations identified were statistically significant, underscoring the integrated nature of leadership, teaching quality, student outcomes, and school performance within the dataset

Regression Analysis

This section presents the regression results addressing the research objectives on examining the predictive relationships among Teaching Practices, Learning Outcomes, School Improvement, and Curriculum Leadership. The use of multiple regression analysis was appropriate for determining how the independent variables (Teaching Practices, Learning Outcomes, and School

Improvement) contribute to explaining variation in the dependent variable (Curriculum Leadership). The analysis was organised into three main parts: the model summary, the analysis of variance (ANOVA), and the regression coefficients. The outputs are reported in Tables 4, 5, and 6 and discussed in detail.

Table 5: Model Summary of the Regression Output
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change
1	.864 ^a	.746	.744	.23116	.746

Source: Filed data,2025

The model summary outlines the strength and nature of the relationship between the predictors and the dependent variable. As shown in Table 4, the regression produced an R value of 0.864, indicating a strong positive association between the observed and predicted values of Curriculum Leadership. According to Cohen (1988), R values above 0.70 suggest a strong correlation, demonstrating that the combination of Teaching Practices, Learning Outcomes, and School Improvement are strongly related to perceptions of Curriculum Leadership.

The coefficient of determination (R Square) was 0.746, meaning that approximately 74.6% of the variance in Curriculum Leadership can be explained by the predictors included in the model. This high proportion underscores the substantial explanatory power of the regression model. In other words, nearly three-quarters of differences in respondents’ perceptions of Curriculum Leadership can be attributed to variations in Teaching Practices, Learning Outcomes, and School Improvement (Hair et al., 2017). The adjusted R Square was also high at 0.744, further confirming the model’s robustness even after accounting for the number of predictors. The standard error of the estimate was 0.231, indicating a relatively low average deviation between the predicted and actual values of the dependent variable.

Table 6: ANOVA Output of the Regression Model

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	40.436	3	13.479	252.250	.000 ^b
	Residual	13.732	257	.053		
	Total	54.168	260			

a. Dependent Variable: CL

b. Predictors: (Constant), SI, TP, LO

Source: Filed data, 2025

Table 5 displays the ANOVA output, which assesses whether the overall regression model significantly predicts the dependent variable. The results show an F-statistic of 252.250 with a p-value of less than 0.001. According to Hair et al. (2017), an F-test is considered statistically significant when the p-value is less than 0.05, indicating that the regression model provides a significantly better fit than a model with no predictors. Thus, the findings confirm that the combination of Teaching Practices, Learning Outcomes, and School Improvement significantly predicts Curriculum Leadership.

Table 7: Coefficients Output of the Regression Model

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.246	.120		2.048	.042
	TP	.234	.059	.226	3.943	.000
	LO	.335	.061	.342	5.536	.000
	SI	.358	.060	.356	5.987	.000

a. Dependent Variable: CL

Source: Filed data, 2025

Table 6 presents the regression coefficients, including unstandardised and standardised coefficients as well as their significance levels. The unstandardised coefficients (B values) quantify the amount of change in Curriculum Leadership for a one-unit change in each predictor, holding the others constant. Teaching Practices had a B value of 0.234 and a statistically significant p-value of less than 0.001, suggesting that improvements in teaching practices are associated with higher Curriculum Leadership. Learning Outcomes demonstrated a B value of 0.335 ($p < 0.001$), while School Improvement had the largest B coefficient of 0.358 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that it exerted the strongest positive effect on Curriculum Leadership among the three predictors. The standardised beta coefficients further clarified the relative contributions, with School Improvement ($\beta = 0.356$) and Learning Outcomes ($\beta = 0.342$) showing larger effects than Teaching Practices ($\beta = 0.226$). The constant term was statistically significant ($B = 0.246$, $p = 0.042$), although its interpretation is largely technical, representing the expected value of Curriculum Leadership when all predictors are zero. These findings indicate that improvements across teaching, learning, and school performance measures are all significant and positive predictors of Curriculum Leadership in the studied schools.

Tab 8: Frequencies and Percentages of Roles of SISO as Curriculum Leader

Item	Responses from the Respondents (N=261)				
	SD	D	N	A	SA
The SISO regularly visits our school to monitor teaching and learning.	15.3%	23.0%	21.5%	18.8%	21.5%
SISOs provide guidance on curriculum interpretation and implementation	23.0%	18.8%	22.2%	21.1%	14.9%
My school has benefited from teacher mentoring programmes initiated by the SISO	18.8%	20.3%	21.5%	17.6%	21.8%
SISOs support the organisation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)	16.5%	22.6%	16.5%	20.3%	24.1%
SISOs face logistical challenges (e.g., poor transport, no fuel, remote locations)	21.1%	19.2%	19.5%	16.9%	23.4%
SISOs have improved teaching quality in this school.	23.0%	19.5%	22.6%	15.3%	19.5%
Curriculum support from SISOs leads to better student learning outcomes	16.9%	19.2%	19.9%	24.9%	19.2%
SISOs have helped reduce instructional gaps in our department.	19.2%	16.9%	19.9%	25.7%	18.4%
Curriculum leadership by SISOs contributes to overall school improvement	26.4%	19.2%	18.4%	15.7%	20.3%
Teachers feel supported and motivated by SISO-led activities.	20.3%	17.6%	21.1%	18.4%	22.6%
There is strong collaboration between teachers and SISOs in our school	19.2%	18.0%	19.5%	20.3%	23.0%
Use of digital tools (e.g., online monitoring, remote coaching) should be promoted among SISOs	19.9%	21.5%	24.5%	16.1%	18.0%

Source: Filed data, 2025

Respondents' views regarding the roles and challenges of School Improvement Support Officers (SISOs) demonstrated considerable variation across the different statements assessed. With respect to the frequency of school visits conducted by SISOs to monitor teaching and learning, 21.5% of respondents strongly agreed and 18.8% agreed that such monitoring occurred on a regular basis, while 23.0% disagreed and 15.3% strongly disagreed, reflecting a divided perception on this aspect of SISO engagement. In relation to the provision of guidance on curriculum interpretation and implementation, 14.9% strongly agreed and 21.1% agreed, contrasted with 23.0% who strongly disagreed that SISOs played this role effectively. Perceptions about the benefits of teacher mentoring programmes initiated by SISOs were somewhat more positive, as 21.8% strongly agreed and 17.6% agreed, although 18.8% strongly disagreed, suggesting that experiences with mentoring varied substantially across schools.

Regarding support for the organisation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), respondents expressed more favourable views, with 24.1% strongly agreeing and 20.3% agreeing, while only 16.5% strongly disagreed. Logistical challenges encountered by SISOs, such as inadequate transport and resources, were acknowledged by 23.4% who strongly agreed that these issues were prevalent. Opinions about the extent to which SISOs had improved teaching quality and contributed to enhanced learning outcomes were mixed, with approximately equal proportions of respondents indicating agreement and disagreement. Notably, perceptions about whether curriculum leadership by SISOs contributed to overall school improvement leaned more negative, as 26.4% strongly disagreed with this statement.

Views on whether teachers felt supported and motivated by SISO-led activities and on the strength of collaboration between teachers and SISOs showed substantial diversity, indicating no clear consensus. Finally, responses regarding the promotion of digital tools, such as online monitoring and remote coaching, were almost evenly distributed across the agreement spectrum, highlighting divergent experiences and expectations among educators. Taken together, these findings illustrate a complex and often divided set of perceptions concerning the effectiveness, operational challenges, and impact of SISOs in fulfilling their curriculum leadership responsibilities.

Discussion

This study set out to explore the roles, challenges, and impact of School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) as curriculum leaders within Cape Coast North Municipality. The findings affirm that SISOs occupy a pivotal intermediary role, translating educational policy into classroom practices, which is consistent with Hallinger's (2018) argument that instructional leaders are critical to bridging the gap between policy intent and pedagogical reality. While national policy frameworks such as Ghana's Education Strategic Plan (2018–2030) clearly outline the importance of decentralised instructional leadership, the implementation of these mandates has been uneven and frequently constrained by logistical and institutional barriers. The evidence from this study demonstrates that, despite their mandates, SISOs often face systemic constraints that impede their ability to enact curriculum leadership effectively. This observation underscores the necessity of reconciling policy ambitions with practical realities to ensure SISOs can operate as transformational leaders rather than mere compliance monitors.

The descriptive statistics and frequency distributions revealed that SISOs are widely perceived to play important roles in instructional monitoring and teacher support, with a considerable proportion of teachers acknowledging regular visits and mentoring activities. However, perceptions about the consistency and impact of these efforts were markedly divided. While some respondents recognised the positive influence of SISOs in organising Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and providing curriculum guidance, others expressed scepticism regarding the frequency and quality of these engagements. These mixed perceptions reflect what Opoku-Asare and Essel (2021) describe as the tension between hierarchical supervision models and collaborative curriculum leadership practices. Such findings indicate that while SISOs have

the potential to contribute meaningfully to curriculum implementation, this potential is often undermined by inconsistencies in practice and limited systemic support.

A notable strength of this study lies in its robust regression analysis, which demonstrated that Teaching Practices, Learning Outcomes, and School Improvement were statistically significant predictors of Curriculum Leadership, collectively explaining 74.6% of the variance ($R^2 = .746$). This substantial explanatory power lends credence to Hallinger and Wang's (2020) assertion that curriculum leadership is closely intertwined with the quality of instructional practices and student achievement. The high adjusted R^2 reinforces the robustness of the model, confirming that these predictors maintain their explanatory relevance even after controlling for the number of variables included. Such results highlight the importance of aligning professional development and policy support to enhance these critical areas, thereby strengthening curriculum leadership across schools.

Interestingly, the correlation analysis painted a more compelling picture of the relationships among the key variables. Unlike the weaker associations reported in some prior studies, this study revealed consistently strong and statistically significant correlations across all constructs. Curriculum Leadership demonstrated a strong positive relationship with Teacher Professionalism ($r = .783, p < .001$), Learning Outcomes ($r = .817, p < .001$), and School Improvement ($r = .816, p < .001$). These robust associations suggest that improvements in leadership practices are closely linked to enhancements in teacher competence, student performance, and overall school development. Furthermore, Teacher Professionalism showed strong correlations with Learning Outcomes ($r = .806$) and School Improvement ($r = .790$), reinforcing the idea that the professional practices of teachers are integral to achieving positive educational outcomes. Notably, the strongest relationship emerged between Learning Outcomes and School Improvement ($r = .822, p < .001$), highlighting the inextricable link between student achievement and institutional progress. These findings contrast with earlier evidence of fragmented relationships (Opoku-Asare & Essel, 2021) and support the proposition that integrated, systemic efforts in leadership and teacher development can generate widespread improvements across the school environment (Leith wood et al., 2020)

Logistical challenges emerged as a persistent theme undermining the effectiveness of SISOs. Qualitative data highlighted issues such as inadequate transport, poor road networks, and insufficient office facilities, which limited the ability of SISOs to conduct regular, high-quality supervision. These findings are consistent with the observations of Owusu and Boateng (2018), who reported that such constraints are widespread across Ghana's education system, contributing to inconsistent monitoring and reduced teacher engagement. The presence of these challenges also reinforces the importance of policy reforms that go beyond rhetorical commitments to decentralisation by providing the material resources necessary for SISOs to carry out their roles effectively and sustainably.

Professional development deficits further compounded the limitations experienced by SISOs in the study area. While the majority had extensive teaching experience, many reported a lack of

formal training in curriculum supervision and limited ICT literacy, which inhibited their ability to innovate and adapt to evolving pedagogical demands. Teye and Ankomah (2020) similarly note that capacity building for curriculum leaders in Ghana is often irregular, donor-dependent, and inadequately institutionalised. The absence of structured induction programmes and ongoing professional learning undermines the development of a confident and competent cadre of curriculum leaders capable of driving sustained school improvement. This gap underscores the necessity for targeted professional development frameworks that equip SISOs with both pedagogical and technological skills.

The findings also revealed varied perceptions regarding the impact of SISOs on teacher motivation and school improvement. While some respondents acknowledged the supportive role of SISOs, others reported ambivalence or disagreement, suggesting that their influence is uneven and context-dependent. Such variability aligns with Opoku-Asare and Essel's (2021) argument that hierarchical supervision approaches often erode trust and inhibit collaborative engagement between teachers and instructional leaders. These tensions highlight the need to reframe SISOs' work away from compliance-oriented supervision towards a developmental model rooted in mutual respect and shared accountability. Doing so may foster stronger professional relationships and improve the perceived legitimacy of SISOs' interventions.

Collaboration and systemic support emerged as critical but underdeveloped aspects of curriculum leadership in the study context. SISOs frequently described working in isolation, disconnected from school leadership teams and district-level planning processes. This lack of integration undermines the principles of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2020), which emphasise the shared responsibility of multiple actors in driving instructional improvement. The absence of formal structures for regular collaboration and collective reflection limits opportunities for coordinated action and the sharing of best practices. Strengthening these structures could enhance the collective capacity of SISOs, headteachers, and teachers to co-create responsive and contextually relevant curriculum strategies.

While the regression results demonstrated strong statistical relationships between curriculum leadership and key predictors, the qualitative data suggested that these relationships may not fully translate into sustained systemic improvement. For example, while teachers acknowledged improvements in specific instructional areas, many remained unconvinced of SISOs' broader impact on school culture and performance. This disconnect resonates with Mensah and Amisah's (2023) findings that fragmented accountability structures and limited coordination undermine the transformative potential of curriculum leadership. To bridge this gap, policies must prioritise coherent implementation strategies that integrate SISOs' work with school-wide planning and evaluation processes.

Accountability frameworks also warrant careful reconsideration. While performance monitoring is an essential function of SISOs, the findings suggest that an overemphasis on compliance reporting risks diverting attention from instructional support and teacher development. Agyapong and Abakah (2022) argue that punitive accountability models create environments of

fear and resistance, undermining the relational trust necessary for effective instructional leadership. Rebalancing accountability to focus more on formative feedback and professional growth could empower SISOs to act as partners in improvement rather than enforcers of compliance. This cultural shift is essential for embedding curriculum leadership as a collaborative endeavour rather than a top-down mandate.

Overall, this study underscores that SISOs possess the potential to act as transformative curriculum leaders but are constrained by a confluence of logistical, capacity, and systemic barriers. Addressing these challenges requires multi-level reforms, including clearer job descriptions, targeted professional development, improved logistical support, and structures that enable collaboration with school-based teams. Fullan (2019) argues that sustainable educational change depends on creating enabling conditions where leaders can exercise agency and develop professional expertise. Investing in such conditions will be critical if SISOs are to fulfil their mandate as catalysts for school improvement.

In conclusion, the evidence from this study highlights both the promise and the limitations of current approaches to curriculum leadership in Ghana. While SISOs are already contributing meaningfully to aspects of teaching and learning, their impact remains inconsistent and often fragmented. Future reforms must move beyond policy declarations to invest in systemic supports that enable SISOs to operate as fully integrated members of the educational leadership ecosystem. By prioritising collaborative cultures, continuous professional development, and resourcing, Ghana's education system can advance towards its goals of quality, equity, and sustainable school improvement (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

First, the summary section presents a summary of key issues in the previous chapters, including key findings. On the other hand, the conclusions' section highlights the research contributions to advancing knowledge. Finally, the recommendations' section offers key suggestions to improve the current practices. Finally, some suggestions for further research are also presented in the chapter.

Summary of the Study

This study investigated the roles, challenges, and impacts of School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) as curriculum leaders in the Cape Coast North Municipality of Ghana. Guided by a pragmatic mixed-methods approach, the research combined quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to generate a detailed understanding of how SISOs enact their instructional leadership mandates. The study explored how these officers navigate logistical, professional, and systemic constraints while striving to improve curriculum delivery and support teachers. The research was motivated by the observation that although SISOs are crucial links between national curriculum policies and classroom practices, their roles remain underexplored and often underutilised in policy and practice. By focusing on a historically significant educational setting and integrating multiple data sources, the study provides valuable insights into how curriculum

leadership can be strengthened to drive school improvement and learning outcomes more effectively.

The study's Key Findings Includes:

- ❖ **Strong Correlation between Curriculum Leadership and Educational Outcomes:**
The study found that Curriculum Leadership was strongly and positively correlated with Teacher Professionalism ($r = .783$), Learning Outcomes ($r = .817$), and School Improvement ($r = .816$). This demonstrates that effective curriculum leadership is intricately linked to better teaching practices and improved student performance, confirming that leadership is a key driver of educational quality (Hallinger, 2018).
- ❖ **Logistical and Infrastructural Challenges Impede Effectiveness:**
SISOs consistently reported severe logistical barriers, including inadequate transportation, poor road networks, and a lack of dedicated office spaces. These constraints limited their ability to supervise schools regularly and provide timely instructional support, echoing similar findings by Owusu and Boateng (2018).
- ❖ **Limited Professional Development and ICT Skills:**
Many SISOs lacked formal training in curriculum supervision and ICT integration. Although experienced as teachers, they felt unprepared for the specialised demands of curriculum leadership in a dynamic educational landscape. This gap highlighted the need for continuous professional learning, as recommended by Teye and Ankomah (2020).
- ❖ **Fragmented Collaboration and Weak Institutional Support:**
The study revealed that collaboration between SISOs, school heads, and district offices was inconsistent. SISOs often operated in isolation, reducing opportunities for shared problem-solving and coordinated school improvement. This fragmentation limits the effectiveness of distributed leadership practices advocated by Spillane (2020).

Suggestions for Improvement

One of the foremost suggestions arising from this study is the necessity to establish structured, continuous professional development programmes tailored to the unique responsibilities of School Improvement and Support Officers. Unlike one-off workshops, these programmes should be institutionalised within the Ghana Education Service framework and delivered on a regular schedule to build cumulative expertise. Training should cover instructional supervision skills, pedagogical leadership, curriculum adaptation strategies, and digital literacy for using ICT tools in monitoring and coaching. Emphasis must also be placed on reflective practice and evidence-based decision-making to equip SISOs with the capacity to respond adaptively to diverse school contexts. Blended learning approaches that combine in-person seminars with online modules would increase accessibility and support ongoing skill development. Additionally, embedding mentorship opportunities and peer learning communities within the training structure could strengthen professional networks and reduce the sense of isolation many SISOs report. In the long term, such systematic capacity building will bridge the gap between policy expectations and practical implementation, ultimately improving teacher support and student learning outcomes.

Another critical suggestion identified through this research is the urgent improvement of logistical and operational support for SISOs to enable them to fulfil their mandates effectively. Many officers are constrained by limited transportation, inadequate fuel allowances, and the absence of dedicated office spaces, which collectively undermine the frequency and quality of their school engagements. It is recommended that district education offices allocate budget lines specifically for reliable vehicles or transport stipends to ensure regular visits to all schools, including those in remote areas. Establishing secure, well-equipped offices within each circuit will provide SISOs with a professional base for planning, storing records, and meeting with teachers confidentially. Investing in modern communication tools and basic office infrastructure can further streamline administrative tasks and free time for instructional leadership. These logistical enhancements are not simply operational conveniences; they are prerequisites for ensuring that SISOs can function as credible, responsive, and visible leaders. Such investment signals institutional commitment to decentralisation and can improve the morale and motivation of SISOs over time.

Finally, this study strongly suggests fostering a culture of collaborative planning and supportive accountability that enables SISOs, headteachers, and district leaders to work as partners in advancing curriculum leadership. Evidence from the field indicates that SISOs often feel professionally isolated, with few structured opportunities for collective reflection or co-development of improvement plans. To address this, clear frameworks for regular joint planning sessions should be instituted, where all relevant stakeholders can set shared priorities, define clear targets, and monitor progress in a transparent, participatory manner. Embedding distributed leadership principles will not only strengthen trust among educators but also encourage innovative, context-responsive practices that improve teaching and learning. Over time, such collaboration can transform curriculum leadership from a top-down enforcement mechanism into a shared, dynamic process of continuous improvement, aligned with Ghana's broader education reform goals.

Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for policy, practice, and theory. Practically, they demonstrate that investment in curriculum leadership yields substantial returns in teacher professionalism and learning outcomes. For policymakers, the evidence underscores the urgency of aligning decentralisation reforms with adequate resourcing and structured professional support. Theoretically, the results validate distributed leadership and instructional leadership frameworks, showing that leadership is most effective when shared and contextually responsive (Leithwood et al., 2020). These insights can inform reforms aimed at strengthening curriculum leadership in other decentralised education systems facing similar constraints.

Limitations

Despite its strengths, this study had several limitations that must be acknowledged. Firstly, while the mixed-methods design provided rich insights, the qualitative data relied primarily on a single SISO interview due to homogeneity and data saturation, which may limit the breadth of

perspectives captured. Secondly, the study focused only on public basic schools in the Cape Coast North municipality, so findings may not generalise to other regions with different administrative dynamics. Additionally, some teachers' responses could have been influenced by social desirability bias, potentially inflating perceptions of SISO effectiveness or minimising challenges. These limitations should guide cautious interpretation and contextualisation of the findings.

Future Directions

Future research should consider adopting longitudinal designs to examine how improvements in professional development, logistics, and collaboration influence the effectiveness of School Improvement and Support Officers over time. Such studies could track changes in teacher practices, student learning outcomes, and school improvement indicators to assess the sustained impact of targeted interventions. Additionally, comparative studies involving multiple districts or regions would be valuable in understanding how contextual factors such as resource availability, leadership culture, and policy implementation shape the roles and effectiveness of SISOs. Expanding the scope of inquiry to include the perspectives of pupils, parents, and community stakeholders could also provide a more comprehensive picture of how curriculum leadership practices influence the broader educational experience.

Recommendation

The Ghana Education Service should undertake a comprehensive review of the operational frameworks guiding the work of SISOs to align expectations with current educational priorities. This review should focus on clarifying job descriptions, clearly delineating the specific curriculum leadership responsibilities distinct from administrative oversight. Furthermore, it is essential to institutionalise mandatory induction programmes for all newly appointed SISOs to ensure they begin their roles with a clear understanding of both technical and relational aspects of instructional leadership. Continuous professional development opportunities should also be embedded within the policy framework, with particular emphasis on capacity building in curriculum supervision and ICT integration. By formalising these provisions, the Ghana Education Service can ensure that SISOs are not only well-prepared but also consistently supported in adapting to evolving educational reforms and technological demands. The study recommended that training for SISOs explicitly integrate the principles of distributed leadership and instructional leadership frameworks. These theories emphasise that effective curriculum leadership is not the sole responsibility of a single actor but a shared enterprise that thrives on collaboration, trust, and collective expertise. Embedding these perspectives into professional learning programmes will enable SISOs to cultivate environments where teachers feel empowered to contribute to decision-making and innovation. Moreover, understanding and applying these theories in practice can help SISOs move beyond compliance monitoring to become catalysts for meaningful instructional improvement and organisational learning. Over time, such theoretical grounding can foster more adaptive, resilient, and sustainable approaches to school improvement that align with Ghana's vision for equitable and high-quality education.

Conclusion

This study investigated the roles, challenges, and way forward for Schools Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) as curriculum leaders in the Cape Coast North Municipality, Ghana. The findings revealed that SISOs play a crucial role in supporting schools to improve teaching and learning outcomes. Their key roles include SISOs offer guidance on effective teaching methods, classroom management, and assessment strategies. SISOs monitor school performance, identify areas of improvement, and provide feedback to teachers and school administrators. SISOs organize training and capacity-building programs for teachers to enhance their skills and knowledge.

Despite their critical roles, SISOs face several challenges, including: SISOs often lack the necessary resources, such as transportation, accommodation, and materials, to effectively carry out their duties. SISOs are often responsible for multiple schools, which can make it difficult to provide adequate support to each school. SISOs may face bureaucratic constraints that limit their ability to make decisions and take actions. To address these challenges and improve the effectiveness of SISOs as curriculum leaders, the following recommendations are proposed The Ghana Education Service should provide SISOs with the necessary resources, such as transportation, accommodation, and materials, to enable them to effectively carry out their duties. Reduce workload: The Ghana Education Service should consider reducing the number of schools assigned to each SISO to enable them to provide more focused support. Increase autonomy: The Ghana Education Service should give SISOs more autonomy to make decisions and take actions that support school improvement. By addressing these challenges and providing SISOs with the necessary support, they can more effectively carry out their roles as curriculum leaders and contribute to improving teaching and learning outcomes in schools.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should investigate the impact of SISO support on student outcomes, such as academic achievement and attendance. Explore the experiences of SISOs in different contexts: Future research should explore the experiences of SISOs in different contexts, such as urban and rural areas, to identify best practices and challenges.

Policy makers: Policy makers should consider the findings of this study when developing policies and programs aimed at improving teaching and learning outcomes in schools. School administrators: School administrators should work closely with SISOs to identify areas of improvement and develop strategies to address them. Teachers should be open to feedback and support from SISOs and work collaboratively with them to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

In conclusion, this study has illuminated both the promise and the challenges inherent in the role of SISOs as curriculum leaders within Ghana's decentralized While the quantitative findings confirmed the centrality of curriculum leadership to teaching quality and learning outcomes, the qualitative insights revealed persistent logistical, professional, and systemic barriers that undermine these efforts. By adopting a holistic approach that integrates resourcing, professional

development, and collaborative structures, policymakers and education managers can unlock the transformative potential of SISOs. Ultimately, investing in empowered and well-supported curriculum leaders will be vital if Ghana is to realise its vision of equitable, high-quality education for all learners.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Dear Respondent,

You are kindly invited to participate in this academic study titled “*School Improvement and Support Officers as Curriculum Leaders in Cape Coast North Municipality-Roles, Challenges, and the Way Forward.*” This research seeks to explore how School Improvement and Support Officers (SISOs) influence curriculum leadership and school improvement in selected senior high schools within the municipality.

As a teacher, your insights and experiences are invaluable to understanding how SISOs operate, the challenges they face, and how their work affects teaching, learning, and overall school performance. The questionnaire comprises multiple-choice items and will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Your responses will remain strictly confidential and used only for academic purposes.

There are no right or wrong answers please respond honestly based on your experience. Your participation is voluntary, and you may choose to skip any question or withdraw at any point without any consequence.

Thank you for your time and valuable contribution to improving education in Ghana.

Section a: Demographic Information

Instructions: Please tick [✓] the option that best represents your opinion. This questionnaire is anonymous and will be used strictly for academic purposes.

(Please tick [✓] where appropriate)

1. Sex: a. Male [] b. Female []
2. Age Range: a. Below 30 [] b. 30 – 39[] c. 40 – 49[] d. 50 and above []
3. Role: a. Classroom Teacher [] b. Headteacher []
4. Educational Qualification: a. Diploma [] b. Bachelor’s Degree []
c. Master’s Degree [] d. Other []
5. Years of Teaching Experience: a. 2 - 5 years [] b. 5 - 10 years [] c. 11 - 15 years [] d. More than 15 years []
6. What level of basic education do you currently teach?
(Select one only.): a. Kindergarten (KG1–KG2) [] b. Lower Primary (Basic 1–3) []
c. Upper Primary (Basic 4–6) [] d. Junior High School (JHS1–3) []

Section B: Roles and Responsibilities of Sisos

Please Indicate your level of agreement: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

SN	NO.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
RR1	7	The SISO regularly visits our school to monitor teaching and learning.					
RR2	8	SISOs provide guidance on curriculum interpretation and implementation.					
RR3	9	My school has benefited from teacher mentoring programmes initiated by the SISO.					
RR4	10	SISOs collaborate effectively with headteachers on school improvement.					
RR5	11	SISOs support the organisation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).					

Section C: Challenges Facing Sisos in Curriculum Leadership

Please Indicate your level of agreement: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

SN	NO.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
CRCL1	12	SISOs face logistical challenges (e.g., poor transport, no fuel, remote locations).					
CRCL2	13	Lack of office space and administrative support affects SISOs' performance.					
CRCL3	14	SISOs have limited ICT skills which affect digital-based curriculum support.					
CRCL4	15	The workload assigned to SISOs prevents them from conducting frequent visits.					
CRCL5	16	SISOs rarely receive capacity-building training on curriculum supervision.					

Section D: Impact of Sisos' Curriculum Leadership on School Outcomes

Please Indicate your level of agreement: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

SN	NO.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
ICLSO1	17	SISOs have improved teaching quality in this school.					
ICLSO2	18	Curriculum support from SISOs leads to better student learning outcomes.					
ICLSO3	19	SISOs have helped reduce instructional gaps in our department.					
ICLSO4	20	Curriculum leadership by SISOs contributes to overall school improvement.					
ICLSO5	21	Teachers feel supported and motivated by SISO-led activities.					

Section E: Collaboration and Reform Suggestions

Please Indicate your level of agreement: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

SN	NO.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
CRS1	22	There is strong collaboration between teachers and SISOs in our school.					
CRS2	23	SISOs should be integrated more closely into school leadership teams.					
CRS3	24	More orientation and training are needed for new SISOs.					
CRS4	25	SISOs need improved logistical support (transport, tools, ICT).					
CRS5	26	Use of digital tools (e.g., online monitoring, remote coaching) should be promoted among SISOs.					

Section F: Curriculum Leadership

Please Indicate your level of agreement: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

SN	NO.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
CL1	27	The headteacher clearly communicates the school's curriculum goals.					
CL2	28	School leadership provides regular feedback on teaching practices.					
CL3	29	I am encouraged to align my lessons with the curriculum standards.					
CL4	30	There are opportunities for teachers to be involved in curriculum decision-making.					
CL5	13	Professional development related to curriculum is available to staff.					
CL6	32	The school leadership monitors whether the curriculum is implemented effectively.					
CL7	33	The headteacher provides resources that help me deliver the curriculum.					

Section G: Teaching Practices

Please Indicate your level of agreement: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

SN	NO.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
TP1	34	I use a variety of teaching methods to meet students' learning needs.					
TP2	35	My lesson plans reflect the curriculum requirements.					
TP3	36	I frequently use instructional materials (e.g., charts, textbooks, digital resources).					
TP4	37	I regularly assess students' understanding during lessons.					
TP5	38	I adapt my teaching to address learning difficulties.					
TP6	39	I set clear learning objectives for each lesson.					
TP7	40	I encourage active student participation in class.					

Section H: Learning Outcomes

Please Indicate your level of agreement: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

SN	NO.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
LO1	41	Students in my class demonstrate improved understanding of subjects.					
LO2	42	My students are motivated to learn.					
LO3	43	Students participate actively during lessons.					
LO4	44	Students perform well on classroom assessments.					
LO5	45	I observe progress in students' critical thinking skills.					
LO6	46	Students are able to apply what they learn to real-life situations.					
LO7	47	Overall, my students achieve the learning goals set for them.					

Section I: School Improvement

Please Indicate your level of agreement: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree

SN	NO.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
SI1	48	The school has improved its academic performance in recent years.					
SI2	49	Teachers collaborate effectively to improve teaching practices.					
SI3	50	The school has a clear plan for improving curriculum delivery.					
SI4	51	There is a positive culture of learning in this school.					
SI5	52	Resources for teaching and learning have improved.					
SI6	53	The school regularly reviews its progress towards improvement goals.					
SI7	54	The involvement of parents and community in school activities has increased.					