School Self-Evaluation and the Nature of Support System for Basic Schools in Ghana

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Abstract
Studies have suggested that the effective use of school self-evaluation is one of the best ways of improving schools. Several countries use school self-evaluation as an accountability measure and quality assurance framework to improve schools’ and students’ academic performance. This article examines teachers’ understanding of school self-evaluation, the usage of school self-evaluation, and the nature of support systems that may be available to basic schools in Ghana. Interview data were gathered from teachers and headteachers to ascertain their perspectives on the application of school self-evaluation and any support systems that may be available in schools. The results show that schools have their own ways of evaluating performance, and school self-evaluation is not used as a tool to evaluate the school’s performance. It became evident that teachers do not have in-depth knowledge about school self-evaluation. The teachers agreed that authorities must organize training workshops for them to enhance their understanding and usage of school self-evaluation to improve performance in their schools.

Keywords
accountability, assessment, effective, leaders, parents, performance, professional, school improvement, support system, teaching

Introduction
Providing education that would benefit children especially in a developing country like Ghana is not just about providing effective teaching and learning, but there must be continuous evaluation of activities that should take place in the schools. Promoting education is a unique way of positioning “modern societies because many people believe that it benefits society at the same time as meeting the aspirations of students and their agents” (Lauder et al., 2006, p. 1). Education is an “enabling process, which provides human beings with the opportunities to have experiences which can help them develop functionings” (Fertig, 2012, p. 395). However, to enable individuals develop these functionings through education, schools must be accountable to parents, education directorates, and even governments. This form of accountability makes evaluation of schools very important to state agencies and parents whose children are in the schools.

Considering the challenges facing education of many low-income countries, coupled with limited financial resources, the importance of evaluating schools to ensure value for money becomes very significant (Tembon & Fort, 2008, as cited in Fertig, 2012). School self-evaluation (SSE) is one unique school evaluation framework that, although relevant in school improvement, seems to have been neglected in Ghanaian schools. The reasons behind the neglect are unclear. Thus, it is not clear whether the neglect is due to teachers’ lack of understanding of the concept of SSE system or whether they do not have sufficient knowledge about SSE or the model of SSE has not been designed as part of the curriculum framework for Ghana’s educational system.

It is significant, therefore, to investigate Ghanaian teachers’ understanding of SSE and how they practice it because SSE is not an only essential element in schools but also a very significant ingredient in education delivery in a country such as Ghana. Research results have also shown that SSE is effective and can be used as a support system to improve schools in many countries (Antoniou et al., 2016; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2009 2013), but what support systems exist in basic schools in Ghana need to be investigated. An “analysis of

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data by schools is an important means of self-evaluation and can assist schools in focusing upon the most important issues” (Harris & Hopkins, 2000, p. 21). These evaluation mechanisms are what appears to be missing in many basic schools in Ghana. Besides, little is also known about SSE in Ghana, let alone its application as a framework to improve performance in schools. The support systems available to schools in Ghana also remain unclear. This article examines teachers’ understanding of SSE, the usage of SSE, and the nature of support systems that may be available to basic schools in Ghana.

The Research Problem

SSE is used as a tool to help schools to improve upon performance and professional practice of staff (MacBeath, 2006), yet some critics also argue that it has its unintended negative effects on staff (Hofman et al., 2009). The OECD (2009) report has shown that it is not clear whether the nature of evaluation framework being used by schools could be a form of support system to help improve performance or not. Bunnell et al. (2016) also asked, what will schools consider “proper and appropriate” for improvement and by which agencies? This also makes the effectiveness and usage of SSE become blurring. It is also argued that schools’ internal evaluation could lead to stress and higher workload for school staff, and in some cases could be a form of window dressing and for fear of reprimanding, so some teachers and departments could manipulate evaluation data to make the report look positive (Ehren & Visscher, 2006, as cited in Hofman et al., 2009). This allows for so many cover-ups and eventually opens up for lapses that may exist in schools. School leaders can put pressure on their staff to change the way they do things, but who will stimulate school leaders to change if self-evaluation does not give a clear indication as to how the change of behavior of teachers must be. Then, it is less likely SSE will bring any significant change or improvement in schools (Devos & Verhoeven, 2003).

In their observation to ascertain the effectiveness of SSE, Devos and Verhoeven (2003) asked the following questions: Can schools meet the high expectations of evaluation, or can schools reflect on their own practices in an unbiased way and take action that could put additional pressure on teachers? All these raise additional questions as to how honest teachers will be, if they are to evaluate themselves and put additional pressure on themselves. According to Hopkins et al. (2016), self-evaluation is done as a requirement for school inspection process, so no matter the degree of rigor and amount of time devoted, it is unlikely to bring improvement. Besides, much of the “thinking has been transposed to studies of schooling in the developing world, with energies focusing upon those characteristics of schools which would denote them as effective” (Fertig, 2000, p. 385). Yet there seems to be more work that needs to be done in the area of SSE, which according to MacBeath (2006) has featured in many countries as a useful tool being used to support schools, although not significant in Ghanaian schools. However, in order to carry out this investigation, the following research questions will become very significant:

- **Research Question 1:** What support systems exist for schools in Ghana to promote improvement?
- **Research Question 2:** How can schools in Ghana be supported so as to improve upon their delivery?
- **Research Question 3:** Do teachers have an understanding and use SSE?
- **Research Question 4:** Can schools in Ghana adopt SSE as a support system to promote improvement?

The Concept of SSE

The concept of SSE may be understood from several angles depending on the school’s improvement plan or the development of objectives as opposed to the school’s broad perspectives taking into consideration internal processes and performance targets (Hofman et al., 2005, as cited in Hofman et al., 2009). It is, however, argued in several educational discourses that SSE has no beginning and no end and the process does not follow any specific framework. How the concept of SSE has been defined also varies from one educationist to the other, and what a school or agency expects from SSE also differs. MacBeath et al. (2004) also observed that the approach to SSE has no clear dimension, but could be approached in many ways. Devos and Verhoeven (2003) look at SSE “as a process mainly initiated by the school to collect systematic information about the school’s functioning, to analyse and judge this information regarding the quality of the school’s education and to make recommendations” (p. 404). Hofman et al. (2009) also defined SSE broadly as a “systematic process, including cyclic activities such as goal-setting, planning, evaluation, and defining new improvement measures” (p. 48). MacBeath (2006) also sees SSE as a form of accountability that is aimed at serving the interest of external bodies rather than something that is supposed to be owned by schools themselves to improve performance. However, Connolly et al. (2019) mention that to become accountable means that some responsibilities have to be assigned to an individual, and those responsibilities must be accepted by the individuals. So schools need to accept that accountability and responsibility so that SSE becomes significant:

By self-evaluation we mean processes, in large part initiated by the school itself, whereby selected participants describe and assess the functioning of the school in a systematic way with a view to taking decisions or adopting initiatives within the framework of overall school development and policy. (Vanhoof & Petegem, 2011, p. 200)

SSE is a school performance improvement practice that is initiated by the school itself that involves carefully selected
participants, who have a better understanding of operations in the school’s functions and can take decisions related to the general operations and development of the school (Petegem, 1998, as cited in Vanhoof et al., 2009). SSE is an ongoing evidence-gathering process in a transparent manner which is supposed to be a purposeful, relationship-building, and classroom performance review through a collaborative, reflective process of the school while at the same time serving as further evaluation and improvement in areas that matter most to authorities (Antoniou et al., 2016; MacBeath et al., 2004). This makes SSE a collection of information about the school’s functions, with regard to the quality of teaching and learning that will enable the school make decisions about ways of improving while at the same time providing recommendations for action.

Hofman et al. (2009) have observed that SSE refers to a process that is directly or indirectly aimed at school improvement. Yet, because of the variation of the usage of SSE, it cannot be justified whether evaluation really brings about improvement (Schildkamp et al., 2011). Hofman et al. (2009) noted that SSE could be narrowed down to measurement phase in which evaluation is focused on a system of quality assurance. As a product, evaluation data are supposed to be used to improve performance or as a form of accountability (Hofman et al., 2009, p. 46). But one question that Fertig (2007, p. 2281) asked about evaluation is, “what would have happened to a suitably defined outcome measure if the intervention had not taken place?” Or will schools’ performance improve if they are regularly evaluated? Answers to such questions will help us reexamine the various definitions of SSE.

SSE is aimed among others to

Promote serious and purposeful discussion among all stakeholder groups, helping to create a culture for further inquiry and on-going self-evaluation; get a picture of the school as seen through the eyes of staff, students and parents; helping to identify and prioritize areas of deeper inquiry. (MacBeath et al., 2003, p. 279).

From the above, it can be noted that the application of SSE in schools could be very useful for them. But some critics have also argued that accepting a new idea can also be very challenging for organizational members for many reasons (James, 2010; James et al., 2006). For example, some members may consider it as additional work, whereas others may think it would not work and should maintain the status quo, while some may have their personal reasons not to accept self-evaluation. However, to avoid some of such conflicts, staff may prefer to concentrate on what they normally do rather than focusing on a task they have no confidence in and cannot predict the outcome (Bunnell et al., 2017).

MacBeath et al. (2004) explained that SSE has no beginning and an end; rather, it is supposed to be a continuous process that must be done throughout the school cycle. To ensure that there is continuous improvement and growth in schools, the application of SSE must be promoted in our schools so that it can give school leaders a means to regularly evaluate their school and bring improvement, which critics say forms the basis of identification of good support system for schools. SSE contributes toward promotion of school effectiveness and improvement, so it would be very prudent if it could be promoted in developing countries which need such evaluation (Fertig, 2000). It will also enhance the value for money in education that parents may wish to get from schools. This is important because schools continue to face social and institutional changes, even in places where there is growing demand for schools to become self-renewing learning institutions through its evaluation mechanisms (Leithwood et al., 1998, as cited in Devos & Verhoeven, 2003).

**SSE in an International Context: Implementations and Applications**

In the last two decades, “different types of self-evaluation have become commonplace in many countries” around the world and have become a common phenomenon in a large number of educational systems (Karagiorgi et al., 2015; Vanhoof et al., 2009, p. 200; Vanhoof & Petegem, 2011). Schools in several countries are also adopting new initiatives aimed at achieving systematic forms of SSE. O’Brien et al. (2017) observed that “in recent decades, self-evaluation has become a key quality assurance mechanism for schools internationally” (p. 62). In England, “there has been a clear shift in accountability in teaching since the 1988 Education Reform Act, [this has led] to evaluation of overall performance to external agencies” such as the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) (Hopkins et al., 2016, p. 52).

Some critics have observed that SSE is one of the educational improvement frameworks that has become a very useful tool for school improvement in many countries around the world (Antoniou et al., 2016; OECD, 2013), so several countries have adopted SSE as a framework to help improve performance in schools. Studies have also shown that while some schools have their own systems of support, some schools also rely on centralized and standardized support systems to improve performance. For instance, in some countries like England, Scotland, Norway, the Netherlands, Spain, and Austria, among others, research has shown the effectiveness of SSE as a support system for schools (MacBeath, 2006; MacBeath et al., 2004). In view of that, SSE is used as a performance improvement tool for their schools.

A study conducted by OECD (2013) has shown that SSE is being practiced in many countries and there are similarities in policies and approaches to the way SSE is practiced, but there are also differences in its application and implementation. The use of evaluation report to support schools differs.
Schools are supposed to use evaluation findings to formulate good policies, review old ones, and develop their school improvement plans (Antoniou et al., 2016). This policy agenda could increase parents’ and public confidence in schools. Also, schools’ internal review agenda has brought different frameworks of evaluation that have been developed to help make SSE successful, while evaluation frameworks have also been developed for various aspects and functions of schools (Vanhoof & Petegem, 2011). Leithwood et al. (2019) also argued that school leaders need “to figure out how best to use that information as they craft their responses to their own unique contexts,” as they try to bring improvement in their schools (p. 5).

According to O’Brien et al. (2017), in a study to ascertain external support and the practice of SSE in a number of countries, it was observed that

Difference between countries’ SSE practices can be attributed, in part at least, to the varying degrees of autonomy that are afforded to schools. Yet there are consistent global patterns relating to the ways in which SSE policies and practices have become embedded and at times, transposed into countries evaluation frameworks. (p. 64)

In Belgium, the Flemish Government established attainment goals and set development targets for schools through SSE (Devos & Verhoeven, 2003). The Inspectorate division in Belgium was tasked to check “whether the subject or subject area-related attainment targets were being achieved and whether the development objectives and/or the cross-subject or subject-area attainment targets were being striven for with sufficient zeal by the educational institutions” (p. 403). Devos and Verhoeven noted that there was a distinction between evaluation that was carried out by external inspectorate division and those done internally by schools and supporting systems available to help them improve their performance.

Schratz (2002) observed that the practice of SSE in some European countries such as “Austria schools have been granted more autonomy whereby the school system might become more democratic” (p. 145). Thus, in their SSE practice, the involvement of teachers, students, and parents in decision-making is very necessary to ensure accountability and autonomy of the schools. This has won support from parents who have campaigned for grassroots participation toward school improvement efforts since the late 1970s. According to Schratz (2002), grassroots participation paved the way for more school-based management, and as a result, school evaluation became more important and more or less a duty for everybody in support of school autonomy. Schratz further noted that a quality evaluation pilot project initiated in Europe to improve quality of schools has the following objectives:

To raise awareness about the need to evaluate secondary education in Europe; to enhance existing national procedures; to give a European dimension to quality evaluation; to support the exchange of information and experiences. On the local level, it should help schools in introducing self-evaluation as a major quality development philosophy including all stakeholders and in implementing measures of school development as a result of the findings. (Schratz, 2002, p. 147)

Denmark and Sweden have centralized form of school governance (MacBeath, 2006). Nevertheless, Norway has one of the most decentralized school systems in Europe, yet there has been little or no evidence to show how the decentralized system of SSE has brought any significant benefit to schools (OECD, 1989, as cited in Mansen, 2002). In practice, there is little to ascertain whether evaluation assists schools to achieve their goals. Although school-based evaluation in Norway is not very old compared with other countries in Europe, “actually, evaluation of schools in Norway began more than sixty years ago when educational researchers asked children what they remembered of the different subjects” (Mansen, 2002, pp. 73–74).

Germany like Norway also has a decentralized form of school governance, and there has never been a “tradition of systematic evaluation concerning school assessment” in German schools (Buhren, 2002, p. 261; MacBeath, 2006). According to Buhren (2002), although German authorities have existed for nearly 200 years now, SSE has been “promoted as a method for assessing school quality and bringing forward school development” (p. 262), while some critics also argue that SSE does not bring a magic solution to a school’s problem and it does not relent itself as a blue-print approach to solving schools’ problems (MacBeath, 2006). Rather, it builds on what exists or has already been done and does not introduce entirely new things into the school.

MacBeath (2002) observed that until the introduction of SSE in the early 1990s in Scotland, it was not that schools were not responsible for their improvement and accountability; rather, in the early 1990s the Inspectorate put in place a system of SSE in the belief that: schools should examine quality from different perspectives, in other words subjectivity counts; schools should take charge of their own evaluation and be furnished with tools to do so; in time, inspection would wither away or be transformed. (MacBeath, 2002, p. 244)

The road to mature SSE has been a highly valued feature for all schools in Scotland as a means to improve performance in Scottish schools.

Unlike countries in Europe and North America, Australia has no national policy framework for SSE; rather, individual schools are supposed to develop their own model of evaluation (MacBeath, 2006). Although it is done with some “guidelines developed by the Office of Review within whose overarching framework school councils is made up, parents, community and staff representatives have significant control over school policy” (p. 176). So, Australia SSE has been observed as an important framework for school
improvement (Antoniou et al., 2016; Antoniou & Kyriakides, 2013). According to Antoniou et al. (2016), Australia Department of Education schools annual report requires schools to collect, analyze, and report data of their SSE report. However, in New Zealand unlike Australia, there is a nationwide policy framework for SSE, so state schools are supposed to undertake self-evaluation which forms part of Schools’ Charter that is supposed to be a living document for schools in the country (MacBeath, 2006).

In Israel, the “educational system is characterized by a high level of centralization, and the evaluation mechanisms it presently employs are largely external, focusing, for the most part, on student achievement” (Friedman & Golan-Cook, 2002, p. 219). To strengthen schools’ capacity to improve performance, the Ministry of Education in Israel launched an educational reform that was aimed at eliminating bureaucracy, empowering schools, and strengthening control so that they can influence their own affairs. The education reform brought about the Autonomous School project initiated in the 1980s aimed at strengthening schools’ accountability and responsibility while “placing emphasis on self-evaluation by ensuring schools develop internal mechanisms” of SSE (Friedman & Golan-Cook, 2002, p. 220).

Although SSE is being practiced in several countries in Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand, the practice of SSE is seen to be neglected in most African countries apart from South Africa.

In South African schools, Govender et al. (2016) observed that school evaluation is conceptualized to form part of schools because it is used as a development strategy whereby schools have to develop their improvement plan through the evaluation report. In some countries, the introduction of “SSE into schools and into the local educational authority was perceived as a means of bringing about a change in the managerial perspectives held by principals and of contributing to the professional development of teachers” (Friedman & Golan-Cook, 2002, p. 221). Harris and Jones (2010) observed in a study that “teachers with a high sense of their own efficacy are more likely to adopt new classroom behaviours and are also more likely to stay in the profession” (p. 173).

**SSE as a Tool for Supporting Schools**

MacBeath (2006) notes that “if an essential purpose of school improvement is to build the school’s capacity to respond to and manage change, such a goal cannot be achieved without a commitment to self-evaluation” (p. 18). MacBeath further noted that SSE also gives students a voice about the nature of teaching they receive from the school, while the teachers also have the opportunity to reflect on what their students would say and find solutions and better ways to sustain any good practice identified.

According to Govender et al. (2016), SSE provides “guidelines, tools for evaluation and built-in mechanisms to report findings and provide feedback to the school and other stakeholders” (p. 997). Nonetheless, how schools are effectively using feedback that is made available to them for improvement purposes has also become another issue that needs to be critically looked at. MacBeath et al. (2003) have argued that if SSE is aimed at bringing improvement to schools, then it must be participative so that teachers, pupils, and parents become actively involved at each stage in the process and all parties must agree on what must be evaluated before proceeding further.

The primary goal of SSE is to assist schools to maintain and improve through a reflection of their activities (MacBeath, 1999, as cited in Devos & Verhoeven, 2003). In support of that, MacBeath (2006) mentions that when SSE outcomes are used to improve teachers’ performance, it will help evaluate their overall general results. Thus, it will help identify areas of improvement for teachers, where they can adjust and fully adhere to. So the argument is, if this will help teachers to improve their skills, then SSE would be supported by the staff. Devos and Verhoeven (2003) further observed that the main objective of SSE is to ensure that the needed recommendations that are put forward for schools through the process of evaluation are implemented. This is because besides making teachers aware of how they teach, it gives them the opportunity to reflect while critically monitoring their own performance and the impetus to develop professionally (MacBeath, 2006) and the nature and quality of effective schools (Harris et al., 2016) they envisage. Therefore, “if the self-evaluation process is not approached in a properly thought-out manner and in a way that is in line with overall school policy, it is very unlikely that the results will make any significant contribution to school development” (Vanhoof & Petegem, 2011, p. 202). SSE must therefore be considered as an important tool not only for teachers’ professional growth and development but also a means to enhance children’s academic performance.

As Lauder et al. (2006) pointed out, through education “individuals are able to develop their potential irrespective of the contrasting worlds that students inhabit beyond the school gates” (p. 2). The lack of access and the right to quality education can also hamper students’ ability to develop their potential and could have serious consequences for many students in lower income countries such as Ghana in which over the years they have not had quality education and could be denied of any opportunities to convert their capabilities into realities (Kalantry et al., 2010, as cited in Fertig, 2012).

**Method**

**Research Approach**

The study adopted mainly a qualitative research approach, and the data were gathered using one-on-one face-to-face interview method. The use of qualitative research approach enabled
the researchers to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons of the neglect of SSE usage. It also helped establish how teachers interpret their experiences with school improvement and any support systems available to schools (MacDonald & Headlam, 2020). To have a better understanding of research participants’ perception about SSE, the use of one-on-one interview was very significant because as Cohen et al. (2007) and Burke and Larry (2012) noted, one-on-one interview gives the research participants the opportunity to explain their understanding and application of SSE in their schools.

Sample and Sampling Technique
Sampling criteria were considered before selecting the sample for the study. In view of that, a convenient sampling technique was used to select both the schools and the teachers for the study (Ary et al., 2014). This according to Burke and Larry (2012) gives research participant the opportunity to participate more, especially those who will have the time to do so. This became significant because the study was done at the time that schools were in section so that teachers who had time to participate were involved after approaching almost every teacher in the selected schools.

The interview data were gathered from all 18 teachers and nine head teachers from nine basic schools who were selected in the Ada district in the Greater Accra because most of the schools that agreed to participate in the study were located in that district. Although 15 schools were initially contacted for the study, nine basic schools agreed to participate in the study. Every basic school has only one head teacher, so all the nine head teachers and two teachers from each school were selected.

Participants
In all, nine head teachers and 18 teachers making a total of 27 participants were interviewed to solicit their views and understanding of SSE and the nature support systems available to schools. This, according to Cohen et al. (2007) and Ary et al. (2014), gives researchers the opportunity to understand the researched in their natural setting while making meaning of the social reality. The participants who were selected have served for at least 2 years in the teaching profession and were willing to participate in the study and level of understanding of the topic under discussion. The nature of the study, the availability and accessibility of the participants at the time of the investigation, and their willingness to participate in the investigation (Burke & Larry, 2012; Cohen et al., 2007) justified the use of convenient sampling technique adopted for the study.

Data Collection
The study employed in-depth interviews for data collection. The interviews were conducted on the participants’ school premises, after school hours, when schools had closed, and the teachers had finished teaching. It enabled the participants to have enough time to respond to all questions while at the same time not disrupting instructional hours in the school. Although all the participants, especially the head teachers, agreed to participate in the investigation, due to their tight schedules staying continuously for 30 min became a little problematic, but the intermittent breaks did not affect the data collected. Some of the scheduled interviews were disrupted by some school activities; nevertheless, the participants who agreed to participate in the study stayed throughout the interview period. The study was carried out in a continuous and consistent manner to avoid what Gray (2004) describes as being bias on the part of participants, which might have arisen from the participants in provision of respondents acceptable to the researcher. Audio tape was used to gather every data to avoid participants to be recalled for additional data. This enhanced the level of reliability of the data that was collected.

Validity of research instrument. A validity of research instrument is attested to be accurate when it measures the proposed research idea (Ary et al., 2014; Bolarinwa, 2016). Ary et al. (2014) have argued that validity is not about the instrument per se but how the data would be interpreted and meaning assigned to it. In determining the internal and content validity of the research instrument, the interview questions were given to the expert in the field, colleague lecturers, and educationist to assess the questions to ensure their accuracy before the start of the interviews (Cohen et al., 2007). This was to check whether all questions for the interview would measure the interest as well as the concepts of the study. Corrections were made and suggestions given to improve the interview questions. This became necessary because the validity depends on experts’ judgment.

Reliability. Reliability of a research instrument measures the consistency of results when tested with the same group of participants more than once. In view of that, a test–retest correlation normally reveals this over a period (Bolarinwa, 2016). In ensuring reliability, researchers piloted the study among teachers who did not form part of the sample. The reliability of the interview was determined when the questions were tested with the sample of the study. This was evidenced when the results proved that majority of the teachers did not have in-depth knowledge about SSE exercises and other support systems which help in the improvement of school performance.

Data Analysis
To ensure reliability in the result, the same questions were used to interview all the respondents. The interviews were conducted at the same time to ensure the information gathered was accurate and reliable, and analyzed to ensure that
the conclusion warrant the data (MacDonald & Headlam, 2020). Before the data were transcribed and analyzed, the transcripts were read back to the participants to ensure they agreed with the information they provided during the interview. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Ary et al., 2014; Burke & Larry, 2012) to make the meaning very explicit and meaningful while addressing the research objectives. The data were first coded and later put into themes for analysis.

**Results**

**Background of Research Participants**

This section looks at analysis of the data that were gathered from the selected teachers and head teachers from nine basic schools. Out of the nine head teachers, five were females and the remaining four were males. With all the 18 teachers, 11 were females and the remaining seven were males. In all, two out of the nine head teachers have been in the profession for less than 10 years, whereas the remaining seven have been in the teaching profession for at least 12 years. Eight out of the nine head teachers have been in the profession for more than 12 years. Only one head teacher (a female) has just about a year and half to retire from teaching. According to her, she has served for almost 35 years. She explained that she spent 21 years in her first school as a classroom teacher and was transferred to another school where she spent 8 years before her current school where she had spent almost 6 years as a head teacher. The remaining head teachers have been in the teaching profession between 12 and 33 years. However, due to data limitation, there was no information about the number of years each head teacher had served as a classroom teacher before becoming a head teacher.

It became evident from the study that all the nine head teachers have been in headship positions for more than 5 years apart from the two head teachers who have been head teachers for just 3 years although they have been teaching for more than 15 years. The study showed that all the nine head teachers do not teach, although three of the head teachers indicated that they occasionally teach when some of the teachers were absent from school, whereas others hold responsibilities such as Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) local branch chairpersons, executives of some local unions, Parents Teachers Association (PTA) secretaries, and leaders in some church groups.

Concerning their ranks, it became evident from the investigation that at the basic level, only few schools have deputy head teachers. This position does not have official recognition, so no allowances are paid to those deputy head teachers. In some cases, some of the head teachers do not have deputy head teachers in their schools; this is because it is usually an internal arrangement put in place by the head for one of the trusted teachers to deputize in their absence.

**Teachers’ Understanding of SSE**

Understanding of the concept of SSE was one of the major issues that remained central during the study. The study sought to ascertain whether the teachers and head teachers really have a better understanding of SSE and how they use it in their schools. So, when the participants (both teachers and head teachers) were asked whether they had ever participated in or used SSE in their current school or any other school they had taught at, emphatically, all the 27 participants agreed that they have participated in or used SSE before, although it was not clear whether what they do is SSE or another form of evaluation tool which they equated to SSE.

When they were asked to explain how SSE is used, one of the participants, a science teacher, indicated that

SSE is something that puts teachers on their toes.

The science teacher explained that as follows:

For me, I am aware of school performance appraisal management (SPAM) which is also the same as the SSE.

He explained that it makes teachers realize whether what they are doing is wrong or right so that they could improve upon them.

Another participant, a mathematics teacher, also explained that

SSE helps us teachers to evaluate our teaching methods and assess where there is the need to improve in our teaching.

One head teacher also explained that

Yea, when you talk about SSE, we look at how the school will be migrated from its lowest term to the highest level in terms of averaging and we talk of the in-service training. At times we have in-service training to enhance our understanding about preparation of lesson notes and scheme of work. We also look at how we mark and close school registers; how to input our co-curricular activities into the timetable as the school term progress.

In looking at the responses given, it is clear from participants’ views that the kind of evaluation they are commenting on concerns SPAM and not SSE.

Again, when participants were asked to indicate which category of individuals are involved in the SSE, all the responses given by all the participants showed that they meant SPAM but not SSE. They explained that SSE and SPAM are the same, so what they practice in their schools is also SSE. They enumerated a list of individuals they believe participate in their form of evaluation. This includes students, parents, PTA chairman, executive members, school management committee (SMC) members, circuit supervisors, and individuals from the education directorate.
In terms of the processes involved in SSE, one teacher who teaches in Primary 6 had this to say:

The money involved in the evaluation and the resources to be used for the evaluation are not there. We don’t have money to do such evaluation.

Another teacher who teaches Primary 3 in one of the participating schools said,

The schools gather the students’ exercises books and their end of term examination results to assess their performance in class and end of term examinations. SPAM report is also used for evaluation.

The head teachers also noted that they use SSE to

- Assess performance of their teachers and students, through analysis of the students’ end of term examination results, class exercises, and tests.
- Identify areas that would need improvement.
- Vetting of teachers’ weekly forecasts as well as their lesson notes to ascertain the nature of preparation that goes into their lesson plans before they go to the classroom.
- Organize PTA meetings to find solutions to whatever challenges the teachers or school may face.

One of the head teachers who maintains she has done this evaluation before also had this to say:

First, we do internal assessment, during which the teachers and I meet to discuss performance of students in the various subjects to ascertain their strength and weakness before the students write their Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). I also sit with my staff to compare the previous BECE results to that of the current results and evaluate the pupils’ performance. We also invite the PTA and SMC members to discuss the performance of the students based on the BECE results.

One head teacher explained that

SSE is the assessment of performance of pupils, teachers and teaching and learning activities in the school and how the school is performing.

Whereas another head teacher said that

“SSE is the system or process whereby achievement of a school is assessed to ascertain whether teachers are doing well or not; and whether teaching approaches need to be changed or if there is the need for any improvement.” “SSE is a way of assessing performance of a school against other schools. An institution evaluates itself to ascertain how well it is doing in terms of academics and sports, among others. It is a periodic review to test the potency of existing systems whether it is yielding results, identify lapses and ways to improve upon them through effective teaching.”

Another teacher who also teaches Junior High School (JHS) mathematics maintained he has had some experience in participating in SSE and explained that

Yes, I have participated in what we called SPAM. Parents, teachers, the students and other stakeholders meet to discuss performance of the students, especially the final year students, analyze their results to find out if there has been improvement or not. We use the opportunity to discuss probable solutions to the identified problems. Sometimes we invite resource persons to the school for an in-service education and training (INSET) which we feel could help the teachers to improve their performance.

We see in the above comments that SSE is equated to SPAM. Another teacher who teaches Class 6 in one of the schools also indicated that

First of all a date is set and facilitators are invited to come and explain how subjects teachers find some difficulties in teaching could be taught well.

One teacher who also teaches JHS Social Studies also explained the process as “SSE is teachers sitting together with the head teacher to discuss progress of the school as well as performance of pupils.”

A head teacher who said she has done SSE several times, both in her previous school and in the school she is currently heading, explained that

Evaluation is put into two different forms—formative and summative evaluation. Formative evaluation involves quizzes, class exercises and summative evaluation involves the use of end of term and midterm examinations. Strategies for monitoring and evaluating school’s performance are also spelt out during the process of evaluation.

Although the participants’ understanding of SSE was a little hazy, they agreed that they would recommend it to schools as a support system that would be used to improve performance. It gives teachers the opportunity to assess their strengths and weaknesses in terms of how their students perform so that they can improve on it. Some of the reasons given by the teachers include the following:

- It gives teachers the opportunity to share ideas.
- It enables teachers to adopt different approaches to improve their teaching.
- It enables teachers to know whether their students are doing well or not.
- It helps teachers to acquire new skills because teachers have the opportunity to share ideas during evaluation.
• It puts teachers and the school on track while helping the teachers to gain knowledge of the job and gives them an opportunity to identify areas they could improve so as to help their students to improve their end of year examination results.
• It gives teachers the opportunity to know the performance of the students before and after their BECE final examinations.
• It gives teachers the opportunity to understand every student well in terms of what they need to do to improve so that they can pass their external examination.

One of the primary school teachers also said,

Yes I will recommend SSE to colleague teachers because it helps teachers to know their strengths and weaknesses. If we do not evaluate, how can we know whether we are doing the right thing or not? Else we might think we are doing something better when outsiders may think you are not doing the right thing. Therefore, we have to evaluate to know what is right and what is not right, what needs to be corrected, what needs to be improved and needs to be maintained.

Another respondent also explained that

evaluation would enable teachers share ideas and decide on how they would be able to assist the students improve their performance. The participants appreciate the importance of evaluation to schools, however their explanations demonstrate different interpretation and understanding of SSE.

One teacher further explained that

Some of the attitudes of the teachers towards work and the process of evaluation is very appalling. They see evaluation as something to judge them or as an assessment of their performance. Because they do not want anybody to know how they teach, whether good or bad, they seem not to like evaluation. Some also feel they have been teaching for many years and have experience so they do not need to be evaluated.

Findings from the discussions above suggest that participants do not have in-depth knowledge about SSE as all suggestions did not indicate any sufficient knowledge about SSE.

Support Systems Available to Schools

Teachers’ self-evaluation is an important component in teachers’ professional development and could lead to overall school improvement because when teachers are performing well it impacts the school and the performance of the students, which is basically the ultimate goal of every school. However, when the teachers were asked to indicate how they evaluate their own performance, it became evident that the only support system the schools have is the SPAM. The responses showed that aside from the SPAM, the teachers only use the BECE results, end of term examination results or class exercises conducted by the teachers as the only way through which teachers or even a school evaluates performance. One teacher said,

Apart from the school examination results that have been the only mode of evaluating teachers’ performance, I do not see any system available to evaluate myself. To me, there should be some standards that have to be used as a means to measure my performance against, but as far as I know, there is no means of evaluating teachers’ performance. If it exists in another school, I may not know. But to the best of my knowledge there is nothing like that in my school.

Two of the head teachers explained that they occasionally observe teachers’ lessons to see their delivery, although such things are done once in a while, even if they do not spend more than 5 min in a class. The participants maintained that in some cases the head teacher pops in briefly or peeps through the window to check whether a teacher is teaching. But when the participants were asked whether peeping through a window to observe a lesson for few minutes is enough to assess teachers’ performance when a lesson is supposed to be taught for an hour, the participants indicated that was not enough but that has been the usual practice going on in the schools in terms of monitoring or observing how teachers do their work.

To ascertain whether the schools have any support systems in place to improve upon performance of teachers, almost all the participants indicated that there is no system in place to support teachers to improve their work. This was also confirmed by all the nine head teachers. Occasionally, some of the head teachers observe some teachers’ lessons and give them advice. The schools do not have any systems in place to assist the teachers. The only thing that was mentioned by almost all the head teachers is in-service training and workshops. These workshops are organized by the Ghana Education Service (GES) and are done when there is an introduction of a new curriculum or when there is a drop in students academic performance as compared to previous records or the national average.

Discussion

Teachers’ understanding of the concept of SSE was very limited because when they were asked to explain the usefulness of SSE and the stages involved in the process, their explanations were very diverse and confusing. Some teachers view SSE as a tool that gives teachers the opportunity to assess their performance through what is commonly called SPAM. Others also think SSE helps teachers to identify and improve upon their problems, whereas others thought it helps teachers to know their strengths and weaknesses. This means that this is in line with the explanation provided by MacBeath et al. (2003) and O’Brien et al. (2017). Other authors and
researchers give different explanations to SSE because of their diverse aims and what they consider could be achieved from schools’ evaluation. As explained in various writings of MacBeath and others, the understanding of SSE varies from one educationist to the other, so it makes the interpretation of the concept also different (MacBeath et al., 2004) and blurred. A head teacher’s explanation clearly demonstrates that the teachers’ understanding of SSE is focused more on evaluation of the final year students’ performance of examination results and look for ways of improving the students’ results. It focuses on examination results rather than overall improvement of the school, which include both academic and nonacademic performances.

The responses showed that SSE being practiced in schools are just evaluation of students’ examination results but not the comprehensive SSE described by MacBeath et al. (2004), MacBeath (2006), Hofman et al. (2009), Govender et al. (2016), and Antoniou et al. (2016). SSE is seen as a form of comprehensive internal review that is aimed at a whole school improvement and serves as a form of quality assurance and accountability. So the interpretation provided by the participants shows lack of understanding of SSE. Or the participants equated SSE to SPAM, so if SPAM is used as a tool to improve the performance of teachers and overall school’s performance, then it presupposes that SSE is used as well. However, it can be noted that looking at the various definitions that literature attest and the responses participants gave, it is evidenced that teachers’ knowledge about SSE is minimal. This proved their lack of understanding about the concept under study.

The head teachers’ explanation of SSE clearly demonstrates lack of understanding of SSE because almost all the 27 participants gave different interpretations of SSE. The participants understand SSE as evaluation of analysis of end of term and final BECE results. The lack of teachers’ understanding of SSE means it would be very difficult for them to use it as a support system for improvement in their schools. This is very significant because the teachers need to have a better understanding of the process, those who are supposed to be involved in all the stages of the evaluation, at what stage they have to be involved, and the significance of SSE. The usage of SSE alone does not solve the problems of school improvement, but rather how evaluation report could be used to draw an improvement plan for the school. Therefore teachers’ understanding of SSE is very significant and key to performance of teachers and to overall school improvement.

Although it became evident that there was lack of understanding of SSE, the participants were of the view that SSE is a tool that could be used to improve performance in schools, but there are some factors that could also make it difficult for teachers to practice its usage. The factors mentioned by the participants include lack of financial resources, time needed to do the evaluation, teachers’ negative attitude toward evaluation, lack of effective monitoring and supervision from senior management, lack of commitment on the part of teachers, unplanned extracurricular activities that may affect evaluation timetable, lack of teacher motivation, and some teachers’ negative view of evaluation as a waste of time. This is in line with a similar observation made by Muijs and Harris (2003) who looked at how performance could be improved through empowerment of teachers. They observed that the quality of teaching depends on how well teachers are motivated and that positively impacts students’ academic performance. They further noted that “it will remain a marginal activity within schools unless forms of remuneration are put in place” (p. 444).

There is no evaluation of staff from their colleague teachers, senior teachers, or school leadership. Teachers’ performance evaluation is always based on students’ class exercises, end of term examination results, or final BECE results. Unfortunately, evaluating teachers’ performance using BECE results means evaluating the performance of teachers who teach final year students. That means the work of teachers who do not teach final year students is not evaluated. So the question that needs to be answered is, should teachers’ performance be based on examination results? What about value-addition? Are teachers not supposed to add value to students’ life? If teachers’ performance would be based on only examination results, then what about value-addition? Or who must add value to what students learn in school?

The study noted that some of the teachers exhibited some negative attitude toward the SPAM which is currently being used as a tool for improving school’s performance. Although SSE is not used as part of the tools being used in school, but SPAM which the participants maintained is being used as a supporting tool in school, teachers have negative attitude toward its usage. This negative attitude of teachers is common with many Ghanaian teachers, especially those who have been in the professions for many years. This attitude has also been observed by some researchers (see, for example, Hofman et al., 2009) that SSE could put additional pressure on teachers so that they may not welcome its use in schools as a performance evaluation tool. The teachers see the use of SPAM as additional work to their already difficult teaching work, so they may not wish to use it. The teachers may not want to be seen as being made to go through another form of observation that may appear to be another form of teaching practice observation when they have passed their initial teachers’ training examinations and have practiced for several years. So they do not want anybody to observe, judge, or comment about the way they work. This is also similar to what Devos and Verhoeven (2003) observed some years ago, that it is sometimes difficult for school leadership to observe their own staff and do an unbiased reflection because they feel it could put pressure on teachers and senior management to find new ways to improve when there is evidence of say, underperformance.

Hall and Noyes (2009) also made a similar observation that SSE exposes teachers’ weaknesses and any unprofessional practices that could weaken teachers, which without SSE
nobody will have knowledge about. As a result, evaluation of any kind (whether SSE or SPAM) would not be supported by teachers. Although there is adequate knowledge of SSE globally, the participants still pointed out that enough training could be given to teachers to enhance their understanding and knowledge of SSE. So adequate training would be useful for teachers to have a better understanding of SSE (Setlalentoa, 2014) and appreciation of the benefits schools may derive from its proper application.

The head teachers also indicated that they can identify teachers who may have problems through their regular school attendance, students’ performance in class, end of term examinations results and class exercises. The SPAM is a means to identify teachers who may have challenges and also a tool to improve performance. However, some head teachers also said they use teachers’ lesson notes and schemes of work to assess teachers’ performance. Sometimes, some of the teachers copy their colleagues’ lesson notes and schemes of work, and that makes it difficult for their performance to be properly assessed if only teachers’ lesson notes and schemes of work were to be used to evaluate performance.

According to the teachers, the schools organize SPAM to discuss and analyze the end of final year examination results, so the teachers use the opportunity to discuss the results in detail, find out what might have gone wrong, why the students did not do well and what could be done to improve performance in future examinations. Paradoxically, teachers’ performances are not evaluated at such meetings because there is no evaluation system for teachers or the schools. Teachers’ reflection on their work is based on performance of students’ performance in class or final year examination grades and not how they teach or how students learn. The study therefore shows that support systems in schools are either ineffective or nonexistent and can therefore be concluded that there is no support systems in place for schools.

The study observed that workshops, training programs, or further studies that are aimed at improving the work of teachers are teacher-initiated, and neither school-initiated nor Ghana Education Service (GES) initiated. At the time of the data collection, a new curriculum was being introduced in all primary schools in the country, so in-service training was organized for all the teachers who teach at the primary level. Such trainings are compulsory for teachers and have nothing to do with teachers’ underperformance, bad methods of teaching, a decline in students’ academic performance, or underperformance on the part of teachers. So, it can be seen that there are no systems in place to help teachers improve their work. In case of individual teachers who may have problems such as ineffective classroom management that could lead to increase in the number of disruptive students in class, bad teaching methods in specific subjects or topics, a drop in teachers’ morale, and lack of teacher-initiated professional development, the teacher concerned is advised by senior management to improve. As to how that individual teacher will do it is also another issue all together.

The head teachers also indicated that they improve performance of their schools through provision of textbooks, occasionally invite the parents through their usual PTA meetings, and advise them to assist their children at home. The PTA is also invited in some cases to discuss problems facing the school and take decisions to support the teachers. In most cases, the support is basically for financial assistance to purchase textbooks or teaching and learning materials (TLMs) or to improve infrastructure in the schools. So there is no support systems in place to support teachers improve their performance or sustain improved performance in schools.

**Conclusion**

The concept of SSE has been used as a tool to promote quality and enhance performance of schools, although some critics also believe that SSE alone cannot bring improvement because it can stress teachers and senior management. Teachers need to develop their skills and should be able to interpret evaluation results, but they should be motivated to use whichever tool they use so as to implement whichever strategies they device in school improvement plan, if necessary (Schildkamp & Visscher, 2010). The schools have their own way of assessing performance. Teachers’ understanding of support systems available to them to improve performance is the SPAM, the BECE results, and students’ class exercises as a means to improve their teaching, classroom work, and improvement of final year students’ examination grades. There is little or no knowledge about SSE let alone using as a support system for schools to improve performance. Despite teachers’ little knowledge and understanding of SSE, the teachers are doing their best to improve their practices as well as schools’ performance. However, understanding and effective application of SSE could help teachers to improve their own practice and overall school improvement and sustain the improvement through regular application of SSE.

The study concludes that the schools are using different means to improve performance, but there are no clear support systems in place to support teachers to improve their work. If teachers are to meet the needs of their learners, they must be given the opportunity to develop and learn (Harris & Jones, 2010, as cited in Harris & Jones, 2010). They should also have clear support systems which they could use to support their work and assess other teachers’ and overall schools’ performance. Also, they have to use it to draw improvement plans for their schools. Teachers’ knowledge of SSE will not only be very useful to them but will help toward improvement of their professional practices and overall school improvement.

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