

Role-Based Leadership of Traditional Rulers: Applying Mintzberg's Managerial Framework to Chieftaincy in Asante Akyem Central Municipality, Ghana

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Abstract: *This study examines the leadership roles of traditional rulers in Asante Akyem Central through the lens of Mintzberg's managerial framework. Using a mixed-methods, cross-sectional design, it reveals that chiefs perform roles beyond ceremonial duties, acting as leaders, negotiators, disseminators, and resource allocators. Findings highlight their critical contributions to governance, development, and conflict resolution, especially in contexts where state presence is limited. The study underscores the strategic importance of chieftaincy in Ghana's decentralized governance system and advocates for the integration of traditional rulers into formal policy and administrative frameworks. Despite methodological limitations, the research provides valuable insights into the functional leadership of chiefs and calls for more inclusive, role-based approaches to governance and development planning in Ghana.*

Keywords: Traditional leadership, mintzberg framework, chieftaincy, governance, development planning, Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Traditional leadership in Ghana continues to wield significant influence in governance, particularly at the community level. Chiefs, queen mothers, and elders form the bedrock of customary authority, exerting control over land, enforcing customary laws, and guiding development initiatives. Their historical role in societal organization, dispute resolution, and land stewardship has remained resilient in the face of modern political structures (Adjei, 2024). This resilience is due in part to the cultural embeddedness of the chieftaincy institution and its strategic alignment with both colonial and post-colonial governance frameworks (Manboah-Rockson, Adjuik & Gyader, 2024).

In Ghana's dual authority system—comprising state and traditional institutions—traditional rulers play complementary roles in governance, especially in land administration. The Constitution of Ghana acknowledges chieftaincy as a legitimate institution, granting it autonomy from partisan politics but bestowing on it considerable informal authority. Chiefs serve as custodians of stool lands, with responsibilities that extend to conflict mediation, enforcement of communal norms, and public mobilization for development initiatives (Adjei, 2024). This role becomes particularly pronounced in

rural areas, where state presence is often limited and traditional leaders serve as the primary interface between citizens and institutions of power (Essel, 2020).

In Asante Akyem Central, the authority of chiefs is especially pronounced. The Asante chieftaincy system operates with a highly organized hierarchy, culminating in the Asantehene, and embodies both cultural continuity and political utility. Chiefs in this region are actively involved in resolving disputes, organizing communal labor, and initiating developmental projects such as schools, water systems, and health centers (Essel, 2020; Kessey, 2006). Their influence is derived not only from lineage and tradition but also from their ability to mobilize resources and command loyalty within their communities. Even during national crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional rulers played a frontline role in delivering relief, organizing awareness campaigns, and maintaining public order (Essel, 2020).

The fusion of symbolic and administrative functions places traditional rulers in a unique leadership position that intersects customary authority and modern public administration. Despite being non-state actors, their involvement in local governance processes is indispensable. Recent studies suggest that integrating the chieftaincy institution more formally into local development frameworks could yield more culturally attuned and sustainable policy outcomes (Manboah-Rockson, Adjuik & Gyader, 2024).

While traditional rulers in Ghana continue to play crucial roles in community development, their leadership functions are often evaluated without grounding in formal theoretical frameworks. This lack of theoretical anchoring limits the nuanced understanding of how their responsibilities intersect with structured managerial practices (Yaro, Nuru-Deen, & Kipo-Sunyezi, 2024; Zakaria, Abdulai, & Ibrahim, 2024). Few studies have explored the applicability of contemporary leadership models such as Mintzberg's framework to traditional leadership, which hinders comprehensive policy integration and reform (Sasu & Owusu-Agyeman, 2024; Dotsey, Kwapong, Addae, & Fuseini, 2024). This study addresses that gap by analyzing chiefs' roles through a structured, role-based leadership lens.

The study addressed the following core research questions to guide its investigation: How did traditional rulers in Asante Akyem Central perform leadership roles aligned with Mintzberg's managerial framework? What contextual factors shaped the leadership behaviors of these traditional rulers within the dual authority system? What implications did these leadership roles have for governance reform and decentralization policy in Ghana? These questions were developed to explore the structural, cultural, and functional dimensions of chieftaincy within a formal leadership context

Conceptual Framework

This study adopted a role-based leadership lens to reinterpret traditional authority, positioning chiefs not merely as cultural figures but as strategic, functional leaders. In many African contexts, particularly Ghana, chieftaincy remains central to community governance, land administration, and social cohesion. However, its functions are often perceived through a symbolic or customary lens rather than a formal managerial one (Yaro, Nuru-Deen, & Kipo-Sunyezi, 2024). This conceptual framework challenged that narrative by framing traditional rulers as individuals whose roles encompass structured, actionable leadership responsibilities akin to those defined in modern leadership theory (Sasu & Owusu-Agyeman, 2024).

The study conceptualized chieftaincy as a domain of functional leadership grounded in socially embedded authority and strategic action. Chiefs operate in environments characterized by complex

governance demands, requiring negotiation, communication, and decision-making competencies. These functions, though informal in structure, mirror core managerial responsibilities in formal institutions (Beltrán Virgüez, Barrera Lievano, & Cote Daza, 2023). By viewing traditional leaders through this role-based framework, the study emphasized their practical involvement in conflict resolution, mobilization, and policy engagement—areas often underexplored in conventional leadership literature (Sasu & Owusu-Agyeman, 2024).

Additionally, the conceptual approach acknowledged that the legitimacy of traditional rulers is derived not only from customary succession but also from their capacity to enact and sustain collective welfare. This aligns with contemporary leadership theories that value legitimacy through functionality and stakeholder engagement (Manboah-Rockson, Adjuik, & Gyader, 2024). Chiefs routinely serve as mediators, community planners, and public advocates, roles that directly correspond with structured leadership models used in organizational theory. As such, the study proposed that traditional authority should be formally analyzed as a site of strategic leadership action rather than as a static cultural relic (Zakaria, Abdulai, & Ibrahim, 2024).

This reconceptualization of chieftaincy supported the broader aim of integrating indigenous institutions into policy frameworks without diminishing their cultural significance. By recognizing traditional rulers as actors capable of performing complex roles, the framework enabled a more inclusive understanding of governance in Ghana. The role-based perspective thus provided a robust conceptual foundation for evaluating chiefs' contributions to development, justice, and administration in a contemporary setting.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted Henry Mintzberg's Managerial Roles framework as its central theoretical model to examine the leadership behavior of traditional rulers in Ghana, particularly within Asante Akyem Central. Mintzberg's theory, developed through empirical observation of executive functions, presents ten roles categorized under three broad groups: interpersonal, informational, and decisional. These roles offer a comprehensive lens to explore the complexity and functionality of leadership practices that go beyond ceremonial duties (Kurke & Aldrich, 1983; Pearson & Chatterjee, 2003).

In the interpersonal category, the roles include figurehead, leader, and liaison. Traditional rulers often perform ceremonial duties that position them as figureheads, representing the historical and cultural continuity of their communities (Henegama, 2024). As leaders, they provide moral and strategic direction, mobilizing their subjects toward collective goals such as community development or land disputes resolution. Their liaison role manifests through constant engagement with local government, NGOs, and external stakeholders, often bridging formal and informal governance systems (Buabeng & Tettey, 2024).

The informational roles—monitor, disseminator, and spokesperson—are crucial in understanding the communication dynamics of traditional authority. Chiefs monitor community issues through local surveillance mechanisms, gather informal reports from subjects, and keep abreast of district-level governance decisions (Serrat, 2021). As disseminators, they share relevant information on state programs, land reforms, and development interventions, ensuring local uptake. In their spokesperson role, traditional leaders articulate communal interests at higher political or administrative levels, acting as advocates for their people's needs (Karim & Afnan, 2020).

Decisional roles include entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, and negotiator. These roles highlight the strategic and administrative depth of traditional leadership. Chiefs often initiate new development projects, from building schools to advocating for infrastructure, thereby acting as entrepreneurs within their communities (Chareanpunsirikul & Wood, 2002). They handle disturbances such as inter-family disputes, land conflicts, or political tensions, reinforcing social cohesion and local order. As resource allocators, they oversee communal land distribution and negotiate access to development funds. In negotiation, they act as intermediaries between contesting groups or between the community and external agents like corporate bodies or government departments (Holy & Bolek, 2024).

The use of Mintzberg's roles within the context of traditional governance allows for the reimagining of chieftaincy as a dynamic managerial institution. Though deeply rooted in culture and heritage, chieftaincy in Ghana performs vital administrative and leadership functions that align with modern theoretical frameworks. This reinterpretation positions chiefs as active players in policy implementation and governance, thereby validating their inclusion in national development strategies (Mount & Bartlett, 1999).

Notably, Mintzberg's framework has been found adaptable across diverse institutional and cultural contexts. Pearson and Chatterjee (2003) found that while the specific expressions of roles might vary, the structural relevance of Mintzberg's categories remains intact in non-Western settings, including Asia. This insight reinforces the model's utility in Ghana's dual governance environment, where chiefs operate at the intersection of customary and statutory authority. Moreover, Henegama (2024) observed that effective leadership across contexts is closely tied to how well individuals perform the interpersonal and decisional roles—areas where traditional rulers in Ghana are highly engaged.

A key strength of the Mintzbergian framework lies in its ability to contextualize leadership not merely as a set of traits but as functional behavior distributed across multiple, sometimes simultaneous roles. This behavior-oriented model suits the empirical realities of chieftaincy, where a chief may, within a single day, preside over ceremonial rites (figurehead), mediate conflict (disturbance handler), coordinate a development project (entrepreneur), and hold consultations with government officials (liaison). Such multifaceted action is inadequately captured by static leadership typologies, making Mintzberg's dynamic role set particularly valuable for analyzing traditional leadership in Ghana (Tengblad, 2001).

The Mintzberg framework offers a robust structure for decoding the leadership behavior of traditional rulers. It captures the fluid yet functional nature of their roles and provides a scaffold for assessing their contributions to governance and community development. The framework's comprehensive nature, global adaptability, and behavioral orientation render it an ideal model for analyzing the operational depth of chiefs in Asante Akyem Central.

Empirical Framework

Asante Akyem Central provides a compelling empirical setting for examining the relevance of Mintzberg's managerial roles in traditional leadership. The district is situated in Ghana's Ashanti Region, where chieftaincy is deeply embedded in the cultural and political fabric. Chiefs in this area actively engage in governance, development planning, and social coordination, positioning themselves as *de facto* leaders alongside elected officials. This dual authority system allows for the exploration of how traditional leaders manage roles that blend cultural heritage with modern expectations.

The empirical relevance of the Asante Akyem Central context lies in the confluence of customary governance and decentralization. Chiefs serve as agents of mobilization for development initiatives, arbiters in conflict resolution, and custodians of communal land—functions that correspond to several of Mintzberg’s managerial categories. Specifically, roles such as disturbance handler, negotiator, and liaison become evident in the chiefs’ efforts to mediate disputes, coordinate with formal government institutions, and manage community expectations. This aligns with findings from contemporary studies that observe the intersection of traditional authority with public governance in Ghana (Boateng, Owusu, & Baah, 2024).

The research explores how traditional leaders embody interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles described in Mintzberg’s framework. Chiefs often act as figureheads in ceremonial functions, reinforcing their symbolic legitimacy. They disseminate information regarding community development projects and serve as spokespeople on matters concerning local affairs, akin to the roles of monitor and spokesperson. These leadership behaviors have been identified in other empirical studies within Ghana, particularly in how traditional institutions provide governance functions absent in formal structures (Kubi & Asiamah, 2025).

A key empirical observation is the degree to which traditional leaders adapt their leadership styles to local governance challenges. For example, the role of kingmakers in grooming successors indicates a long-term orientation to human resource development within traditional systems, echoing Mintzberg’s conceptualization of resource allocator and leader roles (Kubi & Asiamah, 2025). Chiefs also collaborate with district assemblies in areas such as health, sanitation, and education, acting as boundary spanners between state actors and local populations (Belden, 2010).

This framework also allows for the assessment of leadership efficacy by evaluating how chiefs balance competing demands. Chiefs must address community needs while upholding cultural customs, negotiate with political actors without undermining their traditional status, and implement development programs with limited resources. These dynamics are reflective of the entrepreneurial and resource allocation aspects of Mintzberg’s model, as leaders seek to innovate within constrained environments (Mickson, Anlesinya, & Malcalm, 2020).

Empirical evidence from studies on traditional leadership in Ghana consistently highlights that these roles are not merely ceremonial but involve complex managerial and political responsibilities. Chiefs are increasingly being recognized as pivotal figures in sustainable development due to their proximity to local populations and understanding of community dynamics (Arthur & Nsiah, 2011). Their integration into local governance strategies is thus critical for policy success, particularly in rural and peri-urban contexts.

Moreover, leadership behaviors observed among chiefs in Asante Akyem Central align with broader patterns of effective leadership in Ghana. Empirical findings suggest that transformational and authentic leadership styles—commonly associated with higher staff and community satisfaction—are practiced in varying degrees by traditional rulers (Acquah, 2020). This reinforces the utility of role-based analysis in explaining the functional outputs of traditional authority structures.

In sum, the empirical framework underscores the dynamic, role-driven nature of chieftaincy in Asante Akyem Central. The chiefs’ engagement in development, governance, and conflict mediation not only exemplifies Mintzberg’s managerial roles but also affirms the importance of incorporating traditional

leadership into policy frameworks. As such, traditional rulers in Ghana remain indispensable in the country's governance architecture, especially when analyzed through structured leadership lenses.

METHODS

The study employed a qualitative-dominant mixed methods approach to comprehensively explore how traditional rulers in Asante Akyem Central perform managerial roles as conceptualized by Mintzberg. This methodological choice allowed for both in-depth, contextual understanding and structured analytical insights. The qualitative strand enabled exploration of culturally embedded leadership practices, while the quantitative element provided measurable patterns of role performance. Mixed methods have increasingly been recommended for leadership studies in complex sociopolitical settings, as they bridge the interpretive depth of qualitative narratives with the generalizability of quantitative measures (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021; Alqatawenah, 2022; Osei et al., 2021). The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional design to assess traditional leadership at a single point in time, capturing prevailing behaviors, institutional interactions, and community perceptions. This design was appropriate given the objective to document existing leadership role enactments without manipulating variables. Descriptive cross-sectional designs are widely used in organizational behavior and governance studies for evaluating performance dynamics and stakeholder relationships (Osei et al., 2021; Asante & Boateng, 2022). They are particularly effective in socio-political contexts where leadership roles intersect with deeply entrenched traditional norms and state functions.

The research was conducted in Asante Akyem Central Municipality, situated in Ghana's Ashanti Region. This area presents a fertile ground for examining the interplay of customary and statutory governance due to the coexistence of traditional leadership with local government authorities. Chiefs in this municipality wield considerable influence over land, communal decisions, and conflict resolution—an institutional legacy embedded in Ghana's dual authority system (Adu-Gyamfi, 2022; Ayee, 2020). The municipality also exhibits strong communal structures that facilitate participatory leadership, making it ideal for empirical evaluation under Mintzberg's framework.

A total of 120 respondents participated in the study, including 40 traditional rulers and opinion leaders, 30 assembly members and municipal officials, and 50 community residents. Stratified sampling was employed to ensure that perspectives from various leadership and societal segments were proportionately represented. This approach aligns with the recommendation to stratify by role proximity in studies involving complex leadership hierarchies (Abor et al., 2020; Osei et al., 2021). Community respondents were selected using simple random sampling to eliminate selection bias and ensure demographic fairness. Chiefs and key officials were purposively sampled due to their experiential knowledge and decision-making authority relevant to the research questions.

Three data collection tools were utilized: structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Structured questionnaires gathered standardized data on perceived leadership behavior, role frequency, and leadership impact. In-depth interviews targeted traditional rulers and officials, probing the nuances of role interpretation and performance. FGDs were conducted with community members to capture grassroots perspectives that might validate or contradict elite viewpoints. The triangulation of these instruments enhances credibility and richness of data, as supported by previous governance and leadership studies in sub-Saharan Africa (Boateng et al., 2022; Antwi-Boasiako & Ntow-Gyamfi, 2023).

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS for descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages. This statistical lens enabled a structured understanding of leadership role distributions across different actor categories. The qualitative data, drawn from interviews and FGDs, underwent thematic content analysis. Thematic categories were developed in alignment with Mintzberg's ten managerial roles: interpersonal (figurehead, leader, liaison), informational (monitor, disseminator, spokesperson), and decisional (entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, negotiator) (Mintzberg, 2009; Holy & Bolek, 2024). Triangulation was applied to ensure reliability across data sources and to validate emerging patterns. This combined analysis method has proven effective in leadership research where formal frameworks are mapped onto context-specific practices (Karim & Afnan, 2020).

RESULTS

This section presents findings based on Mintzberg's three categories of managerial roles—interpersonal, informational, and decisional—as they were interpreted and executed by traditional rulers in Asante Akyem Central. The results combine survey data with narrative insights from interviews and focus group discussions. The updated response table uses grouped categories to present a clearer summary of community perceptions.

Interpersonal Roles

Chiefs function as ceremonial figureheads, playing a vital role in reinforcing traditional authority, cultural heritage, and societal unity. Their presence at rituals such as Akwasidae, funerals, and naming ceremonies conveys a sense of continuity and legitimacy. As one respondent explained, "*During Akwasidae, the chief leads the entire town; it reminds the youth of our values.*" These symbolic functions not only affirm the chief's status but also bind the community to a shared identity. According to Buabeng and Tettey (2024), such roles embody tradition and bolster social cohesion. This view is supported by survey data: 50% strongly agreed and 33.3% agreed that chiefs perform essential ceremonial roles.

Traditional rulers were widely acknowledged as mobilizers of community effort, particularly in initiating and organizing public projects. Chiefs often led sanitation campaigns, supervised communal labor, and rallied support for school and health facility maintenance. One participant emphasized, "*When the chief speaks, we act. That is how we cleaned and reopened the school after the rains.*" This form of leadership is consistent with findings by Boateng et al. (2024), who highlight the capacity of traditional leaders to facilitate local development through civic engagement. Survey results support this view: 45.8% of respondents strongly agreed, and 37.5% agreed, that chiefs effectively lead and inspire collective community action.

Chiefs served as vital intermediaries between local communities and external stakeholders, including district assemblies, NGOs, and diaspora networks. Their ability to connect local needs with broader resources enhanced community development efforts. A notable example came from a respondent who shared, "*We contacted our sons abroad to help with the health centre renovation.*" These bridging roles have been emphasized by Arthur and Nsiah (2011), who argue that traditional rulers are instrumental in decentralized governance systems. Survey data further confirmed this liaison function: 40% of respondents strongly agreed, and 41.7% agreed that chiefs maintain critical relationships with external actors to advance communal interests.

Informational Roles

Traditional rulers were actively engaged in monitoring community issues through both formal and informal channels. Chiefs received information from palace meetings, sub-chiefs, and local informants, allowing them to detect and address problems early. One chief remarked, *“We hear things before they become public. That’s how we knew about the water contamination.”* This grassroots vigilance aligns with Mintzberg’s managerial conception of monitoring and is supported by Wilfahrt and Letsa (2023), who describe traditional leaders as early responders to local crises. Survey results reflect strong community recognition of this role, with 35% of respondents strongly agreeing and 43.3% agreeing that chiefs effectively monitor community concerns.

Chiefs played a crucial role in disseminating information within their communities, especially during periods of public health emergencies or government policy rollouts. They used culturally resonant channels such as palace announcements, durbars, and town criers to relay directives. During the COVID-19 pandemic, one respondent observed, *“It was the chief who told us how to stay safe.”* This aligns with Kubi and Asiamah (2025), who emphasized the centrality of traditional leaders in rural communication systems. Survey findings affirmed this function: 33.3% of participants strongly agreed, and 45% agreed that traditional rulers were effective disseminators of important community and governmental information.

Chiefs actively represented their communities in formal governance settings such as district assembly meetings and regional Houses of Chiefs. They articulated concerns about education, health, and infrastructure on behalf of their people. As one interviewee recounted, *“Our chief fought for our school furniture at the District Assembly meeting.”* This advocacy function reflects the spokesperson role outlined in Mintzberg’s framework and is corroborated by Belden (2010), who identified traditional leaders as legitimate voices in policy discourse. The survey results supported this observation, with 31.7% of respondents strongly agreeing and 46.7% agreeing that chiefs effectively serve as spokespersons for their communities.

Decisional Roles

Chiefs demonstrated entrepreneurial leadership by initiating development projects without waiting for formal government intervention. These projects included building boreholes, rehabilitating schools, and constructing access roads. A community member recounted, *“We didn’t wait for the government. The chief led us to dig the well.”* This finding reflects the entrepreneurial role described by Mintzberg and aligns with research by Busia and Adjei (2020), who noted the proactive nature of traditional rulers in community-led development. Survey responses strongly validated this role, with 37.5% of participants strongly agreeing and 41.7% agreeing that chiefs acted as catalysts for initiating and leading local development initiatives.

Traditional rulers were widely recognized for resolving disputes involving land, family, and trade conflicts. These interventions were often swift, community-centered, and culturally appropriate. One female trader testified, *“He resolved my land issue in one week. No need to go to court.”* This aligns with findings by Anderson and Larbi (2022), who highlighted the judicial competence of chiefs in mitigating local tensions. Chiefs employed mediation, arbitration, and moral persuasion to maintain harmony. The survey results reinforced this perception: 36.7% of respondents strongly agreed and 42.5% agreed that traditional rulers effectively handled disturbances and conflicts within their jurisdictions.

Chiefs played a vital role in allocating communal resources, especially land and voluntary labor, for developmental purposes. Their authority over land distribution was instrumental in facilitating projects like markets, schools, and sanitation infrastructure. An assembly member shared, “The chief allocated the land for the market without asking for a fee.” This underscores findings by Adotey (2019), who noted the strategic influence of traditional leaders in land governance and planning. Chiefs prioritized equitable and community-beneficial use of resources. Survey responses mirrored this, with 30% of participants strongly agreeing and 45.8% agreeing that chiefs actively and fairly performed resource allocation functions.

Traditional rulers actively engaged in negotiations with diverse stakeholders, including municipal officials, NGOs, and private investors, to secure resources for their communities. These engagements often led to infrastructure upgrades, education support, and healthcare interventions. One participant recounted, “Our chief met with the MP and we got street lights installed.” This leadership role aligns with the work of Osei-Tutu et al. (2019), who emphasized the negotiating power of chiefs within Ghana’s decentralization framework. Chiefs utilized diplomacy and local credibility to advocate for community needs. The study’s survey data affirmed this role, with 35.8% of respondents strongly agreeing and 41.7% agreeing with chiefs’ effectiveness in negotiation.

Summary Table of Results

Role Category	Specific Role	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)
Interpersonal	Figurehead	50.0	33.3	8.3	8.3
	Leader	45.8	37.5	12.5	4.2
	Liaison	40.0	41.7	12.5	5.8
Informational	Monitor	35.0	43.3	13.3	8.3
	Disseminator	33.3	45.0	12.5	9.2
	Spokesperson	31.7	46.7	13.3	8.3
Decisional	Entrepreneur	37.5	41.7	12.5	8.3
	Disturbance Handler	36.7	42.5	12.5	8.3
	Resource Allocator	30.0	45.8	13.3	10.8
	Negotiator	35.8	41.7	13.3	9.2

Source: *Field Work, 2022*

Summary of the Results

The findings of this study affirm that traditional rulers in Asante Akyem Central perform a diverse range of managerial roles that align closely with Mintzberg’s framework. Within the interpersonal domain, chiefs emerged as powerful cultural figureheads, respected community leaders, and effective liaisons to external actors. Their ceremonial visibility during festivals, proactive leadership in communal development, and ability to network with the diaspora and governmental agencies underscore their broad influence.

In the informational domain, chiefs functioned as grassroots monitors of local dynamics, disseminators of critical public information, and articulate spokespersons for community advocacy. Their reliance on informal surveillance networks, culturally embedded communication channels, and formal

institutional platforms reflect a hybrid governance role—rooted in tradition but responsive to contemporary needs.

Under decisional roles, traditional rulers demonstrated entrepreneurial foresight in initiating projects, adeptness in dispute resolution, strategic oversight in resource distribution, and diplomatic skill in negotiations. Their ability to act as development agents and peace brokers highlights the enduring relevance of chieftaincy in both socio-political and economic spheres.

Quantitative data corroborated these insights: large proportions of respondents expressed strong agreement across all ten managerial roles, especially in figurehead (83.3% agreement), leader (83.3%), and negotiator (77.5%) roles. These numbers were further substantiated by narrative evidence from interviews and focus group discussions, which enriched the understanding of chiefs' lived leadership practices.

The results suggest that traditional rulers are not merely ceremonial actors but complex, adaptive leaders performing strategic functions within Ghana's dual governance system. Their integration of cultural legitimacy with managerial competency offers compelling evidence for re-evaluating the theoretical and policy treatment of traditional leadership in contemporary governance discourse.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Key Findings: The findings of this study affirm that traditional rulers in Asante Akyem Central perform leadership functions that align closely with Mintzberg's managerial role framework. Chiefs demonstrated strong interpersonal capabilities, particularly in their roles as figureheads, leaders, and liaisons. Their ceremonial visibility during events such as the Akwasidae festival was not merely symbolic but served to reinforce cultural identity and unify communities—thus responding to the first research question on how traditional rulers enact leadership roles. Informational roles were also evident, as chiefs acted as monitors, disseminators, and spokespersons. Their use of town criers and palace meetings to communicate directives validated their role in community-based communication systems. Most decisively, the study revealed chiefs as entrepreneurs, negotiators, and resource allocators—responsibilities traditionally associated with formal state actors. Respondents strongly affirmed these roles, with high agreement percentages across categories such as figurehead (83.3%), leader (83.3%), and negotiator (77.5%). The second research question, concerning contextual factors, was addressed through qualitative evidence highlighting chiefs' strategic collaboration with municipal authorities, NGOs, and diaspora networks. These interactions showcased their adaptive leadership in a hybrid governance context. Finally, the third research question—regarding implications for policy and governance—was answered by demonstrating the seamless integration of traditional and formal leadership roles. Rather than occupying isolated roles, chiefs appeared to embody an integrated leadership style that combined ceremonial authority with functional execution. This suggests the urgent need to reconsider how traditional rulers are positioned within formal development and governance frameworks.

Existing Literature: The findings of this study align with and extend existing literature on traditional leadership in Ghana, particularly in relation to administrative functions, development facilitation, and governance legitimacy. The role of chiefs in land allocation and administration, as demonstrated in this study, reinforces Adjei's (2024) assertion that traditional leaders retain significant authority over land management, a domain that underpins their strategic power in rural governance structures.

Similarly, the strong affirmation of chiefs' leadership during communal crises echoes Essel's (2020) observations on the active involvement of traditional rulers in public health awareness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chiefs' involvement in communication and information dissemination, as seen through their use of palace meetings and town criers, aligns with findings by Kubi and Asiamah (2025), who emphasized the reliability of traditional leaders in crisis communication in rural contexts.

In terms of development roles, this study supports earlier insights by Boateng et al. (2024) and Arthur and Nsiah (2011), who highlighted traditional leaders' capacity to mobilize resources and facilitate community development. Chiefs in Asante Akyem Central played liaison roles that extended to NGOs and diaspora networks, reinforcing their strategic function in bridging local needs and external support. Furthermore, this study validates the work of Manboah-Rockson et al. (2024) and Zakaria et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of legitimacy and public trust in enabling traditional rulers to exercise effective leadership. In this case, high levels of agreement with roles such as spokesperson and negotiator suggest that traditional rulers continue to enjoy public confidence, reinforcing their relevance in both customary and modern governance spheres.

The current study not only corroborates earlier research but also extends it by applying Mintzberg's managerial roles as a structured lens through which traditional leadership can be analyzed with greater precision and formality.

Unexpected Findings: While the study affirmed the active and respected leadership roles of traditional rulers, some findings revealed moderate community agreement on roles such as resource allocation and spokesperson responsibilities. For instance, only 30% of respondents strongly agreed that chiefs effectively manage communal resources, while 13.3% remained neutral. This suggests underlying community tensions, possibly stemming from land disputes or perceived inequities in resource distribution. Adjei (2024) cautions that chiefs' authority in land matters can become controversial when transparency is lacking, especially where communal expectations clash with elite interests.

Another area of mixed perception was the spokesperson role, with 31.7% of respondents strongly agreeing. Although many chiefs advocate at district forums, some community members may question the consistency or outcomes of these representations. This gap might reflect limited feedback mechanisms or unmet expectations regarding service delivery. Furthermore, the negotiator role, while affirmed by many, raised potential concerns about chiefs navigating political negotiations while maintaining cultural neutrality. Manboah-Rockson et al. (2024) note the delicate balance chiefs must maintain to preserve legitimacy while engaging political actors.

Finally, the moderate levels of agreement in certain areas may reflect generational or socio-political shifts. Younger residents, influenced by formal education and civic ideals, may have different benchmarks for evaluating leadership effectiveness. These nuanced findings suggest that while traditional leadership remains influential, it is increasingly subject to evolving community expectations and accountability standards.

Theoretical, Policy, and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications: This study contributes significantly to leadership theory by validating the applicability of Mintzberg's managerial roles in a traditional governance context. Chiefs in Asante Akyem Central did not function in isolated customary capacities; rather, they integrated interpersonal, informational, and decisional roles in ways that mirror formal administrative leadership. This supports the theoretical repositioning of traditional authority as not only symbolic but also functional and

managerial. The research confirms that Mintzberg's framework—originally conceptualized for bureaucratic organizations—can be reinterpreted to analyze role complexity within indigenous systems. Such reinterpretation opens space for comparative governance studies, especially in hybrid political systems where customary and statutory institutions coexist.

Policy Implications: From a policy standpoint, the study underscores the urgency of formally recognizing the roles traditional leaders play in development governance. Chiefs already act as key actors in community mobilization, public health education, and grassroots project implementation. However, their roles remain largely informal within Ghana's national governance structure. The findings support the recommendation for institutional frameworks that encourage structured collaboration between chiefs and municipal assemblies. Policy reforms should clarify jurisdictional boundaries and define mechanisms for joint planning and accountability. This would minimize role conflict, promote transparency, and enhance developmental synergy. As suggested in the interviews, clearer linkages between chiefs and local government bodies would allow for better resource utilization and more responsive governance.

Practical and Educational Implications: The findings of this study carry significant practical implications for strengthening decentralized governance in Ghana through the effective integration of traditional leadership. Chiefs in Asante Akyem Central play crucial roles in areas such as community mobilization, conflict resolution, developmental negotiation, and resource management. However, their performance in these capacities often depends on informal experience and community expectations rather than formalized training or structured support. There is thus a strong need for targeted capacity-building programs tailored to the functional demands of traditional leadership. Practical interventions should include training in alternative dispute resolution, participatory planning, communication strategies, and collaborative development project management. Many chiefs already negotiate with political authorities, mediate disputes, and disseminate information during crises; equipping them with practical governance skills would not only improve their effectiveness but also enhance public trust and accountability in traditional institutions.

Moreover, institutionalizing participatory platforms that bring together traditional rulers, assembly members, civil society, and residents is essential. Structures such as joint development planning committees, town hall forums, and multi-stakeholder dialogues can provide formal spaces for traditional leaders and statutory bodies to engage as equal partners. These platforms would allow chiefs to represent community priorities more effectively while enabling residents to hold them accountable in a transparent and respectful manner. Such collaboration also reduces the possibility of parallel governance and enhances synergies between customary and statutory systems.

Another critical implication is the need to systematically document and disseminate best practices in traditional leadership. Case studies from districts where chiefs have successfully driven local development, promoted peacebuilding, or facilitated inclusive participation should be made accessible to other regions. Peer learning networks among traditional leaders could also be supported by national governance institutions to encourage the exchange of innovative strategies and solutions. Finally, national and local policies must explicitly recognize and incorporate traditional rulers as integral actors in governance frameworks. Practical support—such as resource allocation, legal clarity, and logistical facilitation—should be provided to ensure that their leadership is not only symbolic but structurally embedded in Ghana's development processes. Through these measures, traditional leaders can become empowered, legitimate, and accountable agents of transformative governance.

The findings also carry important educational implications at both school and community levels. Incorporating topics on traditional leadership roles—such as community mobilisation, negotiation, and conflict resolution—into school curricula, particularly in Civics, Social Studies, and Ghanaian Language, can deepen students’ understanding of how traditional and formal governance systems intersect. Case studies from this research can serve as teaching materials in leadership, problem-solving, and entrepreneurship courses. Teacher training institutions should equip educators to collaborate with traditional leaders in promoting educational initiatives, such as school attendance drives, public health campaigns, and community projects. Chiefs’ established communication channels, including durbars and community meetings, can be utilised for educational outreach, especially in rural and underserved areas. Capacity-building for educational leaders can also draw from the chiefs’ demonstrated skills as liaisons, disseminators, and negotiators to enhance school–community relations. Finally, education policy should formally recognise traditional leaders as stakeholders in school governance, ensuring their influence and networks are leveraged to improve learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that traditional rulers in Asante Akyem Central exercise diverse leadership roles that align closely with Mintzberg’s managerial framework. Far from being mere custodians of tradition, chiefs operate as figureheads, community leaders, disseminators of information, negotiators, and key decision-makers. Their roles intersect with core governance functions, including advocacy, resource mobilization, and conflict resolution, highlighting their strategic relevance in local administration.

Despite these contributions, the study’s cross-sectional approach and limited sample scope suggest caution in applying the findings universally across Ghana. Self-reported data may also have been influenced by social desirability bias, while cultural sensitivities might have prevented full disclosure during interviews. Future research should expand across multiple districts to account for regional diversity in chieftaincy practices. Further investigation is also needed into how chiefs balance their traditional authority with expectations from political and administrative domains. Ethnographic and participatory methods are especially encouraged to deepen understanding of leadership dynamics in varied socio-cultural contexts.

The integration of traditional leaders into Ghana’s decentralized governance framework must be strengthened. Their role-based leadership, rooted in both custom and function, offers a valuable and underutilized asset for national development and local governance enhancement.

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