

Influence of Principals' Leadership Styles on Students' Academic Performance in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

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Abstract

This study was designed to determine the influence of principals' leadership styles on students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the study examined the following objectives: principals' autocratic and democratic leadership style on academic performance of students. Two (2) research questions were stated; Two (2) hypotheses were tested. This study was built on system theory. The study adopted descriptive research design with a population of 4,465 which consisted of all the teachers and students of 18 selected public senior secondary schools drawn from three (3) senatorial districts of Rivers State. The sample size of the study was 605 comprising teachers and students drawn from the targeted population with the aid of Tayo-Yamen's formula. An instrument titled "Principals' Leadership Styles and Students' Academic Performance Questionnaire" was used for data collection from the teachers and students using a 4 point rating scale of very high extent, high extent, low extent and very low extent. The Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used for test of reliability, and a reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained. Out of 605 questionnaire administered, only 401(66%) were retrieved. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyzed data, while the null hypotheses were tested with Z-test statistic at 0.05 level of significance. The results of the study revealed that there were no significance differences among the two leadership styles practiced by principals of public senior secondary schools towards the students' academic performance in Rivers State. Besides, it also revealed that students' academic performance are function of the application of different dimensions of leadership styles. Based on the findings of the study, conclusions were stated and recommendations made, among which are that teachers should be exposed to adequate knowledge of school administration and adequately motivated as to make them get committed to work outside being motivated by the principals styles of leadership.

Keywords: *Principal, Style, Academic, Performance, Leadership, Autocratic, Democratic*

Introduction

In every organization, the essence and primary basis for existence is for the production of output in the form of goods, services or ideas of a well-defined class in the socioeconomic sub-sector. For example, an educational institution exists for the production of educated persons (like school leavers or university graduates) for the public and the business sectors. Again every organization produces its expected output of goods, services or ideas through the labour input of its human employees. Since the human employees of any organization need during their organizational work periods to channel their diverse physical, intellectual, affective and skillful resources to the joint or collaborative task of producing their organization's expected output they require leadership.

Thus in the typical senior secondary school today, the principal as a leader or the number one person in secondary school setting is expected to provide leadership for the teachers and for all the other categories of school workers. In several ways, the principal is basically the most important and influential individual in the secondary school, whose ultimate responsibility is the overall performance, productivity and effectiveness of the school system. Iheukwumere (2010) sees the principal as one who stands out as the chief executive administrator, the instructional leader, the personnel manager for both the pupils (students) and staff personnel. Schools' ability to deliver high quality education is dependent to a very large extent on its leadership value. This implies that the principals have a very important role to play regarding educational quality improvement. According to Hale & Rollins (2006) the school principal checkmate the activities of the students in the school as they progress in their studies and attention for specific students and identify areas of curriculum and instruction in need of change or improvement in the school.

Communication is the ability to send in the simplest form, information or ideas which the recipient can easily understand; and the ability on the other part of the recipient to reciprocate in such a way that can easily be understood (Otamiri, Isaiah & Wori, 2002). If the principal's communication style is unfavorable to teachers, there is the tendency that the teachers would not co-operate with the principal and performance would be affected.

In the school system, the principal makes informed decisions that guide whatever the school does. Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011) noted that decision making is vital in such management functions as planning, organizing, influencing and controlling. Participatory decision making in a collaborative form with stake holders in school usually improves the quality of decisions since diverse organizational experiences are drawn and these increases the understanding of the group as well as their commitment to the decisions. This ownership perception motivates them to successfully implement the decisions.

System theory was propounded in 1940's by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy and later expended by

System Theory

In order not to allow the school system to suffer deadlock, the principal must be in a good position to control and co-ordinates the activities of the school system through the adoption of the appropriate leadership style that will benefit the school itself, teachers and students leading to school effectiveness and achievement of predetermined educational goals. This theory will help principals to see the school system as a whole and not a separate entity.

System theory is relevant to educational organization because the entire educational setup is a system. Formal organizations like the school system are setup to achieve specific goals, but the organizations on their own do not accomplish goals without the involvement of humans. The humans in an organization combine their skills and knowledge with other available material resources or inputs to bring about the attainment of organizational goals. The humans accomplish organizational goals by executing desirable policy decisions of management. In other words, employees are primary and necessary need of an organization. The school principal needs to appreciate the fact that, without the school system, there will be no principal, teachers and students. That is, the principal cannot exist without the school system; neither can the teachers nor students exist without the school system. In the school, principal, teachers and students are inter-related and inter-dependent parts of the school system. This means that one cannot effectively function without the functioning of the other.

Leadership Theory

People have been interested in leadership since they began coming together in groups to accomplish set goals. However, it wasn't until the early part of the twentieth century that researchers actually began to study leadership. However, from historical viewpoint, it has been identified that there have been several theories to the study of leadership (Ogunsanwo, 2000; Akintayo & Adeola, 2001). These include: the Great Man Theory, The Trait Central Theory, and The Behavioral Theory and Situational theory.

Autocratic Leadership Style

The autocratic leadership style is also referred to as the authoritarian style of leadership in which power and decision-making reside in the leader. The autocratic leader controls group members on the way things should be done. The leader does not maintain a clear channel of communication between him and his subordinates. He or she neither delegates authority nor permit subordinates to participate in policy-making (John, 2002).

Democratic Leadership Style

The democratic style of leadership encourages group and leader participation in the making of policies while decisions about organizational matters are arrived at with consultation, communication, and suggestions from the various stakeholder members of the organization. The leader promotes a sense of belongingness thereby making every individual feel an important member of the organization. In this leadership style, a high degree of motivation, and job satisfaction is always enhanced (Mba, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

In contemporary years, students' results in external examination have been marred with irregularities emanating from the poor leadership styles exhibited by public secondary schools principals in Rivers State, such that students had to register for Senior School Certificate Examination and General Certificate Examination in order for them to have at least 5 credits. SSCE or GCE exam results are crucial in the life of students. This is because it is the sole criterion used for assigning opportunities for further higher education and employments in Nigeria (UNESCO, 2004).

Although public senior secondary schools in Rivers State and in Nigeria at large, continue to face myriad of management problems. Various stake holders, professionals and opinion leaders have continued to raise accusing fingers on the leadership styles been practice by public senior secondary school principals in their respective schools. The Rivers State government in 2013, employed thirteen thousand classroom teachers during the Rotimi Chibuike Amachi administration, and posted them appropriately to all public primary, junior and senior secondary schools across the state. Yet, the problems of poor leadership styles keep erupting in the educational sector. Parents are left with no choice than to seek for admission in private owned secondary schools for their wards/children due to the bad leadership styles like autocratic and democratic, which is not favourable to their children.

It is on this premise, that the researcher is challenged to embark on a study on the influence of principals' leadership styles on students' academic performance of public senior secondary schools' in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine the influence of principals' leadership styles on students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the study examined the following objectives:

1. Determining whether principals' autocratic style of leadership affect students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
2. Determining how principals' democratic style of leadership influences academic performance of students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does autocratic leadership style of principals affect students' academic performance?
2. To what extent does democratic leadership style of principals influence students' academic performance?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested for this study.

- H₀₁:** There is no significant difference in the mean responses of teachers and students on how autocratic leadership style of principals' affects students' academic performance in Rivers State.
- H₀₂:** There is no significant difference in the mean responses of teachers and students on how democratic leadership style of principals' influence students' academic performance in Rivers State.

Significance of the study

The findings of this research might help school principals to look for more effective leadership style that would yield a positive academic performance in favour of students. This is because education is administered to students through teachers who are directly affected by the principal's leadership styles. In addition to that, this research would help to identify leadership style that influences student academic performance in most public secondary schools. The study is important because it will enable principals of schools and policy formulators to appreciate which of the leadership style is more effective in raising morale in school administration and eventual students' academic performance in certificate examination.

Methodology

This section centres on the methods and techniques that were used in carrying out the study under the following sub titles: design of the study, area of the study, population of the study, sample and sampling techniques, research instrument, validation of the instrument, reliability of the instrument, administration of the instrument and method of data analysis

Design of the Study

The study employed descriptive survey design to examine the influence of principals' leadership styles on students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. This design were deemed appropriate because it attempts to collect data from member of a population in a bid to determine the current states of the population with regards to one or more variables.

Area of the Study

The study was conducted in Rivers State. Rivers State is one of the 36 states of Nigeria, located in the southernmost part of the country. The state capital, Port-Harcourt is the largest city, and is of economic significance as the centre of Nigeria's oil industry. Rivers State is made up of 23 local government areas. Its inhabitants are mainly people from diverse occupations ranging

from civil servants, non-governmental employed workers, farmers and business men and women. It has a total of two hundred and sixty-eight (268) public senior secondary schools.

Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of 626 teachers and 3,839 students giving the total of 4,465 selected from eighteen (18) public secondary schools drawn from three senatorial zones in Rivers State. **Source: Planning, Research & Statistics Department, Rivers State Senior Secondary Schools Board (2017).**

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample size for the study comprises 605 respondents drawn across the three senatorial zones with eighteen public senior secondary schools. Thus, Taro Yamene's formula was used for sampling of the population.

Development of the Instrument

The instrument was questionnaire titled; principals' Leadership Styles and Students' Academic Performance Questionnaire (LSSAPQ). The questionnaire comprises twenty-one (21) structured items. A four point scale was used and the respondents select one of the four (4) options: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE).

Validation of the Instrument

Validity is the degree to which a measuring instrument measures what it purports to measure (Orodho, 2009). To validate the instrument, principals' Leadership Styles and Students' Academic Performance Questionnaire (LSSAPQ), the content validity was determined by the expert judgment of two experts in the field. The suggestions in respect of the scope, comprehensive, face and logical validity was used to draw the final instrument.

Reliability of the instrument

The test-retest method was used for the reliability of the instrument. The instrument was administered to Twenty (20) respondents outside the sample area of the study. Both the first and second scores were analyzed by the instrumentality of the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient which resulted to 0.78.

Administration of the Instrument

The researcher in teamwork with the research assistants administered the copies of the questionnaires on the teachers and students. The researcher spent quality time with the respondents to clarify questions on any issue relating to the filling of the copies of the questionnaire. Thus, 605 copies of questionnaire were administered and retrieve 401(66%) copies for the analyses of the research questions and hypotheses.

Methods of Data Analysis

The data collected through the administration of the instrument on the respondents were analyzed through the use of frequency distribution tables. Mean scores and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions while z-test was used in analyzing the hypotheses.

Analysis of Data and Results

Research question 1: To what extent does autocratic leadership style of principals' affect students' academic performance?

Table 1: Weighted responses on autocratic leadership style of principals and students' academic performance.

Items	Teachers N=163		Students N=238		Mean Set	Remarks
	\bar{X}	Std	\bar{X}	Std		
1. My Principal structures the entire work situation in manner that enhances students' academic performance.	3.16	0.79	3.21	0.78	3.19	Agreed
2. Principal's decision making authority contribute to students' responsibility for academic activities.	3.31	0.73	3.21	0.77	3.26	Agreed
3. My Principal does not compromise when it comes to students discipline in academic issues.	3.24	0.79	3.20	0.72	3.22	Agreed
4. Prefectship appointment is normally is done solely by the principal based on students level of academic performance.	3.28	0.71	3.23	0.74	3.26	Agreed
5. My Principal strictly ensures performance improvement towards quality of SSCE results.	3.21	0.78	3.27	0.76	3.24	Agreed
6. My Principal maintains standards of performance.	3.15	0.77	3.18	0.82	3.17	Agreed
Total	3.22	0.76	3.21	0.77	3.22	Agreed

The findings of the above table 1 revealed that Principal's decision making authority contribute to students' responsibility for academic activities and Principal's decision making authority contribute to students' responsibility for academic activities (3.26), Principal strictly ensures performance improvement towards quality of SSCE results (3.24), Principal does not compromise when it comes to students discipline in academic issues (3.22), structuring the entire work situation in manner that enhances students' academic performance(3.19) and maintains standards of performance (3.17). It was generally accepted that autocratic leadership style of principals' affect students' academic performance with an average mean score of (3.22).

Research question 2: To what extent does democratic leadership style of principals influence academic performance?

Table 2: Weighted responses on democratic leadership style and students' academic performance

Items	Teachers N=163		Students N=238		Mean Set	Remarks
	\bar{X}	Std	\bar{X}	Std		
7. Confidence and trust for effective students' academic performance.	3.26	0.74	3.20	0.67	3.23	Agreed
8. Delegates authorities to the students based on their excellent in academic responsibilities.	3.33	0.73	3.31	0.67	3.32	Agreed
9. Possesses ability that endears students to enhance their independent capacity in their learning processes.	3.16	0.83	3.29	0.71	3.23	Agreed
10. Respects the ideas and views of the students on instructional activities.	3.30	0.75	3.26	0.76	3.28	Agreed
11. My Principal organizes tutorial for the students to accelerate their learning abilities.	3.23	0.73	3.29	0.75	3.26	Agreed
Total	3.25	0.77	3.27	0.71	3.36	Agreed

The result of table 2 indicated that the principals Delegates authorities to the students based on their excellent in academic responsibilities (3.32), respects the ideas and views of the students on instructional activities(3.28), Principal organizes tutorial for the students to accelerate their learning abilities(3.26), Confidence and trust for effective students' academic performance and Possesses ability that endears students to enhance their independent capacity in their learning processes (3.26) respectively. Thus, the respondents agreed that democratic leadership style of principals influence academic performance with an average mean score of (3.36).

Test of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of teachers and students on how autocratic leadership style of principals' affects students' academic performance.

Table 3: Test of hypothesis using z-test

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	STD	DF	Z-cal	Z-crit	Level of sign	Decision
Teachers	163	3.23	0.76	399	0.77	1.96	0.05	Not significant
Students	238	3.21	0.77					

The result of table 3 indicated that the calculated z-calculated (0.77) was less than the z-critical (1.96) at the degree of freedom (399) and 0.05 significant levels. Hence, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean responses of teachers and students on how autocratic leadership style of principals' affects students' academic performance was accepted.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of teachers and students on how democratic leadership style of principals' influence students' academic performance.

Table 4: Test of hypothesis using z-test

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	STD	DF	Z-cal	Z-crit	Level of sign	Decision
Teachers	163	3.26	0.77	399	0.66	1.96	0.05	Not significant
Students	238	3.27	0.71					

The result of table 4 indicated that the calculated z-calculated (0.66) was less than the z-critical (1.96) at the degree of freedom (399) and 0.05 significant levels. Hence, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean responses of teachers and students on how democratic leadership style of principals' influence students' academic performance was accepted.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it was concluded that students' academic performance are function of the application of different dimensions of leadership styles. For organization like schools to attain the goals for which they were established, the leaders must be well exposed to the different leadership styles and must be willing to reasonably apply the most appropriate leadership style or the styles that are contingent to the situation at hand. This has become necessary given the present findings which discovered that certain leadership styles do not illicit positive attitude to work.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. There is the need to appoint professionals, trained in educational management as principals. This is important because of their exposure in the rudiments of educational management and administration. Experience is not enough to make somebody a school head but a combination of the two.
2. For those already in office, workshops, seminars, professional development programme are important to update their knowledge and keep them abreast with the latest techniques in educational administration.

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