

## Principals' Leadership Behaviour and School Learning Culture in Secondary Schools in Ekiti-State Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This study investigated, the effect of principals leadership behaviour on school culture in some selected secondary schools in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was employed. The study population comprised all the secondary schools in Ekiti State. About 65 schools were randomly selected out of 161 secondary schools in the state. The instrument used to collect data was questionnaire tagged Teachers Perception of Principal's Leadership and School Learning Questionnaire (TPPLSLQ). Data collected were analysed three hypotheses were tested using the spearman rank correlation and the one way ANOVA. The findings show that leadership behaviour of a school principal affects the school learning. Based on the findings, it was recommended that a better understanding of leadership behaviour should be learnt by the school principal through regular attendance of seminars or workshop on leadership and school management.

**Key words:** Transformational leadership, transactional, *laissez-faire* leadership, vision, school, learning culture

### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's educational system is presently undergoing various reforms. Among the reforms is the introduction of Universal Basic Education, which shall be of 9 years duration comprising 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. It also, includes adult and non-formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary levels for the adult and out of school youths (FRN, 2004). The reform aims at providing free and compulsory education for all Nigerian children. This reform initiative no doubt requires significant capacity development on the part of all education stakeholders. It requires, high levels of motivation and commitment on the parts of individuals to solving the often complex problem associated with the implementation. In education any discussion on reforms of teaching and learning focuses attention on school principals who as leaders of schools are responsible for ensuring effective learning culture in the schools.

The importance of the role of principals on the school organization cannot therefore be over looked. Principals are very unique in school organizations. This was confirmed by Amoloye (2004). He called them school managers. The job of managing according to Idowu (1999), involves among other things, the provision of leadership for men and women, coordinating both human and material resources to ensure the achievement of organizational goals. In the school system, the principal

as an administrator influences his teachers to achieve the goals and objectives of the school. The fundamental goal of the school is to enhance the teaching and learning process; hence the school administrators should endeavour to influence the behaviour of the teachers in order to achieve the goals of the school. Transformational approaches to leadership have been advocated for effective management of the school system. Cohen noted that transformational leader is the leader who inspires people to excel and articulates meaningful vision for the organization. A leader acts in both formal and informal ways to build employee commitment in the organization. Olaleye (2001), Ibukun (1997), Leithwood *et al.* (1999) have cited empirical evidences suggesting that transformational leadership contributes to a range of organizational outcomes including motivation, commitment and capacity for teachers to develop new approaches to education. School principals are expected to exhibit this leadership quality to enhance teaching and learning in the school. Ukeje (1991) points out that the success of a leader depends on the readiness, the willingness commitment and the ability of the followers to follow as well as the ability, the style and skills of the leaders. Consequently, the success of educational administrators depends on their effectiveness as well as the effectiveness of the classroom teachers.

It has been observed, by education stakeholders in Nigeria that education system at all levels is riddled with series of problems, which include poor academic

performance of students, cheating in examination and poor attitude of teachers to teaching. Unfortunately, these management problems go on unabated in schools. These school principals are blamed for non-performance of their duties and their failure to exhibit appropriate leadership behaviour to solve these perennial problems besieging education system. The main duty of the principals is to enhance teaching and learning in the school. Adetona (2003) noted that the task of the principal is to produce well educated boys and girls through effective teaching and learning. Positive school cultures are associated with higher student motivation, good academic performance and improved attitudes of teachers towards their job. A review of literature showed that the relationship between principal leadership and student learning outcomes is mediated by school conditions including purposes and goals, school structure and school culture (Hallinger and Heck, 1998). Evidence has also, suggested that principals are in a unique position to influence school learning culture (Deal and Peterson, 1990; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1997; Ajayi and Ayodele, 2002). A significant challenge for principals today is to identify the situations of the school, such as school culture the likely direct effects on students and the type of leadership behaviour the principal should employ. Leadership model developed by Bass and Avolio (1997) identified three leadership behaviours. Transformational is identified by certain behaviours, which include inspirational, motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. Transactional leadership is identified with exchange of rewards for meeting agreed-upon to objectives. Monitors followers to ensure mistakes are not made but allows group to exist. In this case, the leader intervenes only when things go wrong. A non-leadership construct, laissez-faire leadership is an absence of leadership. Various researches have investigated the direct effects of leadership on student performance. Result showed weak effects, whereas research that has included mediating variables has reported significant effects (Leithwood and Jantzi, 1997). This study therefore aimed, at identifying the leadership behaviour of the school principals and the possible effects of these behaviors on the student learning culture. Student learning as mediating variable in this study includes motivating students to develop new skills, improving the level of competence, or achieving a sense of mastery through reading and studying in school. This study therefore, used school learning culture as a mediating variable.

The aim of this study was, to investigate the relationship between principal's leadership behaviour and school learning culture. Three research questions were generated to guide the investigation:

- What dimension of transformation, transactional and laissez-faire leadership do principals practice in schools?
- What dimensions of school learning culture are evident in schools?
- What are the relationship between transformation, transactional and laissez-faire leadership and dimensions of learning culture?

#### **Research hypotheses:**

- There is no significant relationship between transformational leadership and school learning culture.
- There is no significant relationship between transactional leadership and school learning culture.
- There is no significant relationship between laissez faire leadership and school learning culture.

**Statement of the problem:** Nigerian educational system is undergoing various reforms in recent years. These reforms include the changing from 6-3-3-4 system to 9-3-3-4 system of education and the inclusion of information communication technology in the school curriculum at both primary and secondary school levels. The successful take off of these reforms, depend on a new set of actions by education planners and school administrators. It is obvious that successful transformation of education sector depends on the roles and decisions taken by education policy makers and planners. Hence, visionary leadership is needed to achieve quality teaching and learning in the school. It has been observed, that student learning culture has slowed down in the schools. Students are not motivated to read due to the effects of home video, some anti-social behaviour such as cultism, examination-malpractices and negative leadership behaviours of some school principals. It is therefore necessary to re-examine the system and evaluate the leadership behaviour of the school principal vis-à-vis the school learning culture.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study was designed, as a descriptive survey. The study population comprised secondary schools in Ekiti State. There were 161 secondary schools in the state. Out of which 65 schools were randomly selected. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 650 teachers for the study i.e., 10 teachers from each selected school selection of teachers was based on 5 years teaching experience and 2 years work experience with the current principal. This will enable the teachers to

effectively assess the leadership behaviour of their principal's Vis-a-Vis teaching and learning in the schools.

**Research instrument:** The instrument used to collect data was questionnaire, tagged Teachers Perceptions of Principals Leadership behaviour and School Learning Questionnaire {TPPLSLQ}. It was a self administered questionnaire that consist of 10 items. The items are individually measured on the 5 point Likert type, ordinal scales {0 = not at all to 4 = frequently, 5 = if not always. Section A of the questionnaire was on leadership behaviour. It contains 10 latent constructs of leadership such as inspiration, motivation, intellectual construction, individual consideration and contingent reward, active in management, passive in management Section B of the questionnaire was used to measure the constructs of school learning culture. It consists of 20 items such as in this school, my principal recognizes students for their efforts and achievements, encourages students to learn, motivate teacher to teach. The items are individually measured on 5 point likert type, ordinal scales (i.e., 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The items relate to school learning culture, emphases classroom learning for students, teacher's personality, teaching efficacy and teacher's use of instructional strategies, which are task focused or performance focused for students.

The face and content validity of the instrument were certified by experts.

The reliability of the instrument was established using test-retest method. The reliability confidence level is 0.05.

## RESULTS

The relationship between leadership behaviour of school's principal and student's learning culture was measured by comparing the results between variables that measure leadership behaviour and those that measure school learning culture. This was done by using the spearman rank correlation since the data were ordinal and ranks were allotted to the responses, leadership style and school learning culture was determined based on the response of individual teachers in the school. The ranks were later scored by determining the median split halt and eventually used in scoring leadership style and school learning culture. Three hypotheses generated were tested using the one-way ANOVA and the Spearman's correlation to determine the strength of relationship between the variables.

**HO<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between transformational leadership and school learning culture.

Transformational leadership is determined by ability to:

- Be a visionary leader
- Be performance focused
- Willingness to listen

In confirming if there is a significant difference between transformational leadership and school learning culture, analysis of variance indicated that an F-Cal of 753.916 was derived. However, the tabulated F-value is 3.48. Since, the Calculated F is greater than the Tabulated F-value, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference between transformational leadership and school learning culture.

$$(F(4.581) = 753.916; p < 0.01)$$

The Spearman's rho Correlation R-value of 0.886 also indicates that there is a very strong positive relationship between transformational leadership and school learning culture. The calculated value (0.865) is also greater than the tabulated value (0.195), showing that the relationship is significant. The  $p < 0.01$ , which also indicates that the relationship is significant ( $R(585) = 0.865; p < 0.01$ ) (Table 1).

**HO<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between transactional leadership and school learning culture.

Transactional leadership is determined by:

- Task focus goal
- Monitoring of teachers to ensure no mistakes are made
- Motivation of teachers

In confirming if there is a significant difference between transactional leadership and school learning culture, analysis of variance indicated that an F-Cal of 1011.187 was derived. However, the tabulated F-value is 3.48. Since, the Calculated F is greater than the Tabulated F-value, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference between transformational leadership and school learning culture ( $F(4, 581) = 1011.187; p < 0.01$ ).

The Spearman's rho Correlation R-value of 0.920 also, indicates that there is a very strong positive relationship between transactional leadership and school learning culture. The calculated value (0.931) is also greater than the tabulated value (0.195), showing that the relationship

Table 1: One-way ANOVA and spearman rank correlation showing the difference between transformational leadership and school learning culture

Variables	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-Cal	F-Obs	R-Cal	R-Obs	p-value
Between groups	536.100	4	134.025	753.916	3.48	0.865	0.195	<0.01*
Within groups	103.285	581	0.178					
Total	173.300	585						

\*Statistically significant;  $p < 0.01$

Table 2: One-way ANOVA and pearson product moment correlation showing the difference between transactional leadership and school learning culture

Variables	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-Cal	F-Obs	R-Cal	R-Obs	p-value
Between groups	559.078	4	139.769	1011.187	3.48	0.931	0.195	<0.01*
Within groups	80.308	581	0.138					
Total	639.386	585						

\*Statistically significant;  $p < 0.01$

Table 3: One-way ANOVA and pearson product moment correlation showing the difference between Laissez-Faire leadership and school learning culture

Variables	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-Cal	F-Obs	R-Cal	R-Obs	p-value
Between groups	559.078	4	139.769	170.401	3.48	-0.576	0.195	<0.01*
Within groups	80.308	581	0.138					
Total	639.386	585						

\*Statistically significant;  $p < 0.01$

is significant. The p-value is also  $< 0.01$ , which also indicates that the relationship is significant ( $R(585) = 0.920$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) (Table 2).

**HO<sub>3</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between Laissez Faire leadership style and school learning culture practiced by principals in schools.

Laissez Faire leadership is determined by:

- Being a passive leader
- Not allowing academic competition among students
- Showing favoritism to teachers and students

The stated hypothesis is validated after running the ANOVA of Laissez Faire leadership and learning culture at 0.01 significant levels. The F-Calculated value is 170.401, which is greater than the observed F-value (2.45). This leads to a rejection of the null hypothesis and concluding that there is a significant difference between Laissez Faire leadership and school learning culture ( $F(4,581) = 170.401$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ).

The Spearman's rho Correlation coefficient between these variables is calculated as -0.576. This implied that there is a strong negative relationship between Laissez Faire leadership and school learning culture ( $R(585) = 0.576$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). The  $p < 0.01$ , which shows that the means are statistically significant (Table 3).

### DISCUSSION

All the 3 hypotheses stated in the study were rejected, indicating that there is a significant relationship between leadership style and school learning culture. The mean score of these leadership styles based on the responses of the teachers in each school and the mean scores of the school's learning culture are statistically different and significant. Laissez Faire leadership has a

negative effect on school learning culture. Laissez Faire leadership is not likely to motivate teachers to aspire to task focus goals. This is consistent with previous research (Leithwood *et al.*, 1999) that has suggested that passive leadership is an unhelpful form of leadership in school. It is apparent from the data analysis that the transformational leadership behaviour, individual concern was perceived by teachers to have important indirect relationships with task focus goals and excellence in teaching and learning.

### CONCLUSION

There were a number of conclusions that can be made about the nature of leadership in schools and school learning culture. The study showed that there were variations in teacher's perception of their principal's leadership behaviour. Each teacher perceived his or her principal uniquely. This is constituent with other research (Hall and Lord, 1995) that has contented that leadership is implicit in nature and based on information processing of individuals. Individuals have different perceptions of leadership and store information differently. In addition, the finding showed that one-to-one relationship between a principal (leader) and individual teachers mainly characterize leadership in schools.

The study provided, empirical support for transformational leadership and one dimension of transactional leadership in schools. Task focus goal, excellence in teaching and task performance were identified as dimensions of school learning cultures.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

For the practicing principal, a thorough understanding of vision in school is needed to achieve the school goals and objectives. They need to recognize

that vision has the potential to assist in the attainment of goals and at the same time principal need to understand that vision also has the potential to displace goals (Barnett *et al.*, 2001).

Selection of principals to schools should include a process to identify those who have history of exhibiting the interpersonal skills, consistent with individual concern as identified in this research. A selection based on mass promotion or year of certification would not work well for effective leadership and school learning culture. Periodic seminars for school principals should be organized to assist them in the management of their schools. Ministry of Education should make it compulsory for school principal to go for one year refresher courses in school management and if possible have a master's degree in school administration.

For the school principals who practice passive leadership behaviour the study suggests caution. Since school administration is becoming complex, proper orientation is needed for the school administrators through attending workshops and seminars.

This study has implications for schools and school administrators. Schools need to be aware that the adoption of task focus learning, goal orientation encourages teachers to engage in innovative teaching practices. A better understanding of leadership is needed for establishing individual principal-teacher relationships in schools. Future research can be carried out in higher institutions.

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