

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS IN GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

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Abstract

Educational leaders play a pivotal role in affecting the climate, attitude and reputation of their schools. In secondary schools, the principal is the manager and the educational leader of the school he/ she is saddled with lot responsibilities. The principals are therefore expected to deploy all they have in terms of experience, human relationship, communication skills and collaborative skills to bring to bear quality leadership practices that will not only stimulate and motivation the human element in the school, but will ensure that all available resources are put to judicious use with the singular aim of achieving set educational goals or objectives. It is the concern of this study therefore that, the solution to this ugly trend is to address the educational leadership practices of the school principals. Based on this, the study has identified three all time tested leadership practices that can redirect the leadership sagacity of school principals if put to practice effectively. These three leadership practices are, Setting direction for goal achievement, developing People (staff and students) for Goal Achievement and developing the organization (school) for goal achievement. This paper therefore discusses, concept of education, leadership, educational leadership and educational leadership practices. In addition, the paper further discusses the role of principals in Setting direction for goal achievement, developing People (staff and students) for Goal Achievement and developing the organization (school) for goal achievement in secondary schools in Nigeria. It was concluded that the goals of our educational system can be achieved maximally if genuine effort is put in place to substantially address the

gap created in the existing educational leadership practices. It was recommended that National Institute of Educational Leadership (NIEL) should be established to provide avenue where educational leaders, principals and would be principals will undergo extensive courses on all aspect of educational leadership programmes and practices.

Keywords: Education, Educational Leadership, Secondary Schools, Principals, Goal Achievement.

Introduction

Education is widely held to be crucial for the survival and success of individuals and countries in the emerging global environment. Nigerians of all stripes have placed education at the center of their political platforms, and education has been at the center of many Nigerian policy agendas. Comparable agreement is also evident about the contributions of leadership to the implementation of virtually all initiatives aimed at improving student learning and the quality of schools. It is therefore difficult to imagine a focus for research with greater social justification than research about successful educational leadership practices. Schools require effective leaders and managers if they are to provide the best possible education for their learners, this requires trained and committed teachers but they, in turn, need the leadership of highly effective principals. In countries such as Denmark, Finland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, the preparation of school principals involves specialized training. This practice took its root in Jamaica with the establishment of the National College of Educational Leadership (NCEL) where a specialized programme for the training of principals is offered (Canute, 2018). Is my humble desire that this is replicated in Nigeria.

Leaders are people who shape the goals, motivations, and actions of others. Frequently they initiate change to reach existing and new goals. By virtue of the position occupied by principals in secondary schools in Nigeria, they naturally become the leaders of the schools, principalship as evident, comes with responsibilities among which are, leadership, teacher supervision/evaluation, students discipline and many others. The principal as a leader of group of teachers in the school system has the function of interacting with the teachers in other to improve teaching and learning situation for the students. The principal identifies and set goals and objectives of the school, which of course, must be in line with the national objectives, analyses tasks and share responsibilities of the staff according to specialization and expertise (Uyanga, 2008). The discharge of these duties and responsibilities is what constitutes leadership and the manner, pattern and methods deployed by principals in the discharge of this responsibilities is referred to leadership practices

Leadership

Leadership can be described by reference to two core functions. One function is providing direction; the other is exercising influence. Whatever else leaders do, they provide direction and exercise influence. This does not imply oversimplification. Each of these two leadership functions can be carried out in different ways, and the various modes of practice linked to the functions distinguish many —models|| of leadership, Karen, Leithwood, Kyla and Stephen (2010).

Adesina (2011) considered Leadership as the ability to get things done with the support and cooperation of other people within the institution, organization, or system. Leadership is all about organizational improvement; more specifically, it is about establishing agreed-upon and worthwhile directions for the organization in question, and doing whatever it takes to prod and support people to move in those directions. Leadership simply means influencing others' actions in achieving desirable ends. Leadership takes much ingenuity, energy and skill Bush (2007). Leadership can be understood as a process of influence based on clear values and beliefs and leading to a 'vision' for the school. The vision is articulated by leaders who seek to gain the commitment of staff and stakeholders to the ideal of a better future for the school, its learners and stakeholders.

Leadership occurs when one group member modifies the motivation or competencies of others in the group. In the opinion of Ololube in Joel and Henry (2014) leadership is the development of a clear and complete system of expectations in order to identify, evoke and use the potentials of all resources in the organization the most important of which is people. In other words, Leadership is the interpersonal influence exercised in a situation, and directed, through the communication process, towards attainment of a specific goal or goals.

Leadership could be looked at from six perspectives according to Robinson (2011)

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| 1. Instructional leadership | Focuses on the school's core business – teaching, learning, pupils' progress and achievements |
| 2. Transformational leadership | Is concerned with the commitment of colleagues, leading change, improving performance |
| 3. Moral leadership | Emphasizes the importance of values, vision and ethical leadership |
| 4. Participative leadership | Stresses the importance of including colleagues, shared decision-making and social capital |
| 5. Managerial leadership | Focuses on the importance of defining functions, tasks and behaviours |
| 6. Contingency leadership | Highlights how leaders respond to the particular organizational circumstances and challenges they face and encounter over time |

Putting all these into a comprehensive statement, Leadership is a process in which a leader attempts to influence his or her followers to establish and accomplish a goal or goals. In order to accomplish the goal, the leader exercises his or her power to influence people. That power is exercised in earlier stages by motivating followers to get the job done and in later stages by rewarding or punishing those who do or do not perform to the level of expectation. Leadership is a continuous process, with the accomplishment of one goal becoming the beginning of a new goal. The proper reward by the leader is of utmost importance in order to continually motivate followers in the process.

Educational leadership

Educational leaders play a pivotal role in affecting the climate, attitude and reputation of their schools. They are the cornerstone on which learning communities function and grow. With successful school leadership, schools become effective incubators of learning, places where students are not only educated but challenged, nurtured and encouraged. On the other hand, poor or absent of school leadership can undermine the goals of an educational system. When schools lack a strong foundation and direction, learning is compromised, and students suffer. According to a Wallace Foundation study, Leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning. (Joseph, 2017)

School leaders are those persons, occupying various roles. Leaders do not merely impose goals on followers, but work with others to create a sense of purpose and direction. Educational Leaders primarily work through and with members of staff. Effective educational leadership makes a difference in improving learning. Of concern to this study is educational leadership practices championed by secondary school principals in Nigeria.

There is widespread recognition that the school principal is a key player in determining the performance of schools. The principal is therefore an educational leader who act by setting the purpose or direction for one or more other persons and gets them to move along together with him or her and with each other in that direction with competence and full commitment. In the course of performance of duty, the principal leads others by influencing their activities towards goal achievement

Educational leadership (principals) plays a crucial role in refining school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capabilities of the teachers, as well as the school climate and environment. Educational leadership is vital to improve the efficiency and pertinence of education. Educational leadership responsibilities should be adequately defined through an understanding of the practices that are required to make an improvement in teaching and learning. In many countries, the school administrators and the principals have heavy workloads, they are over-burdened with work. Most of these individuals are reaching the retirement age and it is difficult to find leaders with capabilities and competencies. Educational leadership functions can contribute in making provision of guidance on the main characteristics, tasks and responsibilities of proficient leaders in the field of education (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2008)

The goals of educational leadership according to Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, (2004) include the following;

1. Creating and sustaining a competitive school
2. Empowering others to make significant decisions
3. Providing instructional guidance
4. Developing and implementing strategic and school improvement plans
5. Supporting, evaluating and developing teacher quality
6. Goal-setting, assessment and accountability
7. Strategic financial and human resource management
8. Collaborating with other schools

The ultimate goal of secondary education is to develop the individual's mental capacity and character for higher education and useful living within the society (FRN: NPE, 2013). In spite of the societal demand for effective educational leadership and the need for dynamic leadership practices in schools, there is a growing concern about the realization of secondary education objectives due to doubt that many principals are not living up to expectations in the management secondary schools. Consequently, there have been steady decline in teachers' instructional task performance and students' academic performance which depicts non-realization of goal achievement in secondary schools (Adeolu, 2012).

Educational Leadership Practices

The principal in a school system is a professional leader. The principal therefore is seen as one who combines all efforts in the school system towards the realization of set objectives and this can be achieved through the cooperation and support of his teachers. Consequently, the teachers have to be motivated to be in the right frame of mind to deliver qualitative instruction to the students. This calls for principals' leadership capability. School leadership can be summed up as the principal's ability to influence teachers, students and other stakeholders so that they enthusiastically and willingly make every effort towards the achievement of school goals Sisungu in Joel and Henry (2014). By implication, leadership can only be understood in terms of what a leader does and not who the leader is or what kind of a person he/she is.

Educational Leadership practices are the patterns of behaviour used by leaders in attempting to influence group members and make decision regarding the mission, strategy, and operations of group activities. According to Joel and Henry (2014), educational leadership practices are the manner and approach in which a leader (principal) provides direction, implements plans, and motivates staff so as to achieve school goals.

It is therefore imperative to note that educational leadership practices have a link with House (1996) Path-Goal Theory of leadership. This theory is based on the premise that an employee's perception of expectancies between his effort and performance is greatly affected by a leader's behaviour. It describes the ways that leaders use to encourage and support their followers to achieve the goal they have set by making the path they should take clear and easy. Leaders can take a strong or limited approach in each case. In clarifying the path, they may be directive or give vague hints. In removing obstacles, they may scour the path or help the followers move the hindrances. In increasing rewards, they may give occasional encouragement or pave the way with a reward. All this activities and behaviours are what constitute leadership practices. However, for the purpose of this study, three all time tested educational leadership practices by secondary schools principals and how they lead to goal achievement will be discussed. A core set of leadership practices form the basics of successful leadership and are valuable in almost all educational contexts. These are:

- 1 Setting direction for goal achievement,
- 2 Developing People (staff and students) for Goal Achievement, and
- 3 Developing the organization for goal achievement.

Principals' Leadership Practice in Setting Direction in Secondary Schools for Goal Achievement

Leadership is a communication process of influencing and directing people to commit to and achieve a shared goal voluntarily, in a given situation. A critical aspect of principal leadership is helping his staff to develop shared understandings about the school and its activities and goals that can undergird a sense of purpose or vision. The best explanation for the importance of direction-setting practices on the part of educational leaders is found in goal-based theories of human motivation postulated by Thayer, (1988); Weick (1995). According to such theory, people are motivated by goals which they find personally compelling, as well as challenging, but achievable.

Evidence suggests that those leadership practices included in Setting Directions in a school system account for the largest proportion of a leader's impact. Staff is often motivated by goals which they find personally compelling, as well as challenging but achievable. Having the knowledge of such goals through principals' sense of direction helps staff to make sense of their work and enables them to find a sense of identity for themselves within their work context thereby contributing towards the school goal achievement.

Principalship is a well established position of the chief executive who provides instructional leadership by coordinating curricula, co-curricular programmes and is responsible for the general administration of the secondary school. The principals being instructional leaders are at the vantage positions to supervise, monitor, assess, evaluate and disseminate current information on educational issues and modern teaching techniques to teachers in order to stimulate them for scholarship and best practices in curriculum delivery.

At the same time, instructional leadership is in many ways a shared responsibility. It engenders a common sense of commitment and collegiality among the staff. Effective school principals establish clearly defined goals for academic achievement, and they concentrated their available resources and their operations on attaining them, provide adequate time-table for teaching, routine check of lesson notes and subject dairies, observation of classroom instruction, continuously monitor students progress to determine whether their instructional goals are being met, provide feed-back on student performance, motivation of teachers for improved performance, reinforcement of students for excellent performance, maintenance and appropriate usage of physical facilities, enforcement of discipline to ensure peaceful atmosphere, capacity building of teachers for effective service delivery and provision of instructional facilities and materials to enhance quality teaching-learning processes (Adeolu, 2012).

Some of the principals' leadership practices that often help setting direction for teachers and students are identified by Kenneth, Karen, Stephen and Kyla (2014) to include the following;

- Identifying and articulating a vision
- Fostering the acceptance of group goals

- Creating high performance expectations
- Monitoring organizational performance
- Promoting effective communication throughout the organization for shared organizational purposes.

Principals' Leadership Practice in Developing People (staff and students) in Secondary Schools for Goal Achievement

Leadership is that process in which one person sets the purpose or direction for one or more other persons and gets them to move along together with him or her and with each other in that direction with competence and full commitment. While clear and compelling organizational directions contribute significantly to members' work-related motivations, they are not the only conditions to do so. Nor do such directions contribute to the capacities members of staff often need in order to productively move in those directions. Such capacities and motivations are influenced by the direct experiences members of staff have with those in leadership roles, as well as the school context within which teachers work. More-specific sets of leadership practices significantly and positively influencing these direct experiences include, for example: offering intellectual stimulation to teachers, providing individualized support to teachers and providing appropriate models of best practice and beliefs considered fundamental to the school system.

The principals' leadership concept implies a focus on school and classroom practices. However, specific leadership practices require establishing and maintaining focus on a particular direction for goal attainment. The main underlying assumption is that instruction will improve if school leaders provide detailed feedback to teachers, including suggestions for change. It follows that leaders must have the time, the knowledge, and the consultative skills needed to provide teachers in all the relevant grade levels and subject areas with valid, useful advice about their instructional practices.

Principals by virtue of their leadership practices, tend to develop and support teachers, create constructive working conditions, allocate the resources in an efficient manner, formulate appropriate organizational policies and systems and get involved in other kinds of in depth and meaningful work, outside the classroom setting. The meaningful work that educational leaders are involved in outside of the classroom and educational institution, has emphasis upon the activities and tasks that are implemented within the institution. The educational leaders need new directions to guide their practice and carry out their work effectually (Radhika, 2016)

In the context of school system, productivity is measured in terms of both efficiency and effectiveness, since the realization of goals and objectives in the school depends on the efficiency and effectiveness of the teachers (Garret & Poole in Ajayi&Afolabi, 2012).

Training is a very important aspect of staff development. Training according to Udo in Ezeani & Oladele (2013) is the development of specific skills and attitudes needed to perform a particular job or series of jobs to maximize the productivity of the individual and improve the overall organizational efficiency. Part of principals' leadership responsibilities is to provide

enabling atmosphere for staff participation in various workshops and conferences on different aspect of subject areas.

Most work in schools is, of course, accomplished through the efforts of people. Effective educational leaders influence the development of human resources in their schools by,

- Offering intellectual stimulation
 - Providing individualized support
 - Providing an appropriate model to promote school value and goal achievement.
- (Kenneth, Karen, Stephen and Kyla ,2014)

Principals' leadership Practice in Developing Secondary Schools for Goal Achievement

Leadership is an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of members. The contribution of schools to student learning most certainly depends on the motivations and capacities of teachers and administrators, acting both individually and collectively. But organizational conditions sometimes blunt or wear down educators' good intentions and actually prevent the use of effective practices. In some contexts, for example, high-stakes testing has encouraged a drill-and-practice form of instruction among teachers who are perfectly capable of developing deep understanding on the part of their students. And extrinsic financial incentives for achieving school performance targets, under some conditions, can erode teachers' intrinsic commitments to the welfare of their students. Successful educational leaders develop their and schools as effective organizations that support and sustain the performance of administrators and teachers, as well as students. Specific practices typically associated with this set of basics include strengthening school cultures, modifying organizational structures and building collaborative processes. Such practices assume that the purpose behind the redesign of organizational cultures and structures is to facilitate the work of organizational members and that the malleability of structures should match the changing nature of the school's improvement agenda.

School leaders (principals) are expected to attend to aspects of the school as an organization and a community, with consideration of internal processes and external relationships. Principals can work to achieve:

- Strengthening school culture
- Modifying organizational structure
- Building collaborative processes
- Managing the environment (Kenneth, Karen, Stephen and Kyla, 2014)

Conclusion

There is still many gaps to cover in the way school principals under take educational leadership, there is the challenge of how principals can balance the demand of their educational leadership practices with managerial responsibilities and personal interest in order to move the school towards goal achievement. The required competence, skills, sagacity, human relations and experiences by principals in setting directions, developing human resources and the school in general is grossly missing. The goals of our educational system can be achieved maximally if genuine effort is put in place to substantially address the gap created in the existing educational leadership practices.

Recommendations

The recruitment of educational leaders should be based on important characteristics. They should possess appropriate educational qualifications, capabilities, competency, proficiency, effective decision making skills, leadership skills, and resourcefulness. Above all, the establishment of National Institute of Educational Leadership (NIEL) will be most appropriate in Nigeria. This will provide avenue where principals and would be principals will undergo extensive courses on all aspect of educational leadership programmes and practices.

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