10-1-2007

Teachers Perception Of Principals Leadership Capacities In Nigeria

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Recommended Citation

Arikewuyo, M. (2007) "Teachers Perception Of Principals Leadership Capacities In Nigeria," *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*: Vol. 5: Iss. 3, Article 15.

DOI: 10.58809/WDQI9386

Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol5/iss3/15>

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Academic Leadership Journal

Introduction

Without any doubt, leadership plays a dominant role in the outcome of any organized effort aimed at a particular goal or a set of goals. It is the genius of leadership that mobilises human and material resources and creates the necessary climate for productivity. As a matter of fact, studies have shown that leadership accounts for most of the outcomes observable in Organisations. In the view of Jiboyewa (1988), leadership involves much more than the behaviours exhibited by leaders in any other organisation.

Leadership is therefore of particular importance in the organisation to the extent that without it, goals may be difficult to attain. In fact, Cheng and Townsend (2000) reported that in the efforts of various countries for education change and effectiveness, the role of leadership at both the system and site levels is often crucial to their success.

It is in the light of this crucial role of leadership that different scholars have tried to interpret the concept of leadership differently (Yuki, 1998). Some typical examples are: leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an organised group toward goal – setting and goal achievement (Stogdill, 1974); leadership is the initiation of a new structure or procedure for accomplishing an organisation's goals and objectives (Lipham, 1964); and leadership is a force that can initiate action among people, guide activities in a given direction, maintain such activities and unify efforts toward common goals (Kenzevich, 1975). Leadership is a process of social influence where leaders induce followers to apply their energies and resources toward a collective objective. It is an interactive relationship between leaders and followers, which is characterised by influence and identification (Bolman and Deal, 1977). And in the view of Ogunsaju (2006), leadership is a position of dominance and prestige accompanied by the ability to direct, motivate and to assist others in achieving a specified purpose. Cheng (1996) found two general elements of leadership in the various definitions. First, leadership is related to the process of influencing others behaviours and secondly, it is related to goal development and achievement.

Leadership is also of particular importance in educational administration because of its far-reaching effects on the accomplishment of school programmes, objectives and attainment of educational goals (Peretomode, 1991). Cheng (1994) went further to propose that leadership in educational institutions compose of five major dimensions, namely: structural leadership, human leadership, political leadership, cultural leadership and educational leadership. According to him, structural leadership refers to the leadership that develops clear goals and policies, established appropriate organisational structure for different roles, holds staff accountable for results, and provides suitable technical support to plan, organise, coordinate and implement policies in the institution. Political leadership refers to the leadership that builds alliances and coalitions, encourages participation and collaboration in decision-making and resolve conflicts among constituencies. Cultural leadership refers to the leadership that inspires and stimulates members to pursue institutional vision and excellent performance, builds up new institutional culture and transforms the existing values and norms of staff in the institution.

Educational leadership refers to the leadership that provides direction and expert advice on developments of learning, teaching and curriculum, emphasises relevance to education in management, diagnoses educational problems and encourages professional development and teaching improvement.

At the head of leadership at secondary school in Nigeria is the principal, who administers the school with other teaching and non-teaching staff. Accordingly, the principal is regarded as the chief executive of the school, who is responsible for all that happens in the school (Oyededeji and Fasasi, 2006). As the Chief Executive, the principal assigns duties to those who could perform the duties, though all responsibilities still reside in him as the accounting officer. It is in this regard that Babayemi (2006) views principalship as involving the control of human and material resources of the school. The position of the principal in the school is so germane to the extent that the school cannot exist without that position. Babayemi further sees the principal as the supervisor, manager, school climate developer and change facilitator. Earlier, Akpa (1990) sees the principal as a human resource manager, a liaison and public relations officer as well as an instructional leader. In the same vein, Obemeata (1984) sees the principal as a manager, administrator, an exemplary leader, a counselor, a public officer, a building contractor, a nurse and even a messenger. In specific terms, Arikewuyo (1999) viewed the functions of the principal as follows:

1. Providing leadership for curriculum development
2. Providing leadership for instruction improvement
3. creating an environment conducive for the realisation of human potentials,
4. Influencing the behaviour of staff members and
5. Supervising instructional activities in the school system.

The Commonwealth Secretariat (1993) also adduced the functions of the principal to include the following:

- (i) manage and deploy school resources efficiently
- (ii) allocate school accommodation appropriately
- (iii) ensure satisfactory standards of maintenance and cleanliness of school facilities
- (iv) organise staff development in school
- (v) guide curriculum implementation and change
- (vi) manage the developmental appraisal system, whole school evaluation and new integrated quality management system
- (vii) create a professional ethos within the school by involving staff members in decision making, and
- (viii) manage restructuring and redeployment of teachers.

All these functions however portend a wide range of demands and challenges for the principal. For instance, in South Africa, Mestry and Grobler (2004) analysed such demands and challenges to include:

- (a) establishing a culture of teaching and learning
- (b) improving and maintaining high standards of education
- (c) working more closely with parents
- (d) coping with multicultural school populations
- (e) managing change and conflict
- (f) coping with limited resources and
- (g) ensuring more accountability to the community they serve.

Realising the important role of the principal within the secondary school system, it is imperative to examine the leadership capacities of secondary school principals. This is particularly so because of the fact that secondary education, especially in Nigeria serves as the bridge between the primary and tertiary levels. The junior secondary school (JSS) level in particular is now an integral part of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme of the Nigerian government. The UBE is free, compulsory and universal. Principals' competencies can be measured from various dimensions; from the perceptions of students, teachers, parents, communities and their employers. For instance, Scotti Jr. and William (1987) agreed that teachers' perceptions of their principals' leadership is one of the many variables, which affect a school's productivity. Teachers' perception of principals' leadership behaviour is also positively related to teachers' morale (Hunter-Boykin and Evans, 1995). Luo (2004) further contended that perceptions about principals as leaders by their teachers indicate an important dimension to evaluate the leaders capacities. To him, understanding how teachers perceive their principals leadership capacities has a great significance and providing evidence for improvement of school leadership. Research has also demonstrated that teachers' perceptions of their principals' capabilities and their working conditions will determine the organisational climate and culture of the school. Such perceptions will also impact on the performance of the school. (Sweeney, 1996).

In an attempt to explain the requirements of a competent principal, Cranston (2002) explained the skills and capacities which principals are expected to possess as follows:

Table 1:

Skills and Capacities of Principals' overview.

ENHANCED SKILLS AND CAPACITIES

§ Generally, various aspects of strategic leadership – people, school, educational.

§ Generally, various aspects of strategic management – facilities, budgeting, staffing, accountability.

§ Leading, visioning, cultural change

- § Knowledge of state, national and international educational developments.
- § Knowledge of wider organisation and development issues beyond education section.
- § Capacity to manage and developments (educational and otherwise).
- § Capacity to make, manage and lead through uncertainty.
- § Interpersonal, people skills – communication, collaboration, consultation, negotiation, persuasion, conflict management.
- § Capacity to empower and delegate effectively, leading to multiple leadership roles.
- § Capacity to manage time effectively, identify and act on priorities.
- § Capacity to operate in a culture of higher pressure and greater job demands.
- § Capacity to identify skill deficiencies.

Source: Cranston (2002), pg. 5

However, in a study in America, Hunter-Boykin and Evans (1995) found that majority of the principals were rated as ineffective by their teachers. This reflects that there is a big discrepancy between the principals' performance and their teachers' expectations. They however reasoned that because teachers do not have leadership experiences and cannot fully understand principals' work, they make subjective judgements, character assessment and stereotypical comments about principals who are dissimilar to themselves (Banks, 1991). In the same way, Luo (2004) discovered that teachers' perception of their Principals' leadership capacities in urban settings are significantly higher than in sub-urban and in rural settings. He further observed that schools in urban settings enjoyed advantages in terms of funding, cultural and physical environment, student quality and community support systems. To him, principals in urban settings enjoy better professional development opportunities, higher salaries and more comfortable living conditions than their sub-urban and rural counterparts. Luo's finding agrees with most research results that urban schools are significantly advantaged to rural schools in terms of funding, educational resources, teacher quality and students' achievements (Hannum, 2003). In another study, Lee, Smith and Cioci (2000) discovered that while female teachers feel empowered when working in schools headed by female principals, male teachers consider themselves less powerful in those circumstances. The interaction between teachers and principals' gender contributes to understanding the persistent under-representation of women in high school principalship. Jones (2002) also studied teachers' perceptions of American principals' leadership in urban schools. Findings showed that in areas of image management and relationship, colour and European American teachers in urban schools perceive their principals' leadership differently. Results also indicated that leaders of colour were critical in creating an inclusive school among groups of ethnically diverse group of teachers. And in Hong Kong, the images of the principal in the mind of pre-service primary teachers were found to be negative. It was also discovered that these negative beliefs about principalship in Hong Kong were predominantly formed during pre-service teachers experiences in school life and teaching practice, (Lee, Walker and Bodycott, 2000). A recent study by Luo and Najjar (2007), investigated Chinese principal leadership capacities as perceived by master teachers.

Findings indicated that principal's leadership capacities were generally perceived moderately negative. Internal leadership capacities in school vision, instruction and organisation were perceived lower than external leadership capacities in collaborative partnership, moral perspective and larger-context politics. Principals with higher degrees were perceived to have higher internal and external leadership capacities.

Unlike in many developed countries where studies on principals' competencies are available in multitude, such studies are still at its low ebb in Nigeria. Most studies in this country have focused on leadership styles, rather than leadership competencies. The study therefore intends to fill this gap by examining the perception of teachers of the leadership capacities of their principals.

Objective

The objective of this study is to examine how secondary school teachers in Nigeria perceive the leadership competencies of their principals.

Methodology

The samples of the study were made up of all the two hundred teachers of secondary schools in Oyo State of Nigeria who attended a workshop organised by the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA NIGERIA), Ondo, in December 2006. The samples were made up of one hundred and twenty six male and seventy-four female teachers. All the samples have a minimum teaching qualification of a first degree. Fifty-nine of the teachers were from the rural areas while one hundred and forty one of them were from the urban areas of Oyo State. Eighty one of the teachers were experienced, having spent more than five years on the job while one hundred and nineteen of them were less experienced.

The instrument used for the study was the Principals' Leadership Capacities Questionnaire (PLCQ), developed by Luo (2004) to measure the leadership capacities of Chinese Principals. The instrument was however modified to reflect the socio cultural background of Nigeria. The PLCQ used a 5-point Likert scale for teachers to rate their principal's leadership capacities by indicating their assessment with each of the items on the following: having no capacity; having little capacity; having moderate capacity or having excellent capacity. The PLCQ had a total of 28 items. The reliability of instrument was carried out by using twenty teachers from Lagos State. Their response was analysed with the aid of split half method and it provided a reliability co-efficient of 0.76. The instrument is therefore reliable to measure the leadership capacities of school principals in Nigeria. Data collected for the study were analysed using simple percentage. The simple percentage was used to measure the general response of the teachers to the items in the instrument.

Results

The results of the research questions formulated for the study are presented as follows:

1. What is the perception of secondary school teachers about the leadership capacities of their principals?

The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

S/N	STATEMENTS	A	B	C	D
1.	Vision of learning to promote success of students			65 (32%)	135 (68%)
2.	Communicate the vision to staff, parent and students			34 (17%)	166
3.	Use effective strategies to implement the vision		28 (14%)	32 (16%)	140 (83%)
4.	Promote positive school culture			08 (04%)	192 (96%)
5.	Facilitate activities that apply principles of effective instruction to improve instructional practices and curricular materials.		26 (13%)	152 (76%)	22 (11%)
6.	Use and promote technology and information system to enrich and improve curriculum and instruction.		165 (83%)	33 (16%)	02 (01%)
7.	Apply human development theory and motivational theories to the learning process.		17 (8.5%)	55 (27.5%)	128 (64%)
8.	Be fully aware of learners' diverse needs and accommodate their needs.		17 (8.5%)	148 (74%)	53 (17.5%)
9.	Implement effective professional development progress based on reflective practice and the needs of the teachers.		13 (6.5%)	141 (70.5%)	46 (23%)
10.	Optimise the learning environment by applying appropriate models and principles of organisational development and management.		100 (50%)	52 (26%)	48 (28%)

11.	Optimize the learning environment with attention to indicators of equity, effectiveness and efficiency.		58 (59%)	99 (49.5%)	43 (21.5%)
12.	Develop plans of action for focusing on effective organisation		25 (12.5%)	87 (43.5%)	88 (44%)
13.	Give priority to student learning, safety, curriculum and instruction when development plans of action		10 (05%)	17 (8.8%)	173 (86.5%)
14.	Manage time effectively			38 (19%)	162 (81%)
15.	Deploy financial and human resources in ways that promote student achievement		04 (02%)	118 (59%)	78 (39%)
16.	Involve staff in conducting school operations		02 (01%)	13 (16.5%)	185 (92.5%)
17.	Use group process skills to build consensus, communicate and resolve conflicts.			08 (04%)	192 (96%)
18.	Allocate and use fiscal, human and material resources effectively, legally and equitably		16 (08%)	146 (73%)	38 (19%)
19.	Focus the use of resources on teaching and learning		13 (6.5%)	88 (44%)	99 (49.5%)
20.	Bring together the resources of family members and the community to positively affect student learning		19 (9.5%)	112 (56%)	69 (34.5%)
21.	Use public resources funds appropriately and effectively to encourage communities to provide new resources.		06 (03%)	36 (18%)	158 (79%)
22.	Collaborate with agencies, families and other community members			08 (04%)	192 (79%)

23.	Respect the rights of others		07 (3.5%)	35 (17.5%)	158 (79%)
24.	Treat students fairly.		53 (26.5%)	19 (9.5%)	128 (64%)
25.	Make and explain decisions based upon ethical and legal principles		59 (29.5%)	99 (49.5%)	42 (21%)
26.	Demonstrate on an understanding of the policies, laws and regulations enacted by local, state and federal authorities that affect schools.		115 (57.5%)	32 (16%)	53 (26.%%)
27.	Demonstrate an understanding of the economic factors that shape local schools.		56 (28%)	120 (60%)	24 (12%)
28.	Fully consider political, social, economic, legal and cultural context in school policy development and school operation.		29 (14.5%)	146 (73%)	25 (12.5%)

Key:

A – having no capacity

B – having little capacity

C – having moderate capacity

D – having excellent capacity

From the analysis in Table 1, it could be found that teachers viewed their principals as either having little capacity, moderate capacity or excellent capacity. None of the principals is said to be having no capacity. The teachers view their principals as having little capacity in the area of technology and information system; ability to apply appropriate models and principles of organisational development and management, as well as the understanding of policies, laws and regulations enacted by local, state and federal authorities that affect schools. The teachers however viewed their principals as having moderate capacity in facilitating activities that can improve instructional practices and curricular materials; ability to accommodate learners needs; deploying of financial and human resources that will promote student achievement; legal and equitable allocation of human and material resources, bringing together the resources of family members and community to positively affect students' learning, as well as demonstrate and fully consider socio, economic legal and cultural context in school policy development and operation. The principals are also considered as having excellent capacity in the

area of vision for the school, communicating this vision to staff, parents and students and have the ability to use effective strategies to implement this vision in order to promote positive school culture.

Discussion

This study discovered that the Nigerian teachers considered their principals as either having a little capacity, moderate or excellent capacity in the skill areas. There is no area where the principals are perceived as having no capacity. This is unlike the Chinese teachers who perceived their principals leadership capacities as moderately negative (Luo and Najjar 2007).

This may not be surprising because all the principals have a minimum of a first degree and/ or a Postgraduate Diploma in Education which qualifies them to be competent to head their schools. Each of the principals also have minimum of fifteen years teaching experience at the secondary school level. With such qualifications and teaching experience, the principals could be said to be qualified.

Teachers perceived their principals as having little capacity in the area of information and technology system; ability to apply appropriate models and principles of organisation development and management, as well as an understanding of education laws and policies. This implies that principals have not fully imbibed the importance of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the delivery of information and teaching and learning processes. According to Omotayo (2005), ICT ensures faster access to expert knowledge and information; faster and more efficient delivery of information, wider dissemination of information to people hitherto unreached or underserved and deeper geographic penetration, etc. Indeed the use of ICT can improve not only teaching and learning, but also administrative effectiveness. Teachers also perceive the principals as not having the necessary capacity to apply appropriate models and management principles. This is not good enough for the system because for contemporary Nigerian managers including educational administrators to rise up to the challenges posed by the prevailing economic situation, and the need for greater organisational efficiency, they must of necessity have a firm grip and an up-to-date knowledge of what management is all about, the job of the manager, the modern management techniques and the essential ingredients for their use to achieve predetermined results (Igwe, 1990). Such management theories, as Management By Objective (MBO); Programmes Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT); Planning, Programming, Budgetary System (PPBS), etc; are still useful to Nigerian principals, because the theories will help them to draw up good plans and programmes for action for the enterprise and ensuring that its operations are effectively monitored and supervised.

One of the major functions and responsibilities of a principal is to improve and facilitate efficient curriculum implementation, enhance teaching and learning activities of the school, as well as deploy financial and material resources of the school in order to meet learners' needs. The teachers consider their principals as having moderate capacity in this regard. This finding perhaps negates an earlier finding by Akpa (1990) that academic and instructional activities including curriculum development, teaching and instructional; supervision were treated with less vigour by principals. According to him, principals are more concerned with custodial services (administration and managerial functions), rather than ensuring the actual teaching and learning in the school. As a matter of fact, since the school is established for the purpose of teaching and learning, such functions, as providing leadership for curriculum development; providing leadership for instructional improvement and supervising instructional activities in the school (Arikewuyo, 1999), must be given a proper attention.

Principals are also considered by their teachers as having excellent capacity in the area of vision for the school, time management, involvement of staff in school operations, building consensus to resolve conflicts, collaboration with agencies, families and other community members, respect for the rights of others and fairly treatment of students. All these are pointer to the fact that principals are very democratic in their administrative endeavour. This finding agrees with an earlier observation by Obemeata (1984) that the development of understanding between the school and the community must come through community participation in school affairs. Indeed, both the school and community must go along together as partners (Arikewuyo and Onanuga, 2005). The National Policy Education also lends credence to effective collaboration between the school and community when it emphasises that the day-to-day administration of the school shall grow out of the life and social ethos of the community they serve. It therefore stresses that the administrative machinery for the national education system, shall be based, among other things, on the following principles:

- a. Close participation and involvement of the communities, at the local level, in the administration and management of the school, and
- b. Effective line of communication between local community and the state on one hand and national machinery for policy formulation and implementation on the other.

Recommendation

From all indications, secondary school teachers in Nigeria considered their principals as having the leadership capacity to administer the schools. This is unlike the Chinese principals whom their teachers considered as having a generally moderate negative capacity (Luo and Najjar, 2007).

It is however recommended that Nigerian principals should be trained in Information Communication Technology (ICT). No doubt, the world has virtually become a global village, with the advancement in information technology. A sound knowledge of ICT will therefore enhance the administrative effectiveness of the principals.

There is also the need to equip the principals with modern management skills, which this study shows that the principals are deficient in. This deficiency stems from the fact that the professional training of school administrators has not been given the proper attention by successive governments in Nigeria, because teaching experience is the major yardstick used by government to promote teachers from the classroom to administrative positions (Arikewuyo and Onanuga, 2005). But it must be emphasised that teaching and administration are not the same. It is therefore recommended that before any teacher is appointed as a principal, s/he must be made to undergo a course in school administration. The Nigerian government established the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) for this purpose. Unfortunately, the policy of compulsory training for would-be-school administrators is yet to be imbibed as a policy by the government.

Future researchers may wish to examine the relationship between geographical variables, such as age, experience, geographical location and gender on teachers' perception of principals' leadership capacities.

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