

Exploring Headteachers' Leadership Practices in Resolving Conflicts Among School Actors: A Case Study of Rurally Located Nigerian Primary School

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Abstract

The effectiveness of primary schools is determined by the efficacy of administrative techniques implemented by headteachers leadership strategies. Primary school academic achievement had been hampered by power struggles between headteachers and teachers. This has resultant effect on the global and national goals and objectives of primary education across the world, according to observations as a teacher, and as well as literatures. The study contributed to knowledge, theory and practice in primary education and proffering suggestible solutions to the challenges facing education development at the rural setting.

Keywords: Communication flow, power-rated issues, primary schools, leadership, teachers, headteachers

Introduction

Primary schools across the world is created after the early childhood education, this education level is seen as the foundation phase for learners. Leadership practices are source of concern in schools, as elementary school headteachers appear to be employing outdated tactics. UNESCO (2014); Vaillant (2015) argued that school leadership in developing countries has been a source of contention, with a number of schisms between headteachers and instructors. According to Opoku-Asare, Takyi, and

Owusu-Mensah (2015), conflict between teachers and headteachers has a negative impact on academic achievement, causing disruptions in teaching and learning and learners drop-out rate in primary schools. Lack of inclusion of teachers in decision-making processes, lack of communication skills training, lack of under delegation of duties, and insufficient communication flow from a complex organogram have all been issues, with students bearing the brunt of the schisms between teachers and headteachers.

Literature Review

There is a general agreement in literature (Pherali 2011) Adeyemi and Adu 2013; Ayodele, Buari and Oguntuase (2016; Jonah, Nwachukwu, Nanah, & Umoh, 2021) that leadership practices in schools world over has been characterised by many challenges which brings about conflicts in schools. Consequently, Oburu (2017), averred that both verbal and nonverbal communications occur on a daily basis between teachers and headteachers, during the interchange of views and ideas, conflict erupts throughout the interactions, learners are verbally abused and dealt with in punitive ways where such occurs. This has resulted in student depression and, in some cases, drop-out. Learners' academic performance has suffered as a result of the issue they are dealing with, as a "*happy teachers have a happy contents to deliver*".

Adeyemi and Adu (2013) argued that elementary school principals' leadership styles influence teachers' job satisfaction. They also agreed that elementary school leadership is characterised by undemocratic and exclusionary practises employed by headteachers. Gawaza (2016), the behaviour of headteachers is identical with that of a god, and this has altered school leadership. Kalungad (2020) also contend that the headteacher styles is a motivation for the teachers and thus affect their job performance. Ayodele, Buari and Oguntuase (2016) concurred that leadership administrative strategies are significant to students' academic performance. To achieve good productivity in the school system, the principal should guarantee that teachers accomplish their jobs properly. Headteachers as school administrators are charged with the daunting task of managing teachers for good job performance. Olajiga & Onaolapo

(2019) purported that good headteachers administrative skills helps in the attainment of education goals and objectives.

Despite international and national attempts to improve the efficiency of primary education in Nigeria. The leadership practices in elementary schools have been plagued by issues since some headteachers utilise authoritarian leadership styles in schools, which has hampered the effectiveness of learners' academic performance in primary schools (Amuchie, Asotibe and Audu, 2013). To achieve effectiveness in elementary schools, both headteachers and teachers must work collaboratively (Bubale, Kasule & Mbabazi, 2021). However, in our arguments, leadership with experience should manage problems in schools. In rural located schools, this is not the case, as instructors at primary schools have a difficult time relating to their headteachers. Discrepancies such as 'favouritism' and 'politiking' characterise many rurally located schools in Nigeria primary schools (Jonah *et al.*, 2021). Minadzi and Nyame, (2016) confirmed the fact, that school leaders are unaware of the leadership techniques for maintaining effectiveness in primary schools. To justify our arguments, (Acheck Timah, 2015) acknowledged that school leaders are not adequately equipped to cater for their functions as stipulated in the Ekiti state teachers manual, (2011) and such cases exist in the rural located schools.

Statement of the Problem

The efficacy of primary schools is challenged by the practicality of headteacher leadership practices, as rural school principals are incompetent in terms of specialised leadership abilities. However, the purpose of this study is to highlight the issues of leadership practices in rural schools, as well as the viewpoints of teachers, in order to propose possible solutions to the leadership lacuna in primary schools.

The research question is: How can headteachers' leadership practices be enhanced for better effectiveness in Nigeria primary school.

Objectives of the Study

In order to answer the above reserch questions, the following objectives were raised to guide the study;

- To examine the challenges facing headteachers' leadership practices in Nigeria Primary schools.

- To provide a possible solutions to ameliorate the challenges faced by leaders in Nigeria primary schools.

Theoretical Framework

Distributive leadership theory has been used to understand the study. This was chosen because a familiar structure of leadership can be taken over by a charismatic leader and over throw the challenges of leadership practice into transforming school culture, contributing to great teachers satisfaction. Spillane (2005) argued that the problem leadership practices proposes can be solved by distributive leadership theory. Distributed leadership is fathered by Spillane, he proposed distributed leadership as three elements: Leadership practise is the core and underlying concern; leadership practise is formed by leader interactions; and leadership practise is defined by situations (Spillane, 2012). Timperley (2005) argued that distributed leadership is a foundation for inclusive and democratic leadership practice in schools. With this, one conclude that distributive leadership is the best for leadership practice in schools to shed out consequences and embrace the motivaion aspects of leadership in ensuring the actualisation of school goals and objectives.

In respect of the above, it can be deduced that from authors such as (Harris and Spillane 2008) agreed that distributive leadership contributes to greater job performance and improved learners performance. This is to say distributive leadership practice is inclusive, democratic and motivates towards the realisation of goals and objectives of education. Distributive leadership practices sees followers as partner in progress towards the realisation of goals of education as situations arises (Liang & Sandmann. 2015). Fusarelli, Kowalski & Petersen (2011) argued that distributive leadership has civic engagement and deliberative democracy strategies that vehicles schools improvement. This is to extend on our earlier discussions that distributive leadership encompasses the belief of collectiveness in decision making process, from leaders to followers, trust process in communication flow. The arguments here is that distributive leadership is an agent of change in the leadership practices process in Africa primary schools. Headteachers and teachers should see themselves as partners in which the achievement of school goals and objectives.

Significance of the study

This study will be beneficial to ministry of education in training of headteachers in relating to the teachers professionally. The headteachers will use the results of this study to institute professional relationships with the teachers. Teachers should be included in the decision making process. Distributive leadership strategy should be encouraged to reduce power dichotomy that exists between headteachers and teachers within the education system.

Research Methodology

In order to provide solutions to the problem stated from the study by answering the research questions and the execution of the stated objectives. We adopted the qualitative research approach. This is relevant as this approach helps the researcher to get indept enquiry into the leadership practices problem in Nigeria primary schools (Pathak, Jena & Kalra 2013:192). This helps us to understand people and social context within their communities (Koppel & Telles, 2020). For this to be implemented, a case study design approach was adopted for an in-depth enquiry of existing phenomenon (Tetnowski, 2015). This according to, Yin (2012), case study is suitable to describe phenomenons and the implementation of a new policies. Therefore, building this study on case study is imperative because the target is to rationalise issues involved in the distributive leadership practices in schools. Focus group discussion was used to collect data from participants. It was appropriate because group discussion allows the researchers to get the understanding of the real problem from the participants (Gawlik, 2018). 6 participants were selected, 1 headteacher and five teachers were selected from a rural located primary school in Nigeria. The participants were selected using convenient sampling technique, as the school was easily located, and the members were easy to locate (Flanagan, 1980). At the time of this study, teachers that had five-year experience as a teacher and a two-year experience as a headteacher were selected.

Data collected were analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA) and this is appropriate because it respond to the objectives of the study which has been categorized into two segments 'challenges' and the 'suggestible solutions' (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Williams & Moser (2019) has three

steps to coding, which are; identifying, defining and describing. These steps were considered for this study, making consistent meaning out of the themes created. The principles of research ethics were followed, as the participants rights were respected and participants were free to free to leave when they deem necessary (Gajjar, 2013).

Results

The results of this study were defined in themes below. The themes were identified using Williams & Moser's three steps to coding. Three themes namely; lack of good communication chain, complex pattern of delegation of duties, and power-related tussles between headteachers and teachers.

Lack of Good Communication

Data revealed showed that lack of communication flow between headteachers and teachers is responsible for the problems of leadership practices in rurally located primary schools. This is generally regarded as a major problem in the developing countries education sector because lack of communication flow distorts effectiveness in teaching and learning and this has contributed to teachers' low job performance and low learners' academic performance in schools (Samuel, Nduku and Machyo 2019). Macharia (2012) also argue that clear headteachers' communicative flow has a significant effect on teaching and learning of learners among others is important to the improvement of school's effectiveness but reverse is the case in this research area. This is evident in the following conversation:

Communication is the major problem in the school because the headteacher prefers not to communicate to teachers especially on informations from the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB. In rural area is even more difficult as communication is clear, and when we communicate to the headteacher he usually delay feedback.

The first statement shows that there is communication lacuna between teachers and headteachers and this is a major set-back in the implementation of good leadership practices in schools. This shows that headteachers are 'small lords' in the discharge of daily duties, the headteachers conceal information meant for teachers towards the development of learners. This is not far from the findings of (Odhiambo, 2005) that clear communication enhances better job performance and

motivation. Not only that, poor listening by the headteachers have been the major setback in the communication process in schools. When headteacher did not develop listening strategies to accommodate the complaints of teachers regarding motivation and teaching and learning materials. This is shown in the following statements form the participants:

My headteacher screams and shouts at me whenever I go to express myself about the lack of teaching materials and resources in schools. As a headteacher I think I need to work on my listening skills to accommodate a good rapport between me and my teachers, but, most teachers timing is very bad, they come when they are supposed to be in the class.

From the first statements, it shows that lack of communication flow has deterred the academic performance of learners. Poor listening skills has deformed information flows in primary schools, poor timing of teachers in communicating with the headteachers is another problem seen as the problem of information flow in schools and delayed feedback regarding information passed to the headteacher is a problem which affects teachers motivations and in-turn affects the teaching and learning in schools. This may be the reason why Samuel et al (2019), notes that one of the challenges of school effectiveness is lack of good communication flow.

Complex Patterns of Delegation of Duties

Complex organisation structures in schools in Nigeria primary school, has deterred information flow. Graber (2002) argued that complex organisation structures affects the information flow which in-turn affects realisation of organisations goals and objectives. Naicker & Mestry (2013) argued that school has a complex structures in hierachy from Department of Basic Education (DBE) to schools, this complexity has problem for education departments as these complex nature of hierachy in schools affects the flow of information and affects learners academic performance. This is why (Gray, 1982) asserted that complex pattern in schools reduce good relationships and good leadership enhances learners performance in schools. This is not the case in this study, the headteachers are not aware of this complex delegation of duties in schools which is evident in the following conversations:

I give teachers roles under my purview, and insist they do that without clashing with their lesson periods. As a teacher I observed that there is favouritism with the delegation of duties, my headteacher gives duties to some teachers which I perceive that some teachers are closer to him. Teachers are lazy in dispersing their duties, one saying goes 'Ogo Ta Ogo O Ta, Owo Alaru A Pe' it's a yoruba saying that is interpreted as even if we work or not our salary will be paid" I see some teachers lazy so I delegate some duties to the dilligent ones.

It is revealed that the declining nature of leadership practices in schools is because of the complex nature of delegation of duties which affects the motivation and academic performance if learners. The first statement confirms that the headteacher gives roles to teachers. The second statement confirms that the headteacher gives roles to some favourite teachers. Not only that, the third statement confronts this statement as sees the teachers as been lazy and not been aware of the complex nature of the schools decision making process.

In the context of Nigeria, especially in rural located school, the issue here is that when the teacher is lazy, it does not encourage the headteacher to give them roles in schools. Our argument is that, this complex delegation of duties affects leadership practices in primary schools. Ibrahim and Daniel (2019) opined that a good leadership practices involves all teachers in the decision making process and in the delegation of duties both in the school and out of school duties.

Power-related tussle between Headteachers and Teachers

Schools need good leadership practices in order to attain its set objectives and effectiveness (Lumby, 2012). Leat, Reid & Lofthouse (2015) averred that proper teacher engagements brings about positive teacher effectiveness, where the teachers are not meaningfully engaged, it leads to rather low job effectiveness from the teachers and thereby affects the learners academic achievement. Sompaa, Machila, Chibamba, and Muleya, (2020) also argued that power related conflict brings about low commitment in teachers thereby affecting curricular activities, pedagogical implications, and unconducive teaching and learning environments. Musah, Abdul-Rahman, Tahir, Al-hudawi and Daud, (2018) asserted that earning teachers

trust is essential to reducing conflicts between teachers and headteachers. Levent, Özdemir, and Akpolat, (2018) also concurred that trust is essential in gaining teachers commitment in a task assigned by headteachers. This is not the case in this study, the teachers claimed that they did not earn the trust of their headteacher which caused the conflicts evident in the following conversations.

As a teacher, I do have confrontations with my boss, the headteacher, he feels all in all and has favourites among the teachers. As an headteacher, I do try my best to democratise every of my decision making meetings with staff. The conflicts of this nature causes disruptions in teaching and learning, pedagogical implications and disturbance in curricular activities. The conflicts between teachers and headteacher caused the alarming trend of abuse and agitations that erupts from the classroom.

From the first statement, it can be deduced that the teachers feels threatened with headteachers working with some teachers (favouritism), and such statement affects teachers morale, causes conflicts among staff and headteacher. The second statement confirms that the headteacher tried their best to democratise roles, the third statement revealed that the conflicts that erupts from headteachers and teachers disturbs teaching and general curricular activities. The fourth statement confirmed the abuse of learners through the use of cane/confrontations is caused by the conflicts that erupts from the headteachers and teachers.

In the context of Nigeria primary schools, especially in the rurally located schools, conflicts that erupts from the confrontations of teachers and headteachers affected the teaching and learning process and the general effectiveness in primary schools. Conflicts, according to our ideas, have an impact on the teaching and learning processes in Nigerian primary schools. and the power struggle (headteachers' egotistical personalities) harmed the smooth rapport that should exist between headteachers and teachers. Musah et al. (2018) confirmed that earning teachers trust through a selfless leadership approach, carrying the teachers along in decision-making procedures which distributive leadership approach enshrined is the best if the objectives and goals of primary education should be attained.

Discussions

The study revealed that schools located in rurally located schools lack of good communication chain needed for the smooth running of the school. This lack of good communication chain has rendered the idea of good leadership practices null. This lack of good communication flows has done more harms than good to the wellbieng of the learners in terms of academic achivement. Therefore, the lack of a good communication flow has a negative influence on the academic achivement of the learners. This in support of (Kamau, 2016) that lack of good communication flows affects learners academic performance in primary schools. The findings of (Kiadese, 2011) also corroborates the above findings that lack of good communication flow are responsible for the bad attitude the teachers and perceptions towards teaching in primary schools. This logically infer that, good communication flow between headteacher and teachers is impossible because of the lack of good commication flow.

The study also revealed that complex organogram in primary schools and the delegation of duties is a problem as revealed as a cause for incessant conflicts among teachers and headteachers. This is in consonance with the findings of (Wanzare and Da Costa, 2001) that complex delegation of duties has negative impact on learners performance. This corroborates the findings above (Ayub, 2014; Rajbhandari, 2016) that, complex delegation of duties are responsible for the bad attitudnal change manifested by teachers and headteachers. This to infer that leadership practices have been impaired by the complex delegation of duties in Nigeria primary schools. The findings from the study revealed that power-related tussules existed between headteachers and teachers in Nigeria primary school. This had rendered the school incapacitated to ensuring a conflict-free school. The resultant effect is however, not pleasant as learners bears the brunt of conflicts between the headteachers and learners. The inference here is that, where cooperation between headteachers and teachers lacks, it affects the academic performance of learners. This in line with the submissions of (Etsey, 2005; Olaleye 2011) that where cooperation between headteachers and teachers ceased and conflicts erupts, it has negative impacts on learners academic performance in Nigeria primary schools and it detter the actualisation and realisation of the goals and objectives of primary

education. That is, there are yet to follow the principles of distributive leadership strategies in Nigeria primary schools (Amanchukwu, Stanley and Ololube, 2015). This is to confirm that, leadership practices in Nigeria practices ceased to be inclusive because of the incessant conflicts that erupts between teachers and headteachers.

Conclusions

The empirical investigations consisted the leadership practices of headteachers in managing conflicts in Nigeria primary schools. Among these challenges, identified to be predominant in Nigeria rurally located primary schools, is lack of good communication chain which affected the realisation of the goals and objectives of primary education. Secondly, complex delegation of duties also affected the relationship between the teachers and the headteachers which has resultant effect on the academic performance in Nigeria primary schools. Lastly, power-related tussles between headteachers and teachers caused the relationship strain among the school actors which have a resultant effect on the academic performance and job satisfaction in schools. Education should be inclusive and democratic. Therefore, headteachers and teachers should work collaboratively to reduce power play dynamics played out in day-to-day administration. Distributive leadership strategies if adopted in Nigeria schools, it will change the leadership practices positively and will improve the academic achievement of learners.

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