Assessing Autocratic Leadership Behaviour of Principals of Secondary Schools of South-Eastern Region of Nigeria and Academic Achievement of Students

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Abstract	Original Research Article

The leadership behaviour demonstrated by principals of secondary schools affect directly or indirectly the academic achievement of students. Autocratic leadership style/behaviour is one of such leadership behaviours which principals in secondary schools adopt in day-to-day administration of their schools. This paper attempts to assess autocratic leadership behaviour of principals in the south-eastern states of Nigeria and its impact on achieving academic success by the students. Thus, this research sets out to identify how autocratic leadership behaviour of principals could promote teaching and learning processes in schools. It also examines the negative impact of autocratic leadership styles of principals. The researcher made use of descriptive and case study designs of autocratic leadership behaviours viz-a-viz academic achievement. Empirical studies carried out on autocratic leadership behaviours as well as theoretical studies were equally examined. The findings showed that autocratic leadership by principals were used to achieve urgent needs of the school while on the other hand alienates subordinates from participating in administration of schools. The researchers recommended among others that autocratic leadership behaviours should be used sparily as the need arises; while liberalizing administration for everybody to participate.

Keywords: Autocratic, leadership behaviour, principals, academic achievement..

Background to the Study

Leaders of different organizations demonstrate certain leadership behaviour in the day-to-day running of their organizations. Every organization was set up to achieve a common purpose (Anyaogu, 2016). The organization focuses on the set objectives and the leader mobilies his subordinates towards these set objectives. To achieve these objectives too, leaders of such organizations adopt one leadership behaviour or the other or combine two or more leadership styles together.

School principals are not exempted in this assertion. They have set goals and objectives as set by the government and different non-governmental bodies. The primary purpose of

schools as an organization is to change the behaviour of the learners Unachukwu (2016). Schools equip the learner/child with the necessary skills and behaviour to be able to live in the society and contribute to her development. In realization of these objectives, principals adopt different leadership behaviours in their secondary schools while some adopt participatory (democratic leadership), others adopt laissez-faire and autocratic leadership styles respectively. While participatory leadership behaviour of principals allow his/her staff to contribute ideas, laissez-faire principals care less about what goes on in their schools. And autocratic principas do not carry their staff along in the daily administration of schools Okorji (2018). Each of the administrative behaviours has both positive and negative influence on the academic achievement of the students. Each of the leadership behaviours affect the relationship between the staff and the principal.

Thus, the school leader is essentially a leader of the staff and the students. The school principal therefore, occupies a prominent frontline position in providing good educational plans, good school programmes and adequate facilities that are required to achieve educational success. However, bad leadership behaviours by the principals may render best school programmes, most adequate resources and most motivated staff and students ineffective and achievement of school goals a mirage

Generally speaking, a school principal's behaviour requires sufficient flexibility and sensitivity to the duties and functions required in the complex leadership situations. Hence Nwankwo (2016) listed some behavioural components which are essential for successful leadership in a school organization:

1) Consistent, generous, humble, honest, modest and fair in dealing with others.

2) Sensitive to the feelings of others while being at once considerate, helpful, responsive and friendly.

3) Loyal to his/her ideals and ideas and respectful to the beliefs, rights and dignity of others.

4) Strong in his/her feelings of self-confidence and the ability to identify easily with others including those who supervise him.

5) Enthusiastic, informing others about the policies and programmes of the school organization.

6) Takes interest in improving the group while also possessing the ability to get work done quickly and economically.

7) Understands the need to avoid envy, jealousy and is willing to take blames for his/her own mistakes.

8) Endeavours to give others the benefit of doubt and advantage.

9) Firm, but not proud or stubborn in making judgments and decisions.

10) Willing to learn to improve himself/herself and encourage others to learn.

School principals desire in the realization of the above is determined by the type of leadership behaviour which he/she exhibits. Whether participatory, laissez-fair, autocratic leadership behaviour, each of them affect the success of the above mentioned qualities which could lead to academic achievement.

Statement of Problem

Leadership is a factor that when rightly put in place will enhance performance in secondary schools. However, if it fails, this can never guarantee students' academic achievement. It can never guarantee good principal-staff relationship. The effectiveness of secondary schools in South-East Nigeria in ensuring students acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and attitude is dependent on the presence and nature of the leadership behaviour of such principal. If the principal who should man the leadership of the school is found wanting, then there is a problem.

It has therefore, been observed that some principals do not carry the entire staff along, respecting the views of the staff and motivating

the teachers. This has made teachers and other staff to be on their own as the principal do not involve them in the daily activities of the school administration. This has led to suspicion, instruct and loss of confidence. Consequently, the student's academic performance in internal and external examinations have been negatively affected. The high-handedness of some school principals who "knows it all" has therefore affected the goals and objectives of education in such schools. It is against this backdrop that the researcher embarked on this research to find out the impact of autocratic leadership behaviour of principals of secondary schools of South-Eastern region of Nigeria and academic achievement of students.

Objectives of the Study

The study was aimed at assessing the role of autocratic leadership behaviour of principals in South-East and academic achievement students. Hence the other objectives of the study are:

1) Identifying the extent of relationship between autocratic leadership behaviour and principals final decision-making authority and academic achievement of students in South-East, Nigeria.

2) Ascertaining the extent of relationship between principals who tell employees what has to be done and academic achievement of students in south-East Nigeria.

3) Identifying the extent of relationship between principals who believe that employees must be directed or threatened with punishment and academic achievement of students in South East Nigeria.

4) Establishing the extent of relationship between principals who do not consider suggestions made by employees and academic achievement of students in south-East, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide our study:

1) What is the extent of relationship between autocratic leadership behavour of principals and final decision making authority and academic achievement of students among secondary schools in the South-East region of Nigeria?

2) What is the extent of relationship between principals who tell employees what has to be done and academic achievement of students among secondary schools in the South-East region of Nigeria?

3) What is the extent of relationship between principals who believe that employees must be directed or threatened with punishment and academic achievement of students among secondary schools in the south-east region of Nigeria?

4) What is the extent of relationship between principals who do not consider suggestions made by employees and academic achievement of students among secondary schools in the South-East region of Nigeria?

Review of Literature

Concept of Leadership

Leadership is an integral part of every school organization, and without it, several challenges may surface for the school leaders. This is the essence of employing the most appropriate leadership style to enhance academic achievement. Leadership style is viewed as a combination of different characteristics, traits and behaviours that are used by leaders for interacting with their sub-ordinates (Mitonga-Monga & Coetzee, 201).

Leadership style can be defined as the kind of relationship that is used by an individual to make people work together for a common goal or objective (Nwankwo, 2017). Ukeje, Okorie and Nwagbara (2018) defined leadership style as any behaviour employed by an individual towards organizations goals through a process of influencing, directing and communicating group in the organization.

The purpose of any leadership behaviour is to mobilize the members of the organization towards realizing set goals and objectives. The behaviour demonstrated at any given period could be determined by what the leadership intends to achieve.

Autocratic Leadership Behaviour in Secondary Schools

This style of leadership is characterized by a leader who takes decisions alone, hands instructions to his followers, intimidates and threatens them into action using coercive power (Adeoye, 2020). The autocratic leader has no time for consultations and pays no attention to the views of his subordinates. Principals who demonstrate autocratic leadership behaviour has no interest in the welfare and feelings of his staff. He sees his staff as tools that should be manipulated for more work and increase in productivity.

Principals with such behaviours emphasize much on work and sees communication as a one way process. This leadership style is negatively characterized by fears, gossips, cliques, eye service, unwilling co-operation and unfavourable work climate. Autocratic principals achieve results within the shortest possible period. People do their job and take their responsibilities seriously (Smith, 2019).

Autocratic leadership behaviour by principals tend to make all decisions by themselves. Researchers have argued that this is the most effective style to complete a lot of tasks in a short period of time. This is indeed the strength of autocratic leadership but its weakness is that the decisions may be opposed or questioned, which in turn increases the likeness of conflict and the refusal by teachers to co-operate with the principal. The autocratic principals impose school rules without discussion. This makes such rules to be disobeyed frequently which is counter-productive in dealing with misconduct and bullying (Werang & Lane 2019).

Autocratic leadership often follows the status quo and given conventions, offering little in terms of innovation and development. Academic results are poor in autocratically led schools, as the students receive little attention. This type of leadership behaviour is commonly referred to as dictatorship. It is best described as leadership through force. The leadership is imposed upon the organization. He gets others do things by giving them little scope to influence decisions. This is because he takes primary responsibility for the group by controlling, managing directing. This style allows the leader a measure of autocracy and is task-oriented in his interactions with the members of the organization (Nwamal & Kayii 2018).

Autocratic leadership often leads to high levels of absenteeism and low employee turnover. However, it could remain effective for some routine and unskilled jobs, as the advantages of control may outweigh the disadvantages (Igunu, 2020). Generally, a leader who gets things done is advantageous but the follower becomes dependent on the leader and his/her personal development becomes a disadvantage from the autocratic leadership style (Yukul, 2018). Followers of the autocratic leadership feel disadvantaged at work as a result of autocratic leaders high-handedness. Followers of such autocratic leader do not feel comfortable. The autocratic leader however, is satisfied at work. While decisions made by such leaders are binding on the team, autocratic leadership allows for minimal team participation in the decision-making process and leaders even ignore subordinates opinions. Autocratic leaders are to firm to secure effectiveness and efficiency (Berhanu & Nomalanga, 2022).

Principals who employ autocratic leadership style may not get high quality results. The subordinates may pretend to be working, but are indeed not working. Autocrats are tyrants who enforce their orders on others leading to hostility of the people from them. They make decisions without consulting the followers and ultimately hurt them from performing to their excellence. They tell their employees what they want them done and how they want it accomplished, without getting the advice of the followers.

Empirical Review

Rebecca, Shaista and Ijaz, (2022) examined the effects of principals' leadership style on students' academic achievement at higher secondary level in Southern Kenya of Awendo.

The study compared the autocratic leadership style and democratic leadership of college principals. Moreover, the study aimed to find the correlation of leadership style towards students' academic achievement. The study falls in positive paradigm and accordingly it is a quantitative approach. The sample comprised of 30 principals and students from 30 colleges: 1428 students that are selected from the three selected districts. From the selected sample, data was collected through the research tool. A T-P leadership questionnaire was administered to collect data from the principals which was comprised of 35 items.

Students' academic achievement was calculated through 12th grade students marks obtained in Board of Intermediate and secondary education annual examination 2021. Statistical analysis was run through Pearson correlation coefficient applied to find out the correlation between principals' leadership style and students academic achievement. Descriptive statistics was used to measure the prevailing leadership style of principals.

Furthermore, t-test was applied to compare the differences among the leadership styles of principals. Results showed that there is a significant correlation between the leadership styles of principals and students academic achievement. While autocratic leadership style used by principals had a significant correlation, democratic leadership style of principals had a little correlation with students' academic achievement at higher secondary school level. Prevailing leadership style of principals was also analysed. Autocratic leadership style is mostly dominating in the principals' leadership behaviour. Democratic leadership style is also been used at higher secondary school level to get the success in students' academic achievement. Moreover, there is significant difference between autocratic leadership style of principals and the democratic leadership on students' academic achievement.

Research Methodology

This study adopted descriptive survey design. The design was considered appropriate because the study is aimed at identifying the relationship between two or more variables. The study intends to find out the relationship that exists between principals' autocratic behaviour and academic achievement of students in south-Eastern region of Nigeria.

Results

RQ1: What is the extent of relationship between principals' final decision-making authority and academic achievement of students in South-East Nigeria?

From our literature review, authors and experts in administrative leadership styles of principals have established vividly that final decision-making authority lies with the autocratic principals of secondary schools in south-east, Nigeria (Bass, s2019, Akudo 2020 and Nomalanga, 2022). The autocratic principals also do not consult his/her subordinates because the final decision making powers rests with him/her. Also Silva (2016) and Schwab (2017) agreed that the autocratic principals have the final power and authority in taking decisions. Their assertions were in agreement with the authors that even when the autocratic principal consult, the final-decision making process lies with him.

RQ2: What is the extent of relationship between principals who tell employees what has to be done and academic achievement of students in South-East, Nigeria?

The result of this study showed that principals who tell their employees what they should do and what to do are autocratic principals. Such principals do not believe that their sub-ordinates could contribute towards the success of the school. Such principals too claim monopoly of knowledge as their subjects are seen as mere robots. This is the views of Emiru (2018) and Achimugu & Obaka (2020). Furthermore, autocratic principals teaches their subjects the way they should go about their duties and when they should do it. Also (Cf Rabeea, Shaista and Ijaz (2022).

RQ3: What is the extent of relationship between principals who believe that employees must be directed or threatened

with punishment and academic achievement of students in South-East, Nigeria?

Autocratic principals always threaten their subordinates with queries, suspension and even dismissals. They direct their subordinates on every matter, thereby killing critical thinking of such staff. Such behaviours by the principals do not encourage good relationship and consequently stifles academic achievement (Cf Disu, 2017 and Gates 2018).

This is in line with the authors views that for a good academic environment to be sustained, principals of secondary schools should liberalize school administration and be friendly with the employees.

RQ4: What is the extent of relationship between principals who do not consider suggestions made by employee academic achievement of students in South-East, Nigeria?

To achieve academic result, principals should be considering the suggestions made by their employees. But autocratic principals do not consider their employees suggestions for the purpose of mutual benefit and inclusion. This is the views shared by Bello (2016), John (2017) and Kalu (2021). These experts in leadership behaviour agreed that with the authors that autocratic leaders do not consider their subjects views and suggestions. This action could lead to loss of personality among the staff as they (the staff) see themselves as mere pawns in the autocrats chess. This could be discouraging as it can lead to the realization of a school's programmes and policies.

Discussion of the Findings

For discussing of findings, we will be mindful of the objectives we set out to achieve in this study. Hence, our discussion will be aimed at achieving the several objectives using the answered research questions under the following sub-heading:

Principals autocratic behaviour as final decision-making authority: The final decisions-making authority lies in the four wall of the autocratic principal. Our findings showed that autocratic principal takes final decisions, even when they seek employees opinion. This is supported by Obilade (2016) Nwammae and Kayii (2018) and Pratt (2012). Our findings further revealed that decision making process is lacking in schools where autocratic principals held sway. All the employees are to take final decisions from the autocratic principal and no one else. Teachers and other employees of the school may not find this palatable; and this might affect academic achievement of students in South-East, Nigeria.

Autocratic Principals always tell their subordinates what has to be done and how it should be done.

Principals who demonstrate autocratic traits in South-East Nigeria do not believe in the initiative and ingenuity of subordinates. Our findings further showed that such autocratic principals dictate job responsibilities to their staff and even tell them how they should carry out such responsibilities. Our findings were supported by Baker, Miller & Timer (2018) and Bass (2019) who shared our views in its entirety.

Directing and Controlling Subordinates

Our findings on autocratic principals in South-East, Nigeria showed that such principals direct, threaten and punish staff on regular basis. Our findings further showed that such staff do not feel satisfied with their jobs as a result of the numerous threats of query, suspension, salary slashes and other punitive measures taken against them. This is a threat to academic achievement (cf Bello, Ibi & Bukar (2016) Sari & Steh (2017) and Reaves, Pun & Chung (2017).

Consideration of Suggestions by Autocratic Principals

Principals who demonstrate autocratic behaviours do not consider any suggestions made by their staff. Our findings showed that when staff make suggestions that would guarantee academic achievement, such suggestions are not taken. Our findings were supported by Oyagi and Gogo (2019) and Prachi (2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

We conclude by stating that:

The study discovered the need to involve staff in decision making process and taken their suggestions into consideration. Teachers and other members of staff should not be threatened and punish without regard to their human and professional dignity. Involving them in the day-to-day administration would enhance academic achievement. However, it is not always that the principals seek their staff opinion, especially when results need to be delivered within the shortest possible period.

Therefore, we recommend that:

1. Autocratic leadership behaviour should be seldomly applied in administration of secondary schools in South East.

2. Principals of secondary school may apply autocratic leadership styles when they want to achieve immediate results in the school.

3. There should be balance of powers by principals of secondary schools in south East, Nigeria. Administrative leadership should be situational as circumstances arise.

4. Principals of schools in the South-East, Nigeria should be firm but considerate in administration of their schools.

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