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## Influence of Principals' Sex, Experience and Age on their Choice of Leadership Style in Managing Students' Indiscipline in Public Secondary Schools in Edo North Senatorial District of Nigeria

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### Abstract

*This study investigated influence of principals' sex, experience and age on choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline in public secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District, Nigeria. Four (4) research questions were raised and two (2) of which were not hypothesized but answered while two (2) hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The descriptive study based on survey research design was adopted. A population of 184 principals of public secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District was studied. The questionnaire used was titled: "Influence of Principals' Leadership Style on Managing Students' Indiscipline (IPLSMSI)". The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation and the t-test. The results of the study were that principals in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District adopted three leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline. These included democratic leadership style, autocratic leadership styles and laissez-faire leadership style. The democratic leadership style was the most effective style used by principal in managing students' indiscipline in Edo North Senatorial District. It was recommended that principals should adopt the democratic style of leadership in managing students' indiscipline in secondary schools since it was found most effective.*

**Keywords:** *Influence, Principals' Sex, Experience, Age, Leadership Style, Management, Students' Indiscipline*

## Introduction

Education is seen as one of the sure ways of inculcating discipline, enlightenment and moral virtues in children. The school on the other hand, is one of the agencies through which education is acquired. The educational system therefore, is expected not only to produce future leaders of the nation that are worthy in learning and in character. The importance of education in nation building cannot be over-emphasized hence the review of the 1977 National Policy on Education in 1981, 1988, 2004 and recently 2013. Education is a cardinal sector and an instrument for effecting nation building as it provides for the well-being of the individual members and the society. Education is seen as one of the most viable tools for the development of the society (Aikaman&Unterhalter, 2005).

The formal education system of primary, secondary and tertiary training is the principal institutional mechanism for developing human capital for the nation. When people are educated, their standards of living are likely to improve, since they are empowered to access productive ventures, which will ultimately lead to an improvement in their standard of living. The role of education therefore, is not just to impart knowledge and skills that enable the beneficiaries to function as economists and social change agents in society, but also to impart values, morals, ideas, attitudes and aspirations important for national development. This can only be attainable in an environment that is well managed (Cheloti, Obae and Kanori (2014).

The school as an organization with ordered structures and formations established to achieve educational goals is also a social unit established by members of the society as a formal agency of education where people learn about the customs, attitudes and ways of doing things in their society. Laolu (2005) define school in a sociological context as the place where the culture of the people is transformed from onegeneration to another.

Every society or system is expected to have rules and regulations governing its activities. Therefore, members of the wider society, including the operators of the educational system are governed by norms and laws that direct the affairs of an individual member. Such laws according to Asaolu (2007) are meant to compel the entire members of the society to exhibit character that will conform with the societal laws and order. In order to ensure peaceful co-existence in schools, the authorities often make rules and regulations that guide and control the behaviour of their students with a view of setting high standards of discipline conducive to the education process. Akinpelu (2008) asserted that the infringement by any students on such established school rules and regulation constitute offences which are subject to appropriate retributive punishment. Therefore students are expected to be disciplined by obeying these rules. Failure to obey these rules is known as indiscipline. Indiscipline refers to improper behaviour exhibited by an individual or group of people within the school or community.

Effective teaching and learning cannot succeed in an unstable social environment and as such, disciplined behaviour is an essential variable in enhancing school outcomes. Nakpodia (2010) explains that students' indiscipline seems to be ubiquitous in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Nigeria secondary schools; and child's discipline is a part of socialization. And that with recent increase in schools enrolment students' indiscipline problems are bound to accentuate and cause more burdens on teachers and school administrators. That students' indiscipline has plagued school leading to series of unrest. Indiscipline, on the other hand, means any act that does not conform to the societal values and norms. It means absence of discipline. Discipline of students safeguards the security of teachers and school property and promotes amicable learner – teacher interaction

with a likely positive effect on the quality of learning. However, in spite of the vital role discipline plays in influencing education outcomes, irresponsible behaviour among learners in secondary schools is a common occurrence (Cotton, 2001). Documented causes of students' indiscipline broadly include unfavourable students' personal characteristics, socio-economic background and the school environment (Nasibi, 2003). Indisciplinary acts by students could be classified into: students personal profile e.g. untidiness, filthiness, laziness, indecent dressing etc; Students to students' relationship e.g. fighting, quarrelling, bullying, stealing, raping etc; Students and teachers relationship e.g. rudeness, insubordination; students' academic profile e.g. unpunctuality to school, truancy, examination malpractices, refusal to copy notes, refusal to do assignment etc. and students' and school properties e.g. vandalisation of school properties, stealing of school properties etc.

The paramount concern of every school principal is to ensure that teachers and students are disciplined for the achievement of school goals through effective management. This requires the knowledge and application of good strategies. Offiong (2002) points out that ensuring effective discipline in school depends on the ability of the school principal to intelligently utilize the various leadership styles of managing students' discipline in order to ensure compliance and good behaviour. The ability of the principal to effectively manage the disciplinary issues in schools may be dependent on principals' leadership styles and the styles of leadership may be influenced by some variables such as sex, years of teaching experience and age.

A person who leads a group of people towards a common goal is known as a leader. A leader influences his group members to accomplish the specified objectives. The position of the principal as a leader within the school cannot be over emphasized. Every person within the school system looks forward to the principals to give the appropriate leadership for others to follow. Leadership is commonly referred to in management – as getting others to do something. Leadership is the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly towards the achievement of objectives, (Adeyemi & Bolarinwa, 2013).

There are different leadership styles commonly used in schools in the management of students discipline which could be adopted by the principal. These styles include the forcing or dominant style, smoothing style, compromise style and confrontational or integrated problem solving style, democratic style, autocratic style *laissez-faire* style; but in the cause of this study, the researchers looked at the democratic, autocratic and *laissez-faire* leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline which were conceptualized by Adeyemi (2006). These are explained below.

**Democratic leadership Style:** This involves the application of due process in the management of students' discipline. It makes use of disciplinary committees and decisions reached are not unilateral but all parties are put into consideration. It allows for fair hearing. It also encourages dialogue and consultation with other members of staff on what decisions to take.

**Autocratic leadership Style:** This involves impromptu justice by using power and authority without due consultation. The principal takes decision on any student without necessarily observing due process in public administration of justice to serve as deterrent to future offenders. **Laissez-faire leadership Style:** It involves passivity i.e. ignoring offence and misdeed as though they never occurred; and threatening offenders without any visible acts of justice.

The sex of principals is germane in this discuss. Principals who are managers of secondary schools could either be male or female with different administrative experiences and ages. The

sex of principals is observed to be of influence on their styles of leadership. One would say that male principals are likely to be autocratic in their approach of discipline in schools while female principals being mothers would prefer the democratic styles in their approach. Fgatabu (2012) found out that principals' gender, age and experience had an effect on students' discipline. Barter (2001) has a different view. In a survey carried out on the relation between sex and styles of management, he found that male and female principals rated equal in ability and personal qualities.

The experience of principals is also important to this study. Some principals are more experienced than others based on the number of years they have spent in service as school heads. Ibukun, Oyewole and Abe (2011) found a significant relationship between principal's years of experience and their leadership effectiveness in managing students' indiscipline. It was further discovered that the more experienced a principal the better he was able to adopt an effective leadership style to manage students' indiscipline. Principals that had experience of between 5-10 years were more likely to adopt an unsuitable leadership style to manage students' indiscipline. This was because they had limited experience. Principals that had served for about 10-15 years were more experienced in applying leadership styles that effectively handle students' indiscipline. Those that had served for 25-30 years were found to have the most suitable leadership style to manage indiscipline. Uduak and Usang (2011) however found no relationship between experience of principals and management of indiscipline in schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The rate of indiscipline in public secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District is a matter of great concern. It is generating series of debates and discussions on the increasing rate of indiscipline in secondary schools. This problem needs investigation because if the rate of the indiscipline is not well managed by the school principals, it may lead to collapse of our educational system. This is because the success of teaching-learning process is dependent upon the quality of students' discipline (Mungai, 2001). The developmental trends of indiscipline in the society seem to have generally affected the standard of discipline among students in secondary schools. Indiscipline which is regarded as any act that does not conform with the societal values and norms is said to be on the increase in public secondary schools.

Indiscipline in public secondary school takes many forms depending on how it is being carried out. Indiscipline could either relate to students' academic profile, students' personal profile, students to students relationship, students and school properties or students and teachers relationship. Many researchers like Aderoumu and Ehiamentor (2005) and Aguba (2009) see indiscipline as a worrisome act that is capable of destroying an entire school system and as such must be tackled by all. However, the control of indiscipline by principals could vary by sex, age and experience which affect their leadership styles.

### **Research Questions**

To guide the study, the following questions were raised.

1. What leadership styles do principals apply in curbing students' indiscipline in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District?
2. Which styles of management of students' indiscipline do principals in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District consider most effective?



3. Does the sex of principals influence their choice of leadership style on managing students' indiscipline?
4. Does experience of principals influence their choice of leadership styles on managing students' indiscipline?

### Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference between male and female principals in their choice of leadership styles used in managing students' indiscipline.
2. There is no significant difference between more experienced and less experienced principals in their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline.

### Method and Procedure

This study is a descriptive research based on the survey research design. The survey design was chosen for the study because of its ability to observe the research variables as they occurred in their natural settings. Survey research method was suitable for the study because it enables the researchers to use a sample that captured an entire group and at the same time enables for a valid generalization.

**Population and Sample of the Study:** The population of the study is made up of one hundred and eighty-four (184) principals in 184 public secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial district as at 2011/2012 school session.

**Instrument of the Study:** The questionnaire was used for this study and was titled "Influence of Principals' Leadership Style on Managing Students' Indiscipline (IPLSMSI)". The instrument was designed by the researchers. The instrument was used to elicit information from school principals. The questionnaire was divided into Sections A, B and C. Section 'A' was used to obtain background information about the respondents' sex, age, size of school, administrative experience. Section 'B' dwelt on the students' indiscipline act and the leadership styles to handle such acts. There were sixteen items in this section which elicited information on how principals managed indiscipline. Section C covered the rating techniques by the principal of the choice of leadership styles on managing students' indiscipline. Rating scale that was used for this study was the four points rating Scale and was rated as follows: Most Effective (ME), Effective (E), Fairly Effective (FE) and Rarely Effective (RE) and were scored 4points, 3points, 2points and 1point respectively.

**Validity and Reliability of the Instrument:** The instrument was validated by two experts who were lecturers in the Department of Educational Foundations and Management. The corrections identified by them were effected and incorporated into the final draft before they were administered on the respondents. By so doing the validity of the instrument was established. The test re-test reliability method was adopted. This was done by administering copies of the instrument to 20 principals in Edo South Senatorial District. After two weeks, the same instrument was re-administered to the same principals and the two sets of scores collected were

correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to establish the reliability. The reliability coefficient was 0.89 and was very reliable.

### Administration and Method of Data Analysis

The researcher went round the public secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District to administer the instrument to the respondents. The respondents at the different schools were briefly trained on the importance of the research and the need to give honest responses. The completed copies of questionnaire were retrieved on the spot so as to ensure high rate of return. The researcher spent three months to complete the exercise and 100% return rate was recorded.

The data collected were analysed using frequencies; mean, percentage for the research questions while the hypotheses were tested with t-test statistics. For effectiveness of style of leadership, the four point scale of Most Effective (4points), Effective (3points), Fairly Effective (2points) and Rarely Effective (1point) was added and divided by 4 ( $4+3+2+1=10/4 = 2.5$ ). So the benchmark was set at 2.5. Any mean of 2.5 and above was accepted as effective while below was not effective.

### Results

The results from the analysis is presented in tables and interpreted for clarity.

**Research Question 1:** What leadership styles do principals apply in curbing students' indiscipline in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District?

**Table 1:** Leadership styles principals apply in curbing students' indiscipline in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District.

S/N	LEADERSHIP STYLES	AGREED	DISAGREED	TOTAL
1	LAISSEZ-FAIRE	125 (68%)	59 (32%)	<b>184</b>
2	DEMOCRATIC	178 (97%)	6 (3%)	<b>184</b>
3	AUTOCRATIC	143 (78%)	41 (22%)	<b>184</b>

Table 1 presented the leadership styles principals applied in curbing students' indiscipline. The above table showed that the three leadership styles listed in the study were adopted by secondary school principals in Edo North Senatorial District. One hundred and twenty-five (125) of the respondents representing 68% agreed that laissez-faire leadership was applied by the principals in abating students' indiscipline while 59 representing 32% did not. Similarly, 178 of the respondents representing 97% agreed that democratic leadership style was adopted by the principals in curbing students' indiscipline while 6 of the respondents representing 3% disagreed. In the same way, 143 of the respondents representing 78% agreed that autocratic leadership style was adopted in abating students' indiscipline and 41 of the respondents representing 22% disagreed. Sixty percent (60%) and above of the respondents stated that the three leadership styles were adopted by the principals. It can be concluded that principals apply democratic, autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles in abating students' indiscipline in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District of Nigeria.

**Research Question 2:** Which style of management of students' indiscipline do principals in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District consider most effective?

**Table 2:** Style of management of students' indiscipline by principals in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District considered most effective

S/N	LEADERSHIP STYLES	N	Mean	SD
1	LAISSEZ-FAIRE	184	6.41	1.674
2	DEMOCRATIC	184	25.97	4.353
3	AUTOCRATIC	184	6.82	1.649

This Table showed the style of management of students' indiscipline principals in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District considered most effective. Laissez-faire leadership style had mean rating of 6.41, democratic leadership style had mean rating of 25.97 while autocratic had mean rating of 6.82. The mean values showed that democratic leadership style was the most effective style used by the principals in managing students' indiscipline, followed by autocratic leadership style and laissez-faire leadership style. It was concluded therefore that democratic leadership style was considered most effective in handling students' discipline in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District of Nigeria.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference between male and female principals in their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline.

**Table 3:** Summary of t-test of sex of principals and their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline

Sex of principal	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t-cal.	Table Value	Remark
Male	86	41.12	5.662	182	-1.865	1.960	Retained Ho
Female	98	42.77	6.252				

Table 3 showed the t-test of sex of principals and their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline. The table showed that the t-calculated (-1.865) was not significant at 0.05 level of significance. This was because the calculated value of -1.865 was lower than the table value of 1.960. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. Hence, it was concluded that no significant difference existed between male and female principals in their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference between more experienced and less experienced principals in their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline.



**Table 4:** Summary of t-test of years of experience of principals and their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline

Principal years of experience	N	— X	SD	df	t-cal.	Table Value	Remark
10 years and above	102	42.30	6.296	182	0.776	1.960	Retained Ho
Less than 10 years	82	41.61	5.682				

Table 4 gave the analysis of t-test of years of experience of principals and their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline. The t-calculated value (0.776) was not significant at 0.05 level of significance. The calculated value (0.776) was lower than the table value (1.960). Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. This meant that there was no significant difference between more experienced and less experienced principals in their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline. Principals therefore did not differ in their management of students' discipline as a result of their years of experience as principals.

### Discussion

The result of this study showed that principals applied democratic, autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles in abating students' indiscipline in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District of Nigeria. This means that principals applied all the three leadership styles (democratic, autocratic and laissez-faire) in managing students' discipline in secondary schools. The reason could be that students are very difficult to handle and using only one style for them may not yield the desired result. Hence, the principal had to apply different styles depending on the circumstances and the kind of students who were involved. It could also be as result of the principals personal characteristics and attitude because some principals as leaders are autocratic and want things done their own way while some may not want to take any position at all on certain issues while others may want to be fair in their dealings with students. In this case, the leadership styles adopted depended on the kind principal and situation in that school. The result of this study supports the finding of Adeyemi (2006) who identified three Styles of leadership used by school managers in addressing disciplinary issues in schools. These were autocratic style, democratic style and laissez- faire styles. He argued that in the autocratic style of leadership, the administrator had the interest of the subordinates as secondary. On the other hand, in the democratic leadership style, the needs and interests of subordinates are given priorities or considered. In the laissez- faire leadership style on the other hand, there was the shift of authority to the group. The leader leaves a lot of initiatives and decisions to the group.

The result of this study showed that democratic leadership style is considered most effective in handling students' discipline in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District of Nigeria. The democratic style of leadership adheres to due process in administration of justice and allows dialogue to take place. In disciplining students, fair hearing is allowed and as such students have confidence in the process that cases will be justly treated and this makes it more effective than the other styles (autocratic and laissez-faire), where threats and passivity are common features respectively. The reason for this result could be that principals of schools in handling students discipline over the years may have discovered that being fair to students and

transparent earn more respect and obedience from students; no human being without a feeling and any student that is duly cautioned with dignity to his name may certainly take to the side of morality and change to good behaviour.

The result of this study also showed that there is no significant difference between male and female principals in their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline. This meant that male and female principals applied similar leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline in secondary schools. The reason for this could be that adopting any leadership style in managing students' discipline may not necessarily be based on gender difference but individual differences. The finding of this study supported the finding of Barter (2001) who in a study on the relationship between sex and styles of management, found that male and female principals rated equal in ability and personal qualities in their management styles. This means that sex of principals is not a major determinant that influences their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline in secondary schools.

This study also showed that there was no significant difference between more experienced and less experienced principals in their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline. Principals therefore do not differ in their management of students discipline as a result of their years of experience as principals. The number of years spent on the post as principal was found not to significantly influence the leadership styles adopted in managing students' discipline in secondary schools. Being democratic, autocratic or laissez-faire in one's style of leadership may not depend on the number of years in service of principals but other factors most especially individual factors and the nature of the schools environment could also play a role in this situation. This finding conformed with the finding of Uduak and Usang (2011) who found out that principals' experience did not really determine their leadership styles but school size did. The findings further revealed that as a result of this, principals heading large sized schools have more indiscipline problems to manage. Contrary to the findings of this study was that of Ibukun, Oyewole and Abe (2011) who found that there was a significant relationship between principals' years of experience and their leadership effectiveness in managing students' indiscipline.

## Conclusion

In line with the findings of this study, the following conclusions were drawn:

- a) Principals in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District adopted three leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline. These included: democratic leadership style, autocratic leadership styles and laissez-faire leadership style.
- b) The democratic leadership style was the most effective leadership style used by principals in managing students' indiscipline in secondary schools in Edo North Senatorial District.
- c) Male and female principals did not significantly differ in their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline.
- d) Principals did not differ in their choice of leadership styles in managing students' indiscipline on the basis of years of experience.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study:

1. Principals should adopt the democratic style of leadership in managing students' indiscipline in secondary schools. The study had shown that democratic leadership style is most effective in managing disciplinary issues. If principals key into this leadership pattern, disciplinary problems among students in secondary schools would be minimized.
2. Principals should ensure they are not deterred on the basis of sex and experience in the management of students' discipline since they are not impediment to effective management of disciplinary problems. If this recommendation is adhered to, it would go a long way in curbing gender insensitivity in handling disciplinary challenges as well as inferiority that may exist among less experienced teachers in the area of school discipline.
3. Parents of students must play active role in managing students' discipline in schools because charity begins at home. The role of parents especially through Parent Teachers Association (PTA) would aid in handling students' disciplinary problems. All that is required is commitment on the part of parents as responsibility of training the young ones do not rest on teachers alone but joint efforts between teachers and parents.
4. Government must empower the principals to handle effectively students' disciplinary issues in schools in order to realize secondary school goals. This will help to prevent any form of molestation from the parents or guardians of students who may be disciplined in schools.

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