

UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The problems that plagues the school system are so numerous that those who are within the educational system are so overwhelmed not to talk of outsiders who are poised to ask such a pertinent question like “are the principals leading the schools well?”. This paper examined the quality valuation among the male and female principals in their choice of leadership styles. The principals, the teachers and the student were all required to make their contributions to ascertain what style of leadership that is commonly adopted by the male on the one hand and the female principals on the other. The analysed data shows that the female principals qualitatively involve the democratic style of leadership than the men. The female principals also involve their staff in decision-making than does the male counterpart, the male principals, who adopted the democratic and the autocratic styles of leadership are quicker at the management of crises in schools than the female principals.

Keywords: *School, Principal, Leadership Styles, Gender*

1. INTRODUCTION

The position of the principal as a leader within the school cannot be overemphasized. Every person within the school system looks forward to the principals to give the appropriate leadership for others to follow. Adesina (1980) maintained that the principals are “where action is”. Leadership is commonly referred to as management – as getting others to do something.

The current happenings in school system like increased failure rate, secret cult formation, the unabated trends in examination malpractice, the principals and staff feud, academic rivalry and a spate of unwarranted transfer of teachers, the poor salary regime and lack of needed social facilities and benefits to teachers and the entire working public requires that the principal who knows how best to organized the work force to achieve the goals of the school, whether a male or female, be given the high responsibility of leading the different schools in the State.

The sex of the principal from previous experience reveals that the strength of character and dynamism is needed to achieve or reach some administrative goals. The female principals may be intimidated by the enormity of the school problems and get carried away or accept the situation as it is. After all the women are already piqued in a war of words with men regarding their right denial and marginalization in the scheme of things within the school system.

The great awareness among the children, the parents and the shrinking in size of the world as a global village owing to much improvement in international communication requires the school leaders both male and female to wake up because it is not the time to play to the gallery on the basis of gender factor. The teacher would definitely share part of the blames for the so called “falling standards of education”, even though the falling in standards of education is still being debated as to whether it is a real or a myth.

The study is a contribution along this line for it tries to find out the differential that exists between the male and female principals of qualitative valuation and principal choice of leadership styles and application in the management of staff and the students in general in Rivers State. The amount of money the State “is committing to the education” of our children at this level is much, and much more will continue to be so committed to that and other levels. The secondary education is such an important aspects, to the youth that cannot and should never be sidelined for any reasons. The moment it is known among educationists, who among the male and female principals chooses the right type of style for the management of the schools, a vital discovery would have been made. This type of quality valuation among the female and male principals will definitely help future managers of the schools. This is what underscores the importance of this study.

2. THE HEART OF THE MATTER

There exists a number of literature on what roles the principal should play in the leadership of the school. In playing some given roles, the male or female principal’s ability to make a qualitative value judgement and their need disposition will enable them choose the right style of leadership to achieve the needed goals (Getzel and Guba’s 1957) and Lipham and Hoeh, 1974) notes that there are still some degree of disagreement on the boundaries of the main roles of the principals. The principal functional areas, when the appropriate valuation of the right leadership style is to be used to give effective leadership are:

- A. - Instructional programme supervision
- B. - Staff personnel administration
- C. - Student personnel administration
- D. - Financial and physical resources and administration

E. - School community relationships administration

Many studies have been carried out that acknowledged the leadership position of the school principal in recent years. Fafunwa(1971) recognized that the principal is the overall administrator of the school, the supervision of staff, students, the curriculum planner and the community relation developer. The types of leadership adopted by the teacher along the line to achieve these several goals within matters to a large extent.

The high rate of failure in school certificate examinations yearly, the unexpected proliferation in examination misdemeanour and cheating, secret cult formation among teenagers, and unparalleled wanton destruction of life and properties of colleagues in schools, the intolerable fight between the principals and teachers on the one hand and the students and teachers on the other has made (Soli and Deveine, 1976) to cast aspersion on the leadership roles of the principals.

Ejiogu (1990) studied on male and female principals of Imo and Anambra States; it was found that the female principals were more of the initiating structure than their male counterpart. Cambel (1971) in his pioneer study of secondary school principals in the United States also reported leadership style differences along the lines of sex-role socialization orientation. The findings revealed that most of the female principals were reported to be autocratic.

The position taken by another researcher like McKinney (1975), has shown that the female principals are better administrators than their male counterparts whoa re described as more chauvinistic and authoritarian in the various roles in the secondary school administration. The study is, therefore, keenly interested in placing in perspective the following questions:

- The extent to which the male and female principals differ in their adoption of leadership styles in secondary schools in Rivers State.
- The extent to which the male and female principals differ in their involvement of their staff in decision-making in their schools.
- The extent of difference between male and female principals ability to use the right styles of leadership to manage crises in secondary schools.
- The extent to which differences exist between male and female principals emphasis on the use of appropriate leadership styles to achieve curriculum and co-curriculum goals of the schools.

3. METHOD

The stratified random sampling technique was used to obtain the sample of 14 principals; that took care of the seven male and female principal headed schools, the 24 vice-principals, the 56 heads of department and teachers who have spent nothing less that 6 years in their schools. The choice of the 120 senior secondary students who had been in the schools for a period of 6 years was so stratified to ensure that the students contribution was not faked in any way. The principals, the

teachers and the students were all made to respond to the sole instrument of the study.

The instrument used for this study was the Principal Leadership Style Adoption and Usage Questionnaire (PLSAUQ). This 24-item questionnaire was in five main sections including the personal data of the respondents. The instrument addressed issues related to the principal adoption of leadership styles, owing to his value for its importance, involvement of the staff in decision-making, management of cases and adoption of most valuable leadership styles to achieve the curriculum and extra curricular goals of the schools. The reliability of the instrument, based on the test-retest method, that involved Pearson product moment – correlation formula was $r = 0.81$. The test of stability and consistency was therefore compared, when the coefficient of r was compared with the fishers transformation of $(Z_n - Z_r)$ table score. The respondents were required to respond to the items of the instrument wanting to know how the principals involved the three leadership styles of *democracy*, *autocracy* and *laissez faire*. The response categories were “Always”, “Often”, “Occasionally”, “Seldom” and “Never”. Each response was weighted accordingly with value from “Always” = 4 to “Never” = 0. On collection of the data simple frequency counts based on their responses and as weighted were analysed in percentages.

4. RESULTS

The following results presented in the tables 1 – 4 clearly show how the different respondents, that is the students, the teachers, the vice principals and the principals have seen these principals in this part of the country choose and apply their leadership styles for the control and management of their various institutions.

Table 1, shows how the different respondent see the principal’s valuable choice of leadership styles separately and collectively. The table shows that the female principals are more democratic with 41 percent than their male counterpart with 40 percent. The data analysis equally reveals that the male principal uses autocratic style of leadership more than the female principal with a percentage of 2, as reflected in a bracket. It can be seen also that the female principals with 5% chose to use the Laissez faire style of leadership than their male counterpart with just 2 percent.

Table 2 has shown again that the principals are more democratic than being autocratic or involving the laissez faire style. The total summation in the table shows that while 51 percent of the female rapidly delegate the decision making in school. More respondents were in agreement that principals adopt the democratic style of leadership as 91% of the principals were said to involve their staff in school decision-making. Some also agree that 8% of the laissez faire choosing principals involve their staff in decision-making.

Table 3 shows the difference between the male and female principals’ ability to manage crises situations in the schools. Some 31% of male principals involving

the democratic leadership and 24 percent of the female principals the same democratic style are rated as being able to manage crises situation. It is rather interesting to note that it is also shown on the table that 26 percent of the male principals and 9 percent of the female principals involving the autocratic strategy are able to control and manage crises situations in schools. In general 55% of the principals that involve the democratic style of leadership and some 35% of those principals involving the autocratic style of leadership were said to have been successful in managing crises in their schools.

Table 4 shows how the different principals valuably chose the leadership styles with which they emphasize the achievement of goals of their schools. There was no perceptible difference seen between the male and female principals using the democratic style of leadership. The only area of difference was noted was with their assessment under those who adopted the laissez faire was 6% male and 10% female were said to be concerned with the use of the appropriate type of leadership style for goals achievement.

Nevertheless, as many as 79% of those using the democratic type of leadership, 5% of those who are pro-autocratic leadership style and 16% of those with laissez faire inclination are concerned with the use of the most valuable styles of leadership for the achievement of goals.

5. FINDINGS

The finding in this study has shown that the female principals are more democratic in their choice of leadership style to sue than their male counterpart. The findings quite agree with the findings of McKinney (1975). This in the main, makes the appointment of female principals into municipal secondary schools, where highly qualified and politically aware teachers a sine-qua-non.

Unfortunately, this study has equally shown that some female principals are often more autocratic in their choice of leadership than their male counterpart. This findings is however at variance with what (McKinney, 1975) described in male principals as more chauvinistic and authoritarian in the various roles in the secondary school administration. In recent years with the women now taking the roles of men and with the "spirit of women liberation programme", women tend to be over-assertive about their positions in administration. Often their much orchestrated campaign and propaganda is targeted at the men folk they regard as the enemy that sideline them in control positions. This study, finding that women who now blend both democratic and autocratic styles of leadership is a proper step in the right direction. This is highly needed to achieve the much-needed peace in any school environment.

This study has also shown us that the female principals are equally more prone to the laissez faire style of leadership than male principals are. This does not show a qualitative valuation of leadership style before choosing one. The frequent resort to the laissez faire style of leadership often borne out of laziness on the part

of the personnel in the position of leadership. It is this type of situation that may have led (Soli and Deveine 1976) to cast some aspersion on the leadership roles of the principals.

The fact that the female principals had come out very strong when they show that they qualitatively value the use of the democratic and autocratic styles of leadership, makes this study very unique. This would have put the women fold far ahead of the men in quality valuation of leadership styles. But it has again been shown in this study that the female principals resort to the use of the laissez faire style of leadership than their male counterpart, shows that female principal are nevertheless more superior to the male principals in quality valuation and choice of leadership styles in the management of schools in Rivers State.

The female principals are shown in the study to involve the teachers more in decision making than their male counterpart. This shows that the women are more democratic in their choice of style of leadership than the male counterpart. The laissez faire style adopting principals are equally involving their staff in decision making. This situation is found to be very common with the female principals than the male principals. This is a minus point on the part of the female principals.

The male principals were found to be more tactical with the use of the democratic style of leadership to arrest the crises situation than their female principals. More men principals who are prone to autocratic leadership style manage crises than the female counterpart.

Again, there was no much difference observed between the male and female principals in their choice of leadership styles to achieve the main goals of their schools. Their use of the democratic style of leadership more than the autocratic and laissez faire style may have accounted for this. Once the system is used to one main dominant style of leadership, the leaders can hardly change to autocratic or laissez faire style over night.

6. CONCLUSION

The male and female principals were found to involve more of the democratic style of leadership than the autocratic and the laissez faire style of leadership. Given the fact that different principals face difference situations in their places of administration daily, it will not be out of place to proffer these suggestions.

The principals should though a most researched procedure adopt the most valuable leadership style in their schools. The situations that require management decisions in the school are many. It is not what happens today that is expected the next day. Therefore given the circumstances in the school the principals should be tactful in using a blend of the leadership styles.

The democratic style of leadership is highly praised as the best style because it involves consultation with other staff and a general involvement of all in the processes of decision-making. The moment the staff of the school feel a sense of

belongingness, they will be willing to contribute their best towards the achievement of the goals of the organisation.

The leaders out of wisdom must under-study the different styles of leadership, so that they can adopt the most appropriate method at the most ripe situation. This is what makes the real stuff of an administrator. Rigidity to one particular style of leadership has no place in the leadership of a tried and tested leader in the school.

This paper is not objecting the autocratic and laissez faire style of leadership, but it is rather highly recommending the most school principals should be more tutored and oriented towards the democratic ideals in leadership in their schools for fast goals achievement and the involvement of the higher percentage of their personnel in active and efficient participation.

If it is possible, the school leaders should be involved in some training and retraining of refresher courses in order to give them more information along these new research findings that are very important to contemporary society.

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Table 1: The Percentage Difference in Male and Female Principals' Choice of Leadership Styles in Rivers State

Group	No of Resp.	Principals Sex	Democrat ic Leadership Resp.	% Respons	Autocrat ic Leadership Resp.	% Respons	Laissez Faire Resp.	% Respon
Student	120	M	50	(42)	8	(7)	-	-
		F	60	(50)	-	-	2	(2)
Teacher	60	M	22	(37)	10	(17)	3	(5)
		F	14	(23)	4	(7)	7	(12)
Principa	14	M	6	(42)	1	(7)	-	-
		F	6	(42)	-	-	1	(7)
Total	194	M	78	(40)	19	(10)	3	(2)
		F	80	(41)	4	(2)	10	(5)
<i>Grand Total</i>	194		154	81%	23	12%	13	7%

Table 2: The Percentage Involvement of the Staff in Decision making by Male and Female Principals

Respond in the Group	Numb er of Resp.	Principa ls Sex	Democrat ic Leadership Resp.	% Respo nse	Autocrat ic Leadershi p Resp.	% Respon se	Laisse z faire Resp.	% Respo nse
Student s	120	M	48	(40)	-	-	6	(5)
		F	63	(53)	-	-	3	(3)
Teacher s	60	M	25	(41)	-	-	-	-
		F	30	(50)	-	-	5	(8)
Principa ls	14	M	5	(35)	-	-	2	(14)
		F	6	(43)	1	(1)	-	-

Total	194	M	79	(40)	-	-	8	(4)
		F	99	51)	1	(1)	8	(4)
<i>Grand Total</i>	194		177	91%	1	1%	16	8%

Table 3: The Percentage Difference in Male and Female Principals in management of Crises Situation

Respond in the Group	Number of Resp.	Principals Sex	Democratic Leadership Resp.	% Response	Autocratic Leadership Resp.	% Response	Laissez faire Resp.	% Response
Students	120	M	38	(32)	20	(17)	-	-
		F	32	(27)	10	(8)	-	-
Teachers	60	M	18	(30)	24	(40)	-	-
		F	12	(20)	6	(10)	-	-
Principals	14	M	5	(36)	6	(43)	-	-
		F	2	(14)	1	(7)	-	-
Total	194	M	61	(31)	50	(26)	-	-
		F	46	(24)	17	(9)	-	-
<i>Grand Total</i>	194		107	55%	67	35%	-	-

Table 4: The Percentage Difference between Male and Female Principals emphasis on Goals Achievement based on Right Leadership styles

Respond in	Number	Principals	Democratic	% Resp	Autocratic Leadership	% Resp	Laissez faire	% Resp
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the Group	of Resp.	Is Sex	Leadership Resp.	onse	Resp.	onse	Resp.	onse
Students	120	M	52	(43)	7	(6)	9	(8)
		F	42	(35)	-	-	10	(8)
Teachers	60	M	20	(33)	-	-	-	-
		F	30	(50)	-	-	10	(17)
Principals	14	M	5	(36)	-	-	2	(14)
		F	4	(29)	3	(20)	-	-
Total	194	M	77	(40)	7	(4)	11	(6)
		F	76	(39)	3	(2)	20	(10)
<i>Grand Total</i>	194		153	79%	10	5%	31	16%

Key:

M = Male Principal

F = Female Principal

(*) = Percentage Response