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## Principals' Leadership Styles and Student Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

This paper examined principals' leadership style and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. It was a correlational research by design. The study population comprised all the 175 secondary schools in the State. Out of these, a sample of 140 secondary schools were selected through the simple random sampling technique. Out of the 7,284 teachers' in the schools, 2,560 teachers were selected for the study through the stratified random sampling technique. Two instruments were used to collect data for the study. These were a questionnaire and an inventory. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. It was found that the democratic style of leadership was the prevalent leadership style used by school principals in the State. The autocratic leadership style was found to be significantly related with students' academic performance. It was recommended that principals should endeavour to use the autocratic leadership style in enhancing better academic performance of students in their schools.

**Keywords:** Principals' Leadership Styles and Student Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria

### Introduction

Leadership in any organization implies the action and interaction with persons and things with a view to attain a specific objective. It is the ability to plan, control, direct and co-ordinate the activities of school involving both human and material resources for the achievement of

school goals (Adenounmu, 1986). It is a process through which persons or groups intentionally influence others in the attainment of group goals.

Leadership is generally defined as the art or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly toward the achievement of objectives. This concept can be enlarged to involve not only the willingness to work but also the willingness to work with zeal and confidence. It is the functional behaviour of a leader in relation with subordinates to facilitate the accomplishment of group goals.

In this regard, leadership is the ability to get things done with the assistance and co-operation of other people within the Institution. Adeyemi (2004) supported those views and remarked that leadership involves a guide that directs activities of individuals in a given direction in order to achieve the goals of the organization.

These views were however contrary to the arguments made by Ibukun (1997) who defined leadership as a projected feeling from one individual (the leader) towards others (followers) for the purpose of realizing group objectives.

In this regard, leadership could be seen as the process of influencing the activities of an organization toward goal setting and goal achievement. As such, it must be stressed that any meaningful and useful definition of leadership must contain some elements such as a group to be led which must have a set of laid down objectives, there must be conscious attempts to influence the behaviour of others within the group and there must be willingness of subordinates to carry out the action (Akerle, 2007).

Adeyemi (2004) identify 3 types of leadership styles used in Nigerian schools. These are the autocratic, democratic and laissez faire leadership styles. He argued that the autocratic leader is an authoritarian. He directs group members on the way things should be done. He also gives orders which are to be obeyed whether or not the members of staff have initiatives. All powers are concentrated in his hand such that when he is away, it would be difficult for the staff to know what to do. Power and decision-making reside in the autocratic leader.

On the other hand, the democratic style of leadership emphasizes group and leader participation in the making of policies. Decisions about organizational matters are arrived at after consultation and communication with various people in the organization. The leader attempts as much as possible to make each individual feel that he is an important member of the organization. Communication is multidirectional while ideas are exchanged between employees and the leader (Okeniyi, 1995; Adeyemi, 2007).

Contrary to these leadership styles, the laissez-faire leadership style is the kind of leadership that makes provisions for the individual to have dominant roles in decision-making and in the exercise of power. The style allows complete freedom to group decision without the leader's participation. Thus, subordinates are free to do what they like. The role of the leader is just to supply materials. The leader does not interfere with or participate in the course of events determined by the group. It is thus, a weak style of leadership as it leads to no meaningful progress within an organization (Obilade, 1998; Ogunsanwo, 2000).

The term 'academic performance' has been described as the scholastic standing of a student at a given moment. It refers to how an individual is able to demonstrate his or her intellectual abilities. This scholastic standing could be explained as the grades obtained in a course or groups of courses taken (Daniels and Schouten, 1970, Owoyemi, 2000). Simkins (1981)

commented on the scholastic standing of students and argued that performance is a measure of output and that the main outputs in education are expressed in terms of learning, that is, changes in knowledge, skills and attitudes of individuals as a result of their experiences within the school's system. Thus, in determining academic performance, Daniels and Schouten (1970) emphasized the use of grades in examinations and reported that grades could serve as prediction measures and as criterion measures. Findings made by Al-Shorayye (1995) and Adeyemi (1998) led credence to this point.

Academic performance therefore is largely identified by a range of statistical indicators. STAN, (1992) supported this argument and reported that performance is the level of attainment of a person in an examination, that is, how an individual is able to demonstrate his or her abilities in an examination. Performance has been regarded as a measure of educational output (Adeyemi, 2006). This fact buttress Obemeata's (1992) argument that the performance of students in public examinations in many Nigerian schools has been poor as a result of shortage of teachers, inadequate funding of schools and the broad secondary school curriculum. Supporting these findings, Animashaun (1992) expressed that this poor performance of students has been a great concern.

Omotoso (1992) attributed the causes of dwindling performance of students in Nigerian schools to the poor financial position of government which has made the funding of schools inadequate. This situation has placed a greater burden on the Parents Teachers Associations which is saddled with the funding of most capital projects in schools.

The introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme by the federal government of Nigeria in 1986 has led to the rising cost of textbooks and stationery in Nigeria. Hence, the running grants to schools were often delayed and grossly inadequate in view of the rising cost of living (Ige, 2001). Ibukun (1990) supported this view and reiterated that poor training of teachers, lack of textbooks and inadequate facilities often lead to poor educational results. As a result, he asserted that the educational system in Ondo State, Nigeria is being seriously challenged, as there appears to be truth in the opinion of many people that the standard of the enterprise is falling in the State.

Commenting on the inadequacy of physical facilities in schools, Animola (1990) remarked that there were over-crowded classrooms especially in urban schools and the absence of laboratory facilities in many schools thereby inhibiting effective teaching and learning processes. This situation tends to have adverse effect on students academic performance in schools.

Towards this end, Adeyemi, (1998) conducted a study on schools and teacher variables associated with students' academic performance in Ondo State secondary schools and found that students' performance in the major subject of the school curriculum was at a low level. Similar findings were made by other researchers (Aghenta, 2000; Ige, 2001).

It needs to be mention, however, that the pattern of scoring in the senior secondary certificate examinations was such that: A1 to C6 are credit grades. As such, students are required to obtain credit grades in 5 subjects including English Language in order to qualify for admissions into higher institutions in Nigeria (WAEC, 2010).

In this regard, the purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between principals' leadership styles and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti

State, Nigeria in order to correct erroneous impressions. The study was delimited to only public secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria and students' academic performance in senior secondary certificate examinations (SSCE) conducted by the West African Examination council.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The dwindling performance of students of secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria in senior secondary certificate examinations in core subject of the school curriculum such as English, Mathematics and Sciences has been a major concern to stake holders in education (Ige, 2001; Ekiti State Ministry of Education, 2010). Many reasons might have accounted for this. Among this was perhaps the observed style of leadership used by school principals. The problem of this study therefore was to determine what relationship exists between principals' leadership style and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria? In addressing this problem, the following questions were raised.

1. What is the prevalent leadership style used by principals of secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria?
2. What is the level of students' academic performance in the schools?
3. Is there any relationship between principals' autocratic leadership style and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria?
4. Is there any relationship between principals' democratic leadership style and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria?
5. Is there any relationship between principals' laissez faire leadership style and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria?

### **Method**

The descriptive research design of the survey type and the ex-post facto design were adopted in this study. A descriptive survey is a form of planned collection of data from a large population for the purpose of analyzing the relationships between variables (Oppenheim, 1992). An ex-post facto research is an after fact or after event research (Gay, 1996).

The study population comprised all the 175 public secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Out of this, a sample of 140 secondary schools was taken and selected through the simple random sampling technique. Out of the 7,284 teachers including principals in the schools, 2,560 teachers including principals were selected for the study. The method of selection was by stratified random sampling technique. The 2,560 teachers including principals were the respondents in the study.

Two instruments were used to collect data for the study. These were the principals' leadership style questionnaire (PLSQ) and the students' academic performance inventory (SAPI). The principals' leadership style questionnaire was in two parts A and B. Part A elicited demographic information about each school such as the name of the school, its location, number of students, number of classes and number of teachers. Part B requested information about the prevalent leadership style used by principal in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

The students' academic performance inventory was also in two parts. Part A was demographic. It elicited information on the bio data about each school such as the name of the school, its location, number of students, number of classes and number of teachers. Part B

required data on students' academic performance in the senior secondary certificate examinations for 5 years (2008-2012) in 5 major subjects in the school curriculum namely English language, Mathematics, physics, Chemistry and Biology.

The phase and content validity of the instruments were determined by experts in test and measurement. In determining the phase validity of the instruments, the structure, layout, sequence, alignment and configuration of the questionnaire were examined. In conducting the content validity of the instruments, items of the questionnaire were matched to the research questions in order to determine whether or not the instruments actually measured what they were supposed to measure. The observations made by the expert were used to effect necessary corrections to the instruments.

The reliability of the instruments was determined using the test-retest reliability technique. Only the questionnaire was subjected to the test of reliability. The inventory was not subjected to reliability test. This is because the data collected through the inventory were already in the schools as the study was also an after event research. In conducting the test re-test reliability for the questionnaire, the instruments were administered to 40 respondents drawn from 20 schools outside the study area. After a period of two weeks, the instruments were re-administered to the same respondents. The data collected on the two tests were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis. A correlation coefficient 'r' of 0.87 was obtained indicating that the instrument was reliable and consistent for the study.

The instruments were administered to the respondents by the researcher and research assistant. After a period of two weeks, the completed instruments were retrieved from the respondents. All the respondents duly completed the instrument indicating 100 response rate.

The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The null hypotheses were tested for significance at 0.05 alpha level.

## Result

### Question 1: What is the prevalent leadership style used by principals of secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria?

In answering this question, data on the prevalent leadership style used by principals' of secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria were collected from the responses of the respondents to items of the principals' leadership style questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The findings are shown in table 1.

**Table 1: Leadership Styles Commonly Used by Principals of Secondary Schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria.**

Leadership Styles	N	Prevalent Leadership Style	Percentage
Autocratic	2,560	1,040	40.6
Democratic	2,560	1,262	49.3
Laissez-faire	2,560	258	10.1

In table 1, the democratic leadership style had the largest number of responses. Out of the 2,560 teachers who responded to the instrument, 1,262 (49.3%) claimed that the democratic leadership style was the prevalent leadership style used by principals' of secondary schools in the State. Although, some of the principals (40.6%) were using the autocratic style of leadership in their schools, evidences from the findings of the study indicated that the bulk of the principals of secondary schools in the State were using the democratic style of leadership.

**Question 2: What is the level of students' academic performance in the schools?**

In answering this question, the grades obtained by students in 5 core subjects of secondary school curriculum namely English Language, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and biology in Senior Secondary Certificate (SSC) examinations in Ekiti State, Nigeria from 2008 to 2012 were collected from the principals of each of the schools using the inventory. In computing performance, the frequency counts of the number of students who obtained credit grades 1 to 6 in each subject in the examinations were transformed from discrete data into continuous data through secondary analysis (Adeyemi, 2008). The weighted average performance was computed using the following formula:

$$P = \frac{n_1A_1 + n_2A_2 + n_3A_3 + n_4C_4 + n_5C_5 + n_6C_6}{N}$$

**Where:**

P = Performance

n1, n2 ...n6 = Number of times each grade occurs.

A1, A2, ...C6 = Numeric weights of each grade.

N = Number of students registered

The performance level of students in the senior secondary certificate examinations in the State are indicated in table 2.

**Table 2: Performance Level of Students in the SSC Examinations in Ekiti State, Nigeria**

Years	English language	Mathematics	Physics	Chemistry	Biology
	%	%	%	%	%
2008	6	11	9	18	35
2009	5	15	26	21	20
2010	6	12	20	25	19
2011	7	14	19	27	18
2012	10	17	20	28	26

As indicated in table 2, the performance of students in all the subject was found to be at a low level in each of the years of study. There was no particular year where the performance level of students in each of the subject reached 50%.

**Question 3: Is there any relationship between principals' autocratic leadership style and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria?**

In answering this question, the following hypothesis was raised.

**Ho: There is no significant relationship between principals’ autocratic leadership style and students’ academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria.**

In testing this hypothesis, data on principals’ autocratic leadership style were collected from the responses of the respondents to items of the principals’ leadership style questionnaire. Data on students’ academic performance were collected from the responses of the principals of schools to items of the students’ academic performance inventory. The data collected were analyzed using frequency count, percentages and the mean while the hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The findings are presented in table 3.

**Table 3: Correlation between Principals’ Autocratic Leadership Style and Students’ Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria.**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	r-calculated	r-table
Principals’ Autocratic Leadership Style	140	89.72	27.14	5,118	0.512	0.195
Students’ Academic Performance	140	47.15	20.41			

P<0.05

As indicated in table 3, the r-calculated 0.512 was greater than the r-table 0.195 at 0.05 alpha level. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This shows that there was a significant relationship between principals’ autocratic leadership style and students’ academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The findings suggest that the more autocratic a principal is the better the performance of students in the Senior Secondary Certificate examinations.

**Question 4: Is there any relationship between principals’ democratic leadership style and students’ academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria?**

In answering this question, the following hypothesis was raised.

**Ho: There is no significant relationship between principals’ democratic leadership style and students’ academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria.**

In testing this hypothesis, data on principals’ democratic leadership style were collected from the responses of the respondents to items of the principals’ leadership style questionnaire. Data on students’ academic performance were collected from the responses of the principals of schools to items of the students’ academic performance inventory. The data collected were analyzed using frequency count, percentages and the mean while the hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The findings are presented in table 4.



**Table 4: Correlation between Principals’ Democratic Leadership Style and Students’ Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria.**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	r-calculated	r-table
Principals’ Democratic Leadership Style	140	78.61	20.12	5,118	0.342	0.195
Students’ Academic Performance	140	38.42	17.81			

$P < 0.05$

In table 4, the r-calculated 0.342 was greater than the r-table 0.195 at 0.05 alpha level. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This shows that there was a significant relationship between principals’ democratic leadership style and students’ academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

**Question 5: Is there any relationship between principals’ laissez faire leadership style and students’ academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria?**

In answering this question, the following hypothesis was formulated.

**Ho: There is no significant relationship between principals’ laissez faire leadership style and students’ academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria**

Testing this hypothesis, data on principals’ laissez-faire leadership style were collected from the responses of the respondents to items of the principals’ leadership style questionnaire. Data on students’ academic performance were collected from the responses of the principals of schools to items of the students’ academic performance inventory. The data collected were analyzed using frequency count, percentages and the mean while the hypothesis was tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Table 5 shows the findings.

**Table 5: Correlation between Principals’ Laissez-faire Leadership Style and Students’ Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria.**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	df	r-calculated	r-table
Principals’ laissez-faire Leadership Style	140	31.58	13.47	5,118	0.187	0.195
Students’ academic performance	140	19.72	11.21			

$p > 0.05$

In table 5, the  $r$ -calculated 0.187 was less than the  $r$ -table 0.195 at 0.05 alpha level. As such, the null hypothesis was accepted. This indicates that there was no significant relationship between principals' laissez-faire leadership style and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

### Discussion

The foregoing shows the analysis of data collected for this study. In the analysis, several findings were made. The principals' democratic leadership style was the most prevalent leadership style used by school principals' in the State. This finding was consistent with the findings of previous researchers (Nias, 1994; Ademilua, 1999).

The poor academic performance found in this study among students of secondary schools' in the State in core subject of the school curriculum implies that effective teaching has not taking place in the schools. This finding was consistency with the findings made in earlier studies (Smylie & Jack, 1990; Omotoso 1992; Ige, 2001).

The significant relationship found in this study between principals' autocratic leadership style and students' academic performance suggest that the more autocratic a principal is, the better the academic performance of students in the schools. This suggests that principals of schools need to be authoritative in order to achieve results. It further explains the fact that students need to be coerced in order to make them perform effectively. The finding was in consonance with the findings made by Adeyemi, (2011) who found that people perform better under the autocratic leadership style. The finding was, however, variance with the findings of earlier researchers (Evan, 1998; Akerele, 2007).

The significant relationship found between principals' democratic leadership style and students' academic performance suggest that the more democratic a principal is in his or her leadership style the better the academic performance of students in the schools. The finding was in agreement with the findings made by Akerele, (2007) who found significant relationship between principals' democratic leadership style and students' academic performance in secondary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria.

The non-significant relationship found in this study between principals' laissez-faire leadership style and students' academic performance implies that there was no concurrence between them. This finding suggests that principals' laissez-faire leadership style had no significant relationship with students' academic performance. The finding was consistent with the findings made in previous studies (Goldring & Sharon, 1993; Liberman, Beverly & Alexander, 1994).

### Conclusion

Considering the findings of this study, it was concluded that principals' autocratic style of leadership was a vital variable in students' academic performance in secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Evidences from the findings of the study have led the researchers to conclude that students' academic performance in the schools was a function of the style of leadership used by principals of school.

### Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that the autocratic style of leadership should be used by principals' of secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria in effecting better academic performance among students. This was evident in the findings of this study which isolated the autocratic leadership style as the best leadership style that could enhance better academic performance among students in the schools.

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