

# **PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP FUNCTIONS AND CHALLENGES IN PUBLIC SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

Leadership has become more complex than ever before. This is as a result of the complexity of present social, economic, political, industrial and above all fast technological advancement. Studies on efficient and effective leadership in educational sector have continued to emphasize the important functions school principals play in establishing and sustaining education in Nigerian schools. It is on this premise that this paper examined the principals' leadership functions and challenges in public senior secondary schools in Nigeria. The meaning of education and leadership were examined. Functions of school principal such as planning, funding, record keeping, reporting and supervision were critically looked at. Teachers' attitude, parents' demand, inadequate resources, funding issue, and teachers' training constitute the challenges that are associated with principal leadership functions. The study concluded that the importance of principals in senior secondary schools cannot be underestimated; hence effective leadership is needed to implement the school curriculum. Based on the foregoing, principals need to ensure that teachers are involved in school decision making and regular meeting with them are held to review their policies and practices in line to meeting the goals and objectives of the school.

**Keywords:** School Principal, Leadership, Challenges, Secondary School, Nigeria

## **Introduction**

Globally, education is seen as the bedrock of any nation because of the significant role it plays in national development. It has been recognized as the sword with which any country could use to conquer poverty, ignorance and simultaneously win prosperity in terms of economic buoyancy, political transformation, social advancement and civilization (Ahmed,

2016; Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Chandolia & Anastasiou, 2020; Duze, 2012). As such, the importance of making it more effective has become paramount in the minds of well-meaning scholars. Then, for education to actually achieve its goals, principals' leadership behavior cannot be put aside with a wave of hand as it has a vital role to play on school effectiveness

(Ajayi, 2020; Hess, 2013; Ige, 2013; Kulkami, 2013; Ogbonaya, 2009).

As contained in the National Policy on Education, senior secondary education is the type of education received by children within the age of 14-18 years. Senior secondary education is the third level of educational system received after junior secondary school. The major aim of secondary education in Nigeria as stated in the National Policy on Education (2013) section 221(19) are two-fold- preparation for useful living within the society and preparation for higher education. In terms of the management of the senior secondary school, two key things are involved for school principal as the leader. They include human (teaching and non-teaching staff) and material resources (teaching and learning materials). It is the combined force of their activities which determine the success or otherwise of the school system. A good measure of success may be achieved in the hands of a dedicated school principal and a hardworking and resourceful teacher being the twin key needed factors apart from material resources for the effective administration of schools.

For goals of secondary education to be achieved through implementation of the education curriculum, efficient and effective leadership are expected to be provided by the school principals who are saddled with the responsibility of managing resources that are allocated to their schools. That is why scholars in the field of management have viewed leadership as a realistic skill that entails the ability of an individual to direct

or guide employees in organizations. It is equally a process by which an executive direct, guide and influence the behavior and work of others towards accomplishment of specific goals in a given situation (Akomolafe and Adesua, 2016; Chemers, 2010; Mestry, 2017; Rowitz, 2014). Risch (2012) is of the view that leadership is the ability of a manager to induce the subordinates to work with confidence and zeal. It is the potential to influence behaviour of others. Leaders have the capacity to influence a group towards the realization of a goal, and are required to develop future visions, and to motivate the organizational members to want to achieve the vision.

Abdullahi and Wan-Zahari (2015) opined that leadership is creativity in action because it is the ability to see the present in terms of the future while maintaining respect for the past. Leadership is based on respect for history and the knowledge that true growth builds on existing strengths. Leading is in part a visionary endeavor, but it requires the fortitude and flexibility necessary to put vision into action and the ability to work with others and to follow when someone else is the better leader. Leaders also need resilience to function in normal and not-so-normal times. Ijaiya (2019) observed that school principals are faced with multidimensional tasks in ensuring effective implementation of education policies. These tasks are not assisting effective teaching and learning processes. The duties of today's school leader is far cry from what was obtained years ago this is due to technological advancement.

It is often said that the principal as school leader occupies a unique and strategic position in the secondary school administrative structure. It is on this premise that this study examined principals' leadership functions and challenges in public senior secondary schools in Nigeria.

### **Concept of Education**

For us to fully appreciate the importance of educational leadership and its role, it would be necessary to examine what education is. The concept of education has received considerable attention from educationists since the days of the sages like Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Dewey, etc. But one common characteristics of education, whether traditional or western, is change. From birth to adulthood, man continues to grow physically, mentally and socially. The role of education and thus schools in any society is to pilot or guide that growth/change to positive ends. Education has three major components which must be balanced namely Knowledge, Skills and Character (KSC). They complement each other. Knowledge takes care of the subject matter; skills include language, critical thinking, and technical/practical as well as digital skills. Character is about moral development and acquisition of core values (Adebiy, Adebiyi, Daramola & Seyi-Oderinde, 2019; Ijaiya, 2019; Zulu, Bhengu & Mkhize, 2019).

The society perceives education as a way of changing individual's life, provide good life, give better exposure, improve people's experience and receptiveness to new ideas, knowledge, concepts, value and custom.

Quality education for societal development encompasses teaching and learning of knowledge, proper product and technical competency. It also focuses on the cultivation of skills, trades or professions as well as mental, moral and aesthetic development". The school as a social institution transmits all these to humanity so that things can be done in an orderly manner (Briggs, 2010; Brown & Wel, 2019; Hamiza & Francis, 2020).

Education is therefore a progressive process by which education leaders pilot the learners to acquire knowledge, skills and core values that would make them *positively* useful to themselves and the society. The pertinent question is - has education always been successful in achieving that end? There is no doubt that the world has advanced even more rapidly than envisaged in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with the development of ICT in particular turning the complex world into one massive inter-connected 'village'. Education is also benefitting rapidly through knowledge sharing. But on the other hand is the increase in crime rates such as digital fraud, among others perpetrated by beneficiaries of education. Who is to blame, education or its leadership or the learners (Ijaiya, 2019). Adeyemi and Adeyemi (2014) attributed that the development of any nation is hinged on solid educational foundation of its citizens and this also suggest that education is a means of effecting changes in the society in order to build a well- developed nation.

### **Senior Secondary Education in Nigeria**

Senior Secondary school is the education given to children within the age of 14-18

years. This set of education is the third level of educational system and it is the link between junior secondary school and tertiary institution. The major aim of secondary education in Nigeria as stated in the National Policy on Education (2013) are two-fold- preparation for useful living within the society and preparation for higher education. Specifically, the objectives of secondary school education include: provide the opportunity for primary school leaver to have higher education, diversified curriculum to cater for different talent, foster national unity, inspire students' desire for self-improvement and achievement, provide vocational and technical manpower in area of commerce, industry, agriculture etc, develop and promote Nigeria language, Art and Culture, raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appropriate those values specified under our national broad goals and live as good citizen (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

In terms of the management of the school organization, two key persons are involved, they are the school head and the teachers. Students spend six years in Secondary School that is 3 years of JSS (Junior Secondary School), and 3 years of SSS (Senior Secondary School). The Senior Secondary School ends on the West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination. Junior Secondary School is free and compulsory. It leads to the Basic Education Certificate Examination, which qualifies students to be admitted to Senior Secondary School. Sound secondary education will not only prevent, reduce if

not totally eradicate poverty and insecurity in the country but also built needed future leaders that would champion the cause of good governance right from the grass root to the national level of governance in Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

### **The Concept of Leadership**

Leadership is a dynamic process whereby one man influences other to contribute voluntarily to the realization and attainment of the objectives towards the common goal. Aspiration, values of the group that is representing the essence of leadership is to help a group or an organization to attain sustainable development and growth. Malik, Saleem and Naeem. (2016) opined that leadership brings in the required change to influence learning and development of required skills, performance and creates a platform for individual growth in an organization. Men (2010) submitted that despite the extensive research on the construct of leadership in the discipline of management, business, and marketing, a scholarly discourse on leadership is lacking in public relations. Leadership is all about taking ownership and accountability aimed at achieving the end objective by applying the available resources and ensuring a cohesive organization where an individual influences.

In the same vein, scholars have described leadership as a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others towards the achievement of a goal (Jambo & Hongde, 2020; Locke & Latham, 2004; Robert, 2014). Similarly, Igbal, Anwar and

Haider (2015) see leadership as a process by which leaders can direct, guide and influence the behavior and work of others towards the accomplishment of specific goal in a given situation. In considering the above explanations, the scholars see the executive as the leader in a given situation, and the leader is the human factor that can influence other resources (human and material) to achieve the set goal. The scholars further see leadership from different perspectives, firstly as a “process”, which implies that leadership requires series of things to be done in order to achieve the needed result. Secondly, as a “social influence”, leadership requires that one is set to influence the activities of others toward a particular purpose. Thirdly, as “goal achieving”, meaning that the cardinal objective of leadership is to achieve the set goal in a given situation. Ogidi (2016) defined leadership as the capacity to guide, direct and influence the behavior of others, imaginatively, towards given ends.

Also, Akinawo (2009) is of the view that leadership is the ability to understand subordinates and make them do what is expected of them. And you must be able to do this painlessly. You must make them work willingly. You must make them understand your policies. You must make them do what is expected of them. And you must make them enjoy their job. As a matter of fact, leadership involves the ability, skills and power to influence your subordinates through persuasion, motivation and human relations. True leadership is in-fact, when both the followers and the leaders are working together. In that case, there must be a

combined effort and willingness to achieve the common goal. According to Okoli (2015), leadership is explained to be the ability to guide, persuade, influence people to willingly, painlessly and enthusiastically work towards the achievement of common goals. Consequently, leadership is about implementation of policies and decisions that direct the activities of an organization to its specific goals. Leadership is in fact, more successful when leaders and followers see themselves as important and ready to bear the burden of leadership together. Leadership is therefore, a shared responsibility. Leadership is not really about whom you are or what you do but how you go about doing it. This is why today there is a growing consensus that charismatic leaders have the ability to touch people in meaningful ways to yield excellent performance.

Leadership is a very strong, if not the strongest, resource for organizational success. If a country or a school is falling or growing, examine its quality of leadership, not necessarily the chief executive but including all the principal officers. Leadership and management are two important roles often misunderstood. It is therefore important to distinguish between the two first. The term 'Managing' is said to originate from a Latin word 'manus' meaning 'a hand' as in handling a horse or machines with its origin in industrial environment headed by engineers and accountants. Managers work with systems: planning, organizing, coordination, directing, controlling, and appraisal. Managing is therefore a systematic approach to the operations of organizations to achieve their aims and

objectives. The emphasis is on productivity (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; McGrath and Bates, 2013; Pranitasari, 2020).

Peter Drucker (2011) identified what should be the responsibilities of managers as follows:

1. Setting the organization's/team's objectives;
2. Providing and organizing the resources required to achieve the objectives.
3. Motivating staff performance against objectives.
4. Improving performance by continually developing themselves and their staff

### **Principals' Leadership Functions**

Leadership is in fact, administration and has to do with general managerial functions. The school leadership functions must be directed towards achievement of equality and quality education performance, management of human and material resources, as well as maintenance of discipline. The roles of school principals have been on the increase. Principals presently serve as supervisors, classroom teachers, organizers, motivators, community leaders, government's representatives etc. In the words of Okoli (2015), "school principals too often must deal with these aspects of work superficially. The reasons for this can be understood as one examines the full range of responsibilities that principals have". She further describes the extent of such responsibilities as almost everything that happens in school and out. In that case, principals are responsible for personnel, making sure that employees are physically

present and working to the best of their ability.

As a matter of fact, a principal is accountable for academic achievement of all children, their minimum standards at each grade level, for the gifted, and of those who are neither. The principal has become a provider of social services, food services, health care, recreation programs, transportation and even security and expected to do more in inclusive program, with all children, able and disabled, learning together in the same classroom. Aghenta (2006) viewed school principal as a leader that provides direction and expert advice on development of teaching and learning in school. The Principal has a duty to lead, guide, conduct, direct and motivate both the teaching and non-teaching staff toward achievement of the school goals and objectives. Principals are indeed the most important people in our secondary schools, as they have the potential for improving and maintaining quality and equality education. Success or failure of our school programs depends on the individual principals' ability and skills to utilize school resources towards achievement of the set goals as they perform the following major management functions:

- (1) Planning
- (2) Funding and accountability
- (3) Record keeping
- (4) Reporting
- (5) Supervision

### **Planning**

Planning should be the most important role of any school principal. The main reason for planning is to develop strategy for future action to ensure efficient and

effective implementation of all educational program. This explains why Okoli (2015) states that educational planning is "the process of applying scientific or rational procedures to the process of educational growth and development so as to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the educational system". Also Longe (2003) said that planning in general is a process of establishing priorities for future actions in an attempt to solve economic problems, which stem from the existence of scarce resources. To her, planning thus implies giving thoughts to the goals, aspirations and priorities of a nation. A close and cursory look at above definitions of planning shows that there are three unique features among them that worth paying attention to, and these are:

1. **Orientation to Action:** Planning involves taking of needed and necessary action, which does not take place by coincidence, but by willfulness and willingness.
2. **Orientation to the Future:** This is another unique feature found among the experts definitions, issue of future has to do with things to be done later and not now (or present). Each of the definitions projected into the future or attainment of set goals and objectives in a later life or later future.
3. **Orientation to Achieve Goal:** There is a difference between goal and objective. While goal is long term or long range, objective is short range. Objective can be realized within a short time or period of about 30 or 45 minutes or one hour class. Goal however is realized probably within a

month, a year or more than that. Planning is therefore targeted at achieving goals which are long range or long term.

### **Funding and Accountability**

Although, principals in Nigerian public schools may not have control over the source of funds for their schools but many of them can actually influence the provision of funds and other resources by effective negotiations, lobbying, fund raising and donations, for the benefit of all children, able and disabled. Principal as the head of the school is responsible for all resources available in the school. They must ensure that both funds and other facilities are efficiently and effectively managed to achieve school goals and objectives (Ijaiya, 2019). Udoh (2003) affirms that it is certainly true that funds are important but the basic issue in Nigeria is not that of the funds alone but how to manage and account for the funds. He further stated that, in spite of efforts by the various governments in the country to stamp out corruption, there is sufficient evidence to show that the attitude of corrupt officials of the local government, ministries of education, schools, parastatals and other establishments have done serious damages to public expenditures, including educational expenditures. Certainly, human and material resources are elements in planning and implementation of any new program like inclusive education, especially in Nigeria, where public schools and older educational programs are suffering severe financial crises. Indeed, Nigerian government has not done enough to salvage education sector, as the 26%

total budget of developing countries to education as recommended by UNESCO has not yet been actualized by the government.

Accountability has been an educational issue for as long as people have had to pay for and govern schools. The term covers a diverse array of means by which some broad entity requires some providers of education to give an account of their work and holds them responsible for their performance. Anderson (2005) explained that Educational accountability targets either the processes or results of education. A desired goal is identified (e.g., compliance with the legal mandates of providing special education, highly qualified teachers, improved student performance), and measures are identified for determining whether the goal is met. Educational activities affect almost every individual in the society in one way or the other. In accounting for the progress of educational system each individual is responsible to someone and for specific activities that facilitate goal achievement.

Accountability starts with the classroom teacher. He is accountable for the expected outcome of his job as a teacher. The teacher is directly accountable to the school administrator who is the Principal. School administrators are accountable directly to the various statutory organs set up by government to co-ordinate their affairs. Amongst such organs is the Ministry of Education who is also responsible for the selection and employment of staff to the institutions and for instructional programs to facilitate goal achievement. The Commissioner and Ministry of Education are accountable to

the Governor for the supervision, monitoring and evaluation of the process of education. The Governor is accountable to the State Assembly for the selection, definition and prioritization of the goals and objectives of education and the State Assembly is accountable to the electorates who provide the funds and enabling environment for the pursuit of education (Awuor, 2019; Dauda, 2019; Durosaro, 2002; Igiri, Effiong & Achigbe, 2019).

### **Record Keeping**

School record is one of the most important aspects of the school principals' duties. It is information about the school; such as students enrolment, finance, academic, statutory, staff, maintenance and general records. These pieces of information are highly dependable, factual and reliable. It is in fact, a vital and accurate knowledge of the past and current events. Also all schools, private and public are mandated by law to keep school records as it may be required by education ministry or inspecting officers, any time. Oke (2011) explained that the school record is a repository of information for the society. The purpose is to save time and cost, improve the efficiency of storing and maintain records, as well as providing adequate and accurate information about the school. It is therefore very vital for operation of the school.

### **Reporting**

Report writing is a skill that every school principal must possess. All school principals must pay serious attention to report writing. Principals must be able to prepare readable reports, be able to identify vital and trivial issues and how to



present their findings objectively, meaningfully and truthfully. Also, annually or quarterly, school principals could write reports on their own performance that of staff, students and the entire school, such reports can be sent to education ministry as an account for their stewardship. School principals therefore, should not only be highly knowledgeable but must possess report writing skills to be able to prepare readable reports. According to the National Teachers' Institute (2015), those whose work involves report writing cannot afford to neglect paying serious attention to writing skills". School principals are among this group as their job is mainly report writing. They write inspection and supervision report, end of year report, school budget report, recommendation report, financial and activities reports. Therefore, school principals must be mindful of their grammar and language and avoid careless errors, especially spelling, punctuation, long sentence and style. Generally, school reports should be objective and factual, devoid of emotion and sentiments.

### **Supervision**

School principals' roles are majorly administrative and professional, either way, their most important function remains supervision. Supervision is the process of improving all elements and conditions surrounding teaching and learning to produce better learning through providing the leadership necessary to effect improvement in the work of teachers. Therefore, the principal must see it as his responsibility to help teachers improve their instructional skills, boost teachers' morale and motivation by

provision of adequate welfare services for staff and students. Such services may include accommodation, good health-care services, end of the year bonus and loans. Even the environment must receive adequate attention. Material resources, which may include playground, cafeteria, classrooms, toilet facilities, libraries, laboratories, school clinics and school buses. As a matter of fact, some researchers view these infrastructural facilities as more important than instructional supervision.

This is why Murphy and Amanda (2015) assert that, "there is no question over the supervision of infrastructural facilities which they say is the most important role of principal which he must play". The key things here are the functions (professional and administrative) aimed at realizing the goals and objectives of establishing the school. Therefore, planners of education programs must take seriously these factors mentioned above into consideration. Most importantly, school supervision in public secondary schools is of great importance, as stated in the National Policy of Education (2013) "that the objective of supervision is to ensure quality control through continuous supervision of instructional materials, teaching and learning environment. This is relevant to inclusive program, to ensure that all students, abled and disabled are together in the same classroom under the same teacher, which may end segregation and lead to promotion of equality and quality education, friendship, respect and understanding among the Nigerian children.

## **Other Principals' Leadership Functions in Senior Secondary Schools in Nigeria**

1. **Structuring of the school for purpose of instruction.** For effective teaching and learning to take place in a school, a conducive atmosphere which is devoid of confusion must be created. One of the ways by which the principal can do this, is by clearly identifying positions and roles, and acquainting the position occupants with their roles and the relationship that is supposed to exist between role occupants.

2. **Development of Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff.** The principal carries out the function of staff development by identifying and indicating the staff needs of the school. Well trained staff will have the requisite knowledge and skill to perform well on their job. Another way by which the principal carries out development of staff is through ensuring that right recruitment is done for the school by letting the authority know the school requirement. Arranging for proper orientation of new members of staff to the school system which includes staff, students and the community.

3. **Staff motivation.** The principal can conduct staff improvement program through classroom observations and other forms of evaluation. This will enable him/her identify areas of strength and weakness on the part of the teacher. The principal through the maintenance of good human relations with staff, could motivate them both to learn and put in their best on the job.

## **Challenges Associated with Principals' Leadership Functions in Senior Secondary Schools in Nigeria**

Management of secondary schools has been constrained with many challenges. The principal position is a high-pressure job in the context of instructional supervision (Olowoselu & Bello, 2015). Similarly, Olowoselu (2016) posited school management as the process of guiding and directing teachers' and administrative staff towards the achievement of school objectives is highly challenging. Notably among the challenges are:

1. **Inadequacy of relevant resources and facilities:** School Principals are regularly confronted with the unavailability or inadequate supply of correct and relevant resources required to properly administer the school. School infrastructures or educational facilities or educational resources directly contribute to academic and skill acquisition achievement of the learners. Good enough, there is clear indication that the availability or non-availability and adequacy of infrastructure will have significant impact on the quality of teaching-learning process (Ekundayo, 2010). In some schools the classrooms are not adequate to accommodate the students so are other relevant resources which makes it difficult for smooth administering of instructional and other school program.

2. **Staffs' Attitudes:** As part of the challenges confronting the management of secondary schools in Nigeria, the attitudes of the staff are fragment of principal leadership challenge. In the same vein, Olowoselu, (2016) reiterated that the working conditions of most Nigerian

teachers are poor, consequently, influence their pejorative attitudes.

**3. Parents Demand:** It was discovered that the need for principals of secondary schools to embrace partnership with parents of students in their style of supervision will go a long way towards achieving smooth management of the schools. Most of the principals will agree that parents of students can be of help for the principals' leadership style. Parents that are not well informed about some decisions that will affect their ward can make life difficult for the school while well informed ones can contribute to the upliftment of the school in many ways (Olowoselu & Bello, 2015).

**4. Staff Training:** The perceptions of principals showed that every principal leadership style must give attention to staff especially in the areas of regular training. This has lend credence to the findingsthat, there is need to have common goal and commitment to the objectives of secondary school through training of teachers regularly.

**5. Government Policy:** Aside the role to be played by principals in order to achieve good management of the secondary schools, government policy is a key determinant of any leadership style. Someof the policy somersault by government has challenged the principal and the school effectiveness.

**6. Funding Problem:** One of the greatest problem confronting leadership of secondary schools is the gross under funding of the educational sector in the country in general and the neglect of the

maintenance of the physical facilities; Instructional and living conditions have deteriorated in many of the schools;visit to some of the schools one will see dilapidated classrooms blocks, libraries and laboratories. The poor funding of the school infrastructureultimately leads to declining in academic standards. Oyedeggi (2013) explained that for achieving the set goals of education effectively, there is need for sufficient money to implement the basic school development programs that will accomplish the achievement of students' academic performance.

**7. PoliticalInterferences:** Another problem of Education in Nigerian schools today is that of political interference, politics is the major force in the educational system in Nigeria. Today, many educational institutions are opened and run in many states on political ground, admission into universities, colleges, polytechnics, most especially universities are sometimes guided by politicians, not academic performance. Some parents today use their political offices or influences for the education of their children.

### **Conclusion**

In viewof rapid changes in the society, advance in technology and the fact that duties and roles of secondary school principals have been equally changing and increasing, there is need for principals to develop and redevelop themselves and to apply human relations approach in accomplishing school's goals and objectives.It is equally important for principals and staff to engage in up-to-date capacity building in meeting the

challenges of providing good leadership in education sector as well as meeting requirements of new technologies and strive to increase their personal and general knowledge through seminars, workshops and conferences to overcome the challenges of today's fast changing world.

### Recommendations

1. Government should ensure that facilities in public senior secondary schools are sufficient, modern and relevant, this will enable the school principals to discharge their duties efficiently.
2. Government should formulate policies to enhance the relationship and cooperation of parents in supporting the school leadership. This has multiple advantages to the school from their contribution to provision of school resources, the communication flow of the school activities and challenges to effecting discipline of their wards.
3. Principals need to ensure that teachers are involved in school decision making and regular meeting with them are held to review their policies and practices in line to meeting the goals and objectives of the school.
4. Training and development programs play a vital role in every organization. These programmes improve organization performance at workplace, it updates employee knowledge and enhances their personal skills and it helps in avoiding obsolescence. Thus, adequate leadership training should be provided

for principals for them to be equipped with modern leadership skills.

5. Political interference in school management during recruitment of teachers, admission of students, discipline and related activities that distort or negatively affect the school administration should be discouraged.
6. Principals should always employ leadership styles that is suitable in dealing with the staff and students of their schools.

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