

**Principals' Leadership: School Climate and Student Academic Achievement in
Secondary Schools in South-East States, Nigeria**

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Abstract

This study examined principals: leadership: school climate and student's academic achievement in secondary schools in South-east States, Nigeria. Two research questions and two hypotheses was guided the study and tested at 0.05 significance level. The study employed a correlational research design. The population was 12,444 in public secondary schools in South-east, while the sample comprised 1,244 teachers in the 61 public secondary schools in the south-east states of Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed, while simple random sampling was used in the selection of the sample size. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-constructed questionnaire titled "Leadership Style and School Climate Questionnaire (LSSCQ)". Students' academic schedule was used in place of questionnaire items for academic achievement. The instrument was validated by three experts, one from the Department of Educational Administration and Planning, two from the Measurement and Evaluation Department, and subjected to reliability using a one short test reliability technique and the coefficient of 0.80 and 0.87 were realized, which implied that the instruments were considered adequate for the study. Simple linear regression was used to answer research questions while t-test statistic associated with regression were used to test hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The finding revealed that transformational leadership style significantly relates to students' academic achievement, transactional leadership style significantly relates to students' academic achievement in South-East States, Nigeria secondary schools. The study recommends among others that schools should encourage transformational leadership practices, where leaders inspire and motivate staff and students, to foster an environment that enhances academic success

Keywords: Principals' Leadership, School Climate, Academic Achievement

Introduction

Leadership is the backbone of every organization; without which no institution or organization can thrive. Leadership in any organization plays a very vital role. The importance of leadership in the success of an organisation cannot be ignored. Good leadership practices provide a competitive advantage to the organisation. It is an all-encompassing phenomenon that human society cannot function without (Angwaomaodoko, 2023). Every organisation wants leaders

who value the needs and demands of their stakeholders and fulfil their requirements to accomplish the goals. Leadership in education plays a crucial role in shaping the future of our society. A strong and effective leader can inspire and motivate teachers, students, and parents to strive for excellence and achieve their full potential.

Thus, the summary of the school administrators' work is as follows: evaluate and standardize curriculum and teaching methodologies, recruit, hire, train, and dismiss staff, communicate with families, lead practices for achievement of high academic standards, meet with administrative communities, superintendents, and school boards as well as local, state, and federal agencies, monitor financial affairs, including budgets and purchasing of school expenses, conduct teacher and staff evaluations to ensure proper implementation of curriculum, represent and maintain school image and reputation, adjudicate appropriate discipline for delinquent students, support faculty with training, enrichment, and goal-setting, complete job functions on computers using online communications, spreadsheets, word processors, and other automated tools, communicate with parents regarding failing grades or disciplinary issues, supervise care of the facility for safety and quality of physical condition, ensure compliance with local, state, and federal standards, attend school-related events on weekends and evenings and prepare for the upcoming school year during the summer (Phongnimit, 2020). A school principal plays a crucial role in shaping the school environment; ensuring students receive quality education. a school leader plays a role in creating a good school atmosphere and climate. A principal is someone who can plan to improve the excellence of students in a school through the use of discipline, and integrity, and act as a good role model. A principal also needs to display good leadership management, extensive community interaction, high intellectual power, and various skills needed to improve the school's achievements and excellence (Ibrahim, Md-Rami, Sulaiman, & Ghazali, 2021). The role of the 21st-century principal has become complex partly due to increasing accountability pressures and the need to produce good student outcomes as principals are expected to do a whole as it pertains to school management (Eke & Ikpe, 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Declining academic achievement among students has remained a recurring irritant in Nigeria's educational system despite all efforts of the government and major stakeholders to change the narrative in the education sector. School leadership and school climate is a social system that moulds, invents, and creates a healthy learning environment that in turn influences the acts and behaviours of those in its sphere. The school environment is of paramount importance in

shaping and reshaping intellectual ability. However, supportive and favourable school environment enriched with learning facilities and a favourable climate make students more comfortable, more concentrated on their academic activities that result into high academic achievement.

Leadership and school climate in secondary schools in South-East states are becoming uninteresting for teaching and learning because in some cases principals adopt inappropriate leadership styles which contribute to dragging students behind; instructional material is inadequately provided, infrastructural facilities are in dilapidated conditions, low-level collaboration, qualified teachers and facilities that promote teaching and learning are in shortfall. The cumulative effect is that some of the students perform poorly in class.

The researcher has observed that the leadership style employed by the principals is archaic and stern. Many principals raise their voices for both students and teachers. Some principals are authoritative and domineering which has made the students to relate with the principals in fear and trembling. As a result of this, their psychological disposition and responsiveness to school and learning are inhibited; hence, the need for this study. The problem of this study put in question form is; could leadership styles and school climate influence the academic achievement of students in secondary schools in Southeast States, Nigeria.

Research objectives:

This study aim to determine the;

1. extent transformational leadership style relate to students' academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria
2. extent does transactional leadership style relate to students' academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does transformational leadership style relate to students' academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria?
2. To what extent does transactional leadership style relate to students' academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

Ho 1.. Transformational leadership style does not significantly relate to students' academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria.

Ho 2. Transactional leadership style does not significantly relate to students' academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Classical Management Theory

This theory is concerned with effective structuring of organizations. It is interested in how managers and workers could be most effectively organized into an overall structure. Its major thrust is maximization of output of workers through the application of scientific management principles in order to bring about work efficiency. It also holds that sound management practice falls into certain pattern than can be identified and analyzed. The theory was propounded by Fredrick Winslow Taylor (1911), Fayol (1940) Gulick and Urmick (1939), among others. The implication of this theory is that a Rector who possesses administrative competency to the extent that he is able to apply prior training in educational administration in identifying school objectives, and work towards attaining effective administration through assigning duties and giving rewards and punishments (Gilbreth (1868-1924) and Gautt (1861-1919). The scientific management was intended to bring about a complete mental revolution, which must occur in the minds of the workers and the management (Nwachukwu, 2004). Infact, according to Taylor (1911), the essence of scientific or classical management is to:

1. increase the output of the average employee
2. improve the efficiency of management

From the forgoing, therefore it is apparent that the knowledge of this theory will help the institutional leadership in polytechnics to ensure maximized output at the cheapest possible cost. In other words, his leadership will be directed at achieving optimal results. Institutional leadership, who applies the knowledge of this theory in his administrative work, will help the staff to achieve high productivity with minimum cost. This theory is significant to the present study, because it helped the researcher to develop some questionnaire items which emphasized the achievement of school goals with the required administrative competencies.

Human Relations Theory

This theory emphasizes the basic problem in organizations which is the building and maintenance of good relationship that promotes healthy organizational climate and workers' productivity. It maintains that the human factor is important in the achievement of organizational goals. It also maintains that workers perform better if their personal welfare is taken into consideration. The work of Macgregor (1960), who emphasized employee participation in decision making, and Maslow (1954), who stressed the need to motivate workers, valued human relations. Those who worked on this theory were Mary Packer Follett (1868-1933), Felix Reocthlisherere and Dickson (1938) and Elton Mayo (1880-1959). The

implication of this theory to the leadership in secondary schools is that the school organization is a complex social group. Therefore, it requires effective handling of its activities. Therefore, there is need for healthy relationship between administrative, teachers and institutional culture. Angwaomaodoko (2023) investigated the effect of leadership styles on teacher job satisfaction in Nigerian secondary schools. The research set out to investigate the impact of school managers' and leaders' leadership philosophies on teachers' work satisfaction. Ninety-five instructors were chosen at random for the research, which used an observational poll methodology. The primary tool used to gather data for the research was a questionnaire. Means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation were used to analyse the data collected. The findings showed that democratic leadership was primarily used by heads of schools and that teachers typically had high levels of work satisfaction. Additionally, it was discovered that there was a strong correlation between teachers' job satisfaction and the leadership approach utilized by administrators and school leaders. The study's results led to the conclusion that the leadership style of head teachers influenced the degree of work satisfaction among teachers in secondary institutions in Lagos State. It was suggested, among other things, that teachers in secondary schools be allowed to participate in in-service training because doing so will make them more enthusiastic about their work.

Abdul Rahman, Andi, Jamaludin, Masri and Mustafa (2023) determined and identify the relationship between transformational leadership and student engagement with the academic performance. Summary of the methodology is presented in this study which includes the sampling procedure, data collection processes and instrumentation jointly with data analysis procedures. A survey data was collected by using sample of 370 students of Private University and the findings did not support that the transformational leadership and student engagement have significant relationship with academic performance. It indicates that transformational leadership and student engagement did not affect students in achieving higher grades to determine their academic performance. However, due to the presence of several limitations and the suggestions and recommendations were discussed.

Okoth and Yambo, (2022) investigated the influence of Principals' building collaborative cultures on academic performance of secondary schools in Kisumu County. The study adopted a survey research design. The target population consisted of 204 principals, 2,196 teachers, and 13,213 Form Three students. In sampling, Krejcie and Morgan's table was used to find 152 principals, 333 teachers and 378 students, from 152 schools. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, observation and document analysis, and analyzed using simple

linear, simple correlation, and stepwise regression with dummy variables, at a.05 level of significance. The study tested a specific hypothesis that Principals' building collaborative cultures have a significant influence on the academic performance of secondary schools in Kisumu County. Building collaborative cultures (good) [$F(2,149) = 2.818, p = .009, R^2 \text{ adj} = .024, t(149) = 2.362, p = .018$] has a significant influence on academic performance of secondary schools in Kisumu County. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education should empower principals with resources that will enable them to empower their teaching staff by training them on various needs that may arise in society from time to time, and since the society is dynamic continuous provision of resources by the ministry would be ideal.

Furahini and Baraka, (2020) investigate the effect of the school environment on students' commitment toward learning in Secondary Schools in Monduli District, Tanzania. The study employed the quantitative approach in collecting and analyzing data from 346 respondents across five secondary schools in the District. The findings revealed that students' perceptions were negative on the school environment as they tended to disagree with the items. The study further indicates that students were committed to learning. Finally, the study established the existing relationship between school environment and students' commitment toward learning. Therefore, an effective school environment predicts the rate of students' commitment toward learning. The study therefore recommends that school management teams should work hard to improve the identified school environment factors as the factors are essential for effective learning to take place. The identified students' commitment toward learning needs to be rewarded for students to maintain such a spirit as it is a key factor for effective learning to take place. Furthermore, school administrators should find ways to create conducive learning environment.

Ezike, (2018) investigated classroom environment and students' academic interest as correlates of achievement in Senior Secondary Chemistry. Correlational design was adopted. 208 SS II students from ten randomly selected Public Secondary Schools in Ibadan Oyo State, Nigeria participated. Instruments include Classroom Environment Students' Questionnaire ($r = 0.76$), Students' Academic Interest Scale ($r = 0.81$) and Chemistry Achievement test ($r = 0.85$). Four null hypotheses were tested at.05 alpha level of significance. Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis were used for data analysis. Result showed significant relationships between classroom environment and academic achievement, students' academic interest and achievement in Chemistry. Composite contribution of classroom environment and academic interest was significant. However, classroom environment better

predicted achievement than students' academic interest. Conclusion was that the predictor variables are active correlates of achievement in Chemistry. Therefore, it was recommended that all hands should be on deck in providing conducive school and classroom environments for learning, teachers and parents should create activities that will help develop and sustain interest of students.

Ucar, Alpkın, and Elci (2021) focuses on the effect of the servant and transformational leadership on employee creative behavior and the moderating role of authentic leadership on these relationships. One thousand one hundred forty-six blue- and white-collar employees working in the western region of Turkey were selected by convenience sampling. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and Process Macro by Hayes have been used to determine the effects and interactions among variables. Servant and transformational leadership were positively related to employee creative behavior, and that these effects increased if moderated by authentic leadership. Thus, authentic leadership strengthens the positive impact of servant and transformational leadership on employee creative behavior. It is predicted that leaders should be servants or transformational leaders to increase employee creative behavior in their organizations. It should be taken into account that if these leaders also exhibit authentic leadership, the effect of leadership on employee creative behavior will be even greater. A second leadership is also included in the relationship between leadership and employee creative behavior, which is generally examined through a single leadership type. The interaction of this second leadership with other leadership is also tested.

Methodology

The study employed a correlational research design. The population of the study comprised 12,444 teachers in the 1,210 public secondary schools in the southeastern states of Nigeria. Abia State. The sample of the study is 1,244 teachers in the 61 public secondary schools in the South-East States of Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed, while simple random sampling was used in the selection of the sample size.

Results of Findings

Research Question One

To what extent does transformational leadership style relate to students' academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria?

The result of the data analysis is presented in Table 4.1;

Table 1: Linear Regression to Explore Relationship between Transformational Leadership and Students' Academic Achievement

Model	r	r Square	r square x 100	Adjusted r Square	Remarks
1	.625 ^a	.391	39.1%	.390	High Extent

a. Predictors: (Constant), Transformational leadership style

Table 1 presents the analysis of the relationship between transformational leadership style and students' academic achievement in secondary schools in southeast states, Nigeria. The result showed that there is a high extent of positive relationship with an R-value of 0.625. The result also showed the coefficient of determination to be $r^2 = .391 \times 100$ which implies that 39.1% of students' academic achievement is contributed by transformational leadership. The result indicates that transformational leadership relates positively to a high extent with students' academic achievement of students in secondary schools in south-east, Nigeria.

Research Question Two

To what extent does transactional leadership style relate to students' academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria?

The result is presented in table 2;

Table 2: Linear Regression to Explore Relationship Between transactional leadership and students' Academic Achievement

Model	r	r Square	r square x 100	Adjusted r Square	Remarks
1	.623 ^a	.388	38.8%	.388	High Extent

a. Predictors: (Constant), Transactional Leadership

Table 2 presents the simple linear regression analysis of the relationship between transactional leadership and students’ academic achievement in secondary schools in southeast, Nigeria. The result showed that there is a high extent of positive relationship with an R-value of .623. The result also showed the coefficient of determination to be $r^2=.388 \times 100$ which implies that 38.8% of students’ academic achievement is contributed by transactional leadership. The result indicates that transactional leadership relates positively to a high extent with students’ academic achievement in secondary schools in south-east, Nigeria.

Hypothesis One

Transformational leadership style does not significantly relate to students’ academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria.

The result is presented in Table 4.7;

Table 3: t-test Statistic Associated with Regression Analysis of Significant Relationship between Transformational leadership style and Students’ Academic Achievement

		Std.					
(Constant)	B	Error	Df	β	t-cal	t-crit	Sig.
1	1.075	.056				1.96	
Transformational leadership	.679	.017	1236	.625	19.174		0.00

a. Dependent Variable: Students’ Academic Achievement

Data presented on Table 3 shows the summary of analysis which assumed that transformational leadership style does not significantly relate to students’ academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria. The result indicated df to be 1236 (β , .625 and calculated t-value of 19.174 and a t-crit of 1.96 with a p value of 0.00, that is the result of the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Since the p value is less than the criterion significance level, this therefore leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis, and an alternate hypothesis established thus; transformational leadership style significantly relates to students’ academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

Transactional leadership style does not significantly relate to students' academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria.

The result is presented in Table 4.8;

Table 4: t-test Statistic Associated with Regression Analysis of Significant Relationship between Transactional Leadership and Students' Academic Achievement

(Constant)	B	Std.		Df	β	t-cal	t-crit	Sig.
		Error						
1	2.151	.039					1.96	
Transactional Leadership	.377	.013		1236	.623	54.780		0.00

a. Dependent Variable: Students' Academic Achievement

Data presented in table 4. shows the summary of which assumed that transactional leadership style does not significantly relate to students' academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria. The result indicated df to be 1236 (β , .623 and calculated t-value of 54.780 and a t-crit of 1.96 with a p-value of 0.00; which is the result of the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Since the p-value is less than the criterion significance level, this, therefore, leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis, and an alternate hypothesis is established thus; transactional leadership style significantly relates to students' academic achievement in secondary schools in Southeast States, Nigeria.

Summary of Findings

The following are summaries of the findings;

1. Transformational leadership relates positively to a high extent with students' academic achievement. Transformational leadership style significantly relates to students' academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States.
2. Transactional leadership relates positively to a high extent with students' academic achievement. Transactional leadership style significantly relates to students' academic achievement in Southeast States, Nigeria secondary schools.

Transformational leadership relates positively to a high extent with students' academic achievement

The finding from research question one shows that transformational leadership relates positively to a high extent with students' academic achievement. At hypothesis, it also reveals

that transformational leadership style significantly relates to students' academic achievement in secondary schools in South-East States, Nigeria. This finding is an indication that principals applying transformation leadership practices in school may open up students' abilities to perform better in academic-related roles. The finding from the study disagrees with that of Abdul Rahman, Andi, Jamaludin, Masri and Mustafa (2023) whose study determined and identify the relationship between transformational leadership and student engagement with the academic performance. The findings did not support that the transformational leadership and student engagement have significant relationship with academic performance; meaning that transformational leadership and student engagement did not affect students in achieving higher grades to determine their academic performance. The finding from the study however, agrees with that of Ledimo, (2014) who explored the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational culture for service delivery practices. The results of this study indicated a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership and the constructive dimension of organizational culture within a public service organization.

Transactional leadership relates positively to a high extent with students' academic achievement

The finding from research question two shows that transactional leadership relates positively to a high extent with students' academic achievement. And also, that transactional leadership style significantly relates to students' academic achievement in Southeast States, Nigeria secondary schools. This finding implies that transactional leadership has an emphasis on reward when goals are achieved can be a good factor when seeking to improve students' performance. The finding from the study disagrees with that of Mwove, Mwanja, and Kasivu, (2023) who examined the influence of transactional leadership style on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Mwala Sub-County, Kenya. The results established a weak positive but statistically significant correlation between transactional leadership style and students' academic performance. The finding is in disagreement with that of Ahmad and Ali, (2023) whose study was titled comparative effects of Teachers' transactional leadership styles on Students' academic achievement at the School Level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. The research found that transactional had no significant relationship with students' academic achievement. The finding is also in agreement with that of Sika and Anyango (2020) who investigated the influence of Principals' transactional leadership styles on learning motivation and students' academic performance in K.C.S.E examinations in Migori County. The study revealed that there was a positive relationship

between transactional leadership style and levels of students' performance. This implied that transactional leadership style had some significant influence on learning motivation and student's academic performance in KCSE examination.

Conclusion

Based on the discussions made, arising from the findings of the study, the conclusions;

1. Transformational leadership practices significantly enhance students' performance.
2. Transactional leadership practices are effective in promoting students' academic success.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study;

1. Schools should encourage transformational leadership practices, where leaders inspire and motivate staff and students, to foster an environment that enhances academic success.
2. Policies could be implemented to create structured learning environments where students understand the link between effort and rewards, which may improve academic achievement.

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