



Survey of Nigerian Secondary School Principals' Educational Innovation and Leadership Behaviour: Implications for Effective School Management

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian education system at various levels has witnessed a lot of setbacks in the recent past due to the economic hardship meted on the school administrators. This economic hardship resulted from several factors of which the emergence of coronavirus in late 2019 was a part. This situation has brought a lot of drastic negative changes in the school administration in Nigeria and beyond. Moreover, it is worthy to note that the school's development revolves around the principal who is a major determinant of effective school administration. Thus, the principal's involvement in exhibiting leadership qualities and behaviour is a key element in deciding if the school is successful in attaining its objectives. However, there is a dearth of research on the level of educational innovation of school principals in the Nigerian context. Therefore, this research explored the association between principals' educational innovation and their leadership behaviour for effective management of schools. This research adopted cross-sectional correlational survey research using a sample of 250 secondary school principals. Innovation and leadership behaviour questionnaires were used for data collection. Data analysis was conducted using regression analysis. The findings of the study revealed that principals' leadership and work behaviours significantly predict their educational innovation. The implication of this is that a principal without good leadership and work behaviours will not be able to exhibit quality educational innovation for the management of schools. The researchers, therefore, recommend that secondary school principals should be properly trained through in-service training to be able to acquire good leadership and work behaviours that are healthy for effective school management.

Keywords: Innovation, leadership behaviour, management, work behaviour

Introduction

The financial difficulty inflicted on school administrators has resulted in numerous defeats for the Nigerian education system at all levels in recent times. Several events led to this economic difficulty, one of which being the coronavirus outbreak in late 2019. The management of schools in Nigeria and elsewhere has seen many severe unfavourable changes as a result of this predicament. It's also important to remember that the principal, who plays a key role in determining efficient school management, is at the centre of the school's development. Therefore, a crucial factor in determining whether the school succeeds in achieving its goals is the principal's engagement in demonstrating leadership traits and behaviours. Consequently, an effective principal will have good teachers, staff, and students at the school. Conversely, it is also true that staff, students, and teachers will not try to be good if the administration is bad. Research from other nations, particularly Europe, has shown that having innovative teaching strategies that are up to par helps principals run their schools efficiently. The most recent of the many difficulties that most schools in Nigeria and elsewhere confront is the development of the coronavirus in 2019 (COVID-19).

Due to the fact that the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic was not funny, there is an urgent call for innovations in the school systems. Demand for innovation in school administration and leadership has been steadily rising around the world, particularly since the coronavirus emerged in 2019 (COVID-19). This is in line with the finding of Sauphayana (2021) that the adoption and application of this innovation have accelerated due to the development of major world events like the COVID-19 pandemic. During the early period of the COVID-19 pandemic, most schools across the globe were totally shutdown with few countries through the application of technology resorted to online mode of administration of schools (Harris & Jones, 2020; Kavrayıcı & Kesim, 2021). COVID 19 has made health problems worse and brought attention to how education imbalance negatively impacts society (Harris & Jones, 2020).

Furthermore, changes in educational management and leadership might be linked to technology innovation. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many schools across the globe to embrace a lot of innovations and changes in order to meet the demands of the current reality in the education system (Xue, Li, Li & Shang, 2020). Even though the terms change and innovation have different definitions, change is typically used to refer to a transition from one state to another, a replacement, a conversion, an alteration, while innovation refers to the opening of new doors, the introduction of new techniques or modalities. Thus, Innovations are distinct from change in the sense that they always imply changes but not all changes are innovations. It is worth noting that the quality of innovation and change in schools is dependent on the quality of the educational leadership.

Educational leadership is the capacity and process of influencing, coordinating, and mobilizing other people or groups that are related to the development of science and the implementation of education and teaching (Bafadal, Nurabadi, Sobri, & Gunawan, 2019). Educational leadership ensures that the activities that are carried out are more effective and efficient in achieving the goals of education and teaching. The main differences between leadership in other disciplines and leadership in education are the context and goal of the activity. At educational institutions, educational leadership is used to influence all students to perform their tasks and work properly and in accordance with their responsibilities. This eventually attempts to develop all of the potential that students possess. Education is no exception to the rule that leadership applies to all aspects of an organization. Since educational leadership is leadership that occurs in a setting or context related to education, it should exhibit the traits of educational leadership (Gunawan, 2017). This is supported by Gunawan (2018), who suggested that the word education should appear after the word leadership to emphasize the unique qualities of leadership that are instructive and alluring, rather than forceful or repressive in any way. Based on this definition, it can be inferred that educational leadership encompasses any actions taken to try to persuade others—individuals or groups—in the educational environment or circumstance to cooperate freely in achieving the specified educational objectives. The goal of educational leadership is to persuade all students to actively participate in achieving the established educational objectives. The school principal's leadership is referred to here as educational leadership.

A key element in deciding if the school is successful in attaining its objectives is the principal's involvement in exhibiting leadership qualities and behaviour (Bafadal et al., 2019). The school's development revolves around the principal. As a result, a successful principal will lead to good instructors, staff, and pupils at the school. The opposite is also true: if the administrator is bad, the instructors, staff, and students will not strive to be good. All students in the school should follow the principal's example of leadership. School principals must be given more authority as educational leaders (Knezovic & Musrati, 2018; Lonati, 2019).

Thus, it is the duty of school principals to increase the level of innovation inside their organizations. The practical techniques, abilities, and mentality of the principal determine the scope of an organization's innovation (Sauphayana, 2021). Innovative leadership involves elements that help leaders succeed organizationally. It is important to note that visionary leaders like principals communicate openly and provide motivation through their actions (Sauphayana, 2021). School innovation benefits from having innovative principals because it makes people more eager to learn new things and be innovative. This implies that principals play crucial roles in achieving quality innovations in schools. Moreover, the roles of educational leadership in achieving school objectives through innovations and changes have been documented.

Problem of the study

Most secondary schools in Nigeria are no longer functioning effectively due to a lack of administrative qualities of the principals. Literature in the Nigerian context is silent on the educational leadership of principals in schools, and this constitutes a major worry to education stakeholders. Thus, this research becomes necessary to gather empirical evidence on the principals' educational innovation and leadership in Nigerian schools in order to come up with possible administrative policy implications. Thus, this research on the level of educational innovation of school principals through school leadership is timely and appropriate for the fact the expected outcome will have positive policy and practical implications in the school leadership.

Research questions and hypotheses

1. What is the predictive power of leadership behaviour on principals' educational innovation?
2. What is the predictive power of work behaviour on principals' educational innovation?

From the two research questions, the following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 5% probability levels.

H₀₁: There is no significant predictive power of leadership behaviour on principals' educational innovation.

Ho₂: There is no significant predictive power of work behaviour on principals’ educational innovation.

Methods

This research adopted a purely quantitative research approach using a cross-sectional correlational survey research design. This design enabled the researchers to obtain relevant information regarding the level of principals’ educational innovation and leadership in schools. This research approach as well as the design has been used by Eze et al. (2020), Ezema et al. (2021), Ezeaku et al. (2021), Okeke et al. (2020) Okeke, Okeke et al. (2020), Ugwuanyi et al. (2020), Okenyi et al. (2021) in similar research.

This research was conducted in different cities in Southeast Nigeria. A total number of 86 public secondary schools will be sampled for this study using a proportionate stratified random sampling technique. Thus, all the 250 principals of such schools were used for the study. A standardised principal’s questionnaire on educational innovation and leadership was used for data collection. Before the commencement of this research, the researchers applied and obtained ethical clearance from the research ethics committee of the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria Nsukka. Thereafter, gatekeepers’ permission was sought from the various schools used for the study. The actual data collection was conducted through the assistance of graduate research assistants to be recruited for the research. These graduate research assistants will take the responsibility of administering and retrieving the principal’s questionnaire. Data analysis was conducted using regression analysis.

Results

Table 1 Regression analysis of the predictive power of leadership behaviour on principals’ educational innovation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	RStd. Error of the Estimate
1	.895	.800	.799	2.60264

a. Predictors: (Constant), Leadership Behaviour

Table 1 shows that the magnitude of the association between leadership behaviour and principals’ educational innovation is ($R = .895$) while the coefficient of determination of the criterion variable by the predictor variable is ($R^2 = .800$). This means that principals’ leadership behaviour has a high positive relationship with their educational innovation while 80% variation in principals’ educational innovation can be explained by the variation in their leadership behaviour. In other words, the predictive power of leadership behaviour on principals’ educational innovation is 80%.

Table 2 Regression t-test analysis of the predictive power of leadership behaviour on principals’ educational innovation

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-4.914	1.157		-4.246	.000
	Leadership Behaviour	1.135	.036	.895	31.521	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Educational Innovation

Table 2 revealed that there is a significant predictive power of leadership behaviour on principals’ educational innovation, $t = 31.521, p = .000$. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected ($p < .05$).

Table 3 Regression analysis of the predictive power of work behaviour on principals’ educational innovation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	RStd. Error of the Estimate
1	.952	.906	.906	1.78207

a. Predictors: (Constant), Work Behaviour

Table 3 shows that the magnitude of the association between work behaviour and principals’ educational innovation is ($R = .952$) while the coefficient of determination of the criterion variable by the predictor variable is ($R^2 = .906$). This means that principals’ work behaviour has a high positive relationship with their educational innovation while 90.6% variation in principals’ educational innovation can be explained by the variation in their work behaviour. In other words, the predictive power of work behaviour on principals’ educational innovation is 90.6%.

Table 4 Regression *t*-test analysis of the predictive power of work behaviour on principals' educational innovation

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.071	.645		.110	.912
	Work Behaviour	.999	.020	.952	48.992	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Educational Innovation

Table 4 revealed that there is a significant predictive power of work behaviour on principals' educational innovation, $t = 48.992$, $p = .000$. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected ($p < .05$).

Discussion of the Findings

This research was necessitated due to the paucity of empirical evidence on the relationship between principals' leadership and work behaviours and their educational innovation. The results of the regression analysis revealed both leadership and work behaviours of principals are major determinants of their educational innovation in schools. These findings are not surprising to the researchers due to the roles of leadership and work behaviours in the management of schools. The primary role of a principal's leadership is to motivate and support the work of teachers and other educational personnel, both separately and jointly, so that they can carry out their responsibilities in a way that best suits the needs of the school. By exerting influence on a procedure that establishes the attainment of school performance, the principle can, as a leader, raise student achievement. The school needs a captain to manage and utilize all of the school's potential in order to perform its duties.

The principal manages the school in his capacity as a manager, hence it is expected of him to possess the necessary leadership skills. The direction and success of school performance are largely determined by the leadership of the principal (Hidayat & Wulandari, 2020). Moreover, the notion of leadership behaviour extends beyond the management responsibilities outlined in legal and regulatory frameworks (Ploatcan & Titrek, 2004). It encompasses the act of an individual imparting knowledge and skills to their subordinates and the role that a leader plays within their business (Ploatcan & Titrek, 2004). The overall supervisor-support component, which is made up of a principal's perceived fairness and leadership, was found to have a favorable and significant impact on teachers' innovative work behaviours Khaola & Oni, 2020). The relationship between innovation in school management and shared leadership skills, trust in school principals, and innovation in school management and shared leadership skills is moderately positive and significant (Zafer-Gunes, 2016).

Furthermore, it has been indicated that while educators view entrepreneurial leadership as crucial for school administrators, principals only sporadically adopt this approach (Pihie et al., 2014). It has been discovered that the outcomes of innovation may enhance relationships and collegial teamwork (Heissenberger & Heilbronner, 2017). Besides, Heissenberger and Heilbronner (2017) further found that compared to participants with their less transformational counterparts, leaders with greater transformational leadership styles valued innovation more and saw it more favorably. According to a study, proactive work habits and transformational and transactional leadership styles are crucial for encouraging instructors in Barkin-ladi's private schools to engage in creative work practices (Dung, 2024). Teachers who had strong cooperation skills and principal support were more likely to report innovative work behavior, according to multiple linear regression analysis (Johari et al., 2021). In a similar study, Hidayat and Patras found that the leadership behaviour of principals had a significant direct effect on their innovative work behaviour.

Conclusion and recommendation

Based on the findings of this research, the researchers concluded that principals' leadership and work behaviours are major determinants of their educational innovation in schools. This implies that effective management of schools is highly dependent on the principals' leadership and work behaviours. Based on this, the researchers, therefore, recommend that secondary school authorities should ensure that school principals are properly trained through in-service training to be able to acquire good leadership and work behaviours that are healthy for effective school management.

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