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FUNCTIONALITY OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN THE NIGERIAN BASIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

Leaders and their leadership skills play important roles in the growth of every organization. Leadership refers to the process of influencing the behaviour of people in a manner that they strive willingly and enthusiastically towards the achievement of group objectives. It is said that a leader should have the ability to maintain good interpersonal relations with the followers or subordinates and motivate them to help in realizing set-objectives. Against the above background, this paper looks into the functionality of leadership practices in the Nigerian Basic Education. For this research work to be effective, certain concepts were reviewed and discussed, as a result, suggestions, which include among other things, the following; 1. Special training should be organized for school heads, especially in the area of interpersonal relationship (most especially as it concerns them and their subordinates). 2. Every school leader should adopt democratic type of leadership in personnel management etc were made.

Keywords: Education, Basic Education, Leadership, Leadership Practices, Goal Achievement.

Introduction

The term basic education has over the years been a topic of controversy, as there seems to be no consensus on what connotes basic education world over. There is no general agreement on what makes up basic education. To some people it begins and end with the first six years of formal schooling (primary education), while some argue that, it stretches across six years of primary and the first three years of middle school (lower secondary education), others believe that basic education involves all the activities geared towards the acquisition of basic knowledge, whether formally or informally. No matter how it is perceived all is right, so long as it revolves within the acquisition basic knowledge for live activities. Strengthening the above, Nhung (1997), opined that Each country interpreted the term in different ways, and, that lead to the 2011 world revision on basic education, where a discussion paper was issued to seek clarification on the concept. However, it noteworthy, that, in spite of the said

challenges in conceptualizing basic education, there are some authors, organizations/bodies that have done noble by putting together what basic should represent in sense. It is a whole range of educational activities, taking place in various settings, that aim to meet basic learning needs as defined in the World Declaration on Education for All (UNESCO,1990). For more clarification United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO, 1990), added thus, basic education comprises primary education (first stage of basic education) and lower secondary education (second stage). It also covers a wide variety of non-formal and informal public and private activities intended to meet the basic learning needs of people of all ages. Similarly, International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED, 1997), posited that basic education comprises two stages primary education and lower secondary education. *National Bureau of Statistics* (2010), asserted that education at this level strengthens the learner's feet to climb the educational ladder to the zenith of academic attainment if a good foundation is laid. It is also referred to as educational activities designed for people to acquire necessary knowledge and skills to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning (UNESCO, 2000)."*Universal Basic Education in Nigeria - Centre for Public Impact (2017), noted that* before 1976, education policy was still largely shaped by the colonial policy of the British Colonial Period. In 1976, the Universal Primary Education program was established. This program was said to have interfaced with many difficulties and was subsequently revised in 1981 and 1990 accordingly. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) which involves 6 years of Primary School education and 3 years of Junior Secondary School education, culminating in 9 years of uninterrupted schooling, in which transition from one class to another is automatic but determined through continuous assessment testing, was introduced to replace the existing schemes in the year 1999. According to Okpala (2007), The lunching of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme was the Federal Government effort to salvage the primary education system which is the foundation stone of other educational levels and in fact, the corner stone of national development. On his own, Fafunwa (2001) maintained that the Universal Basic Education covers non-literate Nigerians who make up 45% of our population in addition to all children of school age which represents another 20% of the population making a total of about 70% of Nigerian's population. For the above reason, He opted that 70% of education budget should be allocated to this level of education. Any system that neglects primary education, which is the very foundation of the entire education system will not have good secondary or university education, and neither its economy, nor its people will progress and as a result poverty, ignorance and disease will envelop the people (Fafunwa, added). Basic education is more than an end in itself. It is the foundation for lifelong learning and human development on which countries may build, systematically, further levels and types of education and training (Unesco, 1990). Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC, 2012), refers to it as early childhood care and education. The scheme covers a 9-year formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skill acquisition programs, and the education of special groups such as nomads and migrants, girl child and women, Al-majiri, street children and disabled people (Aderinoye, 2007). It is therefore, regarded as free, compulsory and the right of every child. Basic Education being accorded too much importance based on the place it occupies in national development should be piloted by people, whose managerial prowess is of high standard. People, whom through their leadership actions/practices may be able to drive home the goals for which this programme was established.

Leadership Practices

Organizational excellence cannot wonderfully occur without development and creativity by the leaders. The environmental changes such as more violent competitions among countries, the quickly growing of market of technological development/advancement leading to increased competition, needs for rapid change in the organizations such as organizational growth, various kinds of product, expansion of trade, and increase in the use of technology, cause more complexity in the organizational management. All these result in the problems of difficulty in changing technique, effectiveness and the efficiency. Therefore, expert leader with knowledge and competency is what is required for success. Because, leadership according to Hongwilai, (1997) is the most important factor for managing organization during the changing time and crisis. Writing on the importance of leadership, Karuna, Kanokon, Sujanya, Sonjed and Aduldjed (2013), submitted thus, for organizations to be successful, managers must become leaders who can inspire, motivate, innovate in advance, and collaborate to get extraordinary things done. Leadership is the potential of a person in the developing process of motivating the others to collaborate or to be satisfied with work practice, and implement activities in lieu to a specified plan and objective (Pattanarangsan in Spillane, 2005).In the words of Spillane (2005), Leadership refers to activities tied to the core work of the organization that are designed by organizational members to influence the motivation, knowledge, affect, and practices of other organizational members or that are understood by organizational members as intended to influence their motivation, knowledge, affect and practices. From his own angle, Bennis (2002), opined that leadership, by nature, is the process of influencing the group under appropriate situation and duration in order to stimulate the personnel in using their willing attempt to achieve their organizational objective. The manner in which the leader performs roles and directs the affairs of the organization is referred to as his/her leadership practice (Oyetunyi, 2006). It therefore means that leadership practice is the way a leaders leads. Whereas some leaders are more interested on the job, some pay more attention to workers performing the job. Oyetunyi (2006) emphasized that consciously or unconsciously leaders operate on the basis of certain personal theory of human behavior, a view of what their subordinates are like as a people. One of those assumptions is that some heads of schools employ the task-oriented philosophy of management whereby they confer it upon themselves that teachers as well as students are naturally lazy in achievement, therefore need to be punished in order to stir up their enthusiasm, commitment and support. This type of leaders explores styles such as autocratic and bureaucratic leadership styles (Oyetunyi further stated). Autocratic head teachers are usually concerned with despotic principles of management which concentrates leadership on top rather than from the bottom, while on the other hand, bureaucratic head teachers are concerned with the rule of the game, procedures and regulation as a way of transforming productivity. Another assumption is that of employee-oriented philosophy of management which focuses interest on putting the subordinates at the center of progress, a principle that ties the organizations' success on the shoulders of the subordinates. Hence, the subordinates are treated with compassion, care, trust and considerations that place him/her in the realm of the governance. Consequently, subordinates inputs on school functions are often high as a result of morale and motivation. Others include behavioural-leader philosophy of management which explores styles as democratic, participative and laissez-fair leadership styles. Karuna et al reiterated that being a leader means an art of influencing other people so that those people have their confidence towards the leader, respect and collaborate with him in sincerity. The

principals/head- teachers as the head of the schools set the tone and thus responsible for all that happens in the school. The school head is the manager, administrator, a public and liaison officer of the school. In this regard, the school head is expected to create an enabling environment for the realization of human potentials within the organization, influence the behaviour of staff members and provide leadership for curriculum development as well as supervising instructional activities in the schools as specified by law. School heads adopt various patterns of behaviour in the process of directing the efforts of subordinates towards the achievement of school goals and objectives (Olagboye, 2004). According to Mullins (2007), there are three general leadership styles identified in literature. These are the autocratic, the democratic and the laissez-faire or the free rein styles and these are the dominant styles of leadership employed in schools. It is however worthy to note, that the attainment of school objectives is dependent on the leadership styles adopted by the school head. In the light of the above, Mullins (2007) further informs that, whatever leadership behaviours as perceived by teachers determine considerably their mental and emotional attitudes towards their job. Olujuwon (2016), opines that teachers enjoy working with principals that values them as human beings and as colleagues than those that do not. The above is somewhat in line with the view of Waters, Marzano & McNulty (2003) who submitted thus; various factors that make school leadership effective include the school, teachers and students as well as the redesigning of the organization to foster collaboration; engaging families and the community, and providing support and resources for managing organizations. The foregoing reveals that leadership is an operational tool used by school heads to influence staff and make them to strive willingly and enthusiastically towards the achievement of the organizational goals in the school system. Therefore, whatever leadership style and trait possessed or adopted by the school head, should influence the job performance of staff in the school (Yahaya, Osman, Mohammed, Gibrilla & Issah, 2014). This can be possible through the leader creating a system platform where it becomes possible for him/her to collaborate with other staff members of the school/organization in decision making and also in the discharge of other leadership functions. In stressing the above, Yahaya et al (2014), warns that the ability to accommodate and show receptive disposition should form the most common attributes of; and be evident in the personal qualities of every leader. There are also identified obstacles which affect leadership practices in schools. However, these can be mitigated by exploring the best leadership practices through the roles of teacher leadership in schools. The above was supported by Katzenmeyer & Moller (2001), who posit that teacher leadership is the key to educational change and school improvement. The top-down leadership approach, hierarchy and bureaucracy inherent in public schools tend to isolate teachers from each other and from administration, and limit the practice of teacher leadership in schools (Ash & Persall, 2000). According to Bryk & Schneider (2003), the top-down leadership approach should be replaced with a culture of collaboration, trust and networking in schools. Studies have shown that effective school leadership makes a significant improvement in students' learning outcomes and development. Effective school leadership is the key to large-scale, sustainable education reform etc (Fullan, 2002) puts further.

Goal achievement

Goal achievement is the ability to identify and prioritize activities that lead to a goal (Google, 2020). According to Wikipedia (2020), a goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a person or a group of people envision, plan and commit to achieve. People endeavour to reach goals within a finite time by setting deadlines. A goal is roughly similar to a purpose or aim,

the anticipated result which guides reaction, or an end, which is an object, either a physical object or an abstract object, that has intrinsic value (Wallace foundation, 2011). Goal achievement is the process through which human and other resources are mobilized for the attainment of collective purposes (Oxford reference, 2020). In a social system, it could be said that goal achievement functions are met through political activities, while in the school system it is met through the leader's management prowess. According to Wallace foundation (2011), the school head will be more effective in the functions of goal achievement by shaping a vision of academic success for all students, creating a climate hospitable to education, cultivating leadership in others, improving instruction and managing people, data process to foster school improvement. Those with the capacity for goal achievement are those who can execute plans to get the desired results. This skill relies on the four competencies in the Leaders Lead Themselves section: self-management and personal accountability aided by flexibility and resiliency (Wallace foundation 2011) further opined. In other words, goal achievement is the end result of leaders leading themselves. It is also pertinent to note that before a goal is achieved such steps as learning the tools of establishing achievable goals, identifying and implementing objectives, and taking the necessary actions toward victory must be observed.

Leadership practices/Goal achievement

It has become of general knowledge that school leadership has both direct and indirect impact on both staff, student and in general, the organizational achievement. According to Linda in Onyetunyi (2006), there is a positive relationship between teachers' morale, Job satisfaction and motivation and the type of leadership in schools. For clarity purposes, she adds, indeed, head teachers have the capacity to make teachers feel at home, comfortable, happy and super productive while on the job. At the same time can make their lives so unpleasant, unfulfilling, problematic and frustrating that they form the major reason why teachers do not perform as expected and some even have to exit the profession. The level of achievement in school is largely dependent on the type of leadership style adopted by the school head. Of all the leadership styles, democratic remains the most viable tool in dealing with human beings in an organization, as it is an employee centered approach and thereby forces out the best in them. Wallace foundation (2011) also share in this line of thought, when it posited that the school head will be more effective in the area of goal achievement by shaping a vision of academic success for all students, creating a climate hospitable to education, cultivating leadership in others, improving instruction and managing people well, data process to foster school improvement. In his own words Muyingo (2004), asserts that democratic style of management regards people as the main decision makers. Here, the subordinates have greater say in decision making, the determination of academic policy, the implementation of system and procedures of handling teaching, which leads to school discipline, academic excellence and other overall school performance in the fields of sport and cultural affairs. Emphasizing the effect of leadership practices on goal achievement, Wallace foundation reiterates that Success in creating schools that contribute substantially to student learning depends in some measure on interaction with the specific social and organizational contexts in which school- and district-level leaders find themselves working. Creating supportive organization for learning is an effective domain in leadership exercises (Hitt and Tucker, 2016). According to Gohlmann (2018), creating a supportive organization for learning is important, because just as teachers need to establish a sense of well-being and trust for students to learn in their classrooms, administrators must establish the same sense of trust and comfort to create an environment where teachers can teach to their highest capacity. Empirical literature suggests

that leadership is an essential element in promoting students' achievement, equity and is a critical condition for success in schools (Gohlmann, 2018). It has however, become widely accepted that lots of the leaders' exercises in school, will definitely affect goal outcome and that whatever type of leadership style adopted by the school head, must have either positive or negative impact on students who are the major targets of every education system/level. For instance, scholars found an impact of leadership on student achievement through improvement in working conditions such as teachers' job satisfaction, school culture, and climate (Dutta & Sahey, 2016). Generally, the leadership practice of a school leader can enhance or mar result achievements. It should be noted at this juncture, that the achievement of every organization represents the leader's managerial efficiency/prowess which is an attribute of a particular leadership practice preferred against the rest. Leadership styles have both positive and negative impacts on workers performances, if the leader makes a right choice it reflects on the work output of the workers, this is also true of the leader who makes a wrong choice. Therefore, great relationship exists between the leadership practice of the organizational head and the job performances of staff.

Conclusion

Effective school heads understand direction setting, they know that an investment of time is required to develop a shared understanding of what the school should "look like" and what needs to be done to get it there. They know that teachers and other staff included in identifying goals are much more likely to be motivated to achieve those goals. It could be observed in the above discussed concepts that teachers who are asked to engage in open and honest communication with the head-teachers, to contribute their suggestions, and to voice their concerns are much more likely to follow the direction set by their leader. School leaders, who work to strengthen the school culture, modify organizational structure and collaborative processes tend to be more successful than their counterparts who take to the opposite. The head's leadership style is unarguably a determining factor in goal achievement. This corroborates the assertion of Linda in Onyetunyi (2006), who states; there is a positive relationship between teachers' morale, Job satisfaction and motivation and the type of leadership in schools. In buttressing her point, Linda also puts further, that, indeed, head teachers have the capacity to make teachers feel at home, comfortable, happy and super productive while on the job. At the same time can make their lives so unpleasant, unfulfilling, problematic and frustrating that they form the major reason why teachers do not perform as expected and some even have to exit the profession. More so, the state of teachers goes further to affect students' academic performances. Teachers are the ones carrying out the most primary function in educational setup and tend to mix it up when not committed to work. When the students are not properly handled, its effect on the larger society is usually disastrous. Therefore, to achieve set goals, the leaders must create environment where those working under them will see themselves as parts and not apart from the business.

Ways forward

1. Special training should be organized for school heads, especially in the area of interpersonal relationship between them and their staff

2. Every school leader should adopt democratic type of leadership in the management of subordinates

3. They should show expertise in instructional activities
4. The must show love, understanding, support and cooperate with the teachers in carrying out functions that lead goal achievement

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