

THE CHALLENGES OF INDISCIPLINE IN NIGERIAN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: THE NEED FOR CREATIVITY IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

By

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Abstract

Leadership is very crucial to the success of any organization and society in general. Successful leaders build committed followers who in turn build successful system. The success of an organization or community depends on the leaders. Nigerian primary schools are bedeviled with indiscipline in various forms; examination malpractices, truancy, bullying, sexual molestations and gross disrespect for laid down rules and regulations. These examples of indiscipline are not limited to pupils but found among teachers too, and it is no gain- saying that moral indiscipline impacts negatively on academic achievement of pupils, and overall standard of education. If education is truly an important tool for national development, then creativity is needed in school leadership to challenge and curb the menace of moral laxity in primary schools otherwise the purpose of education as instrument for national development may be a mirage. The level of discipline obtained in a school depends largely on the environment created by the leader, hence creativity is required in leadership as effective leadership is not static but dynamic in nature. This paper therefore examined school leadership roles in creating and maintaining a disciplined environment where morals and academic achievement thrive. Recommendations which include: organizing workshops on creativity development for primary school heads and teachers from time to time; head-teachers being the change they wish to see in teachers; and headteachers adopting democratic leadership style while maintaining firmness in the running of the school among others were made.

Keywords: School leadership, creativity, discipline maintenance.

Introduction

It is no gain-saying that moral laxity permeates Nigerian schools with its negative impact on academic performance of pupils and this has been a great concern to all the stake- holders. One of the broad objectives of Nigerian education is the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society. However, with increasing moral and academic decline in schools, it is very obvious that the school or rather, our educational system has not been able to accomplish this goal, hence the need for this study. School is a place where students are trained not only to acquire knowledge and skills, but be found worthy in character as well. Moral indiscipline is correlate to poor academic achievement as Warren (2014) explains that discipline is an essential element of an instructional programme, because pupils' (especially at primary school) are oblivious of what is expected of them, it takes discipline to get them do and sustain what is expected of them. Odebode (2019) cited an example

of moral indiscipline in a primary school where the teacher demanded a gift from pupil so he could pass an examination. The signal this could send to the pupil is that one can pass an examination without studying, as long as one can afford to give gift, and when the pupil grows up in whatever walk of life, bribery would be a norm for him. If a teacher who is to raise leaders is raising cheaters, one can imagine the future of such society.

Society or environment determines the characters of its members, and leaders in every society dictate or set the tone of the environment. Hence, a discourse on moral and academic discipline of pupils centers on school leadership. A morally stimulating environment will impact on both teachers and pupils. Redempta (2010) defines discipline as system of arranging conditions for healthy learning and living. It is important as society expects children to develop and assume leadership roles, be of good moral. From this definition it is expected that people who are to instill moral discipline are themselves leaders with this character quality. Not only this, they should be able to set an environment which enables the inculcation of moral discipline. In other words, without someone to lead (a leader) there could be no discipline.

The post - modern age is characterized with high level of moral laxity due to the abuse of technoworld especially socio-media, hence, the need for pragmatic approach in school leadership. To be relevant and effective as a leader, there is the need for a change in the way school leaders carry out their leadership roles, the present age and educational system call for creative leaders, who will impact both teachers and pupils for moral uprightness, restoration of lost values and enhance academic performance.

Conceptual Definition of the term Leadership

Leadership is a complex process which involves inspiring, motivating, and guiding followers in a particular direction to achieve a set goal. It is the art of influencing others to willingly work towards a set goal which involves casting a vision, goal setting, and encouraging people to be successful (Fischer, Dietz, & Antonakis, 2017). Leaders' responsibility is to show the goal and objective of the institution and direct the followers towards achieving such. Leadership is a personal commitment to achieving success, but it is often under-utilized in many primary schools and often results in moral indiscipline viz a viz poor academic achievement of pupils.

The term leader has been used in literatures to be synonymous to one who is saddled with the responsibility of running an organization or a school. For example, scholars have observed that in schools, every principal, head teacher or school-head is called leader regardless of if he or she has leadership qualities or not (Dahar, Faize, Niwaz, Hussain, & Zaman, 2010; Niazi, 2012; Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). An organization or educational institution head may be an administrator, manager, boss, principal or school-head, but he or she may not necessarily be a leader. Reilly (2015) rightly asserts that it is possible for every school to have at least one administrator, but only few have leaders. In other words, many schools are run without leaders. A leader is one who not just runs an institute or organization, but builds or develops it as well. It is one thing to be a leader, it is another thing to just merely occupy an office. People who merely occupy office focus on "self" rather than the system.

Focusing on self could mean being too extremely harsh on teachers and pupils, thus overtly projecting self or being too weak to enforce rules for fear of what followers will say. Either way, "self" is the focus at the expense of the system. According to Tesfaye and Ayalew (2020) such people do not lead (a dynamic process that implies growth, movement), but remain stuck to

themselves (something static) and as such they lead no one but self. Running an institution does not essentially mean leading it, just as being the head is different from being a leader.

The moral indiscipline and poor academic performance of pupils in Nigerian Primary school are of great concern to scholars. They have been attributed to many factors like, lack of parental involvement in pupils academics (Alidzulwi, 2000; Bowman 2004), parenting styles (Rossouw, 2003) poor socio- economic background of pupils (Ogunsola and Adewale, 2012) and poor funding for facilities in school (Abubakar, 2021). While these factors cannot be debated, leadership roles in moral discipline and academic achievement of pupils are often overlooked; hence the focus of this paper is on leadership style as it affects pupils' moral discipline and academic achievement.

Many at times the word leader is often confused with some other related terms like coach, boss, administrator or manager. It is important to see the difference between them. Cambridge dictionary defines coach as “someone whose job is to teach people to improve at a sport, skill, or school subject”. Coach helps in improving the skill set, but he or she may not define the goals. Usually the goals are already defined and targets are set, and a coach helps a person in improving the skills for those objectives. A coach may or may not be a leader. Similarly a leader may or may not be a coach. These two terms cannot be used interchangeably all the times. Boss is defined by Cambridge dictionary as “the person who is in charge of an organization and who tells others what to do”.

The difference between a boss and a leader is again quite clear here. Boss may not have the power to define or redefine objectives. Also the boss “tells” while a leader not only tells, he/she also inspires and motivates. Boss and other related terms are often used with negative connotation such as “bossy attitude”, “don’t be a boss” etc. Leader, on the other hand, is taken in a positive way. Comparing administrators and leaders, Reilly (2015) explains thus, “Leaders deal from their hearts as well as their minds; administrators work almost exclusively from the mental framework”. As it was explained before, leaders inspire and motivate the people, creating a bond with them; while administrators are more to focus on getting the assigned tasks done. They value tasks, assignments, rules and organizations above human beings. Leaders work at policy level and make key decision while administrators are responsible for day to day affairs, and make routine everyday decision.

Leaders are the heart of the organization to achieve short and long-term goals and objectives. They can help the team to develop a shared understanding of organization’s, mission, vision, and its activities, can give clear and convincing organizational direction to their followers (Ojokuku, Odetayo, & Sajuyigbe, 2012). Scholars say that leadership matters because effective leaders make a difference in people's 'career and live as they empower followers and educate them on how to do their activities by taking appropriate actions that can facilitate change (Hina & Hussain, 2019; Karadağ, Bektaş, Çoğaltay, & Yalçın, 2015; Mlingwa, 2015; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). They are to be abreast of others in knowing what is required to improve the quality of teaching and learning process and can influence employees’ (teachers') capacity through inspiration to get them reach the desired results thus, increasing their productivity (Hina & Hussain, 2019; Karadağ, Bektaş, et al., 2015; Mlingwa, 2015; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Apart from the fact that the head teacher understands what to do, he also knows when, how, and the reason for doing it, the consequence of improvement that brings about perfection on pupils' performance. Therefore, if a head teacher does not engage in actions consistent with institutional objectives or aims, then he is either oblivion of such goal or has a wrong perspective of the

school's goals (Ouma, Lucy, & John, 2015). In other words, the responsibility of the head teacher is to create an inspiring atmosphere that fosters competence, effective teaching, and learning. Here the issue of a conducive environment cannot be overemphasized as a determinant of the head teacher's effectiveness (Vaismoradi, Bondas, Salsali, Jasper, & Turunen, 2014).

Head teacher and Moral and Academic Discipline of pupils

A conducive environment is an index of an effective head teacher. One of the roles of school head is to ensure the school provides a safe and orderly environment in which teaching and learning take place. Since every community has rules, the school is no exception. A school, through the head teacher and supportive staff members makes reasonable rules for orderliness and discipline of pupils, and the rules are enforced through discipline. Rowne (2005) asserts that the school priorities are designed to ensure that pupils are provided with a conducive environment where they can learn and thrive. A conducive school environment increases the possibilities of full potential realization of pupils while a disorderly lawless school environment as observed by Mitchel (1996) lends hand to disciplinary challenges to the school and impede pupils' academic performance. Bullying, violence, disrespect to teachers and fellow pupils, addiction to drugs etc., are common place in such schools.

According to Webster (2001), all objects in school, ranging from curricular and co-curricular activities, every day plan, method of instruction, quality education in school, general environment of the institution and discipline are arranged and structured as the school leader wants. In other words, vision of school leader matters a lot for effective and efficient running of the institution to maintain quality education. Nyamu (2001) describes, entire programmes of the school related to development of the institution is always according to the abilities, vision and training of school leader. Masood *et al* (2021) explains that the whole things of the schools i.e buildings, discipline, libraries, laboratories, furniture, relationships with higher authorities, method of teaching and techniques of learning process and curricular and co-curricular activities all depend on the school head.

Discipline is central to the success of the whole educational system in that its enforcement ensures smooth journey of pupils to adulthood and its neglect spelt disaster, not only for the individual pupil and school, but the whole society at large. Ali, et al (2014) opines that a disciplined pupil is one whose behaviours, actions and inactions conform to the predetermined rules and regulations of the school. The most important aspect of discipline is the learners' ability to discern what is right or wrong and abide by what is right while avoiding the wrong. Njorge and Nyabuto (2014) aver that discipline is a basic requirement for successful teaching and learning and overall improved academic and "moral" performance.

Asiedu-Akrofi (1978) has identified two kinds of discipline. The first is that in which rules and regulations are willingly supported and obeyed by the pupils. They do not have reason to believe that they are being forced to comply with the rules, they not only understand the rules but might be equally involved in making them. This kind of discipline promotes cooperation and obedience. The second kind of discipline is that which is externally imposed and robs pupils the opportunity of learning to exercise their sense of judgement, and thus affects their responsibility and cooperation, and affects their ability to make reasonable decisions. Whichever kind of discipline is obtainable in the school, depends on the quality of leadership.

Head teacher- Teachers' Relationship

Ibukun (2007) describes the main task of head teachers as creating conducive atmosphere for teachers to be able to achieve desirable changes in pupils. Teachers are co-key players in formulating discipline mode and its execution in the school. Hence teachers themselves must first demonstrate that they themselves are disciplined before they could instill discipline in the pupils.

Head-teacher relationships vary greatly among schools and even among teachers at the same school. This is because as there are different leadership styles, so also are differences in the ways teachers perceive the leadership role of the head teacher. Teachers who perceive the head teacher as facilitators, supporters, and reinforcers for the jointly determined school mission and vision rather than as guiders, directors, and leaders of their own personal agenda are far more likely to feel personally accountable for students' learning (McEwan, 2003). Schools with effective principals produce pupils with high achievement as those relationships robbed off on students' achievement (Walsh, 2005).

The issue of pupils' discipline is all involving as both institutional head and teachers alike have to contend with discipline matters relating to children. Though the head teacher is also involved in dealing with discipline problems among pupils, his role is somewhat different from that of the teacher. Nonetheless, teachers and the head teacher could work as a team in instilling discipline in pupils. Parental issues are another area of great concern. The pressure for high educational standards and achievement could be demanding on the teachers (Albritten et al, 2004) and except the leader is skilful enough in managing teachers, there could be hitches in head teacher-teachers' relationship.

Head teacher is assumed to have the ability to improve teachers' overall perceptions by simply attending to fundamental components inherent in quality relationships. By the positive influence of head teacher, teachers are motivated and thus become effective in the classroom, leading to pupils' discipline in character and in knowledge acquisition. To instill discipline, rules must be set, and consequences of breaking the rules must be spelt out clearly. Likewise, punishment or correction and rewards for breaking or keeping the rules must be applied immediately, otherwise pupils might be clueless of the reason for punishment or reward. Besides, immediate correction discourages pupils from engaging in behaviours that contradict classroom's or school rules, e.g. laziness in doing classwork or homework, going late to school, bullying or truancy, while immediate reward stimulates repetition of desirable behaviour in pupils. Explanation on the reasons for the rules must be given and reminded children from time to time. There must be commitment on the part of teachers to ensure that pupils not only keep the rules but are also involved in making rules, observing pupils keep the rules. In other words, rules are not to be enforced, but to be understood and willingly observed or kept by pupils.

Leadership styles and their Impacts on Teachers' Effectiveness

Authoritarian leadership or autocratic leadership style is an administrative style in which the head has total decision - making power and absolute control over his subordinates. In other words, the "leader" makes decision based on his personal view without considering collective opinions or views of others. Okunbe (2008) opines that the leader centralizes power, authority and decision making. Close monitoring and supervision of subordinates are done. The authoritarian head always wants things done in his way.

Igbal (2010) in his study of the impact of head teachers' leadership style on job performance of teachers in Pakistan shows that teachers working under a democratic leadership perform better than teachers working under an authoritarian style of leadership. This corroborates the findings of Nsubuga (2008), in his study on leadership style of headteachers and teachers' job performance in primary schools in Uganda, that the greater the use of autocratic principles the lesser the job performance of teachers. This is because intimidation, bullying, coercion etc., are often involved in this leadership style, thus teachers become afraid to report any irregularities going on among fellow teachers or act of indiscipline among pupils.

Despite its non-effectiveness in teachers' performance, autocratic leadership style is mostly used as found out in the study carried out by Omeike and Onah (2011) on 'The Influence of Leadership Styles of headteachers on teachers' job performance in Nsukka educational zone, Enugu state, Nigeria. This style is prevalent in Nigerian private schools and while it may appear that the method is yielding high performance in pupils' result, such performance may be temporal, as teachers are not satisfied with job, and could change job right in the middle of term, leaving the school stranded, or putting extra workload on other teachers.

Democratic leadership style: This style involves decentralization of power, authority and decision making (Okumbe, 2008). The headteacher makes consultation with two or three members of staff before making decision. Other times, meetings of all teachers are called to discuss issues and unanimously arrived at a decision. Teachers in this case always have high performance level because they were part of decision making. They have a sense of belonging and since the decision is theirs, they would not want to fail, hence they put in their best to work, with little or no supervision. Not only this, they are equally happy going to and doing their work. In other words, teachers are highly motivated (Mukutu, 2005). In the study carried out by Okoth (2008), it was revealed that democratic headteachers produced higher mean score grade in comparison to autocratic head teachers.

Laissez- faire leadership style: The "leader" completely delegates power, authority and decision making to the subordinates without follow up. He depends mostly on the group to establish goals and means of achieving progress and success (Okumbe, 2008). Schools with this kind of leadership often lack discipline as McDonald's (2007) study revealed that laissez fair leadership style is associated with highest rates of truancy and delinquency. This corroborates Nkuni's (2012) observation that teachers under the leadership of laissez faire headteachers had lesser job performance.

Incidence of Indiscipline in Nigerian Schools

Manifestations of indiscipline abounds in Nigerian schools. Such indiscipline includes but not limited to bullying, lateness to school, examination malpractices and sexual immorality.

Punch Newspaper (2024) highlights various bullying incidence in Nigerian schools. For instance in 2018 in a special school for the deaf in Kuje, Abuja, an 11 years old was introduced to Sodomy (homosexuality) and forced to perform oral sex on older school mate. In the same Abuja in 1921, a teacher flogged a 13 years old boy to death for failing to complete assignment. Omoteso (2010) in his study on Bullying Behaviour among secondary school students in Nigeria found that 88.1% of the students had experienced bullying, 33.0% had engaged in bullying themselves, and 64.1% had been involved in relationship bullying.

Lateness to school is another form of indiscipline as observed by Odebode (2019). She asserts that lateness to school is prominent among indiscipline behaviours among school children. For instance, official arrival in Nigerian schools is 7:30 am but many would not arrive until 8:30 or 9:30 am, especially among public school children. By the time such pupils arrive school, one or two periods of lesson would have gone. This is buttressed by Adegunju et al (2019) that lateness to school is linked to poor academic performance, because such students not only miss classes and partaking in assembly activities but are also punished for lateness which make them to further miss lessons thus leading to academic failure. Lateness to school is an index of an ineffective school administrator or head-teacher because lateness to school is not limited to pupils, in some cases teachers are also found guilty of this.

Stealing is also another example of indiscipline found in schools. Stealing according to Lust (2016) is always associated with other potentially antisocial behaviours such as poor grades, alcohol and drug use, regular smoking and depression. Stealing among school pupils ranges from eating other children's food, pilfering writing materials, toys to stealing money. Since the habit often start from childhood, it is unlikely that such children start stealing from home. However, school being a training institution (training both in learning and character) is expected to help shape children's behaviour by helping them get rid of bad behaviour while inculcating good behaviour at the same time through discipline. Where discipline is lacking, bad behaviour not only get worse but other bad character are imbibed.

Pornography and sexual immorality are also among prominent indiscipline behaviours in schools. A common trend is the adults' deliberate exposure of children to pornography in order to prepare them for sexual abuse (Flood, 2009). In other words, the commonest form of abuse is through porn. Incidence of child sexual abuse globally is mind-boggling (WHO, 2014). For instance, the prevalence of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) in Africa was 34.4%, in Asia 23.9%, in America 10.1%, and Europe 9.2% (Strivasta et al).

In Nigeria, over 31.4 % of girls first sexual experience was reported to be with violence (United Nations Internal Children's Emergency Funds 2015). According to Oguniran (2011), incidence of CSA through child marriage abounds in the Northern part of the country where girl children are often withdrawn from school to be married off to men much older than them.

There are daily reports of incidence of CSA on radio, television, social media and newspaper. For instance, PressReader digital Newspaper (2018), reports various cases of sexual immorality and Child Sexual Abuse in Nigerian schools; a 47 year old school supervisor sexually abused a two-year-old girl at a school in Victoria Garden City, Ajah, Lagos. Likewise, a Headmaster of a school in Lagos was also caught pants down having sexual intercourse with a primary five pupil. Also, in 2015, girls in basic three in a particular school revealed a teacher had been showing them pornographic video materials and sexually abused them.

It is worrisome and disheartening that Nigerian schools which supposed to be custodians of moral and academic excellence are fast becoming thriving places for pedophiles and breeding grounds for CSA. All these bother on inefficiency or indiscipline of school heads and administrators. If indiscipline in schools is these much, and involves teachers and headteachers, then pragmatic policies and actions need to be taking for the realization of educational goals in Nigeria.

Creativity in School Leadership: A key to Sustainable Teaching and Learning.

Creativity has always been a discourse of interest in educational setting, and with the rapid changing in the modern society, there is an increased focus on the subject. This is because creativity encourages the performance of individual students and influences their future success (Castillo-Vergara, 2018). Recently, creativity has been extended to teachers as well, because teacher's creativeness sustains learning. Gusman (2014), for instance opines that many teachers lack motivation in completing their tasks related to learning devices, some teachers lack good teaching programme and creativity in approach to teaching while other teachers pay more attention to personal interest than teaching activities and their pupils. All these negatively impact on sustainable learning. It takes a creative leader to draw out the creative ability of the teachers.

One of the important factors of education management but still less touched in the education development programme is the leadership of the school. No matter how much schooling input is added or improved, the output will still not be optimal, if the leadership factor, which is a very strategic aspect in the teaching and learning process, is not given adequate attention (Ekosiswoyo, 2007). In the view of Wong and Davey (2007) the main challenge of education leadership is how to develop talented people in the organization by creating a positive work climate and providing opportunities for innovation and taking risks to deal with uncertainty in the future (Handoyo, 2011). School environment is a significant factor to enhancing creativity in school: school environment in terms of socio- cultural aspect, leadership style and facility available in school.

The teacher is the pivot of learning and source of trusted information and is responsible for what is conveyed and its impact on their students and society in general, hence whole teaching and learning outcome depends on how teacher manages the lesson activities; a monotonous method of teaching and boring personality of teacher will result in poor performance, while a creative, active and fun personality will result in good performance in the learning process that is active, creative and fun (Iriyani, 2008). Fauziah (2011) identifies characteristics of creative thinking to include fluency, flexibility, authenticity or originality and detailing or elaboration. All these are necessary for effective teaching and learning. Creative teachers are not satisfied with good lesson delivery but are concerned with how the lesson is understood by individual pupils, and here both teacher's and pupils' activities are avenues for creativity development.

Therefore, teacher's teaching behavior itself plays an important role in encouraging student creativity (Soh, 2017). Mostly, play method, and arts (moulding, painting or colouring) are preferred approaches to creative teaching. Next to these is a stimulating environment for creative ideas (Wang & Kokotsaki, 2018). Stimulating environment is created by the teacher, thus flexibility, optimism, respect, humour, inspiration, gentleness, discipline, responsiveness, and empathy must characterise creative teacher. Creative learning is about the teacher's personality, personal creativity, and its manifestations in daily practice (Lapeniene & Dumciene, 2014).

There are some challenges hindering teachers' creativity and these are inability of the teacher to identify creativity in his class as some equate creativity with art, (Mullet et al., 2016), rigid mentality, non- flexibility, teacher's resistance to change, or fear of taking risks and teacher's lack of discipline. This is where the role of head teacher comes into play. The head-teacher must be able to encourage teachers' creativity by showing a sense of friendliness, close and full of consideration for the teachers both as individuals and as a group (Triyanto et al., 2013). This is because Bahri (2010) found that principal or Head-teacher impacts teachers' creativity, viz a viz productivity.

However, teachers' creativity can only be impactful in combination with teachers' moral character. Where a teacher is identified with lateness, bullying, examination malpractices or engages in sexual immorality, no matter how creative or talented he is, he would do more harm than good. His character would impact negatively on the pupils, and the whole educational exercise would be a waste.

Conclusion:

Leadership is one of the fundamental functions of administration and success of the school depends on how creative a leader is. Creativity in leadership positively impacts on teachers' and pupils' moral discipline and subsequently overall academic achievement. Likewise moral discipline determines the academic environment and cannot be divorced from pupils' achievement, where discipline is lacking, failure is always the result. Yet discipline is best instilled and not enforced. This then depends largely on how creative a school leader is. Democratic leadership style has been found to be the best to yield positive results from the teachers and pupils as well.

Recommendations

Creativity is a skill that is essential in school administration, especially in this ever -dynamic era, hence Nigerian Ministry of Education should give attention to training headteachers on creativity skills. Workshop on creativity development should be organized for headteachers and principal teachers e.g, assistant headteachers and head of departments, during mid- term breaks and long vacations. Headteachers should also foster a culture of innovation and welcome novel ideas from teachers.

Creativity starts with being imaginative, teachers should put aside traditional methods of teaching which is rhetoric and monotonous and think outside the box by being creative in lesson delivery. Teachers should participate in various school activities, training or in-training service to enhance their cognitive and imaginative senses. Learning becomes less tedious and more invigorating with a creative teacher, as pupils are directly involved in learning process, and not just passive learners. Teachers must also be resourceful, as resourcefulness enhances creativity. To be resourceful, teachers need to read and study beyond their domains (Subjects), be well equipped with necessary information for problem solving.

Creativity as a course should be introduced into the curriculum of Primary Education in tertiary institution especially at colleges of education level, where teachers are being trained. A young and fresh teacher in primary school today, becomes the headteacher tomorrow, hence the need to include creativity as a course into the curriculum.

Judging from the high level of indiscipline not only among the pupils but also among teachers, it is high time government and school administrators began to look for not just the intelligence of the teacher at the point of interview for teaching job, but the moral character and personality of the would -be teacher, so as to mitigate the spread of indiscipline in schools. At this juncture, it is needful to seek the service of personnel psychologist who would be able to access the applicant's character and moral standing.

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