



School Leadership Effectiveness as Predictor of Internal Efficiency of Public Secondary Schools in Less Developed Communities in South-South Region of Nigeria

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Abstract

The internal efficiency of schools in Nigeria's South-South region, known for its abundant natural resources, has been a growing concern in recent times. This study explored the connection between effective school leadership and the internal efficiency of public secondary schools located in underdeveloped communities within the region. To achieve this, four research questions were posed, and three hypotheses were developed. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. A total of 242 schools were selected using a multi-stage sampling method. Data collection was facilitated through two researcher-designed instruments, both validated by experienced education professionals. These instruments included the Leadership Effectiveness of Public Senior Secondary School Questionnaire (LEPSSSQ) and the Public Senior Secondary School Students' Enrolment Checklist (PSSSSEC). The questionnaire underwent pilot testing, and its reliability, calculated using Cronbach's alpha, yielded a value of 0.79. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation, alongside inferential statistics such as Pearson's correlation coefficient. Findings revealed that while principals demonstrated effective leadership, schools exhibited inefficiencies. Consequently, it was recommended that principals undergo regular training and retraining on effective leadership strategies to enhance and maintain internal efficiency despite prevailing challenges in the system.

Keywords: School Leadership; Effectiveness; Internal Efficiency; Less Developed Communities.



Introduction

The role of school leadership in achieving educational policy goals and sustainable development is widely recognized. According to Onuma (2016), leadership involves influencing and guiding others to direct their efforts and resources toward achieving a specific objective. Leadership is also described as the process of motivating and communicating with people to accomplish set goals (Nwankwo, 2014). As noted by Nusche and Moorman, cited in Dabesa and Cheramlak (2021), effective school leadership significantly enhances educational outcomes by motivating teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. Bush (2018) observed that in several developing countries, individuals are often appointed as school leaders based on their teaching experience rather than specific leadership training. School leadership directly influences the commitment of principals and teachers, making it a vital factor in assessing school effectiveness. Farhat, Zarghuna, Khalid, Ashiq, and Mohammad (2012) defined school effectiveness as improving school conditions to enhance student achievement. Martin (2021) further described it as the extent to which a school retains students and achieves strong academic performance. Effective school leadership ensures that students complete their education successfully with a sense of accomplishment.

Secondary education plays a crucial role in preparing individuals for productive societal roles and further learning. As outlined by the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FGN, 2014), secondary education bridges primary and tertiary education. Principals, as school leaders, are pivotal in ensuring the achievement of educational goals. They oversee school management, monitor student attendance, maintain discipline, and foster positive relationships between schools and communities to support student development. Dabesa and Cheramlak (2021) emphasized that principals' actions, decisions, and policies are essential in achieving school objectives. Principals play administrative and instructional roles, implementing policies to improve academic performance through classroom observation, teacher evaluation, and maintaining positive relationships with staff and communities. Onwubiko, Eze, Udeh, Okoloagu, and Chuka-Okosa (2015) described principals as administrative heads, managers, community relations officers, instructional leaders, and agents of change in education. Mutegei (2019), in a study on internal efficiency in Kenyan primary schools, stressed the importance of supervising teachers' lesson notes, tracking participation in extracurricular activities, and ensuring regular instructional delivery to promote school effectiveness. Similarly, Hayat (2015) found that instructional leadership practices such as supervision and assessment were frequently employed by principals in Sharjah schools. Muhammad (2014) emphasized that well-trained, experienced, and capable principals who effectively supervise teachers can improve school efficiency.

Unachukwu and Odumodu (2015), in their study on management support practices for teachers' supervision in Anambra State, identified differences in principals' and teachers' views on the extent of management support for teacher supervision. Effective school leadership ensures that all available resources are utilized efficiently to achieve educational goals. The leadership style adopted by school heads significantly influences their effectiveness and the internal efficiency of schools. Achieving internal efficiency in secondary schools is vital for educational leaders. Adeyemi (2012) described internal efficiency as the effective use of available resources to achieve educational objectives. It reflects the relationship between educational inputs (incoming students) and outputs (graduates) (Idehen & Edeki, 2022). In less developed communities, high dropout and repetition rates are common, preventing students from completing secondary education. The Vision 2020 report (2009) also highlighted increased educational wastage in rural and urban slum areas. When an educational system

graduates students within the expected timeframe without dropouts or repeaters, it is considered internally efficient (Ayodele & Ogbiye, 2018; Ayodele, Adaralegbe & Adeleke, 2015; Ileuma, 2017).

Internal efficiency is closely linked to resource allocation and utilization. Principals are central to ensuring resources are effectively managed, including supervision, curriculum implementation, facility maintenance, and staff administration. Indicators of internal efficiency include dropout rates, repetition rates, and graduation rates. Cohort analysis, which tracks promotion, repetition, and dropout patterns, is commonly used to measure internal efficiency (Kolawola & Ogbiye, 2020; Ileuma, 2017). Umar, Kenayathulla, and Hoque (2021), in their study on principal leadership practices in Niger State, Nigeria, concluded that effective leadership practices significantly improve school effectiveness by promoting collaboration with parents, teachers, and the community to achieve educational objectives. Akinola's (2013) study in South Western Nigeria found that administrative skills were the most prominent leadership trait among principals. Akinsolu (2017) also identified high educational wastage rates in public secondary schools in Ogun State, Nigeria. Conversely, studies by Pitan (2012), Adeyemi (2012), and Kolawola and Ogbiye (2020) reported that some secondary schools achieved high progression rates due to effective use of available resources. Given these findings, this study investigates the impact of school leadership effectiveness on the internal efficiency of public secondary schools in less developed communities in Nigeria's South-South region (Iroriteraye-Adjekpovu, 2022). The study focuses on principals' administrative, supervisory, and instructional skills, alongside key indicators of internal efficiency such as promotion, repetition, and dropout rates.

The effectiveness of principals' leadership is pivotal in promoting internal efficiency in secondary schools. However, concerns have been raised about the declining confidence in secondary education's ability to adequately prepare students for meaningful future endeavours and higher education. Despite considerable financial and material investments by the government, the persistence of student repetition and dropout rates remains worrisome to stakeholders in the education sector. Some principals have been criticized for their perceived shortcomings in administrative, supervisory, and instructional roles, which may contribute to this challenge. In response to these concerns, this study explores the effectiveness of school leadership and its potential influence on internal efficiency in public senior secondary schools located in less developed communities of the South-South region of Nigeria.

Research Questions

To achieve the objectives of this study, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the levels of principals' leadership effectiveness and internal efficiency in public senior secondary schools in less developed communities within the South-South region of Nigeria?
2. Is there a correlation between principals' leadership effectiveness and internal efficiency in public senior secondary schools in the South-South region?
3. Does a connection exist between principals' instructional supervisory role effectiveness and internal efficiency in public senior secondary schools in less developed communities of the South-South region?



4. Is there a relationship between principals' charismatic leadership style and internal efficiency in public senior secondary schools within these communities?
5. Does a relationship exist between principals' functional leadership style and internal efficiency in public senior secondary schools in the South-South region of Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at a 0.05 significance level:

1. There is no meaningful relationship between principals' leadership effectiveness and internal efficiency in public senior secondary schools in less developed communities in the South-South region.
2. There is no significant correlation between principals' instructional supervisory role effectiveness and internal efficiency in these schools.
3. Principals' charismatic leadership style does not notably impact internal efficiency in public senior secondary schools in the region.
4. There is no substantial relationship between principals' functional leadership style and internal efficiency in public senior secondary schools in the South-South region.

Methods

A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The target population included 3,020 principals and 68,898 teachers across 3,020 public senior secondary schools located in less developed communities within the six South-South states of Nigeria: Akwa-Ibom (31), Bayelsa (8), Cross River (16), Delta (25), Edo (18), and Rivers (23). Using stratified random sampling, two schools were selected from each state, totaling 242 schools. The sample included all 242 principals and five randomly selected teachers from each school, resulting in 1,210 teachers participating in the study.

Data were collected using two instruments: the Leadership Effectiveness of Public Senior Secondary School Questionnaire (LEPSSSQ) and the Public Senior Secondary School Students Enrolment Checklist (PSSSSEC). The LEPSSSQ was divided into three sections — A, B, and C — each consisting of five items rated on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The questionnaire focused on principals' leadership effectiveness, instructional supervision, and leadership styles. The checklist captured data on students' enrolment from the 2015/2016 to 2017/2018 academic sessions.

To ensure validity, the instruments were reviewed by two educational management experts from the Faculty of Education at the University of Benin. A pilot test involving 20 teachers (not included in the main study) was conducted, and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was calculated at 0.79 to confirm the reliability of the instrument.

Data analysis involved descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation to address the research questions. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was applied to test the hypotheses. Principals' leadership effectiveness was classified as low if the mean score was 2.50 or below and high if it was 2.51 or above. Internal efficiency levels were interpreted as follows: mean values between 0 and 0.9 indicated inefficiency, while mean values from 1 to 1.5 indicated efficiency.

Results

Table 1: Levels of principals' leadership roles effectiveness of public senior secondary schools in less developed communities in South- South region of Nigeria

Variables	N	Mean	SD
School discipline	232	2.19	.47
Instructional supervision	232	3.39	.56
School-community relationship	232	2.86	.43
Staff and students' welfare	232	2.45	.51
Grand Mean		2.72	

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that the overall level of principals' leadership role effectiveness in public senior secondary schools in less developed communities of the South-South region of Nigeria was above average, as reflected by the grand mean score. This suggests that while some aspects of leadership may require improvement, principals generally demonstrated a moderate to high level of effectiveness in their leadership roles.

Table 2: Public senior secondary school enrolment and outputs cohort from 2015/2016 – 2017/2018 academic session in South- south, Nigeria.

S/N	States	Enrolment (Inputs)	Completers (Output)	Actual (Input/Output)	Wastage Ratio (Inefficiency)
1	Akwa-Ibom	51509	21739	2.37	0.8
2	Bayelsa	19721	11421	1.73	0.6
3	Cross Rivers	15127	9664	1.57	0.5
4	Delta	35194	25891	1.36	0.5
5	Edo	26238	18578	1.41	0.5
6	Rivers	24473	22435	1.09	0.4
	Total Mean	172262	109728	1.59	0.55

The results presented in Table 2 reveal the internal efficiency levels of public senior secondary schools in less developed communities across the South-South region of Nigeria. The calculated wastage ratios for the states were as follows: Akwa-Ibom (0.8), Bayelsa (0.6), Cross River (0.5), Delta (0.5), Edo (0.5), and Rivers (0.4). The overall average wastage ratio was 0.55. Since an efficiency value below 1 indicates internal inefficiency, the results suggest that public senior secondary schools in these communities experienced significant inefficiencies, reflecting considerable student attrition before completion.

Table 3: Pearson r of the relationship between principals' leadership roles effectiveness and internal efficiency of public senior secondary schools in less developed communities of South-South region of Nigeria

Variables	N	Pearson r	p-value	Remark
Principals' leadership roles effectiveness School Efficiency	232	0.032	0.627	Not significant

Table 3 shows a Pearson r value of 0.032 and a p -value of 0.627. Testing with an alpha level of 0.05, the p -value is greater than the alpha level. Therefore, null hypothesis which states that there is no relationship between principals' leadership roles effectiveness and internal efficiency of public senior secondary schools in less developed communities of South-South region of Nigeria is retained.

Table 4: Pearson r of the relationship between principals' instructional supervisory roles effectiveness and internal efficiency of public senior secondary schools in less developed communities of South-South region of Nigeria

Variables	N	Pearson r	p -value	Remark
Principals' Instruction Supervisory Roles School Internal Efficiency	232	-0.025	0.703	Not significant

Table 4 shows a Pearson r value of -0.025 and a p -value of 0.703. Testing with an alpha level of 0.05, the p -value is greater than the alpha level. Therefore, null hypothesis which states that there is no relationship between principals' instructional supervisory roles and school internal efficiency of public senior secondary schools in less developed communities of South-South region of Nigeria is retained.

Table 5: Pearson r of the relationship between principals' leadership roles effectiveness and internal efficiency of public senior secondary schools in less developed communities of South-South region of Nigeria

Variables	N	Pearson r	p -value	Remark
Principals' charismatic leadership styles School Internal Efficiency	232	0.135	0.040	Significant

Table 5 shows a Pearson r value of 0.135 and a p -value of 0.040. Testing with an alpha level of 0.05, the p -value is less than the alpha level. Therefore, null hypothesis which states that principals' charismatic leadership style does not significantly influence internal efficiency of public senior secondary schools in less developed communities of South-South region of Nigeria is rejected. Consequently, principals' charismatic leadership style significantly influences internal efficiency of public senior secondary schools in less developed communities of South-South region of Nigeria.

Table 6: Pearson r of the relationship between principals' functional leadership style and internal efficiency of public senior secondary schools in less developed communities of South-South region of Nigeria

Variables	N	Pearson r	p -value	Remark
Principals' functional leadership style School Internal Efficiency	232	0.138	0.036	Significant

Table 6 shows a Pearson r value of 0.137 and a p -value of 0.036. Testing with an alpha level of 0.05, the p -value is less than the alpha level. Therefore, null hypothesis which states that principals' functional leadership style does not significantly influence school internal efficiency of public senior secondary schools in less developed communities of South-South region of Nigeria is rejected. Consequently, principals' functional leadership styles significantly influence internal efficiency of public senior secondary schools in less developed communities of South-South region of Nigeria.

Discussions

The study's findings indicate that principals' leadership roles in underdeveloped communities within Nigeria's South-South region are generally effective. This suggests that school heads in this region are attentive to their duties, including routine inspection of teachers' lesson notes, ensuring the availability of teaching facilities, maintaining staff and student attendance records, and fostering a positive school-community relationship. These findings align with Onwubiko, Eze, Udeh, Okoloagu, and Chuka-Okosa (2015), who described an effective principal as an administrative leader, manager, community liaison, instructional guide, and agent of educational reform.

Despite the effectiveness of principals' leadership roles, the study revealed that senior secondary schools in the region still face issues of internal inefficiency. This inefficiency may be linked to the limited availability of essential facilities and the shortage of qualified teachers in rural and underserved areas. These challenges may discourage students from pursuing secondary education, potentially leading to dropouts as students opt for activities such as fishing, farming, or informal labour. Consequently, this contributes to educational system wastage. This finding contrasts with Kolawole and Ogbiye (2020), who reported that secondary schools in Ekiti State were internally efficient due to the effective use of human and material resources.

Interestingly, the study found no notable connection between principals' leadership effectiveness and secondary school internal efficiency. This contradicts the assertion of Umar, Kennyathulla, and Hogue (2021), who emphasized that strong leadership encourages parental, teacher, and community involvement, which supports school efficiency. However, if teachers are not motivated, their dedication to instructional delivery may wane, ultimately affecting student achievement. Ensuring parental and community engagement is vital for improving student outcomes. Without this support, achieving internal efficiency may remain difficult despite principals' leadership efforts.

The study further identified no substantial correlation between principals' instructional supervision and secondary school internal efficiency in the South-South region. This might be due to unpredictable factors such as inadequate learning materials, student distractions caused by hunger, insecurity, or lack of interest in education. However, hypothesis three revealed a meaningful relationship between charismatic leadership by principals and internal efficiency in public senior secondary schools within less developed areas of the South-South region. This finding aligns with the view of Nusche and Moorman in Dabessa and Cheramlak (2021), who emphasized the importance of leadership style in improving learning outcomes. Charismatic principals often possess qualities like patience, humility, creativity, and dedication to students' needs. Combining professional expertise with a positive personality can enhance internal efficiency by promoting greater student success.

Lastly, the fourth hypothesis showed a significant link between functional leadership and internal efficiency in public secondary schools within underdeveloped South-South communities. This supports the conclusions of Nwankwo (2014) and Bush (2018), who highlighted the role of functional leadership in achieving school goals. The implication is that principals who demonstrate strong administrative skills, effective communication, and responsiveness to staff and students' needs are more likely to achieve improved school performance. Such leaders prioritize teamwork and involve stakeholders, especially parents, to enhance educational service delivery.



Conclusion

Public senior secondary schools in underdeveloped areas of South-South Nigeria face internal inefficiency, with a high wastage ratio of 0.5 among enrolled students during the study period. Although principals' leadership effectiveness positively influences school efficiency, other factors such as adequate facilities, teacher availability, student motivation, and a safe learning environment are critical. Effective school administration requires technical and functional leadership skills to achieve educational objectives.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. School principals should remain dedicated to their leadership duties to enhance staff performance and improve student outcomes.
2. Government authorities should regularly organize capacity-building programs for school leaders to boost their effectiveness in navigating educational challenges.
3. Principals should actively improve their instructional supervision by consistently monitoring teaching activities and offering support to teachers and students facing challenges.
4. Disciplinary measures in schools should be reinforced to promote responsible behaviour and ensure students stay committed to academic and extracurricular pursuits.
5. School leaders should strive to motivate teachers and students by providing essential learning resources, ensuring security within school premises, and fostering a positive school-community relationship through effective leadership strategies.



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