



Leadership Styles for Inclusive Educational Attainment in Tertiary Institutions

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Abstract

The study examined leadership strategies for inclusive education in tertiary institutions. Leadership plays a pivotal role in piloting the affairs of higher institutions' students and lecturers. The paper examines autocratic, transformational, and democratic leadership styles and their strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are to be harnessed to enhance students' academic achievement and inclusivity. Attributes that enhance students' academic and inclusivity include motivation, cordial relationships among students and colleagues, mentorship, and collaboration. This study implies that integrating these aforementioned leadership styles will produce outstanding visionaries who will encourage others to develop through dedication and diligence, charm, promoting togetherness, acknowledging the accomplishments of their subordinates, and ultimately coaching and mentoring others. The idea of inclusivity is ingrained in this leadership approach. The study recommended mentorship and preparing students for society through good leadership.

Keywords: Leadership; Leadership Styles; Academic Achievement; Inclusion; Mentorship; Motivation.



Introduction

The fight against inequality, social injustice, and the sustenance of the environment led to the emergence of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The focus of SDG 4 was inclusive and equitable education, emphasizing equal opportunity to access affordable education for all, including learners in tertiary education (United Nations, 2015). It becomes imperative to ensure that this opportunity is not skewed to a particular group of people with privileged backgrounds compared to others in the same society. The high cost of living in Nigeria has affected the cost of learning materials, accommodation, transportation, and feeding of students. The leaders in Nigeria in all sectors are responsible for ensuring inclusiveness and equity in their domains, including universities, to enable the students to attain academic success with good mentorship. This has led to the major gap in this study put in a question form: What is the role of leaders (lecturers) in ensuring that students attain inclusive and equitable academic achievement as their mentors in tertiary institutions?

Conceptualizing Leaders and Leadership Styles

Leadership is a process of persuading one another to accomplish shared objectives and uphold the leader's and the followers' beliefs by combining ideas, emotions, and behaviours (Nur et al. 2021). Hendrawan and Pogo (2021) posited that leadership is the process by which a leader influences or exemplifies to his followers how to achieve organizational goals. They further explained that leadership style can be viewed as a determining element for success because it has a substantial impact. In contrast, there are various leadership styles used in organizations and institutions to create behavioural patterns and inspire others to collaborate towards common objectives. Leaders are individuals with special qualities, personalities, and characters that set them apart from others. According to Mwaura and Thinguri (2018), a leader's style inspires followers to work towards the organization's goals. Leadership in the context of this study refers to lecturers in universities, and followers are the students. A common list of crucial mediators for promoting advancement, modernization, modifications, and innovations in capacity building and teaching and learning methods, including school environments, is the leadership positions (Lee et al. 2019; Parveen et.al 2022). Their leadership role will be discussed vis-a-vis their relationship with their students and the overall attainment of academic goals of the students through inclusiveness and equity.

Students' Educational Attainment

An achievement test refers to an assessment in which scores are often used to determine the level of attainment of instructions. Kashyap (2021) opined that an excellent means of evaluating student educational achievement is through the administration of tests. The degree of improvement in a student's performance, particularly in the results of their final year external exams, is referred to as their academic performance (Galante et al., 2018). The literature has identified some elements that may have an impact on pupils' academic success. Some of them are the school locations of students (Ntibi & Edoho, 2017), the gender of students (Odey, 2019), subject combinations of social studies students (Uwaifo & Dania, 2021), and teacher factors (Uwaifo, 2024).

Akpan (2020) looked into several factors that affect students' academic performance in Nigeria, including quality assurance and student welfare. The study found that, among other things, inadequate welfare packages for teachers and students were a contributing factor in the declining performance of social studies students. Undoubtedly, students who feel they have a bad relationship with their professors rely more on them, have difficult lives, and don't have

close relationships, all of which contribute to their subpar academic achievement (Means & Pyne, 2017). Strong bonds between the two sides are essential components of the educational process that have a significant impact on student participation, academic achievement, career development, and readiness for the challenges of the remainder of life. Teachers' and students' more positive attitudes have an impact on the growth of social and academic conditions as well as the improvement in students' academics. More pleasant interactions between teachers and students have an impact on the growth of social and academic circumstances as well as the improvement in students' achievement (Jiang & Zhang, 2021). Teachers have a significant influence on students' lives and careers, claim Afzal et al. (2023). Teachers and lecturers assist young people in establishing successful careers. They concluded that a strong teacher-student relationship positively impacts students' academic progress. Additionally, a positive relationship serves as a motivator, enabling pupils to effectively prepare for life beyond school and fulfil their social obligations.

Overview of Leadership Styles

Leaders employ various strategies to drive their policies to achieve their goals. In educational institutions like universities, lecturers are the main providers of good leadership and mentorship that raise student academic achievement. Therefore, it follows that lecturers, to a large extent, should be held responsible for promoting good citizens by enhancing current knowledge management and instruction that most likely maximize academic achievement and improve job performance through their leadership strategies (Keddie, 2015; Parveen et al., 2021; Parveen et al., 2022). Hence, the products from the university become the people that will drive all facets of the country positively or negatively.

Three leadership styles are discussed in this study. The authoritarian leadership style, the transformational leadership style, and the democratic leadership style. These styles will be discussed with emphasis on their strengths and weaknesses.

Authoritarian Leadership Style

According to Oko (2017), autocratic leadership is a style in which the leader has complete control over all decisions and solicits little input from his subordinates. This suggests that his subordinates' well-being, opinions, and interests are unimportant. According to Ugbor et al. (2023), an authoritarian leadership style has negative effects on both teachers and students since it puts them under continual stress, anxiety, fear, and pressure within the school. This is because neither the staff nor the students are always safe. After all, the principal is seen as a dictator while the staff follow his instructions. These result in low academic accomplishment in school, which affects the students' learning morale. According to Bakare and Oredein (2022), this leadership approach could be suitable for inexperienced staff and fast-track judgments that need to be made quickly without unnecessary bottlenecks. The authoritative leadership strategy was ineffective in raising academic achievement (Igwe, 2017; Imhangbe, 2018; Tedla et al., 2021; Mwove, 2023).

Contrarily, the research conducted by other authors revealed that authoritarian leadership affects students' academics and job performance positively (Weli & Eguzorobe, 2022; Parveen et al 2022; Eze et al 2024). This could be because some people perform excellently under strict supervision.



Strengths

Autocratic leadership strategy has some strengths associated with its implementation, they include; the followers must obey the leader's directions and directives to achieve set goals, an autocrat maintains control over the group by giving directives and instructing members on functioning effectively, the leadership style is characterized by zeal and visionary clarity, it enables speedy decision-making, and that the leaders decide on work procedures and establish all policies.

Weaknesses

The autocratic style of leadership with outstanding characteristics has some shortcomings, stated as follows:

Autocratic leader makes use of threats and bullying to ensure compliance with instructions and directives. The dictatorial boss often ignores the opinions of those under him, has little or no interest in the well-being of their staff/subordinates, and their major aim is to achieve set goals at any cost without any remorse.

Transformational leadership style

This leadership strategy is transformational and innovative in approach, culture, and principles. This leadership strategy can motivate subordinates to perform tasks at a higher level. A transformative leader who desires to be successful must align the self-interests of their subordinate with the organization. The two main components of transformational leadership are idealized influence, which serves as a charismatic paradigm and conveys a shared vision of the future, and secondly is the inspiring motivation. This leader inspires his followers through motivation and encouragement (Mahdinezhad et al. 2013). On the other hand, Mendez-Keegan (2019) posited that teachers' opinions of the atmosphere, commitment, job satisfaction, and conditions of the school are influenced by transformational leadership. This implies that transformational leaders have the responsibility to project good conditions for the institution, create conducive social interaction, and be committed to ensuring success in organizational goals.

According to Murage and Kikechi (2023), transformational leaders are seen as agents of change with distinct visions to seek advice from others with an insider understanding of the company. Motivating others is the most important component of transformative leadership, by kindling a desire in followers, convincing them of a goal, and assisting them in realizing it. Transformative leadership draws critical attention to pressing issues. It promotes creativity and education, which raises performance levels overall. Leaders and followers must increase one another's sense of purpose and drive to practice transformational management.

Strengths

There are several advantages associated with the transformational leadership strategy. They include: Employees/subordinates and students under transformative leadership experience high levels of motivation, which increases outputs. The leadership strategy is very good for institutions needing and undergoing reforms and growth. They are change agents with a distinct vision who also rely on the expertise of others within the organization for direction. As team players, they increase institutional output, morale, and motivation in many ways. They are people with great vision who inspire others to achieve great heights by inspiring

commitment and enthusiasm. Another admirable strength of a transformational leader is their charismatic nature. Transformational leaders foster loyalty and commitment. They acknowledge and celebrate the accomplishments of their subordinates and offer coaching and mentoring to assist their team in gaining new abilities.

Weaknesses

Despite the numerous advantages, some of the weaknesses include unrealistic expectations and possible power misuse. A lack of attention can still occur even when team members are cohesive and aware of the exact metrics required to complete a task. Employees under transformative leadership may be trained to think in a way that makes it harder for them to recognize bad practices. Inadequate oversight mechanisms may impede the group's ability to identify shortcomings in their output.

Democratic Leadership Style

According to Bakare and Oredein (2022), a democratic leader delegates authority to the people, allows for flexibility and adaptability, relies on staff input, and considers feedback. The implication is that the leader gives power to his subordinates and trusts them to contribute their expertise to the achievement of organizational goals. Democratic leadership permits all individuals to engage, share ideas, have their voices heard, and promote dialogue (Ocheme, et al 2023). This leadership strategy allows followers to participate in policy formation and decision-making, making them important and part of the system. This leadership approach can be used in various settings, such as households, workplaces, and schools. A leader who invests time in gaining people's trust and regard can inspire loyalty, confidence, and respect. A democratic leader fosters flexibility, responsibility, and high moral standards by allowing people to participate in decision-making that impacts their goals and work. This leadership strategy involves increased group participation in the decision-making process, encouraging other members of the organization to participate in the decision-making process, and creating a sense of inclusion (Eze, et al 2024). This explains why Jacobs (2018) opined that democratic leaders use competent staff members to hasten the accomplishment of the goals or objectives of the institutions.

Strengths

Several advantages are associated with the democratic leadership strategy as highlighted. A democratic leader encourages staff to work hard and honestly by providing them with appropriate rewards based on their performance. Since everyone participates in decision-making, leadership is participatory. Highlights the role of leaders and groups in the formulation of policies for the achievement of corporate goals. A democratic leader ensures that everyone's welfare and best interests are upheld by their acts or inactions, which supports harmonious coexistence among members. Provide a positive work environment for employees, foster creativity, and find innovative answers to firm challenges. It creates a solid sense of support and increases collaboration in institutions.

Weaknesses

Some weaknesses associated with this leadership style include; Constantly ending meetings that leave people puzzled and without a clear consensus is one of his shortcomings. The leadership style can result in poor efficiency and a lack of accountability. A democratic leadership style can increase employee stress when responsibilities are not adequately



managed. There is a delay in decision-making, which will result in inefficiency. Another common setback is conflict in opinions, which can lead to an unconducive work environment and diminished productivity.

Leadership Strategies and Students' Educational Attainment Reviewed

Weli and Eguzoroibe (2022) worked on principals' leadership styles and how it influences students' academic achievement in Rivers State. The study adopted a descriptive research design, using a sample of 742 from the population of 27004. According to the study, autocratic leadership philosophies significantly impacted students' academic performance. According to the hypothesis, there is no discernible difference between teachers' and students' mean assessments of how much the use of an autocratic leadership style by principals affects students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State's Port Harcourt City. Employees, pupils, or subordinates in schools that employ this approach lack motivation and are less engaged.

Jama (2023), who worked on leadership and students' academic achievement in Somalia, used a correlation research design population of 2000 and 67 as a sample. He discovered that low performance results from autocratic leaders. It is believed that the low level of performance was a result of the use of force by the leader to accomplish goals. On the contrary, Parveen, (et al 2022), studied principal leadership strategy and its impact on teachers' job performance using a total of 612 respondents made up of principals and teachers in Punjab, Pakistan. The study demonstrated that the kind of leadership that was most frequently used was autocratic and that it had a strong and favourable effect on teachers' output. Corroborating this finding is the study carried out by Eze et al. (2024) on the effectiveness of management in secondary schools in Ebonyi State as predicted by leadership styles. The correlational research comprised 226 respondents serving as the population and sample. The study revealed a positive relationship between autocratic leadership style and management effectiveness in secondary schools.

Ocheme, et al, (2023,) examined the different leadership philosophies of principals that affect students' academic achievement in Marist Secondary Schools. The population and sample used were 518 and 311, respectively. SPSS Version 24 was used to generate descriptive statistics. They discovered that the transformational leadership style influences students' academic achievement positively. Mwove, (2023) analysed how principals' leadership philosophies affect pupils' academic achievement in public secondary schools in Mwala sub-county, Machakos County, Kenya. The population of 543 respondents is made up of principals and teachers. The sample size comprising principals and teachers was 288. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data while Inferential statistics was employed to test the hypotheses. The findings showed a statistically significant but weakly beneficial relationship between students' academic achievement and transformational leadership style. Abuhassira, (2024) carried out a study on the effect of transformative leadership on interactions in secondary schools in the United Arab Emirates. They employed descriptive statistics to analyse their data using a sample size of 374. The study reviewed that Department heads' use of transformational leadership techniques was positively correlated with student-teacher interactions, and the experience levels of the instructors shaped these relationships. It is suggestive, therefore, that a positive correlation will lead to improved student achievement in the class.

Jama (2023) researched the impact of student academic performance on school leadership in a case study of Bosaso secondary schools in Puntland. The population for the

study was 2000, with 67 as the sample. Correlation research was used in this study. The study revealed that democratic leadership styles largely affect students' academic performance and achievement, suggesting that democratic leadership styles significantly and favourably impact students' academic success.

On the contrary, Mwove, (2023) discovered a statistically significant but weakly beneficial relationship between students' academic achievement and democratic leadership style. The study has proved that the democratic leadership style does not play an important role in enhancing students' academic success in schools.

The Role of Lecturers as Leaders in Ensuring Inclusivity and Equity in Tertiary Institutions

According to Javed et al. (2019), an inclusive leader is someone who is easily accessible to staff members and available to subordinates. Lecturers who practice inclusivity encourage students and colleagues to develop fresh concepts that open the learning environment to progress, healthy competition, and development, leveraging both internal and external opportunities. According to Ainscow, (2020), teachers/lecturers, particularly those in higher positions, must believe they have a greater duty to all students. Additionally, they must establish internal organizational patterns that allow them to collaborate with stakeholders outside of the school and with other schools. It also implies that administrators of school systems must modify their priorities and methods of operation in response to internal school-led improvement initiatives. This type of strategy is more likely to work in environments with a collaborative culture that values and promotes problem-solving among lecturers and students. The creation of inclusive practices is thought to include people in a specific setting in collaborating to remove obstacles to education attainment that certain students face.

Universities/lecturers play a critical role in promoting ethical leadership by providing education and training, conducting research and thought leadership, and forming partnerships and collaborations. By integrating ethics into their curricula, developing ethical leadership theories and frameworks, and partnering with organizations and stakeholders. Universities can help prepare students for ethical leadership roles in their professional lives and contribute to more ethical and responsible business environments

Superi and Nasqshbandi (2022) investigated the competence of lecturers and students' achievement in higher institutions. 210 students in higher institutions in Brunei were used as the sample. The study revealed a strong relationship between student achievement and the competencies of their lecturers. This is a reflection of the inclusivity demonstrated by the lecturers. Furthermore, the lecturers' motivation enhances the students' positive academic achievement to a large extent. According to Ayu, et al. (2017), it is very beneficial to support and meet the requirements of students when teachers/lecturers act as motivators in the classroom by giving them interactive activities. The Teacher Leadership Institute (2018) states that instructional leadership includes community awareness, participation, advocacy, coaching and mentoring, and facilitating collaborative connections. One intriguing concept for school development is lecturer leadership. Teachers' involvement in school decision-making regarding the technical aspects of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development seems to have been underemphasized in research that used teacher empowerment. In addition to concentrating on the three aspects as mentioned earlier, studies that employ the construct of teacher leadership also demonstrate increased concern regarding the function of teacher leaders in fostering a cooperative school culture and closer ties with the community and parents (Shen et al., 2020).

According to Carmeli et al. (2010), inclusive leadership consists of three elements: accessibility, availability, and openness. These elements are covered in the section that follows. This simply implies that for lecturers to become motivators and mentors to students and younger colleagues, they should be accessible. Most students fear being bullied by lecturers or teachers. These students find it difficult to approach the lecturers for fear of being shouted at. This is at variance with The Teacher Leadership Institute (2018), which states that good leadership should foster collaboration, mentorship, and coaching, which is not feasible in a tense atmosphere. Furthermore, the availability and openness of the teacher and lecturer to the students help to maintain affability and create an inclusive environment, leading to positive outcomes academically.

Implications for Social Studies Educators and Students

Social Studies, by nature and content, revolves around man in his physical, social, and technological environments. The content develops knowledge, skills, necessary processes, values, and attitudes geared toward producing responsible citizens who are capable of producing positive change through good leadership and mentorship. Good mentorship of a leader fosters inclusion in every institution, including universities.

Autocratic, transformational, and democratic leadership styles and their strengths, weaknesses, and discoveries of researchers were critically examined. The implications of the various leadership styles play a vital role in ensuring inclusivity and improved academic achievement in higher institutions in general and social studies mentees in particular. From the literature reviewed, it was discovered that some of the findings established that the autocratic leadership style did not enhance students' academic outcomes (Weli & Eguzoroibe, 2022; Jama, 2023). The reason for this poor performance was that Autocratic leaders make use of threats and bullying. Associated with that was a lack of interest in the welfare of the students and the fact that these students were not motivated to learn. The implication is that there will be a shortage of products who would love to make a career in such a discipline. Contrary views were also attested to in favour of the autocratic leadership style by Parveen, (et al 2022) and Eze et al. (2024). The success attained by the student was attributed to the leadership style that is characterized by zeal, visionary clarity, and a speedy decision-making process.

The transformational leadership style was discovered to improve student academic achievement to a large extent, and this leadership style can be positively connected with the relationship between students, teachers, and subordinates (Ocheme, et al., 2023; Abuhassira, 2024). This implies that this leadership should be projected by lecturers and institution leaders to enhance inclusivity in the system. Some highlighted strengths of transformational leadership that should be harnessed include: high levels of motivation, which boost productivity; great visionaries who inspire others to grow through commitment and hard work; charisma, which fosters unity, and celebrate the success of subordinates, and finally coach and mentor others. In this leadership style lies the principle of inclusion through and through.

Finally, democratic leadership is known for its participatory tendencies. It was established that this leadership style has increased students' academic output (Jama, 2023). This leadership style implies that it allows everyone to be part of the system and feel relevant. The welfare of the people is catered for, harmonious coexistence, a positive work environment, creativity, and collaboration are the hallmarks of this leadership style.



Conclusion

Good leadership is the nucleus of inclusivity. A good leader can galvanize everyone together by integrating the various leadership styles discussed. This is through harnessing the strengths inherent in autocratic, transformational, and democratic leadership styles to ensure inclusive educational attainment for students and a harmonious work environment for colleagues. To achieve this aim, the leaders must possess the attributes of mentorship, motivator, influencer, bridge builder, and collaboration in the voyage of success.

Recommendations

Based on this discourse, the following measures are suggested.

1. Lecturers of every cadre should be amiable to both students and colleagues.
2. Corrections should be done with the motive of making the person corrected to become better and not to rubbish the fellow.
3. Replicate yourself through mentorship because life is a stage. When the leaders are off the stage, there should be others who have been well-groomed to take over.
4. The university is a mini society; therefore, products from the university should be well nurtured to be deemed worthy of character and learning in the larger society after graduation.
5. The strengths of the various leadership styles should be harnessed to enhance output and inclusivity in tertiary institutions and society at large.



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