Nigerian Secondary School Teachers' Perception towards Teacher Leadership

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Abstract: *This qualitative research explores how secondary school teachers in Nigerian public secondary schools perceive teacher leadership. It determines the extent to which teachers participate in leadership activities within and outside schools. Data for this study was elicited through an analysis of documents and semi-structured interview. The participants included three principals, three vice principals, nine teachers and a Tutor General/Permanent Secretary of an Education District in Lagos, Nigeria. This paper highlights the benefits of teacher leadership and the roles teachers play in school improvement. The findings from the study supported the notion provided by theorists that administrators and teachers have vague conceptions about the meaning of teacher leadership. It also showed that the level of collaboration among teachers was low in relation to academic matters and high in matters related to extracurricular and social activities. Some of the barriers militating against teacher leadership that the findings highlighted included: inadequate trust between teachers and administrators, school norms and beliefs, micro-politics and teacher's attitude towards work. The finding in this research lends credence to studies conducted in the UK, USA, Canada and Australia on teacher leadership which confirmed that if teacher leadership is to thrive in, schools teachers must work collaboratively and their roles and responsibilities must be distributed within the schools.*

Keywords: Teacher leadership, distributed leadership, school culture, Nigerian secondary schools teacher identity.

Introduction

In recent times, teachers' professional responsibilities have increased exponentially. School leaders are currently expected to assume administrative responsibilities; ensure student safety; and while also engaging in teaching and other curriculum related activities. Furthermore, school leaders are under pressure to improve student performance in public schools (Abari, 2005). These teachers' efforts are not made known due to inadequate facilities, the socio-economic and political factors in schools (Olujuwon, 2013). Effective school leadership is about providing vision, direction and support towards a preferred school (Harris & Muijs, 2005). The studies of Portin, Alejano, Knapp and Marzolf (2006) and Water, Marzano and McNulty (2003, 2005) revealed that effective school leadership make significance improvement in students' learning outcomes and development. Similarly, Fullan (2002) believed that effective school leaders are the key to large-scale, sustainable education reform. Water, Marzano and McNulty (2003) explained the factors that make school leadership effective to include, the school, (curriculum, goals, parental involvement, orderly environment and collegiality), the teacher (instruction and curriculum) and student (motivation). This is in tandem with the analysis of critical leadership practices that influences student learning outcomes as identified by Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) such as

the setting of direction through vision, goals and expectations, helping of individual teachers through support and modelling, the redesigning of the organisation to foster collaboration and engage families and community and for providing support and resources for managing organisations.

New challenges in improving schooling and student achievement need new partnerships which governments can help with resources, facilities and where appropriate, initiate with enhanced involvement of key stakeholders (Institute Alliance of Leadership Education Institution (IALEI), 2008). Similarly, teacher leaders have been described as those in the first place are expert teachers, who spend majority of their time in the classroom but take on leadership roles, like team leaders, departmental heads and union representatives, at times when development and innovation are needed" (Harris & Muijs, 2005; IEL, 2001). This means creating the conditions in which people work and learn together, where they construct and refine meaning, leading to a shared purpose of goals (Harris & Muijs, 2005).

Moreover, teachers are recognised as agent of change and are instrumental to educational reforms and school improvement (Aluede, 2009). In spite that teaching is an essential service in national development; the profession did not assume considerable respect in Nigerian society compared with other professions (Adelabu, 2005). Literature also revealed the instances that the professional and personal identities of teachers are completely ignored in reform strategies and educational innovation policies (vanVeen, Sleegers & van de Ven, 2005). Furthermore, there are many impediments preventing teacher from being leaders such as bureaucracy in schools, teachers' perception of leadership and the teacher preparatory programme as well as role definitions and time (Blaise, 1991; Zinn, 1997). The roles and responsibilities of teachers as leaders are reflected in their functions and professionals, but studies explained that teachers were reluctant in being regarded as "leaders" and do not want to take on formal titles of leadership. Meanwhile, they work through informal channels and effect changes in schools systems (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2012). It was in this perspective that the researchers attempts to answer the question: What are the Nigerian secondary schools teachers' perceptions towards teacher leadership?

Literature Review

Teacher leadership is a process by which teachers; individually or collectively influence their colleagues as well as other members of the school community as they try to bring about better teaching and learning processes. The Institute of Educational Leadership report of 2001 in the United States of America, emphasized teacher leadership as a means of mobilizing the untapped attributes of teachers to strengthen learners' achievement at the ground level, thus principals, teachers and students benefits from teacher leadership. Teacher leadership is about the discovery of teachers' potentials for collaboration in school leadership (Institute of Educational leadership, IEL, 2001). Recent researches have called for distributed forms of leadership where all teachers are viewed as having the capacity to lead and where power is redistributed across the organisation (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001; Supovitz, Sirinides & May, 2010).

However, new challenges in improving schooling and student achievement need new partnerships which governments can help with resources, facilities and where appropriate, initiate with enhanced involvement of key stakeholders (Institute Alliance of Leadership Education Institution (IALEI), 2008). Similarly, teacher leaders have been described firstly as expert teachers, who spend majority of their time in the classroom but take on leadership roles, like team leaders, departmental heads and union representatives, at times when

development and innovation are needed" (Harris & Muijs, 2005; IEL, 2001). This means creating the conditions in which people work and learn together, where they construct and refine meaning, leading to a shared purpose of goals (Harris & Muijs, 2005).
York-Barr and Duke's (2004) study observes that teacher leadership promotes "continuous improvement of teaching and learning…with the result being increased achievement for every pupil" (p. 255). They categorised the benefits of teacher leadership into four namely: decision-making, teachers' expertise, recognition and growth as well as student achievement. In spite of the benefits of teacher leadership, there has been lots of contention on the definition. The understanding of teacher leadership depends on "who" is doing the defining (Leonard, Petta & Porter, 2012). In a study carried out by Angelle and Schmid (2007) in South-Eastern United States, participants perceived teacher leadership from different perspectives either as positional designee, role model, or exemplary leader. They concluded that teacher leadership is defined in terms of how it was lived in the context of the individual school and most often it is described in terms of a person (Angelle & Schmid, 2007).

Similarly, Leonard et al. (2012) inform that different researchers in the last 20 years have wrestled with the definition and conceptualisation of teacher leadership. This corroborates the findings of this research, about participants understanding of teacher leadership; their responses were varied, they see teacher leadership as formal teacher roles, role models as well as in mastery of subject matter. However in this study, teachers collaborate more in extracurricular activities through social programmes than in academics due to their perception of teacher leadership.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research methodology which is exploratory and descriptive in a multiple case study. This was employed to understand issues from participants' viewpoints (Struwig & Stead, 2004). Also, how the participants' experiences were created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The participants were purposefully selected from the five public urban schools of the study because they are major stakeholders and believed to be competent to provide answers to the research question. There were 9 teachers, 3 Principals, 3 Vice-Principals and 1 Educational Administrator in Education District IV.

Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews and documentary evidence. The interviews were conducted at the school sites, after school hours and during free periods over an eight month periods. The interviews elicited information on the participants' biographical information, how they gain, maintain and exercise leadership and their perception towards teacher leadership (Robson, 2002). The interviews were audio-taped for easy verbatim transcriptions of participants' responses in order to enhance credibility and trustworthiness. A minimum of on1 hour was spent on each interview. Data from the semi-structured interview and documentary evidence were triangulated in order to establish the credibility of findings and easy interpretations (Struwig & Stead, 2005). Data was analysed using content and discourse analysis so as to understand the interaction and the literal meaning of language of people in their day-to-day activities (Shaw & Bailey, 2009).

Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the Faculty of Education's Ethics Committee of the University of Johannesburg; the Education District VI in Lagos, Nigeria; and the principals of the five public secondary schools. We used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants and the schools used in the study.

Research Context

The five schools in this context are located in urban area in Lagos and are funded solely by the Lagos State Government. In addition, all the participants are full time staff and are members of the Nigeria Union of Teachers. They are also certified by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN). One of the schools in the study is situated in a military facility, two in an estate; one is close to the seaports in Lagos and one situated very close to a major highway. Harris and Chapman (2002.p.2) research revealed that effective leaders in challenging schools are constantly managing tensions and problems directly related to the particular circumstances and context of the school. The main leadership task facing them is one of coping with unpredictability, conflict and dissent on a daily basis without discarding core values.

Data Analysis

Data was presented using direct quotes and comments of participants. The process of analysis of the enormous amount of data collected through semi-structured interview and policy document analysis led to the categorisation of major themes which translate into different challenges militating against teacher leadership in schools. These themes include inadequate trust, school culture, micro-politics and teacher's attitude.

Inadequate Trust

Inadequate trust refers to a scenario when followers no longer have confidence in their leader while trust is seen as confidence in or reliance on the integrity, veracity, justice, friendship, or other sound principles, of another person or group (Louis, 2007). Similarly, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003) offers a comprehensive definition that "trust is an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (p. 189). In the schools system, all professionals are dependent on one another to achieve school goals and empowered by each other's efforts. Trustworthiness is typically judged according to these five main facets: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty and openness.

In the study, four teachers raised the issue of lack of trust among colleagues as one of the hindrances to the practice of leadership in school. An excerpt from Bayo, one of the teachers interviewed revealed thus "When the authority (school Management) does not have trust in you with which to carry out an exercise .....That's what mistrust can do."
The excerpt from Bayo shows that lack of confidence by management on teachers' capability in accomplishing tasks lead to mistrust. This was also corroborated by Njoku, another teacher, who said, "The hindrance is mistrust, or poor communication, when information is not effectively passed. Njoku believed that the cause of mistrust is poor communication between the leader and the follower.

Inadequate trust could occur in schools as a result of poor communication, discriminations in workplaces, lack of confidence on the part of the teacher. Inadequate trust may stifle innovation, cause conflicts, unhealthy rivalry and could lead to some unwholesome practices in schools. When there is trust, it fosters necessary social exchanges among school professionals. This would enable them to learning from one another and experimenting with new practices (Bryk & Schneider, 2003).

It was observed that trust helps build relationship and helps uplift schools towards academic achievement. This study corroborates that of Ngcobo and Tikly's (2010) that trust, fairness and collaborative action contributes to school effectiveness. In other to foster teacher

professionalism in school Tschannen-Moran (2009) enjoin school leaders to resist bureaucratic orientation, with its implicit distrust but adopt practices that lead to strong trust among school leaders, teachers, students and parents (Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

School Culture

School culture essentially refers to 'the way we do things around here'. It is meant to describe the character of a school as it reflects deep patterns of values, beliefs and traditions that have been formed over the course of its history (Inuwa & Yusof, 2012). In this respect, one teacher, one VP raised the issue of school culture. Butter, one of the teachers interviewed believes that any leadership role to be exhibited by teachers must be in consonant with the tradition of that school as well as that of the host community of the school. Butter remarks, "One ah…ah the leadership role which is expected of a teacher to play must follow the tradition of that school. The leader must follow the do and don'ts of the school as well as that of the host community."

This is buttressed by Saida, a vice principal, that in order to have a healthy relationship with the host community, the culture where the school is located should be respected. Saida notes, "You will not get on with them. So, whatever is a culture.... or the social life of where the school is located should be respected."

As all schools are not alike, it is expected that different types of organisational climate prevail in schools. Any climate that is prevalent in schools must be used to achieve success for the school. Research has revealed that school leaders must understand school's culture before implementing change (Bulach, 1999; Mortimore, 2001). This will enhance understanding of the values, beliefs and norms that is prevalent in the organisation.

Micro Politics

Micro politics is the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organisations (Blase, 1991). All 16 participants believed that micro-politics occurs in various ways in schools either in promotion or distribution of responsibilities. Three teachers view it as form of ethnicity, three VPs and the TGPS view it as part of human existence, while some believe it is as a result of ethnicity. In addition, one teacher observe it as forming of cliques by colleagues in schools and one principal believes it as part of management but suggests that fairness is needed. Accordingly, three teachers and one principal note the negative effects of micro-politics on teaching and learning.

Njoku explains the negative effect of micro politics due to the disparity in appointments which affects cordial relationships among colleagues in school. Njoku illustration shows that:

> It influences negatively. We have a situation where a junior officer is directly placed over a senior officer. The possibility of the latter carrying out instructions from the former will be very difficult. Look at this scenario, you are a level 16 officer and a level 15 is made a principal above you and he/she is giving directives, can you take it?. Unless there is an adjustment in the organogram where people are put in positions fit for them.

To buttress the view of Njoku, High, one of the VP's, interviewed explains the role politics played in teachers, Vice Principals and Principals' appointments and even in the appointment of students as prefects in schools which has been entrenched in the school culture as part of teachers' practices. High comments thus:

> I must say this that micro-politics have a role to play even in the appointment of teachers, in the appointment of vice-principals, principals even in the appointment of emm... prefects especially the head boy, the head girl in the schools around this areas, you know, it has really gone a long way.

Boladale, another teacher, explained that micro politics affects teacher and learning and it is an entrenched act of favouritism which causes dissatisfaction and mistrust among colleagues in school systems. According to Boladale, "It affects it in a great deal, we believe that in a system where certain people appear to be more favoured than others, it creates bitterness and lack of trust by some people in the school."

It was revealed micro politics leads to favouritism and this is preferring someone or group of people on the basis of liking or disliking the person or the use of power unfairly in an organisation and this act can manifest in many ways (Sadoza, Saman, Marri & Samay, 2012; Swenson, 2006). Marshall and Scribner (1991) state that "power relationships, conflict, and the policy process as concepts are central to the study of political dynamics that exist within schools" p. 349. This made Kelchtermans (2005) to argue "that professional and meaningful interactions of teachers with their professional context contain a fundamental political dimension" p. 995. This reveals, that in human interactions, there is bound to be elements of political elements which could either be positive or negative but based on the study participants were not happy with the disparities seen in the educational setting as regards promotion and this has affected relationships with colleagues.

Teachers' Attitude

Teacher attitude is the approach or mind-set of teachers in the teaching and learning processes which could be cognitive or psychological. An attitude is described as "a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably towards an object, person, institution or event" (Webster, Mavies, Timothy & Cordial (2012) p. 33). It could also be the "very general evaluations that people hold of themselves, other people, objects and issues" (Webster et al., (2012) p. 33). According to Brief and Weiss (2002.p.280), the organisations in where people work affect their thoughts, feelings and actions just as people's thoughts, feelings, and actions affect the organisations in where they work. In respect of teacher attitudes in schools, there were three teachers' responses. One of them, Massarawa, explains how teachers do not want to respect their leaders, take to corrections or follow instructions. He further stated, that there were cultures of indifference in teachers that after all, "nobody can do anything" to reprimand or sanction them, it is like a vicious cycle. Teachers are not ready to provide leadership to their colleagues or subordinates. It displays carefree attitude. It may affect academic effectiveness in schools. In Massarawa's words:

> Many teachers do not want to bend to teacher leadership...If HOD call any teacher come, you are not doing this' he will just look at you, he won't abuse you, he will just flat your rule. He/she knows you cannot do anything to him or her. So, it goes across like that.

Another teacher, Orji buttresses the view of Massarawa on the attitude of teachers in schools, in that lazy teacher when given assignment outside teaching and learning disregard orders from constituted authorities. Orji notes that "...the lazy teachers, because, I always persist on them to do their work, to write their note of lesson, they see me as a different thing." This reveals that some teachers are lazy in their professional duties and

responsibilities. They wait to be reminded or forced to ensure that their lessons notes are written and are up to date. Any leader that ensures right things are done is most times not liked and could be labelled. This is related to definition of attitude towards work by Ponticell (2006) as "the mental positions, feelings, or emotions that employees associate with work and the workplace" (p. 63). A classical example that comes to mind is the Douglas Macgregor (1960) Theory X and Y. In theory X, employees are viewed generally as having negative attitudes towards work; they are termed "lazy" and are motivated only by money.

Discussions

This study investigated the perceptions of teacher leaders towards teacher leadership in public secondary schools in Nigeria. Two methods of data collection namely, semi-structured interviews and documents analysis were persuasively used. The study showed that problems militating against the practice of teacher leadership are artificial and they are caused by teachers, government and the society at large. Collectively, these problems hamper effective teaching and learning process and teacher leadership in schools.

The findings are important as they revealed factors that hinder distributed leadership in schools. Consequently, inadequate trust hinders effective relationships and collaboration among colleagues in schools. The practice of micro-politics visible in promotion and distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities, thus, hinders creativity, professionalism and merit. This will not augur well with teaching and learning of the 21st century that lays emphasis on knowledge, innovations, collaborations and creativity. Constitutional and international instruments that guarantee freedom from any form of discrimination in any place should be enforced. This will instil confidence in teachers thereby improve teaching and learning. Any clog in the wheel of progress for professional development and career progression of teachers should be removed as this will make them to be de-motivated and this would affect schools and the country. Therefore, teacher must be alive to their professional responsibilities and must be accountable to themselves, the teaching profession, parents and the students. Any actions or inactions that would jeopardise learning outcomes should be avoided. As a result of this, roles and responsibilities must be distributed as this would bring to the fore "untapped" qualities of teacher and help to achieve students learning outcomes and help in the vision of transforming Nigeria by the year 2020. This study corroborates earlier findings that there are obstacles in the development of teacher leadership (Harris & Muijs, 2002; Zinn, 1997).

Conclusion

The study showed that the challenges faced by teachers in Nigerian public schools are artificial. The remedies to these challenges include dialogue, trust, respect and collaboration so as to engender true academic environment. The findings revealed that inadequate trust; teachers' attitude coupled with micro-politics affect teacher morale, job satisfaction and by extension affects the teaching and learning processes in schools. In addition, mistrust, low perception of teachers to teacher leadership affects teachers' performance in their duties. The quest to put Nigeria in the map of the world by the year 2020 as an economic power can only be realised if teachers are provided with essential resources to transform education. All these included but not limited to providing conducive teaching and learning environment, but putting in place an effective conflict resolution mechanism as well as strong emphasis on professionalism will lead to the realisation of Nigerian national educational goals. In addition, the study shows the need for distributed leadership in schools that will foster collaboration, networking and exchange of ideas. In addition, all relevant agencies should ensure that policy statements that guarantee freedom from any form of discrimination are upheld. This will

enhance professionalism in teaching and remove apathy in the system. Furthermore, there is need to encourages in schools, open and effective communication that will help to clarify ambiguity with the provision for a feedback. More importantly, teachers should uphold professional ethics and standards and any action or words that will jeorpadise attainment of goals should be done away with and above all, schools should be made to be conducive for effecting teaching and learning purposes.

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