

INFLUENCE OF PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP STYLES ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

The researcher examined Influence of principals' leadership strategies on experiential learning in public Secondary Schools in Enugu State. Two research questions guided the study. The researcher adopted descriptive survey research design. The study was carried out in Enugu State, located in Nigeria's South East geopolitical zone. The study involved a total population of 8,816 respondents, which consisted of 295 principals and 8,521 teachers from secondary schools in Enugu State. Principals and teachers were ideal respondents for this study as they have direct experience and insights into how these leadership styles influences the use of experiential learning. The study comprised a comprehensive sample size involving a total of 1,147 respondents. This diverse group consisted of 297 school principals and 852 teachers, all drawn from secondary schools in Enugu State. The instrument for data collection for this study was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, titled "Influence of Principals Leadership Styles on experiential learning on Questionnaire (IPLSELQ)." To establish the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was validated by three research specialists. Two of the experts are from the Department of Educational Management, and one from the Department of Mathematics and Computer Education (Measurement and Evaluation Unit). All the experts are from the Faculty of Education Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Agbani, Enugu. To ensure the reliability of the research instrument, a trial test was conducted on a sample of 40 respondents, comprising 12 principals and 28 teachers, from secondary schools in Abia State. The computed Cronbach alpha values for clusters 1 and 2 were .81 and .80 respectively. The research questions were answered using mean scores and standard deviations. t-test statistic was used to test the null hypotheses. Findings of the study revealed that authoritarian leadership style limits teachers and students' autonomy, increasing teacher -centered approach leaving the students behind, increases fear-based environment for students, reduces creativity among students and make students and teachers to lack effective collaboration. Findings equally revealed that democratic leadership style encourages student participation, boosting student motivation and promotes group work and discussions, allowing students to learn from each other and develop teamwork skills. From the findings of the study, it was recommended among others that Enugu State Ministry of Education should organize regular workshops, seminars, and leadership training programmes for principals, focusing on effective leadership strategies that promote experiential learning and learner-centered teaching approaches.

Keywords: Principals' leadership, experiential learning, public secondary schools

Introduction

Secondary education refers to the stage of schooling that follows primary education. Secondary education in Nigeria is one of the institutions established to transmit desired skills to youths for academic excellence and achieving national development (Agusiobo and Etukokwu, 2017). Secondary education serves as a bridge between the primary education and tertiary education (Nwakpa, 2017). Secondary education occupies a central position in the education ladder. While it absorbs graduates from primary education, it prepares students for access into higher educational institutions. This gives secondary education its relevance (Etomes and Molua, 2019). Effective secondary education relies heavily on the leadership and vision of principals, who play a crucial role in shaping school policies, fostering an environment conducive to learning, and supporting both teachers and students in achieving

academic success. The principal is the chief executive in secondary schools. He is on the top position in the leadership oreganogram of the school leadership. Ikediugwu (2016) is of the view that the principal is a curriculum master minder, who works as a catalyst towards planned educational goals. She maintained that the principal is the leader whose onus is to plan, coordinate and supervise the affairs of teaching and learning exercise in schools so that the entire academic system will run smoothly. In this case, it is expected that such personnel must possess a proven quality as well as the experimental knowledge to enable him achieve tangible results particularly when the enormous and complex leadership task in the educational system is incumbent on him or her. According to Nwaokike (2016) the principal has the sole responsibility of initiating changes in the school in order to accomplish the goals of the academic institution. The degree of success of meeting the educational goals as stipulated in the National Policy on Education; Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013), depends on the type of leadership style adopted by the principal, his competence as well as enabling skills.

A principal is an educational leader responsible for the overall administration, management, and supervision of a school, including its staff and students. Egwu (2016) defined a principal as a leader who must plan, coordinate and supervise the affairs of the school for it to run smoothly. A principal in a school plays the role of an administrative and professional leader who takes direct responsibility in the control and management of successful operation (Wangui, 2017). Principals and their leadership styles are explored in this study to gain a deeper understanding of how educational leadership dynamics influence secondary school students' performance.

Principals function as managers and instructional leaders. They have the primary responsibility of accomplishing the aims and objectives of secondary education as stipulated in the National Policy on Education (NPE). In doing this, they play a number of important roles among which is providing effective leadership in secondary schools aimed at enhancing better job performance of teachers and in essence promoting students' academic achievements in schools. In the secondary school situation, the principal is the leader. His role involves managing the students and staff personnel in a way that will maximize learning outcome. Leadership is the process of influencing, guiding, and directing others to achieve a common goal. Leadership is about aligning people with their vision, inspiring, motivating them, and presenting effective communication (Pleacas, Squires and Garis, 2018). Leadership style refers to the characteristic approach and behaviour that leaders use to guide, motivate, and manage their teams. Rivai (2017) defined leadership style as a set of characteristics used by leaders to influence subordinates so that organizational goals are achieved. It involves the methods, strategies, and attitudes leaders employ to influence their followers and achieve organizational goals.

Different leadership styles, such as authoritarian, democratic, laissez-affair and transformational, reflect varying degrees of authority and participation. According to Northouse (2019), leadership style is a composite of various behaviours, including directive, supportive, and participative actions that leaders display in different situations. Yukl (2023) emphasized that the effectiveness of a leadership style depends on its alignment with organizational culture, the nature of the tasks, and the needs of the followers. Hurdzue (2018) proclaimed that effective leadership style could promote excellence in the development of the members of the organisation. The leadership style used is different for each employer depending on the style that is suitable for the employee and depending on the direction, empowerment, and power in decision making (Samdin, Nasrul and Sukotjo, 2021). As a dynamic and multifaceted construct, leadership style plays a crucial role in shaping organizational outcomes and the overall work environment. Principals' leadership styles include a variety of approaches, with transformational leadership standing out as particularly effective in fostering positive school environments and driving educational improvements.

Authoritarian leaders, also known as autocratic leaders, provide clear expectations for what needs to be done, when it should be done, and how it should be done. This style of

leadership is strongly focused on both commands by the leader and control of the followers. There is also a clear division between the leader and the members. Authoritarian leaders make decisions independently, with little or no input from the rest of the group (Ogunsaju, 2016). Researchers found that decision-making was less creative under authoritarian leadership. Lewin also concluded that it is harder to move from an authoritarian leadership style to a democratic leadership style, and vice versa. Autocratic Leadership style is usually viewed as controlling, bossy, and dictatorial. Authoritarian leadership is best applied to situations where there is little time for group decision-making or where the leader is the most knowledgeable member of the group. The autocratic approach can be a good one when the situation calls for rapid decisions and decisive actions. However, it tends to create dysfunctional and even hostile environments, often pitting followers against the domineering leader (Ogunsaju, 2016).

Democratic leadership is typically the most effective leadership style. Democratic leaders offer guidance to group members, but they also participate in the group and allow input from other group members. Lewin (2018; Ugboaja and Ibiam, 2022) revealed that children in this group were less productive than the members of the authoritarian group, but their contributions were of a higher quality. Democratic leaders encourage group members to participate, but retain the final say in the decision-making process. Group members feel engaged in the process and are more motivated and creative. Democratic leaders tend to make followers feel like they are an important part of the team, which helps foster commitment to the goals of the group (Omoregie, 2018). Thus, how the teachers perceive the principals could to a large extent affect their attitude to their job and, by implication the school environment. For effective experiential learning, leadership styles, positions and general management needs to be articulated to suit the need at hand. A teacher or teachers cannot achieve full package of experiential learning without the support and effort of the school management which the principal serves as the head.

Experiential learning approach is “learning by doing” that promotes active-engaged learning. Coker and Porter (2023) defined experiential learning as an engaged learning process whereby students “learn by doing” and by reflecting on the experiences accumulated through series of hands-on laboratory experiments, practicals, field exercises, and studio performances. It is the creating of knowledge through the transformation of experience based on the perspective that learning is a holistic process that incorporates all one’s life experiences (Jennings & Wargnier, 2020). It is an instructional approach that encourages hands-on minds-on learning, actively involving learners in the teaching and learning process. Experiential learning approach was first introduced by David Kolb in 1984. Kolb emphasized that for students to expand their knowledge and practice problem solving, effective learning must go through four processes namely concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. As an initial process, concrete experience learning emphasizes on individual learners being open-minded and able to adapt to a systematic approach to problem situations. In the reflective observation process, students observe simple demonstrations by displaying virtual visualizations as well as try to express opinions on why and how they can occur. As such, reflection is essential for transforming experience into learning as it allows one to question the validity and usefulness of experiences. Today, experiential learning has been fully articulated in schools and environments that accommodates learning by doing (Baker, 2022). This study examined the influence of principals’ leadership styles such as autocratic leadership on democratic leadership on experiential learning in Enugu State.

Statement of the Problem

In public secondary schools in Enugu State, there are growing concerns about the persistent reliance on traditional, teacher-centered instructional methods, with limited integration of experiential learning approaches. This situation has been linked to challenges such as inadequate instructional supervision, limited professional development opportunities for teachers, poor motivation, insufficient provision of learning resources, and weak instructional

leadership. These challenges suggest possible gaps in the leadership strategies employed by principals in facilitating and promoting experiential learning practices within their schools. Despite government policies and curriculum reforms emphasizing learner-centered and activity-based teaching methods, evidence indicates that the use of experiential learning in many public secondary schools in Enugu State remains low. This raises questions about the extent to which principals' leadership strategies—such as authoritative leadership, and democratic leadership styles influence teachers' adoption and effective use of experiential learning approaches. Therefore, the problem of this study is to examine the influence of principals' leadership styles on the use of experiential learning in public secondary schools in Enugu State.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to ascertain the influence of principals' leadership styles on experiential learning in public secondary schools in Enugu State. Specifically, the study sought to determine the influence of principals:

1. authoritarian leadership style on experiential learning in secondary schools in Enugu State.
2. democratic leadership style on experiential learning on students learning outcome in Enugu State.

Research Questions

The following research questions was developed to guide the study:

1. to what extent does authoritarian leadership style influence experiential learning in secondary schools in Enugu State?
2. to what extent does democratic leadership style influence experiential learning in secondary schools in Enugu State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 level of significance:

- Ho₁:** There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and teacher on the extent to which principals' authoritarian leadership style influence experiential learning in Enugu State
- Ho₂:** There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and teachers on the extent to which principals' democratic leadership style influence experiential learning in Enugu State

Method

The researcher adopted descriptive survey research design. According to Okoye (2015), descriptive survey research is a design used to gather quantitative data from a sample or population to describe trends, attitudes, or opinions, often involving the use of questionnaires or interviews. This study was carried out in Enugu State, located in Nigeria's South East geopolitical zone. Enugu State is educationally divided into six educational zones: Enugu, Awgu, Agbani, Nsukka, Obollo-Afor, and Udi, comprising a total of 295 secondary schools. The study involved a total population of 8,816 respondents, which consisted of 295 principals and 8,521 teachers from secondary schools in Enugu State, all managed by the Post Primary School Management Board (PPSMB) (Source: Statistics Unit, PPSMB, Enugu State, 2025). Principals and teachers were ideal respondents for this study as they have direct experience and insights into how these leadership styles influences students' performance in Enugu State. The study comprised a comprehensive sample size involving a total of 1,147 respondents. This diverse group consisted of 295 school principals and 852 teachers, all drawn from secondary schools in Enugu State. The instrument for data collection for this study was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, titled "Influence of Principals Leadership Styles Questionnaire (IPLSQ)." To establish the validity of the research instrument, the questionnaire was validated by three research specialists. To ensure the reliability of the research instrument, a trial test was conducted on a sample of 40 respondents, comprising 12

principals and 28 teachers, from secondary schools in Abia State. The computed Cronbach alpha values for clusters 1 and 2 were .81 and .80, respectively, reflecting strong internal consistency within each cluster of the instrument. The researcher, in collaboration with six research assistants, carried out the process of administering the research instrument to the respondents. These research assistants played a key role in both the distribution and retrieval of the questionnaire copies from the respondents. The research questions was answered using mean scores and standard deviations. t-test statistic was used to test the null hypotheses, with a significance level of .05. To calculate the mean, each response option was assigned a numerical value using real limit of numbers: VHE = 3.50-4.00, HE = 2.50-3.49, LE = 1.50-2.49 and VLE = 0.00-1.49.

Results

Research Question1: to what extent does authoritarian leadership style influence experiential learning in secondary schools in Enugu State?

Table 1: Mean Ratings on influence of authoritarian leadership style on experiential learning in secondary schools in Enugu State

S/N	ITEMS	Teachers 852		Principals 297		Overall 1,149		Dec
		$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	
1	Limiting student/teachers autonomy	2.60	.98	2.55	.93	2.58	.96	HE
2	Increasing teacher-centered approach	2.57	.89	2.51	.92	2.54	.91	HE
3	Increase fear-based environment	2.56	.95	2.55	.89	2.56	.92	HE
4	Reduce creativity among students	2.59	.92	2.54	.91	2.57	.92	HE
5	Make students and teachers not to collaborate	2.50	.93	2.54	.85	2.53	.89	HE
Cluster Mean/SD		2.57	.92	2.56	.90	2.57	.92	HE

The data analysis on Table 1 above shows the mean ratings on how authoritarian leadership style influence experiential learning in secondary schools in Enugu State. In the above Table, teachers mean ranged from 2.50 to 2.64, while the principals mean ranged from 2.51 to 2.61. The values of their cluster means are 2.57 and 2.56 with standard deviations of .92 and .90 respectively. However, their overall mean ranged from 2.53 to 2.60 with cluster mean of 2.57 and standard deviation of .92. The finding of the study signifies that authoritarian leadership style influence experiential learning in secondary schools to a high extent. The standard deviations of the respondents show that they are homogenous in their responses.

Research Question 2: To what extent does democratic leadership style influence experiential learning in secondary schools in Enugu State?

Table 2: Mean Ratings on influence of democratic leadership style influence experiential learning in secondary schools.

S/ N	ITEMS	Teachers 852		Principals 297		Overall 1,149		Dec
		$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	
6	Encouraging student participation	3.12	.80	3.11	.82	3.11	.82	HE

7	Democratic decision-making can be slow, hindering timely implementation of experiential learning activities	2.34	.84	2.37	.82	2.36	.83	LE
8	Boosting student motivation	2.52	.81	2.51	.82	2.51	.82	HE
9	Too many voices can lead to confusion, causing students to lose focus in experiential learning.	2.55	.80	2.53	.82	2.55	.81	LE
10	This style promotes group work and discussions, allowing students to learn from each other and develop teamwork skills.	3.07	.84	3.04	.82	3.04	.83	HE
Cluster Mean/SD		2.62	.82	2.61	.82	2.62	.82	HE

The data analysis on Table 2 above shows the mean ratings on influence of democratic leadership style influence experiential learning in secondary schools. Table 2, teachers mean ranged from 2.25 to 3.12, while principals mean ranged from 2.23 to 3.11. The values of their cluster means are 2.62 and 2.61 with standard deviations of .82 and .82 respectively. However, their overall mean ranged from 2.24 to 3.11 with cluster mean of 2.62 and standard deviation of .82. The finding of the study signifies that democratic leadership style influence experiential learning in secondary schools to a high extent. The standard deviations of the respondents show that their responses were closely related.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were developed at 0.05 level of significance.

HO₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and teachers on the extent to which principals' authoritarian leadership style influence experimental learning in Enugu State

Table 3: Summary of t-test analysis of the mean scores' principals and teachers on the extent to which principals' authoritarian leadership style influence experimental learning

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Df	p-value	Decision
Principals	297	2.57	.92	1,147	.01	H ₀₁ not rejected
Teachers	852	2.56	.90			

Table 6 above shows a t-test analysis of the mean scores of principals and teachers on the extent to which principals and teachers on the extent to which principals' authoritarian leadership style influence experimental learning in Enugu State. Principals had a mean score of 2.57 (SD = 0.92), while teachers had a slightly higher mean score of 2.56 (SD = 0.90). The p-value of 0.01 indicates a statistically significant difference between the groups at the 0.05 significance level. However, the decision is not to reject the null hypothesis (HO₁), suggesting that the observed difference is not practically significant in this context.

HO₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and teachers on the extent to which principals' democratic leadership style influence experimental learning in Enugu State

Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis of the mean scores of principals and teachers on the extent to which principals' democratic leadership style influence experimental learning in Enugu State

Group	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	Df	p-value	Decision
Principals	297	2.61	.82	1,147	.00	H ₀₂ not rejected
Teachers	852	2.62	.81			

Table 4 above presents a t-test analysis comparing the mean scores of principals and teachers on the extent to which principals' democratic leadership style influence experimental learning in Enugu State. Principals had a mean score of 2.61 (SD = 0.82), while teachers had a very similar mean score of 2.62 (SD = 0.81). The p-value of 0.00 indicates a statistically significant difference between the groups at the 0.05 significance level. However, the null hypothesis (H₀₂) is not rejected, implying that the observed difference is not practically significant in this context.

Discussion

The result in table I revealed that teachers and principals agreed that authoritarian leadership style limits teachers and students' autonomy, increasing teachers -centered approach leaving the students behind, increases fear based environment for students, reduces creativity among students and make students and teachers to lack effective collaboration. This is in line with the work of Ogunsaju (2016) who asserted that authoritarian leadership style is strongly focused on both commands by the leader and control of the followers, making it difficult for students to adapt in experiential learning activities. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and teachers on the extent to which principals' authoritarian leadership style influence experimental learning in Enugu State

Results in table 2 clearly show that many teachers and principals are aware that democratic leadership style has positive influence on experiential learning in secondary schools. Respondents agreed that it Encourages student participation, boosting student motivation and promotes group work and discussions, allowing students to learn from each other and develop teamwork skills. This is in line with the work of Omoregie (2018) who opined that democratic leaders tend to make followers feel like they are an important part of the team, which helps foster commitment to the goals of the group. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and teachers on the extent to which principals' democratic leadership style influence experimental learning in Enugu State

Conclusions

This study examined the influence of principals' leadership strategies on the use of experiential learning in public secondary schools in Enugu State. The findings of the study revealed that principals' leadership strategies play a significant role in determining the extent to which experiential learning approaches are adopted and effectively utilized in schools. Leadership practices such as instructional supervision, participative decision-making, teacher motivation, professional development support, and the provision of instructional resources were found to positively influence teachers' use of experiential learning methods in classroom instruction. In conclusion, the study affirmed that democratic leadership style adopted by principals are essential for the successful integration of experiential learning in public secondary schools in Enugu State. Strengthening principals' leadership capacity through targeted training and policy support will significantly enhance the use of experiential learning, thereby improve the quality of teaching and learn outcomes in secondary education.

Recommendations

The following were the recommendations for the study

1. The Enugu State Ministry of Education should organize regular workshops, seminars, and leadership training programmes for principals, focusing on effective leadership strategies that promote experiential and learner-centered teaching approaches.
2. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) in collaboration with Enugu State Ministry of Education should ensure that experiential learning principles are fully integrated into the education curriculum to encourage practical and reflective learning.

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