

PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND INSTRUCTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ILORIN SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT, KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the principals' leadership practices and instructional effectiveness in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government, Kwara State. The study was driven by the persistent concern over declining academic performance and the central role of school leadership in improving instructional quality. A descriptive survey design of correlational types was adopted for the study. The population comprised of 59 senior secondary schools and 20 schools were sampled purposively to ensure more detailed and maintaining quality of data analysis. Whereby, five teachers each were selected as samples for the study totaling 100 respondents. Data was collected and administered through a structured questionnaire titled Principals' Leadership Practices and Instructional Effectiveness Questionnaire (PLPIEQ). The instrument, comprising 30 items, demonstrated a high reliability coefficient of 0.95. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions on the prevalence of leadership practices among principals while inferential statistics was used to test the hypothesis using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) to examine the relationship between leadership practices and instructional effectiveness. The results showed that there is a significant relationship between principals' leadership practices and instructional effectiveness in senior secondary school in Ilorin-south, Kwara state ($r = 0.68$, $p = 0.000$ @ 0.05 level of significance).

The findings revealed that principals' leadership practices had a significant relationship with instructional effectiveness in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government of Kwara State. In conclusion, principals who adopt strong leadership practices positively influence teaching quality, teacher morale, and overall student academic performance which remains critical for driving better instructional outcomes in schools. It was recommended that Principals should prioritize regular professional development workshops for teachers, ensuring they remain updated with current pedagogical methods to boost instructional effectiveness in senior secondary schools, Ilorin south Local Government, Kwara state.

Keywords: Principals' Leadership, Instructional Effectiveness, Secondary Schools, Transformational Leadership, Nigeria

Introduction

Education is universally acknowledged as a cornerstone for national development, social progress, and individual empowerment. In Nigeria, the senior secondary education level serves as a critical transition phase to tertiary education, providing students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for higher learning and participation in national development. Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) recognized this stage as essential in preparing youths for both academic pursuits and the demands for a rapidly changing society. However, despite its strategic importance, the Nigerian secondary education sector continues to grapple with various challenges, particularly in relation to the quality and effectiveness of instruction delivered in schools.

Among the most debated issues in recent years is the persistent decline in students' academic performance, teacher morale, and overall instructional quality in public and private secondary schools. While factors such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, student characteristics, and teacher competency have been extensively cited, the role of school leadership, particularly the leadership practices of principals, has not always been given commensurate attention. Principals are key agents in driving school improvement through their leadership styles, managerial skills, and instructional supervision. As the administrative and instructional heads of the institutions, their practices significantly influence teaching quality, teacher motivation, and student achievement (Orunbon, 2023; Bada et al., 2020).

However, leadership in educational institutions plays a pivotal role in shaping instructional effectiveness, particularly in secondary schools. Principals, as the primary leaders within school settings, influence teaching quality, learning outcomes, and the overall school climate. In Nigeria, where secondary education serves as a critical bridge between basic education and higher education, effective leadership is even more crucial to drive academic success and holistic student development.

Among various leadership models, transformational leadership has gained prominence for its emphasis on inspiring, motivating, and empowering teachers to exceed standard expectations. Transformational principals foster environments of trust, innovation, and collaboration, thereby directly impacting the instructional practices within their schools. Given the increasing demands on secondary education in Nigeria, understanding the relationship between principals' leadership practices particularly transformational leadership and instructional effectiveness is vital. This study therefore investigates how leadership practices among secondary school principals influence instructional effectiveness, aiming to provide insights that can enhance school leadership and, by extension, improve educational outcomes across Nigerian secondary schools.

Although, existing literature affirms that effective leadership correlates with better school performance, there remains a knowledge gap concerning how specific leadership practices especially those categorized as instructional and transformational, affect instructional effectiveness at the grassroots level. This gap is more evident at the local government area level, where contextual variables may significantly shape leadership dynamics and outcomes. The importance of exploring this issue is underscored by Sarwar, et al. (2020), who assert that effective leadership is directly tied to the professional presentation and instructional output of teachers. Bassey (2022) also emphasizes that instructional effectiveness is marked

not only by the delivery of content but by measurable improvements in student learning outcomes. Therefore, investigating the leadership practices of principals within this specific context provides valuable insights into a critical but often overlooked determinant of instructional quality. It is against this background that this study was set to examine the principals' leadership practices and instructional effectiveness in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government, Kwara State.

Literature Review

Challenges in the effectiveness of school leadership remain a significant concern in the Nigerian education sector. Ifedili (2015) highlighted inadequacies in principals' performance in managing and monitoring school environments. Supporting this view, Ayandoja et al. (2017) noted that many Nigerian school principals fall short in supervising instructional activities, which adversely impacts overall school performance and student achievement. Odeh et al. (2015) further argued that principals themselves often constitute the core of systemic challenges in schools, a position reinforced by Victor (2017), who emphasized that ineffective leadership remains a major factor in the persistent underperformance of secondary schools across Nigeria.

Despite the central role of principals in educational administration, the northern Nigerian school system continues to struggle. Abdulrasheed and Bello (2015) observed that low academic achievement and weak institutional performance, especially in Kwara State, are exacerbated by a shortage of experienced and well-trained school leaders. Lipham (2016) affirmed that the quality of school administration is directly linked to the leadership capacity of principals. Igu, Ogba, and Igwe (2014) also emphasized that the quality of professional training received by prospective principals significantly shapes their leadership effectiveness and administrative vision.

A recurring theme in the literature is the practice of appointing high-performing classroom teachers to leadership roles without formal leadership preparation. Lipham (2016) critiqued this trend, asserting that it violates foundational principles of administrative competence, such as those proposed by Frederick Taylor. Consequently, leadership responsibilities are frequently assigned to individuals who lack essential managerial and administrative expertise. Leadership in secondary education is multidimensional, encompassing instructional supervision, school culture development, performance evaluation, conflict resolution, and strategic planning (Danbaba, Panshak, & Ibrahim, 2021; Orunbon, 2023). These responsibilities require broad intellectual, psychological, and professional capacity. McCarley, Peters, and Decman (2016) found that capacity-building programs in Eastern Nigeria significantly improved school outcomes, particularly through reduced failure rates linked to leadership training. The Federal Government of Nigeria has introduced various leadership development initiatives, including in-service and online training modeled after international practices (Umar, Kenayathulla, & Hoque, 2021).

Effective school leaders must also possess interpersonal competencies, moral integrity, and conflict management skills (Owen & Valesky, 2011; Yukl, 2011). These traits foster environments conducive to effective teaching and learning. Leadership styles offer a theoretical framework for analyzing principals' effectiveness. Transformational leadership—characterized by empathy, visionary thinking, and individualized support—has been shown to

enhance school culture and staff motivation (Bwalya, 2023). Democratic leadership promotes participatory decision-making, thereby improving teacher engagement and accountability (Hafeez, Abbasi, & Novita, 2023). Meanwhile, laissez-faire, transactional, and autocratic styles may suit certain contexts but often lack the adaptability needed in dynamic school environments (Northouse, 2018; Yusuf, 2023). Empirical studies increasingly favor a combination of transformational and instructional leadership styles as most effective in achieving educational objectives (Ughamadu & Ujunwa, 2021).

Instructional Effectiveness

Instructional effectiveness refers to the extent to which teaching strategies lead to intended learning outcomes, including critical thinking, autonomy, and overall student development (Basse, 2022). Adeyinka et al. (2019) identified key indicators such as academic progression, learner independence, and holistic growth. While competent teaching is essential, Okogbaa and Igbogi (2019) argue that institutional leadership, school climate, and resource availability also significantly affect instructional success.

In Ilorin South Local Government Area of Kwara State, multiple studies have examined the connection between principals' leadership practices and instructional outcomes. Mustapha et al. (2023) found a strong correlation between adaptive managerial styles and school effectiveness, noting that principals who exhibit flexibility in leadership contribute meaningfully to student achievement. Ahmad and Shamas (2021) also reported that headteachers' instructional leadership significantly enhanced teacher effectiveness and student performance.

Collectively, these studies underscore the critical importance of strategic, adaptive, and inclusive leadership in promoting instructional effectiveness within secondary schools in Ilorin South. Principals who combine transformational vision with instructional supervision are better positioned to cultivate high-performing learning environments.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to:

1. examine the leadership practice which is commonly adopted by the principals in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government, Kwara State;
2. determine the level of instructional effectiveness in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government, Kwara State;
3. investigate the relationship between principals' leadership practices and instructional effectiveness in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government, Kwara State.

Research Questions

- i. What is the leadership practice which is commonly adopted by the principals in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government, Kwara State?
- ii. What is the level of instructional effectiveness in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government, Kwara State?

Research Hypothesis

Hypothesis one: There is no significant relationship between principals' leadership practices and instructional effectiveness in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government, Kwara State.

Methodology

Descriptive survey of correlational type research was adopted for this study. This method is deemed suitable as it is widely recognized as one of the most employed approaches in descriptive research. There are a total number of 59 senior secondary schools in Ilorin-South Local Government of Kwara state. The population of teachers in these schools comprised 13,145. Twenty (20) secondary schools were sampled purposively to ensure more detailed and focused analysis maintaining quality of data analysis and because they are public secondary schools. Whereby, five teachers from these 20 schools were selected as samples for the study totaling 100 respondents. Data was gathered through a validated 30-item structured questionnaire titled Principals' Leadership Practices and Instructional Effectiveness Questionnaire (PLPIEQ) using a five-point Likert scale. Furthermore, the validity of the questionnaire was established through face and content validity by experts. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.95 which translated to a high level of reliability. Data was analyzed with descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test the hypothesis at 0.05 significance level.

Results

Research Questions: What is the leadership practice which is commonly adopted by the principals in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government, Kwara State?

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation Responses on leadership practice commonly adopted by the principals in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government, Kwara State

Leadership Practices	Mean Score	SD
1. Instructional Supervision	4.45	0.52
2. Goal Setting and Vision Communication	4.30	0.60
3. Decision-Making Involvement	4.10	0.65
4. Professional Development Support	3.95	0.70
5. Delegation of responsibility	3.85	0.75
6. Monitoring student Academic Progress	4.25	0.58
7. Staff Motivation and Morale Boosting	4.05	0.63
Grand Total	4.14	0.63

Source: Field Survey, 2025

As shown in table 1, all practices have relatively high mean scores. Instructional Supervision, Goal Setting and Vision Communication, Decision-Making Involvement, Professional Development and Support, Delegation of responsibility, Monitoring student academic progress and staff motivation and morale boosting with a mean score of 4.45, 4.30,

4.10, 3.95, 3.85, 4.25 and 4.05 respectively. This indicates that respondents perceive these leadership practices as commonly or frequently applied for instructional effectiveness in schools. However, the moderate standard deviations suggest there is variation in responses, but overall consistency in how these practices are rated. The grand mean of 4.14 shows that on average, leadership practices among principals of Ilorin South secondary schools in Kwara state are positively rated by the respondents.

Research Question 2: What is the nature of the relationship between principals’ leadership practices and instructional effectiveness?

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the nature of the relationship between principals’ leadership practices and instructional effectiveness.

S/N	Variables (Principals’ Leadership Practices)	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Principals’ supervision improves instructional delivery	4.20	0.65	High
2	Leadership practices influence student academic performance	4.10	0.72	High
3	Principals’ goal-setting enhances teacher effectiveness	4.15	0.68	High
4	Instructional leadership affects classroom management	4.05	0.75	High
5	Principals’ feedback strengthens lesson planning and execution	4.16	0.60	High
	Weighted Mean Score	4.16	0.68	High

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 shows that the overall mean rating of 4.16 (out of 5) indicates that respondents agreed that there is a strong, positive relationship between principals’ leadership practices and instructional effectiveness with Principals’ supervision improves instructional delivery having a mean rating of 4.20, Leadership practices influence student academic performance with a mean rating of 4.10, Principals’ goal-setting enhances teacher effectiveness, 4.15, Instructional leadership affects classroom management, 4.05 and Principals’ feedback strengthens lesson planning and execution, 4.16. The standard deviation of 0.68 shows moderate agreement consistency, suggesting that most respondents had similar perceptions.

Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between principals’ leadership practices and instructional effectiveness in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South.

Table 3:

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation of Leadership Practices and Instructional Effectiveness

Variables	N	R	P-value	Decision
Leadership Practices	100	0.68**	0.000	H ₀₁ Rejected
Instructional Effectiveness				

P<0.05

Source: Field Survey, 2025

As shown in Table 3, the Pearson correlation co-efficient of r was calculated to be 0.68 while its calculated significance value is 0.000 at $p < 0.05$. On this basis, null hypothesis one was therefore rejected. This indicates a strong positive relationship between leadership practices and instructional effectiveness. This means that there is a significant relationship between principals' leadership practices and instructional effectiveness in senior secondary schools in Ilorin south, Kwara state.

Discussion of Findings

The study investigated the prevalent leadership practices among principals and their influence on instructional effectiveness in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Kwara State. The findings reveal that instructional supervision, goal setting, monitoring student progress, and decision-making involvement are among the most frequently adopted leadership practices by principals in the area. Saidu (2017) examined the impact of various leadership styles; situational, transactional, transformational, democratic, autocratic, and charismatic, on teaching and learning in secondary schools within Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State and the findings indicated that all six leadership styles significantly influenced teaching and learning outcomes. Notably, transformational and democratic leadership styles had a more pronounced positive impact on instructional effectiveness.

Furthermore, the findings from this study align with Abdulkareem, et al. (2024) assertion that effective principals' leadership practices play a crucial role in enhancing instructional effectiveness in secondary schools. Leadership practices such as instructional supervision, communication of school vision, decision-making involvement, and monitoring of student academic progress were prominently observed among the principals studied in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Kwara State. It was emphasized that instructional leadership, particularly supervision of classroom instruction and regular assessment of student performance, remains a critical determinant of school success. Consistent with these observations, this study found that principals who actively supervised instruction and communicated clear academic goals experienced higher levels of instructional effectiveness. Teachers under such leadership were more motivated, adhered better to curriculum delivery, and maintained higher classroom engagement levels.

Likewise, the findings of this study align with those of Umar, Kenayathulla, and Hoque (2021), who investigated principals' leadership practices and school effectiveness in secondary schools in Niger State, Nigeria. Their study demonstrated that effective leadership practices by principals significantly contributed to school effectiveness. Specifically, principals were found to lead by example, foster external relationships particularly with the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) to mobilize support, and demonstrate a clear understanding of their subject areas. They were also adept at identifying the professional development needs of their staff. However, despite the positive influence of leadership practices such as laissez-faire approaches, credibility and trust, and effective communication flow, these factors were not statistically significant predictors of school effectiveness. Additionally, the relatively high levels of instructional effectiveness observed among the schools further affirm the positive role of leadership. These include clear classroom goals, learner participation, assessment feedback, and the use of diverse teaching strategies.

However, leadership areas such as delegation and staff motivation, while present, had slightly lower mean ratings, suggesting potential areas for capacity building and policy emphasis.

The study further established a moderately positive and statistically significant relationship between effective leadership practices and instructional effectiveness. This suggests that principals who adopt strong instructional and transformational leadership styles positively influence teaching quality, teacher morale, and overall student academic performance. However, the findings also indicate that while principals are generally effective in supervisory and goal-setting roles, areas such as delegation of responsibilities and sustained professional development support require greater attention. Strengthening these areas will further enhance instructional practices and student outcomes.

In summary, the findings underscore the significance of leadership practices and instructional leadership models in driving quality teaching in Ilorin South schools. Principals who are proactive, inclusive, and focused on academic outcomes tend to create environments that are conducive to effective instruction.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between principals' leadership practices and instructional effectiveness in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South Local Government Area, Kwara State which revealed that leadership practices such as instructional supervision, goal setting, monitoring of student academic progress, and staff motivation are widely adopted among principals and contribute significantly to enhancing instructional delivery. It was however established that a moderately positive and statistically significant relationship exists between effective leadership practices and instructional effectiveness which suggests that principals who adopt strong instructional and transformational leadership styles positively influence teaching quality, teacher morale, and overall student academic performance. Therefore, effective principal leadership remains a cornerstone for achieving instructional excellence in secondary schools. Continuous investment in leadership development programs and systemic support for principals are essential steps toward achieving sustained educational improvement in Ilorin South and beyond.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions of this study, the following recommendations are made to enhance principals' leadership practices and promote instructional effectiveness in senior secondary schools in Ilorin South, Kwara State:

1. The Ministry of Education and relevant educational agencies should organize continuous leadership training programs focusing on instructional supervision, transformational leadership, and effective decision-making practices to enhance principals' competencies.
2. Principals should prioritize and institutionalize regular professional development workshops for teachers, ensuring they remain updated with current pedagogical methods and innovations.

- Principals should focus on boosting staff morale through recognition, motivation, and inclusive decision-making processes, thereby creating a more supportive and productive teaching environment.

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