

Relationship between Distributed Leadership and Sustainable School Improvement

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ABSTRACT The study examined the relationship between distributed leadership and sustainable school improvement. Descriptive survey design was used for the study. A sample of 200 public secondary schools out of a total of 595 schools in Lagos State as on September 2010, with their principals (105 male and 95 female) as subjects was drawn for the study using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The study developed and utilised two sets of questionnaire tagged "Distributed Leadership Questionnaire (DLQ)" and "Sustainable School Improvement Questionnaire (SSIQ)" with reliability coefficients (r) of 0.72 and 0.80 respectively. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) was employed to analyse the data. The null hypotheses developed for the study were tested at .05 level of significance. The findings revealed significant relationships between distributed leadership and school goal achievement; teachers' professional development; instructional programme management; effective teaching and learning; and promotion of school climate. It was therefore recommended among others that distributed leadership should be adopted in such a way that everyone in schools is empowered to make his or her job more efficient, meaningful, and effective.

INTRODUCTION

Current educational reform places a great importance on the effective leadership and management of schools. The reason for this position is that an orderly school environment that is efficient and well-managed provides the pre-conditions for enhanced student learning. It is not a gainsaying that there is a relationship between leadership and higher levels of student outcomes. Researches have identified the quality of leadership as most important single factor in the success of the schools, and various research efforts have been made to identify model of leadership that enhanced student outcomes and school improvement. The efforts varied from transactional and transformational approaches (Caldwell 1999; Leithwood and Jantzi 1990) to instructional leadership models (Leithwood et al. 1999; Sheppard 1996). Also, it has been widely argued that complex and dynamic changes, such as the 'cultural' changes that are required for sustained school improvement, are more likely to occur as a result of transformational leadership (Caldwell 1999; Leithwood and Jantzi 1990).

Hopkins (2001) argues that schools that sustain improvement or increase their effectiveness over time have particular ways of approaching change issues. They describe these as 'tactical', 'strategic' and 'capacity building'. The tactical

approach to change is about the 'quick fix' which may lead to improvement, albeit short lived. If change continues to be dealt with through a series of 'quick fixes' this often results in teachers suffering 'innovation fatigue' and an inability to sustain improvement. Schools which adopt a 'strategic' approach to change may use a series of short term tactics but they are aware of the limitations of such approaches and are concerned about how achievement levels can be improved across the school.

School improvement is a distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change. School improvement is about raising student achievement through focusing on the teaching - learning process and the conditions that support it. It is about strategies for improving the schools capacity for providing quality education in times of change (Hopkins 2001). In other words, school improvement is seen as the mobilization of knowledge, skill, incentives, resources and capacities within schools and school systems to increase student learning (Elmore 2000). Some researches point towards the importance of capacity-building as a means of generating and sustaining school improvement (Fullan 2001; Harris and Lambert 2003; Hopkins and Jackson 2003). At the core of the capacity-building model, it has been argued, is distributed leadership

along with social cohesion and trust (Hopkins and Jackson 2003). An effective leader uses a number of techniques and strategies in cruising the school towards effectiveness. One of such leadership strategies is to confer teachers with authority and then to trust them (Harris 2002). The concept of distributed leadership assumes that leadership is stretched over all the individuals in school (Gronn 2000; Spillane 2006).

Leadership, from this perspective, resides in the human potential available to be released within an organization; it is what Gronn (2000) terms 'an emergent property of a group or network of individuals in which group members pool their expertise'. Here leadership is a form of concerted action which locates the additional dynamic that occurs when people work together, or that is the product of conjoint agency. Implicit within the distributed leadership model are the leadership practices of teachers, either as informal leaders or in a formal leadership role as a head of department, subject co-ordinator, or teacher mentor (Muijs and Harris 2003). This view of 'distributed leadership' assigns a central role to the relationship between agency and structure, where structure is the medium of human interaction. It implies that to understand the human situation necessitates exploring how structure and agency interact together to construct practice, including leadership practice. Spillane et al. (2003) clarify a way of understanding leadership that focuses upon interaction and the exploration of complex social processes. In this sense, leadership is best understood as practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation and incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals. It implies a social distribution of leadership wherein the leadership function is stretched over the work of a number of individuals and the task is accomplished through the interaction of multiple leaders. It also implies inter-dependency rather than dependency, embracing how leaders of various kinds and in various roles share responsibility.

Distributed leadership is defined as one of the forms of leadership that involves all the different forms of collaboration experienced by the principal, teachers, and members of the school's improvement team in leading the school's development (Heck and Hallinger 2009). Distributed leadership incorporates the activities of many individuals in a school who work at mobi-

lizing and guiding other teachers in the process of instructional change (Spillane et al. 2004). It extends the boundaries of leadership significantly as it is premised upon high levels of 'teacher involvement' and encompasses a wide variety of 'expertise, skill and input' (Harris and Lambert 2003: 16). Engaging many people in leadership activity is at the core of distributed leadership in action, it has roots in earlier concepts such as "shared decision-making." Hopkins and Jackson (2003) suggest it is where leadership and organizational growth collide and by definition, it is dispersed or distributed. Principalship is a complex task requiring technical knowledge of testing, in-depth understanding of academic goals, motivational skill, and the ability to tease out implications for classroom practice. Even the best-qualified principal is unlikely to have mastery of all these areas; instead, effective principals exercise leadership by eliciting leadership from those who have the expertise. Leadership is distributed not by delegating it or giving it away, but by weaving together people, materials, and organizational structures in a common cause. It is clear that a top-down approach to distributed leadership is possible, and that giving improvement or development responsibilities to teachers offers a means of empowering others to lead. But it will be important to ensure that distributed leadership is not simply misguided delegation. Instead, it implies a social distribution of leadership where the leadership function is stretched over the work of a number of individuals and where the leadership task is accomplished through the interaction of multiple leaders (Spillane et al. 2004).

Harris (2002) viewed distributed leadership as a form of collective leadership, in which teachers develop expertise by working collaboratively. This is not to suggest that no one is ultimately responsible for the overall performance of the organization or to render those in formal leadership roles redundant. Instead, the job of those in formal leadership positions is primarily to hold the pieces of the organization together in a productive relationship. Their central task is to create a common culture of expectations around the use of individual skills and abilities. In short, distributing leadership equates with maximising the human capacity within the organization. Distributed leadership therefore means multiple sources of guidance and direction, 'following the contours of expertise in an

organization made coherent through a common culture. It is the ‘glue’ of a common task or goal -improvement of instruction - and a common frame of values for how to approach that task’ (Elmore 2000:15).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to empirically establish the correlation between distributed leadership and sustainable school improvement with the aim of using its findings to make useful recommendations on the proper adoption distributed leadership for the improvement of schools.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were developed and tested in the course of this study to find answers to the problems under investigation.

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and school goal achievement.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and professional development of teachers.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and instructional programme management.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and effective teaching and learning.

Ho₅: There is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and promotion of school climate.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey design was used for the study. A sample of 200 public secondary schools out of 595 schools in Lagos State as at September 2010, with their principals (105 male and 95 female) as subjects was drawn for the study using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The study developed and used two sets of questionnaire tagged “Distributed Leader-

ship Questionnaire (DLQ)” and Sustainable School Improvement Questionnaire (SSIQ)” with a reliability coefficient (r) of 0.72 and 0.80 respectively. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient (r) was employed to analyse the data. While the null hypotheses developed for the study were tested at .05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study are presented below according to the hypotheses generated for the study.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and school goal achievement.

Table 1 shows that the observed r = .76 and the tabulated r = .159 at 0.05 level of significance. The observed r - value is greater than the tabulated r -value. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that, there is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and school goal achievement, is rejected. So there is significant relationship between distributed leadership and school goal achievement.

This result buttresses Glickman et al. (2001), who found that distributed leadership has significant positive relationship with student learning outcomes for all students over time. Similarly, research by Silns and Mulford (2002) has shown that student outcomes are more likely to improve where leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community, and where teachers are empowered in areas of importance to them.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and professional development of teachers.

Table 2 shows that the observed r = .71 and the tabulated r = .159 at 0.05 level of significance. The observed r - value is greater than the tabulated r -value. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that, there is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and professional development of teachers is rejected. So there is significant relationship between distributed leadership and professional development of teachers.

Table 1: Relationship between distributed leadership and school goal achievement

Variable	N	df	Observed (r)	Tabulated (r)	Remark
Distributed leadership	200	198	0.76	.159	Sig.
School goal achievement	200				

P< 0.05

Table 2: Relationship between distributed leadership and professional development of teachers

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Observed (r)</i>	<i>Tabulated (r)</i>	<i>Remark</i>
Distributed leadership	200	198	0.71	.159	Sig.
Teachers' professional development	200				

P < 0.05

Development does not merely present teachers with a menu list of how and what to teach rather it focuses on teachers gaining understanding about how children learn. Schools that encourage teachers and resource them to adopt a reflective stance to teaching and learning at both the school and classroom levels are better able to sustain improvement in student achievement. Professional development that involves the staff as a learning community, that targets professional development to the needs of the school and improving student achievement and involves school staff in reflection on practice is positive professional development that helps schools sustain improvement.

Owens (2001) describes teachers as 'professional experts' that is, they have knowledge about what they do, strategies for carrying it out and ways of reflecting on and regulating their performance. This expertise continues to grow throughout teachers' professional lives in explicit ways through courses and/or study and implicitly through their daily work observing and working with students in classrooms. When teachers and schools pool this expertise the school can develop as a 'community of learners'. Distributed leadership is found to provide professional development that encourages teachers to build their own knowledge of teaching and learning that helps to sustain school improvement. The present results corroborate the findings of Day et al. (2000).

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and instructional programme management.

Table 3 shows that the observed $r = .66$ and the tabulated $r = .159$ at 0.05 level of significance. The observed r - value is greater than the tabulated r -value. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that, there is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and instructional programme management, is rejected. So there is significant relationship between distributed leadership and instructional programme management.

The present finding supports Leithwood and Riehl (2003), who claimed that teacher leaders can help other teachers to embrace goals, to understand the changes that are needed to strengthen teaching and learning and to work towards improvement. The implication from this is that distributed leadership can assist schools in building the internal capacity for development.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and effective teaching and learning.

Table 4 shows that the observed $r = .81$ and the tabulated $r = .159$ at 0.05 level of significance. The observed r - value is greater than the tabulated r -value. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that, there is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and effective teaching and learning, is rejected. So there is significant relationship between distributed leadership and effective teaching and learning.

The present finding supports the view that teaching is more than just presenting material; it is about infusing curriculum content with

Table 3: Relationship between distributed leadership and instructional programme management

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Observed (r)</i>	<i>Tabulated (r)</i>	<i>Remark</i>
Distributed leadership	200	198	0.66	.159	Sig.
Instructional programme management	200				

P < 0.05

Table 4: Relationship between distributed leadership and effective teaching and learning

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Observed (r)</i>	<i>Tabulated (r)</i>	<i>Remark</i>
Distributed leadership	200	198	0.81	.159	Sig.
Effective teaching and learning	200				

P < 0.05

appropriate instructional strategies that are selected in order to achieve the learning goals the teacher has for his students. Successful teachers are not simply charismatic, persuasive, and expert presenters; rather, they create powerful cognitive and social tasks to their students and teach the students how to make productive use of them (Glickman et al. 2001). The purpose of instructional leadership is to facilitate and support this approach to teaching and learning, which is provided by distributed leadership. Also, the result of this present study corroborates Leithwood et al. (2008), who claimed that the opportunities to teachers to build their capacity through collaboration and sharing knowledge are important leadership strategies provided by the distributed leadership to motivate teachers.

Hypothesis 5: There is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and promotion of school climate.

Table 5 shows that the observed $r = .62$ and the tabulated $r = .159$ at 0.05 level of significance. The observed r - value is greater than the tabulated r -value. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that, there is no significant relationship between distributed leadership and promotion of school climate, is rejected. So there is significant relationship between distributed leadership and promotion of school climate.

The present finding supports (Hopkins and Jackson 2003), who found that distributed leadership provides a more democratic leadership that encourages good school climate. School climate refers to a set of measurable properties of the school environment, that are perceived by the people who live and work in it, and that influence their motivation and behaviour. It has to with leadership ability to mobilise its workforce in order to achieve school goals and maximize performance (Hart et al. 1996). Distributed leadership can be referred to as the delegation of leadership responsibilities to other competent staff members, the creation of a team of leaders that divvy up the school's work load and leadership responsibilities, or the explicit use of teacher leadership to provide functions of instructional

leadership, staff development and staff mentorship.

CONCLUSION

Distributed leadership implies inter-dependency rather than dependency; it embraces the ways in which leaders of various kinds and in various roles share responsibility. It encourages schools to operate more openly and collaboratively, and it is the form of leadership most often identified with improved learning outcomes. It is indeed clear that certain tasks and functions would be have to be retained by those in formal leadership positions but that the key to successful distributed leadership resides in the involvement of teachers in collectively guiding and shaping instructional and institutional development. Distributed leadership also plays a crucial role in generating school reform and instructional improvement. It is a leadership model that facilitates, improves, and promotes teachers professional development, effective teaching and learning activities, good school climate, academic progress of students, and sustains school improvement in general.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is a usual saying that "two good heads are better than one", schools need to adopt distributed leadership model because school organizations are so complex and tasks so wide-ranging that no one person can manage all. In distributed leadership everyone is not a decision-maker, but everyone is an expert whose knowledge contributes to the decision-making process. Since all share the same mission, even though we contribute to it in different ways, everyone is empowered to make his or her job more efficient, meaningful, and effective.

Also, schools should embrace distributed leadership in such a way as to bring success in handling problems, threats, and change. It not only encourages idea sharing; it demands it. Good ideas can come to fruition because a team

Table 5: Relationship between distributed leadership and promotion of school climate

Variable	N	df	Observed (r)	Tabulated (r)	Remark
Distributed leadership	200	198	0.62	.159	Sig.
Promotion of school climate	200				

P < 0.05

is ready to ignite the process moving from concept to reality.

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