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**International Journal of
Educational Management,
Rivers State University.**

Improving Instructional Leadership for Goal Attainment of Secondary Schools Education

¹Dr. Anunobi, Okechi Uhuka & ²Martina Oluchi Ogbonna

¹Department of Educational Management, Rivers State University, Nigeria.

²Department of Educational Foundation, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Corresponding Authors' Email: okechi-uhuka.anunuobi@ust.edu.ng; oluchiogbonna58@gmail.com

Abstract

Instructional leadership is essential to ensure the attainment of the goals of secondary education. This study seeks to explore strategies to improve instructional leadership strategies in order to better serve the goals of secondary education. Qualitative and quantitative research methods have been considered in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and best practices associated with improving instructional leadership strategies. Through a range of literature review, interviews, observations, and surveys, this study has established that there are several key elements that contribute to effective instructional leadership. Such elements include building a shared understanding of the school's vision and goals, setting clear expectations for staff and students, developing a culture of collaboration and trust through positive relationships and communication, and providing support to staff through meaningful professional development opportunities. The implications of this research are discussed, and future research directions are suggested.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, Secondary education, Professional development opportunities.

Introduction

Leadership is a universal concept which differs in perspective, application and practice depending on the environment and society. Leadership in the 21st century has assumed a very complex dimension largely due to the technological changes which have affected our lives in recent times. These changes do not only occur in the way we live but also in our schools. The methods of teaching and learning have changed so also has leadership. Leadership involves influencing people by providing purpose, direction and motivation while trying to improve the image of the organization. Leadership plays an important role in every organization to achieve particular goals. Leadership is of particular importance in the educational environment because of its far-reaching effects on the accomplishment of school programmes and attainment of educational goals.

Being an instructional leader is a huge responsibility which cannot be undermined. The role of the instructional leader is to have an impact to the instructional core and influence how teachers and students engage with content so that teaching and learning is achieved. As a leader, one acquaints oneself with most of the school activities in order to give effective instruction. Instruction here refers to all the activities that are known and carried out by staff and students of a school. How far a school goes and the quality of students it produces depends largely on instructional leadership. In other words, instructional leaders are the life wire of every institution. Strong and effective instructional leadership can make a huge difference in a school and for the teachers. Weak instructional leadership will produce inefficient teachers and by extension emotionally unbalanced and intellectually bereft students.

Instructional effectiveness connotes lesson plan and notes preparation, ensuring that instructional materials are handy, employing modern teaching methods and using the relevant equipment to achieve the lesson objectives. The onus is on the instructional leader to ensure that teaching and learning is successful in the classroom environment. Amanchukwu (2018) defines teaching as making a change in others so as to be more relevant wherever they find themselves. In support of this, Amanchukwu (2011) states that teachers should provide all that are necessary to make teaching and learning successful but where that fails, the leader (principal) should employ either coercive or otherwise measures to achieve success in the school. This further implies that the leader has the power to make the teachers and students do the right thing.

Who is a leader?

The question of who a leader is cannot judiciously be answered without first determining what leadership is. According to Okorie (2009), leadership is a process of giving direction to the efforts of workers towards achieving their set goals. In the same vein, Tracy in Adiele (2020) defines leadership as ‘the ability to elicit extraordinary performance from ordinary people’. Kouze and Posner in Harry (2015) posit that leadership is the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. Ogunu in Anyaogu and Ojule (2016) describes leadership as a dynamic process in a group whereby one individual influences the other to contribute voluntarily to the achievement of group tasks in a given situation. Going by the above definitions, we can say that leadership involves three (3) things – Person, People and purpose. There must be someone who leads, there must be people who follow and there must be a purpose for wanting to lead.

Who then is a leader? Ejiogu and Ogonor in Adiele (2020) describe a leader as “that individual who by virtue of his/her formal and informal power, authority and influence, directs and controls other people in the pursuit of common goals”. According to Conger in Anyaogu and Onye (2015), leaders are individuals who establish direction for a working group of individuals who gain commitment from these groups of members to this direction and who then motivate these members to achieve the direction’s outcomes. From the foregoing, it can be deduced that a leader is someone who:

- a. **Has followers:** No one can lead themselves. Leadership involves followers so a leader must be someone who commands followership. If there is no follower, then we can’t talk about leadership.
- b. **Has influence:** People come together from different backgrounds to work in an organization. Coming from different backgrounds implies coming with different experiences and behaviours. It therefore follows that a leader must have what it takes to influence his subordinates to conform to his ideas and values.
- c. **Has a vision:** Every organization has a vision and purpose for which it was established. A leader must apply himself to the vision and goals of the organization and work towards achieving them.
- d. **Follows process:** Leadership is a process which involves organizing, controlling, planning, coordinating etc. A leader should be organized and know what to do at a particular point in time.
- e. **Is empathic:** A leader must be empathic and connect with the people to lead them to success.

Taking into cognizance all the points raised above, a leader therefore, is an individual who motivates the efforts of other members of the organization towards achieving set goals by using the available resources.

Qualities of a Leader

The essence of leadership is to create a conducive environment, map out strategies, and inspire employee teachers towards achieving organizational goal most efficiently using available resources/human and material resources. The quality of both inborn skills and competencies of an interactional nature which can be acquired through training and experience are very important for any leader to be successful in playing his role as a leader. Therefore, the following are the qualities of an instructional leader;

1. **Good communication skills:** It is a well-known factor that communication is the key to the success of any organization, with clear communication, subordinates will not find it difficult to understand the mission and goals of the leader. Good communication is one of the attributes of an instructional leader. This is because good communication skill is needed to establish work expectation and also get feedback from the subordinates. For any organization to be effective in goal attainment, there must be a proper channel of communication
2. **Commitment:** An instructional Leader should be able to demonstrate a high level of commitment to the attainment of educational goals and objectives. By being at the forefront with the rest of the employees following him. He does this by setting a good example, which in turn earns him respect from his subordinates and instills in them the drive for hard work.
3. **Creativity:** An instructional leader should be able to think outside the box when a challenge arises in the organization because his followers look up to him to provide solutions in the face of challenges. This he can achieve by brainstorming ideas with his subordinates, and by getting them involved in the decision-making of the organization. By so doing, he builds upon his ideas and learns from his subordinates.
4. **Accountability:** An instructional Leader must take responsibility for everyone's performance as well as his actions. When his subordinates are performing well, he praises them and when things are going wrong he identifies the problem, proffers a solution, and gets everyone back on track.
5. **Focus and purpose Driven:** A good instructional leader is always focused and able to think rationally, he is purpose-driven. Always ready and willing to achieve a better result for the organization.
6. **Delegation of Authority:** As instructional leader knows he cannot do everything all by himself, and then he sees the need to always delegate authority to subordinates who are capable of handling the task given to them. This in turn builds confidence in the subordinates who feel recognized and important.
7. **Positive Attitude:** A good leader must always have a good mindset towards the achievement of organizational goals and aims. He must always encourage the subordinates in the course of achieving tasks giving to them which will in turn motivate the workers to achieve the organization's goals.
8. **Honesty:** A good instructional leader must be honest and straightforward in his dealings

with people. He must lead by example.

Goals of Secondary Education

Secondary Education is the education children acquire after primary Education and before University Education. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) divided secondary education into Junior and Senior Secondary Schools. Junior Secondary School is immediately after primary education. The objective is to provide the children with different basic knowledge entrepreneurial skills and educational advancement. The student after 3 years writes the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). The senior secondary school level of education is received after the junior secondary school which takes another 3 years at the end of which the student is expected to write the West African School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). This level equips the student with the knowledge to write other examinations and proceed to tertiary education.

In broad terms, secondary education is to prepare the student for:

- (i) Useful living within the society
- (ii) Higher education

While in more specific terms, according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) shall;

- (a) Provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of higher level irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background
- (b) Offer Student diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in tenants, opportunities and future roles.
- (c) Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology, and commerce at sub-professional grades.
- (d) Develop and promote Nigerian languages, art, and culture in the context of the world's cultural heritage
- (e) Inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence.
- (f) Foster national unity with emphasis on the common ties that unit us in diversity
- (g) Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, appreciate those values specified under our board national goals and live as good citizens
- (h) Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial commercial and economic development.

The Concept of Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is a critical concept in education that focuses on the role of school leaders, such as principals and administrators, in improving teaching and learning outcomes within schools. It emphasizes the idea that effective leadership should be centered on fostering a positive learning environment, supporting and developing educators, and ultimately enhancing student achievement. Dewi and Sowiyah (2021) see it as leadership often referred to as leadership behaviour or leadership style. Machali and Kurniadin (2012) defined leadership style as behavior and strategy, which is a combination of traits, philosophies, skills, and behaviors that a leader applies to influence the performance of his followers. Toha (2013) on his part, defined leadership style as a behaviour norm that a person uses when they influence a change of behaviour in others.

Dewi and Sowiyah (2021) identified two general concepts of instructional leadership: narrow and broad. The narrow concept, according to them, views instructional leadership as activities that have to do with the teaching and learning process, for instance, carrying out a classroom observation. This concept of instructional leadership was used in the 1980s to assess small, underdeveloped elementary schools located mostly in remote villages. The broad concept of instructional leadership incorporates every leadership activity that has an indirect impact on student learning. Such indirect influence could be the school culture or the timetable.

Instructional leadership is not limited to one individual but is often a collaborative effort involving various school leaders, including principals, department heads, and instructional coaches. Its primary goal is to improve the overall quality of instruction and, consequently, student achievement.

When executed effectively, instructional leadership can lead to better educational outcomes, a positive school climate, and a culture of continuous improvement.

Importance of Instructional Leadership in Achieving Goals of Secondary Education

Instructional leadership plays a crucial role in achieving secondary education goals. Secondary education, typically grades 6 through 12 or equivalent, aims to provide students with a comprehensive and well-rounded education that prepares them for future academic pursuits, career success, and active citizenship. Below is how instructional leadership is linked to achieving these goals:

Curriculum Alignment: Instructional leaders work to align the curriculum with educational

standards, ensuring that what is taught in secondary schools is relevant, rigorous, and meets the needs of students. They collaborate with teachers to design, evaluate, and update the curriculum to keep it current and effective in achieving educational objectives.

Effective Teaching and Learning: Instructional leaders focus on improving teaching practices within the school. They provide professional development opportunities for teachers, help them implement research-based instructional strategies, and monitor classroom instruction to ensure that it is engaging and effective.

Assessment and Data Analysis: Instructional leaders use data-driven decision-making to assess student performance and identify areas for improvement. They implement assessment tools and strategies that help teachers gauge student progress, enabling them to adjust instruction as needed to address individual needs and support struggling students.

Teacher Collaboration: Collaborative leadership is vital in secondary education. Instructional leaders foster a culture of collaboration among teachers, encouraging them to share best practices, discuss student performance data, and work together to develop effective teaching strategies.

Student Engagement: Instructional leaders recognize that engaged students are more likely to succeed academically. They support the creation of a positive learning environment that includes extracurricular activities, clubs, and events that promote student engagement and well-being.

Equity and Inclusion: Achieving the goals of secondary education also involves addressing equity and inclusion issues. Instructional leaders work to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have access to high-quality education and support systems. They promote diversity in curricular materials and teaching staff to reflect the student population.

Parent and Community Engagement: Instructional leaders foster partnerships between the school, parents, and the community. Engaged parents and community members can play a critical role in supporting students' educational goals, and instructional leaders facilitate this collaboration.

Graduation Rates and College/Career Readiness: One of the primary goals of secondary education is to prepare students for post-secondary education or the workforce. Instructional leaders track graduation rates and work to enhance programs that prepare students for college

and career success, such as career and technical education initiatives.

Continuous Improvement: Instructional leaders recognize that education is an evolving field. They lead the school in a process of continuous improvement, regularly reviewing and revising the school's goals and strategies to ensure they align with the evolving needs of students and the community.

In summary, instructional leadership is fundamental to achieving the goals of secondary education by focusing on curriculum alignment, effective teaching and learning, data-driven decision-making, collaboration, student engagement, equity, and inclusion, as well as preparing students for their future endeavors. Effective instructional leadership ensures that secondary schools provide a high-quality education that equips students with the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need to succeed in life.

Strategies to Improve Instructional Leadership for Efficiency in Goal Attainment in Public Secondary Schools in Rivers State

Education has been seen as a process through which the culture of a people is developed and transmitted from generation to generation (Osaat, 2016). Nwabueze (2014) in Nwakudu and Fanny (2015) defines education as a system where people are managed through proper teaching, administration and research for the development of individuals and the society at large. At the head of leadership in secondary schools in Nigeria is the principal, who administers the school with other teaching and non-teaching staff. The principal is responsible for all that happens in the school. The principal manages both human and material resources to ensure the achievement of organizational goals.

Instructional leadership in secondary schools is very crucial to the attainment of educational goals as a school is what her leader is. The principal must be creative, innovative, dynamic and efficient in handling issues that may arise among the school community.

While every school and staff differ, below are some of the strategies that can improve instructional leadership in secondary schools.

- 1. Visit the classroom more often:** Instructional leadership begins from instruction. Teachers will improve and grow if the leader visits the class very often and gives targeted and focused feedback. The visits help in maintaining visibility with students and staff and also build a culture of accountability. The visits will further give the leader insight into what happens in the class and help him decide where to give support. More than anything else, teaching and

learning should be uppermost in the leader's mind. Leadership is seen as a balance between management and vision (NAESP 2001). Despite the leader having other duties to attend to, he should give teaching and learning priority and ensure that he is well- informed about what goes on in the classrooms.

2. **Remain a teacher:** Instructional leaders are teachers despite the change in formal title. A leader should lead by example and be sure to model whatever behaviour or character he requires of the students and teachers. An instructional leader should know a little of everything. He should maintain an understanding of best practices for teaching and learning and should try to coach the teachers. This provides a better context for the evolving role of the teacher in the digital age. An instructional leader who walks the walk builds better relationships with staff which will help one elicit ideas from them on how to improve instruction (Sheninger 2019).
3. **Develop yourself professionally:** A leader commands more respect if he knows more than his subordinates. An instructional leader should develop himself professionally by attending conferences and workshops in order to be abreast with current trends in education. He should collaborate with his professional peers on topics that interest him and might benefit the school in the long run. Amanchukwu (2018) asserts that Leaders' participation in professional sessions will help them remain informed and will provide a focus for monitoring. In addition to the traditional professional learning, social media provides new ideas, resources, strategies and feedback that are advantageous to teachers in the digital age. An instructional leader should hone his digital skills and avail himself of the numerous opportunities.
4. **Be consistent and comprehensive with feedback:** Formal and informal observations are crucial to improving instructional leadership. However, the observations must be consistent, and comprehensive feedback given at all times. An instructional leader should create a time for discussion with teachers concerning his observations and ensure they are relaxed and comfortable enough to ask him questions. The greatest asset of a leader is to work with teachers to deliver high-quality instruction.
5. **Reflect constantly on your leadership:** An instructional leader should take time out to reflect on all the activities and decisions made on a daily basis. The following questions are pertinent to improve on leadership:

How did I decision I made impact the staff and students?

What might I have done differently?

Am I investing my time and energy in the right place?

The above questions and more will help an instructional leader to take account of his strengths and re-strategize in areas he has challenges.

- 6. Review Curriculum Constantly:** The curriculum is the centre of teaching and learning in educational institutions. Ivowi (2008) in Amanchukwu (2018) describes curriculum as an instrument made for educating a person or people so as to change the orientation, behaviour and value of a person whose concern is to develop and affect the whole world. Society is dynamic and nothing remains static, therefore, educational curriculum should be constantly reviewed to meet the needs of the society.
- 7. Reflect and Plan as a Team:** Meeting with teachers to reflect on past and present achievements and failures as well as planning as a team can inform and empower teachers. Teachers become more confident and productive when they believe that their opinions count.
- 8. Implement Peer Coaching:** This is a method whereby two similarly skilled teachers help each other to solve problems, share ideas and learn more in the process. This builds confidence and collaborative spirit in teachers.
- 9. Model What You Want:** An instructional leader should model the skills and behaviours you want to see in your staff especially in the area of integration of technology in the classroom and professional learning to improve practice. Don't just

Challenges Confronting Instructional Leadership in Secondary School

Instructional leadership in secondary schools is becoming more and more challenging as the years go by Ojoegbu and Obiwehiozor in Ekpo and Akeke (2017) observed that most educational institutions in Nigeria are faced with serious financial handicaps, inadequate classrooms for teaching and learning, and lack of facilities. These and many more will be discussed below.

i. Global and Technological Changes: The rate of technological changes especially in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has increased. These changes provide new platforms for enhancing teaching and learning. It is imperative for instructional leaders to be IT savvy and also employ qualified digital personnel who can utilize the available technological platforms to impart knowledge in the classrooms. According to Ajayi and Ogundayo in Ekpo and Akeke (2017), the Federal Government of Nigeria lays emphasis on the provision and utilization of Information and Communication Technology in advancing

knowledge and skills for effective functioning in the modern world. Unfortunately, most instructional leaders are still struggling to find their feet in the world of technology.

ii. Motivation: Whereas motivation is the force that is capable of inspiring followers to achieve set goals, it poses a serious challenge to leaders for the fact that what motivates one man may not motivate another. Obasi and Asodike in Obasi & Chuu-Uzomah (2015), define motivation as the force that prods workers to do things to accomplish the task as a result of their needs being met. Well-motivated staff will result in great output. The instructional leader must find a way to satisfy every teacher's needs. It could be financial incentives, awards, recommendations, etc.

iii. Unqualified Teachers: The quality of teaching staff to a large extent, determines the product of a school. In Nigeria, the appointment of school heads is done by the ministry or commission in charge of education in various states. The Minister or Commissioner for education is invariably a politician, who has the interest of his party in mind before making any appointment. On this note, an inappropriate person might be appointed, as such, such management might not be successful.

iv. Inadequate Funding: The provision of funds helps instructional leaders to perform their duties without many restrictions. Where there are no funds, the leader will be handicapped. He will be unable to employ qualified teachers, provide adequate facilities or maintain the available ones, and organize excursions or training sessions for teachers: all these require funding. Poor funding affects all facets of the education system.

Conclusion

No organization can exist without a leader. Effective instructional leadership makes a school thrive. The onus, therefore, is on instruction leaders to make their schools stand out. The success or not, of a school depends on the leadership, hence all the staff look up to the leadership of the school to showcase their talents and abilities. What this means is that the impact the teachers and students make is dependent on the leadership acumen of the leader. In view of this, instructional leaders need to wake up to the challenges facing instructional delivery, especially in the face of the global and technological changes the educational sector has to contend with.

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