

# MAJOR LEADERSHIP ROLES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS FOR EFFECTIVE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*Leadership has now become more complex than ever before. This is so because of the complexity of present social, economic, political, industrial and above all, inclusive education and fast technological advancement, especially that of information and communication technology (ICT). Researchers on efficient and effective leadership in educational sector have continued to emphasize the vital role school principals play in establishing and sustaining quality, quantity and equality education in Nigerian schools. This paper examines the concept of leadership, the various leadership and managerial roles of school principals and problems in meeting schools' expectations in inclusive setting. The writer believes that quality and equality relationship are important ingredients in the make up of an inclusive school and recommends, among others, delegation of responsibilities to staff and students, fostering cooperation of all students abled and disabled, through application of human relations approach by the principals in discharging their roles for efficient and effective teaching and learning in Nigerian public secondary schools.*

## **Introduction**

No doubt, the issue of leadership has been with us right from birth, within our families and communities. Fathers, mothers and elders are the traditional leaders who socialize the young ones into adulthood. These leaders inform the young ones what is expected of them and their reward for performing appropriately, as well as punishment, as the case may be.

Invariably, leadership is as old as life, therefore, not peculiar to school alone, but in businesses, offices, hospitals, army, church, mosque, in fact, anywhere people gather for their social or work, leadership function also emerges. It is so because there must be someone to guide, control and lead the group. Ojo and Olaniyan (2008 P. 172) explained that "the art of leadership is as old as age itself, and covers all aspects of life may it be simple one unit or extended family, social and religious organization, business, small or large industrial firms and politics. Oke (2008 P. 14) also states that "leadership is as old as life, historically from the early-times of life, as far back as the biblical days of Adam and Moses, leadership was in existence".

There have been also claims that leaders are born while some researchers have rejected such claims. As Clark and Starr (P. 80) argued: "We should dispel immediately

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the notion that there is any such person as “born anything”. Therefore, no born leaders. Rather, leaders are made. The subtle traits that go into the making of an efficient and effective leaders are more of environment than heredity”. The same goes to abled and disabled learners. An effective leader can make a difference in supervision of inclusive programme for all students, abled and disabled. According to Guruge (2008), supervision will help to diagnose problems and shortcomings in the implementation of the curriculum. Indeed, effective and efficient supervision will enhance and promote academic performance of all students.

### **The Concept of Leadership**

Researchers have shown that there are many ways of approaching the subject, leadership. According to Ukeje et al, in Oke (2008) “Leadership is an input into an organization and involves inter-personal influences as one initiates structures and acts that result in consistent pattern of group interaction aimed at productivity and individual fulfillment”. The key things here are interpersonal influences and group interactions, indicating the importance of creation of team spirit to work towards a common goal. Ogidi (2003 P. 73) defined leadership as “the capacity to guide, direct and influence the behaviour of others, imaginatively, towards given ends”. Also, Akinnawo (2009 P. 47) explained that:

Leadership is the ability to understand subordinates and make them do what is expected of them. And you must be able to do this painlessly. You must make them work willingly. You must make them understand your policies. You must make them do what is expected of them. And you must make them enjoy their job.

As a matter of fact, leadership involves the ability, skills and power to influence your subordinates through persuasion, motivation and human relations. True leadership is in fact, when both the followers and the leaders are working together. In that case, there must be a combined effort and willingness to achieve the common goal. Roost in Sergiovani (2001 P. 57) argued that “it is not leadership if a person orders, requires, seduces or threatens another’s compliance”. Also, Ade in Ojo and Olaniyan (2008, P. 172) defined leadership as “a social influence, process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organizational objectives”. From all these indications, there are four key elements that are acceptable in these definitions. These are influence, relationship, mutual purpose and common goals.

Leadership therefore, can be defined as the ability to guide, persuade, influence people to willingly, painlessly and enthusiastically work towards the achievement of common goals. All in all, leadership is about implementation of policies and decisions that direct the activities of an organization to its specific goals. Leadership is in fact, more successful when leaders and followers view themselves as important and ready to bear the burden of leadership together. Leadership is therefore, a shared responsibility. Leadership is not really about who you are or what you do but how you go about doing it.

This is why today, there is a growing consensus that charismatic leaders have the ability to touch people in meaningful ways to yield excellent performance.

### **Concept of Inclusive Programme**

Inclusive programme from all indications is the most effective means of gaining equality in education. It is in fact, a way of eliminating segregated schools in order to increase participation of disabled children and maintain integration, making isolation difficult and equality more likely. Ozoji in Obiweluzo (2009, p. 83) defined inclusive education as an education option or programme carefully designed to educate special needs learners within the restructured mainstream or school community.

Likewise, Obiweluzo (2009) defined inclusive education as a programme designed to provide a neutral teaching and learning environment for optimal service delivery to special needs children and other children in regular schools.

However, educators have seen inclusive programme differently. Some view it as mission impossible, therefore not achievable, while others have argued that inclusive programme is the most effective strategy for gaining equality, therefore, achievable. The writer believes that inclusive programmes is achievable with careful planning, effective supervision and appropriate strategies.

These definitions are in line with National Policy on Education (2004) and United Nations declaration in Salamanca (1994) as both emphasized need for equal educational opportunities for all children, abled and disabled.

### **The Role of Principals**

Leadership is in fact, administration and has to do with general managerial functions. These functions must be directed towards achievement of equality and quality education performance, management of human and material resources, as well as maintenance of discipline.

The roles of school principals have been on the increase. Principals presently serve as supervisors, classroom teachers, community leaders, government's representatives etc. In the words of Barth in Sergiovanni (2001, P. 13), "school principals too often must deal with these aspects of work superficially. The reasons for this can be understood as one examines the full range of responsibilities that principals have". He further describes the extent of such responsibilities as almost everything that happens in school and out. In that case, principals are responsible for personnel, making sure that employees are physically present and working to the best of their ability. As a matter of fact, principals should be accountable for academic achievement of all children, their minimum standards at each grade level, for the gifted, and of those who are neither. The principal has become a provider of social services, food services, health care, recreation programs, transportation and even security and expected to do more in inclusive programme, with all children, abled and disabled, learning together in the same classroom.

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Principals are indeed the most important people in our secondary schools, as they have the potential for improving and maintaining quality and equality education. Success or failure of our school programmes, depends on the individual principals' ability and skills to utilize school resources towards achievement of the set goals as they perform the following major management functions.

- (1) Planning
- (2) Funding and accountability
- (3) Record keeping
- (4) Reporting
- (5) Supervision

### **Planning**

Planning should be the most important role of any school principal. The main reason for planning is to develop strategy for future action to ensure efficient and effective implementation of all educational programmes. This explains why (Adesina, in Ogunsaju 1983 P. 245) states that educational planning is "the process of applying scientific or rational procedures to the process of educational growth and development so as to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the educational system". Also Coombs, in Nwagwu 1983, P. 2000) opined that educational planning is, the application of rational, systematic analysis to the process of educational development with the aim of making education more effective and efficient in responding to the needs and goals of its students and society". Educational planning is in fact, very crucial for policy, decisions and implementation of educational programmes. Apart from setting target and strategy development, it is essential for critical choices and determining priorities. Therefore, everybody concerned with education must be "planning conscious". As success or failure of new programmes, like inclusive programme actually depends on effective planning. School principals must understand that inclusive programme is an answer to equal educational opportunity to all Nigerian students.

### **Funding and Accountability**

Although, principals in Nigerian public schools have no control over the source of funds for their schools but many of them can actually influence the provision of funds and other resources by effective negotiations, lobbying, fund raising and donations, for the benefit of all children, abled and disabled.

Principals are responsible for all resources available in their schools. They must ensure that both funds and other facilities are efficiently and effectively managed to achieve school goals and objectives. Consequently, Ogunsaju (1983, P.52) advised that Nigerian principals should learn to use their position to create an environment conducive to the release of human potentials. This can be possible when school activities are well planned and managed. Ogunsaju further stated that, this source of power normally manifested itself in control of a variety of resources which can be used to influence the

behaviour of the staff members. In that case, principals must be prudent with funds, keep and maintain records. This is essential to avoid unnecessary wastage and unacceptable explanation of inadequacies of human and material resources in schools due to lack of money. Certainly, money is an indispensable element for school programmes that must be fully accounted for to avoid unwarranted suspicion as Gentry and Jones (1972 P. 18) remarked, “we’ve pumped in money and look at the results. The articulation of the “hopeless” syndrome takes a variety of interlocking forms, all of which are inadequate as explanations. They function only as excuses for inaction”. Checks and balances should be part of the lifestyle of every public school principal for proper accountability. This is very necessary in view of widespread corruption in almost all government agencies. It is now common for government officials, including those of education to not only misappropriate, mismanage but also embezzle money meant for school programmes especially new programmes like inclusive education, which usually results to poor management and inadequacies in school resources. This is why Udoh (2003 P. 21) affirms that, it is certainly true that funds are important but the basic issue in Nigeria is not that of the funds alone but how to manage and account for the funds. He further stated that, in spite of efforts by the various governments in the country to stamp out corruption, there is sufficient evidence to show that the attitude of corrupt officials of the local government, ministries of education, schools, parastatals and other establishments have done serious damages to public expenditures, including educational expenditures.

Of course, the argument is valid as corruption reports have become so common in our secondary schools especially in cases of examination malpractice as also observed by Wakili (2008, P. 36):

The government is busy chasing the political thieves while the culture of corruption continues to rubbish our educational sector. How would you describe a situation where most of the secondary school principals and teachers, apart from hiring professional examination takers (impersonators) to write exams for students connived with invigilators at exam centers to close eyes to malpractices, after candidates must have been fully charged for the fraudulent arrangements?

These reports are not only unethical, unprofessional but very shameful. No matter the cause, a well trained educational administrator must live above board and with high sense of accounting responsibilities, in view of the fact that the lives and future of these leaders of tomorrow depend on school principals.

Therefore, reckless and irresponsible educational administrators are not only guilty of wasting efforts and resources but destroying our children’s lives and future of our nation. In view of the seriousness of this offence, no excuse whatsoever can exonerate any school administrator from such serious offence, not even poorly paid teachers and school administrators. As Denga in Bebia (2000 P. 109) stated, “one of the challenges of the principals today, therefore, is to exhibit a prudent and adroit

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management behaviour capable of justifying the huge investment in education by the Nigerian parents and taxpayers, generally”.

Therefore, school administrators must be above board, highly disciplined, prudent with public funds, transparent, decent, honest, and indeed people of integrity with selfless ideas.

The planners of inclusive education must take cognizance of available resources on ground to avoid failure of inclusive programme due to inadequacies of resources. Certainly, human and material resources are elements in planning and implementation of any new programme like inclusive education, especially in Nigeria, where public schools and older educational programmes are suffering severe financial crises. Indeed, Nigerian government has not done enough to salvage education sector, as the 26% total budget of developing countries to education as recommended by UNESCO has not yet been actualized by the government. As a nation, Nigeria has witnessed and experienced much agitation, over the right of every Nigerian child to quality, quantity and equality education, as our school results have remained intolerable.

Of course, inclusive education is achievable if all concerned in promoting education for all can come together and work towards increased resources in education sector, advocating massive and positive support for inclusive programme for equal educational opportunity for all Nigerian children.

### **Record Keeping**

School record is one of the most important aspects of the school principals' duties. It is information about the school; such as students enrolment, finance, academic, statutory, staff, maintenance and general records. These pieces of information are highly dependable, factual and reliable.

It is in fact, a vital and accurate knowledge of the past and current events,. Also all schools, private and public are mandated by law to keep school records as it may be required by education ministry or inspecting officers, any time.

Oke (2011 P. 109) explained that the school record is a repository of information for the society. The purpose is to save time and cost, improve the efficiency of storing and maintain records, as well as providing adequate and accurate information about the school. It is therefore very vital for operation of the school.

### **Reporting**

Report writing is in fact, a skill that every school principal must possess. All school principals must pay serious attention to report writing. Principals must be able to prepare readable reports, be able to identify vital and trivial issues and how to present their findings objectively, meaningfully and truthfully.

Also, annually or quarterly, school principals could write reports on their own performances, that of staff, students and the entire school, such reports can be sent to education ministry as an account for their stewardship.

School principals therefore, should not only be highly knowledgeable but must possess report writing skills to be able to prepare readable reports. According to the National Teachers' Institute (2008, P. 76). "All whose work involves report writing cannot afford to neglect paying serious attention to writing skills".

School principals are among this group as their job is mainly report writing. They write inspection and supervision report, end of year report, school budget report, recommendation report, financial and activities reports. Therefore, school principals must be mindful of their grammar and language and avoid careless errors, especially spelling, punctuation, long sentence and style. Generally, school reports should be objective and factual, devoid of emotion and sentiments.

### **Supervision**

School principals' roles are majorly administrative and professional, either way, their most important function remains supervision. Okoli (2004, P. 141) states that "Supervision is the process of improving all elements and conditions surrounding teaching and learning to produce better learning through providing the leadership necessary to effect improvement in the work of teachers". Therefore, the principal must see it as his responsibility to help teachers improve their instructional skills, boost teachers' morale and motivation by provision of adequate welfare services for staff and students. Such services may include accommodation, good health-care services, end of the year bonus and loans. Even the environment must receive adequate attention. Material resources, which may include playground, cafeteria, classrooms, toilet facilities, libraries, laboratories, school clinics and school buses. As a matter of fact, some researchers view these infrastructural facilities as more important than instructional supervision. This is why Murphy and Amanda, in Ojo and Olaniyan (2008 P. 176) assert that, "there is no question over the supervision of infrastructural facilities which they say is the most important role of principal which he must play". The key things here are, the functions (professional and administrative) aimed at realizing the goals and objectives of establishing the school. Therefore, planners of inclusive programmes must take seriously these factors mentioned above into consideration. Most importantly, school supervision in public secondary schools is of great importance, as sated in the National Policy of Education (2004) "that the objective of supervision is to ensure quality control through continuous supervision of instructional materials, teaching and learning environment. This is relevant to inclusive programme, to ensure that all students, abled and disabled are together in the same classroom under the same teacher, which may end segregation and lead to promotion of equality and quality education, friendship, respect and understanding among the Nigerian children.

### **Conclusion**

In view of rapid changes in the society, advance in technology and the fact that duties and roles of public school principals have been equally "changing and increasing,

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there is need for principals to apply human relations approach in accomplishing school's goals and objectives, mostly as it affects disabled students.

It is equally important for principals and staff to be up to date with the inclusive programmes, new technologies and strive to increase their personal and general knowledge through seminars, workshops and conferences to overcome the challenges of today's fast changing world. It is therefore, pertinent that principals make inclusive programme part of their major roles in public schools.

School principals must therefore, exhibit positive attitude to parents, children, staff and entire public who must be educated on the gains of inclusive education. As stated by Ozoji in Oriade (2009, p. 267) effective public information is needed to combat prejudices and to create informed and positive attitudes for the public to support inclusive education programme.

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