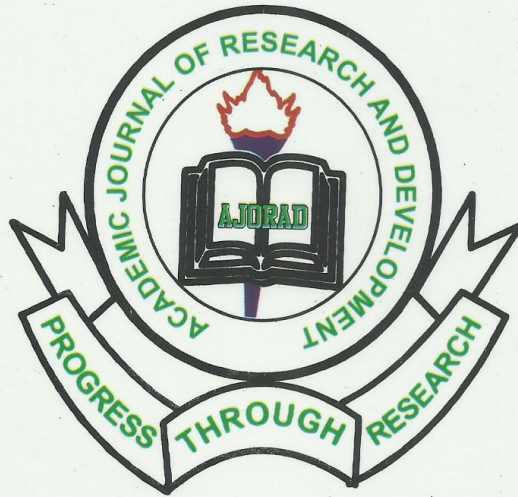




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Inspiring Effective Educational Leadership in Africa: Towards Improving Students' Academic Achievement Against All Odds

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Abstract

Scholarly researches across the world have reported educational leadership to be a predictor of students' achievement at all levels of education. This position is a reflection of the educational standards and prospects of nations with such qualities and an infraction to nations yet to devise workable leadership structure. This manuscript reviewed characteristic problems associated with educational leadership in African and the role of government, teachers and relevant stakeholders in the present-day anomaly. This research work enumerated peculiarities of structures and standards in two countries. A critical examination of educational leadership policies and structures obtainable in Australia and Japan as case studies. Notable similarities and differences in culture, values and traditions of the examined countries were basic, unique and also catered for the need of these societies. However, what Africa can learn as a continent from the leadership qualities of these countries was succinctly outlined.

Introduction

Efforts made by relevant stakeholders in the education sector in Africa have ever been to evolve teaching and learning process with a view to improve students' educational achievement in terms of performance or achievement. These efforts are directed towards producing internationally competitive students at all levels of education and eventually world-class citizens able to succeed in their chosen carriers without limitations in global representation. Similarly, maintaining a functional school system with quality educational leadership characteristics sufficient enough to serve as models of good academic institutions. Several researchers have identified various factors responsible for students' poor academic achievement at every level of education in Africa.

The approach to these territorial factors has been short of a holistic view. In reality, the trend of research in Central America, Europe and Asia took into consideration several areas of peculiarities, leadership prowess, and structure among others. Putting the right structure in place to facilitate education, as well as, taking into consideration the leadership style that is obtainable in various cultures. In this clime, leadership can be by age, by birth, by

influence and also occasionally by merit. In an educational setting, the type of leadership structure should mostly be based on merit with a view to promote excellence. Unlike what is obtainable in other continents of the world, not many researches there are to alleviate the predicament of educational leadership on the continent, especially in recent time.

Researchers have focused mainly on teaching and learning in Africa. Challenges peculiar to teachers as identified by Okeke (2009), school environment as identified by Ogunmade (2006), family variables as identified by Omosewo (2003) and methodologies for effective teaching (Badmus, Akanmu & Akanbi, 2015) are among overly researched areas. The importation of foreign teaching methods, curriculum, syllabi, establishment of copied school environment and structure at the expense of nature among other trends have surfaced with great details in Africa, without any consideration for leadership structure, culture, system and state of events. Similarly, several of the efforts to improve teaching and learning in Africa have been directed towards the development of policy frameworks and instructional resources to bring about the desired difference in teaching and learning in the classroom. It is however unfortunate that, these new policies and resources have produced inconsistent outcomes which are unconvincing. Regardless of what is made available pertaining to instructional resources and enabling environment, the leadership structure available in such institutions is pivotal to any meaningful outcome. What will influence and guide the classroom practices among teachers who are to implement various policies, instructional resources and professional development efforts remain in a state of quagmire.

Formal and non-formal sector of developed countries have paid agreeable attention to leadership as an important structure for effectiveness, unlike many developing countries. Leadership is an important component for improving teaching and learning in the classroom. In Africa, no consistent attempt has been made towards sustaining researches in the congruence among instruction, learning and leadership in education. Several researchers have reported correlation between educational leadership and students' performance (Avey, Palansk, Walumbwa, 2011; Biswas, 2009; Cerit, 2010). Educational leadership characteristics are often related to teachers' performance and commitment to duty. The failure or success rate of students is often determined by the job performance and organizational commitment of the teachers and school leadership (Cerit, 2010).

Professional Standards in Education

Professional standards are set rules, models or/and guidelines which are expected to communicate expectations to school leaders, affiliated institutions, educational bodies, policy makers and the public about efforts, qualities and values of effective educational leaders. These standards are indicators which direct the work of policy makers, professional associations and supporting institutions. Although, it does not give specific direction, rather it encourages actors in education sector to be proactive in their development in all affordable circumstances. These professional standards as set by nations to include details of Mission, Vision, and Core Values, Ethics and Professional Norms, Equity and Cultural Responsiveness, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Community of Care and Support for Students, Professional Capacity of School Personnel, Professional Community for Teachers and Staff, Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community, Operations and Management, School Improvement [National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) , 2015].

The afore-state standards are inter-connected and rely on all other areas to bring about meaningful learning. Figure 1 is a pictorial representation copied from NPBEA (2015). This is a replica of the way professional standards can effectively guide professional leadership practice and promote better educational outcome. The inter-relatedness of these standards directly influences educators by authoring the expectations and directions for practice in educational leadership. It is a guide for educational associations on how best to shape and provide support for their members through educational leadership training certification, educational leadership preparation, professional development and also evaluation. This module among others is expected to monitor the societal expectations of education, policy and support institutional practices.

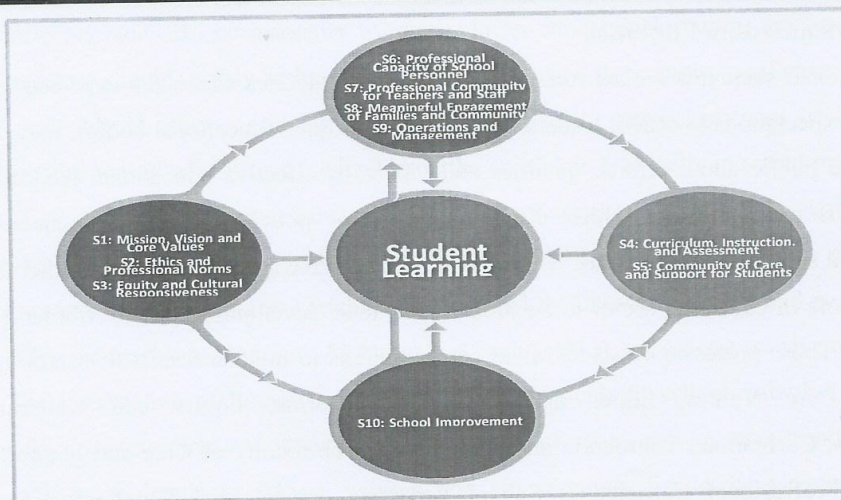


Figure 1: Relationship of School Leadership Work to Student Learning. Source: (NPBEA, 2015)

Challenges of Education in Africa

Pre-colonial era in most African countries witnessed education in its literal sense. Although, civilization was in existence but formal education was not prevalent. Prior education in this period is mostly informal. The knowledge been transferred is generally craft and artisanship. Post-colonial era has so far developed the education sector, at least, to the best of the abilities of the various governments in each country on the continent at the time. These countries have faced numerous challenges in the implementation of educational policies that could foster rapid economic growth and social development capable of favourably competing with other continents. Scanlon and Moumouni (2012) posited that the challenges confronting most governments in Africa are political. These challenges cannot be accrued as singular but differ considerably from one country to the other. As such, proffering a single solution for the education sector or any sector for that matter will most likely be ineffectual.

Several factors are responsible for the state of education in Africa, these challenges range from poor national economic policies, bad governance, corruption, civil and regional conflicts and environmental issues. This misnomer has left Africa vulnerable to infectious disease (terminal and otherwise) without adequate knowledge and technology to tackle the difficult despite been curable. Food production in Africa is below per. The importation of food and consumable product still erode the economy of an already poor continent. Raw materials available in African soil are being imported for lack of technology to explore or

political indifference to grow the economy. For instance, countries in Africa with crude oil still transport the crude to other continent to refine before bringing back for domestic consumption. The preceding instance lay credence to deliberately poor and unsustainable governance obtainable in many countries in Africa. The aforesaid is coupled with corrupt interest among relevant stakeholders. It is unfortunate that this sad situation is affecting various sectors including education.

The 1986 conference held in Nairobi, Kenya was a significant part of several efforts made to acknowledge, alleviate and improve the already declining state of education in Africa. The said effort woke interest in the expansion of vocational, technical, adult and non-formal education. The education policy makers took a stand while the economic planners chose separately, ushering a new gap between these two closely related areas. These approaches were limited from the start, instead, education policies should be the driving force and the sole entity for catalytic growth of the economy (Scanlon & Moumouni, 2012). Barber Conable of late memories was the President of the World Bank between 1986-1991. He once remarked that "Without education, development will not occur. Only an educated people can command the skills necessary for sustainable economic growth and for a better quality of life."

Similarly, the former president of South Africa, Jacob Zuma remarked in 2011 that "Schools do not provide the required skills for the growing job market in Africa". It is evident that the state of education in Africa is poor and needs better effort for it to compete favorably with what is obtainable in other countries of the world and ultimately cater for the need of its industries. Reading and writing in any language whatsoever is a good start for every child and adult in Africa, after which secondary and tertiary education could be regarded as an upgrade. The choice of quality leadership in any country is a reflection of such society's level of education, as such; bad leadership and corruption could have been an accomplice of illiteracy and lack of self-awareness. The second most populous continent in the world is Africa; only ten of her universities were ranked in the first one-thousand in 2017. A fraction of the many issues confronting this sector in Africa is not limited to having the right curriculum and instructional resources but also effective leadership at all levels of education.

Australia's Educational Leadership Standard: What is in it for Africa?

Researches on leadership and learning in Africa, as reported by Bush and Oduro (2006), Phoko (2008) like other popular works sought to address the inadequacies in conditions associated with educational leadership in Africa without paying sufficient attention to the practices and consequences of leadership for teaching and learning in specific subjects with limited context. In Australia for instance, educational leadership is a top priority in the implementation of policies and even structure. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) established in 2010, had among other objectives to develop and maintain rigorous professional standards for teachers and principals. AITSL being a public institution is affiliated to the Australian Government through the Ministry of Education. AITSL is governed by representatives of the various education system stakeholders which include central government, the authorities of all Australia's provinces, the teachers' union and principals' associations, deans of education colleges and organizations of independent and Catholic schools (Timperley, 2011).

The Australian model like Singapore, Finland, and China aims at improving the quality of teaching and school leadership. Among its activities, the AITSL promotes the specialization and accreditation of school leaders and principals on the basis of national professional standards developed and validated in the year 2011. This structure afforded stakeholders the all-inclusiveness and holistic approach it deserves, thereby encouraging local to national objective flow. Unfortunately, in most African countries, educational objectives are water down from the national to state to local, where applicable. In such system, more often than not, importation of structure and strict adherence are implemented upside down. Evident from the overall rating of tertiary institutions across the world, population of the educated and the GDP's of countries in Africa, it may be fair to assume the continent is on the wrong toll.

The Australian Professional Standard for educational leadership was set to elicit scholarship in educational leaders to achieve excellence in their work (AITSL, 2012). The educational leadership policy in Australia was established on the basis of three requirements, first of which is vision and values, knowledge, understanding, and personal qualities, also, social and interpersonal skills. The afore-listed requirements are established within five areas of professional practices, which are: leading teaching and learning; developing self and others; leading improvement, innovation and change; leading the management of the schools and engaging in and working with the community (Timperley, 2011). Similar approaches

cannot be said of several African nations, rather nepotism, favouritism, religious bigotry among many irrelevant practices is the order.

From the literature available, the AITSL model for training promotes activities which are effectively coordinated with utmost independence. Specialized institutions at all level have access to select and assess the relevance of their standard independently. Similarly, AITSL develops tools for educational leaders for critical reflection on their performance, as well getting feedbacks from colleagues, students, teachers, parents, communities and also the schools governing bodies. Aside from the pre-stated responsibilities, AITSL organizes fora for deliberations among experts, schools and school leaders with the purpose of coming to agreement on how best to design a plan of action and discuss implementation with peculiarities to each of the schools. The individual characteristic of the schools serves as a guide in decision making (AITSL, 2012). This pattern is systemic and worthy of emulation by willing nations across Africa.

As part of the effort of AITSL in ensuring standard practices in school leadership and administration, it provides an avenue to evaluate the progress made and also the way forward for the sustainability of the system (AITSL, 2014). These efforts are strategic, consistent and purposeful. Unfortunately, not many African countries understand the needs for such standard, and even when such standards exist, the political will for effective implementation for its sustainability are often absent or non-existing.

Japan's Educational Leadership Standards: What is in it for Africa?

Educational leadership standard in Japan derived its uniqueness from its people and culture. It focuses on three key areas; students, institutions and system. The student phase is saddled with the responsibility of raising outcomes in terms of equity and quality of education for the citizenry. The institutional aspect of this policy focuses on raising the quality of education through school improvement braced with evaluation and assessment. The system aspect of the policy looks at the organization of educational policy in terms of leadership and funding (Japan Education Policy Outlook, 2015).

Review of the Japanese approach to leadership in education favoured team spirit to leadership. This is not only peculiar to the education sector but all round as it is culturally embedded (Ishikawa, 2012). The Japanese culture is a morally conscious one, which not only preach against shame and dishonour but also act respectfully. Researchers have associated Japan's educational leadership structure to be that which evolved from their culture (Chang,

2015). Furthermore, school leadership have been reported to evolve from their value system (Miller, 2011; Sentocnik & Rupar, 2009). On the contrary, educational leadership structures in Africa are either alien or borrowed with the system of education. These leadership structures have no peculiarity to culture or believe of the instructors, learner, and even the instruction. Afore - listed practices may therefore be responsible for both the civilization and technological gap.

In Japan, the National Center for Teachers' Development (NCTD) provides national-level training programs in cooperation with the Ministry of Education Culture Sports Science and Technology (MEXT). These trainings afford selected school leaders nominated by the Board of Education of local government to participate and play a central role in their region after such training. Two types of trainings are being embarked upon by NCTD in educational leadership, first is the school administration training, and second is the training for future trainers on school organizational management. These school administration training programs are designed for the specific positions and experiences which includes; principal, vice-principal and mid-level teachers. These training programs cover various aspects of school administration. The focus of school administration training is in four thematic areas, which includes; organizational management, school compliance, risk management, and teaching methodology (NCTD 2015).

The trainers of these programs are university professors, managers of leading private companies and experts in school organizational management. NCTD along with other responsibilities also provide specialized training in school organizational management. This prepares participants with the knowledge of theories and practices for effective organization management and expert trainer of school management. However, participants of the training programs are expected to water down the knowledge and educational resources acquired to their respective region (Yamamoto, Enomoto & Yamaguchi, 2016). Africa is perhaps the most culturally enrich society with diverse values and heritage. The spirit of the continent is dated back to the evolution of man. It may therefore be reasonable to afford peculiarities of culture and values in the planning and implementation of policies that promotes effective leadership in African education sector with aboriginal characteristics.

Conclusion

Effective educational Leadership is the key to the future of Africa development. The quality of leadership available in schools will not only influence academic achievement of students but also foster discipline, preparedness and the willingness to evolve knowledge among learners. Africa's inability to training citizen in fields of expertise to meet the industrial needs of the continent can be met and surpassed when policy formulation, structure and resources meets the required standards, this will attract the best brains around the world. However, the absence of standards discourages professionalism and hinders experts from various fields from staying to grow all aspect for all round development of Africa. The continent's decision to appoint leadership in schools' base on merit will also go a long way in encouraging hard work among prospective school leaders and institution workers.

The growth and development of nations across continents is determined by the quality of education available to her citizens. As such, countries in Africa will only be competitive when its' standard of education can afford to compete favourably. The quality of an economy is also determined by the effectiveness of such society's educational system. The leadership of such system influences the outlook by providing a workforce capable of sustaining the current and future economy. Harnessing effective educational leadership standards will transform ultimately all aspect of livelihood.

Recommendations

1. Notable countries in Africa appoint novice or experts in other fields to man education sector and it affairs. This should be discouraged as experience and exposure have been found to be instrumental in the development of education.
2. Capacity building should be encouraged to strengthen leadership competencies among education leaders. This will adequately prepare them for the task and expertise therewith.
3. Countries in Africa should understudy developed countries with similar leadership trait in a bid to imitate the merits in such system and eventually grow their own model.

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