

Principals' Leadership Behaviours as Correlates of Students' Academic Performance in Public Senior Secondary Schools in South-South Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated Principals' Leadership Behaviours as correlates of Students' Academic Performance in Public Senior Secondary Schools in South-South, Nigeria. Five research questions and five null hypotheses were raised to guide the study. Correlational survey design and ex-post facto design were adopted for the study. From a population of 84,841 teachers and 709 public senior secondary schools, a sample size of 382 teachers and 71 public senior secondary schools in Edo and Delta States in the South-South, Nigeria was taken using multistage sampling technique. Two instruments titled "Principals' Leadership Behaviour Questionnaire (PLBQ)", and "Students' Academic Performance Proforma (SAPP)" were used to elicit data for the study. The reliability of the PLBW was determined using split half method and correlated using Pearson product moment correlation which yielded reliability index of 0.82. Descriptive and inferential statistical tools were employed for the analysis of data. Research questions were answered using mean scores and standard deviation; while the null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using linear regression and multiple regression analysis. The findings of the study revealed that task centred, people centred, transformational and transactional leadership behaviours were exhibited by school principals; there is a high extent of teachers' continuing professional development; and a very good performance in SSCE results in public senior secondary schools in South-South of Nigeria from 2013 to 2022. The study concluded that there is significant relationship between principals' leadership behaviours and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South of Nigeria.

Based on the findings and conclusion, it was recommended among others that principals should critically identify and continuously demonstrate leadership behaviours that enhance their administrative competences and facilitate satisfactory academic outcomes of secondary school students in South-South of Nigeria.

Key Words:

Principalship, School Leadership, Leadership Behaviours, Students' Academic Performance, Public Secondary Schools, South-South

Introduction

In recent decades, the role of school leadership has garnered increasing global attention as a determinant of educational effectiveness. In Nigeria, the quality of leadership at the secondary school level is considered central to achieving the national educational goals of preparing students for useful living and for higher education (FGN, 2014). Principals, as key actors in the educational system, are expected to demonstrate leadership behaviours that facilitate both instructional effectiveness and organizational efficiency (Akpan, 2012; Beri & Shuaibu, 2018). Effective principals combine managerial and instructional leadership roles, including policy implementation, curriculum development, supervision, personnel development, and community engagement. These roles are influenced by their leadership behaviours, often conceptualized in terms of leadership styles—namely task-centred, people-centred, transformational, and transactional (Reyes, 2024). While task-centred leadership focuses on achieving organizational goals (Ejiofor, 2016), people-centred leadership emphasizes staff welfare and interpersonal relationships

(Hlumela, 2015). Transformational leadership motivates staff to exceed performance expectations (Opara, 2016), whereas transactional leadership reinforces performance through structured reward systems (Eboka, 2016; Obi & Onyeike, 2018).

Students' academic performance, typically assessed through internal evaluations and national examinations such as the WASSCE and SSCE, remains a critical benchmark for assessing school success (Ayodele, 2015; Olowo & Fashiku, 2019). However, performance trends in public secondary schools across Nigeria, particularly in the South-South region, have raised concerns. WAEC statistics between 2009 and 2012 showed an average performance deficit of 41.7% across South-South states, indicating persistent underachievement.

Given the pivotal role of principals in shaping school outcomes, their leadership behaviours may significantly influence students' academic achievement. This study, therefore, investigates the relationship between principals' leadership behaviours and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South Nigeria from 2013 to 2022.

Statement of the Problem

Academic performance remains a critical benchmark for evaluating the effectiveness of secondary education in Nigeria, particularly within the South-South geopolitical zone. Despite sustained efforts to improve educational outcomes, persistent underperformance in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE), especially in Edo and Delta States, continues to raise concern among policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders. WAEC performance records from 2009 to 2012 reveal an average cumulative pass rate of 59.43%, leaving a substantial performance deficit of 40.57%. This gap underscores the need to interrogate the underlying school-based factors influencing students' academic outcomes.

A growing body of evidence suggests that school leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping instructional quality and student achievement. However, the researcher has observed that not all principals in public senior secondary schools in the South-South region exhibit the leadership behaviours necessary to drive academic

excellence. In many instances, principals fail to articulate clear instructional goals, support teachers' pedagogical needs, provide timely corrective feedback, or foster a culture of high expectations and continuous professional growth among staff. These leadership inadequacies may directly compromise the academic performance of students by creating environments that are neither academically rigorous nor professionally supportive.

The observable decline in student performance in SSCE may thus be attributed, in part, to deficiencies in the leadership behaviours of some school principals. Without visionary, supportive, and instructional leadership, efforts to improve academic standards may remain unproductive. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the extent to which principals' leadership behaviours influence students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. Examine the task-centred leadership behaviours exhibited by principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.
- ii. Ascertain the people-centred leadership behaviours exhibited by principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.
- iii. Establish the transactional leadership behaviours exhibited by principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.
- iv. Determine the transformational leadership behaviours exhibited by principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.
- v. Find out the trend in students' academic performance in SSCE results in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria from 2013 to 2022.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the task-centred leadership behaviours exhibited by principals in public

senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria?

2. What are the people-centred leadership behaviours exhibited by principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria?

3. What are the transactional leadership behaviours exhibited by principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria?

4. What are the transformational leadership behaviours exhibited by principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria?

5. What is the trend in students' academic performance in SSCE results in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria from 2013 to 2022?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between principals' task-centred leadership behaviour and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between principals' people-centred leadership behaviour and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between principals' transactional leadership behaviour and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between principals' transformational leadership behaviour and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.

Ho₅: There is no significant relationship between principals' leadership behaviours and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a correlational survey and ex-post facto research design. The correlational design enabled the examination of the predictive relationship between principals' leadership behaviours (independent variable) and students' academic performance (dependent variable), while the ex-post facto design allowed for analysis of already existing SSCE results from 2013 to 2022 in South-South Nigeria.

The study population comprised 1,744 public senior secondary schools and 128,552 teachers across South-South Nigeria. A sample of 382 teachers from 71 public senior secondary schools in Edo and Delta States was selected. The sample size was determined using 10% of the school population and Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table. A multistage sampling technique was employed: simple random sampling for state selection, stratified sampling for educational zones, and proportionate sampling for schools and teachers.

Data were collected using the Principals' Leadership Behaviour Questionnaire (PLBQ) and the Students' Academic Performance Proforma (SAPP). Instrument validity was confirmed by experts using face and content validation. PLBQ reliability was established through a pilot test involving 28 teachers, yielding a split-half reliability index of 0.69 and a Spearman-Brown adjusted index of 0.82. The SAPP, used for collecting secondary data, was not subjected to reliability testing as it contained WAEC-gazetted results.

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS v23.0. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) addressed the research questions, while linear and multiple regression analyses tested the hypotheses at 0.05 significance level.

Data Analysis and Results

Research Question One

What are the task centred leadership behaviours exhibited by principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 1: Analysis of Task Centred Leadership Behaviours Exhibited by Principals in Public Senior Secondary Schools in South-South, Nigeria

N = 382

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	S.D	Decision
1	Delegate responsibilities to teachers to perform.	107	101	96	78	2.62	.81	Agreed
2	Sets clear processes for teachers to actualize set goals.	128	103	81	70	2.76	.84	Agreed
3	Prioritizes achievement of specified outcomes.	120	116	78	68	2.75	.80	Agreed
4	Encourage teachers to formulate plans to achieve set goals.	114	118	81	69	2.73	.76	Agreed
5	Issues straight forward deadlines to ensure all teachers remain focused.	103	100	97	82	2.59	.81	Agreed
6	Instructs teachers to deliver their work within designated time.	119	106	86	71	2.71	.82	Agreed
7	Enforces reward and punishment systems.	115	110	83	74	2.70	.79	Agreed
8	Communicates clear objectives for teachers to accomplish.	133	107	67	75	2.78	.81	Agreed
9	Offers guidance to teachers facing challenges in completing their tasks.	128	104	62	88	2.71	.80	Agreed
10	Encourages teachers to focus on their tasks using rewards.	106	112	77	87	2.62	.87	Agreed
	Section Mean					2.70	.81	Agreed

Table 1 shows that principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South Nigeria exhibit task-centred leadership behaviours, with all items recording positive mean values (2.59–2.78). Item 8 had the highest mean (2.78), and item 5 the lowest (2.59). The section mean (2.70) exceeds the criterion mean (2.50), confirming the presence of task-centred leadership behaviours.

Research Question Two

What are the people-centred leadership behaviours exhibited by principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 2: Analysis of People-Centred Leadership Behaviours Exhibited by Principals in Public Senior Secondary Schools in South-South, Nigeria

N = 382

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	S.D	Decision
11	Shows concern about improving relationships among personnel.	106	96	52	128	2.50	.97	Agreed
12	Emphasizes increasing cooperation and teamwork.	99	159	65	59	2.78	.82	Agreed
13	Focuses on developing the competencies of teachers.	110	148	61	63	2.80	.74	Agreed
14	Priorities recognizing the efforts of teachers.	120	100	80	82	2.68	.84	Agreed
15	Is keen about increasing teachers' job satisfaction.	91	140	69	82	2.63	.86	Agreed
16	Motivates teachers towards achieving personal and organizational goals.	125	100	87	70	2.73	.81	Agreed
17	Emphasizes frequent team meetings involving school personnel.	107	110	83	82	2.63	.87	Agreed
18	Provides for the instructional needs of teaching staff.	125	117	46	94	2.71	.83	Agreed
19	Encourages creativity among teachers towards developing efficient methods to complete task.	116	109	67	90	2.66	.89	Agreed
20	Facilitate effective communication between super-ordinates and subordinates.	100	107	76	89	2.57	.95	Agreed
	Section Mean					2.67	.86	Agreed

Table 2 shows that principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South Nigeria exhibit people-centred leadership behaviours, with mean item scores ranging from 2.50 to 2.80. Item 13 recorded the highest mean (2.80), while item 11 had the lowest (2.50). The section mean of 2.67 exceeds the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating a positive display of people-centred leadership.

N = 382

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	S.D	Decision
21	Corrects the mistakes make by teachers in the performance of instructional tasks	103	98	81	100	2.53	.96	Agreed
22	Uses rewards to motivate teachers who complete their tasks.	96	123	85	78	2.62	.85	Agreed
23	Uses incentives to appreciate the efforts of teachers who successfully complete their tasks.	105	103	92	82	2.60	.88	Agreed
24	Punishes teachers who deviate from acceptable standards.	117	106	85	74	2.70	.82	Agreed
25	Ensures that deadlines on tasks are met effectively.	120	96	82	84	2.66	.84	Agreed
26	Monitors the tasks given to teachers.	107	118	86	71	2.68	.83	Agreed
27	Clearly identifies the tasks to be done by teachers.	101	106	77	98	2.55	.97	Agreed
28	Ensures that teachers adhere to negotiated levels of performance.	120	100	75	84	2.66	.84	Agreed
29	Has an indifferent attitude towards subordinate welfare and task.	92	66	117	107	2.37	1.04	Disagreed
30	Only show concern when problematic issues become serious.	84	78	100	120	2.33	1.09	Disagreed
	Section Mean					2.57	.91	Agreed

Table 3 shows that principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South Nigeria exhibit transactional leadership behaviours, with a section mean of 2.57 exceeding the criterion mean of 2.50. Items 21–28 had positive mean values (2.53–2.70), while items 29 and 30 had lower mean values of 2.37 and 2.33, respectively. Item 24 recorded the highest mean (2.70), and item 30 the lowest (2.33).

N = 382

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	S.D	Decision
31	Shows personal interest in teachers' improvement and achievement.	115	107	82	78	2.68	.82	Agreed
32	Encourages hard work and attainment of goals among teachers.	94	109	74	105	2.50	.98	Agreed
33	Establishes a common vision and influences teachers' participation in it.	108	104	89	81	2.63	.85	Agreed
34	Stimulate teachers to be creative and active in	100	105	81	96	2.55	.94	Agreed

Research Question Three

What are the transactional leadership behaviours exhibited by principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 3: Analysis of Transactional Leadership Behaviours Exhibited by Principals in Public Senior Secondary Schools in South-South, Nigeria

Research Question Four

What are the transformational leadership behaviours exhibited by principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria?

Table 4: Analysis of Transformational Leadership Behaviours Exhibited by Principals in Public Senior Secondary Schools in South-South, Nigeria

	providing solution to problems.							
35	Provides teachers with challenging tasks to improve their competence.	120	102	84	76	2.70	.80	Agreed
36	Helps teachers discover their potentials and attain higher levels of performance.	122	63	108	89	2.57	.93	Agreed
37	Constantly suggests new goals and objectives for teachers.	89	129	64	100	2.54	.97	Agreed
38	Set high level goals and expectations for teachers.	103	107	56	89	2.73	.78	Agreed
39	Inspires teachers to achieve beyond their expectations.	114	115	84	78	2.70	.83	Agreed
40	Show concern for teachers personal and professional needs.	101	113	91	77	2.62	.90	Agreed
	Section Mean					2.65	.88	Agreed

Table 4 reveals that principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South Nigeria exhibit transformational leadership behaviours, with a section mean of 2.65 exceeding the criterion mean of 2.50. All items (31–40) had positive mean values (2.50–2.73), with item 38 highest at 2.73 and item 32 lowest at 2.50.

Research Question Five

What is the trend in students' academic performance in SSCE results in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria from 2013 to 2022?

Table 5: Analysis of Trend in Students' Academic Performance in SSCE Results in Public Senior Secondary Schools in South-South, Nigeria

Year	No. of Candidates	4	3	2	1	\bar{x}	S.D	Decision
2013	34892	16625	6603	5714	5950	2.97	.82	Good
2014	36783	16736	6794	6805	6448	2.92	.84	Good
2015	35674	15447	7885	5996	6346	2.91	.86	Good
2016	37565	16458	6976	7087	7044	2.87	.89	Good
2017	38456	18569	7067	6178	6642	2.98	.80	Good
2018	41347	20670	9158	6269	5250	3.09	.74	Very Good
2019	44238	21781	9249	6340	6868	3.04	.78	Very Good
2020	49129	27892	6330	5441	9466	3.07	.76	Very Good
2021	42016	23903	6421	5552	6140	3.14	.70	Very Good
2022	43987	26879	5534	5407	6167	3.21	.67	Very Good
Total	404,087	204,960 (50.72%)	72,017 (17.82%)	60,789 (15.04%)	66,321 (16.41%)	3.02	.79	Very Good

Table 5 presents the trend in SSCE academic performance of students in public senior secondary schools in South-South Nigeria from 2013 to 2022. A total of 404,087 students sat for the exams across the sampled 71 schools. Of this number, 50.72% obtained 5 credits including English and Mathematics, 17.82% had 5 credits with either subject, 15.04% had 5 credits without both, while 16.41% had less than 5 credits. The highest mean performance (3.21) was recorded

in 2022, and the lowest (2.87) in 2016, with a cumulative average of 3.02, indicating an overall positive performance trend.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between principals' task centred leadership behaviour and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 6: Linear Regression Analysis of Relationship between Principals' Task Centred Leadership Behaviour and Students' Academic

Performance in Public Senior Secondary Schools in South-South, Nigeria

R	R ²	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of Estimate	Extent of prediction	Sig.	Decision
.682	.465	.680	.02738	46.51%	.000	Significant

* $p < 0.05$ = Significant relationship between variables

Table 6 reveals that task-centred leadership behaviour significantly predicts students' academic performance ($R = .682$, $R^2 = .456$, $p < .05$), accounting for 46.51% of the variance. As $p < .05$, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming a significant relationship between principals' task-centred leadership behaviour and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between principals' people centred leadership behaviour and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 7: Linear Regression Analysis of Relationship between People Centred Leadership Behaviour and Students' Academic Performance in Public Senior Secondary Schools in South-South, Nigeria

R	R ²	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of Estimate	Extent of prediction	Sig.	Decision
.669	.448	.665	.02825	44.80%	.004	Significant

* $p < 0.05$ = Significant relationship between variables

The hypothesis test in Table 7 shows that people-centred leadership behaviour significantly predicts students' academic performance ($R = .669$, $R^2 = .448$, $p = .004$). This indicates that 44.8% of the variance in academic performance is explained by principals' people-centred leadership behaviour. Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected, confirming a significant relationship.

Ho₃: There is no significant relationship between principals' transactional leadership behaviour and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 8: Linear Regression Analysis of Relationship between Principals' Transactional Leadership Behaviour and Students' Academic Performance in Public Senior Secondary Schools in South-South, Nigeria

R	R ²	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of Estimate	Extent of prediction	Sig.	Decision
.619	.383	.614	.03158	38.31%	.009	Significant

* $p < 0.05$ = Significant relationship between variables

Table 8 reveals that transactional leadership behaviour significantly predicts students' academic performance ($R = .619$, $R^2 = .383$, $p = .009$). This indicates that 38.31% of the variance in academic performance is explained by principals' transactional leadership behaviour. Since $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected,

confirming a significant relationship between the variables.

Ho₄: There is no significant relationship between principals' transformational leadership behaviour and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 9: Linear Regression Analysis of Relationship between Principals' Transformational Leadership Behaviour and Students' Academic

Performance in Public Senior Secondary Schools in South-south, Nigeria

R	R ²	Adjusted R square	Std. Error of Estimate	Extent of prediction	Sig.	Decision
.643	.413	.410	.03004	41.3%	.007	Significant

* $p < 0.05$ = Significant relationship between variables

Table 9 shows that transformational leadership behaviour significantly predicts students' academic performance ($R = .643$, $R^2 = .413$, $p = .007$), accounting for 41.34% of the variance. With $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating a significant relationship between the variables.

Ho5: There is no significant relationship between principals' leadership behaviours and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.

Table 10: Multiple Regression Analysis of Relationship between Principals' Leadership Behaviours and Students' Academic Performance in Public Senior Secondary School in South-South, Nigeria.

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	SE	Beta (β)		
(Constant)	3.587	1.794		2.693	.038
Task Centred	.436	.135	.373	4.234	.000
People Centred	.392	.149	.341	3.986	.006
Transactional	.308	.193	.298	2.997	.013
Transformational	.361	.177	.326	3.579	.009
α Dependent Variable: Students' Academic Performance					

* $p < 0.05$ = Significant relationship among variables

The multiple regression analysis in Table 10 reveals that principals' leadership behaviours significantly predict students' academic performance. Task-centred leadership was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .373$, $t = 4.234$, $p < 0.05$), followed by people-centred ($\beta = .341$, $t = 3.986$, $p < 0.05$), transformational ($\beta = .326$, $t = 3.579$, $p < 0.05$), and transactional leadership ($\beta = .298$, $t = 2.997$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that improvements in these leadership behaviours are associated with higher student academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that principals in public senior secondary schools in South-South Nigeria commonly exhibit task-centred, people-centred, transactional, and transformational leadership behaviours. These findings align with prior

research by Bello et al. (2016), Wilson (2017), Wanyoko and Muchanje (2021), Obama et al. (2016), Akpan (2016), Mwove et al. (2023), Duraku and Hoxha (2021), and Opara (2016), who similarly reported the prevalence of these leadership styles among school principals across various regions.

Furthermore, the study found a positive trend in students' academic performance in SSCE results from 2013 to 2022. This is consistent with Aniekop (2023), who reported strong academic performance trends in the South-South region.

Importantly, the study established a significant relationship between principals' leadership behaviours and students' academic performance. This supports the findings of Osagie and Momoh (2019), Okeze et al. (2018), Brown and Weli (2019), Wanyoko and Muchanje (2021), and Mwove et al. (2023), who reported a strong link between leadership styles and student outcomes. However, it contrasts with the studies of Bello et al. (2016) and Obama et al. (2016), which found no significant relationship between

principals' leadership behaviours and academic performance in their respective contexts.

Conclusion

The study from its findings established that task centred, people centred, transformational and transactional leadership behaviours are exhibited by school principals; and there is a very good performance of students in SSCE results in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria from 2013 to 2022.

The study concluded that there is significant relationship between principals' leadership behaviours and students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools in South-South, Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made in view of the findings of the study:

1. Principals should critically identify and continuously demonstrate leadership behaviours that enhance their administrative competences and facilitate satisfactory academic outcomes of secondary school students in South-South, Nigeria.
2. School principals should prioritize the harmonization of the task centred, people centred, transactional and transformational leadership behaviours in the management of secondary schools in order to foster greater participation of teachers in continuing professional development programmes and further enhance the academic excellence of secondary school students in external examinations.
3. The State Post Primary Education Boards in Edo and Delta State should periodically organize strategic leadership oriented workshops for school principals in order to expand their administrative knowledge of leadership behaviours and promote dynamism in their approach to leadership responsibilities.

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