Challenges of Principal Leadership Styles and School Management: A Solution Oriented Approach

Olowoselu Abdulrasheed (PhD Cand.)[1], Fauzi Hussin[2], Muhamad Dzahir Kasa[2]
[1,2] School of Education and Modern Languages, Universiti Utara Malaysia
[1] rasheedolowoselu@yahoo.com

Abstract - *This study explored principals' leadership styles in the management of unity schools in Nigeria. Specifically, the work focused at knowing the challenges as well as solutions to leadership styles of unity schools principals. This becomes necessary in view of the needs for improvement in unity school management which has become a top priority for government education reform in Nigeria. Meanwhile, in spite of these challenges and complains trailing the management of these schools in the last one decade, little research has been done examining both the reasons and solutions especially from the perspectives of the main administrator of these schools. To achieve this is through in-depth interviews with 10 principals of unity schools selected purposively in North Central Nigeria, this study has discovered that apart from the leadership styles of the principals, government policy which failed to involve the school principals is challenge to smooth school management. Interview data were analyzed thematically using NVivo 10 Qualitative Software. Findings suggested that principals' leadership styles should be all-encompassing to give recognition to the roles of parents, staff and students, while the government should increase funding to schools in view of their national importance to the unity and stability of Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Leadership, Unity school, Education management, Principal, Challenges.*

INTRODUCTION

The need for improvement in school leadership has become a top priority for school reform in Nigeria. This becomes necessary in view of the challenges and complains trailing the management of these schools in the last one decade. Education is being planned to meet developmental goals of human resources in Nigeria [1]. Apparently, many challenges still serve as constraint to these plans. However, due to the strategic importance of schools, reform has been seen as the essential to development of schools in the nation interest [2]. Arising from this, the 2014 Ministry of Education survey on unity schools by policy makers in education board office affirmed that, principal leadership is among the challenges confronting secondary education in rural areas in Nigeria [2].

Reiterating the importance of unity schools [9] revealed that after the National Assembly, and perhaps the National Youth Service Corps, the Unity Schools come in as a structure for socio-economic and political integration of the country. In relation to this therefore Leithwood et al. [16] found empirical link between school leadership and improved student success. Drawing on detailed case studies and large-scale quantitative analysis, the research shows that most school variables, considered separately have at most significance effects on learning. Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that affects student learning in school [10]. What is leadership and why is leadership crucial in school management.

Northouse [19] posited leadership as a process where by an individual influence people to achieve common objectives. A leader is a fellow who leads a group of individuals, state or nation [22]. Leadership is the transactional and transformational activities that often takes place between the followers and leader [7]. The authors further contend that, leadership includes adherence to common goals, effective abilities toward their subordinate to achieve stated goals. Several scholars have defined leadership in many ways such as the process of social influence. From the foregoing definitions, it is clear that, leadership occur in group,

leadership involves behavioral influence and includes collective attention to organization objective.

In the opinion of the researchers, concept of leadership can be posited as upholding the trust of the people in respect to their services entrusted on the leader. Apparently, since many leadership concepts and theories focuses on service delivery [4],[19],[22]. It is pertinent to say that, leaders' are specifically to serve the interest of the people, school, organization or nation [25]. School leader are entails to possess professional qualities like honest, empowerment of people, inspiration, set good examples, lead to change, visionary leader, forward looking and show competency in the leadership position [22].

Principal as a leader is the liaison officer that mediates between the school and the society. His role as a principal is to mobilize the teaching and non-teaching staff towards the achievement of school objectives. Northouse [19] viewed leadership as a position of dominance and prestige accompanied by ability to direct, motivate and to assist others in achieving a specified purpose. According to [4] leadership is about concern for social justice, a compassion for the underprivileged, dedicated to the growth of self-reliance, commitment, ability to communicate, courage to take risks, make bold decisions, ability to achieve the desired result and faith in the people's ability. Tobin [25] Posited school principal as a leader that provides direction and expert advice on development of teaching and learning in school. The principal has a duty to lead, guide, conduct, direct and motivate both the teaching and non-teaching staff toward achievement of the school goals and objectives [11]. The principal position is a high-pressure job in the context of instructional supervision. It is also a job that the remuneration is less compare with the responsibilities attached to it [23].

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main research objective of the study is to investigate the challenges of principal leadership styles and school management. Specifically, the research objectives are: investigate the styles and possible challenges to principal leadership in school management; and identify possible solutions to the challenges of school management of unity schools.

School Management

In this study, school management refers to the structural means that coordinates the efforts of the staff to accomplished stated goals, and objectives of the school by using resources available effectively [27]. In the definition of [20] posited school management as the process of guiding and directing teachers' and administrative staff towards the achievement of school objectives. The principal should provide teachers' and administrative staff with adequate facilities for reaching the highest levels of achievement and for improving the professional growth to the maximum [11]. On the basis of effective and efficient school management, the principal need to ensure that, right type of people with the required skills are employed at the right time for carrying out the various jobs and services for the betterment of the school [26].

As noted by the authors, the meaning of educational management implies the process of planning, organizing, implementing, directing, and evaluating educational policy through proper funding for educational development [22]. The management of secondary school through effective and efficient mechanism is paramount to sustainable development in the education sector [22]. These factors include admission procedures, setting direction, planning, teaching strategies and resources utilization, controlling and improving the school standard [12]. Schools are established in the community in order to cater for the education needs of the children. Parents are desire to be informed about termly school progress [17]. It is ascertained that good principal-parents relationship leads to better school effectiveness [11]. While parent adequate support for teachers' will facilitate positive student-learning outcomes in school.

As noted by the researchers, most unity secondary schools in Nigeria have the following hierarchical structures with the Principal as the head of the school, while vice principals are posited to assist the principal in the areas of academics and administration [2]. The senior masters' coordinate the daily routine of teachers on duties and boarding masters' schedules in boarding house. Administrative staff comprises school secretary, admission office, finance department, security office and cafeteria. These are essential elements in school administration.

Most recent challenges were the academic achievement of students in unity secondary school, which has been major concern to the parents, teachers and even the principals themselves (WAEC, 2014). Research has also shown that some secondary school principals are confronting leadership challenges which have resulted in low quality of instruction, indiscipline

among staff and students [23]. Most principals have been receiving blame from the education stakeholders. These problems reoccur yearly and transformed into challenges. The school system is face with many challenges which prompted the researchers to conduct this study on principal's leadership challenges, in order to proffer viable solutions to principals with challenges in their schools. Additionally, it also provides manageable solutions to principal school management system in order to improve quality of instruction and good students' academic achievement in schools.

Figure 1. School Hierarchy in Nigeria. Source: FME (2014).

METHODS

In line with Northouse [19] who theorized that leadership is a process where an individual influence people to achieve common objectives therefore, this study embarked on qualitative method to elicit perspectives of unity schools principals on the Challenges and solutions to Principal Leadership Styles. The method was employed through in-depth interview approach because of its dyadic encounter between a researcher and participants which allows for gathering of account of lived experiences of these principals. As noted by [8] interview enriches participants – researcher communications and support research findings. For that reason, this study adopted interpretive perspective which places significance on qualitative data value in a pursuit of knowledge [14] and providing contextual depth.

The sampling design was based on purposive method [15]. The in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 Unity schools principals and the data generated were codified and categorized in themes using NVIVO 10 software for the analysis and generation of models. In the light of this, the following research questions were explored and later discussed in themes:

RQ1: What are the styles and possible challenges to principal leadership in school management?

RQ2: What are the possible solutions to the challenges of school management of unity schools?

RESULTS

In view of this paper main research objective which is to understand the possible challenges and solutions to principal leadership in school management of unity secondary schools in Nigeria, the perspectives of the principals are presented and discussed in the theme that emerged from clusters of sub-themes as shown in the figure 2.
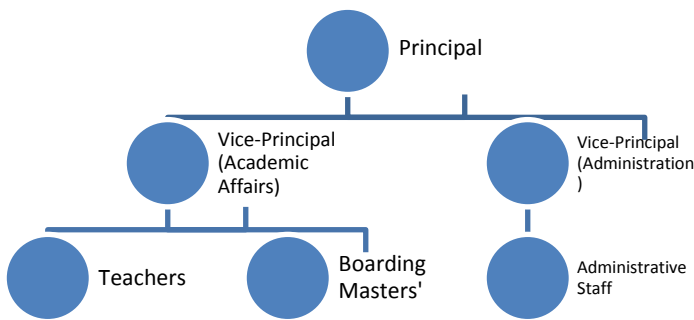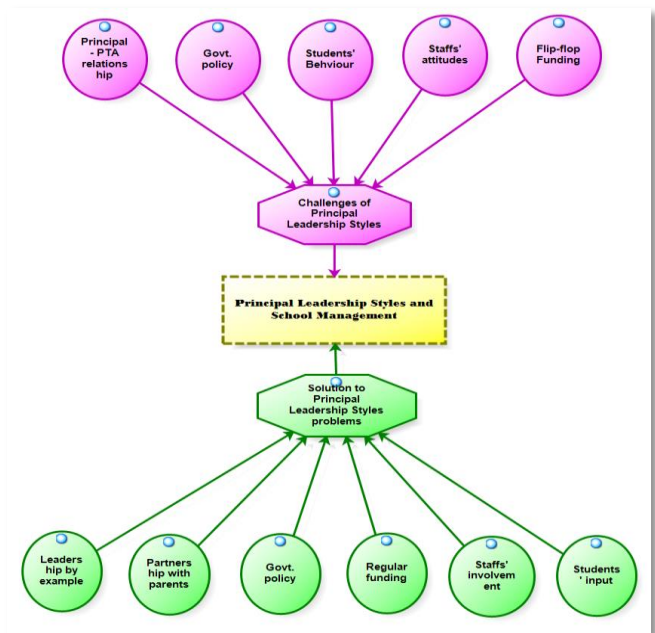

Figure 2. The emerged themes and sub-themes about principal leadership style and school management in unity secondary schools.

Challenges of principal leadership style and school management in unity secondary schools

Management of secondary schools has been constraint with many challenges. The principal position is a high-pressure job in the context of instructional supervision and provision of funds [23]. Similarly, [20] posited school management as the process of guiding and directing teachers' and administrative staff towards the achievement of school objectives is highly challenging. In relation to this, the perspectives of the principals as emerged through NVivo 10 modeling are shown in the figure 3 below.
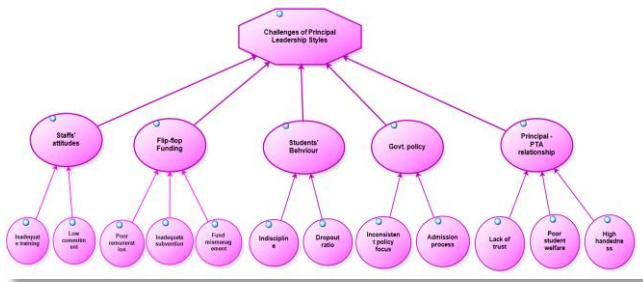
Figure 3. Sub-themes and sub sub-themes showing the challenges of principals' leadership styles.

Staffs' Attitudes: As part of the challenges confronting the management of Unity schools in Nigeria, some of the Informants emphasized that the attitudes of the staff are fragment of principal leadership challenge. In the same vein, [3] reiterated that the working conditions of most Nigerian teachers are poor, consequently, influence their pejorative attitudes. For instance, Informant 2 noted thus "main leadership challenges that we principal content with and which is an influence on staff attitude are inadequate training as well as general low commitment". Amplifying this, Informant 9 concluded that "most of our teachers are poorly trained in the objectives of unity schools, so they constitute problem for principal". From the perspective of Informant 6, "low commitment of staff in the teaching and implementation of the objectives of unity schools is great challenge for principals". These perspectives as discovered by this study are shown in Figure 4.
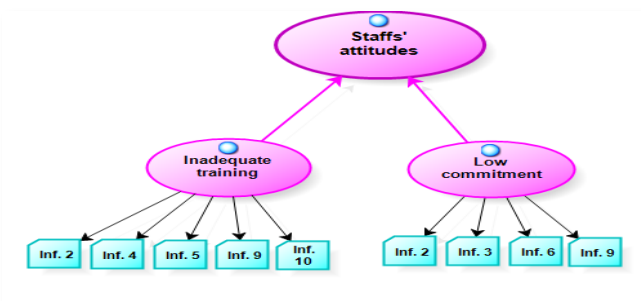

Figure 4. Impact of Principal's leadership style on staff attitudes

Students' behaviors: Principal leadership styles have been attributed to challenges emanating from students' behaviour in most of the unity schools in Nigeria [23]. This perspective was also highlighted by some of the principals interviewed. For instance, Informants 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8 all agreed that student indiscipline is a major behaviour that challenges the management of unity schools. Precisely, Informant 4 disclosed that "our students have now developed a kind of indiscipline attitude that is affecting the management of our schools". However, Informant 6 specifically, adduced the indiscipline behaviour to some principals' leadership styles. He said thus "the uncared and lackadaisical style of leadership of some principals informed the indiscipline behaviour of these students".

Another emerged sub sub-theme which challenges the leadership style of principal is the incessant students' dropout in unity schools [5]. For instance, Informant 1 linked the spate to student behaviour which every principal must struggle to overcome. According to Informant 10, "student dropout in our schools is worrisome and cannot be detached from the style of managing the school by principals".

Flip-flop funding: The principals leadership style has also been associated with decreasing funding that are available for the management of unity schools. Based on the exploration of this study, the emerged sub sub-themes that explained this are poor remuneration, inadequate subvention and fund mismanagement. According to Informant 2, "poor remuneration of teachers in unity schools is constituting a big challenge to the management of these schools". Meanwhile, Informant 6 conluded that "where funding from the government is decreasing, princiapls has no choice".

Inadequate subvention to unity school is posing a great challenge which is affecting principal leadership style [18]. This perspective was expressed by Informants 2, 4, 5, 9 and 10. Explicitly, Informant 5 highlighted that "in the last two years, the subvention being released to us has been dwindling and such constraining us from carrying out our responsibilities as expected by teachers, students and even parents".

On the other hand, in spite of the inadequate subvention, some of the principal interviewed also alluded to fund mismanagement as a bad leadership style which is inducing the challenges in schools [5]. According to Informant 3, "to say the fact, the way some of our colleagues mismanaged fund is alluded to some of the problems being experienced". Similar view was expressed by Informant 9 who stated thus: …if a principal leadership style is to singlehandedly expend school funds, then the staff will definitely accuse him of mismanagement even if has not. So, like I try to involve all stakeholders in the spending of fund, that is my style of managing the school and I

have no any proble. The graphical representation of this perspectives as emerged from NVivo analysis is shown in Figure 5.
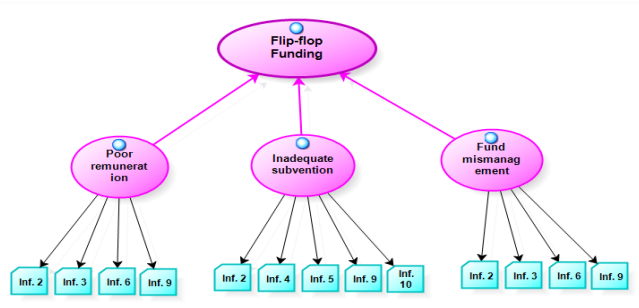

Figure 5. The role of funding on principals' leadership styles.

Principal parent teachers' association relationship: Several arguments have been adduced to the challenges of leadership style. However, one of the emerged reasons was the management of relationship between principal and PTA [23]. Based on the data generated for this study, it was discovered that principal leadership style have culminated to lack of trust, poor student welfare and high handedness. According to Informants 2, 4, 5, 9 and 10 lack of trust is as result of leadership style of some principals. Specifically, Informant 2 noted that "in a situation where the leadership style lack trust, there is bound to be challenges in the management of unity school". Similarly, Informant 5 concluded that "lack of trust among the principals, teachers and even students of unity schools is a major challenge affecting running of these schools".
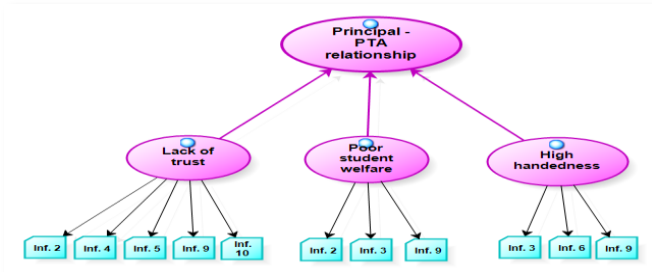

Figure 6. The impacts of PTA relationship on principal leadership style.

Solutions to Principals Leadership Styles problems

The need for improvement in school leadership has become a top priority for school reform in Nigeria. This becomes necessary in view of the challenges and complains trailing the management of these schools in the last one decade. These challenges according to [9] have necessitated the call for the scrapping of unity

schools in Nigeria. However, given the important role of principal, [23] viewed school principal as a leader that provides direction and expert advice on development of teaching and learning in school. In relation to this therefore, this study explored the possible solutions to these challenges which principals of unity schools can employ in their leadership style. The emerged solutions indicated five sub-themes and 12 sub sub-themes.
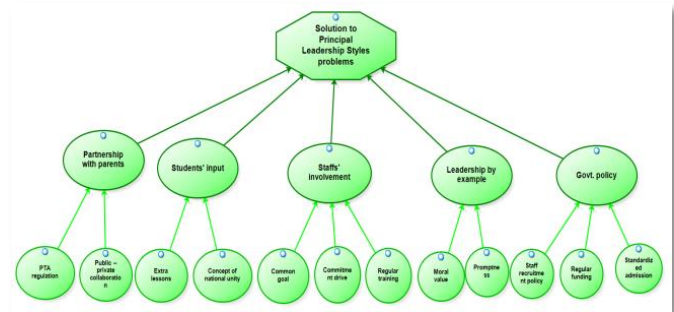

Figure 7. **Principals' perceptions on solution to leadership styles problem and unity schools management.**

Partnership with parents: It was discovered that the need for principals of unity schools, to embrace partnership with parents of students in their style of supervision will go a long way, towards achieving smooth management of the schools [23]. Most of the principals agreed that parents of students can be of help for the principals' leadership style. According to Informant 3, "when there is regulation in the activities of the principals as well as the parents there is bound to be peace". To Informant 6, "regulation of Principals and teacher will moderate the leadership style to people oriented". In a similar perception, Informant 1 noted that "to overcome the leadership challenges, every principal should adopt public private collaboration". The detail finding as it emerged is shown in figure 8 below.
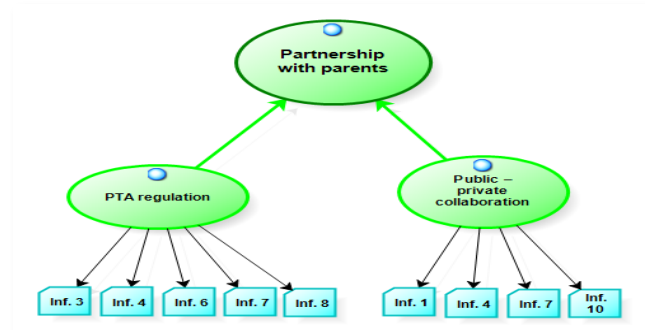

Figure 8. Partnership with parents as strategy to principals' leadership style.

Student input: As part of the suggestion for the best principal's leadership style, the Informants perceptions showed that in view of the general challenges facing unity schools, principal should ensure extra lesson as well as inculcation of national unity in all students. Most of the Informants, especially Informants 2 and 4 concluded students need extra lessons in order to perform well and performance is a determinant of easy inculcation of the concept of national unity.

Staff involvement: The perceptions of principals interviewed showed that every principal leadership style must give attention to staff especially in the areas of regular training. This as lend credence to the findings of [1] that, there is need to have common goal and commitment to the objectives of unity school through training of teachers regularly. Specifically, Informants 2 and 10 stated that "when the principal considers the interest of the staff, there is possibility of achieving common goal which will help in the management of the school". As for Informant 3 "most time if the leadership style of the principal give consideration to staff, it serves as commitment drive in the management of the school. So principal styles should ensure that:
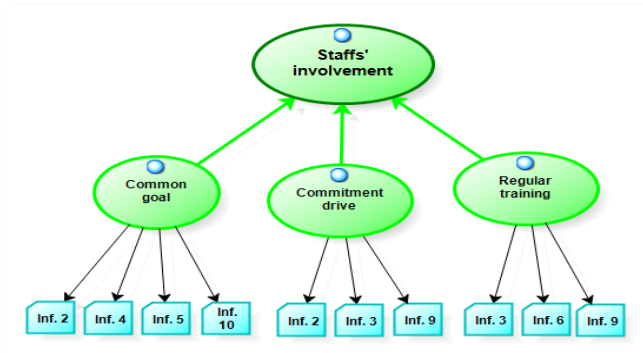

Figure 9. Perceptions on staff involvement as a good leadership style.

Government policy: Aside the role to be played by principals in order to achieve good management of the unity schools, most of the Informants have identified government policy as a key determinant of any leadership style . For instance, Informant 5 concluded that "in a situation where local government authority recruits non fit staff for a school, there is bound to be crises between principal and staff [13]. Therefore, government should always involve principal before recruiting". Similar perception was expressed by Informants 9 and 10 who summed it up

as "qualified staff will compliment principal every leadership style in the management of unity schools".

Also, development focus policy was mentioned as part of the strategy that required for smooth running of unity schools. It emerged that where the government policy is geared towards this, the principal will have the leverage to implement laudable projects which will endears him to both staff and students. With this perspectives are Informants 4, 7 and 8. Meanwhile, Informants 3 and 5 also highlighted that if the government can standardize it admission policy, the principals will not have much problem in the management of unity school. Citing many cases of principals being challenged of manipulating students' admission to favor some segments of Nigeria. The Informants therefore concluded that even if the principal leadership style is transparent as long as the government policy towards staff recruitment, school development and admission process is not inclusive, there will continue to be challenge. The model below shows the perceptions.
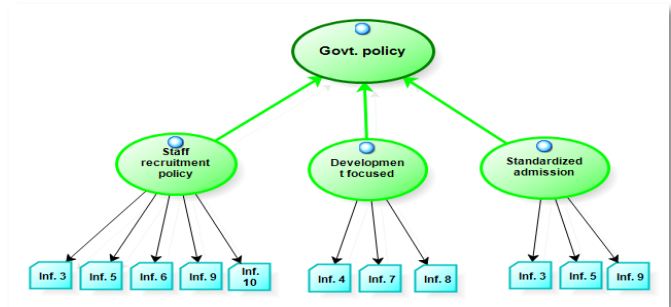

Figure 10. Principals' perceptions on the role of government policy on leadership styles.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This paper has significantly contributed to the understanding of the potential reasons for the principals' leadership styles challenges as well as the possible solutions that can be adopted. Understanding the elements and influences towards such challenges could hold lessons for governments, principals and all those involved in the administration of unity schools in Nigeria.

Therefore, the research questions established for this research have been used to achieve the objectives. Some of the study's findings support education management and leadership styles philosophies while some are novel to the issue. In view of this study's findings therefore, the following recommendation are imperative. The principals' leadership styles should be all-encompassing to give recognition to the roles of

students' parents, staff and students. Meanwhile, due to the complexity of unity schools, government should always involve principals in some vital policy implementation such as staff recruitment and student admission.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Certainly, this article has achieved its objectives, there were some inexorable limitations. Pursuant to the time limit, this study was conducted on small sample sizes who were principals' of secondary schools in north central region of Nigeria. Apparently, in other to investigate national in-depth challenges of school principals, the researchers recommended further studies on other five regions of Nigeria. The authors adopted qualitative research design using Nvivo 10 software for the analysis; it is recommended that future studies should adopt quantitative research design, using Partial Least Squares - Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) software for the analysis.

REFERENCES

[1] Nwangwa, T. & Omotere, K. C. K. (2013). The New Roles of School Managers in Managing Educational Challenges in Nigeria schools. European Scientific Journal, 9 (25), 160-170.

[2] FMOE (2014). Ministry of Education Survey on Unity Schools. Abuja: Federal Ministry of Education.

[3] Akinsolu, A. O. (2007). Challenges in Planning Education in Nigeria. A paper presented at the first international conference of Teacher Education. University of Lagos, Nigeria.

[4] Aina, S. (2011). Rudiment of Educational Management. Lagos: Fountain Training Consult.

[5] Ajaja, P. O. (2012). School Dropout Pattern among Senior Secondary Schools in Delta State, Nigeria. International Education Studies, 5(2), 145-153.

[6] Badau, K.M. & Olowoselu, A. (2015). Management of Emergency Peace Education Programmes for Boko Haram Internally Displaced Persons in Yola Refugee Camp of Adamawa State Nigeria. Journal of Social Science Studies, 2(2), 36-45.

[7] Burns, J.M. (1978). Leadership. New York: Harper & Row.

[8] Creswell, J. W. (2012). Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research. (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

[9] Ebegbulem, S. (2013). Verification: Teacher Can't Read Own Certificate. The Vanguard News (Nigeria) August 14. Retrieved from http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/08/

[10] Enueme, C. P. & Egwunyenga, E. J. (2008). Principals' Instructional Leadership Roles and Effect on Teachers' Job Performance: A Case Study of Secondary Schools in Asaba Metropolis, Delta State, Nigeria. Journal of Social Science, 16(1), 13-17.

[11] Fabunmi, M. (2005). Perspectives in Educational Planning. Ibadan: Awemark Industrial Press.

[12] Fernandez, I. & Sabherwal, R. (2010). Knowledge Management: System and Process. New York: Armonk Press.

[13] Adelokun, A. S. & Akinola, O.B. (2015). The Challenge of Teacher Quality and Human Development in Nigeria. US-China Education Review, 5(3), 191-198.

[14] Kaplan, B. & Maxwell, J. (2005). Qualitative Research Methods for Evaluating Computer Information Systems. New York: Springer.

[15] Keyton, J. (2015). Communication Research: Asking questions, finding answers. (4th ed.). New York: McGraw Hill Higher Education.

[16] Leithwood, K.A. & Riehl, C. (2003). What we know about successful school leadership. Philadelphia: Laboratory for Student Success, Temple University.

[17] Mohanty, J. (2013). Educational Administration Supervision and School Management. (2nd ed.) New delhi: Deep and Deep.

[18] Moja, T. (2000). Nigeria Education Sector Analysis: An analytical Synthesis of Performance and Main Issue. World Bank Document on Nigeria.

[19] Northouse, P. G. (2015). Introduction to Leadership Concept and Practice. (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

[20] Okoye, C. U. (2002). Farm Management. Monograph for Farm Management and Accounting Practice. Nsuka: University of Nigeria.

[21] Olasumbo, O. A. (2010). Principals' Decision-Making as Correlates of Crisis Management in South-West Nigerian Secondary Schools. International Journal of Pedagogies & Learning, 6(1), 62-68.

[22] Olowoselu, A. (2016). System of Education in Nigeria; Nomadic Education Perspective. Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.

[23] Olowoselu, A. & Bello, A. S. (2015). Challenges to Secondary School Principals' Leadership in Northern Region of Nigeria. British Journal of Education, 3(3), 1-5.

[24] Olowoselu, A. Onuselogu, A. & Bello, A. (2014). Historical Analysis of Boko Haram Insurgency on Educational Management in Northern Nigeria. Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(10), 77-83.

[25] Tobin, J. (2014). Management and Leadership Issues for School Building Leaders. International

Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, 9, 1-14.

[26] Sumintono, B. (2009). School-Based Management Policy and Its Practices at District Level in the Post New Order Indonesia. Journal of Indonesian Social Sciences and Humanities, 2, 41-67.

[27] Wohlstetter, P., Briggs, K.L. (1994). The Principal's Role in School-Based Management. Principal, 74(2), 16-17.