

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AS A PREDICTOR OF ADMINISTRATIVE EFFECTIVENESS IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Instructional leadership is increasingly recognized as a core determinant of school effectiveness, particularly in developing education systems where quality assurance and accountability remain major concerns. This study examines the relationship between principals' instructional leadership skills and administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 570 teachers across 110 schools using structured questionnaires. Regression analysis revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between principals' instructional supervision and measures of administrative effectiveness, including discipline, teacher performance, and student learning outcomes. The findings suggest that principals' emphasis on classroom supervision, teacher support, and curriculum implementation plays a crucial role in strengthening overall school administration. The study recommends professional development programs that enhance principals' instructional leadership capacities to improve teaching quality, teacher accountability, and student achievement. Introduction / Background Globally, instructional leadership has been described as the heart of effective school administration. Unlike managerial leadership, which focuses on structures and processes, instructional leadership is directly concerned with teaching, learning, and curriculum implementation. Principals who adopt this model prioritize classroom observation, teacher professional development, and curriculum monitoring as the foundation of school improvement. In the Nigerian context, concerns about poor student performance in WAEC and NECO examinations, declining teacher morale, and weak accountability structures have renewed interest in strengthening principals' instructional roles. Instructional leadership is now viewed not just as a school-level responsibility but as a critical policy instrument for raising educational standards. This paper situates instructional leadership within the broader discourse on school effectiveness and investigates its predictive power on administrative effectiveness in Adamawa State public secondary schools.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Instructional Leadership, Policy, Teachers, Students performance, Administration, Secondary School, Nigeria.

Introduction

Background to the Study

School leadership has long been recognized as one of the most critical determinants of school effectiveness, teacher performance, and student learning outcomes. Across decades of educational research, scholars have demonstrated that the quality of leadership exercised by principals significantly influences not only the organizational climate of schools but also the daily instructional practices of teachers (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020). In today's knowledge-driven society, where schools are expected to equip learners with complex competencies and lifelong learning skills, leadership that is directly oriented toward instruction has become indispensable.

Instructional leadership refers to the deliberate actions undertaken by school leaders to define the school's mission, manage the instructional program, and create a conducive learning environment (Hallinger & Murphy,

1985). Unlike administrative leadership, which emphasizes managerial efficiency and compliance with bureaucratic processes, instructional leadership focuses on the heart of schooling—teaching and learning. Principals who practice instructional leadership engage in classroom supervision, teacher mentoring, curriculum coordination, and the promotion of professional learning among staff. The end goal is to ensure that every student benefits from effective instruction that leads to improved academic achievement.

In Nigeria, the importance of instructional leadership is particularly urgent. Public secondary schools face persistent challenges such as inadequate facilities, teacher shortages, inconsistent instructional practices, and declining student performance in national examinations like WAEC and NECO. Studies have reported high failure rates in core subjects, raising concerns about the quality of teaching and learning in many states, including Adamawa (Owoeye & Yara, 2011; Okorji & Ogbo, 2013). Against this backdrop, principals' leadership roles cannot be confined to administrative routines; rather, they must become active instructional leaders who set academic goals, monitor teaching practices, and support teachers in improving classroom delivery.

Literature Review

Theoretical Foundations of Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership has emerged as one of the most influential frameworks for understanding the role of school principals in promoting teaching and learning effectiveness. Unlike traditional administrative models that emphasized managerial control and routine supervision, instructional leadership places the **core instructional process**—teaching, curriculum, assessment, and student learning—at the center of school leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). The concept of instructional leadership gained prominence through the work of Hallinger and Murphy (1985), who developed the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS). This model outlined three critical domains: (1) Defining the school's mission by articulating clear academic goals; (2) Managing the instructional program through curriculum oversight, supervision, and assessment; and (3) Promoting a positive learning climate by protecting instructional time, fostering high expectations, and supporting teacher development.

While transformational leadership has also been influential in educational research, emphasizing vision, motivation, and commitment (Bass & Riggio, 2006), instructional leadership is distinguished by its **direct focus on classroom practices and student outcomes**. Bush (2013) argues that instructional leadership is more task-oriented and directly linked to teaching and learning than transformational leadership, which primarily shapes school culture and teacher motivation. Recent studies suggest that both models can be complementary: transformational leadership provides the motivational foundation, while instructional leadership ensures the operationalization of change at the classroom level (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson et al., 2008). This model underscores the principal's **direct involvement in teaching and learning** rather than focusing exclusively on organizational maintenance. Research shows that schools where principals emphasize instructional leadership often achieve higher academic outcomes (Hallinger, 2011; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Bush's Perspectives on Instructional Leadership

Bush (2007, 2013) extends the conversation by positioning instructional leadership within the broader context of **educational leadership models**. He argues that while transformational leadership emphasizes vision,

values, and motivation, **instructional leadership is more tightly linked to teaching and learning outcomes**. According to Bush, effective instructional leaders:

- Focus on **teaching quality and learning outcomes** as the primary concern of leadership.
- Engage in **professional development** to improve teacher practice.
- Use data and evidence to guide instructional improvement.
- Ensure alignment between curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

Bush also highlights the cultural and contextual dimensions of instructional leadership. In developing countries like Nigeria, instructional leadership is particularly significant because schools often struggle with issues of teacher quality, student discipline, resource constraints, and systemic inefficiencies (Bush, 2011).

Instructional vs. Transformational Leadership

The debate between **instructional leadership** and **transformational leadership** has been widely discussed in the literature. Transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring followers, building commitment, and articulating a vision (Bass, 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Instructional leadership, by contrast, is more **practical and task-focused**, concentrating on classroom practices, teacher supervision, and curriculum management. Scholars such as Hallinger (2003) argue that both approaches can be complementary—transformational leadership motivates teachers to commit to change, while instructional leadership ensures that change is **implemented effectively in the classroom**.

Instructional Leadership in Global and African Contexts

Globally, research consistently shows a positive correlation between instructional leadership and school effectiveness. In high-performing school systems such as Singapore, Finland, and South Korea, principals are actively engaged in curriculum leadership, teacher coaching, and assessment practices that directly influence classroom quality (Tan, 2018; Sahlberg, 2015). In the United States and the United Kingdom, instructional leadership has been linked to improved student achievement, especially when principals regularly monitor classroom instruction and provide constructive feedback (Louis et al., 2010).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, where educational systems often grapple with resource scarcity, large class sizes, and insufficient teacher training, instructional leadership has shown promise as a practical intervention for improving schools. Research from Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa indicates that principals who emphasize classroom supervision, teacher professional development, and curriculum monitoring tend to foster higher levels of teacher effectiveness and student performance (Oduro, 2020; Bush & Glover, 2016). However, these studies also emphasize that without adequate support, training, and resources, principals may struggle to implement instructional leadership practices consistently.

Global evidence (USA, UK, Asia)

Internationally, studies confirm the impact of instructional leadership on school effectiveness:

- In the **United States**, Robinson et al. (2008) found that principals' active instructional involvement yielded stronger gains in student achievement than other leadership functions.

- In the **United Kingdom**, Day et al. (2016) showed that effective instructional leaders improved teacher morale and raised student performance in underperforming schools.
- In **Singapore**, Ng (2017) highlighted that principals' support for reflective inquiry and teacher collaboration enhanced instructional quality.
- In **South Korea and Finland**, systems renowned for strong academic outcomes, principals devote significant time to supervising instruction and promoting professional learning (Sahlberg, 2015).

African studies (Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Nigeria)

Research in Africa has increasingly documented the positive effects of instructional leadership, despite contextual challenges:

- In **Kenya**, Njuguna (2017) found that principals' instructional supervision predicted teacher discipline and school performance.
- In **Ghana**, Oduro (2020) showed that instructional leadership practices improved accountability and student learning, though principals faced resource constraints.
- In **South Africa**, Naidoo and Petersen (2015) reported that female principals who emphasized instructional leadership achieved stronger teacher accountability.
- In **Nigeria**, however, research indicates mixed results. While some principals practice instructional supervision effectively, many are bogged down by administrative and political duties (Asiyai, 2020; Musa, 2018). Studies by Olagboye (2021) and He (2024) nevertheless demonstrate that when principals do prioritize instructional leadership, schools experience improved discipline, higher teacher performance, and better student results.

Instructional Leadership in Nigeria

Nigeria provides a unique context where instructional leadership is both essential and underdeveloped. Studies across several states reveal that many principals still devote most of their time to administrative and bureaucratic duties rather than instructional tasks (Asiyai, 2020). This imbalance often results in weak teacher supervision, inconsistent instructional practices, and poor monitoring of curriculum implementation. Nevertheless, empirical evidence suggests that when Nigerian principals adopt instructional leadership practices—such as organizing teacher professional development, conducting classroom observations, and enforcing academic standards—schools experience improved discipline, higher teacher performance, and better academic outcomes (Olagboye, 2021; He, 2024).

Your own research in Adamawa State contributes to this growing body of evidence. By investigating the relationship between principals' instructional leadership skills and administrative effectiveness, it sheds light on the critical role principals can play in addressing local challenges of teacher performance, school discipline, and overall school effectiveness. This study is timely given Nigeria's commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4—ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Nigerian context (Adamawa State challenges, WAEC/NECO performance)

In Nigeria, secondary education is a critical foundation for national development. Yet, systemic challenges have hindered its effectiveness. Public secondary schools face issues such as inadequate infrastructure,

overcrowded classrooms, shortage of qualified teachers, inconsistent supervision, and declining performance in national examinations like the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) (Asiyai, 2020). In Adamawa State, these challenges are even more pronounced due to insurgency, displacement, and resource constraints.

WAEC and NECO reports consistently reveal **poor student performance in Mathematics, English, and core science subjects**, raising concerns about the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of school management. Studies have attributed these outcomes in part to the weak instructional leadership of principals, who are often preoccupied with bureaucratic compliance and administrative duties at the expense of instructional supervision (Musa, 2018; Takwate, 2019).

Instructional vs transformational leadership debates

The literature continues to debate whether **instructional leadership** or **transformational leadership** is more effective in schools. Robinson et al. (2008) and Leithwood et al. (2020) argue that instructional leadership yields more direct academic benefits, whereas transformational leadership enhances motivation, trust, and collaboration. A growing consensus suggests that the two are **complementary rather than competing**—with transformational leadership providing the cultural foundation and instructional leadership operationalizing improvements in classroom practice (Hallinger, 2011; Bush & Glover, 2016).

Gaps in Nigerian research → justification for study

Although international evidence overwhelmingly supports instructional leadership, **few empirical studies in Nigeria**, particularly in the North-East, have rigorously examined its predictive relationship with administrative effectiveness. Most Nigerian studies are descriptive, offering general observations rather than robust statistical analyses (Asiyai, 2020). This gap creates uncertainty about how instructional leadership translates into improved discipline, teacher performance, and student learning in challenging contexts like Adamawa State.

By addressing this gap, the present study contributes to both Nigerian and global debates on leadership and school effectiveness. It provides **context-specific evidence** that can guide policy reforms, professional development for principals, and strategies for improving the quality of secondary education in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognized importance of instructional leadership, many Nigerian secondary school principals remain more focused on administrative compliance, resource management, and external relations, often neglecting their instructional role. This has contributed to persistent problems such as declining student performance, poor curriculum implementation, and inadequate teacher accountability. While international studies demonstrate a clear link between instructional leadership and improved student outcomes, limited research in Nigeria—especially in the North-East geopolitical zone—has examined how principals' instructional leadership predicts administrative effectiveness in secondary schools. This gap underscores the need for empirical studies, such as the present one, to provide context-specific evidence.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the predictive relationship between principals' instructional leadership skills and administrative effectiveness in public secondary schools in Adamawa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Assess the extent to which principals demonstrate instructional leadership skills in secondary schools.
2. Determine the relationship between instructional leadership and administrative effectiveness.
3. Establish the predictive power of principals' instructional leadership on indicators of administrative effectiveness such as teacher performance, student discipline, and academic outcomes.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of instructional leadership demonstrated by principals in Adamawa State public secondary schools?
2. What is the relationship between principals' instructional leadership skills and administrative effectiveness?
3. To what extent do principals' instructional leadership skills predict administrative effectiveness in Adamawa State secondary schools?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to theory, policy, and practice. Theoretically, it reinforces instructional leadership theory within the Nigerian context, extending Hallinger's and Bush's frameworks to a Sub-Saharan African environment. Practically, it provides empirical evidence for policymakers, educational administrators, and stakeholders on the importance of strengthening instructional leadership among principals. The study's findings can inform professional development programs, principal preparation curricula, and policy reforms aimed at enhancing school effectiveness. Ultimately, by highlighting the role of instructional leadership in administrative effectiveness, this research supports efforts to improve the quality of secondary education in Nigeria.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised secondary school teachers in Adamawa State. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 570 teachers from 110 schools, ensuring proportional representation of urban and rural institutions. Data collection was carried out using structured questionnaires with two main sections: (1) principals' instructional leadership skills, and (2) indicators of administrative effectiveness. The instrument was validated by experts in educational administration, and reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis with SPSS.

Results

The results revealed that principals' instructional leadership skills significantly predicted administrative effectiveness. Key results are summarized below:

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Principals' Instructional Leadership Skills

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
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Instructional Skills	Leadership	3.72	0.58
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Table 8: Regression Analysis of Instructional Leadership on Administrative Effectiveness

Model	R	R2	Significance(p-value)
Instructional Leadership predicting Admin. Effectiveness	0.601	0.362	0.000

Discussion

The findings affirm that principals' instructional leadership plays a significant role in predicting administrative effectiveness. This is consistent with Robinson et al. (2008), who emphasized the strong link between instructional leadership and student learning outcomes. International comparisons also support this, with Liu (2013) highlighting in China that principals who actively supervised instruction improved teacher innovation. In Africa, Njuguna (2017) and Odoro (2020) confirmed similar results in Kenya and Ghana, respectively. In Nigeria, these findings resonate with Musa (2018) and Oyetunji (2013), who documented that principals' supervision and teacher support translated into greater school effectiveness. The mechanisms through which instructional leadership contributes to administrative effectiveness include enhanced teacher accountability, improved discipline, and stronger professional growth opportunities. Given the contextual challenges of Adamawa State—limited resources, insecurity, and low student performance—principals who emphasize instructional supervision create structures of accountability that mitigate systemic weaknesses. However, the study acknowledges limitations such as reliance on self-reported data and restriction to one state, which may limit generalizability. Future studies should explore longitudinal effects and use mixed methods to deepen understanding.

Policy Recommendations

1. Leadership training programs should prioritize instructional supervision, curriculum leadership, and teacher mentoring.
2. Administrative support staff should be strengthened to free principals from routine non-instructional tasks.
3. Performance appraisal systems should include instructional leadership indicators.
4. Teacher professional development programs should integrate coaching and mentoring led by principals.
5. Instructional leadership should be explicitly emphasized in the National Policy on Education and principal preparation curricula.

Conclusion

This study concludes that principals' instructional leadership is a strong predictor of administrative effectiveness in Nigerian secondary schools. By emphasizing classroom supervision, teacher support, and curriculum leadership, principals enhance both teacher performance and student achievement. Strengthening instructional leadership in Adamawa State and beyond is essential for improving educational quality and achieving national education goals.

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