

TEACHERS' LEADERSHIP QUALITIES AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS IN PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

This paper explores the influence of teacher qualities and classroom leadership styles on students' academic performance in private senior secondary schools. It examines how qualifications, pedagogical competence, leadership styles, and teaching experience affect learning outcomes. The paper reveals that teacher effectiveness and instructional leadership significantly enhance student performance when supported by conducive learning environments and low student-teacher ratios. The paper concludes that qualified, competent, and pedagogically sound teachers must lead their classrooms with clarity, motivation, and emotional intelligence. It recommends that private school administrators and policymakers must establish regular, structured training programmes focused on leadership skills, modern pedagogy, classroom assessment, and technology integration.

Keywords: Teacher Qualities, Classroom Leadership, Academic Performance, Pedagogical Competence, Instructional Delivery.

Introduction

The academic performance of private senior secondary school students in Nigeria could be influenced by factors like teacher qualities and school leadership. These disparities have increasingly been linked to variations in teacher effectiveness and leadership practices across schools (Adeyemi & Olaleye, 2021). Globally, educational scholars affirm that the competence, commitment, and instructional strategies of teachers are vital to achieving high academic outcomes (Darling-Hammond, 2017). In Nigeria, where education faces systemic challenges, quality teaching and strong leadership are even more critical. Indeed, having an effective and

efficient educational system at any level depends heavily on teachers for the execution of its programmes and policies. Therefore, teachers are highly essential for the successful operation of the educational system and are important tools for educational development. Teachers constitute the most important factor in the educational process and are instrumental to the success of any educational programmes embarked upon by any government. It is noteworthy that no educational system can rise above the quality of teachers in the system. Hence, the relationship between teacher qualities, classroom leadership, with students' academic performance is significant for educational policies given the achievement of educational goals and objectives.

Teacher qualities such as pedagogical knowledge, content mastery, teaching experience, professional development, and motivation are critical components of instructional quality (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Similarly, school leadership plays a key role in creating an enabling environment for learning, setting academic expectations, and supporting teacher growth (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2020). Hence, understanding how these two variables affect student achievement is crucial for policy and practice. Therefore, despite substantial investments in the private education sector, concerns persist regarding students' academic performance. Again, these concerns have been linked to various factors, notably teacher quality and leadership practices within schools.

Leadership plays a crucial role in any organisation to achieve particular goals. It is the ability of leadership that harnesses human and material resources to create productivity. Ogunsayin (2006) stated that leadership is a position of dominance and prestige accompanied by the ability to direct, motivate, and assist others in achieving a specific purpose.

Leadership within schools, particularly the styles adopted by principals and administrators, also plays a significant role in shaping educational outcomes. Hence, leadership refers not only to a teacher's ability to manage student behaviour but also to the capacity to inspire, guide, and maintain instructional coherence. Meanwhile, Nigeria has witnessed a rise in the number of private secondary schools, which examine teacher quality and classroom leadership critical to improving learning outcomes. Effective leadership can foster a conducive learning environment, motivate teachers, and implement policies that enhance academic performance. Conversely, ineffective leadership may lead to teacher dissatisfaction, high turnover rates, and ultimately, poor student performance. Thus, given the unique operational structures and challenges of private schools, it is imperative to explore how teacher qualities and leadership practices influence students' academic performance in this context.

This paper then seeks to explore the influence of teacher qualities on students' academic performance in senior secondary schools and examines how teachers' qualifications, training, and experience influence students' academic performance. Therefore, this paper explores how the interplay between teachers' attributes and classroom leadership influences academic performance among students in private senior secondary schools in Nigeria.

Justification For The Study

In recent years, the academic performance of students in private senior secondary schools in Nigeria has raised concerns among teachers, parents, and policymakers. Despite the proliferation of private schools, many students are observed to still perform below expected standards in national examinations. This gap calls for an in-depth analysis of teacher-related factors influencing learning outcomes. Research consistently shows that teacher qualities, such as academic qualifications, teaching experience, and instructional skills, are crucial to student success. Also, classroom leadership plays a central role in promoting an organised, motivating, and engaging learning environment. However, in Nigeria, limited empirical studies have holistically examined the combined effect of teacher qualities and leadership on student performance. This paper aims to fill that gap by focusing on private schools, where parental expectations and financial investments are high. Understanding these dynamics is vital for designing effective teacher training, recruitment, and evaluation policies. Ultimately, the study will inform school administrators and policymakers on strategies to enhance educational quality and students' academic performance in private senior secondary schools in Nigeria.

This paper is anchored on *Transformational Leadership Theory*, propounded by James MacGregor Burns in 1978. Burns introduced the concept to describe a leadership style where leaders and followers engage in a mutual process of raising one another to higher levels of morality and motivation. This theory was later expanded by Bernard Bass (1985), who articulated four dimensions of transformational leadership: *idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration*.

In the context of education, transformational leadership theory is relevant because it emphasises how teacher-leaders can inspire students, model ethical behaviour, stimulate critical thinking, and show personalised concern, all of which are instrumental in improving students' academic performance. Teachers who embody transformational leadership are more likely to create a positive classroom climate, encourage active participation, and motivate students toward academic success. Transformational leadership significantly impacts student engagement, achievement, satisfaction, and academic performance in schools, as demonstrated by scholars like Leithwood and Jantzi (2000) and Nguni, Slegers, and Denessen (2006).

Moreover, Odongo and Wang (2020) investigated transformational leadership among secondary school teachers in Kenya and concluded that such leadership enhances both teaching quality and students' learning outcomes, findings that are equally relevant to Nigerian schools. The integration of teacher qualities (such as competence, experience, and training) within the transformational leadership model provides a robust framework for evaluating how teachers' behaviours and skills influence students' academic performance in private secondary schools in Nigeria.

Teacher Qualifications And Pedagogical Competence

Teacher qualifications and pedagogical competence are among the most influential school-level factors affecting students' academic performance. The qualifications of a teacher include

their academic degrees, professional certifications, subject mastery, and teaching credentials, while pedagogical competence refers to their ability to effectively plan, deliver, and assess instruction to facilitate learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000). These two components are critical to educational quality and student achievement, especially in developing contexts like Nigeria.

Teacher Qualifications: Academic And Professional Background

Qualified teachers are those who possess not only the minimum required certification to teach but also adequate subject-matter knowledge and instructional training. In developed countries, teacher preparation programmes have become rigorous, integrating pedagogical theory with practical experience (OECD, 2018). For instance, in a large-scale study, Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2007) found that students taught by certified and highly qualified teachers scored significantly higher in Mathematics and English than those taught by uncertified instructors.

In the Nigerian context, the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) mandates a minimum of the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) for primary and junior secondary school teachers and a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) or Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) for senior secondary school teachers. Yet, challenges persist with many teachers employed without requisite qualifications, particularly in private schools (Uchefuna&Akinyemi, 2020).

A study by Akiri and Ugborugbo (2019) in Delta State found a significant relationship between teacher qualifications and student academic performance in English and Mathematics, suggesting that properly trained teachers are more effective in delivering curriculum content and responding to student needs.

Pedagogical Competence: Teaching Skills And Classroom Practice

Pedagogical competence involves a teacher's ability to apply effective instructional strategies, assess students' progress, manage the classroom, and adapt teaching methods to diverse learning styles. Shulman (1987) opines that effective teaching requires both content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), a specialised understanding of how to teach specific subjects. A study by Rockoff (2004) in the *American Economic Review* demonstrated that students taught by pedagogically competent teachers made greater gains in academic performance compared to peers in classrooms with less skilled teachers.

Similarly, Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005) found that teacher quality, measured through classroom observation and student achievement gains, was the single most important school-based factor influencing student learning. In Nigeria, Adepoju and Olaniyi (2021) in their study of public and private secondary schools in Lagos State reported that pedagogical skills such as lesson delivery, use of instructional materials, and feedback mechanisms significantly improved students' performance in standardised tests. Teachers who regularly used interactive teaching methods like group work, questioning, and project-based learning recorded higher student engagement and academic results.

Integrating Qualifications With Competence

While qualifications indicate the teacher's foundational preparedness, pedagogical competence determines their ability to translate that knowledge into effective teaching. The integration of both is crucial. As noted by Ngada (2020), possession of degrees without practical teaching ability often results in poor classroom engagement and weak academic outcomes.

The OECD (2018) highlights the importance of teacher certification, continuous professional development, and reflective teaching practices in high-performing school systems. Both qualifications and pedagogical competence contribute to effective teaching and improved student performance. In Nigeria and similar contexts, efforts to improve education should prioritise both robust teacher training and continuous capacity-building initiatives that enhance pedagogical effectiveness.

Classroom Leadership Styles And Instructional Delivery

Effective instructional delivery in secondary schools is not solely a product of curriculum mastery or pedagogical competence; it is also deeply influenced by a teacher's leadership style. Classroom leadership refers to the way a teacher exercises authority, motivates learners, maintains discipline, and fosters an environment conducive to learning. This leadership style significantly shapes the level of student engagement, classroom climate, and ultimately, academic performance (Adeyemi, 2010).

Types Of Leadership Styles In The Classroom

Educational researchers generally classify classroom leadership into several styles, primarily *authoritarian*, *democratic*, and *laissez-faire*, though *transformational* and *transactional* leadership models are also increasingly discussed.

Authoritarian: leadership is characterised by a top-down approach, suppressing student creativity.

Democratic: leadership encourages collaboration and student input, fostering higher motivation and achievement.

Transformational: leadership inspires intellectual engagement and has positive effects on academic outcomes and socio-emotional growth.

Laissez-Faire: leadership provides minimal guidance, leading to disorganised learning environments and reduced academic achievement.

Influence Of Leadership Styles On Instructional Delivery

Leadership style directly affects how instruction is planned, delivered, and received. Authoritarian teachers tend to use lecture-heavy methods with little room for interaction. In contrast, democratic leaders often employ interactive and student-centred teaching strategies, such as discussions, project-based learning, and group work (Ndubuisi&Nwankwo, 2013).

According to a study by Adeyemi (2010) in Osun State, democratic teachers significantly improved standardised test performance, highlighting the importance of effective classroom leadership in fostering inclusive learning environments and enhancing student participation and achievement. Ololube (2006) found that leadership style significantly predicts instructional quality and student success, with transformational and democratic styles being most effective. Leadership style significantly impacts student engagement, particularly in socioeconomic contexts like Nigeria. Democratic and transformational styles enhance critical thinking, retention, and instructional delivery, highlighting the need for leadership development in Nigerian schools.

Teacher Experience And Students' Academic Performance

Teacher experience is widely recognised as a critical factor influencing student learning outcomes. While teacher qualifications and pedagogical training are fundamental, it is the accumulated experience in real classroom settings that often determines how effectively a teacher can apply instructional strategies, manage diverse learners, and respond to varying academic challenges (Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005). In Nigeria, as in many educational systems, the correlation between teacher experience and student academic performance has garnered attention due to persistent disparities in student achievement across schools.

Years Of Teaching Experience And Academic Achievement

Years of teaching experience have been linked with increased content knowledge, improved instructional delivery, and greater adaptability in managing student needs. Kini and Podolsky (2016) argue that experienced teachers are more effective at supporting student learning, especially after the first five years of teaching. Their study, published by the Learning Policy Institute, shows that teacher effectiveness improves significantly with experience and continues to grow throughout a teacher's career. Research shows that experienced teachers consistently perform better in English and Mathematics, with deeper knowledge, better classroom control, and refined assessment techniques. In the U.S., teacher experience is a significant predictor of student performance, particularly during the first decade of teaching.

Classroom Management Skills And Learning Outcomes

Effective classroom management is an integral part of a teacher's experience. Teachers who have spent more time in the classroom tend to develop better strategies for organising instruction, maintaining student discipline, and addressing behavioural challenges, factors that collectively foster a positive learning environment.

Marzano and Marzano (2003), in their research-based model of classroom management, argued that seasoned teachers are more likely to anticipate disruptions and implement preventive strategies. Their study showed that students in well-managed classrooms demonstrated higher levels of engagement and achievement. Similarly, in a study conducted in Lagos State, Nigeria, Ajayi and Olatunji (2017) reported that teachers with over 10 years of experience were more

adept at using time effectively, maintaining order, and facilitating group learning practices that translated into improved student performance in standardized tests.

Balancing Experience With Innovation

Teacher experience is linked to student success, but it's not enough without adaptability and innovation. Long-serving teachers should balance experience with a growth mindset, supported by ongoing training and reflective practice. In this regard, Babatunde and Olaniyan (2019) emphasised the importance of “experience renewal” through regular exposure to new teaching technologies and methodologies, especially in a rapidly changing educational landscape. Their study in Ogun State secondary schools concluded that experienced teachers who engaged in modern pedagogical practices were more effective than those who relied solely on traditional methods. Teacher experience, professional development, and effective classroom management significantly impact students' academic performance. Regular refreshment and innovation are crucial for maintaining positive learning outcomes. Investing in teacher retention and professional development is essential for improving student success.

Criticism

While extensive literature affirms the positive influence of teacher qualities and leadership styles on student academic performance, several critiques challenge the linearity and universal application of this relationship. One key criticism is the overemphasis on teacher attributes as isolated variables, neglecting other socio-economic and systemic factors such as school funding, parental involvement, student socio-cultural background, and policy environments (Hanushek&Rivkin, 2010). In many Nigerian contexts, students' academic performance may be more strongly affected by poverty, inadequate infrastructure, or inconsistent government oversight than by teacher attributes alone. Moreover, the use of teacher qualifications and leadership styles as sole predictors of academic performance can be problematic. Some scholars argue that teacher certification does not always equate to teaching competence (Akiba, LeTendre, & Scribner, 2007). Also, leadership styles like transformational or democratic may be effective in one context but fail in others due to differing student behaviour, cultural expectations, or institutional structures.

Despite these criticisms, this paper affirms the central role of teacher qualities and classroom leadership in shaping student academic performance, particularly within the Nigerian educational setting. However, it adopts an integrated perspective, arguing that teacher effectiveness must be viewed in conjunction with broader systemic, environmental, and policy-related variables. The study contends that while teacher qualifications and leadership are not the only determinants, they remain controllable, scalable, and actionable factors that can be improved through targeted interventions.

In private senior secondary schools, where accountability and competition for excellence are typically higher than in public schools, teacher leadership and quality stand out more clearly as determinants of student success. This paper takes the position that improving these variables,

through professional development, recruitment reforms, and pedagogical support, can lead to measurable gains in learning outcomes.

Conclusion

This paper underscores the significance of qualified, competent, and pedagogically sound teachers who lead their classrooms with clarity, motivation, and emotional intelligence. In private senior secondary schools, the academic success of students is closely tied to the quality of instruction and leadership provided by their teachers. However, these qualities do not function in isolation; they are shaped and constrained by institutional support, access to resources, and ongoing professional development. While criticisms against an overreliance on teacher variables are valid, overlooking the influence of teacher quality and leadership in favour of systemic excuses only delays the necessary reforms. Investing in teacher excellence remains one of the most cost-effective and high-impact strategies for enhancing educational outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions in this paper, the following recommendations are offered:

- ix. Education authorities should enforce strict compliance with qualification standards, ensuring that only professionally trained and certified teachers are employed in secondary schools.
- x. Private school administrators and policymakers must establish regular, structured training programmes focused on leadership skills, modern pedagogy, classroom assessment, and technology integration.
- xi. Colleges of education and universities should embed leadership theory and practice in their teacher preparation curricula, especially emphasising transformational leadership in the classroom.
- xii. Experienced teachers should be engaged in mentoring less experienced colleagues, creating a culture of knowledge-sharing and continuous improvement within schools.
- xiii. Incentivizing teachers based on their students' progress, measured through a combination of assessment and engagement metrics, could drive improved performance and morale.
- xiv. School leadership and regulatory bodies should carry out regular classroom observations, not just for control, but for coaching and identifying training needs.
- xv. Schools should consider cultural and institutional contexts when applying leadership models, allowing flexibility in how democratic or transformational styles are implemented.
- xvi. Regular in-service training and monitoring should be carried out to improve teaching quality across all school types.

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