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# Principals' Application of Distributed Leadership Model in the Administration of Secondary Schools in Rivers State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study that examined principals' application of distributed leadership model in the administration of secondary schools in Rivers State, adopted the survey research design. The population of study comprised all the 267 principals in senior public secondary schools in Rivers State. A sample of 110 principals drawn using stratified sampling technique formed the sample for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a 15 item questionnaire based on the three research questions and two hypotheses formulated for the study. A reliability coefficient of 0.80 was obtained for the instrument. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation for the research questions and z-test statistics for hypotheses at  $P < 0.05$ . The findings of the study showed that distributed leadership model was applied in teachers' professional growth, instructional programmes and students' personnel administration. The study among others recommended that secondary school principals in Rivers State should create opportunities for teachers to work alongside them to improve distributed leadership practices in schools. It concluded that the application of distributed leadership model by principals could improve the administration of secondary schools in Rivers State.

**Keywords:** Principal; Distributed; Leadership; Administration; Secondary School; Application.

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## INTRODUCTION

A common trend in contemporary research endeavour on principal leadership is the ways in which principals take important decisions. Also, one of the most important elements connected with the professional work of any principal is ensuring that his or her leadership functions are achieved within the school context. Effective school leadership is necessary for successful school, since the outcome of a school depends on the quality leadership (Salahuddin, 2011). As a current popular form of leadership, distributed leadership focuses not only on the leadership of the principal of a school, but also on that of other team members. In this context, principals can no longer be expected to lead and manage their schools on their own. According to Mayrowetz (2008) distributed leadership is an emerging theory of leadership with a narrower focus on individual's capabilities, skills and talents. Hence, this type of leadership focuses on a shared or joint responsibility for leadership activities. Distributed leadership implies that leadership of a school is not held by one leader only, but leadership roles are distributed among the rest of the school management team. School leaders seldom think about how a leadership model would be beneficial for a school and why they should use it (Salahuddin, 2011).

As Nigeria is now facing the challenge of reformation in secondary education, it could consider distributed leadership as a means to achieve the reformation. The relevance of secondary education in Nigeria warranted the federal government of Nigeria to state the broad aims of secondary education in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004). As espoused in the policy document it prepares the individual for meaningful living in the society and for higher education. In this wise, secondary education is expected to provide quality education to all those that could benefit from it. Nevertheless, Ekundayo (2010) noted that secondary schools appear not live up to its original expectation as contained in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014). According to him, there has been perceived poor performance of students as a result of poor administration of secondary schools. In Rivers State, Nigeria the education sector is facing a challenging period for school leadership. There is much concern about the quantitative issues such as raising student enrolment, rather than quality improvement in terms of pedagogical development. It is now time to think about how the leadership of secondary schools could be developed to improve the quality of education in Rivers State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Distributed leadership is relatively an emerging theory of educational leadership which focuses not only on the leadership of the school head, but also on that of other subordinates in the school. New theories for leadership such as distributed leadership have emerged in the education field with little empirical inquiry. As Harris (2008) rightly observed new leadership theories have been formulated and successfully sold to schools without adequate scrutiny or empirical evidence. Similarly, Leithwood (2006) argued that distributed leadership is a movement based more on philosophy and democratic values than empirical evidence.

Nevertheless, the emergence of new theories cannot be ignored as the focus of leadership changes as a result of the necessity for effective leadership. In terms of theory development and application, distributed leadership is seemingly not popular in developing countries, hence research endeavour is scanty. Thus, without empirical verification distributed leadership would likely become idealized and philosophized. In this regard, it is imperative to strengthen distributed leadership model with systematic empirical evidence drawn from secondary schools principals in Rivers State, Nigeria. Accordingly, the present study investigated principal's application of distributed leadership model in the administration of public senior secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study investigated the extent principals apply distributed leadership model in the administration of secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically the study:

- Determine the extent to which principals apply distributed leadership model in improving teachers' professional development programmes in the administration of secondary schools in Rivers State.
- Determine the extent to which principals apply distributed leadership model in improving instructional programmes in the administration of secondary schools in Rivers State.
- Determined the extent to which principals apply distributed leadership model in the administration of students' personnel services in secondary schools in Rivers State.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the conduct of the study:

- To what extent do principals apply distributed leadership model in improving teachers' professional development in secondary schools administration in Rivers State?
- To what extent do principals apply distributed leadership model in improving instructional programmes in secondary schools administration in Rivers State?
- To what extent do principals apply distributed leadership model in the administration of students' personnel services in secondary schools in Rivers State?

## **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses guided the study:

- There is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of principals in urban and rural schools on the application of distributed leadership model in improving teachers' professional development programmes in secondary schools.
- There is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of principals in urban and rural schools on the application of distributed leadership model in improving instructional programmes in secondary schools.
- There is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of principals in urban and rural schools on the application of distributed leadership model in the administration of students' personnel services in secondary schools.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This aspect of the paper deals with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the study. The theoretical foundation of the study is anchored on path-goal theory of leadership. The path-goal theory of leadership was developed by Robert House in 1971. The theory is classified as situational and contingency leadership theory. The path-goal theory upholds that there is no one universally best style of leadership and states that a leader's behaviour is dependent on motivation, satisfaction and performance of the subordinates. House (1971) noted that path-goal theory derives its name from its concern of how leaders' influence subordinate's perception of their work goals and the paths they follow toward goal attainment.

The path-goal theory recommends participative leadership as one of the leadership models that can be used by a leader in different situations for effective performance. Participative leadership like distributed leadership is best applied when the subordinates are competent but require assurances of their roles and higher levels of motivation to perform. The subordinates in this situation could be the teachers or other staff in the school, who because of their level of competence have established internal locus of control. They know that they have the potentials to exercise some level of leadership responsibilities, but require being motivated to bring out the best. Thus, relating the path-goal theory model of leadership to the study. The principals who are the leaders in secondary schools through the sharing of ideas and responsibilities offers the subordinates assistance in clarifying the paths and consequently influence leadership towards achieving set goals.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

The concept of distributed leadership lends itself to a range of meanings and is associated with a variety of practices (Mayrowetz, 2008). The purpose of distributed leadership is to bring the school management team and other teachers in contact with the goals and values of the school. Also, it relieves the principal of the many responsibilities of administration and other school activities (Loeser, 2008; Ibara, 2011). In a distributed leadership model, teachers collectively assume responsibility for the wellbeing of their schools. Furthermore, the distribution of leadership can also have an important effect on enhancing teacher commitment and involvement in decision making. This is achieved by involving more teachers in leadership responsibilities in the school system leading to generation of innovations with a strong team approach (Marishane & Botha, 2011; Botha, 2014).

According to House and Aditja (1997) distributed leadership is the process of leadership which involves collaborative relationships that lead to collective action anchored on the shared values of people who work together to bring about positive change. Similarly, Leithwood and Reid (2003) observed that distributed leadership ensures that teachers and principals work together towards the attainment of school goals. Elaborating on the concept of distributed leadership MacBeath (2005) sees distributed leadership as an ability to relinquish one's role as ultimate decision maker, trusting others to make the right decisions and a belief in the potential and authority of others. While MacBeath, Oduro and Waterhouse (2004) noted that distributed leadership means the same as dispersed, shared, collaborative and democratic leadership. Bennet, Wise, Woods and Harvey (2003) believe that distributed leadership is an emerging network of interacting individuals with an openness of boundaries and expertise.

Commenting on the similarities between democratic and distributed leadership models, Ritchie and Woods (2007) observed that the democratic and distributed leadership models are very similar in many ways. According to them, both models involve the distribution of responsibility at all administrative levels, working through teams and engendering collective responsibility. In the distributed leadership model, the principal shares authority and power, teachers assume leading roles and act independently as individuals or in teams (Loeser, 2008). However, Jameson (2007) argued that the distributed leadership model goes some way further than shared leadership along the continuum of fuller group engagement in leadership. According to him, this is possible through specifying distribution of tasks and responsibilities, though not necessarily knowledge, power and authority. Furthermore, Hatcher (2005) opined that democracy adds to the emergent feature of distributed leadership and the idea that everyone by virtue of his or her human status should play a role in the process.

Arising from the above views, definitions, and purpose of distributed leadership is the recognition of the potentials and capabilities of other members of the school to play a role. The definitions and explanations of distributed leadership model equally suggests that in distributed leadership, it is not only the leadership of the principals that counts, but also the leadership responsibilities performed by vice principals, teachers, support staff and even students. Thus, a major focus of distributed leadership is on a joint or shared responsibility for leadership activities in the school.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study utilised a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised 267 public senior secondary school principals in Rivers State. The sample for the study was drawn using stratified sampling technique which yielded a total sample of 110

principals made up of 67 and 43 principals in urban and rural schools respectively. The main instrument employed in the study was a self-constructed instrument titled “Principals Distributed Leadership Questionnaire (PDLQ)”. The questionnaire was structured on 4-point Likert type rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE) = 4, High Extent (HE) = 3, Moderate Extent (ME) = 2 and Low Extent (LE) = 1. A reliability index of 0.80 was obtained for the instrument. The mean and standard deviation were utilized in providing answers to the research questions, while z-test statistical analysis was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## RESULTS

**Research Question 1:** To what extent do principals apply distributed leadership model in improving professional development programmes in secondary school administration?

**Table 1:** Mean and standard deviation responses of distributed leadership model in improving professional development programmes

S/N	Professional Development	Principal's Urban		Principal's Rural		Mean Set	Decision
		$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD		
1.	Provides appropriate knowledge and skills for staff and principals.	3.25	1.27	3.05	1.04	3.15	HE
2.	Encourages group collaboration and sharing of ideas.	2.33	0.24	2.41	0.92	2.37	LE
3.	Promotes professional growth of principals and staff.	3.24	1.06	2.84	0.97	3.04	HE
4.	Improves on the job competencies and performance of staff and principals.	2.96	1.01	3.50		3.23	HE
5.	Improves instructional learning in school.	3.40	1.28	2.93	1.05	3.17	HE
<b>Aggregate Mean Set</b>						<b>2.99</b>	<b>HE</b>

Legend: HE = High Extent; ME = Moderate Extent; LE = Low Extent

Table 1 indicates the responses of principals in urban and rural schools on the application of distributed leadership in improving the professional development programmes. A summary of Table 1 reveals that principals in urban and rural schools obtained aggregate mean set response of 2.99 indicating a moderate application of distributed leadership model in improving professional development programmes in secondary schools.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent do principals apply distributed leadership model in improving instructional programmes in secondary schools administration.

**Table 2:** Mean and Standard Deviation Responses of Distributed Leadership Model in Improving Instructional Programmes

S/N	Instructional Development	Principal's Urban		Principal's Rural		Mean Set	Decision
		$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD		
6.	Improves students' learning outcomes.	3.55	0.74	3.34	0.78	3.45	HE
7.	Helps teachers improve their job performance	3.05	1.02	2.75	1.13	2.90	ME
8.	Promotes acquisition of new knowledge.	3.18	0.67	3.20	1.15	3.19	HE
9.	Opens up opportunities for teachers career to development	3.89	0.88	3.33	1.05	3.61	HE
10.	Enhances interaction with staff.	3.35	1.22	3.20	0.99	3.28	HE
<b>Aggregate Mean</b>						<b>3.29</b>	<b>HE</b>

Legend: HE = High Extent; ME = Moderate Extent; LE = Low Extent

Table 2 presents the responses of principals regarding the application of distributed leadership model in improving instructional programmes. A look at the table 2 shows that principals in urban and rural schools obtained aggregate mean set response of 3.29, indicating a high extent (HE) of the application of distributed leadership model in improving instructional programmes in secondary schools.

**Research Question 3:** To what do principals apply distributed leadership model in the administration of students’ personnel services in secondary schools?

**Table 3:** Mean and Standard Deviation Responses of Distributed Leadership Model in the Administration of Students’ Personnel Services

S/N	Students’ Personnel Services	Principal’s Urban		Principal’s Rural		Mean Set	Decision
		$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD		
11.	Enables orientation of new students	3.06	0.11	3.35	0.78	3.21	HE
12.	Encourages counselling services for improved students’ behaviour.	2.98	1.12	2.78	1.12	2.88	ME
13.	Coordination of the school environment for orderliness provides proper placement of students.	2.88	1.00	2.95	1.27	2.92	ME
14.	Ensures that facilities are available for conducive learning environment.	3.11	0.89	2.96	0.96	3.04	HE
<b>Aggregate Mean Set</b>						<b>3.08</b>	<b>HE</b>

Legend: HE = High Extent; ME = Moderate Extent; LE = Low Extent

Table 3 presents the responses of principals on application of distributed leadership in the administration of students’ personnel services. A summary of the table shows that both principals in urban and rural schools obtained aggregate mean set response of 3.08, indicating a high extent (HE) of the application of distributed leadership model in the administration of students’ personnel services in secondary schools.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of principals in urban and rural schools on the application of distributed leadership model for the improvement of professional development programmes in secondary schools.

**Table 4:** Summary of z-test analysis on application of distributed leadership model in improving professional development programmes in secondary schools

S/N	Source	No	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	Z-cal	Z-crit	Sig. level	Decision
1.	Urban principals	47	3.78	1.09	108	0.87	1.96	0.05	Not significant
2.	Rural principals	43	3.23	0.96					

Table 4 shows that the calculated z-value of 0.87 at 108 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated z-value of 0.87 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in the mean score ratings of principals in urban and rural schools with regard to the application of distributed leadership in improving professional development programmes was upheld. This is an indication that principals in urban and rural schools have similar responses regarding the application of distributed leadership model in improving professional development programmes.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of principals in urban and rural schools on the application of distributed leadership model for the improvement of instructional programmes in secondary schools administration.

**Table 5:** Summary of z-test analysis on application of distributed leadership model in improving instructional programmes

S/N	Source	No	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df.	Z-cal	Z-crit	Sig. level	Decision
1.	Urban principals	63	2.95	0.89	108	1.02	1.96	0.05	Not significant
2.	Rural principals	43	2.87	0.94					

Table 5 indicates that the calculated z-value of 1.02 is less than the critical value of 1.96 at 108 degree of freedom. This means that the null hypothesis two is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean score of principals in urban and rural with regards to the application of distributed leadership in the improvement of instructional programmes.

**Hypothesis Three:** There is no significant difference in the mean rating scores of principals in urban and rural schools on the application of distributed leadership model in the administration of students' personnel services in secondary schools.

**Table 6:** Summary of z-test analysis on application of distributed leadership model in the administration of students' personnel services

S/N	Source	No	$\bar{X}$	SD	Df	Z-cal	Z-crit	Sig. level	Decision
1.	Urban principals	63	3.24	0.87					
2.	Rural principals	43	3.01	0.97	108	0.99	1.96	0.05	Not significant

Table 6 reveals that the calculated z-value of 0.99 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 108 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated value of 0.99 is less than the critical value of 1.96. The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference in mean scores ratings of principals in urban and rural schools with regard to application of distributed leadership in the administration of student's personnel services was accepted as postulated.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings on application of distributed leadership model in improving professional development programmes in the administration of secondary schools revealed that the respondents were in agreement that application of distributed leadership model in improving professional development programmes include, providing appropriate knowledge and skills for staff and principals (mean set = 3.15), promotion of professional growth of principals and staff (mean set = 2.37), improving on the job competences and staff performance (mean set = 3.23) and instructional learning in schools (mean set = 3.17). The findings are consistent with Spillane (2006) who observed that distributed leadership acknowledges a broader perspective of leadership activities than just the leadership of school principals.

Concerning the application of distributed leadership model in improving instructional programmes in secondary schools administration, the respondents were in agreement in table 2 that application of distributed leadership model in improving instructional programmes include, promotes acquisition of new knowledge (mean set = 3.19), enhances interaction with staff (mean set = 3.28), improvement in students' learning outcome (mean set = 3.45), assisting teachers improve their job performance (mean set = 2.90) and opening up

opportunities for teachers' career development (mean set = 3.61). The findings support that of Harris (2008) who opined that students' outcomes are more likely to improve when leadership sources are distributed throughout the school community and when teachers are empowered in areas of importance to them.

Regarding the application of distributed leadership model in the administration of students' personnel services, the respondents are in agreement in table 3 that application of distributed leadership model in students' personnel services include, enabling orientation of new students (Mean set = 3.21), encouraging counselling services for improved students' behaviour (mean set = 2.88), enabling coordination of school environment for orderliness (mean set = 2.92) and providing placements of students (mean set = 3.29). The findings are in line with David and Gamage (2007) and Mbogori (2012) who noted that effective participatory or shared leadership in school administration influence the trust of students by reducing unfaithfulness, grudges and indiscipline.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicated that principals applied the instrumentality of distributed leadership model in various ways in the administration of secondary schools. The study showed a high level of application of distributed leadership model in improving professional development programmes, instructional programmes and students' personnel administration. Distributed leadership model appears to create friendly atmosphere between the principal and students and equally makes the principal to have the opportunity to interact with students. Thus, the application of distributed leadership model in school administration could improve the quality of service delivery leading to the realisation of the objectives of secondary education in Rivers State.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings some recommendations were made as follows:

- To develop and exercise distributed leadership in secondary schools, the Rivers State Secondary Education Board should organise training programmes for principals and teachers with focus on long-term direction and change.
- Secondary school principals should apply distributed leadership model in the areas of staff development programmes, instructional programmes and co-ordination of students' personnel administration.
- Secondary school principals in Rivers State should create opportunities for teachers to work alongside them to improve distributed leadership practices in schools.

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