

Leadership Principles and Its Implications for Stability in Nigerian Education System

Bitrus Dambo Gyot (Ph. D), Felix Danjuma Tappi

Department of Educational Foundations, Federal College of Education, Pankshin, Nigeria
michogun63@gmail.com

Date Received: August 13, 2015; Date Revised: November 17, 2015

Abstract - *This paper analyzed leadership principles and its implications for stability in Nigerian education system that leadership is a commendatory concept that attracts the attention of all because it is the key to human direction. Analysis of the experience in Nigeria was undertaking, against the back drop of pointing and counter pointing of accusing fingers on who is to be blame for the unending instability being experience in the education system. In considering Nigerian experience, it was observed that our leaders particularly Principals, Provosts, Rectors and Vice Chancellors lack most of these principles which are key qualities of a leader that is why we have continually experienced instability of one form or the other across the strata of the school system. Accordingly it is hereby suggested among others that our leaders must shy away from mediocrity and pursue justice no matter what it will cost them, as this is the only guaranty for purposeful leadership.*

Keywords: *Leadership, Stability, Education System, Nigeria*

INTRODUCTION

Whenever the issue of instability is raised, accusing fingers are pointed wrongly or rightly in different directions. With particular references to the education system, the frequent crisis that often leads to strikes and counter strikes by students, teachers/lecturers, and the correspondent reactions of the members of the public has been greeted with mixed reactions, for instance while some blame the government for not meeting their demands others blame the students, teachers/lecturers for asking too much, still others heap the blame on the society in general for not speaking out. While this confusion last the entire education system is jeopardized. The issue at stake is how to resolve or minimize these; so as to pave the way for achieving the aims and objectives of our educational system which is to lead to self reliance as contained in the National Policy of Education

(NPE2004). This can be possible through purposeful leadership hinged on some principles suggested by Udoh [1] as shall be analyzed in this paper. Analysis in the words of Blackburn [2] ‘is the process of breaking a concept down into simpler parts so that its logical structure are displayed’(p. 14).

Commenting on the national policy on education, Oboru [3] rightly observed that; “the education sector is guided by the national policy on education and several coordinating mechanism which have been put in place to ensure that the highest standards are maintain in the curriculum, infrastructure and man power development” this paper seek to analyze some of this basic principles as outline by Udoh [1] with the view of establishing whether or not their application can help resolved the challenges of instability in the Nigerian education system. The objectives are to :

- i. Provide a comprehensive and clear understanding of what these principles stand for
- ii. Find out whether or not these principles are tenable in the Nigerian education system. If yes, to what extend are they being adhered to
- iii. To find out the implications of these principles for Nigerian education system and the way forward.

Clarification of Concepts

Leadership: The chambers dictionary [4] states that “to lead is to show the way” and of course we all have idea of what is meant by the term “to lead” (p. 748) for instance in the home we look up to our parents to provide such direction, in the traditional setting we look up to our chiefs, in our religious settings, we look up to the religious leaders, even among peers we look up to an anchor man; therefore in the school system we are looking up to the Principals, Provosts, Rectors and Vice Chancellors to provide leadership. The thesaurus of English [5] is succinct about what leadership entails as it states thus: “leadership is headship, directorship, direction,

governorship, governance, administration, jurisdiction, captaincy, superintendence, control, ascendancy, rule, command, power, mastery, domination, premiership, sovereignty” (p. 585), from these postulations, it can be argued that there is no activity of more than an individual that can be executed without invoking leadership skills. In this light, Katz and Kahn [6] states that: “leadership is concerned with stimulating or influencing people with organizational goals” (p. 301) sharing this view, Tannenbaum, Weshler and Massarik [7] held that: leadership is influenced exercised in situations and directed, through the communication process, towards, the attainment of a specialized goal or goals” considering the tasks of a leader, Udoh [1] declared that: “leadership is the ability to decide what is to be done and get others to want to do it” (p 62). Usman [8], the central issue in contemporary leadership is “participation in the process of making decisions” (p. 28).

Stability: According to thesaurus [5] connotes firmness, solidity, steadiness, secureness, strength, fastness, stoutness, sturdiness, security, safety. What then is the problem with leadership in Nigerian education system? Let us first examine how leaders emerge.

There are about two schools of thought on how leaders emerges; the religious and secular views. From the religious point of view, the Holy Bible [17] for instance states in Genesis that after creating the universe and everything there in, God gave man the mandate to subdue the earth. It can therefore be deduced from the above that leadership comes from God. Similarly, the account of the calling of Moses in Exodus to go and lead the children of Israel out of Egypt is also an indication of God chosen leadership. There are many other instances of God selection. In the secular world, leadership emerges at various levels and in different styles. For instance in the family setting, leadership runs in a simple hierarchy from father to children. Similar practice obtains in some traditional institutions where prince and even princes sometimes automatically succeeds the sitting King. Because these people share the same ideologies hardly do we experience rancor as a result of these arrangements. Coming to the larger society, the situation becomes more complex and difficult. This is partly due to the fact that there are different sets of people with different orientations and differences in ethnic, religious and socio-political backgrounds. Leaders in such societies therefore emerges through

elections. Candidates are normally subjected to thorough scrutiny at the end, only those deemed to certify qualities appreciated by majority members of the society are voted to represent their communities. This process even dates back to the ancient Greece days when adults assemble at the ‘Agura’ regularly to elect leaders based on their specialization[9]. What is considered important in any of such cases is that those elected as leaders are expected to demonstrate high sense of transparency, honesty, accountability, love and concern for all like Jesus did when He emphasize, that He came to serve not to be served which saw His ministry striving in a stable and strong unity (this is supposed to be the case in education system).

Leadership Principles and Nigerian Education System

Udoh [1] has suggested some qualities which a leader should possess and they include: productivity, goal-directedness, transparency, adaptability, ambition, and fairness/decisiveness. They will be examined in the light of Nigerian experience in Nigerian education system

a. **Productivity:** Many people see leadership as symbolic to a productive machine. This is so because the leader does not only help in generating funds, but also in the proper utilization of resources of the group for the progress of the group, he initiates appropriate projects for the production of goods and services. Udoh [1] emphasized that “it appears that group productivity may be facilitated by a leader who provides direction and structure” (p. 18). A leader harness individual people’s talents and potentials towards such production. A leader who is not productive leaves no legacy and cannot be referred to as a good leader, lack of productivity emanates from lack of goal directedness which we shall now turn to. Nigerian leaders lack this focus. That is why our productivity particularly products of the education system cannot compete with others at the international levels i.e China and America

b. **Goal-Directedness:** a leader needs to have a focus, a target towards which his efforts are directed. The choice of his goal may arise from the identified pressing needs of his group, organization or nation. Any of these needs can be identified as his goal within a stipulated period of time, though the concentration towards a particular goal does not mean sacrificing the attention of other sectors. Also, caution must be

exercised in setting goals in order to avoid getting unrealistic goals. Attainable goals are set in consideration with availability of resources. This should be well articulated, with appropriate consultation. After setting goals, in pursuing same, it is necessary to show transparency in the general conduct particularly the disbursement of funds otherwise it will lead to suspicion and total loss of confidence on the leader. The Nigerian education system lack this principle that is why Adewole [10] laments that lack of philosophical tenets namely coherence, consistent and correspondent has led to our educational failure.

c. Transparency: the utilization of public resources calls for the leaders every sense of transparency. The argument is to the effect that while there are leaders who are very sincere, honest and can be trusted as such, there are those that are dubious and selfish. Society and particularly the school system expect a leader to be transparent to instill transparency in his subordinates as a virtue. What leads people to distrust their leader is sometimes such a leaders' instability to exhibit transparent behavior. Transparency also entails free interaction with subordinates and contemporaries as this will enhance confidence building. He is then placed in good position to know more about the problems of his people and the way forward, while they will be able to appreciate his efforts even in the presence of scarce resources. In fact when Nigerians indicts leadership, they are referring to lack of accountability resulting in lack of productivity. In the Nigerian education system the principals/rector/provost/vice chancellors are entrusted with material and human resources but lack of transparency has be deviled them leading to constant friction [11].

d. Adaptability: due to the tasking nature of leadership, it is binding on the leader to be adaptive. It is by being adaptive that he can explore many avenues to better meet the needs of his people. Though this is not to suggest that decisiveness is substituted. What is being emphasized is the leader's open-mindedness. It is not a sign of weakness for a leader to adopt ideas that have been tested elsewhere and found useful. Udoh [1] remarks that: "human beings do not operate like machines, they are amenable to change, therefore change is inevitable because dogmatism is a bane to human progress" (p 84). It is possible for a junior worker to bring an idea that can solve a problem or

involve changing plans made by a senior staff member or even the leader himself. The important point as a pragmatist may say is that: "an idea works, if it solves problems" irrespective of the source [12]. If a leader adapts his subordinates ideas, he stand the better chance of winning their confidence. Udoh [1] supporting this position states that: "learning to adapt to interdependent and shared responsibility for group goals does not entail the elimination of appointed leaders' role" (p 84). After all, situation may arise when plan, programs decisions and line of action on an issue, must either be altered or changed. This is where rationality should be the leaders guide. The task of leadership is such that incidental situations arise with their demands for adaptability without which the leader may be embarrassed or ridiculed. For instance in Nigeria where crisis situation crops up at anytime, leaders are often called back from their tours and leave to handle such situations. This is a further justification that conservatism is baneful to human progress even though the answer to this question may depend on the consideration of the value system of a people. A society that seeks to retain its questionable values will uphold conservatism, but a dynamic society that values progress will abhor conservatism. Lack of dynamism in Nigerian leadership is a bane to our development. What can help is for the leader to be ambitious. In light, Leaders in the school system will do well by listening to their subordinates after all nobody have the monopoly of knowledge.

e. Ambitions: this may sound to some people like greed, malice and so on. Such people may fail to apply it to leadership. Udoh [1] states that: ambition simply refers to that "spirit of success, that inner will that energies a person to refuse to be left behind, that he will see possibilities rather than impossibilities" (p. 85). It is therefore incumbent on any leader who wants to achieve success to show some degree of ambition. Nigeria demonstrated these to the world by trying to bring peace to some countries in West Africa like in Sierra Leon, Liberia while the same spirit is lacking back home in Nigeria particularly in the school system. There is however a tendency for ambition to transfer to selfishness. Once a leader allows his ambition to incline towards personal gains as most Nigerian leaders do, then he see public resources as opportunity to enrich himself, while the war lasted in Liberia for instance, the then head of state, General Babangida was accused of using the opportunity to arm-twist Nigerian money in the name of peace

keeping. That anybody who is not ambitious may not succeed as a leader. In a self contradictory manner Nigerians have been participating in technical aids corps scheme outside the country while we need more of the service in the country

f. Firmness/Decisiveness: human beings are not like other animals therefore are difficult to be controlled. This fact, even Jesus experience with His disciples and followers. What led to His successful accomplishment of His task as Udoh [1] observed was the firmness. Firmness/decisiveness emanates from deep reflections, reasoning and so on. Firmness is a leader's dogged determination that follows from his conviction that what he is trying to pursue will be in the best interest of his people. This is a major problem with Nigerian leaders how are saddled with the running of the education sector. Flexibility in leadership is good but it has limits. It occurs in occasions such as fairness, accessibility to people, liberalism, accommodation of opinions and views. A leader who combines these attributes finds himself in a comfortable position of authority over his people like Pericles and Caesar. Unfortunately we have continually witness frequent changes in education policies with no corresponding result because successful leaders cannot stand firm and defend their actions.

Implications of leadership principles for stability in Nigerian Education System

Catherine [13] observed that; 'leadership is the act of guiding subordinates towards attaining an organizational goal it involves organizing, planning, coordinating, innovating, initiating and appraising the actions of others with the view of achieving specific organizational goals'. (In this case educational goals) Generally, Popkins and Stroll [14] asserts that "a person is by nature selfish and egoistic" (p. 66). He is motivated by selfish desire that require satisfaction if he is to be happy, when men herd together in large organizations, conflicts will break out among them in the effort to satisfy their desires at the expense of others. This is particularly the case in the school system. Life become a battle in which the strong will win but only temporarily for even the strong will finally succumb in the conflict (a defeated person may organize a group against the victor, for instance and this may take different form). They sum up that: the life of man in the state of nature is solitary, poor, nasty, Brutish and short". They also caution that such

a state of affairs cannot continue indefinitely if people are to survive, and it is to be argued here that same should apply if the school is to move forward academically, and also hatched the idea of a society where they see it as consisting of an agreement among people to abide by a certain set of rules, or conventions". These constitute what we now call the laws of the society. People agree to abide by these laws in order to avoid being harmed in conflicts that would rage where there are no laws in existence. And even where in existence, it takes a firm/decisive leader to enforce same. In Nigeria, this spirit is lacking in our leaders in particular the school system.

As a nation, the Nigerian constitution [15] is succinct on overall philosophy as it states in the opening remarks that "having firmly and solemnly resolved" (p.1). To live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble Sovereign Nation founded the principles of freedom; equality and justice, the promotion of inter African solidarity, and world peace, through understanding. Also section 1 subsection 5 on Nigeria's philosophy of education states thus;

- a. the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen.
- b. The full integration of the individual into the community: and
- c. The provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside the formal school system.

Similarly, section 1 subsection 4 (c) of the policy states that: every Nigerian child should have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his or her ability [16]. Yet we have witness one form of discrimination or the other with the end of the crisis not yet in sight. If it is not ethnic bias, it is religious bias, if not religious, it is political, social, economic, gender or something else. What is baffling here is the fact that while these injustices are perpetuated, the government through its agents did not take any decisive steps to check these. In the schools discrimination in many fronts can be observed, particularly when selecting her leadership. For instance in the secondary schools, the principals supposed to emerge through what can be considered as "natural progression" that is rising steadily to attain that position with senior colleagues emerging before the junior ones but cases abound where some junior

colleagues are wrongly placed over senior colleagues. This often creates disaffection and lead to instability in the system. Worst still , it is the case that those who are eventually saddled with this responsibility hardly live up to expectations when it comes to applying the outline principles as stated in this paper. This apply to all leaders across the strata. For instance, the complicity of the principal government secondary school Chibok is still raging following the abduction of over two hundred (200) school girls. Many people are attributing these to lack of clear decisiveness, firmness and honesty from the principal's public statement.

CONCLUSION

From the forgoing, it can be argued that no matter how a leader emerges, no matter his mastery of the mentioned qualities such as productivity, goal directedness, transparency, adaptability, ambition and firmness/decisiveness, unless he is able to take appropriate decision particularly in crisis ridden situations not much can be achieved under his leadership. This must also apply in the school system otherwise these will constantly constitute setbacks and hence have serious implications for our ambition of attending the fit of other nations in terms of educational attainment and consequently natural development.

It is recommended that leaders who are the heads of the school system should avoid crisis situations which lead to instability by being proactive, i.e watching out for early warning signals and taking steps to avert same. Decisiveness/firmness should be leaders overriding principle in their day to day conduct in the school system. As a people, whenever we found ourselves in leadership position, we must do away with greed, malice, selfishness and other forms of hostile tendencies that can hinder the attainment of our goals. Since the school is a micro some of the larger society the ideal democratic tenets namely freedom of speech and association, consultation, rule of law and accountability must be strictly adhered to [18]. There is need for training and re-training of all staffs for the purpose of updating them with modern skills of leadership/management

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