

Youth Leadership Skills' Empowerment for National Transformation

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to ascertain the role of secondary schools in empowering students with youth leadership skills for national transformation. The population of the study included students from public and private secondary schools in Uyo Metropolis of Akwa Ibom State. A sample of 400 students were used for the study. One research question and two hypotheses guided the study. Data collection was done using researchers-developed instrument titled "Leadership Skill Development Questionnaire (LSDQ)". The questionnaire was validated by experts in Test and Measurement. The reliability estimate using Cronbach Alpha was $r=0.86$. Data collected were analyzed using frequencies, simple percentages, population t-test and independent t-test. Findings indicated that the level of empowering students with leadership skills under existing curricular and extra-curricular activities was significantly low and that there was no significant differences between public and private secondary schools in the level of their empowering students with leadership skills. Recommendations made included that leadership skills should be embedded into regular school curriculum. This paper will be invaluable to stakeholders in the educational sector. In this regard, the findings would be beneficial to secondary school administrators as it will provide useful information that will facilitate the training of youths with leadership skills. Also, it is envisaged that the study will help curriculum planners in including leadership skills as part of the curricula.

Keywords: secondary schools, youth, leadership skills, empowerment, national transformation

INTRODUCTION

The world today is experiencing serious threats and challenges such as robbery, strikes, economic downturn, unemployment, conflict, poverty, bombing, arson, diseases, climate change and so on. Many of these challenges and pressures are predicted to increase in scale and intensity as a consequence of economic meltdown (Kahn, Hewes & Ali, 2009). Nigeria as a nation has had its fair share of these vices, especially armed robbery, kidnapping, strikes and bombings. For our nation to succeed, there is need to invest in young people's skills and capabilities to act as powerful advocates and agents of change and social transformation to help society meet these challenges. It is generally recognized that for any country to achieve sustainable development, young people must be given a chance to meaningfully participate in the social, political and economic processes.

The importance of youth in Nigeria's transformation agenda cannot be overemphasized, because they constitute a significant proportion of Nigeria's total population. Besides, they are the next generation of leaders. The United Nations has long recognized that the world's youths are valuable resources for the advancement of societies. They are often the leaders of socio-political and technological developments, as well as, dynamic agents of social change. Young people constitute a vital national resource that can be tapped to promote a country's development.

However, if they are to take an active role in combating societal problems, then they must be given the right tools with which to work (Sigudhla, 2005).

There have been consistent calls for enhanced participation of youths in leadership and governance in recent years (Karibuni, 2012). The present government of Nigeria has made the youth, the fulcrum of its transformation agenda. President Goodluck Jonathan has consistently maintained that it is doubtful if the current transformation agenda can succeed if the youths are neglected. The challenge is how to move from rhetoric's to action, so as to realize meaningful inclusion of youths in democratic and national transformation processes. The youths cannot be ignored or be excluded from developmental processes as this will pose a recipe for future problems and challenges of greater dimension. As observed by Karibuni (2012), the Arab spring of 2011 has served as an awakening call around the world on the need to seriously address issues of leadership, governance and meaningful inclusion of young people and helping them realize their potentials.

To achieve meaningful national transformation, it is important that youths are empowered with leadership skills. Education is an important tool for youth leadership development. Youths in secondary schools are important assets that must be invested upon to achieve the much needed transformation. There is a

saying thus; '*catch them young*'. Youths have innate talents that need to be exploited and developed. The school is always seen as a powerful, dynamic instrument for social, political, scientific and technological development of nations (Fadipe, 2000 & Adegun and Akomolafe, 2010). Education is a form of investment in human capital, which yields benefits for national transformation.

One of the goals of secondary education is to train youths for useful living. At this level, if youths are equipped with leadership skills, it will help to transform our society from a developing country to a developed nation. According to Rost (1993), leadership is not the work of a single person, rather a collaborative endeavour among group members. Adegun and Akomolafe (2010) also stressed that producing more effective leaders is essential to building a better society and a better world. Good leaders develop through a never ending process of self study, education, training and experience. Thus learning and leadership experiences should be transmitted by the school. As observed in African Common Position, Para 6, "Today's investment in children is tomorrow's peace, stability, security, democracy and sustainable development".

The role of the principals is a central variable in the success of any leadership empowerment programme for students. Neigel (2006) pointed out that, without, the complete and unequivocal support of principals, the process of transformation of youth can become an arduous endeavour. The principal must completely believe in the ability of students as future leaders and change agents, and as such, help the students to understand the complex nature of leadership and provide whatever resources are necessary to support students' efforts. Such resources will include the provision of appropriate amounts of encouragement and praise to sustain motivation and perseverance in students leaders.

Today's youths have the potential to understand leadership and develop their leadership potentials. Through leadership education and programmes focused on leadership development, this potential can be recognized. Educators can help youths to develop leadership and build character at the same time (Fertman & van Linden 1999). Student leadership enhancement involves giving students opportunities to practice a range of leadership skills in supportive learning and social environment where progress and errors are reviewed (Bisland, 2004). Students can be helped to develop leadership skills by inclusion of leadership opportunities in and outside the classroom (Layfield, Radhakrishna and Andreasen, 2000). Also, Boatman (1999) pointed out that colleges can use both formal (classroom and laboratory instruction) and informal (students organizations) methods to enhance student leadership abilities. It is important

that students are given the opportunity to practice and acquire leadership experiences in schools because as pointed out by Baker (2011), the more opportunities that youths are involved in, the more likely they are to develop the critical skills that will see them through as leaders throughout life.

The Federal Government of Nigeria has put forward its transformation agenda which is directed at addressing the major challenges facing the nation. The agenda which is based on a set of priority policies and programmes which, when implemented, will transform the Nigerian economy to meet the future needs of the Nigerian people. For any meaningful transformation to take place, youth leadership empowerment is critical. This is more so, because the youths are the main beneficiaries of successful reformation agenda, because they are young and have their entire future ahead. The purpose of this paper is to find out the role of secondary schools in empowering students for youth leadership.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The need for building youth leadership is becoming more critical now since the present day society continues to grow and change with challenging demand for the future. The youths of our nation face many challenges in their lives from social issues, unemployment, to dealing with the dysfunctions in our societies. The new focus of Nigeria's national development is duly centered on investing more for the future. It is commonly recognized that the future of any nation lies with the well being of its youths. The prospect for the socio-economic transformation of the Nigerian nation rests with investing in the young people. Through effective empowerment opportunities within Nigerian secondary schools system, students can be developed and prepared for future leadership and national transformation roles through practical leadership skill acquisition. It is however disheartening that most of our youths do not have the necessary skills to serve as agents of change. Thus, this paper intends to find out the extent to which secondary school students are empowered with leadership skills for national transformation.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study includes:

- 1.To ascertain how secondary school students rate their leadership skills competence.
2. To determine the level at which secondary school students are empowered with leadership skills.
- 3.To ascertain if there is any difference between public and private schools in the level at which secondary school students are empowered with leadership skills.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. How do secondary school students rate their leadership skills competence level?

HYPOTHESES

1. The level of empowerment of secondary school students with leadership skills is not significantly low.
2. There is no significant differences between private and public secondary schools regarding the level of empowering students with leadership skills.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study participants were drawn from secondary schools in Uyo Metropolis which is just one out of the thirty one Local Government Areas that constitute Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Thus generalization of the findings to the entire state may be difficult.

METHODS

Survey research design was utilized in conducting this study. The population of the study consisted of senior secondary (SS) three students in public and private secondary schools in Uyo Metropolis of Akwa Ibom State. The rationale for choosing SS Three students was based on the fact that they were being prepared to leave the school soon and needed to be empowered. The researchers adopted purposive sampling technique for convenience. A sample size of 400 students contributed to the data collection. Of this, 200 participants were derived from public secondary schools, while another 200 came from private secondary schools. The ages of the respondents ranged from 14-20 years. The respondents were predominantly female 62%, while male students were 38%.

A researcher-developed instrument titled "Leadership Skill Development Questionnaire (LSDQ)" was employed for data collection. The instrument consisted of two sections. The first section gathered demographic information relating to school ownership, age and sex of the respondent, while the second section contained 30 items that measured the role of schools in empowering students with leadership skills. The section was further divided into five sub-sections as follows: teaching of leadership skills, assignment of leadership responsibilities,

building of leadership skills, organization of leadership programmes and provision of leadership opportunities. The subjects were asked to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with the role of the school in empowering students with leadership skills on each of the 30 items along a four-point Likert scale. The developed instrument was validated by experts in test and measurement, while the reliability indices using Cronbach's Alpha was 'r'-0.86. The instrument was administered to the participants by the researchers in their various schools. All the copies of the questionnaire were retrieved. A variety of statistical techniques such as frequencies, percentages, population t-test and independent t-test were utilized to analyzed data generated.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

How do secondary school students rate their leadership skills competence level? Data gathered in answer to this question were analyzed using frequency count and percentages. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Students' rating of their leadership skill competency level (N = 400)

Rating of competency level	Number	Percentage %
High	24	6%
Moderate	92	23%
Low	284	71%
Total	400	100%

The results in Table 1 show that only 24 (6%) of the students rated their leadership skill competency level as high. Those with moderate leadership skill competency level were 92 (23%), while majority of the students, 284 (71%) rated their leadership competency level as low.

Hypothesis 1

The level of empowering secondary school students with leadership skills is not significantly low. The only variable is level of empowering secondary school students with leadership skills. Population t-test was used to analyze the data collected statistically. Summaries of the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Population t-test analysis of level of empowerment of secondary school students with leadership skills N = 400

S/N	Variables	Observed expected Mean (x)	Assume d mean (x)	SD	t
1	Teaching of leadership skills	7.92	2.50	1.33	119.58*
2	Assignment of leadership responsibilities	8.32	2.50	1.67	99.80*
3	Building of leadership skills	12.26	2.50	2.60	94.40*
4	Organization of leadership Programmes	10.64	2.50	2.41	88.39*
5	Provision of leadership opportunities	12.18	2.50	2.18	111.60*

*significant at 0.05; df = 399; critical t = 1.966

Results presented in Table 1 showed that the calculated t-value were found to be higher than the critical value of 1.966 at 0.05 level of significance and 399 degrees of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis retained. Thus, the level of empowering secondary school students with leadership skill is significantly low.

A further look at the result revealed that the observed mean level of empowering secondary school students with leadership skills were higher than the assumed mean of 2.50. Statistical comparison of these observed mean values and the assumed mean value of 2.50 using population t-test analysis of single mean gave positive t-value. This means that the level of

empowering secondary school students with leadership skill is significantly low.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between public and private secondary schools regarding the level of empowering students with leadership skills.

The independent variable is type of secondary school, while the dependent variable is level of empowering secondary school students with leadership skills. Independent t-test statistical technique is used to compare the mean scores from the two variables. Summaries of the results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: t-test statistical analysis of level of empowerment between public and private secondary schools students with leadership skills

S/N	Variables	Public (N = 200)		Private (N = 200)		t
		X	SD	X	SD	
1	Teaching of leadership skills	7.90	1.33	7.95	1.32	- 0.415
2	Assignment of leadership responsibilities	8.20	1.64	8.44	1.69	- 1.472
3	Building of leadership skills	12.29	2.54	12.22	2.66	0.269
4	Organization of leadership Programmes	10.59	2.49	10.70	2.33	- 0.477
5	Provision of leadership opportunities	12.14	2.18	12.22	2.19	- 0.366

Not significant at 0.05; df = 398; critical t = 1.966

The results presented in Table 3 indicated the calculated t-values were found to be less than the critical t-value of 1.966 at 0.05 level of significance and 398 degree of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis was retained, while the alternate hypothesis was rejected. Therefore, there is no significant difference between public and private secondary schools in their level of empowering students with leadership skills.

A further look at the results revealed that the mean level of empowering students with leadership skill was higher in private secondary schools, except in one variable-building of leadership skills where public secondary schools had an edge. However, the higher mean values of private secondary schools were not wide enough to warrant a significant difference. Statistical comparison of the mean values of the two types of schools using independent t-test, gave a non significant negative t-value, and one positive t-value.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study sought to determine the role of secondary school in empowering secondary school students with youth leadership skills. The findings of research question one which addressed the respondents perceived competency level of their leadership skills, revealed that secondary school students rated their level of leadership competence as being low. This result has painted a true picture of the current state of

leadership development of secondary school students in Uyo Metropolis of Akwa Ibom State. This seems to suggest that the school has not exposed them to opportunities that would have helped to develop the critical leadership skills competencies in students that will prepare them to handle future challenges and developmental process.

The findings of hypothesis one revealed that the level of empowering secondary students with leadership skills is significantly very low. This means that the school system have not empowered students with youth leadership in terms of teaching leadership skills, assignment of leadership responsibilities, building of leadership skills, organization of leadership programmes and provision of leadership opportunities for students. This therefore rendered secondary students ill-prepared for youth leadership to meet future challenges. This has serious implication for the secondary school system in Uyo Metropolis and the transformation agenda of the Federal Government of Nigeria. This findings is in line with the opinion of MacNeil (2000) that, many leadership scholars and youth development professionals agree that leadership is important, but often overlook the facet of youth development and education. The development of leadership contributes greatly to the positive development of young people and their communities because as noted by O'Brien and Kohlmeier (2003), helping young people develop leadership competencies make them better able to

solve community problems and enhances their civic participation.

The analysis of hypothesis two revealed that there is no significant difference between public and private secondary schools in their level of empowering students with leadership skills. This therefore means that the levels of empowerment of secondary school students with leadership skills by both private and secondary schools are the same. The low level of empowerment of students with leadership skills by both public and private secondary schools is not totally surprising because in most cases they are often marginalized and denied involvement in decision making processes and governance. As noted by Sigudhla (2005), young people have been reduced to just being subjects of socio- economic processes and have not been recognized as social stakeholders with specific interest. This finding is not good enough because becoming a leader is a developmental process that the school should encourage and promote. The school should provide opportunities that can enhance leadership development. Young people need to develop their leadership skills in real situations that they deem important, which allows them to become actively engaged in the decision-making processes affecting their lives (Boyd, 2001; Des Marais, Yang & Farzanhkia, 2001; Fertman & van Linden 1999). As asserted by Brockman, Tepper and MacNeil (2012), youths need opportunities to both learn about and practice leadership, in meaningful and authentic ways. In this case, the secondary school seem a most fertile ground for youth leadership empowerment.

CONCLUSION

As revealed in this study, the level of students' leadership skills as empowered by the secondary school system is significantly low. This finding has serious implication for the current transformation agenda of the Nigerian government. Youths of any nation have always been acknowledged as asset that should be nurtured and prepared for the demands of the future. This could be facilitated by school through the inclusion of leadership opportunities in and outside the classroom.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the leadership capacity of students, it is recommended as follows:

- (1) Leadership skills should be embedded into regular school curriculum. In this regard, students should be given opportunities to practice leadership skills that are integrated within their regular lessons. Such leadership enabling skills include; interpersonal relationship skills, motivation skills, engagement skills, problem solving abilities among others.
- (2) The school should build students leadership skills through extracurricular activities. Students

must be given opportunities to be actively involved in club activities and other co-curricular programmes in schools where leadership skills are taught.

- (3) Secondary schools should organize and host leadership conferences, retreats and workshops within the school compound whereby key personnel are invited to lecture students. This will serve as a catalyst in the leadership development process.
- (4) Students should be involved in school governance. They should be given leadership responsibilities in the school and should be part of the decision-making process of the secondary school system. If opportunities are created for students to display leadership at school, it will serve as a potential training ground for youth leadership.
- (5) The school should create students' leadership forum for interactive activities that allow students to develop leadership qualities such as determination, self confidence, social confidence, focus decisiveness among others.

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