



PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP PRACTICES: A PATHWAY TO TEACHERS' COMMITMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper focused on principals' leadership practices, as a pathway to teachers' commitment in Nigeria. The paper identified four principal leadership practices which will serve as a pathway for teachers' commitment to be setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization and managing the instructional program practice. This paper attempted different definitional approaches to the concepts of teacher's commitment, principals' leadership, principal leadership practices and, teachers' commitment and principals. The commitment of teachers can increase drastically if principals set direction, develop people (teachers and other staff), redesign the school as an organization and manage instructional programs. The paper concluded that the aforementioned principal leadership practices could bring about commitments of teachers in our schools if applied. Among other things, the paper suggested that public and private secondary school principals should embark on continuous professional training and development, to be abreast with the relevant leadership practices that could enthrone teachers' commitment and the overall achievement of school goals.

Keywords: Principals' Leadership, Practices, Pathway, Teachers' Commitment, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

The education sector in Nigeria to be specific is generally changing rapidly and becoming more complicated with challenging roles, especially in an environment that embraces and promotes modernization and globalization. To be abreast with 21st-century education globally,

stakeholders in the entire educational system are been challenged to reevaluate their practices, structures, strategies and proficiencies necessary for school leaders to improve their schools. The principal in secondary schools in Nigeria is the educational leader and plays a vital role in setting the climate, attitude and overall success of schools. The principal is the chief accounting officer, whose duty includes school administration and management of human, material and capital resources to achieve set goals and objectives. In the same vein, Onwubiko et al. (2015) postulated that the role of the school principal is that of an administrative head, a manager, a community public relations officer, a supervisor, an instructional leader, a curriculum innovator, and a catalyst of planned revolution in the educational system.

To achieve the objectives of secondary education in Nigeria, principals need to employ all their assets in terms of human relationships, experience, collaborative skills and communication skills to bring forward quality leadership practices that will direct, influence, stimulate and motivate the human elements in the school and also make judicious use of all available resources to accomplish set goals and objectives. Principals' leadership practices are mechanisms applied by principals in directing, influencing, motivating and controlling staff to attain set goals and objectives in secondary schools. In the same light, Manafa (2020) posited that effective leadership practice is the ability of the leader to plan, organize, control and direct the operations of an educational enterprise for the purpose of achieving the objectives set for the educational system as a whole.

Secondary school education assumes a central and vital position in the Nigerian educational space because it equips beneficiaries with profitable living within the society and prepares individuals for tertiary education. Additionally, secondary education is the bedrock for learners to acquire adequate skills, knowledge and attitude for the development of self and the nation. The principals who are the administrators and teachers play a significant role in achieving the set goals and objectives of secondary education. The role of a school principal is critical because as a leader in any organization everything accelerates and falls on leadership; the implication is that the success or failure of the school organization is generally attributed to the working of the principals (Ololube, 2021).

To achieve the set goals and objectives of secondary education in Nigeria, the principals and teachers need to synergize because they are the powerhouses of any school. The principals spell out or interpret educational policies and the teachers implement the policies effectively and efficiently. Hence, principals need to deploy appropriate leadership practices that will cumulate to teachers' commitment to metamorphose in achieving the set goals and objectives of secondary schools. Regrettably, secondary schools have not been able to actualize these aims and objectives which have been reflected in the decline in the standards of secondary schools in Nigeria. It is in the light of this, that Ololube et al. (2014) opined that the present educational system in Nigeria is far from achieving its educational goals and objectives as there are noticeable evidence of a decline in the standards of education and quality of students, especially in secondary schools. Many factors have been identified as the challenges impacting education in secondary schools, which include poor principal leadership, lack of teacher commitment, misappropriation of funds (Ololube, 2016), poor planning, inadequate funding, inadequate infrastructural facilities and insecurity (Ololube et al., 2016).

The aforementioned are all important but the most critical factors are poor principal leadership and lack of teacher commitment in secondary schools because principals provide leadership, direction and coordination within the school and teachers' commitment is key because of their indispensable role in the teaching and learning process. Apart from Principals,

teachers are directly responsible for imparting knowledge and skills to students thus their commitment cannot be overemphasized. Teachers' commitment is crucial in achieving the goals of secondary schools as stated in the National Policy of Education (FRN, 2014) which is the preparation of individuals for useful living within society and higher education. Unfortunately, it has been observed in many secondary schools in Nigeria that most teachers are not committed to their primary responsibility. This is exhibited in their nonchalant attitude to teaching and learning and other school activities. Some use the teaching period to engage in other businesses such as buying and selling and others combine their teaching jobs with full-time graduate programmes in the universities. Therefore, there is a need to examine principals' leadership practices as a pathway for teachers' commitment in secondary schools.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Principals' Leadership

The concept of leadership has been defined by many scholars and in many quarters; it is believed that leadership is one of the most studied concepts in behavioural sciences, however, leadership is arguably one of the most observed, yet the least understood phenomena on earth.

According to Noor (2012), effective leadership entails having a clear and strategic vision, leadership excellence, a positive environment, high quality and effective teaching and learning process, professional development, involvement of all parties in decision making and the existence of a healthy relationship and strong cooperation from all parties both internal and external. Leadership in a school or organization, in a nutshell, is providing direction and exercising an influence on followers.

Yukl (2016) defined leadership as “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives. Ughamadu and Ujunwa (2020) presumed that effective leadership entails attaining efficiency in influencing and directing the activity of teachers.

Principal leadership also known as school leadership is setting goals and collaborating with all stakeholders to ensure objectives are achieved (Osagie & Momoh, 2016). Ololube (2021) and Obena (2021) considered leadership as the ability to get things done with the support and cooperation of other people within the institution, organization, or system. According to Bass in Pius-Uwhubetiyi (2020), leadership is often regarded as the single most important factor in the success or failure of the institution.

Leadership involves a type of responsibility aimed at achieving particular ends by applying the available resources (human and material) and ensuring cohesion and organization in the process (Ololube, 2017). Northouse (2013) described leadership as a process whereby an individual influence a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. According to Robinson (2011), principal leadership could be viewed from six perspectives:

Table 1: Principals leadership perspectives

1. Instructional leadership	Focuses on the school's core business teaching, learning, pupils' progress and achievements
2. Transformational leadership	Is concerned with the commitment of colleagues, leading change, improving performance

3. Moral leadership	Emphasizes the importance of values, vision and ethical leadership
4. Participative leadership	Stresses the importance of including colleagues, shared decision-making and social capital
5. Managerial leadership	Focuses on the importance of defining functions, tasks and behaviours
6. Contingency leadership	Highlights how leaders respond to the particular organizational circumstances and challenges they face and encounter over time

A school leader is a person who is planning and implementing program development, makes appropriate resource allocation, and improves the performance of staff and students by motivating and guiding them (Ogunlade et al., 2015), in order to achieve the objectives of the school. The school leader has two basic functions which are exercising influence and giving directions to teachers, staff, students and other stakeholders to attain set goals for school success. Leaders do not force goals on followers but rather collaborate with staff to create a sense of purpose and direction.

Secondary education is the level of education after primary education that prepares individuals for access to tertiary education. Such uniqueness permits secondary education to occupy an indispensable central position and leading role on the education ladder (Etomes & Molua, 2018). Nnorom et al. (2020) noted that secondary education develops the individual's mental capacity, character and behaviour for higher education and useful living within society. In secondary schools in Nigeria, the leaders and the heads are the principals. Principals in secondary schools are saddled with lots of responsibilities among which are leadership, teacher supervision and evaluation, management of students, parents, finance and infrastructure. Principals are the most conspicuous, most susceptible and potentially the most influential persons in secondary schools (Raman et al., 2015).

Principals as leaders play a vital role in determining the success or failure of secondary schools because they exert influence on teachers and set the direction for the school which in turn reflects in learning outcomes. Leithwood et al. (2019) indicated that principal leadership has an undisputed effect on the characteristics of the school which ultimately positively impact the quality of school effectiveness. He observed that the school principal is the most influential individual in an educational institution and that good leadership is the key to holding efficient administration together. Purkey et al. (1983) in Osagie et al. (2016) noted that in order to build strong teacher commitment towards the realization of school goals, principals must provide strong, directive leadership in setting and developing school goals, creating unity of purpose, facilitating communication and managing instruction.

In the same light, Imo and Ekpenyong (2018) and Igoni (2020) asserted that the principal is the fulcrum upon which the success or failure of the school administration revolves, noting that the principal must maintain close ties with his teachers in the achievement of school goals. Furthermore, the principal is the administrative head who guides, influences and motivates staff toward achieving and implementing educational goals and objectives in schools. In the same context, Hillinger and Heck (1998) posited that the principal as an administrator of a secondary school is occupied with the administrative tasks of planning, controlling and coordinating, which include the management of human, material, financial and time resources aimed at achieving the school goals and objectives.

More so, principals as educational leaders in secondary schools dictate the culture, climate, reputation and attitude of schools; they interact with teachers to improve learning outcomes. School leaders are the pivot in which schools improve and achieve success thereby making schools effective incubators for acquiring knowledge and skills where students do not

only acquire academic excellence but are nurtured, challenged and encouraged. Wallace's foundation study posited that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning (Hsin-Hsiang & Mao-neng, 2015). The goals of educational leadership according to Leithwood et al. (2004) include the following:

- Creating and sustaining a competitive school;
- Empowering others to make significant decisions;
- Providing instructional guidance;
- Developing and implementing strategic and school improvement plans;
- Supporting, evaluating and developing teacher quality;
- Goal-setting, assessment and accountability;
- Strategic financial and human resource management;
- Collaborating with other schools

Consequently, principals set the purpose or directions for followers using leadership practices geared toward teachers' commitment and student success in achieving set goals and objectives of the school.

Principals' Leadership Practices

The professional leaders of secondary schools are the principals. The principals have a plethora of responsibilities and must put in place actions and strategies to influence, motivate and control all staff and students, especially the teachers who are the power houses of schools to achieve set goals and objectives. Thus, principals must adopt effective leadership practices to achieve educational goals. Leadership practices can also be viewed as procedures adapted to influencing, motivating and controlling followers to achieve organizational goals. Kouzes and Posner (2003) asserted educational leadership practices are the manner and approach in which a leader (principal) provides direction, implements plans, and motivates staff so as to achieve educational goals. Furthermore, leadership practices can also be viewed as directly related to the interaction between teachers and students, decision making, teaching and learning, and the entire administration of the school administrators ensure that the aim and objectives of establishing the institution are achieved (Ebeta et al., 2020; Marshall, 2015).

Principals' leadership practices consist of several elements but the most predominant is a balance between instructional and transformational leadership. Danbaba and Panshuk (2021) noted that the components of effective leadership practices include: instructional and transformational leadership. In the same light, Leithwood et al. (2008) posited that educational leadership described two models that currently vie for most of the attention among practicing educators, they are instructional and transformational. The focal point for the instructional leadership practice is promoting teaching and learning. Similarly, Halinger (1985) in Ololube (2017) asserted that instructional leadership focuses predominantly on the role of the school principal in coordinating, controlling, supervising and developing curriculum and instruction in the school. Instructional leaders form a blend of proficiency and charisma. In the transformational model, the leader stimulates and inspires followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes (Ereh et al., 2013; Nguni et al., 2006).

In addition, this leadership practice has to do with building staff commitment in the organization, developing the capacities of others, building new leaders, and cultivating a climate

of continuous learning, reflection and growth (Ni, 2017). According to Leithwood et al. (2004), all transformational approaches to leadership share in common the fundamental aim of fostering capacity development and a higher level of personal commitment on the part of leaders' colleagues. The prior mentioned activities and behaviours of the instructional and transformational models all add up to principals' leadership practices. Researchers believed that there are common practices used by successful school leaders in most contexts. Hallinger et al (1998) label leadership practices as “purposes,” “people” and “structures and social systems.” Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study four time-tested school principals' leadership practices and how they are a pathway to teachers' commitment will be examined. Leithwood et al. (2008) asserted that there are four core practices or bases of successful school leadership.

In the context of this study, leadership practices that are valuable in almost all educational systems can be considered as follows:



Principal Leadership Practice of Setting Direction: A leader must be able to set the direction, create a sense of shared purpose and guide behaviour. This requires the principal developing his own clear vision of where he want to go, describing this future to others in simple language and providing meaningful guidance regarding how to move forward.

Developing People: Leadership development boosts employee engagement, increases the organization's ability to deal with gaps in the talent pipeline, and reduces the headaches and costs associated with turnover. Great leaders attract, hire, and inspire great people.

Redesigning the Organization: These involve increasing the scientific knowledge trending in professional roles of staff for improve academic success. A successful organizational redesign help reshape the resources of a school on its strategic priorities and other growth areas, improve academic performance in order to attain the set educational goals and improve decision making.

Managing the Instructional Program: A strong instructional leadership practice by principals’ helps to create a supportive learning environment for students, teachers, and leaders. Creating a safe and orderly learning environment for students includes creating systems so that students feel safe, providing a caring environment and ensuring high expectations for social behaviour.

Teachers' Commitment

Educational goals and objectives can only be actualized in secondary schools by the commitment of teachers because they are the catalyst of teaching and learning. Akinwale and Okotoni (2019) posited that in the school system the achievement of educational goals and objectives may be impossible without committed teachers who are the main facilitators of teaching and learning. Teachers are generally considered important human resources in the educative process because they play a vital role in the teaching and learning process, as well as the translation and interpretation of educational programmes. Komba et al. (2008) in Mwamatandala (2020) asserted that teachers are important persons in the educative process because they provide knowledge, skills, wisdom, appropriate orientations and inspiration to students. Hence, the importance of teachers' commitment cannot be over-emphasised in achieving school success. Raman et al. (2015) asserted that teachers are the key players in school excellence and their commitment is an important component of school success.

Teachers' commitment refers to teachers' identification, involvement, attitude, belief and loyalty toward the school. Adebule (2008) in Nwiyi and Okorie (2016) saw committed teacher as one with in-depth knowledge in a given area, skills, attitude and values for promoting teaching and learning. Teacher commitment is considered one of the vital factors in the educational space because it is an internal force coming from teachers themselves that influences learning outcomes, teachers' effectiveness, teachers' retention and student learning. Igoni (2020) posited that teachers are committed when they are internally motivated and have strong ties to their schools, students, school programmes and the subject they teach. Adhikary (2018) observed that a committed teacher is one who is ready to address learning difficulties and motivates students to develop interests in active learning. This in turn helps to promote the moral and intellectual development of students.

The term teachers' commitment is complicated because teachers connect with all the stakeholders in the education industry, they connect with school, students, colleagues, parents, the teaching profession itself and professional associations. In simple terms, commitment is when individuals experience responsibility for the outcome of their work. There are diverse definitions of teachers' commitment; recent literature has focused on some combinations of three distinct types of teacher commitment: commitment to the school organization, commitment to the teaching profession, and commitment to students. Nir (2002) identified three types of teacher commitment to include commitment to teaching, commitment to students and commitment to the organization.

The major concern globally in the educational sector is teachers' organizational commitment because it is crucial to school success and student learning outcomes. In the context of this paper, organizational commitment is the degree to which employees identify with their work, its goals and the willingness to remain in the organization. However, Nguni et al. (2006) propounded that organizational commitment typifies an individual's involvement in a particular organization in the following ways which employees identify with their work, its goals and the willingness of the individual to remain in the organization.

Principals' Leadership Practice of Setting Direction as a Pathway for Teachers' Commitment

The leadership practices of the principal in setting direction for the school includes communicating a vision for the teachers to understand, encouraging acceptance of school goals by teachers and creating high-performance expectations. A vital ingredient in principal leadership is for teachers to develop a shared understanding of school goals and activities and have a sense of purpose and commitment. The best explanation for the importance of direction-setting practices on the part of educational leaders is found in goal-based theories of human motivation postulated by Thayer (1988) and Weick (1995) in De Jong et al. (2007). According to such theory, people are steered to goals which they find personally compelling, as well as challenging, but achievable.

De Jong et al. (2007) believed that setting direction as a leadership practice accounts for a huge part of a leader's influence. Teachers will be motivated and committed by goals they find captivating, challenging, and achievable. The teachers when they have an understanding of their work through the principal setting direction, having requisite knowledge of what is expected and showing the teachers the way to go. This enables teachers to find a sense of identity for themselves in the school thereby being committed to contributing to school goals. Principals are instructional leaders and are saddled with the responsibility to monitor, supervise, evaluate, assess, and disperse current information on educational issues and modern teaching techniques to teachers in order to stimulate them for scholarship and best practices in curriculum delivery. Setting a clear direction helps with this because people have a target, something they can put their efforts towards achieving. Working with team to set the direction and then move towards it can be motivating and satisfying, giving the team purpose a reason for being.

Principals' Leadership Practices of Developing People as a Pathway for Teachers' Commitment

The principals' leadership practice of developing people (teachers) is actualized by the principals showcasing individual consideration, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation.

Idealized influence of leaders: This referred to role modelling, exhibiting high moral values in words and action, articulation of high expectations and confidence in followers. The principal as a leader displays a charismatic personality that influences others to be like him by setting a good example. The principal should act as a role model and express willingness to take visits and follow a core set of values, convictions and ethical principles in the actions they take. It is through this concept of idealized influence that the principal builds trust with teachers and this develops teachers' commitment and confidence in the leader. Principals should also demonstrate the highest level of ethical behaviour possible, admitting to mistakes and acting in a socially respectable and appropriate way as this will lead to a change in teachers' attitudes, beliefs and loyalty.

Inspirational Motivation of leaders: Principals who are the leaders are expected to articulate a clear vision for the future, communicate the expectations of the group, and demonstrate a commitment to the goal through one-on-one coaching and mentoring of teachers. Inspirational motivation refers to the principal's ability to inspire confidence, motivation, and a sense of purpose in the teachers. The principal also provides opportunities for in-service or in-

house training for teachers for capacity building to enable them to be fulfilled in their job. This automatically will reflect in teachers' commitment to secondary schools and improve learning outcomes. Principals as leaders who encourage team members to commit to the vision by raising team spirit and building community and a sense of purpose. Principals must provide structure and order so that teachers can execute tasks without confusion. In addition, the leaders must be upbeat and positive and bring energy to a room and enthusiasm.

Intellectual stimulation and creativity: The principals encourage followers to challenge existing approaches, reframe problems, and think in new ways. The vision the leader conveys helps teachers to see the big picture and succeed in their efforts. Anjali and Anand (2015) asserted that intellectual stimulation leads to the development of employee commitment to the organization. They further stated that this has implications for the ability of the organization to achieve goals based on the dedication and hard work of employees. The principal as the transformational leader should support her teachers by involving them in the decision-making process and stimulating their efforts to be as creative and innovative as possible to identify solutions. This will give teachers a sense of belonging and motivate teachers to be committed to school success. The principal solicits ideas from teachers without criticizing and assists to change the way the teachers think about and frame problems and obstacles.

Individual Consideration: The principal should attend to teachers' personal needs. The leader encourages teachers by focusing on the way each person affects the overall goal. In summary, the principal is to recognize and value the motivation, desires and needs of teachers. The principal requires emotional intelligence to enable teachers to grow, learn and be comfortable in the school. Principals exhibit genuine compassion by encouraging the ongoing personal growth and empathizing with the needs of the individuals. Emotionally intelligent principals build a bond based on trust, as mentors, a coach and are willing and open to listening to their teachers' concerns. This will in turn propel commitment on the part of teachers as they will always feel their interest is protected at all times.

Principals' Leadership Practice of Redesigning the Organization as a Pathway of Teachers Commitments

Organizational redesign involves the integration of structure, processes, and people to support the implementation of strategy and therefore goes beyond the traditional tinkering with "lines and boxes. Today, it comprises the processes that people follow the management of individual performance, the recruitment of talent, and the development of employees' skills. When the organizational redesign of a company matches its strategic intentions, everyone will be primed to execute and deliver them. The company's structure, processes, and people will all support the most important outcomes and channel the organization's efforts into achieving them.

This practice of redesigning secondary schools by principals should include building a collaborative school culture by maintaining and creating a shared decision-making structure that fosters participation of all, thus building productive relationships among stakeholders. This will give the teachers a sense of belongingness because people are motivated when they believe the circumstances they find themselves in are conducive to achieving goals they believe is personally important this is a pathway for commitment. Furthermore, principals in restructuring secondary schools should include evaluating and ameliorating administrative processes to ensure that school policies and processes are always reinforced and institutionalized rather than obstruct school improvement, which will make teachers comfortable and be a pathway to commitment.

The teaching profession, and commitment to students (e.g., Firestone & Pennell, in Chan et al., 2008).

Organizational commitment refers to a strong belief in, and acceptance of values and goals of an organization. Teachers with high levels of organizational commitment tends to exert considerable effort on behalf of their schools and to express high levels of attachment to their schools as formal organizations. Teachers who are committed to their schools are more likely to remain and help the schools in achieving their goals, while teachers with low organizational commitment are more likely to leave, possibly to teach in other schools. Teachers with low organizational commitment who remain in their schools tend to exert minimum effort and display patterns of chronic absenteeism, which influence instructional effectiveness and student learning negatively (Akinwale & Okotoni, 2019).

Professional commitment denotes an attachment to one's work and profession, rather than to a specific school. Professional commitment motivates a teacher to develop the skills and relationships necessary for having a successful career, regardless of the particular school or institution. Teachers with high professional commitment are more likely to stay teaching than teachers with low professional commitment. However, teachers with high professional commitment but low organizational commitment may seek teaching positions in other schools. Thus, commitment to students refers to teachers' willingness to take responsibility for student behavior and student learning. Teachers with high levels of commitment to their students have been shown to improve student engagement in learning and academic achievement, especially for low-achieving students. Firestone and Pennell (1993) noted that combination of the commitment types are necessary for teachers to have the motivation to professionalize and pursue changes in their practice while coping with the complex demands these changes present. Also, understanding an individual teacher's commitment orientation is crucial because the effects on educational outcomes may vary depending on which types of commitment are present.

Principals' Leadership Practice of Managing the Instructional Program as a Pathway to Teachers' Commitments

Instructional management is the process of empowering all educational resources to achieve learning objectives. Operational instructional management is the implementation of management functions on learning components, namely: students, teachers, goals, materials, methods, tools, and evaluation (Rahayu, 2015). In this practice, the principal focuses on teaching and learning which is at the heart of secondary schools. Principals provide instructional support by supervising and evaluating the instruction of teachers by giving effective feedback, also buffering them from distractions from their primary assignment and aligning resources this is a pathway of teachers' commitment. Additionally, they coordinate the curriculum and monitor student progress. Managing the instructional program requires the principal's active participation in stimulating, supervising, guiding, and monitoring teaching and learning in the school. The principal must possess expertise as well as commitment, getting "neck-deep" in the school's instruction and curriculum.

CONCLUSION

Based on the identified principal leadership practices, as pathways for teachers' commitment, the paper concluded that the sacrosanct roles a principal plays as an educational leader in secondary

schools should be taken seriously. The success of the school as it concerns the achievement of stated objectives and goals as enshrined in the National Policy of Education is the responsibility of the principal. Therefore the application of setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization and managing the instructional program practice by a principal will lead to teachers commitment as well as give room for excellence and growth in the schools, whether public or private secondary schools. This paper emphasized the leadership practices of a principal should bring to the fore to enable teachers to imbibe some level of commitment. The commitment of teachers can increase drastically if principals set direction, develop people (teachers and other staff), redesign the school as an organization and manage instructional programs. Many other practices are available to principals namely; instructional and transformational leadership practices. It is hoped that in schools where principals practice the aforementioned leadership practices, teachers will be motivated, inspired and ultimately committed to their primary assignment of teaching.

Suggestions

The following suggestions were made to improve the paper:

- Principals of both Public and Private secondary schools should embark on continuous professional training, where they will be equipped with requisite knowledge and skills on leadership practices that are capable of transforming our educational system.
- Principals should organize seminars, workshops, and symposiums which will serve as in-service training where teachers will be taught the ethics and values of the teaching profession.
- Teachers' commitment should be the watchword and story of secondary schools through capacity-building programmes organized by principals.
- Promotion to the position of principals should be based on merit and not for any political or personal reason. When unqualified persons are made principals, secondary schools' effective leadership and success become challenging.
- Principals should ensure that teachers are committed to their jobs by ensuring regular supervision, inspection and monitoring of the instructional process.

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