



**International Journal of Economics,
Environmental Development and Society
(IJEEDS)**

THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERS AND MANAGERS IN LEADING CHANGE AND INNOVATION IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

Ndidi Ugbome OSUYA

Department of Educational Management

Faculty of Education

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria

osuyandidi8@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-5226-9115>

Justice Wilson OSAKPO

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria

justicewilsonosakpo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In a dynamic world driven by technological advancement and improvement, it becomes imperative for Nigerian Educational Leaders and managers to cultivate the culture of leading and managing change and innovation in our schools since they are essential for preparing students for success in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. The traditional methods of teaching and learning are no longer sufficient to prepare students for the challenges of the 21st century. The country's education system faces numerous challenges, including outdated curricula, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified teachers. However, there are encouraging signs of change and innovation in Nigerian schools. One notable example is the introduction of technology in education. Many schools are now incorporating digital tools, such as tablets and laptops for effective instructional delivery. This has improved access to information, made learning more engaging, and developed students' digital literacy skills. This paper explored the multi-dimensional responsibilities and challenges educational leaders and managers' face in effectively leading and managing the change processes, the need for change and innovation and the crucial roles educational leaders and managers play in driving change and fostering innovation in schools. The paper concluded that while there are encouraging signs of progress, more work needs to be done to address the systemic challenges facing the education sector. The paper suggested that there is need for more concerted effort from government, educators, and stakeholders to make Nigerian schools hubs of creativity, innovation, and excellence, empowering students to reach their full potential.

Keywords: Educational Leadership, Change, Innovation, Educational Manager, Collaboration, Empowerment.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Osuya, N. U., & Osakpo, J. W. (2024). The role of educational leaders and managers in leading change and innovation in Nigerian schools. *International Journal of Economics, Environmental Development and Society*, 5(3), 263-276.

INTRODUCTION

Education is an instrument for change and innovation. Change is the process through which new programmes, ideas, concepts, techniques and practices are injected into the operation of the educational system to replace old or existing ones while innovation depicts the act or process of bringing in new ideas or improving on existing ones to guarantee school success and attain educational goals in the 21st century. Both change and innovation are imperative in the school system since they are driven by evolving societal needs, technological advancements, and educational research and development.

Educational leaders need to measure up to the task of leading the necessary change and create the enabling environment and atmosphere for innovation to thrive. This is because, the traditional methods of teaching and learning are no longer sufficient to prepare students for the challenges and complexities of the 21st century. The country's education system faces numerous challenges, including outdated curricula, inadequate facilities, infrastructure, and shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate funding and slow deployment of technology in the teaching and learning process. These affect the overall academic performance and achievement and the level of skills development of students.

Wagner (2014) posited that we must help students to develop skills that will allow them to keep up with the exponential technological advancements that have established the information revolution. “21st Century Skills” will help students to be prepared for constantly changing demands of the world and for new occupations that have not even been created yet. This is the key responsibility of educational leaders.

Sinek (2009) noted that leaders should start with the why. However, Couros (2015) took a slightly different approach into the “why” of innovation by saying that when forward-thinking schools encourage today’s learners to become creators and leaders, I believe they, in turn, will create a better world. In addition, Couros (2015) believed that it is not a matter of compliance but empowering people and inspiring innovation. Educational leaders must so consistently encourage the waves of change. Change is necessary for both development and, more crucially, survival because it is inevitable and constant (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017; Jagnandan et al., 2024).

According to Hao and Yazdanifard (2015), leadership is the process by which individuals employ their abilities and expertise to influence the behaviors and attitudes of their subordinates to help their organizations achieve their goals and objectives. Leaders in the education sector are to be change agents who should possess the ability and skill to recognize, initiate, and carry out change.

Educational leaders should set an example of leadership that makes it clear to their staff, students, parents, and the broader community that they are vital elements of the culture of the organization (Smith, 2016). Conversely, individuals who lack effectiveness as leaders will struggle to deal with change and will find it difficult to manage it. The growth of educational institutions will require the appointment of transformational leaders in education who are completely conscious of their roles in initiating, carrying out, and supervising change (Clawson, 2008).

At this juncture, it would not be out of place to state that there are encouraging signs of change and innovation in Nigerian schools because of the laudable roles played by educational leaders and managers. One notable example is the introduction of technology in education. Many schools are now incorporating digital tools, such as tablets and laptops, to enhance teaching and

learning. This has improved access to information, made learning more engaging, and developed students' digital literacy skills.

Another area of innovation is the adoption of project-based learning. This approach focuses on real-world problems, encouraging students to think critically, collaborate, and develop creative solutions. This method has been successfully implemented in some Nigerian schools, leading to improved student engagement and better academic outcomes.

Furthermore, there is a growing emphasis on entrepreneurship and vocational training in Nigerian schools. This aims to equip students with practical skills, enabling them to become job creators rather than just job seekers. Initiatives such as coding clubs, robotics, and vocational training programs are becoming increasingly popular. In addition, some Nigerian schools are now prioritizing social-emotional learning, recognizing the importance of emotional intelligence, empathy, and soft skills in students' overall development. This includes programs focused on mindfulness, self-awareness, and conflict resolution.

Despite these positive developments, there are still significant challenges to overcome. Many schools lack the necessary infrastructure, resources, and qualified teachers to effectively implement these innovations. Moreover, there is a need for a more comprehensive reform of the education system, including a review of the curriculum to ensure it is relevant and inclusive. This paper, therefore explored the role of educational leaders and managers in leading and managing change in Nigerian schools.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Change and Leadership Change in Schools

Change is a process that affects every aspect of life (Hırlak & Kara, 2018). According to Passenheim (2010), change is an alteration of a company's strategy, organization or culture as a result of new trends in the working environment. Leadership change is an important aspect in any institution. According to Ndibalema (2016), the importance of Leadership change includes helping institutions to increase the performance and reducing performance gaps. Ngussa and Makewa (2014) stipulated that school changes refer to educational transformations that convey the image of starting anew because changes is not only in content but also in forms of shifting from thinking with the old order to inventing a new order that is found on new assumptions, values and vision. Change helps to rectify activities that may have been done ineffectively in the institution. It helps in solving external or internal pressure and maintaining appropriate institutional culture.

According to Hırlak and Kara (2018), leadership change helps to determine plans and strategies accordingly in order to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. In Tanzania, a study by Aunga and Masare (2017) found that leadership changes have impact on teachers' performance since every leader has different behavior and style on how to lead. Therefore, changes that happen in schools may have a positive impact on school goals achievement.

Innovation in Schools

The term "innovation" simply refers to the deliberate adoption of a creative result, product, or process at the individual, group, or system level. Fullan (2007) defined innovation as an infectious state of inquiry that generates momentum for system and organization enhancement.

Innovation, which is the application of creative ideas, is required for enterprises to compete on a global scale in the twenty-first century (Kremer et al., 2018). An organization that employs innovation in linked operations can enhance its efficacy, productivity, and efficiency (Manafi & Subramaniam, 2015). Within the education business, the traditional education system has moved to include a technologically enhanced system that incorporates 21st-century competency skills. This type of innovation in education is essential for enhancing academic achievement, the quality of education supply, equity and equality, and efficiency, as well as lowering educational expenses and increasing profits from education spending. According to Bereiter and Scardamalia (2006), school systems must undergo radical restructuring in order to become institutions that promote knowledge creation, create an innovation-focused culture, and stimulate creative thinking among twenty-first century students.

According to Jaskyte (2004), understanding innovation requires a cultural viewpoint. Danks et al. (2017) claimed that an inventive environment is a factor for organizational innovation. Within a culture of innovation, members of an organization would feel supported and empowered to make significant predictor and explore new ways to issue solving. Thus, organizational culture is regarded as the core of innovation, which necessitates an environment that fosters creativity and productivity, as well as removes obstacles, to ensure excellence (Hofstede, 1991).

Change Leadership

Change is always challenging, even where it is necessary, and educational leaders (principals) play a crucial role in guiding schools through the process. Principals do this by serving as both a leader of change (vision-developer and people motivator) and a manager of change (implementation planner and monitor).

Change leadership requires true, visible ownership for outcomes from the highest levels. Principals leading change must understand the change dynamics within their particular school context and work directly with teams throughout the school to manage the change process (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019). While principals have a foundational role to play, they cannot bring about meaningful change by themselves. In the school, there are a number of stakeholders needed for such change to be impacted, they include teachers, students, family, and community members as well as school partners, district leaders and team members.

Change leadership recognizes that for new systems to be successful, the stakeholders involved in implementation must understand and believe in them. As change is planned for and carried out, it is inevitable that stakeholders will have fundamental questions and concerns. If these questions about impact on personal practice and organization purpose and function are not adequately addressed, they can hamper successful implementation. Effective change leadership acknowledges and responds to stakeholder concerns as an integral means to achieving the intended purpose of the new approach: changed practice and improved student outcomes.

Change Leader and Change Manager

For years the term change management has defined the leadership role involved in implementing change in an organization. The term change leadership emerged and has been used often as a synonym for change management. However, a number of change experts are making the distinction. Kotter (1999) clearly laid out the differences between leadership and management.

He emphasized that neither is better than the other, nor is one a replacement for the other, “rather, leadership and management are two distinctive and complementary systems of action. Each has its own function and characteristic activities and both are necessary for success...” (Kotter, p. 51). Drucker (1993) saw the two distinct roles: management is doing things right and leadership is doing the right things.

Kotter (1999) stated that the field of change leadership view change management and leadership as either or the resource that treats them as two complementary roles. Evidence suggests that both are vital to an organization and interdependent. By way of understanding the difference between the two, a school principal becomes the champion for change with a dual role as leader and manager, because the two roles are distinctive, this guide is organized by these two elements: first, the change leader and, second, the change manager. An emphasis is placed on the change leadership because so many leaders have been well trained in the skills necessary for strong management but have not received the important leadership training. This can lead to organizations being over managed and under led (Minnesota Department of Education, 2019).

As a change leader a principal’s role includes at least the following actions:

- Understand the nature of the change;
- Make the case and create urgency;
- Begin with a vision for change and communicate it;
- Create coherence;
- Understand how change affects others;
- Spread success;
- Incorporate change into the school culture;
- Focus on personal leadership.

As a change manager a principal’s role includes at least the following actions:

- Engage stakeholders and build strong coalitions;
- Design and implement a plan;
- Communicate effectively throughout the change process.

The Need for Change in Schools

Outdated Curriculum

Many traditional school curricula were designed decades ago and have not kept pace with the changing needs of society. The world is evolving rapidly, with advancements in technology, globalization, and new challenges emerging. Schools must adapt their curricula to ensure students are equipped with relevant knowledge and skills for the modern world, including critical thinking, problem-solving, digital literacy, and socio-emotional skills.

Standardized Testing

Overreliance on standardized testing can hinder a holistic approach to education. These tests often focus on rote memorization and regurgitation of information rather than fostering

creativity, innovation, and practical application of knowledge. There is a need to shift towards assessment methods that evaluate a broader range of skills and abilities, including project-based assessments, portfolios, and performance-based evaluations.

Individualized Learning

Students have diverse learning styles, interests, and abilities. However, many schools still follow a one-size-fits-all approach to education, which can lead to disengagement and limit the potential of individual students. Implementing strategies that promote personalized and differentiated instruction can help accommodate the unique needs of students, allowing them to learn at their own pace and explore their areas of interest.

Focus on Critical Skills

In addition to academic knowledge, schools should prioritize the development of critical skills that are essential for success in the 21st century. These skills include critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, collaboration, communication, adaptability, and resilience. Schools can better prepare students for the challenges and opportunities they will encounter in their personal and professional lives by emphasizing these skills.

Integration of Technology

Technology has transformed various aspects of our lives, yet its integration into education has been uneven. Many schools still lack the necessary infrastructure, resources, and training to leverage technology effectively for teaching and learning. There is a need for schools to embrace technology and leverage its potential to enhance student engagement, provide access to diverse learning resources, facilitate personalized learning, and develop digital literacy skills.

Well-being and Mental Health

The well-being and mental health of students have become of significant concerns. Schools need to prioritize the social and emotional development of students, creating supportive environments that foster positive mental health, resilience, and emotional intelligence. Providing adequate counseling services, promoting mindfulness practices, and incorporating well-being education into the curriculum are some steps schools can take.

Cultivating Global Citizenship

With increasing interconnectedness, it is important for schools to cultivate global citizenship in students. This includes fostering an understanding and appreciation of diverse cultures, promoting empathy and tolerance, and developing global awareness and intercultural competence. Schools should encourage international collaborations, promote experiential learning opportunities, and integrate global perspectives into the curriculum. The need for change in schools arises from the rapid changes in the world, the limitations of outdated approaches, and the evolving needs of students. Thus, embracing innovative approaches, and by addressing these issues schools can better prepare students for success in a rapidly changing

society and empower them to become lifelong learners and engaged global citizens (Chen & Zhang, 2022).

The Main Challenges Facing School Leadership and Management

The main challenges facing school leadership and management can be summarized thus:

Efficiency-related challenge

The main reason for efficiency issues is the existing surplus in material and human capacities in schools as a result of a decreasing birth rate; moreover, regulations fail to stimulate the reduction of those capacities. Maintainers have been grappling with difficulties arising from the consequences they have to face given the constraints imposed upon them by the logic of institutional rationalization. Because of the features currently characterizing the manner in which financing is provided and of the prevailing demographical conditions, the aim of schools today is to draw as many students to their institute as possible.

Challenges to increase sensitivity in terms of performance

The Programme for International Students (PISA) survey led to a situation in which for example, Hungarian education was to face the results of an overall performance that was less favourable than what the public initially believed to be the case. The repercussion from that survey was that the system of education began to focus on the development of key competences beside the notion of cognition in the teaching process. The fact that competence-based education has vital consequences both for organizational techniques and for teaching methods to be used in Hungarian schools still goes largely unnoticed by the teaching staff. The assessment of competence - a method in use since 2001, and a new type of secondary school-leaving examination, introduced in 2005 - provide feedback for schools on as well as via students about performance at institutional level. For now, the manner in which that information is to be used is a matter for individual schools to decide on.

Challenges to handle inequalities and heterogeneity

Due to a set of strong selection mechanisms, the PISA 2000 survey identified more significant differences between the performance of students learning in different schools than in situations when the assessment mechanism was applied for students attending the same school. The answer to this phenomenon is inclusion and integration, equally representing a new challenge for school management.

Challenges vis-a-vis teacher supply and motivation of teachers

In Nigeria and Hungary, the social prestige of a teaching career is low. Moreover, the career of an educator has in the past ten years become even more limited in its scope of professional outlook, and young teachers are seen as having a hard time trying to get themselves teaching jobs at schools. Financial motivation has limited possibilities as additional resources for extra

workload put on middle management such as vice-principals, work community leaders and head teachers are not available. Leaders are faced with the problem of lack of motivation.

Technological and pedagogical challenges

Currently, a challenge for innovation appears to manifest itself in three areas: competence based education, learning of foreign languages and the use of info-communication technology (ICT). It is a key priority for schools to introduce these areas into their daily educational routine.

Fast changes in the legal environment

Since changes in the political system have occurred, individuals involved in public education have been affected adversely by regular and quick changes. In many cases, survival techniques and purely formal adaptation rather than real changes are the answers to problems.

The Role of Educational Leaders and Managers in Leading Change and Innovation

Educational leaders and managers play a crucial role in driving change and fostering innovation in schools. They do this by doing the following:

Providing Visionary Leadership

Educational leaders and managers should articulate a clear vision for change and innovation within the school community. This vision should be inspiring, realistic, and aligned with the needs and goals of the institution.

Empowering member of staff

Leaders and managers should empower teachers and staff to take ownership of innovation initiatives. Encouraging autonomy and providing opportunities for professional development can motivate educators to embrace change and contribute their ideas. They empower teachers to take ownership of their professional growth and development and encourage them to explore new teaching methods, strategies, and technologies. They provide opportunities for teachers to share successes and challenges, learn from each other, and collaborate on innovative projects. When employees feel empowered, they will solve problems, participate in administrative decision-making, have open discussions with their educational leaders, and exhibit views and actions that are vital to their educational institution's expansion (Nasra & Arar, 2019).

Cultivating an Institutional Culture of Creativity and Innovation

Leaders can foster a culture that values creativity, risk-taking, and continuous improvement. Recognizing and celebrating innovative practices, as well as creating channels for sharing ideas and feedback, can help nurture a supportive environment for experimentation and growth. Educational leaders and managers are responsible for fostering a supportive institutional culture, according to a study. An educational institution's culture has a direct impact on its effectiveness and performance (Ott & Yang, 2011 as cited in Smith, 2016). Leaders and managers may have a

direct impact on the institution's culture, as well as on teaching and learning methodologies. Leaders may directly influence how people are taught and learn through teacher training programs and support networks. Additionally, by creating conducive learning environments that will raise student performance, leaders can indirectly influence how courses are taught. To advance educational reform and maintain administrative success, leaders must take on teaching responsibilities (Ibrahim & Al-Mashhadany, 2012).

Facilitates Collaboration and Decision-Making

Leaders and managers facilitate collaboration and teamwork among teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members. They create structures and opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration, sharing of best practices, and collective problem-solving. Involving various stakeholders, teachers, students, parents, and community members in decision-making processes can build consensus and ensure that initiatives reflect diverse perspectives and needs.

Allocates Resources Evenly and Effectively

Leaders and managers must allocate resources including time, funding, and technology in a strategic manner to support innovative practices. This may involve reallocating existing resources, seeking external funding opportunities, or forming partnerships with organizations that can provide support.

Creates and Promotes Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Leaders and managers can establish PLCs where educators can collaborate, reflect on their practice, and share insights and strategies for promoting innovation in teaching and learning. The education leader and manager must create a professional learning community (PLC) of people who share the same vision. Cooperative leaders would involve the community, students, and staff to create plans that will benefit their educational institutions and bring about sustainable, beneficial improvements (Zepeda, 2019). Educational leaders should take the following into cognizance and implement them in their quest to build professional learning communities:

- They should create and imbibe an attitude of corporation.
- Students should be taught that there is no fear of asking for help.
- Students should be encouraged with the ability to explore.
- The leader should endeavour to lead by example.
- The leader should lead from the centre and not from the top.
- Members have no desire to take credit individually for work done, but prefer to succeed together as a team by helping one another.
- Teachers should be empowered to do what is best for their students.
- Everyone should be encouraged to be creative and use their initiatives to carry out assigned duties.

Promotes Digital Literacy and Technology Integration

Given the rapid pace of technological advancement, leaders should prioritize digital literacy and the integration of technology into teaching and learning. This may involve providing training and support for educators, as well as ensuring equitable access to technology resources for all students.

Effectively Carries out Monitoring and Evaluation

School leaders establish mechanisms for monitoring the progress and impact of innovation initiatives. They identify areas of success and areas for improvement, and make informed decisions about scaling or refining innovative practices by collecting and analyzing data. They monitor the implementation of change and innovation initiatives, collecting data and feedback to assess their effectiveness and impact. They use this information to make informed decisions, adjust strategies as needed, and celebrate successes.

Be Adaptable and Flexible

Educational leaders and managers should be adaptable and open to feedback, recognizing that change is an ongoing process. They should be willing to adjust strategies based on evolving needs and circumstances, while staying true to the overarching vision for innovation.

Foster Student-Centered Learning

Shift towards a student-centered approach to education that emphasizes personalized learning, student agency, and active engagement. Encourage students to take ownership of their learning and pursue their interests and passions.

Engages Parents and Community

Involve parents and the wider community in the education process by providing opportunities for them to contribute to school improvement initiatives, participate in decision-making, and support their children's learning at home. Educational leaders and managers serve as a link between local communities and educational institutions, assisting them in adjusting to their unique conditions.

According to research, educational leaders should exercise leadership not only inside their buildings but also outside of them, where the pupils they work with are in environments that they can affect. Education professionals have always been the most powerful community leaders (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2017). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) went further to state that even though it is possible to argue that there is less of a bond between educational institutions and their communities. Educational leaders play a critical role in creating and maintaining that bond.

Supports New Policies and Strengthens existing ones

Advocate for supportive policies at the national, state, and local levels that promote innovation in education, allocate resources for innovation initiatives, and remove barriers to change.

Providing Exemplary Leadership

Educational leaders and managers lead by example, modeling the behaviors and attitudes they want to see in others. They demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning, adaptability, and innovation, inspiring others to do the same.

Building Productive Partnership

Educational leaders and managers build partnerships with other schools, universities, businesses, and community organizations to access resources, expertise, and support for innovation initiatives. They leverage these partnerships to enhance learning opportunities for students and strengthen the school's ties to the broader community.

Ensuring Equity and Inclusion

School leaders ensure that change and innovation initiatives promote equity and inclusion by addressing the diverse needs and backgrounds of all students. They advocate for policies and practices that reduce disparities in access to resources and opportunities and promote a culture of belonging and respect for all members of the school community.

Engaging Stakeholders

Effective communication and stakeholder engagement are essential for gaining buy-in and support for change and innovation initiatives. Leaders should communicate regularly with teachers, staff, students, parents, and community members, keeping them informed and involved in the change process.

Motivate and encourage staff and students

The degree to which educational institutions meet their goals for outputs and outcomes is what defines their success. It encompasses not just student accomplishment but also staff and faculty satisfaction (Boonla & Treputtharat, 2014). To motivate their groups to do their duties in a way that will enhance the academic achievement of the students, education leaders and managers must demonstrate effective leadership (Barrett & Breyer, 2014). When educators employ encouraging and motivating leadership strategies, staff members are more likely to do higher-quality work, which directly supports their academic institutions' success (Boonla & Treputtharat, 2014).

When their leaders and managers give them credit for their work, employees are more motivated to produce valuable outcomes that will raise the efficacy of institutions. Not only must we be conscious that leaders must modify their approaches to fulfill the needs of their followers in terms of motivation in certain circumstances, but we also need to be aware that this adaptation must occur naturally (Boonla & Treputtharat, 2014).

It is also perceived that instructors' motivation and demotivation are influenced by the social environment in which they reside. Teachers live in a social environment that is shaped by the collective support they receive from their leaders; more significantly, their leaders have an

impact on their overall job satisfaction. Teachers' leadership also stimulates and nurtures their professional growth and impacts their participation in decision-making.

CONCLUSION

It takes strong educational leadership to support educational improvements. Educational leaders and managers directly influence educational innovations and change. In order to ensure the best teaching techniques, leaders and managers must design realistic learning goals, monitor students' performance, allocate teaching and learning materials, and provide mentorship to teachers through staff development initiatives. Education leaders can also foster change by creating a supportive institutional culture through goal-setting, delineating roles within the institution, creating a shared vision, mobilizing the community, and forming a professional learning community to enhance curricula. The role of educational leaders and managers in leading change and innovation in schools is paramount to the success and advancement of education. These leaders serve as visionaries, strategists, facilitators, and role models, guiding their school communities toward a future that embraces new ideas, practices, and technologies. By fostering a culture of innovation, providing support and resources, and engaging stakeholders, educational leaders empower teachers, staff, students, and parents to collaborate, experiment, and adapt in pursuit of continuous improvement. Through their dedication, vision, and commitment to excellence, educational leaders and managers play a critical role in shaping the future of education and preparing students for success in a rapidly changing world.

Suggestions

- There is the exigent need to strengthen the position of school leaders and managers in their function both as individuals responsible for the improvement of the school and for the ongoing teaching and learning process at the school.
- School heads should be given some sort of administrative support to be able to perform the best possible leadership in their schools. Introducing a middle management could take the burden of administrative work off school leaders and would help distribute leadership within the school.
- New reforms should leave enough room for school leaders and managers to act as “system thinkers in action” (Fullan, 2007) in order to find their own solutions that will fit into the context of their own school rather than turn them into problem solvers fixing errors in the overall system.
- Leadership development should take place at all levels of the system by bringing together all schools types and levels by building networks, thereby creating a mindset for sustainable change.

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