

Leadership Practices and School Performance: A Study of Head Teachers in Urban and Rural Edo State, 2024

Judith Ejemen Eromomene *

Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria

*Corresponding Authors

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ABSTRACT

Good school leadership plays an important role in the quality of education and how well students perform. However, this review looks at the leadership practices of head teachers in both urban and rural primary and secondary schools in Edo State, Nigeria, and how these practices affect school performance. Moreso, using information from research studies, government records, and international education guidelines, the paper explores how leadership style, management of resources, teacher motivation, and community involvement shape learning outcomes. Conversely, the findings show that urban head teachers often have better infrastructure, internet access, and more training opportunities, while rural head teachers, despite having fewer resources, are strong at building close relationships with their communities. Hence, the review calls for more focused leadership training, fair distribution of resources, and stronger Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) in order to improve school performance in both urban and rural areas. Therefore, these recommendations are relevant not just to Nigeria, but to other developing education systems worldwide, and they support United States educational development goals under the EB2 NIW framework.

Keywords: School leadership, Head teachers, Edo State, Urban and rural education, School performance, EMIS

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognised as a major driver of social and economic development, shaping the skills, values, and competencies that citizens need to perform in a dynamic world (UNESCO, 2017). In Nigeria, just as in many developing countries, schools performance is linked to the quality of leadership provided by head teachers. Head teachers often referred to as school principals; play a central role in managing resources, guiding teachers, engaging communities, and ensuring that learning aim and objectives are met (Bush, 2020).

Research has constantly shown that effective school leadership is second only to classroom teaching in influencing student achievement (Leithwood et al., 2020). However, head teachers influence the culture of the school, set expectations, and create an enabling environment where both teachers and students can succeed. For instance, in Edo State, where differences exist between urban, and rural education systems, leadership practices can determine whether a school performs or under performs (Omorie and Ihensekhien, 2019).

Moreso, Edo State, has made notable progress in educational reform in recent years, especially through initiatives such as the EdoBEST programme, which introduced technology-enabled teaching and better monitoring systems (World Bank, 2020). However, despite these reforms, variations in school performance still persist. Urban schools often have better infrastructure, more qualified teachers, and easier access to resources, whereas rural schools are often faced with shortages in staffing, funding, and instructional materials (Aghenta, 2021). This imbalance raises questions about whether leadership practices differ between urban and rural head teachers, and how these variations might affect school performance.

Hallinger and Wang, (2022) revealed that globally, that leadership approaches are not one-size-fits-all; leaders in resource-rich settings may focus on innovation and curriculum enhancement, while those in resource-poor

environments often prioritise problem-solving and resource mobilisation. Therefore, understanding these variations within Edo State is important for designing policies that improve school performance in both urban, and rural contexts.

Furthermore, this review paper explores the relationship between leadership practices, and school performance, with a focus on head teachers in urban and rural areas of Edo State as of 2024. Existing literature, identifies major differences in leadership approaches, and discusses how these practices contribute to educational net results. The aim is to provide evidence-based insights that can inform education policy, leadership training programmes, and targeted interventions to reduce performance disparities between urban and rural schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership in Education

Educational leadership goes beyond managing a school, it involves setting a clear vision, inspiring teachers, managing resources effectively, and creating an enabling environment where students can succeed (Bush, 2018). however, different leadership styles have been studied extensively, with three models often highlighted in the literature including: transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership.

Moreso, transformational leaders focus on motivating and inspiring their teams, often encouraging innovation and a shared sense of purpose (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2006). Instructional leaders, in contrast, concentrate on improving teaching quality, curriculum delivery, and assessment practices to directly impact student learning (Halling, 2011).

Also, distributed leadership involves sharing responsibilities among staff members, promoting collaboration, and recognising that leadership can come from various roles within the school (Spillane, 2006). Each style has strengths and weaknesses, and their effectiveness often depends on the school's context and challenges.

Urban and Rural School Contexts

The location of a school whether urban or rural plays a significant role in transforming its resources, leadership needs, and overall performance. Urban schools in Nigeria have larger student populations, with a diverse teaching staff, and better access to facilities like libraries, laboratories, and internet connectivity (Nwachukwu and Eze, 2020). However, these advantages come with challenges, such as overcrowded classrooms, higher administrative demands, and greater pressure to meet performance targets.

Additionally, rural schools on the other hand, often have smaller class sizes and a strong teacher-student relationships, which can enhance a close-knit learning environment (Aghenta, 2021). despite this, they are still faced with major obstacles including lack of qualified teachers, poor and outdated infrastructure, limited teaching materials, and lack of access to internet. These differences affect not only the quality of education, but also the type of leadership strategies that head teachers can realistically implement in each setting.

Education Management Information Systems (EMIS)

The Education Management Information System (EMIS) has been known as a powerful tool for improving planning and decision-making in schools. In Edo State, the introduction of EMIS has enabled school leaders and policymakers to collect, store, and analyse real-time data on student enrolment, teacher attendance, resource allocation, and academic performance (UNESCO, 2017).

For urban schools, EMIS has promoted accountability and made it easier to track progress toward educational targets. Rural schools have also benefited, but still faced with challenges like unstable electricity supply, and poor internet connectivity that often limit the full use of the system in remote areas (Omorie and Ihensekhien, 2019). This gap is a testament of the importance of pairing technological solutions with infrastructure development, most especially in rural communities.

Head Teachers' Impact on School Performance

Day et al., (2016) and Bush, (2020) confirms that head teachers significantly influence school performance. Effective leaders can boost teacher morale, reduce absenteeism, improve teaching quality, and increase student achievement. They also play a major role in strengthening school-community relationships, which is important in rural settings where community involvement can help address resource shortages (Hallinger and Wang, 2022).

Conversely, poor leadership can have negative effects such as low teacher motivation, lack of discipline, ineffective resource use, and declining academic performance (Nwachukwu and Eze, 2020). This makes leadership development a major priority for educational reform, especially in Edo State where urban-rural variation require adaptable and context-specific leadership strategies.

DISCUSSION

Leadership Practices in Urban Schools

Head teachers in urban areas of Edo State often take on an instructional leadership role, with a view on improving teaching and learning through clear academic targets, close monitoring of lesson delivery, and frequent use of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) for decision-making (Hallinger, 2011; UNESCO, 2017). They regularly analyse data on student performance, attendance, and teacher output to guide interventions.

These urban head teachers also benefit from professional development workshops organised by the Edo State Ministry of Education, NGOs, and other donor partners, which exposes them to modern teaching methods, digital tools, and leadership practices (Edo State Government, 2020). However, urban schools tend to have higher student populations, and more competitive examination environments. The constant pressure to maintain high pass rates in national exams can lead to stress, burnout, and reduced time for creative school improvement initiatives (Nwachukwu and Eze, 2020).

Leadership Practices in Rural Schools

Rural head teachers often take a community-centred leadership approach. Instead of depending primarily on government resources, they work closely with parents, community elders, and local associations to mobilise support for the school (Aghenta, 2021). In most cases, they personally coordinate fundraising activities, secure donations, or partner with local artisans to build or repair school facilities.

However, despite these efforts, rural leaders are still faced with chronic teacher shortages, with some schools having only one or two qualified teachers for multiple grade levels (Obadan, 2019). They also contend with delayed government funding and poor infrastructure, including poor nature of classrooms, lack of electricity, and limited access to teaching materials. Despite these obstacles, head teachers in the rural areas often succeed in creating strong community relationships that help sustain the school even in difficult conditions (Hallinger and Wang, 2022).

Comparative Insights

The leadership strategies in urban and rural Edo State schools reflect both contextual advantages and constraints. However, urban schools often enjoy good physical infrastructure, internet access, and more opportunities for professional training. This allows head teachers to implement technology-based monitoring systems and adopt formal data-driven planning (Omoregie and Ihensekhien, 2019).

On the contrary, rural schools excel in grassroots engagement and adaptability. With limited resources, rural head teachers often demonstrate creativity, reusing materials, rearranging teaching schedules, and drawing on local knowledge to meet educational needs. While urban head teachers take advantage of technology and structured training, rural head teachers depend solely on interpersonal skills, trust-building, and improvisation.

Ultimately, both urban and rural environments require head teachers to act as problem-solvers, advocates, and motivators. The major difference depends on the tools available to them: urban leaders tend to rely on formal

institutional support, while rural leaders rely more on community relationships and resourcefulness.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Leadership Training: Professional development should be context-specific, recognising that urban leaders may require more training in managing large, complex institutions, while rural leaders may benefit from resource mobilisation and multi-grade classroom management skills (Bush, 2020).

Resource Equity: Allocation of funds should consider rural-urban differences to ensure that rural schools receive adequate facilities, teaching aids, and trained staff (Nwachukwu and Eze, 2020).

Strengthened EMIS; Expanding internet coverage and providing digital devices to rural schools would enable head teachers to utilize EMIS fully, enabling real-time data collection and evidence-based planning (UNESCO, 2017).

Mentorship Programs: Also, pairing experienced urban head teachers with rural counterparts could promote peer learning. Urban leaders could share strategies for curriculum delivery and data use, while rural leaders could share approaches to community mobilisation and low-resource innovation (Day et al., 2016).

Furthermore, by addressing these areas, Edo State can build a leadership model that bridges the rural-urban gap, strengthens school performance across all settings, and contributes to national and global educational development goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 (UNESCO, 2020).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, school leadership remains one of the most important factors in improving the quality of education across different contexts (Bush, 2020; Day et al., 2016). The case of Edo State, Nigeria, demonstrates that effective leadership is not a one-size-fits-all process, but rather a context-driven practice shaped by the availability of resources, community relationships, and institutional support systems.

For example, in urban areas, head teachers benefit from better infrastructure, internet connectivity, and opportunities for professional development. These advantages allow them to integrate Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) into planning, set clear performance goals, and implement data-driven monitoring of student and teacher outcomes (UNESCO, 2017). However, they also face difficulties including overcrowded classrooms, and high-stakes examination pressures, which can lead to stress and reduce innovation.

In a report by (Aghenta, 2021; Obadan, 2019), rural areas, head teachers operate in a more resource-constrained environment, often with limited access to trained staff, functional classrooms, and digital tools. Yet, they succeed through strong community engagement, mobilising parents, local leaders, and grassroots organisations to provide material support and maintain school facilities. While this approach strengthens trust and collaboration, the lack of adequate government support can limit the overall impact on learning outcomes.

For Edo State and indeed for education systems globally, sustainable improvement requires a systemic approach including:

1. Leadership development programs tailored to both urban and rural realities.
2. Equitable resource allocation to ensure that rural schools are not left behind in infrastructure, staffing, and digital access.
3. Strong data systems that function effectively in all settings in order to support evidence-based decision-making.
4. Community participation as a major element of school governance, strengthening accountability and local ownership.

These have broader implications beyond Nigeria. The United States has a long-standing commitment to global education and leadership capacity-building through initiatives such as USAID's Education Strategy (USAID, 2022). Moreso, Edo State experience offers real-world insights for improving school leadership in underserved regions worldwide. Therefore, strengthening leadership practices in low-resource settings will not only improve local education outcomes, but will also contribute to global human capital development, economic growth, and social stability (World Bank, 2018).

In summary, Edo State's experience strengthens the idea that effective school leadership whether in urban or rural contexts is a catalyst for educational transformation. Therefore, by combining modern tools, equitable policies, and community engagement, education systems can achieve more inclusive and sustainable improvements, thereby; making such work valuable at both national and international levels.

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