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Role Of Effective School Leadership In Promoting Long-Term Teacher Retention In Delta State

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ABSTRACT

Teacher attrition remains a significant challenge in education systems worldwide, particularly in developing contexts such as Nigeria. This study investigated the relationship between effective school leadership and long-term teacher retention in public secondary schools in Delta State. Adopting a descriptive correlational survey design, data were collected from a stratified random sample of 300 teachers and 30 school administrators through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The instruments were validated by expert review, pilot-tested, and achieved a reliability coefficient of 0.80. Quantitative data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression, while qualitative interview data were thematically analyzed. The results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between school leadership styles and teacher retention ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$). Leadership style and administrative support jointly accounted for 37% of the variance in teacher retention, with administrative support emerging as a slightly stronger predictor ($\beta = 0.53$, $p < 0.001$). Qualitative findings highlighted open communication, recognition, shared decision-making, and professional development as key leadership practices fostering retention. The study also identified leadership-related challenges, including limited resources, policy constraints, and infrastructural deficits, which negatively affect retention efforts. These findings align with Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory, confirming that visionary, supportive leadership can mitigate some systemic barriers to workforce stability. It is recommended that education authorities institutionalize transformational leadership training, strengthen administrative support structures, and grant greater decision-making autonomy to school leaders to enhance teacher retention in Delta State.

Keywords: School, Leadership, Teacher, Teacher Retention.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher retention is essential for the sustainability of educational quality. Delta State, like many other Nigerian states, has witnessed increasing teacher turnover rates due to poor working conditions, lack of motivation, and insufficient administrative support (Okonkwo & Ezeugwu, 2019). Leadership in schools plays a vital role in shaping teachers' professional satisfaction and commitment (Akinyemi, 2017). Education is the bedrock of national development, and teachers are the cornerstone of effective learning delivery. Despite investments in teacher training and recruitment, many teachers leave the profession within a few years. Leadership has emerged as a crucial factor influencing teacher morale and retention (Nguni, Sleegers, & Denessen, 2016). In Delta State, where educational challenges are compounded by socio-economic disparities, the leadership strategies employed by school administrators can significantly affect teacher retention rates. Hence this study explored how effective school leadership can promote long-term teacher retention in Delta State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

School leadership refers to the strategic direction and management of educational institutions by principals, vice-principals, and other administrators. It encompasses activities such as planning, resource allocation, staff development, motivation, and the establishment of a positive school culture (Bush, 2018). Effective school leaders influence both the operational and instructional aspects of schooling, creating an environment that nurtures teacher engagement and professional growth. Leadership styles—transformational, transactional, democratic, and laissez-faire—significantly shape the work environment and determine staff turnover rates.

Concept of Teacher Retention

Teacher retention denotes the ability of schools and educational systems to retain qualified educators over time. It serves as an essential metric of institutional stability and effectiveness. Factors influencing retention include compensation, working conditions, professional development opportunities, administrative support, and job satisfaction (Ingersoll & Smith, 2016). High turnover disrupts educational continuity and incurs substantial financial and academic costs.

Leadership Styles and Teacher Retention

The relationship between leadership styles and teacher retention has been extensively documented in both local and international contexts. Ololube (2017) highlighted that in Nigeria, transformational and democratic leadership styles promote teacher satisfaction and professional commitment. Principals who model trust, respect, and collaboration reportedly experience higher teacher retention.

Adeyemi and Uko-Aviomoh (2019) examined public secondary schools in Southern Nigeria and reported that transformational leaders—those who articulate a shared vision and provide individualized support—successfully minimize teacher attrition. Their study found that participative decision-making, staff involvement, and a recognition culture were critical to long-term commitment.

In the context of Delta State, Okafor and Egwuonwu (2020) observed that schools that practiced shared leadership and accountability had stronger teacher retention. Teachers expressed that leadership visibility, encouragement, and feedback significantly impacted their desire to remain in their roles.

Globally, Hallinger and Heck (2016) concluded that schools led by transformational leaders showed lower turnover. Their meta-analysis across 36 studies revealed that such leaders cultivate a sense of purpose and community among staff, which reduces burnout and dissatisfaction.

Administrative Support and Teacher Job Satisfaction

The significance of administrative support as a predictor of teacher job satisfaction and retention is well documented. Oyetunji (2016) stressed the importance of emotional intelligence, communication, and workload management as core leadership supports. His study across three Nigerian states—including Delta—found that teachers with supportive leadership structures were twice as likely to remain beyond five years.

Allen, Grigsby, and Peters (2018) emphasized that leadership-driven support systems, such as professional development, induction programs, and classroom autonomy, play a major role in enhancing teacher morale. Their findings in the South African context found that school heads who regularly acknowledged staff efforts and facilitated teacher growth achieved significantly higher retention.

Ejiogu and Alonge (2021) further demonstrated that psychological safety, feedback systems, and non-punitive appraisal practices all contribute to lower teacher attrition. These elements are often directly tied to school leadership behavior.

Challenges Confronting School Leaders in Promoting Teacher Retention

School leaders face a myriad of challenges in their bid to promote teacher retention. These include budgetary limitations, bureaucratic interference, inconsistent policy mandates, and a lack of autonomy in teacher management (Olabode & Fashiku, 2018). In Delta State, Ighalo and Udeh (2020) identified poor infrastructure, delayed salaries, and overcrowded classrooms as common deterrents to teacher satisfaction and persistence.

Additionally, societal undervaluation of teaching and weak mentorship structures compound the challenge. Adebayo and Omole (2022) found that principals often work without sufficient institutional backing, which limits their capacity to incentivize and motivate staff.

International evidence by Darling-Hammond (2017) pointed out that principals in resource-constrained settings are less effective in implementing leadership strategies that support teacher well-being. Moreover, overly centralized systems often limit school leaders' discretion, further complicating retention strategies.

Theoretical Framework

This study is built on the following theories:

- **Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory of Motivation**

  Herzberg's theory posits that two broad factors influence job satisfaction: motivators (such as recognition, achievement, and responsibility) and hygiene factors (including salary, policies, and supervision). School leadership can serve as both a motivator—through recognition and delegation—and as a hygiene factor through fair treatment and structured support (Herzberg, 1966). The theory aligns well with the focus on leadership style and administrative support.

- **Transformational Leadership Theory**

  This theory was first introduced by Burns (1978) and extended by Bass (1990), this theory underscores the ability of leaders to inspire followers beyond transactional exchanges. Transformational leaders exhibit four dimensions: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Applied to education, this model emphasizes creating a shared vision, building teacher capacity, and enhancing morale—all essential for fostering teacher retention.

  While numerous studies have examined the influence of leadership styles on teacher retention, there remains a significant gap in localized, empirical research specific to Delta State's public secondary schools. Existing literature has largely focused on general nationwide trends or international comparisons, often overlooking the contextual factors unique to this region such as political interference, socioeconomic disparities, and infrastructure decay. Moreover, few studies have simultaneously integrated both leadership styles and administrative support systems in a single framework assessing long-term teacher retention. This study addressed these gaps by providing an in-depth empirical analysis grounded in the lived experiences of teachers and administrators in Delta State, thereby contributing a localized and practical perspective to the broader discourse.

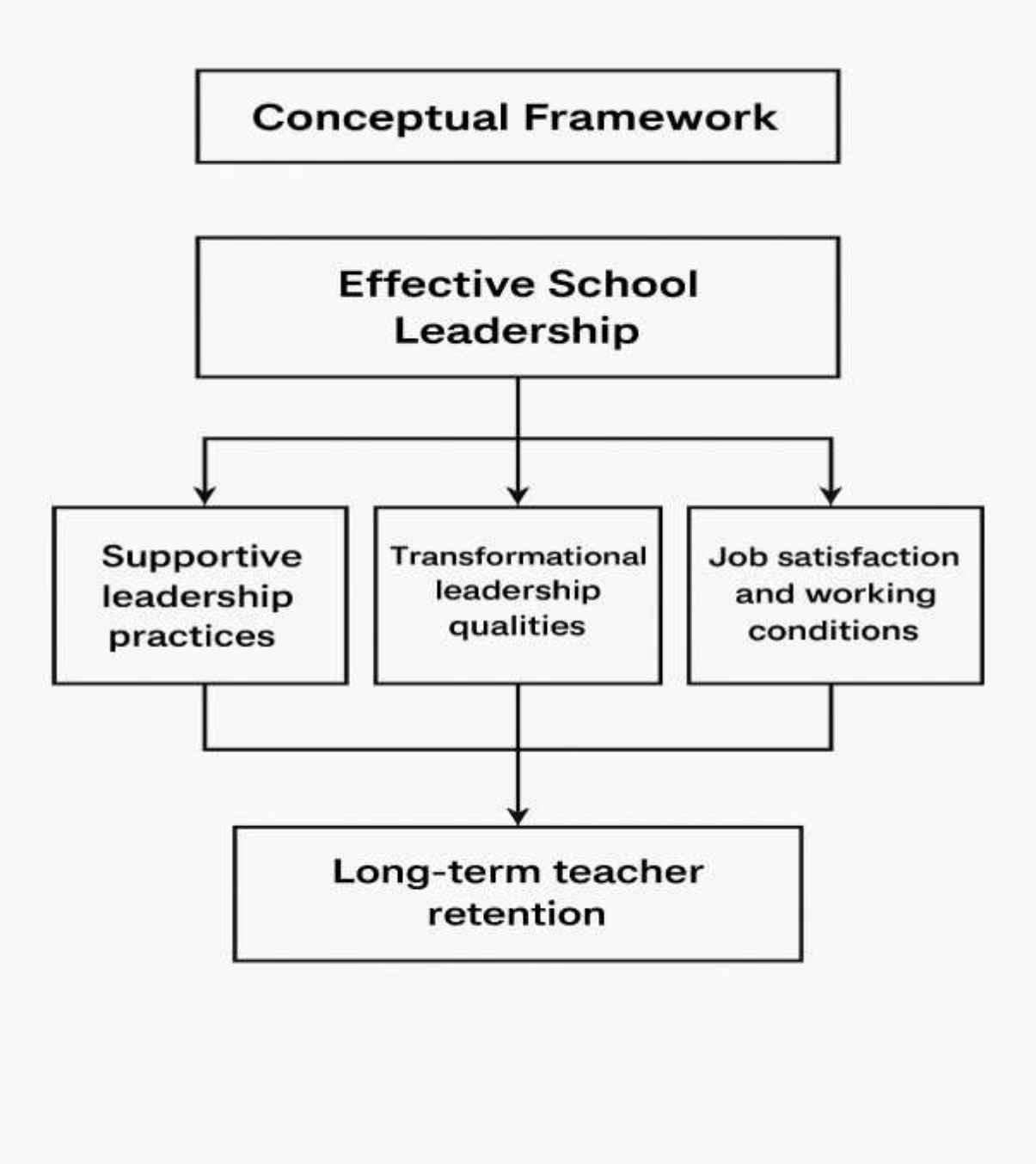

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework Diagram Illustrating hypothesized relationships among Leadership Styles (Transformational, Transactional, Laissez-faire), Administrative Support, Teacher Motivation, and Long-term Retention

Statement of the Problem

High turnover rates among teachers continue to disrupt instructional continuity, weaken student outcomes, inflates educational expenditures in Delta State. Despite ongoing efforts to improve teacher recruitment and welfare, many educators still leave the profession prematurely due to dissatisfaction with working conditions and lack of institutions support.

While factors such as low pay and infrastructure challenges have been widely acknowledged, the role of school leadership remains underexplored, especially in the Delta State context. Anecdotal evidence and preliminary studies suggest that ineffective leadership marked by poor communication, limited staff involvement, and inadequate recognition may contribute significantly to job dissatisfaction and attrition among teachers.

Yet, there is limited empirical research identifying which leadership styles and administrative practices most effectively promote teacher retention. Without clear data and contextual analysis, policy interventions remain generic and often ineffective. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate leadership approaches that correlate with higher teacher retention and foster long term teacher commitments in Delta State's public secondary schools.

Objectives of the Study

1) To examine the relationship between school leadership styles and teacher retention in secondary schools in Delta state.

2) To assess how administrative support influences teacher job satisfaction in secondary schools in Delta state.

3) To identify leadership-related challenges faced by school administrators in retaining teachers in secondary schools in Delta state.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between school leadership styles and teacher retention in secondary schools in Delta state?
2. How does administrative support influence teacher job satisfaction in secondary schools in Delta state?
3. What leadership-related challenges do school administrators face in promoting teacher retention in secondary schools in Delta state?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between school leadership styles and teacher retention in public secondary schools in Delta State.
2. There is no significant influence of administrative support on teachers' job satisfaction in secondary schools in Delta State.
3. There is no significant relationship between leadership challenges faced by school administrators and their ability to retain teachers in secondary schools in Delta State.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive correlational survey design to investigate the relationship between effective school leadership and long-term teacher retention in public secondary schools across Delta State. The study population included teachers and principals in the state's public secondary schools. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 300 teachers and 30 school administrators, ensuring broad representation across different educational zones.

Data collection instruments included a structured questionnaire administered to teachers and an interview guide used to engage principals. The reliability of the instruments was verified using Cronbach's Alpha, with a reliability coefficient of 0.80. Data collection was conducted in person to ensure clarity and completeness of responses.

Quantitative data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), with descriptive statistics used to summarize demographic patterns, and inferential statistics (such as correlation and regression) employed to test the stated hypotheses. In addition,

qualitative data from principal interviews were analyzed thematically to complement and contextualize the statistical findings.

RESULTS

The results from the descriptive analysis indicated that the majority of respondents (62%) perceived their school leaders to employ transformational leadership practices, while 25% described the leadership style as transactional, and 13% as laissez-faire. Table 1 below, presents the frequency distribution of leadership styles reported by teachers.

Table 1: Distribution of Perceived Leadership Styles Among Respondents

Leadership Style	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Transformational	186	62.0
Transactional	75	25.0
Laissez-faire	39	13.0
Total	300	100

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between school leadership style and teacher retention. The analysis revealed a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$), supporting the alternative hypothesis (H1) that effective leadership positively influences teacher retention. The predominance of transformational leadership suggests that many school administrators in Delta State already employ leadership practices associated with vision-building, staff motivation, and participative governance. This distribution is important when interpreting the correlation analysis in Table 2, which shows a statistically significant positive relationship between leadership style and teacher retention ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$). The dominance of transformational leadership likely contributes to this strong correlation. This is summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Between Leadership Style and Teacher Retention

Variable	Mean	SD	R	p-value
Leadership Style	3.85	0.63		
Teacher Retention				
	4.12	0.58	0.61	<0.01

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

A regression analysis was then conducted to determine how well leadership style and administrative support predicted teacher retention. The results showed that leadership and administrative support together accounted for 37% of the variance in teacher retention ($R^2 = 0.37$), indicating a substantial effect size. The beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.53$, $p < 0.05$) for administrative support indicated it was a strong predictor.

Table 3 below, presents the regression summary.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Predicting Teacher Retention

Predicator Variable	β	T	Sig. (p)
Leadership Style	0.41	5.31	0.000
Administrative Support	0.53	6.89	0.000

$R^2 = 0.37$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.36$, $F(2,297) = 47.29$, $p < 0.001$.

Qualitative findings from the interviews with school principals reinforced the quantitative data. Most principals who reported using open communication, delegation, and recognition of staff efforts noted lower turnover and stronger staff morale.

Table 4 below summarizes key themes emerging from the interviews with principals regarding leadership practices that support teacher retention.

Note: While Research Question 2 and Hypothesis 2 focused on teacher job satisfaction, the quantitative component of the study measured administrative support as a predictor of teacher retention. However, qualitative findings from interviews suggest that administrative support also contributes significantly to job satisfaction, as reflected in teachers' responses regarding morale, motivation, and recognition.

Table 4: Emerging Themes from Principal Interviews

Theme	Description
Open Communication	Regular staff meetings and feedback channels
Recognition and Motivation	Acknowledging teacher efforts with informal praise
Delegation of Responsibility	Shared leadership and committee-based initiatives
Professional Development	Support for workshops, trainings, and continued learning

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate a significant relationship between school leadership styles and teacher retention in public secondary schools in Delta State. The prevalence of transformational leadership among school heads (reported by 62% of respondents) aligns with the observations of Ololube (2017) and Adeyemi & Uko-Aviomoh (2019), who found that transformational and democratic leadership styles foster teacher satisfaction and professional commitment in Nigerian schools. Similarly, Okafor & Egwuonwu (2020) noted that schools practicing shared leadership and accountability experienced stronger retention outcomes, which resonates with this study's correlation result ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$) that led to the rejection of Hypothesis 1. This finding also supports Hallinger & Heck's (2016) global meta-analysis, which concluded that transformational leaders create a shared sense of purpose, thereby reducing staff turnover.

The regression analysis indicated that leadership style and administrative support together accounted for 37% of the variance in teacher retention, with administrative support emerging as the stronger predictor ($\beta = 0.53$). This reinforces Oyetunji's (2016) finding that supportive leadership structures double the likelihood of teachers remaining in service beyond five years. It also echoes Allen, Grigsby, & Peters (2018), who emphasized that professional development opportunities, induction programs, and recognition-driven support systems significantly enhance teacher morale and retention. Additionally, the results are consistent with Ejiogu & Alonge's (2021) assertion that psychological safety, constructive feedback, and non-punitive appraisal practices — all forms of administrative support — lower attrition rates. These convergences justify the rejection of Hypothesis 2 and confirm the centrality of administrative backing in sustaining teacher engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of effective school leadership in promoting long-term teacher retention in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria, using a mixed-methods approach. The results revealed a statistically significant relationship between school leadership styles — particularly transformational leadership — and teacher retention, confirming the conclusions of Ololube (2017), Adeyemi & Uko-Aviomoh (2019), and Okafor & Egwuonwu (2020) that participative, vision-driven leadership enhances teacher commitment. The quantitative analysis further showed that administrative support was a strong predictor of retention, consistent with the findings of Oyetunji (2016), Allen, Grigsby, & Peters (2018), and Ejiogu & Alonge (2021) on the role of supportive leadership in sustaining teacher satisfaction and engagement.

Qualitative evidence from school principals underscored the importance of open communication, recognition, delegation, and professional development as strategies for fostering retention — reflecting the principles of Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Bass's Transformational Leadership Theory. At the same time, the study highlighted the significant effect of leadership-related challenges, including budgetary constraints, policy interference, and infrastructural deficits, as documented by Olabode & Fashiku (2018) and Ighalo & Udeh (2020).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that while systemic constraints remain a barrier, effective and supportive school leadership can partially offset these challenges and build a more stable teaching

workforce. The study thus offers both empirical evidence and practical insight into how leadership practices shape teacher retention in the Delta State context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to policymakers, education administrators, and stakeholders in the education sector:

1. The Ministry of Education should implement structured leadership development programs that focus on transformational leadership principles such as inspirational motivation, shared vision, individualized support, and intellectual stimulation.
2. School administrators should be granted greater autonomy in decision-making regarding staffing, recognition, and internal governance.
3. School leaders should cultivate participatory decision-making processes by involving teachers in planning, budgeting, and discipline policies. By implementing these recommendations, Delta State can move toward a more sustainable and committed teacher workforce, improving educational quality and outcomes across its public secondary schools.

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