



## EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION: AN EFFECTIVE WAY OF IMPROVING EDUCATION IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*Educational leadership and administration are essential to the delivery of quality education and sustainable school improvement. In the Nigerian context, these concepts have become increasingly relevant amid persistent challenges such as inadequate funding, teacher attrition, infrastructural decay, and inconsistent policy implementation. This paper examines key leadership theories such as transformational, instructional, and distributed leadership and their application to Nigerian educational institutions. It highlights the critical role of school leaders in influencing teacher performance, student outcomes, and organisational efficiency. Drawing on recent Nigerian literature, the opinion explores the core administrative functions of planning, staffing, coordinating, and evaluating, and discusses how these functions impact school effectiveness. The paper also addresses emerging issues such as digital leadership, professional development, insecurity, and inclusive education, advocating for a shift towards participatory governance and adaptive leadership strategies. Findings suggest that strategic leadership training, integration of ICT tools, and stakeholder collaboration are essential for educational transformation in Nigeria. The opinion recommends policy reforms, leadership development, and investment in administrative systems to drive meaningful change. Overall, the paper contributes to the discourse on educational reform by proposing a framework for strengthening leadership and administration practices in Nigerian schools, aligned with 21st-century educational demands and national development goals.*

**Keywords:** *Educational Leadership, Administration, School Improvement*

## Introduction

Education transcends mere literacy acquisition; it serves as the cornerstone of societal development, empowering individuals with the knowledge, skills, and values required for personal growth and sustainable national progress (Ogunleye & Adeyemi, 2022). In North Central Nigeria covering Kwara, Niger, Kogi, Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, and the Federal Capital Territory this truth is clear. While the region holds immense potential, it faces long-standing challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, poor funding, shortages of qualified teachers, inconsistent policies, and declining student performance. Strengthening educational leadership and administration is one of the most effective ways to address these problems (Akinyemi & Onasanya, 2021). Educational leadership is not merely about occupying a position of authority. It requires vision, the ability to inspire, and the creation of an environment where teaching and learning flourish. Effective leaders motivate staff, encourage innovation, and nurture shared responsibility (Ofojebe & Ezugoh, 2020). For instance, some secondary schools in Kwara and Niger States have recorded better student discipline and teacher performance under principals who adopt collaborative leadership styles, showing that leadership thrives on trust, not just directives. Educational administration, by contrast, forms the operational backbone of a school. It involves managing human and material resources to ensure smooth academic activities and proper policy implementation (Oyetunji & Ogundele, 2023). When administrative systems function effectively, instructional priorities are met, resources are well utilized, and students enjoy a stable learning environment. Unfortunately, many schools in the region still operate with outdated administrative systems characterized by poor record-keeping, delays, and inefficiency that limit positive outcomes (Oyetunji & Ogundele, 2023).

Traditionally, school leadership in North Central Nigeria has followed a rigid, top-down approach, with principals functioning more as bureaucratic managers than change drivers. This style allowed little teacher input, stifled creativity, and discouraged innovation. However, newer leadership models are emerging. Transformational leadership motivates staff to

surpass expectations and work towards a shared vision. Instructional leadership focuses on supporting teachers through mentoring, classroom observation, and data-based decisions. Servant leadership emphasizes the well-being of staff and students, building trust and commitment. Distributed leadership shares decision-making responsibilities among teachers, heads of departments, and students, fostering collaboration (Adewale & Afolabi, 2021; Ogunyemi & Olatunde, 2022). Despite this progress, challenges persist. Leadership appointments are often based on seniority, political influence, or years of service rather than professional competence (Ude & Eze, 2021). Consequently, some school leaders lack essential skills in conflict management, strategic planning, digital literacy, and data-driven administration (Okeke & Adeyemo, 2022). Moreover, poor financial management, weak monitoring systems, and corruption continue to undermine administrative effectiveness (Okebukola, 2020). Still, there are positive developments. Leadership training programmes by state education boards, professional certification from the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), and the gradual introduction of school management software are improving leadership and administrative practices (Bamidele & Yusuf, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic also acted as a catalyst, forcing school leaders to embrace technology, adapt to changing realities, and explore alternative methods to sustain learning (Eze & Nwachukwu, 2021).

Moving forward, North Central Nigeria must deliberately invest in the professional growth of school leaders and administrators. This means establishing structured leadership development programmes, mentoring systems for new principals, and strong accountability mechanisms. Leadership appointments should prioritise competence, vision, and integrity rather than politics or tenure. Providing leaders with the necessary skills, tools, and support will enable them to address entrenched challenges and drive real transformation. In conclusion, strong educational leadership and efficient administration are fundamental to improving the quality of education in North Central Nigeria. Visionary leaders inspire teachers, engage students, and ensure effective policy

implementation. As Nigeria works towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 on quality education, prioritising leadership development is not just a strategy it is a necessity. Building capable and innovative leadership structures at the school level can position North Central Nigeria as a model for nationwide educational transformation.

### Conceptual Clarifications

Improving education in North Central Nigeria requires a clear understanding of educational leadership and educational administration two closely related but distinct concepts. When integrated, they provide a strong foundation for tackling the region's persistent educational challenges. Educational leadership is about people, purpose, and progress. It involves inspiring and influencing teachers, students, parents, and the wider school community toward shared goals. True leadership goes beyond management; it sets a compelling vision for the school, builds professional relationships, and fosters innovation. As Akinyemi and Onasanya (2021) note, leadership is not a title but the capacity to create an environment where teachers and students thrive. In North Central Nigeria often marked by inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and teacher shortages visionary leadership is essential. Research shows that schools with effective leaders have more motivated staff, better discipline, and improved academic results (Adewale & Afolabi, 2021). For example, in some Kwara and Niger schools, principals who engaged teachers in decision-making and introduced mentorship programs saw notable gains in morale and performance. Educational administration focuses on the structures and processes that keep schools running smoothly, including planning, budgeting, staffing, supervision, and record-keeping. As Oyetunji and Ogundele (2023) explain, while leadership provides direction, administration ensures resources are managed and policies are implemented effectively. Weak administrative systems can undermine even the best leadership efforts, leading to gaps in teaching and learning.

Ofojebe and Ezugoh (2020) observe that many school problems stem from a failure to harmonize leadership and administration. In states like Benue, Kogi, Niger, and Kwara,

schools with principals who combine both qualities perform better in teacher attendance, student engagement, and academic outcomes. In rural and insecure areas, leaders must also adapt policies, mobilize community support, and maintain essential teaching systems. For instance, some Niger State principals collaborated with local authorities and community leaders to improve teacher deployment and school maintenance, reducing absenteeism and strengthening trust. A key limitation in the region is the lack of formal management training for principals. Some excel administratively but lack leadership vision, while others inspire but struggle with operational efficiency. Professional development integrating both skills is vital. In essence, leadership inspires improvement, while administration ensures the vision becomes reality. When harmonized, they can overcome systemic barriers, enhance teacher performance, boost student learning, and drive sustainable educational reform in North Central Nigeria.

### Administration as a System-Centred Function in North Central Nigeria

While educational leadership inspires people and drives vision, administration ensures that the school system runs smoothly. It involves practical responsibilities such as preparing timetables, managing finances, assigning teachers, and maintaining facilities. Without this backbone, even the most innovative leadership strategies will struggle. As Akinyemi and Onasanya (2021) emphasise, effective school administration is the foundation on which meaningful leadership outcomes are built. In North Central Nigeria, however, many public secondary schools face serious administrative shortcomings, including mismanaged budgets, poor record-keeping, outdated data systems, and weak supervision (Oyetunji & Ogundele, 2023). These gaps often frustrate the efforts of leaders working to implement reforms or raise academic standards. Strengthening administrative structures is therefore a strategic necessity.

### Balancing Leadership and Administration

Leadership and administration should function as complementary pillars rather than competing roles. Ude and Eze (2021) argue that genuine school improvement occurs when leaders merge a

clear vision with strong administrative capacity. For example, a principal may motivate teachers and engage parents, but without sound financial management or infrastructure upkeep, results will be limited. Conversely, efficient administration without visionary leadership often reduces schools to bureaucratic compliance units. This balance is critical in North Central Nigeria, where under funding, teacher shortages, and infrastructural decay are persistent challenges (Abdullahi & Suleiman, 2024). Developing principals who are competent in both leadership and administration can transform schools from mere bureaucracies into dynamic learning communities, improving teacher motivation, instructional delivery, and student outcomes.

In many public secondary schools, the difference between leadership and administration is poorly understood. Principals are often appointed based on seniority rather than leadership skills (Ogunyemi & Olatunde, 2022). Consequently, some focus more on enforcing rules than inspiring staff, which weakens teacher morale and limits community participation. Nigeria's policy environment also reinforces this bias, with supervision processes prioritising procedural compliance such as attendance reports and inspections over leadership development (Okebukola, 2020). This can result in schools that look well-managed on paper but deliver poor educational outcomes.

### **Types of Leadership Styles in Education: A Framework for School Improvement in North Central Nigeria**

**Transformational Leadership Style:** Transformational leadership inspires vision, innovation, trust, and professional growth. Akinyemi and Onasanya (2021) note that it boosts morale and cultivates shared purpose, while Adewale and Afolabi (2021) report higher teacher retention and student performance under such leaders. Collaborative teaching, mentoring, and digital integration are hallmarks of this style.

**Transactional Leadership Style:** Transactional leadership ensures structure, accountability, and compliance through rewards and sanctions. Oyetunji and Ogundele (2023) highlight its role in enforcing discipline and curriculum delivery, but Ogunyemi and Olatunde (2022) warn that overuse can cause fatigue. A balance with

motivational support is necessary.

**Instructional Leadership Style:** Focusing on teaching and learning, instructional leaders set academic goals, monitor instruction, and build teacher capacity. Ofojebe and Ezugoh (2020) show its impact on outcomes through workshops, supervision, and bridging management classroom gaps.

**Servant Leadership Style:** Servant leadership prioritizes empathy, collaboration, and community engagement. Akinola and Salawu (2021) find it fosters trust, resolves conflicts, and addresses social-emotional needs, vital in contexts of low morale and disengagement.

**Distributed Leadership Style:** Distributed leadership shares responsibilities among staff and students, promoting innovation and accountability. Ogunyemi and Olatunde (2022) and Adeyemi (2021) note that it reduces bottlenecks and supports growth, though it requires trust and decision-making skills.

Blending these styles according to school needs can address systemic challenges, enhance teacher performance, and sustain student achievement in North Central Nigeria.

### **Educational Leadership and Administration: An Effective Way For Improving Education in North Central Nigeria**

In Nigeria's education sector, particularly in the North Central region, leadership and administration are not merely managerial tasks but the driving force behind effective schooling. True educational leadership builds systems that empower teachers, support students, and create environments where learning can thrive. However, many schools face deep-seated challenges such as inadequate funding, shortage of qualified staff, and deteriorating infrastructure. In such a context, leadership and administration become even more critical. When implemented well, core administrative functions planning, organizing, staffing, budgeting, supervision, and evaluation not only help schools survive but enable them to excel (Afolabi & Loto, 2020).

**Strategic Planning: The Roadmap for Change** Planning is the foundation of effective school leadership. It sets clear goals, anticipates needs, and ensures every action aligns with school priorities and national policies. In North Central

Nigeria, where resources are scarce and enrolment is rising, careful planning is vital. Afolabi and Loto (2020) note that effective planning helps schools manage resources efficiently and maintain a long-term vision. Oyetunji (2021) adds that strategic, data-driven planning such as forecasting enrolment, mapping staffing needs, and prioritizing facility maintenance is essential to provide quality learning opportunities.

### **Organizing: Turning Ideas into Reality**

Planning without organization leaves goals unrealized. Organizing involves structuring people, time, and resources for maximum efficiency. In North Central schools, this may mean creatively managing overcrowded classrooms and limited facilities. Oghuvbu (2020) observes that well-organized schools, with clearly defined roles and allocated resources, enjoy better discipline, manageable workloads, and improved student attention. Effective timetabling and coordinated facility use can transform limited resources into workable solutions.

### **Staffing: Building the Right Team**

Teachers are the heartbeat of schools, making staffing more than just hiring it is attracting, developing, and retaining the right people. Teacher shortages and poor deployment remain challenges in many public schools. Ogundele and Afolabi (2022) stress that fair recruitment, continuous professional training, and equitable staff distribution are vital. Investing in teacher development through training, mentorship, and support improves instructional quality, reduces absenteeism, and boosts motivation, all of which directly enhance student outcomes.

### **Budgeting: Making Every Kobo Count**

In regions with limited funding, budgeting is a leadership function that sets priorities and ensures resources are used wisely. Ogunode (2023) identifies financial mismanagement as a major barrier to school improvement. Okorie and Ebong (2021) recommend transparent, participatory budgeting to ensure funds address pressing needs such as textbooks, classroom repairs, or timely staff salaries.

### **Supervision: Supporting, Not Policing**

Traditionally seen as inspection-based and punitive, supervision in education should instead be supportive. Ijaiya et al. (2020) argue that when supervisors act as mentors, teachers feel valued and motivated to grow professionally. In North Central Nigeria, supportive supervision means visiting classrooms to offer feedback, share strategies, and guide teachers rather than merely fault-finding. This fosters collaboration and improves teaching quality.

### **Evaluation: Learning and Improving**

Evaluation measures how well schools meet their goals and uses the findings for improvement. Adebayo and Olowoselu (2020) argue that evaluation should go beyond exam results to assess teacher performance, leadership effectiveness, and the overall learning environment. In North Central Nigeria, regular evaluation helps identify weaknesses such as low morale or underperforming programs and enables targeted interventions. Evidence-based evaluation promotes accountability and long-term improvement. Educational leadership and administration are not just bureaucratic duties; they are transformative tools. By integrating planning, organizing, staffing, budgeting, supervision, and evaluation, school leaders can address systemic challenges and move from coping to driving excellence and sustainable development.

### **Contemporary Issues in Educational Leadership and Administration: An Approach to Strengthening Education in North-Central Nigeria**

In North-Central Nigeria, school leaders are no longer confined to routine duties such as keeping records or managing timetables. Their roles now involve tackling complex challenges that affect teaching and learning. From integrating technology and ensuring safety to implementing policies and supporting teachers, leaders must operate in a rapidly changing environment. These issues are particularly urgent in a region struggling with insecurity, inadequate funding, and the pressure to align with global educational standards (Adebisi & Umeh, 2021).

**Embracing Technology and Leading Digitally**  
Technology is now central to modern education. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the urgent need for digital tools in teaching and school management. While many urban schools have adopted digital learning, rural and low-income areas lag behind. Yusuf and Balogun (2021) note that school leaders must go beyond purchasing devices to guiding effective use. Digital leadership involves ICT training for staff, using virtual platforms for administration, and adapting tools to the school's context rather than a "one-size-fits-all" model.

**Prioritizing Safety and Student Well-Being**  
Insecurity is a pressing challenge in the region, with incidents of student kidnappings, violence, and unrest. Many students in affected areas suffer anxiety and trauma, yet schools often lack counselors (Okeke & Adebayo, 2020). Leaders must establish safety measures, work with local authorities, and introduce peer-counselling programs. Schools that address mental health record better attendance and achievement.

### **Supporting Teachers Through Growth and Retention**

Teachers are the foundation of schooling, but many face low pay, poor conditions, and few professional growth opportunities. Retaining qualified teachers is a concern. Ogunlade and Salami (2022) stress that leaders who invest in training, mentorship, and recognition programs foster motivation and performance. Initiatives such as workshops, career progression pathways, and awards build a committed workforce and improve student outcomes.

### **Translating Policies into Practical Action**

Nigeria frequently introduces education policies, yet many fail at the grassroots level. Adebisi and Umeh (2021) argue that principals must be trained to adapt policies to local realities despite funding constraints or staff resistance. Effective leaders localize national directives rather than waiting for top-down solutions.

### **Promoting Inclusive and Culturally Responsive Leadership**

North-Central Nigeria's cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity demands inclusive practices

that make all students feel valued. Inclusive leadership goes beyond disability inclusion to bridging language gaps, accommodating varied learning styles, and promoting gender equity (Onyeka & Abubakar, 2023). Culturally sensitive schools enjoy higher engagement and community support.

### **Addressing Teacher Motivation and Equity in Rural Areas**

A persistent challenge is the uneven distribution of qualified teachers. Rural schools often struggle to attract and retain staff, creating disparities in quality (Omuya, 2024). Incentives such as housing allowances, rural bonuses, and continuous training can help. Administrators should partner with education boards and local governments to advocate for teacher support in under-served areas.

### **Building Trauma-Informed and Safe Schools**

Beyond physical safety, leaders must address the psychological effects of conflict on learners. Strategies such as peer-support groups, mental health awareness, and NGO partnerships for counselling help students recover from trauma and stay engaged (Okeke & Adebayo, 2020). Schools that combine safety with emotional support are better placed to boost performance.

### **Bridging the Digital Divide for Educational Equity**

Digital learning can transform education, but without action, it risks widening inequalities. Administrators should promote low-cost solutions such as mobile learning apps, offline resources, and shared ICT hubs to benefit both urban and rural students. Yusuf and Balogun (2021) emphasize that teachers must be trained to integrate technology meaningfully into lessons rather than as an add-on. Educational leadership in North-Central Nigeria is evolving rapidly, and expectations of administrators are higher than ever. From technology adoption and student safety to teacher support and policy translation, the region's educational progress depends on leaders' ability to navigate contemporary challenges. As Ogunlade and Salami (2022) note, the future of education will be shaped not only by policy but by leaders' personal commitment to creating responsive, inclusive, and forward-

thinking school.

### **Trait Theory: Born Leaders or Developed Ones**

Ralph M. Stogdill, whose landmark 1948 review systematically advanced the Trait Theory of leadership, argued that effective leaders exhibit inherent characteristics such as confidence, integrity, intelligence, and determination. In Nigeria, Umar and Ojo (2020) observe that school boards frequently prioritise these traits when appointing principals. However, Oyesola and Agbakwuru (2023) caution that traits alone are insufficient; leaders must also learn, interpret their environment, and strategise effectively. Within North-Central Nigeria, this underscores the need to value both innate qualities and context-specific leadership training when selecting school leaders.

### **Situational Leadership: Flexibility in Diverse School Contexts**

Situational leadership emphasises adapting style to match school realities and staff competence. Afolabi and Oyebanji (2022) highlight that principals may be directive with inexperienced teachers but collaborative in established schools. Research in Benue State shows that blending autocratic, democratic, transactional, and transformational approaches can improve teacher performance.

### **Transformational Leadership: Inspiring Change and Growth**

Transformational leaders inspire by creating a vision, fostering innovation, and supporting individual growth. Studies in Ebonyi State link intellectual stimulation and individualised support with teacher effectiveness, while Oyo State evidence credits transformational leadership with fostering cultural change despite scarce resources.

### **Systems Theory and Distributed Leadership**

Systems theory views schools as interconnected, where neglecting one element undermines reform (Adepoju & Ige, 2023). Ugwuanyi and Pietsch (2024) advocate “Leadership for Learning,” integrating instructional, transformational, and shared leadership. Distributed leadership aligns with this view by engaging multiple stakeholders

teachers, parents, and education boards for holistic change.

### **Implications for North-Central Nigeria**

For education to truly drive social and economic development in North-Central Nigeria, leadership practices must go beyond routine administration. The following approaches provide a pathway toward stronger, more inclusive schools:

#### **Prioritising Leaders of Character and Competence**

School heads should be chosen not only for their qualifications but also for their integrity, resilience, and empathy. Integrity builds trust with teachers, parents, and students. Resilience helps principals navigate the region’s common challenges, such as funding gaps or policy changes, without losing focus. Empathy enables leaders to understand the diverse needs of their staff and learners. These personal qualities should be complemented by formal leadership training so that principals can combine moral character with professional expertise.

#### **Teaching Flexible Leadership Skills**

Effective school leaders must be able to adapt their style to the specific needs of their staff and students. A rigid, one-size-fits-all approach often fails in the dynamic educational landscape of North-Central Nigeria, where rural and urban schools face different realities. Training programs should therefore emphasise when to be directive such as during a crisis and when to adopt a more participatory style that encourages teacher autonomy.

#### **Promoting Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is about more than managing daily operations; it is about inspiring a shared vision for excellence. Leaders who articulate a clear, forward-looking mission can motivate teachers and students to exceed expectations. By fostering innovation, encouraging professional development, and recognising achievements, transformational principals can create vibrant learning environments that uplift entire communities.

### Applying Systems Thinking

Education does not operate in isolation. Systems thinking encourages principals to view their schools as part of a larger network that includes parents, local government, community groups, and policy makers. Recognising these interconnections helps leaders anticipate how changes in one area such as state policy or local economic conditions affect the whole system. This perspective supports smarter decision-making and more sustainable improvements.

### Encouraging Distributed Leadership

Finally, schools thrive when leadership is shared. Distributed leadership means giving teachers, department heads, and even students meaningful roles in decision-making. This approach builds collective responsibility, strengthens staff capacity, and ensures that good ideas can come from any level of the school community. Over time, it nurtures future leaders and creates a culture where everyone feels invested in the school's success.

### Conclusion

Education in North-Central Nigeria stands at a decisive crossroads. The rising demand for quality learning and improved student outcomes calls for leadership and administration that move beyond routine rule-keeping. School principals need to be visionaries who inspire and guide their teams, while administrators must serve as proactive planners and resource managers who anticipate challenges and drive innovation.

However, persistent obstacles such as limited leadership training, rigid bureaucratic processes, inadequate facilities, and low levels of community engagement continue to hold many schools back. Addressing these issues requires bold reforms and a shared commitment from government, educators, parents, and local communities. With dedicated effort and collaborative action, schools in the region can transform into dynamic centres of learning that truly prepare young people for the future.

### Suggestions

**Strengthen Leadership Capacity:** Many school principals step into their roles without any formal preparation. Regular, hands-on training in supervision, decision-making, and problem-

solving will help them manage schools more effectively and respond confidently to everyday challenges.

**Promote Inclusive Governance:** Bringing teachers, parents, students, and the wider community into school decisions fosters trust, accountability, and shared responsibility, which in turn supports better learning outcomes.

**Adopt Modern Technology:** Using digital tools such as electronic management systems and communication apps can streamline record-keeping, improve data management, and keep parents informed and engaged.

**Combine Autonomy with Accountability:** Principals should have the authority to manage budgets, staffing, and daily operations, but this freedom must be balanced with clear performance standards and regular oversight.

**Build a Leadership Pipeline:** Establishing leadership development centre, mentorship programs, and peer-learning networks will nurture the next generation of school leaders and ensure continuity of strong leadership across the system.

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