The Behaviours and Roles of School Principals in Tackling Security Challenges in Nigeria: A Context-Responsive Leadership Perspective

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Abstract

Principals are at the apex of all activities in the day-to-day life of secondary schools. Their function goes beyond mere guaranteeing effective teaching and learning, as well as the smooth running of secondary schools, they are entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring an enabling environment that is composite of security and safety for both learners and teachers. However, in recent times, Nigeria has witnessed insecurity and safety challenges to unprecedented heights with students in secondary schools also at the receiving end of these unfortunate realities. Going by the current torrent of insecurity and its obvious engulfment of the Nigerian State, there is a need for principals to build bridges and galvanise their schools against the debacle of insecurity that is ravaging this nation. This paper seeks to propose the context leadership theory as the means to address this menace. The paper provided a detailed explication of insecurity issues in Nigeria, its impacts on secondary education and the implication of principals' behaviours and roles in effectively combatting insecurities. The engagement of this theory unravels the emergence of roles that the principals can take to nip the problem in the bud. Such roles include: managing the school's vision and mission, ensuring teachers' professional development in handling security issues, fostering normative relationships across the entire school community, dealing with internal and external influences, and manage the school's resources. Thus, we recommend that principals need to take on the roles as mentioned above in order to ensure that the current spate of insecurity in the country does not shut the gates of their schools.

Key words: Insecurity, Principals' roles, Secondary Education, Context-responsive theory.

Introduction

Nigeria as a State appears to be suffocating under the intense fire of insecurity (Obi, 2015; Omede & Omede, 2015). Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro (2013) opine that insecurity is a threat to human life and existence. It may, therefore, be congruent to state, that there are threats to the Nigerian lives as kidnapping and abductions, Fulani herdsmen clashes and killings, Boko Haram/Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) insurgency, banditry, armed robbery, ritual killings are sporadically proliferating even into regions where there have been reasonable level of peace in the past. In the light of these, insecurity appears to have gravitated to unprecedented heights, which seems to be setting the nation's foot on the brink of war. Soyinka (2018) declares that Nigeria is sliding from ethnic cleansing to genocide. The security measures of the government

seem to continually fall short in assuaging the flames of insecurity blowing all over the nation. This assertion is confirmed with the ranking from the Global Peace Index, which placed Nigeria among the five least peaceful countries in Sub-Saharan Africa going by their measurement of peacefulness across three domains: safety and security, ongoing conflict, and militarization (Global Peace Index, 2019). In support of the above, Obasanjo (2019) claims that the Nigerian citizenry is losing their confidence in the government's ability to provide security to lives and properties. Hence, they may recourse to finding alternatives to ensuring their security individually and collectively.

In light of these, the implications of insecurity cuts across every sector of the country (Obarisagbon & Akintoye, 2019). However, its impact on education is of a dire consequence to the well-being of the nation. Therefore, it is imperative that educational stakeholders, importantly, principals must be fully kitted to tackle insecurity, as the challenge is not leaving out secondary schools in Nigeria. Thus, principals must take on roles that will empower and enable them to combat insecurity so that the monster does not choke up the educational space. This paper argues that the role of principals in the fight against insecurity has not been sufficiently defined.

Conceptualisation of issues

Conceptualising insecurity in Nigeria

This paper engages the concept of insecurity with the mirror of security. Ewetan and Urhie (2014) argue that the need for security was the sole reason for the social contract between the people and the state, in which the people freely submit their right to the government to ensure their protection. Taking a leaf from this, it could be argued that the government owes all its citizens maximum security at all times. The issue of security of lives has been a significant concern in various climes, in which there are debates that the concept of human security should go beyond being government-centred but should be projected to the peak of all discourse which is encapsulated by human rights, national security and national development (Krahman, 2003). Literature has provided two sub-themes in which human security may be considered (Nwanegbo & Odigbo, 2013). First is the neo-realist theme, which conceptualises the security of the people as the sole function of the government. The second theme is referred to as the postmodernist, is also known as the plural view, conceptualises security as the sole responsibility of non-governmental actors, such as vigilantes and other private security approaches, thereby deposing the government

as the dominant provider of security. Protagonists of the postmodernist theme of human security have argued that the government should focus on providing economic security of individuals because insecurity of various forms is an offshoot of economic wreckage (Dike, 2010; Oche, 2001; Omede, 2012). This paper argues that while the state has its function in ensuring the safety of the citizens, it is docile and unsuitable for the citizens to do nothing to ascertain their personal and collective safety. The concept of security is conceived by scholarship to mean the absence of threats to individual and national peace, national cohesion amidst others (Igbuzor, 2011). However, it has been argued that insecurity goes beyond the presence of threats or other security issues that brews fear but the availability of an effective and efficient system to counter the threats to life proactively with expediency, expertise, and in real-time (Ewetan & Urhie, 2014).

Insecurity, which is the diametric opposite of security, is conceptualised as the presence of threats, danger, and chaos as well as the absence of peace, tranquility, and order (Obi, 2015). According to Achumba et al (2013), insecurity can be conceptualised in two different ways. They state that in a way, it is a condition of being exposed to danger or threat of danger, in which case the individual is vulnerable to harm or injury. In another way, it is a condition in which a person or group is exposed to an unclear and nerve breaking emotion that is experienced while expecting disaster. It can be inferred from the meanings above, that the victims of insecurity are arguably unaware of the threats ahead and may not be able to handle such decisively. Going forward, this paper conceptualises insecurity as any form of breakdown of law and order resulting to anarchy of various sorts, which culminates in the loss of properties or life without a pragmatic response mechanism to prevent it or halt its escalation. Terrorism is a form of insecurity that has been ravaging Nigeria over decades (Obarisagbon & Akintoye, 2019).

Ewetan and Urhie (2014) defined terrorism as the act of using calculated unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to instill fear or enforce or threaten the society or government in the realisation of objectives that are political, religious or ideological. Omede & Omede (2015) present a list of characteristics that describes terrorism. These include the use of unlawful and assorted weapons such as; AK-47 rifles, motivated by goals that might be ideological, religious, or political, derive financial and military supports from national and international loyalists amidst others.

With the uprising of Boko Haram insurgency, Fulani herdsmen killings, the unknown clan of bandits, Nigeria as a state could be described as being terrorised and unsecured. However, terrorism gradually steering in our faces today appears to be of different sorts. It is now being

perceived as the threat of unlawful violence to instill fear on a particular sect or group of people as it is in the recent 30 days ultimatum given to the federal government to implement the still contended Ruga policy, or else (Suleiman, 2019). This was in a statement issued by the Coalition of Northern Groups and corroborated by the Northern Elders' Forum to the Federal Government as well as the Southern Nigerian leaders who are contending the legality and rationale behind the Ruga policy. According to Omenuwa (2019), Ruga (or Rugga) is a Fulani word for settlement but it is currently branded as an acronym for Rural Grazing Area. The Ruga policy intends to constitutionally allocate grazing areas for Fulani herdsmen in all the 36 states of Nigeria (Suleiman, 2019). Although the purpose of this paper is not epicenteric on the Ruga policy discourse, yet it aims at engaging the security demands, the Ruga policy implementation may require going by the scholastic narratives of security breaches that follows Fulani herdsmen presence in any community (Anih & Bjorkqvist, 2018; Johnson & Okunola, 2017; Obi, 2015; Salihu, 2018). In congruence, Global Terrorism Index named Nigerian Fulani militants as the fourth deadliest terror group in the world (GTI, 2014).

It is noteworthy that in 2002, when Boko Haram was founded, their main objective was to purify Islam in Northern Nigeria, and their actions were non-violent (Cook, 2011). However, from 2009 until date, tens of thousands have been killed, and 2.3million people displaced from their homes. This snowballed into the uncouth invasion and kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls in April 2014 (Apuke, 2016). Many of which never returned home, sexually abused, sold off as slaves, and others were murdered (Apuke, 2016). Eme, Azuakor and Mba (2018) state that 112 Chibok girls have not yet returned while the recent invasion and abduction of the 113 girls from Government Girls' Secondary School has not yet returned one of the girls for refusing to renounce her Christian faith. These signals the growing need for school principals to look beyond ensuring the educational objectives are met but to ensure the security and safety of their teachers and learners.

Conceptualising the roles of school principal and insecurity

Principals are expected to function primarily as instructional leaders who engage in the day-to-day life of the school ensuring that teaching and learning activities is achieved for learners (Lyons, 2010). Beyond these, they also have leadership functions, which include; taking initiatives and directing the entire activities in the school towards achieving the educational goals for which the learners are sent to school. The functions stated above are just a few of the myriad of activities that are expected of school principals. School principals, by virtue of the functions they engage in,

they serve as the academic and administrative heads of secondary schools (Adebiyi, 2016). Ayeni (2012a) states that the post of the principal is that of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or Managing Director (MD) who performs a complex range of duties.

Going beyond what the literature says, the Nigerian constitution Section 12 (14) states that the primary role of any school leader as government representative in the school is to ascertain the security and welfare of the staff and students under his watch. Failure to ensure these may lead to inestimable havoc in the development of the nation. There appears to be a dearth in the literature addressing the roles of principals in tackling insecurity. This paper, therefore, contends that the roles of principals in the fight against insecurity needs to be well defined and subjected to scholastic debates so that beyond leading teaching and learning, principals can take the lead in ensuring insecurity do not brood under their watch, and eventually implode their educational space.

Implications of insecurity on education

Insecurity in Nigeria dates back to the 1960s and have at several times, engulfed various sectors of the country, ranging from religious to economic, political and even the educational sectors (Ali, 2013). Up until the advent of Boko Haram insurgency, 2009 which drives the ideology that Western education is a sin, the Nigerian educational sector has not witnessed such a height of insecurity. The Chibok and Dapchi schools may be argued to remain the memorabilia of the implications of insecurity in the educational sector in Nigeria. According to United Nations International Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Boko Haram militants have killed 2,300 teachers and destroyed over 1400 schools in three North-Eastern states; Borno, Adamawa and Yobe since 2009 (Eme, Azuakor & Mba, 2018). Moreover, kidnapping appears to be one of Nigeria's top security challenges in 2019. Adamu (2019) states that in five months 685 persons have been kidnapped in Nigeria. This problem has not precluded school learners and teachers, school learners have been a victim of kidnapping in Nigeria (Punch, 2019). Drawing from this, it is unarguable that learners and teachers in these hot zones would have to continue their education under intense fear of possible incursions. How then can effective teaching and learning take place in such areas? Considering the fault lines in the Nigerian educational system, insecurity would probably be the last straw that will break the camel's back if proactive measures are not taken. It is argued that education is sine-qua-non to national development and no nation can rise beyond the limits of its educational system (Odia & Omofonwan, 2007). The damage with which insecurity may cause to the educational system may overrun the nation into a failed state, particularly, if the proposed

introduction of the Ruga policy across all the 36 states in Nigeria becomes successful or it fails (Abdullahi, 2019).

The trajectory of Principal Leadership and Contextual Diversities

Looking beyond what principals are supposed to do and what they are doing, Leithwood and Day (2007) elucidate that the different contexts in which school principals perform their functions also impact on their overall leadership effectiveness and, consequently, their output. Harma and Adefisayo (2013) reveal the disparity of contexts in Nigerian schools. They concluded that there is no uniform schooling context but that schools operate across a wide range of contexts related to the geographical and economical distribution of the state. In like manner, there is a measure of the difference in the schooling context as it relates to security. It is not debatable that it is one big nation, which comprises 6 geo-political zones, with 36 states (Adebiyi, 2015). It can be argued that despite the oneness of Nigeria, our contextual needs and peculiarity appears to be different. According to Eme et al. (2018), there have been multiple deaths and destruction of schools in the North-Eastern states. Conversely, this may not be true of every state in Nigeria. Some regions are pre-occupied with the need for grazing land for their cows, while some are concerned with their farmlands. The tipping point, however, is not allowing the context to shape our behaviours and roles but allowing extraneous overarching policies to guide the response or prioritizing a particular context's need over others.

This necessitates thorough reflection on the question Apuke (2016) raised on the successful attack of Boko Haram terrorists on the Chibok girls, "why did the Borno State commissioner for education, principal, vice principal and chief security officer, ignored the valid advice of WAEC on the security implications of writing exams in the school and the need to have a center where the children's life will be secured?" Dede (2006) asserts that context shapes the individuals that inhabit them through rewarding or inhibiting the various types of behaviours they put forth. He further claims that the individuals within a context can influence the settings of the context by changing its characteristics (realities) in a way that alters the behaviours that the context reinforces or suppresses. In line with the forgoing, one can conclude that the probable influence generated by the realities in a context is dependent on the actions and inactions of the individuals existing in it. Thus, contextual realities may be inhibited or strengthened by attitudinal inputs of people within the context. It can be argued that if the stakeholders, particularly, the principals concerned in the Boko Haram and ISWAP abduction cases of the Chibok and Dapchi schoolgirls have engaged

collaborative leadership in intelligence gathering, they might have responded differently, and would have successfully inhibited their school from being overwhelmed by their contextual challenge, which is Boko haram insurgency.

Theoretical framework

Unpacking the Problems: A Context-Responsive Leadership Perspective

In unravelling the intersections between context and principal leadership as the case is in this paper, this paper situates the context-responsive leadership theory as a possible panacea to tackling insecurity in Nigeria. Hallinger (2003) concludes that "it is virtually meaningless to study principal leadership without reference to context." Adebiyi (2016) opine that researchers, over time, have emphasised the need for research on the effect of context on leadership behaviours and practices. Boal and Hooijberg (2001) contend that many emerging leadership theories are context-free. This indicates that the theories do not factor in the environmental and organisational context in the leadership process. Therefore, the Context-Responsive Leadership theory emerged to fill this gap in the literature (Bredeson, Klar & Johansson, 2008). This theory seeks to establish a bridge of understanding of the interactions that exist between leadership and the context with a focus on how the context influences the behaviours and practices of leaders while they are engaging in various leadership processes in order to achieve organisational goals (Bredeson, Klar & Johansson, 2011).

This theory essentially investigates the behaviours as against the functions of leaders in less favourable contexts (Bredeson, Klar, & Johansson, 2008). This implies that the theory seeks to know how leaders respond or react to contextual realities and not particularly investigating what leaders are meant to do by virtue of their leadership positions. Bredeson et al. (2011) conceive context-responsive leadership as a balanced application of an intricate blend of knowledge, abilities, and characters properly entrenched and discharged by effective leaders, which enables them to prudently interact with the evolving situational variables and characteristics of their context. This kind of leadership is not necessarily specific to a style or theory of leadership but displays a set of behaviours which exerts a level of restraint or reception of certain features of a particular context in order to achieve the expected results (Bredeson et al., 2008; Dempster, Carter, Freakley & Parry, 2004; Hargrove & Owens, 2002; 2003). Hoy and Miskel (2007) corroborate

that there are times that leaders respond to situations and circumstances around them in a manner not specific to a leadership approach.

The debate in the literature on leadership behaviours and practices with regards to contextual realities has been ongoing and appears not yet resolved, neither concluded with concepts that can be clearly understood (Goldring et al., 2007). Thus, the context-responsive theory emerged as an extension of the existing theories of leadership. The context-responsive leadership theory was not developed by merely matching leadership styles to functions and practices, followership and contexts. It emerged as a result of an empirical study that was conducted to demonstrate the intersections of leadership behaviours and contextual realities (Bredeson et al., 2011). The context-responsive theory underscored five key variations in context. These variations in contexts are school district size, organisational culture, community context and geographical location, the fiscal context, and the political context (Bredeson et al., 2008). In these varying environments, the context-responsive framework relates to the leaders preemptive and proactive engagement with dynamic situations of practice.

It is argued that context-responsive leadership reveals the capacity of school leaders to 'push back' against challenges that tend to limit the goals and vision they have projected for the school (Bredeson et al. 2011). Push back in this regard refers to the school leaders' defiance of the problematic situations capable of rendering them as dysfunctional. Thus, the context-responsive theory provides a mirror with which leadership behaviours and practices can be understood with respect to context and contextual realities. Bredeson et al., (2008) affirm that leaders of this type are keen to know when, where, why, and how to push back or reconfigure the elements of their context in order to provide a more promising context for achieving their aims and objectives. The context-responsive theory describes the behaviours and practices of context-responsive school leaders as including managing the school's vision, mission and direction, professional development of teachers, fostering normative relationship with all members of the school community, focus on learner achievement and development, dealing with internal and external influences and managing the school's resources (Bredeson et al., 2008).

Implication of Context-Responsive Leadership theory in tackling security challenges

Behaviours are demonstrated within a context where people exist. However, contexts are specific to their unique circumstances and situations (Minton et al., 2015). This opinion is corroborated by Hargrove and Owens (2002) who explain that context determines the boundaries

of actions and there exists a reasonable level of fluidity enabled by such boundaries. Accordingly, Nigeria as a nation is divided into six geo-political zones with each zone having situations and circumstances that are unique to them. In line with these scholars' thoughts, it is expected that each geo-political zone should respond proactively to dire demands of their contexts accordingly. Dede (2006) presents the view that as much as the context can influence behaviours of individuals in it, so it is that behaviours of the individuals can have a reciprocal impact on the context. Differences in behaviours within a context may be situationally directed rather than being habitual or generic (Vroom & Jago, 2007). This, however, signals objectivity in understanding the behaviours that are locked up within a situation presenting themselves in the boundaries of certain performance. It can, therefore, be argued that the principles of fluidity and objectivity guide context-responsive leadership behaviours and roles. Therefore, the behaviours taken up by principals in the North East may be different from that of the principals in the southeast because of the different contextual realities and when it appears similar, such realities may be occurring at various degrees that would, therefore, require different responses. This reinforces the claim that successful leadership is contingent on its base of operation (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom 2004; Leithwood et al., 2006; 2008). Thus, leadership behaviours and practices should not be inclined to a singular approach (Bredeson, 2011; Bredeson et al., 2008).

While the dialogue is not always easy and possible, it is desirable; thus, with insecurity, the leaders, including school principals, need to direct all energy to the fundamental principles that undergird the Context-Responsive Leadership theory in confronting insecurity issues in Nigeria. These issues are proportional to managing the school's vision, mission and direction, ensuring professional development of teachers, fostering normative relationships with all members of the school community, dealing with internal and external influences, and managing the school's resources. We, therefore, argue that engaging this framework, insecurity may be halted from breaking down the future of secondary school education in Nigeria.

Application of Context-Responsive Leadership theory to tackling insecurity issues in Nigeria

In this section, this paper focuses on the five principles that underpin this theoretical paper, in an attempt to contribute to the ongoing discourse on security issues in Nigeria. These principles as adapted from Bredeson, Klar and Johansson (2008) include; managing the school's vision, mission and direction, ensuring professional development of teachers, fostering normative

relationships with all members of the school community, dealing with internal and external influences and managing the school's resources.

1. **Managing the school's vision, mission and direction**

Findings from the research conducted by Adebiyi (2016) showed that some schools do not have a clear vision and mission statement. An internal state of anarchy ensues when a school is run without a clear understanding of the direction the school is heading towards by all stakeholders concerned (Adebiyi, 2016). It is, therefore, imperative that a clear vision and mission is set for everyone to know the direction the school is going. This attribute is referred to as beginning with the end in mind (Covey, 2012). Covey (2012) states that all things are created twice, meaning that there is the imaginative phase of creation and then the physical execution of the imagined creation. He, however, noted that all first creations are either intended or unintended. With respect to this, it implies that some creations in mind are a function of the influences within or around the context of functioning. These influences could emerge from people, situations and/or circumstances within or around their contexts (Dede, 2006). Covey (2012) further states that when other people, situations or circumstances influence creativity, a default creation is manifested which resonates with the realities around the individual's context. However, Covey notes that the first creation could also be an output of purposefulness which requires the leader's intentionality to break out of the current realities in order to create the preferred future. This is therefore to submit that purposefulness is required in tackling security challenges. Hence, principals must get back to work, create vision and mission statements that define the future they prefer for their schools regardless of the present and future possible contextual realities.

2. **Ensuring professional development of teachers**

Arogundade (2019) examined the relationships between staff development, promotion and teacher's job satisfaction and recommended that the government should organise continuous development programmes for teachers in secondary schools. In congruence with this assertion, it is imperative that the government should create a financial support system to allow school principals to undertake professional development programs that answer the what, why and how of their contextual realities. In line with these thoughts, we argue that with or without government support, principals should ensure teachers are given up to date security training to mitigate insecurity challenges when it comes beckoning.

3. **Fostering normative relationships with all members of the school community**

Principals' use of different means to ensure normative relationships is established within the school communities in which they lead. In support of this, Bredeson, Klar and Johansson (2011) state that principals have used incentives in the form of gifts, encouraging words to foster normative relationships to heights of practical demonstration of love from learners and teachers to principal and vice versa. This may be perceived to be a way to constitute a force that no level of insecurity can break. Thus, goes the saying, "together we stand, divided we fall". Principals must go beyond all challenges to make sure they build synergy within such that there will exist normative relationships from learners to learners, learners to teachers and principal. With such normative relationships in place within the school community, it becomes easy for everyone to stand up together to defend their own from security hazards when it rises against them.

4. Dealing with internal and external influences

According to Dede (2006), the context where an individual exists will certainly generate specific influences that would necessitate a response. The ability to respond effectively to the demand of the context is referred to as proactivity, which weaves around the leader's awareness and imagination to be able to do the needful that aid the creation of the preferred future (Adebiyi, 2016; Spears, 2010; Goleman, 2009). In mapping out the path to the future, the leader needs to create a win/win situation (Covey, 2012). The leader has to be able to think about how everyone within the community of his/her leadership (learners, teachers, and parents) will benefit from the imagined future. Adebiyi (2016) argued that for principals to be able to overcome the challenging realities, they need to think differently and act differently. We, therefore, call out principals to think towards building synergy with other principals in their geo-political zones to develop security monitor app that can work on their phones, tabs, and personal computers, which can provide real-time information about security realities around them. The paper further challenges principals to establish bridges of productive relationships with their host communities to develop a vigilante group as a response team to security challenges in their geo-political zones.

5. Managing the school's resources

Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) has been discovered as a panacea to get schools out of financial constraints to establishing stable and sustainable school conditions (Hallinger, 2008). To tackle the menace of insecurity, there is a need for adequate funding. Thus, going with the context-response leadership theory, school principals must be dynamic enough to create businesses that will generate a steady flow of income outside school fees, out of which may be dedicated to

solving security problems. Moreover, principals should be able to drive a pool of financial aid from locals, that is, within their community towards providing the requirements to have a safe school environment.

Significance and Conclusion

This article derives its strength from conceptual and theoretical perspectives as a panacea to mitigate insecurity in Nigeria. Although most articles have proposed solutions to insecurity, the uniqueness of this article is drawn from its approach in theorising insecurity and principals' roles through the lens of context-responsive leadership theory and engage its principles as possible solutions to insecurity in Nigeria. Besides, the strength of this paper stems from its call for transformation across the entire school community, which snowballed into the host community in a bid to undertake the monster of insecurity in Nigeria schools. However, the weakness of this paper is the inability to articulate how principals will effectively carry out these roles in order to create safer schools. Nevertheless, this weakness has opened space for which other scholars can explore further. In conclusion, this paper contributes to the ongoing debate on tackling security issues in Nigeria using education as the tool. In doing so, we hereby conclude that if principals take on the role of managing the school's vision, mission and direction, ensuring teachers professional development in handling security matters, foster normative relationship across the entire school community, deal with internal and external influences and manage the school's resources, there may be an excellent chance to combat the menace of insecurity before it overruns Nigeria educational space.

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