

## **PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF HEADMASTERS' CONTINGENCY AND LAISSEZ-FAIRE LEADERSHIP STYLE ON TEACHERS' JOB PERFORMANCE IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN BENUE STATE.**

**OSINDELE Abosede Oluwakemi and Dr. OGABA O. George**

Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi, Benue State  
Department of Educational Administration and Planning

**Abstract:** *This study investigates the perceived influence of headmasters' contingency and laissez-faire leadership styles on teachers' job performance in primary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. Recognizing the pivotal role that primary education plays in individual growth and societal development, the research examines how different leadership approaches can enhance educational outcomes. The study employs a survey research design, targeting a sample of 390 teachers and headmasters from 2,755 primary schools. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. The findings reveal that headmasters' contingency leadership style significantly influences teachers' job performance by providing adaptive support tailored to individual needs. Conversely, the laissez-faire leadership style is shown to negatively impact teachers' effectiveness due to minimal guidance and supervision, leading to decreased motivation and job satisfaction. The results underscore the importance of effective leadership in enhancing teachers' performance, recommending that headmasters adopt flexible leadership strategies while avoiding hands-off approaches. Additionally, it is recommended that headmasters adopt a contingency leadership style, adjusting their approach based on specific situations and the individual needs of teachers to enhance school effectiveness and teacher performance. By being responsive and flexible, headmasters can identify and address the unique challenges that teachers face, such as differing classroom dynamics, resource constraints, or varying student needs. This tailored approach enables headmasters to foster a more supportive and motivating environment, empowering teachers to perform at their best and adapt to changing circumstances. In turn, this can lead to improved teaching quality, increased job satisfaction, and a more positive school culture, ultimately benefiting student learning outcomes and overall school success.*

**Keywords:** *Headmasters Contingency, Laissez-faire Leadership style, Teachers Job Performance.*

### **Background to the Study**

Primary education in Nigeria forms a vital foundation for both societal advancement and individual growth, marking the initial phase of formal schooling, typically encompassing the first three grades. During this stage, children are introduced to fundamental academic principles and life skills, supporting their cognitive, social, and emotional development through a thoughtfully structured curriculum that includes basic literacy, numeracy, and engaging, hands-on learning experiences (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2017; Ogunsola, 2019). Teachers utilize varied instructional approaches to address

diverse learning preferences, ensuring all students can engage meaningfully (Okebukola, 2020). During this stage, students also build social skills and values, such as teamwork, respect, and responsibility (Ofoegbu, 2014). Extracurricular activities play a further role in uncovering and nurturing individual talents, building self-confidence, and fostering a sense of achievement (Oluwatayo, 2018). Given the importance of this stage, enhancing the quality and accessibility of primary education in Nigeria is essential for creating an educated, skilled, and prosperous society, well-equipped to tackle socio-economic challenges and drive sustainable development (Obanya, 2014; Uwaifo & Udu, 2016). Achieving these goals is facilitated by effective leadership from headmasters, which supports efficient and impactful school administration (Ejimofofor, 2017; Adeola, 2018).

The headmaster's leadership style encompasses the methods and strategies used to guide, influence, and manage the school community, involving decisions, goal-setting, staff motivation, conflict resolution, and the promotion of a positive school culture (Ejimofofor, 2017; Abu & Makinde, 2019). Key leadership styles include autocratic (where decisions are made unilaterally), democratic (where decision-making is collaborative), transformational (which inspires and motivates change), transactional (focused on rewards and consequences), and laissez-faire (characterized by minimal supervision and high staff autonomy) (Bass & Avolio, 2023; Ejimofofor, 2017). Effective headmasters often integrate aspects of multiple styles to meet the unique needs of their school, significantly impacting teachers' job performance (Akinola, 2021).

Teachers' job performance refers to the degree of effectiveness and efficiency with which they fulfil their professional responsibilities within the educational setting. This includes delivering instructional content clearly and engagingly, managing classroom behavior, assessing and evaluating student progress, providing constructive feedback, and cultivating a positive and inclusive learning environment (Ofoegbu, 2014; Okon & Ali, 2020). High performance also encompasses continual professional growth, teamwork with colleagues, effective communication with students and parents, and the ability to inspire and motivate students to reach their academic potential (Adeyemi & Adeyinka, 2017). This study will examine the influence of headmasters' democratic and autocratic leadership styles on teachers' job performance in primary schools.

Contingency leadership style refers to a flexible leadership approach where the leader adapts their style based on the specific situation, task, and the needs of their team members (Abu, 2018; Fiedler, 2019). This style is rooted in the belief that there is no single best way to lead; instead, effective leadership depends on various internal and external factors, such as the nature of the task, the maturity and competence of team members, and the organizational environment (Adeola, 2018). The contingency leadership style of headmasters in primary schools can have a highly beneficial impact on teachers' job performance, as they adapt their approach to meet the unique needs of individual teachers and situations, providing personalized support, addressing specific challenges, and fostering a resilient and adaptive school environment

(Oluwatayo, 2018; Ejimofor, 2017). This leads to higher job satisfaction, improved morale, better overall job performance, and continuous improvement in teaching practices and student outcomes, ultimately promoting a tailored and effective leadership that supports teachers in performing their duties to the best of their abilities (Obanya, 2014).

Headmasters' laissez-faire leadership style is characterized by a hands-off approach where the headmaster provides minimal guidance, direction, or supervision to teachers (Bass & Avolio, 2023; Ejimofor, 2017). In this style, headmasters delegate decision-making authority and responsibility to teachers, allowing them significant autonomy in managing their classrooms, curriculum, and instructional methods (Akinola, 2021). The headmaster typically intervenes only when necessary, preferring to let teachers operate independently (Ogunsola, 2019). The laissez-faire leadership style of headmasters in primary schools can have both positive and negative effects on teachers' job performance. Experienced and self-motivated teachers may appreciate the autonomy to innovate and adapt their teaching methods, leading to higher job satisfaction and morale (Uwaifo & Udu, 2016). However, teachers who require more guidance and support may struggle without clear direction, leading to inconsistencies in teaching quality and difficulties in identifying areas for improvement (Okebukola, 2020). The effectiveness of this style depends on individual teachers' levels of experience and self-motivation, requiring a balance between autonomy and accountability to maintain high teaching standards (Abu, 2018). Against this background, the researcher is investigating the perceived influence of headmasters' contingency and laissez-faire leadership styles on teachers' job performance in primary schools in Benue State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The effectiveness of primary education in Nigeria is critical for societal advancement and individual growth, as it lays the foundation for children's academic and life skills development. However, despite its significance, there are persistent challenges in ensuring high-quality educational outcomes in primary schools, particularly in Benue State. One critical factor contributing to these challenges is the leadership style of headmasters, which can significantly influence teachers' job performance.

Headmasters play a pivotal role in shaping the school environment through their leadership styles, including contingency and laissez-faire approaches. While a contingency leadership style allows headmasters to adapt their strategies based on the specific needs of teachers and the educational context, the laissez-faire leadership style often results in minimal guidance and supervision, potentially hindering teachers' effectiveness. This raises important questions about how these contrasting leadership styles impact teachers' motivation, job satisfaction, and overall performance in delivering quality education to students.

Moreover, the variation in teachers' experiences and their individual needs complicates the effectiveness of these leadership styles. Experienced teachers may thrive under a laissez-faire approach, benefiting from the autonomy to innovate, while less experienced or less self-motivated teachers may struggle without the necessary support and direction. This discrepancy

indicates a need for further investigation into how headmasters can best utilize their leadership styles to foster an environment that supports all teachers, regardless of their experience level.

Consequently, the problem this study seeks to address is the perceived influence of headmasters' contingency and laissez-faire leadership styles on teachers' job performance in primary schools in Benue State. By exploring this relationship, the research aims to identify effective leadership practices that can enhance teachers' performance, thereby improving the overall quality of primary education in the region. Understanding these dynamics is essential for informing policy and practice, ultimately contributing to the development of a more skilled and capable workforce equipped to tackle the socio-economic challenges facing Nigerian society.

### **Objective of the Study**

The objective of the study is to investigate the perceived influence of headmasters' contingency and laissez-faire leadership style on teachers' job performance in primary schools in Benue State. Specifically the study sought to:

1. Find out the influence of headmasters' contingency leadership style on teachers' job performance in primary schools.
2. Investigate the influence of headmasters' laissez-faire leadership style on teachers' job performance in primary schools.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. In what ways does headmasters' contingency leadership style influence teachers' job performance in primary schools?
2. What is the influence of headmasters' laissez-faire leadership style on teachers' job performance in primary schools?

### **Statement of Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Headmasters 'contingency leadership style has no significant influence on teachers' job performance in primary schools.
2. Headmasters' laissez-faire leadership style has no significant influence on teachers' job performance in primary schools.

## Methodology

This study applied a survey research design to examine how leadership styles impact teachers' job performance in primary schools across Benue State. The survey method was chosen to enable data collection from a sample that represents the larger population, allowing generalization of findings. Citing Emaikwu (2015), the study notes that surveys provide quantitative data from diverse respondents, offering advantages like standardized responses and cost-effective data collection.

The target population included 15,012 teachers and headmasters from 2,755 primary schools in Benue State (SUBEB, 2018). Using Taro Yamane's formula, a sample of 390 teachers and headmasters was selected through a multistage sampling approach, ensuring diverse representation across schools and local government areas. This sampling method accommodated practical constraints, making it feasible to gather data effectively from a smaller yet representative group.

Data were collected using a self-structured questionnaire titled "Headmasters' Leadership Styles and Teachers' Job Performance Questionnaire" (HLSTJPQ), designed on a 4-point scale. The instrument's validity was reviewed by educational experts, while a pilot test confirmed reliability with an overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.88. Five research assistants with tertiary education qualifications were trained to assist with questionnaire distribution, enhancing the return rate and response accuracy through direct delivery.

For data analysis, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were applied to answer the research questions. The study used the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) goodness-of-fit test to assess hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level, with results indicating the degree of leadership's influence on job performance. The collaborative use of research assistants and a direct distribution method streamlined data collection, making this survey design an efficient tool for understanding educational leadership in Benue State.

## RESULTS

### 4.1. Descriptive Analysis

**Research Question one:** In what ways does headmasters' contingency leadership style influence teachers' job performance in primary schools?.

**Table 1 :Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on Influence Headmasters' Contingency Leadership Style Teachers' Job Performance**

Item No	Items Description	SA	A	D	SD	N	$\bar{X}$	Std	Decision
1	Teachers appreciate the flexibility of a contingency leadership style in addressing their needs.	120	5	138	106	369	2.38	1.21	Agree
2	Headmasters using a contingency leadership style improve teachers' job performance through situational adjustments.	232	137	-	-	369	3.63	0.45	Disagree
3	Headmasters' contingency leadership style effectively addresses varying teacher needs.	51	203	115	-	369	2.83	0.65	Disagree
4	The flexibility of a contingency leadership style improves teachers' adaptability.	158	187	158	24	369	3.36	0.61	Disagree
5	The contingency leadership style helps headmasters respond appropriately to different teaching conditions.	134	197	38	-	369	3.26	0.64	Agree
<b>Cluster Mean/Standard Deviation</b>							<b>3.09</b>	<b>0.72</b>	<b>Agree</b>

**Source: Field Work 2024**

Table 1 indicates that respondents generally agree (mean = 3.09, SD = 0.72) that headmasters' contingency leadership style positively influences teachers' job performance in primary schools, with particular appreciation for its flexibility and effectiveness in addressing varying needs and teaching conditions.

**Research Question Two:** What is the influence of headmasters' laissez-faire leadership style on teachers' job performance in primary schools?

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondents on the influence of headmasters' laissez-faire leadership style on teachers' job performance**

Item No	Description	SA	A	D	SD	N	$\bar{X}$	Std	Decision
6	Headmasters' laissez-faire leadership style allows teachers significant freedom in their roles.	120	5	138	106	369	3.24	0.65	Disagree
7	Teachers' job performance is impacted by the minimal intervention of headmasters with a laissez-faire approach.	232	137	-	-	369	2.75	1.07	Strongly Agree
8	The laissez-faire leadership style leads to decreased guidance and support for teachers	51	203	115	-	369	2.43	0.62	Agree
9	Teachers experience positive outcomes from the laissez-faire leadership style.	117	49	108	16	369	2.49	0.82	Agree
10	Headmasters' laissez-faire style fosters independence increased job performance.	158	187	24	-	369	2.41	1.05	Agree
<b>Cluster Mean/Standard Deviation</b>							<b>2.67</b>	<b>0.84</b>	<b>Agree</b>

**Source: Field Work 2024**

Table 4 demonstrates that respondents generally agree (mean = 2.67, SD = 0.84) that headmasters' laissez-faire leadership style influences teachers' job performance in primary schools, highlighting both significant freedom and decreased guidance, with mixed outcomes on job performance and independence.

**4.2.2 Testing Hypotheses**

Chi-square was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level of significance

**Hypothesis Two:** Headmasters' contingency leadership style has no significant influence on teachers' job performance in primary schools.

**Table 3: Chi-Square Test on influence Headmasters' contingency leadership style on teachers' job performance in Primary School.**

Response Options	Fo	Fe	a	df	$\chi^2$ -cal	Asymp. Sig.	Remark
Strongly Agree	91	92.3					
Agree	196	92.3					
Disagree	7	92.3	0.05	3	115.607a	0.000	S, Reject H <sub>0</sub>
Disagree	75	92.3					
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>369</b>						

The chi-square value is 115.607 with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. This result leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>), indicating a significant influence of headmasters' contingency leadership style on teachers' job performance in primary schools in Benue State.

**Hypothesis two:** Headmasters' laissez-faire leadership style has no significant influence on teachers' job performance in primary schools.

**Table 4: Chi-Square Test on influence Headmasters' Laissez-Faire leadership Style on Teachers' Job Performance in Primary School.**

Response Options	Fo	Fe	a	df	$\chi^2$ -cal	Asymp. Sig.	Remark
Strongly Agree	12	92.3					
Agree	199	92.3					
Disagree	146	92.3	0.05	3	294.469a	0.000	S, Reject H <sub>0</sub>
Strongly Disagree	12	92.3					
<b>Total (N)</b>	<b>369</b>						

The chi-square value is 294.469 with a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. This result leads to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>), indicating a significant influence of headmasters' laissez-faire leadership style on teachers' job performance in primary schools in Benue State.



## Discussion of Findings

In this study, two null hypotheses were formulated and tested to understand the impact of various leadership styles on teachers' job performance. The findings are discussed below:

The first finding reveals that a contingency leadership style has a substantial impact on teachers' job performance. This approach, which adapts leadership strategies to specific situations and individual needs, aligns with the belief that flexibility in management enhances employee satisfaction and productivity. Consistent with this result, Oladele (2020) found a significant positive correlation between contingency leadership and job performance, suggesting that when headmasters tailor their leadership approach to meet the unique needs and challenges of their teachers, it fosters a more responsive and supportive environment. Further supporting this view, Nwokocha (2022) observed that contingency leadership effectively addresses the diverse needs of teachers, leading to increased motivation, commitment, and overall performance. By adjusting leadership styles as required, headmasters can ensure that teachers feel recognized and supported, enhancing their ability to perform effectively in various classroom scenarios.

The second finding highlights a notable impact of laissez-faire leadership style on teachers' job performance, suggesting that minimal supervision and a hands-off approach can adversely affect teacher productivity and effectiveness. Agbo (2020) identified a strong predictive relationship between laissez-faire leadership and job performance, specifically noting the negative consequences associated with this style. According to Agbo, when headmasters provide limited direction, support, or feedback, it can create a sense of disengagement among teachers, often leading to diminished job satisfaction and reduced motivation. Yusuf (2022) further corroborates this perspective, showing that laissez-faire leadership results in decreased teacher performance due to the lack of clear expectations, structure, and guidance from the headmaster. This absence of active leadership can hinder teachers' ability to make informed decisions and efficiently manage classroom activities, ultimately impacting student outcomes and the overall school environment.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that contingency leadership and laissez-faire leadership styles have a significant influence on teachers' job performance in primary schools in Benue State, indicating that effective leadership is crucial for enhancing educational outcomes.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations have been proposed to enhance teachers' job performance in primary schools:

1. Adopting a contingency leadership style, where headmasters adjust their approach based on specific situations and the individual needs of teachers, can greatly enhance school effectiveness and teacher performance. By being responsive and flexible, headmasters can identify and address the unique challenges that teachers

face, such as differing classroom dynamics, resource constraints, or varying student needs. This tailored approach enables headmasters to foster a more supportive and motivating environment, empowering teachers to perform at their best and adapt to changing circumstances. In turn, this can lead to improved teaching quality, increased job satisfaction, and a more positive school culture, ultimately benefiting student learning outcomes and overall school success.

2. Avoiding the laissez-faire leadership style, characterized by minimal guidance and support, is crucial, as it often leads to diminished teacher performance and a lack of accountability. Teachers under laissez-faire leadership may feel unsupported, uncertain about expectations, and isolated in their efforts to manage classroom challenges. This absence of leadership structure can create an environment where teachers struggle to stay motivated, address student needs effectively, or maintain consistent performance standards. Therefore, it is essential for headmasters to provide clear direction, regular feedback, and ongoing support to foster a structured, collaborative, and goal-oriented work environment. This approach not only helps teachers feel more valued and engaged but also enhances their effectiveness in the classroom, contributing to higher job satisfaction and better educational outcomes for students.

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