

ASSESSMENT OF SPORTS ADMINISTRATORS' DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP STYLES ON ATHLETES' PERFORMANCE IN FEDERAL COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN NORTH-WEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the assessment of sports administrators' democratic leadership styles on athletes' performance in federal colleges of education in North-west, Nigeria. The research aimed to determine how democratic leadership style impacts athletes' performance in federal colleges of education in north-west, Nigeria. The research question and hypothesis were formulated in line with the objective to guide the study. Descriptive survey research design was used. Two hundred and sixty (260) sports administrators/ sports officials, coaches, and athletes from five federal colleges of education have formed the population of this study. Multi-stage and proportionate sampling techniques were used to select a sample size of one hundred and fifty-five (155) respondents. Sports administrators' democratic leadership styles questionnaire (SADLSQ) which yielded reliability indices of 0.87 was used as the instrument for data collection. Mean and standard deviations were used to analyze the research question while, chi-square was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed a significant relationship between democratic leadership and high athlete performance. A democratic leadership style was recommended to enhance athlete motivation and performance.

Key words: Assessment, Democratic Leadership Styles, Sports Administrators, Athletes Performance

Introduction

Leadership is conceived as a process where one or more persons influence a group of people to move in a certain direction. The word leadership has been used in various aspects of human endeavour such as politics, business, academics, social works, and sports inclusive. Akpala, (2017) argued that the degree to which the individual exhibits leadership traits depends not only on his characteristics and personal abilities, but also on the characteristics of the situation and environment in which he finds himself.

Globally, leadership in sports administration has garnered increasing attention due to its implications for athletes' development, organizational success, revenue generation, employment, increase income as well as the overall promotion and development of sport. Globalization of sports has necessitated effective leadership to navigate complex challenges such as cultural diversity, technological advancements, and commercialization. Professionals in sports administrations must adapt their leadership styles to foster innovation, collaboration,

and sustainable development within and outside their organizations (Chelladurai & Haggerty, 2016).

Beerel (2019) opined that democratic leadership plays a critical role in inspiring and encouraging individual athletes to work toward shared objectives. Enhanced organizational performance and athletes' happiness have been associated with transformational leadership, which is defined by vision, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and personalized consideration. Leaders employing this style retain ultimate decision-making authority but actively seek input from team members to ensure diverse perspectives are considered (Northouse, 2018). In sports administration, this approach is particularly effective, as it engages athletes, coaches, and staff in decisions related to training, strategies, and team dynamics, enhancing morale, motivation, and trust (Riemer, 2021). By valuing the contributions of all stakeholders, democratic leadership promotes a sense of ownership and commitment which can lead to improved performance and team cohesion (Gastil, 2021). This style also encourages creativity and innovation, as diverse input often results in novel solutions to challenges, though leaders must balance inclusivity with timely decision-making to avoid inefficiencies (Hulles, 2021).

In the context of sports administration, democratic leadership plays a critical role in managing the complex responsibilities of governance, policy-making, and resource allocation (Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2023). By fostering collaboration among coaches, athletes, and administrative staff, this leadership style creates a unified team environment that enhances morale and decision quality (Fletcher & Arnold, 2019). The participative nature of democratic leadership empowers team members, encouraging them to contribute innovative ideas that can improve training techniques, athlete performance, and fan engagement (Nullie, 2020). Additionally, involving stakeholders in decision-making reduces the risk of biased or uninformed choices and increases accountability, as team members feel more invested in the outcomes (Chelladurai, 2020; Akinyemi & Ojuloge, 2021). This approach also supports the development of leadership skills among team members, creating a robust pipeline for future organizational success (Cotterill, 2019 & Fransen, 2021).

The democratic leadership style in sports administration is characterized by several key features, including participative decision-making, open communication, empowerment, and a focus on team development. Leaders encourage athletes and staff to contribute to decisions, fostering trust and a positive team culture (Riemer, 2021 & Northouse, 2018). Empowerment grants athletes autonomy, boosting their confidence and motivation, while a focus on development enhances individual and team capabilities (Carson et al., 2021 & Oshaghi, 2021). Flexibility and adaptability allow democratic leaders to respond to changing circumstances, and consensus-building ensures decisions are widely supported, promoting team unity (Gastil, 2021 & Jago, 2019). By encouraging creativity and innovation, this leadership style enables sports organizations to stay competitive through novel strategies and continuous improvement (Duan et al., 2018). Collectively, these characteristics contribute to a dynamic, inclusive, and high-performing team environment in sports administration.

In Africa, sports are more than just recreational activities; they play a vital role in fostering

social cohesion, promoting physical and mental health, and enhancing international recognition and diplomacy. Through sports, communities are brought together, young people are engaged in meaningful activities, and nations gain pride and visibility on the global stage. Despite these important benefits, sports administration across many African countries is confronted with a number of significant challenges. These include limited financial and material resources, inadequate or poorly maintained sporting infrastructure, lack of strategic planning, and issues related to poor governance and corruption (Segun, 2018). Countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, and Cameroon each experience these challenges to varying degrees, which often hinder the development of sports and the full realization of their athletes' potential. Many talented athletes remain under-supported and underdeveloped due to these systemic weaknesses. In this context, effective leadership becomes essential. Strong, visionary, and transparent leadership is needed to reform sports institutions, attract investment, manage resources efficiently, and implement policies that will nurture talent and ensure sustainable development in the sports sector. Therefore, leadership plays a key role not only in overcoming current challenges but also in unlocking the vast potential of sports to contribute to societal growth and national development across the African continent.

Performance in every organization largely depends on labour productivity, as human labour is universally recognized as one of the most essential resources needed for any organization to thrive. It has been widely acknowledged that the success of many productivity efforts is strongly linked to the quality of leadership guiding the organization (Momoh, 2017). In other words, effective leadership plays a critical role in shaping the direction, motivation, and overall performance of employees or team members. This is particularly relevant in the context of sports administration, where leadership styles can significantly influence the development and success of sports programs and athletes. Recognizing this, the present study focuses on examining the impact of the democratic leadership style in sports administration, specifically within some selected federal colleges of education in the North-west region of Nigeria. The study seeks to understand how democratic leadership, characterized by inclusiveness, participation and shared decision-making, affects the administration of sports in these institutions. By doing so, it aims to provide insights into how leadership practices can be improved to enhance performance, promote teamwork, and achieve better outcomes in sports development at the institutional level.

Statement of the Problem

Effective leadership is indispensable for the successful operation of any organization, including federal colleges of education in Nigeria. Within the context of sports administration, the presence of an effective leadership style plays a crucial role in driving progress and achieving organizational goals. In these institutions, strong leadership serves as a catalyst for fostering excellence, encouraging active participation, and ensuring the holistic development of students through sports (Adekunle & Ahmed, 2021). A well-implemented leadership style contributes to the creation of structured and well-organized sports programs that benefit all stakeholders involved. It ensures that resources are allocated efficiently, decisions are made transparently,

and a positive and inclusive environment is nurtured for coaches, athletes, administrators, and students alike. Moreover, effective leadership helps in motivating staff and students, resolving conflicts, setting clear objectives, and aligning sports initiatives with broader educational goals. By laying a solid foundation for planning, coordination, and execution of sports activities, leadership in these colleges not only enhances athletic performance but also contributes to the overall development of character, discipline, and teamwork among students.

Sports administration within educational institutions, such as federal colleges of education, should provide an environment that fosters the holistic development of athletes, balancing academic pursuits with sporting excellence. Effective leadership is expected to create structured training programs, provide motivational support, and ensure equitable access to resources, thereby optimizing athletes' performance (Northouse, 2022). Ideally, sports administrators should adopt leadership style that is inclusive, supportive, and tailored to meet the diverse needs of student-athletes. The right leadership approach can build athletes' confidence, enhance teamwork, and promote a culture of continuous improvement and resilience, which are essential for achieving peak performance (Horn, 2023).

However, today in Nigerian tertiary institutions, especially in our federal colleges of education, athletics and sports performances motivations to perform better in sports seems to be very inadequate. Lack of funding, limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, bureaucratic inefficiency, lack of motivation, improper decision making among others, limits athlete and sports performance in their college. This may not be unconnected to the leadership style adopted by sport administrators in the institutions.

Moreover, Chukwuma and Halima (2018) further noted that in Nigerian colleges, several prevalent challenges hinder effective management and development. Inadequate funding and resource allocation, constrain infrastructure development, coaching quality, and athlete support system seems to be among the challenges that sports organization in the federal colleges of education in Nigeria are facing. The research observed that, administrative inefficiencies, such as bureaucratic red tape and lack of transparent governance structures, impede decision-making processes and hinder the implementation of long-term strategies in sport administration in Nigeria colleges of education. In light of these challenges, this study seeks to assess the impact of sports administrators' leadership styles on athletes' performance in federal colleges of education in North-west, Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

This study aimed to assess of democratic leadership styles on athletes' performance among federal college of education in North- west, Nigeria. Specially, the study intended to:

1. Assess the effectiveness of democratic leadership style adopted by the sports administrators on athletes' performance in federal colleges of education in North- west, Nigeria.

Research Question

Based on the objective, this research question was raised:

1. What are the impacts of democratic leadership style adopted by sports administrators on athletes' performance in federal colleges of education in North-west, Nigeria?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant impact of the democratic leadership style adopted by sports administrators on athletes' performance federal colleges of education in North-west, Nigeria.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to thoroughly explore the impact of democratic leadership styles on sports administration within selected federal colleges of education in the North-west, Nigeria. This design was chosen to enable the collection of data from a large population in a non-intrusive manner, providing a clear picture of the current practices and perceptions among sports personnel. The population comprised 260 sports personnel across five institutions, representing a diverse range of experiences and perspectives in sports management. To ensure representativeness and minimize bias, a two-stage random sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 155 respondents, based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table.

The research instrument used for data collection was a self-developed questionnaire titled sports administrators' democratic leadership styles questionnaire (SADLSQ) designed to capture relevant variables associated with leadership styles and athletic performance. The instrument's content and internal consistency validity was verified by three professionals in the field of sports administration and educational measurement, ensuring its appropriateness for the study context. Furthermore, a pilot study was conducted to test for reliability, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.87, which, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2013) indicates high internal consistency and reliability of the instrument. To ensure efficient and accurate data collection, trained research assistants were engaged to distribute the questionnaires, and a high response rate of 98.1% was achieved, with 152 out of 155 questionnaires successfully retrieved and deemed valid for analysis. This strong return rate not only reflects the commitment of the respondents but also enhances the validity and generalizability of the findings.

The collected data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, including the use of mean and standard deviation to answer the research question. These descriptive tools helped provide a comprehensive overview of the data trends and patterns. To test the formulated hypothesis, particularly the effect of democratic leadership styles on athletes' performance, the Chi-Square statistical test was employed. This test was chosen due to its effectiveness in evaluating relationships between categorical variables. All hypothesis testing was conducted at the 0.05

significance level, using SPSS version 22, ensuring a robust and systematic approach to data analysis and interpretation. This methodological rigor provided a strong foundation for drawing reliable conclusions and formulating practical recommendations.

Results

Table 1: Impact of Democratic Leadership Style on Athlete Performance

Statement	Mean	SD
Our Coach involves our team members in decision-making processes that enable us to perform better.	3.01	0.88
I feel motivated to perform better when my opinions are considered by my coach.	3.09	0.86
The coach encourages open communication among the team members.	3.17	0.83
I am more satisfied with my role in the team under a democratic leadership style.	3.13	0.81
The involvement of athletes in decision-making positively impacts our overall team performance.	3.13	0.84
My motivation to train and perform is higher when the coach practices a democratic leadership style.	3.14	0.82

Table 1 illustrates the perceived impact of a democratic leadership style on athlete performance, based on mean scores from a survey. The highest-rated statement, with a mean of 3.17, indicates that coaches encouraging open communication among team members is strongly perceived to enhance performance. Other statements, with means ranging from 3.01 to 3.14, suggest moderate agreement that democratic practices such as involving athletes in decision-making (3.01), considering their opinions (3.09), and fostering role satisfaction (3.13) and motivation (3.14) positively influence individual and team performance. Overall, the data reflects a consistent perception that democratic leadership fosters better athlete engagement and performance, with open communication being the most impactful aspect.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant impact of the democratic leadership style adopted by sports administrators on athletes' performance in federal colleges of education in North-west, Nigeria.

Table 2: Chi-square statistics on democratic leadership style and athletes performance

Statement	Chi-square	df	P-value	Decision
Impact of democratic leadership style to be adopted by sport administrators on athletes' performance among federal college of education in North-west, Nigeria.	31.22	7	0.000	Significant

Table 2 revealed the investigated the impact of adopting a democratic leadership style by sports administrators on athletes' performance in federal colleges of education in North-west, Nigeria, revealing a significant effect with a chi-square value of 31.22, degrees of freedom (df) of 7, and a p-value of 0.000, indicating that the democratic leadership style positively influences athletes' performance.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings from the study indicate a positive responses among athletes regarding the impact of democratic leadership on their performance, with open communication being the most influential factor. This aligns with the work of Gastil (2021), who emphasized that democratic leadership fosters an environment where team members feel valued, leading to enhanced engagement and performance. Similarly, the study by Ohio and Asherine (2019) supports these findings, highlighting that democratic leadership positively influences team dynamics and performance by encouraging athlete participation in decision-making processes. The involvement of athletes in decision-making, as noted in the current study, resonates with Adeyemi and Popoola's (2017) research, which found that participative leadership in Nigerian sports administration enhances team cohesion and individual motivation.

The significant effect of democratic leadership on athlete performance as evidenced by the chi-square analysis, is consistent with the findings of Mathias and Xie (2020) which reported that democratic leadership styles in sports settings contribute to improved performance outcomes by fostering a sense of ownership among athletes. This is further corroborated by Lippitt (2021) who noted that democratic leadership in sports administration promotes athlete satisfaction and commitment as key drivers of performance. The perception that open communication enhances performance is in line with Nabara and Ajigir's (2017) study, which highlighted the importance of communication styles in leadership for building trust and collaboration within teams.

Moreover, the motivation derived from considering athletes' opinions, as observed in the study, aligns with Carson et al. (2021) who found that shared leadership practices, a hallmark of democratic leadership, enhances team performance by empowering individuals. This is further supported by Awoseila and Ihejirika (2019) who noted that democratic leadership in educational institutions increases student engagement, a principle applicable to athletes in sports settings. The findings also align with Chelladurai (2020) that leadership styles promoting athlete involvement lead to higher levels of role satisfaction and team cohesion, critical for sustained performance.

The consistent positive perception of democratic leadership's impact on motivation and role satisfaction in this study is in agreement with Cotterill's (2019) research, which underscored the role of democratic leadership in fostering a supportive team environment. Similarly, Akinyemi and Ojuloge (2021) revealed that democratic leadership enhances organizational commitment, which translates to improved performance in sports contexts. The study by Li and Wang (2021) further supports the findings of this study as it rightly revealed that demonstrating democratic leadership strengthens team cohesion, a factor that significantly contributes to athlete performance. Lastly, the findings of this study are in line with Lewin et al. (2021) whose seminal work on leadership styles established that democratic approaches lead to higher group morale and productivity compared to autocratic styles, a principle that remains relevant in modern sports administration.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that a democratic leadership style significantly enhances athletes' performance in federal colleges of education in North-west, Nigeria. With a predominantly youthful and moderately experienced respondent group, the findings highlight that open communication, athlete involvement in decision-making, and consideration of their opinions foster greater motivation, role satisfaction, and team cohesion. The significant chi-square result confirms that democratic leadership practices create a supportive environment that positively impacts both individual and team performance. These insights suggest that sports administrators adopting inclusive and communicative leadership approaches can effectively drive athlete engagement and improve overall performance outcomes in educational sports settings.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and the conclusions drawn, the study recommended that athletes should be involved in the sports decision making so that it can promote open communication, and enhance teams' positive engagement and excellent output during the training and competition.

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