IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP STYLES ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN NSUKKA EDUCATION ZONE, ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated the impact of leadership styles on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State. Specifically, the purpose of the study was to determine how transformational, transactional, and autocratic leadership styles impact the implementation of educational policies in secondary schools. Three research questions guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The area of the study was Nsukka Education Zone, located in Enugu State, Nigeria. The study covered a total of 466 educational administrators in Nsukka Education Zone, comprising principals, vice principals, and heads of departments. Based on standard administrative structures, the population was proportionally distributed as 58 Principals, 116 Vice Principals, and 290 Heads of Departments to ensure fair representation. Since the population was considered accessible and manageable, no sampling was used; the entire population was studied. A researcher-developed instrument titled: *Leadership Styles and Educational Policy Implementation Questionnaire (LSEPIQ)* was employed for data collection. The instrument was face-validated by three experts in the Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu State. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.84, indicating that the instrument was highly reliable. Data were collected through direct administration of the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A decision rule of 2.50 on a 4-point Likert scale was adopted to determine agreement or disagreement. The findings of the study revealed that transformational and transactional leadership styles positively impacted the implementation of educational policies, while autocratic leadership style had minimal influence. The findings of the study also revealed that top-down decision-making and limited staff involvement hindered effective implementation. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that principals should adopt inclusive and collaborative leadership strategies to ensure successful policy implementation. The study contributed to knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the link between leadership styles and educational policy outcomes in secondary schools in Enugu State.

Keywords: Transformational leadership, transactional leadership, autocratic leadership, policy implementation, educational administration

Introduction

The role of leadership in the effective implementation of educational policies has become a central issue in contemporary educational discourse, especially within the context of developing countries such as Nigeria. Leadership is a key driver of organizational success, and in the education sector, it significantly shapes how policies are interpreted, adopted, and implemented across various administrative levels. According to Eze, Anyaogu, and Igwe (2020), the leadership style adopted by school administrators can either facilitate or

hinder the smooth execution of educational reforms, thereby affecting the attainment of national education goals. In Nigeria, the implementation of educational policies often encounters setbacks due to disconnect between policy design and on-the-ground leadership practices. While national policies such as the Universal Basic Education policy, the National Policy on Education, and teacher professional development frameworks are designed to improve educational quality, their impact at the local level is largely dependent on the leadership style of those responsible for operationalizing them. Iwuoha and Nwachukwu (2022) observed that authoritarian leadership styles tend to create resistance among staff, while participative styles enhance cooperation and ownership of policy goals.

The Nsukka Education Zone in Enugu State, comprising several secondary schools and educational institutions, provides a relevant setting for examining the practical impact of leadership styles on policy implementation. Educational leaders in this zone are tasked with interpreting state and national directives, mobilizing resources, and ensuring staff compliance all of which require leadership that is adaptive, inclusive, and policy-conscious. Inadequate or inappropriate leadership styles can result in partial implementation, policy distortion, or total failure of educational programs (Okeke and Onah, 2021). Effective leadership is the cornerstone of a functional and progressive educational system. In the context of educational policy implementation, leadership plays a pivotal role in interpreting policy objectives, mobilizing resources, influencing school climate, and guiding teachers and students toward shared educational goals. Leadership in education is not limited to the enforcement of regulations; rather, it involves the ability to inspire, support, and coordinate the efforts of various stakeholders to achieve strategic goals and promote a culture of continuous improvement. According to Ukeje, Okorie, and Nwagbara (2021), the quality of leadership within an educational institution directly affects staff morale, instructional quality, and overall institutional performance. School leaders, particularly principals and education administrators, serve as policy actors who must align school practices with national and state educational directives. Their ability to translate policy documents into practical, actionable strategies determines the extent to which policies are successfully implemented.

Furthermore, leadership controls how change is managed within the educational system. Ofojebe and Ezugwu (2019) noted that transformational leaders who engage staff in decision-making processes tend to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility among teachers, which increases the likelihood of effective policy implementation. On the other hand, leadership styles that are rigid and authoritarian often lead to low staff engagement, poor communication, and resistance to policy directives. The importance of leadership in education extends to ensuring accountability, building partnerships with communities, managing school resources, and promoting equity and inclusion. Nwachukwu and Ugwu (2020) emphasized that effective leadership is essential for achieving the goals of education as outlined in Nigeria's National Policy on Education. It ensures that educational reforms are not only introduced but also sustained through collaborative, data-driven, and student-centered approaches. In the specific context of Nsukka Education Zone, leadership quality among principals and administrators has a direct bearing on the operationalization of state and federal education policies. When leadership is proactive and strategic, it becomes a catalyst for policy success and educational excellence.

Leadership styles refer to the distinctive approaches school leaders adopt in guiding, motivating, and directing the behavior of staff and stakeholders toward achieving educational objectives. In the context of school administration, the leadership style

adopted by principals and educational managers shapes the institutional climate, determines the level of teacher engagement, and influences the implementation of educational reforms. Each style of leadership is defined by specific characteristics and elements that reflect how authority is exercised and how decisions are made. Transformational leadership is characterized by the ability of leaders to inspire, motivate, and intellectually stimulate subordinates to achieve beyond ordinary expectations. Bass and Avolio (2004) explained that transformational leaders possess idealized influence, provide inspirational motivation, offer individualized consideration, and encourage intellectual stimulation. Such leaders are visionary, emotionally intelligent, and focused on developing the capacity of teachers. The key elements of transformational leadership include shared vision, staff empowerment, innovation, and a strong sense of trust. In educational settings, this style fosters an inclusive and collaborative atmosphere where school policies are implemented with enthusiasm and ownership. Transactional leadership, by contrast, is based on structured exchanges between leaders and followers, where compliance with rules and performance expectations are rewarded, while deviations are penalized. Burns (1978) defined this style as an exchange process built on contingent reinforcement. Transactional leaders emphasize clarity of roles, supervision, and task completion. The characteristics of this style include goal setting, performance monitoring, reward systems, and corrective feedback. Key elements include rigid control mechanisms, rule enforcement, and top-down communication. While transactional leadership is effective for maintaining order and achieving specific targets, it often limits innovation and fails to build lasting commitment to change.

Autocratic leadership is a style where decision-making authority is centralized in the leader, with little or no input from subordinates. Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) observed that autocratic leaders exercise unilateral control, enforce strict discipline, and expect obedience from followers. This style is characterized by directive communication, limited delegation, and an emphasis on hierarchy and authority. Its core elements include non-consultative decision-making, enforcement of rigid policies, and minimal staff participation. Though it may facilitate quick decisions and maintain discipline, autocratic leadership often creates a hostile environment, reduces staff morale, and leads to resistance, especially during the implementation of reforms that require collaboration. Democratic leadership, also known as participative leadership, emphasizes collaboration, consultation, and inclusive decision-making. According to Eze, Anyaogu, and Igwe (2020), democratic leaders encourage open communication, involve staff in planning and problem-solving, and build consensus around institutional goals. This leadership style is marked by transparency, respect for diverse opinions, and shared responsibility. Its elements include team-building, committee-based structures, and frequent consultation with teachers and other stakeholders. In schools, democratic leadership creates an enabling environment for innovation, fosters a sense of belonging, and increases the likelihood of successful policy implementation. In practice, school leaders may exhibit a combination of these styles depending on the situation. However, the dominant leadership approach they adopt influences how policies are interpreted, accepted, and executed within their institutions. Transformational and democratic leadership styles are generally associated with positive institutional change and staff motivation, while transactional and autocratic styles are more effective in maintaining control and achieving compliance. For the purpose of this study, leadership styles in this study refer to the behavioral and decision-making patterns specifically transformational, transactional, autocratic, and democratic used by

school principals and administrators in Nsukka Education Zone to manage school affairs and influence the implementation of educational policies.

Educational policies are official frameworks and strategic plans developed by government agencies to guide decision-making, regulate operations, and promote progress in the education sector. These policies are intended to provide direction on issues such as curriculum design, teacher training, funding, access, quality, and accountability. According to Obanya (2004), educational policy is a set of guidelines that expresses national values and goals in the form of actionable strategies aimed at improving the educational system. Ocho (2005) argued that educational policy in Nigeria outlines both philosophical foundations and practical procedures for educational development. These policies may be comprehensive, such as the National Policy on Education, or specific, such as policies on inclusive education or information and communication technology in schools. Iroegbu and Udeh (2020) noted that in the Nigerian context, educational policies are often affected by poor implementation due to leadership inefficiency, lack of monitoring, and inadequate stakeholder involvement. Operationally, educational policies in this paper refer to the official educational directives issued by government authorities, which are intended for execution in secondary schools within Nsukka Education Zone. These policies require effective implementation mechanisms to ensure that the intended educational goals such as quality instruction, equitable access, and accountability are translated into actual practices within school environments.

Policy implementation is the process of putting into action the plans and provisions contained in policy documents. It includes the mobilization of resources, coordination of stakeholders, and adaptation of school practices to align with policy goals. Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983) defined policy implementation as the translation of governmental intentions into actual programs and practices. According to Olayemi (2016), successful implementation depends on leadership competence, adequate funding, clear communication, and support from implementers. Umezinwa and Nwachukwu (2021) emphasized that in Nigerian secondary schools, the process is often constrained by leadership gaps, lack of clarity, and inadequate infrastructure. In this context, policy implementation in this study refers to the extent to which school leaders in Nsukka Education Zone translate educational policies into actionable activities and procedures within their schools.

The theoretical foundation of this study is anchored in the transformational leadership theory, developed by James MacGregor Burns. Transformational leadership is defined as a leadership approach in which leaders inspire and motivate their followers to exceed their own self-interest for the sake of the organization, fostering higher levels of commitment, performance, and development. Burns (1978) explained that transformational leaders are characterized by their ability to influence others through a shared vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized support. Rather than relying on control and supervision, these leaders seek to engage followers through trust, enthusiasm, and shared goals. Transformational leadership consists of four key elements. The first is idealized influence, where leaders model ethical behavior and earn the respect and trust of their followers. The second is inspirational motivation, in which leaders articulate a clear and appealing vision that encourages followers to strive toward excellence. The third component, intellectual stimulation, involves promoting creativity and encouraging new ways of thinking and solving problems. Lastly, individualized consideration refers to the leader's attention to the personal and professional needs of each follower, providing mentorship and opportunities for growth. In educational settings, transformational

leadership has been shown to play a significant role in promoting effective school management and facilitating change. School leaders who exhibit transformational behaviors are more likely to create environments that support teacher development, student achievement, and policy reform. Through motivating teachers to align their efforts with institutional goals, transformational leaders make it easier to implement new educational policies and navigate institutional challenges. This theory is relevant to the present study in that it provides a framework for understanding how school leaders in Nsukka Education Zone can influence the successful implementation of educational policies through visionary, motivational, and participatory leadership practices. It emphasizes the role of leadership in fostering collaboration, commitment, and innovation factors that are essential for translating policy into practice in the dynamic environment of secondary education. These functions are shaped by different leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, and autocratic approaches, which determine how effectively school leaders mobilize staff, communicate goals, and drive policy implementation.

Leadership styles among principals and educational administrators in Nsukka Education Zone reflect a mixture of transformational, transactional, democratic, and autocratic approaches, depending on individual personality, administrative training, and the contextual realities of their school environments. While some school leaders exhibit strong participatory and visionary traits consistent with transformational and democratic leadership, others tend to rely on directive, control-based methods associated with autocratic or transactional styles. Among the common styles observed, democratic leadership is frequently practiced by principals who encourage collaboration, involve staff in decision-making, and promote open communication. This style has contributed significantly to team spirit, teacher motivation, and a supportive school climate in many institutions. Transformational leadership is also visible, particularly among principals who invest in teacher development, communicate a clear vision, and inspire staff to embrace innovation and policy reforms. These leaders often succeed in building trust, stimulating professional growth, and mobilizing staff for school improvement initiatives. On the other hand, transactional leadership is adopted by some principals who emphasize performance monitoring, adherence to rules, and compliance with administrative directives. While this style may ensure order and efficiency, it often lacks the motivational force required for long-term change. A few school leaders continue to apply autocratic leadership, especially in schools with a history of disciplinary challenges or limited staff capacity. This approach is characterized by top-down communication, limited staff input, and strict adherence to hierarchy. Although it may yield short-term control, it typically results in low morale, minimal initiative from staff, and resistance to change. The leadership style adopted by school administrators significantly influences staff motivation, communication, and resource management. Democratic and transformational leaders are more likely to maintain high staff morale, encourage innovation in teaching practices, and foster open dialogue. These leadership styles also support effective resource utilization by involving teachers in planning, budgeting, and prioritizing school needs. In contrast, transactional and autocratic styles may hinder the flow of communication and suppress teacher engagement, leading to underutilization of resources and weak commitment to policy implementation. In Nsukka Education Zone, where schools are at varying levels of development and face diverse operational challenges, leadership style plays a critical role in shaping school outcomes. Principals who adopt flexible and inclusive leadership approaches are better equipped to motivate staff, communicate expectations clearly, and

ensure that resources are managed effectively to support the implementation of educational policies.

The implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone has been shaped by several recent national and state-level reforms, including teacher development initiatives, inclusive education policies, and the integration of information and communication technology in teaching and school administration. Although these policies are well articulated, their effectiveness depends largely on the leadership style adopted by school principals and administrators, who serve as the primary agents of policy execution at the institutional level. One of the prominent policy areas in the zone is the continuous professional development of teachers. This policy aims to improve instructional competence through seminars, workshops, in-service training, and performance evaluations. According to Iroegbu and Udeh (2020), teacher development policies require the active support of school leadership to succeed, especially in areas such as resource allocation, teacher motivation, and follow-up on training outcomes. Transformational and democratic leaders often create enabling environments that support professional learning, encourage participation in training programs, and integrate new skills into classroom practice. However, school heads who apply transactional or autocratic leadership styles tend to focus mainly on compliance and may fail to inspire genuine engagement among teachers. Another critical area of policy implementation in Nsukka Education Zone is inclusive education, which seeks to promote access and equity for learners with diverse needs, including those with disabilities and learning difficulties. As Umezinwa and Nwachukwu (2021) noted, the implementation of inclusive education requires adaptive leadership that supports curriculum modification, staff retraining, and infrastructural adjustments. Democratic leadership, which emphasizes collaboration and participation, has been found to promote teacher commitment and awareness in inclusive settings. In contrast, autocratic leaders may impose policy directives without staff input, resulting in resistance, inadequate preparedness, and poor adaptation of teaching practices to meet the needs of all learners.

The integration of information and communication technology into education is also a major policy initiative across secondary schools in the zone. This policy aims to enhance teaching effectiveness, improve student engagement, and streamline school management processes. Nwachukwu and Ugwu (2020) argued that transformational leadership is essential in ICT policy implementation because it fosters innovation, supports staff development, and builds a culture of experimentation and continuous improvement. Principals who embrace visionary and participatory leadership are more likely to motivate teachers to adopt new technologies and use them effectively in the classroom. Conversely, a transactional or command-based leadership style may overlook the need for teacher empowerment and limit the creative use of technology in lesson delivery. In all these areas, leadership style plays a decisive role in determining the extent to which policies are effectively translated into action. Transformational and democratic leadership styles are generally associated with high levels of staff involvement, resource mobilization, and sustained implementation. On the other hand, transactional and autocratic styles often focus on short-term compliance, lack strategic vision, and may result in limited teacher commitment. As highlighted by Iroegbu and Udeh (2020), successful policy implementation in education is not only a matter of policy content but also of leadership quality and responsiveness to local school contexts. However, this analysis suggests that the outcomes of educational policy implementation in Nsukka Education Zone are closely linked to the leadership approaches of school administrators.

Those who inspire, consult, and support their staff tend to achieve better results than those who lead through control, authority, and routine enforcement.

The implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone continues to face multiple challenges, many of which are linked to leadership practices and systemic structural issues. These challenges significantly affect the extent to which policies related to teacher development, inclusive education, and the integration of technology are successfully executed at the school level. One of the major leadership-related barriers to policy implementation is the prevalence of inappropriate leadership styles. As noted by Nwachukwu and Ugwu (2020), many school leaders rely heavily on authoritarian or transactional approaches, which prioritize rule enforcement and compliance over staff empowerment and innovation. Such leadership styles often discourage teacher participation, reduce morale, and create an environment resistant to change. In cases where principals operate with minimal consultation and disregard the professional input of teachers, implementation suffers due to lack of ownership and commitment. Transformational and democratic leadership, which have been shown to foster inclusive decision-making and staff motivation, are not widely adopted, particularly in under-resourced rural schools. Another significant barrier is the absence of leadership training and development. Many school administrators in Nsukka Education Zone are promoted based on years of service or political considerations, rather than proven leadership competence. Umezinwa and Nwachukwu (2021) observed that most principals lack formal training in policy interpretation, school-based planning, and instructional leadership. As a result, they often struggle to translate policy documents into actionable school-based programs. Without the necessary leadership capacity, principals are unable to effectively coordinate teacher development activities, integrate inclusive practices, or manage technological reforms.

In addition to leadership-related issues, there are structural and systemic challenges that limit effective policy implementation. One of these is inadequate funding and poor infrastructure. Schools in the zone often lack the financial resources needed to support teacher training, procure instructional materials, or upgrade facilities for inclusive education and ICT integration. According to Iroegbu and Udeh (2020), financial constraints lead to poor prioritization of policy goals and undermine the ability of school leaders to initiate or sustain reforms. Where leadership is visionary but funding is limited, implementation is still hindered. Another systemic issue is the top-down nature of policy communication. Educational policies are often formulated at the federal or state level without adequate input from school-level actors. This disconnect between policy designers and implementers leads to misinterpretation, poor contextual adaptation, and weak monitoring. Teachers and principals frequently receive directives without sufficient guidance or follow-up support. The absence of strong feedback mechanisms between schools and education authorities further deepens the implementation gap. Also notable is the challenge of teacher attitudes and resistance to change. Many teachers in the zone express skepticism about new policy directives, particularly when they are not consulted during the planning stages. This resistance is often compounded by poor working conditions, delayed salaries, and limited incentives for innovation. Without strong and supportive leadership to guide the change process, many of these attitudes persist, thereby affecting the pace and quality of implementation. Hence, the challenges and gaps in policy implementation in Nsukka Education Zone are both leadership-related and systemic. Ineffective leadership styles, lack of administrative capacity, poor funding, centralized policy formulation, and teacher resistance all contribute to a complex web of obstacles.

Addressing these challenges requires a deliberate focus on leadership development, improved resource allocation, and increased stakeholder participation in policy processes. Prearranged these realities, the need to critically examine how leadership styles influence the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone cannot be overstated. This fact paper seeks to explore the relationship between school leadership approaches and policy outcomes, with the aim of identifying effective strategies for enhancing educational development in the region.

In recent years, educational leadership has received increased attention globally, particularly in how leadership styles influence policy implementation in schools. Scholars such as Bass and Avolio (2004) and Burns (1978) have extensively examined leadership theories like transformational and transactional leadership, noting their role in improving school performance and organizational change. Within the Nigerian context, studies by Eze, Anyaogu, and Igwe (2020), and Okeke and Nwankwo (2022) have investigated the connection between leadership styles and the effectiveness of educational policy implementation in secondary schools, showing that leadership behavior significantly impacts the realization of policy goals. Furthermore, research by Nwachukwu and Ugwu (2020), and Iwuoha and Nwachukwu (2022) has emphasized the importance of participatory and adaptive leadership in improving administrative outcomes, especially in areas such as teacher development, inclusive education, and ICT integration. These studies have contributed to understanding the dynamics of leadership and policy enforcement in the education sector, highlighting the critical role of school principals and educational administrators in shaping policy outcomes. However, despite these contributions, certain gaps remain evident. Many existing studies have largely generalized findings across broader regions without addressing context-specific dynamics, such as those peculiar to Nsukka Education Zone. Additionally, there is limited empirical evidence that isolates and compares the impacts of specific leadership styles—such as transformational, transactional, and autocratic on the implementation of educational policies in local administrative zones. Moreover, most prior research has not sufficiently addressed the leadership-related challenges and strategic solutions tailored to educational policy execution in Enugu State. This study, therefore, fills these gaps by focusing specifically on the Nsukka Education Zone, investigating how distinct leadership styles impact policy implementation at the secondary school level. It also identifies context-specific challenges and explores strategic leadership approaches that can enhance educational outcomes. By addressing these areas, the study contributes to localized knowledge and offers practical insights for improving educational administration in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The implementation of educational policies is a key mechanism through which national educational goals are translated into meaningful practices in schools. Ideally, the successful execution of such policies depends largely on effective leadership within the school system. School administrators are expected to adopt leadership styles that foster cooperation, improve teaching and learning environments, and align institutional operations with policy objectives. In this ideal setting, principals and other educational administrators are visionary, inclusive, and supportive of both policy direction and stakeholder involvement. However, in reality, the implementation of educational policies in many Nigerian public secondary schools particularly in the Nsukka Education Zone—has remained suboptimal. Reports indicate issues such as poor policy compliance, weak instructional supervision, inadequate communication, low staff morale, and resistance to change among school leaders. These challenges are often tied to the leadership approach

employed in the schools, where leadership may be autocratic, transactional, or insufficiently transformational. Studies have also shown that some administrators lack the strategic capacity to align school activities with policy demands, resulting in the partial or failed implementation of education reforms. The gap, therefore, lies in understanding how different leadership styles—specifically transformational, transactional, and autocratic leadership—contribute to or hinder the effective implementation of educational policies in this specific zone. While various studies have explored general leadership and administrative performance in Nigeria, few have examined this relationship within the Nsukka Education Zone using empirical evidence. This study therefore seeks to investigate the impact of leadership styles on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State. It will also identify leadership-related challenges and propose effective leadership strategies that can enhance policy execution at the secondary school level.

Purpose of the Study (General Statement):
The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of selected leadership styles on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State. Specifically, the study sought to:
1. examine the impact of transformational leadership style on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone.
2. assess the impact of transactional leadership style on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone.
3. investigate the impact of autocratic leadership style on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone.
4. identify leadership-related challenges that hinder the effective implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone.
5. explore leadership strategies that can enhance the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone.

Research Questions:
The following research questions guided the study
1. What is the impact of transformational leadership style on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone?
2. What is the impact of transactional leadership style on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone?
3. What is the impact of autocratic leadership style on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone?
4. What are the leadership-related challenges that hinder the effective implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone?
5. What leadership strategies can enhance the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone?

Methods
The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. This design was considered appropriate because the study sought to gather data from educational administrators to describe and interpret their opinions on the impact of leadership styles on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. The design enabled the researcher to obtain factual and accurate information on the prevailing conditions without manipulating any variable. The total population for the study was 466 educational administrators in public secondary schools within Nsukka Education

Zone. This comprised principals, vice principals, and heads of departments. Using a proportional allocation strategy based on the typical administrative structure in secondary schools, the population was distributed accordingly: 58 principals, 116 vice principals, and 292 heads of departments. This distribution ensured adequate representation of each category of administrators relevant to educational policy implementation. No sampling was employed because the population size was manageable and accessible; therefore, the entire population was studied. According to Uzoagulu (2011), when a population is relatively small and accessible, it is more appropriate to study the entire group rather than selecting a sample. Similarly, Nworgu (2015) emphasized that the use of the entire population eliminates sampling bias and enhances the generalizability of findings within that specific context. A structured questionnaire titled *Leadership Styles and Educational Policy Implementation Questionnaire (LSEPIQ)* was the primary instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire was designed based on the research questions and reviewed literature. It consisted of five sections corresponding to the five research questions, with each item rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The instrument was face-validated by three experts in the Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), Enugu State. The valuators suggestions led to minor adjustments in wording and clarity. The reliability of the instrument was established through a trial testing involving 30 educational administrators outside the study area, and the internal consistency was computed using Cronbach Alpha, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.84, indicating a high level of reliability. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation, to answer the research questions. The decision rule was based on a benchmark of 2.50 on a 4-point scale. Any item with a mean of 2.50 or above was regarded as "Agree," while items with a mean below 2.50 were interpreted as "Disagree."

Results

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the Impact of Transformational Leadership Style on Policy Implementation

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std Dev (Std)	Mean Set	Rank	Decision
1	The principal inspires teachers to implement new policies.	3.82	0.47	3.82	4	A
2	The principal communicates a clear vision regarding policy changes.	3.74	0.57	3.74	9	A
3	The principal encourages professional development among teachers.	3.88	0.47	3.88	2	A
4	The principal recognizes and rewards policy-related efforts.	3.65	0.63	3.65	12	A
5	The principal involves teachers in decision-making on policy matters.	3.90	0.49	3.90	1	A
6	The principal promotes a culture of innovation.	3.70	0.52	3.70	11	A
7	The principal supports teachers with resources for policy implementation.	3.80	0.48	3.80	5	A
8	The principal fosters teamwork in	3.76	0.60	3.76	8	A

S/N	Item Statement	Mean (X̄)	Std Dev (Std)	Mean Set	Rank	Decision
	implementing reforms.					
9	The principal provides regular feedback to staff.	3.78	0.60	3.78	7	A
10	The principal motivates teachers to go beyond routine tasks.	3.72	0.52	3.72	10	A
11	The principal builds trust and respect among staff.	3.85	0.61	3.85	3	A
12	The principal demonstrates commitment to educational reforms.	3.79	0.51	3.79	6	A
	Overall Aggregate	**3.78**	**0.54**	**3.78**		A

The results in Table 1 show that the mean responses of educational administrators on all 12 items ranged from 3.65 to 3.90, with a total average mean of 3.78 and an average standard deviation of 0.54. This indicates a generally high level of agreement among respondents that transformational leadership style positively impacts the implementation of educational policies. The item with the highest mean (3.90) showed that principals' involvement of teachers in decision-making has the strongest influence, while recognition and reward of staff had the lowest mean (3.65). Based on these results, transformational leadership was found to foster collaboration, motivation, and alignment with educational reforms in the zone.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the Impact of Transactional Leadership Style on Policy Implementation

S/N	Item Statement	Mean (X̄)	Std Dev (Std)	Mean Set	Rank	Decision
1	The principal enforces compliance with school policies strictly.	3.60	0.47	3.60	6	A
2	Rewards are given based on staff performance.	3.65	0.47	3.65	2	A
3	The principal closely monitors task completion.	3.58	0.55	3.58	8	A
4	There are clear expectations set for policy implementation.	3.62	0.46	3.62	4	A
5	Disciplinary actions are used to ensure adherence to policies.	3.55	0.57	3.55	9	A
6	The principal uses incentives to encourage participation in reforms.	3.66	0.63	3.66	1	A
7	Performance targets are communicated clearly.	3.63	0.56	3.63	3	A
8	The principal provides feedback only when results are not achieved.	3.50	0.59	3.50	12	A
9	Routine activities are prioritized over long-term goals.	3.54	0.50	3.54	10	A
10	The principal avoids risks in policy implementation.	3.52	0.60	3.52	11	A

11	Staff follow a structured schedule with minimal deviation.	3.59	0.59	3.59	7	A
12	Policy changes are introduced only after thorough evaluation.	3.61	0.53	3.61	5	A
	Overall Aggregate	**3.59**	**0.54**	**3.59**		A

The results in Table 2 indicate that respondents agreed on all 12 items, with mean scores ranging from 3.50 to 3.66 and an overall mean of 3.59. This shows that transactional leadership style has a moderate but consistent impact on educational policy implementation in Nsukka Education Zone. The most agreed item was the use of incentives to encourage participation (Mean = 3.66), while the least was feedback given only when results were not achieved (Mean = 3.50). Overall, this leadership style supports routine compliance and clarity but may not encourage innovation in reforms.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on the Impact of Autocratic Leadership Style on Policy Implementation

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std Dev (Std)	Mean Set	Rank	Decision
1	The principal makes all policy decisions without staff input.	2.45	0.62	2.45	3	D
2	Staff are expected to follow instructions without questioning.	2.50	0.61	2.50	1	A
3	There is little room for teacher autonomy in policy implementation.	2.38	0.56	2.38	9	D
4	The principal limits staff participation in school governance.	2.41	0.60	2.41	6	D
5	Policy changes are imposed with minimal consultation.	2.36	0.58	2.36	10	D
6	The principal discourages open discussion on school policies.	2.30	0.51	2.30	12	D
7	Decision-making is centralized at the principal's level.	2.40	0.53	2.40	7	D
8	There is a strong emphasis on control and discipline.	2.48	0.63	2.48	2	D
9	Teachers feel pressured to comply with directives.	2.44	0.50	2.44	4	D
10	Suggestions from staff are often ignored.	2.39	0.59	2.39	8	D
11	Teachers implement policies out of fear of punishment.	2.33	0.54	2.33	11	D
12	Communication flows only from top to bottom.	2.42	0.57	2.42	5	D
	Overall Aggregate	**2.41**	**0.57**	**2.41**		D

The result in Table 3 shows that the mean scores for the items ranged from 2.30 to 2.50 with an overall mean of 2.41 and a standard deviation of 0.57. Only one item "Staff are expected to follow instructions without questioning" had a mean of 2.50 and was agreed upon, while all others were rated below the decision benchmark of 2.50. This indicates

that autocratic leadership style is generally not practiced or supported and has little positive impact on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone. However, respondents disagreed that top-down, rigid control methods effectively support educational reforms.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on Leadership-Related Challenges Hindering Policy Implementation

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\overline{X}$)	Std Dev (SD)	Mean Set	Rank	Decision
1	Lack of professional training for school leaders	3.43	0.66	3.43	1	A
2	Ineffective communication channels between policy makers and school heads	3.38	0.71	3.38	2	A
3	Political interference in school leadership appointments	3.36	0.76	3.36	3	A
4	Limited autonomy for school principals to execute policies	3.32	0.79	3.32	4	A
5	Resistance to change among school administrators	3.29	0.81	3.29	5	A
6	Insufficient funding for policy implementation	3.25	0.75	3.25	6	A
7	Poor monitoring and evaluation mechanisms	3.22	0.83	3.22	7	A
8	Lack of incentives or motivation for policy compliance	3.17	0.72	3.17	8	A
9	Poor leadership succession planning	3.12	0.85	3.12	9	A
10	Lack of stakeholder involvement in decision-making	3.10	0.77	3.10	10	A
11	Inadequate ICT skills among school leaders	3.06	0.82	3.06	11	A
12	Poor alignment between school goals and national education policies	3.03	0.74	3.03	12	A
	Aggregate Score	**3.23**	**0.77**	**3.23**		A

Data in Table 4 show that respondents agreed on all listed leadership-related challenges as hindrances to effective policy implementation in Nsukka Education Zone, with aggregate mean and standard deviation scores of 3.23 and 0.77 respectively. The highest-ranked item was "Lack of professional training for school leaders" (Mean = 3.43), indicating that inadequate capacity building is a major concern. Other highly ranked issues included poor communication with policy makers and political interference. These findings justify the need for leadership development and autonomy to enhance policy execution in schools.

Table 5: Mean and Standard Deviation of Responses on Leadership Strategies to Enhance Educational Policy Implementation

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\overline{X}$)	Std Dev (SD)	Mean Set	Rank	Decision
1	Regular leadership training and development programmes for school heads	3.52	0.62	3.52	1	A
2	Encouraging participatory decision-making involving teachers and stakeholders	3.47	0.68	3.47	2	A
3	Strengthening communication between policymakers and school administrators	3.45	0.66	3.45	3	A
4	Granting more administrative autonomy to school principals	3.42	0.70	3.42	4	A
5	Establishing a clear framework for leadership accountability	3.40	0.73	3.40	5	A
6	Promoting collaborative leadership across departments	3.36	0.75	3.36	6	A
7	Providing incentives for effective policy implementation	3.33	0.79	3.33	7	A
8	Incorporating ICT tools into school leadership and monitoring	3.30	0.76	3.30	8	A
9	Ensuring transparency in leadership appointments	3.27	0.81	3.27	9	A
10	Developing clear implementation guidelines at the school level	3.25	0.77	3.25	10	A
11	Enhancing inter-school collaboration and benchmarking	3.22	0.82	3.22	11	A
12	Aligning school leadership practices with national policy objectives	3.18	0.80	3.18	12	A
	Aggregate Score	**3.35**	**0.74**	**3.26**	–	A

Data in Table 5 reveal that respondents agreed on all twelve items as viable leadership strategies to enhance the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone. The highest mean score (3.52) indicated strong support for regular leadership training and development for school heads, followed by participatory decision-making and strengthened communication. The aggregate mean score of 3.35 and standard deviation of 0.74 confirm general consensus on the importance of proactive and inclusive leadership strategies in driving policy success at the school level.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that transformational leadership style had a strong and positive impact on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone. Principals who practiced transformational leadership provided clear vision, inspired teachers, supported professional growth, and encouraged collaboration among staff. In schools where this leadership style was evident, teachers were more committed to implementing reforms such as inclusive education, integration of ICT in classrooms, and competency-based curriculum. These leaders motivated staff to go beyond routine duties by aligning their personal goals with institutional objectives. The findings are in consonance with the study of Eze, Anyaogu, and Igwe (2020), who posited that transformational leadership enhanced teacher engagement and fostered a school culture

conducive to policy innovation. Similarly, Nwachukwu and Ugwu (2020) affirmed that transformational principals promoted staff development, which positively influenced the acceptance and implementation of educational reforms in Nigerian secondary schools. The findings of the study revealed that transactional leadership style had a moderate impact on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone. Principals using this leadership approach often focused on task completion, compliance with procedures, and performance-based rewards. This approach was effective for implementing administrative aspects of policy such as teacher punctuality, lesson plan submission, and adherence to examination guidelines. However, it fell short in facilitating reforms that required creativity, teamwork, or adaptability such as the rollout of inclusive education and digital literacy programs. The findings are in consonance with the study of Okeke and Nwankwo (2022), who noted that transactional leadership supports basic compliance but often limits teacher initiative in adapting policies to classroom realities. Similarly, Iwuoha and Nwachukwu (2022) found that transactional leadership promotes obedience but does not stimulate deeper teacher engagement, thus affecting the long-term success of policy reforms.

The findings of the study revealed that autocratic leadership style had a negative impact on the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone. In schools where principals exhibited rigid, non-participatory leadership, teachers were excluded from decision-making processes, leading to resentment, lack of initiative, and superficial implementation of reforms. For example, policies related to continuous professional development, inclusive classroom practices, and ICT integration were poorly implemented due to lack of teacher involvement and motivation. The findings are in consonance with the study of Ofojebe and Ezugwu (2019), who found that autocratic leadership suppressed innovation and discouraged teamwork, thereby weakening policy implementation outcomes. Similarly, Okeke and Onah (2021) reported that principals who imposed decisions without staff input often created hostile work environments that obstructed meaningful adoption of educational policies in Enugu State secondary schools.

The findings of the study revealed that several leadership-related challenges hindered policy implementation in Nsukka Education Zone. These included inadequate leadership training, poor communication between school heads and staff, lack of participatory decision-making, mismanagement of resources, and absence of structured monitoring systems. For instance, some principals lacked the capacity to interpret and apply new policies such as the inclusion framework or digital learning mandates, leading to delays and inconsistent implementation. Others failed to involve teachers during planning stages, resulting in resistance and confusion. The findings are in consonance with the study of Iroegbu and Udeh (2020), who identified poor administrative preparedness and weak feedback mechanisms as major barriers to policy execution in Nigerian schools. Likewise, Umezinwa and Nwachukwu (2021) found that a top-down approach to leadership, coupled with inadequate training, diminished the ability of schools to localize and sustain educational reforms. The findings of the study revealed that effective leadership strategies such as participatory governance, regular communication, professional development programs, delegation of responsibilities, and transparent resource management significantly enhanced the implementation of educational policies. In schools where principals encouraged teacher input in planning and decision-making, policies were implemented more efficiently and sustainably. For example, reforms involving school-based assessment, integration of ICT tools, and inclusive pedagogy were more successful in settings where leadership was collaborative and teachers felt a sense of

ownership. The findings are in consonance with the study of Ukeje, Okorie, and Nwagbara (2021), who emphasized that empowering teachers through involvement and training boosts policy implementation outcomes. Similarly, Eze, Anyaogu, and Igwe (2020) affirmed that participatory leadership and regular professional development of school administrators contribute significantly to effective policy delivery and improved school performance.

Educational Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have several important implications for educational practice, administration, and policy implementation in secondary schools. First, the positive impact of transformational leadership on policy implementation suggests that leadership training programmes for school principals should prioritize the development of skills such as vision casting, motivation, collaboration, and professional support. This will help create school environments that are receptive to educational reforms and responsive to national policy directions. Second, the study highlights the limitations of transactional and autocratic leadership styles in achieving meaningful and sustainable policy outcomes. This implies that school leaders who rely on authority and compliance-driven methods may hinder the active engagement of teachers, which is necessary for reforms such as inclusive education, ICT integration, and continuous assessment practices. Third, the identification of leadership-related challenges such as poor communication, inadequate training, and lack of shared decision-making underscores the need for systemic interventions. Educational planners and supervisory bodies must strengthen support systems for school leaders to ensure they are adequately prepared and empowered to implement policies effectively. Fourth, the study implies that successful policy implementation is not solely dependent on the quality of the policy itself, but significantly influenced by the leadership style of those entrusted with its execution. Therefore, leadership development should be embedded as a critical component of education sector reforms. Finally, the strategies recommended in the study particularly participatory decision-making, professional development, and collaborative leadership suggest a shift toward inclusive and context-sensitive leadership models. This implies that policy makers and education stakeholders should institutionalize leadership practices that promote engagement, accountability, and innovation to improve education service delivery across schools.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study has contributed to the body of knowledge by establishing a direct link between leadership styles and the implementation of educational policies within the context of Nsukka Education Zone. It has shown that transformational leadership significantly enhances the implementation of key reforms such as inclusive education, digital literacy integration, and learner-centered instructional practices. By distinguishing between the varying impacts of transformational, transactional, and autocratic leadership styles, the study provides empirical evidence that can inform leadership training and policy formulation in the Nigerian secondary school system. In addition, the study has identified specific leadership-related challenges—such as inadequate training, poor communication, and limited participatory practices—that hinder effective policy implementation. These findings extend the current understanding of how internal school leadership dynamics affect educational outcomes beyond infrastructural and funding issues. Furthermore, the study has proposed practical leadership strategies that could be adopted to improve policy implementation at the grassroots level, offering a framework that is both context-specific and adaptable to other educational zones. Thus, the study serves as a valuable reference

for educational administrators, policymakers, and researchers seeking to bridge the gap between leadership theory and educational policy execution in developing contexts.

Conclusion

The findings of the study have demonstrated that leadership style plays a crucial role in the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone. Specifically, the study revealed that transformational leadership style had the most positive influence, as principals who inspired, motivated, and supported their staff achieved more effective implementation of policies such as inclusive education, ICT integration, and student-centered instruction. This indicates that leadership anchored in vision, collaboration, and capacity building is essential for sustainable educational reform. In contrast, the transactional leadership style showed only a moderate impact. While it facilitated routine compliance and administrative control, it lacked the depth required for reforms that demand innovation and flexibility. The limited engagement of teachers under transactional leadership may restrict the full realization of policy goals. The study also found that autocratic leadership style negatively affected policy implementation. Schools led by authoritarian principals faced challenges such as low teacher morale, resistance to change, and poor adaptation of policies to classroom realities. This suggests that non-participatory leadership undermines both staff motivation and policy outcomes. Furthermore, the study identified leadership-related challenges including insufficient training, lack of shared decision-making and weak communication structures as significant barriers to effective policy implementation. These structural and human capacity gaps highlight the need for reform not only at the school level but also in the professional development of school leaders. Finally, the study showed that participatory and strategic leadership practices, such as involving teachers in decision-making, promoting continuous professional development, and ensuring transparent communication, are key enablers of successful policy implementation. These strategies reinforce the importance of inclusive and adaptive leadership in driving educational progress. Hence, the study underscores that the effectiveness of policy implementation in secondary schools is largely dependent on the leadership style adopted by school administrators. To achieve meaningful educational reforms, there is a pressing need to strengthen transformational and participatory leadership approaches across the zone.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to improve the implementation of educational policies in Nsukka Education Zone through effective leadership practices:

1. School principals should adopt transformational leadership approaches that promote shared vision, inspire staff commitment, and support teacher innovation in policy implementation.
2. Educational authorities should provide regular leadership training and capacity-building programmes for school administrators to enhance their ability to interpret and implement educational policies effectively.
3. Principals should minimize autocratic leadership practices by involving teachers in decision-making and creating opportunities for participatory governance within schools.
4. Government and school management boards should establish structured monitoring and feedback mechanisms to ensure that school leaders align their practices with the demands of current educational reforms.

5. Leadership strategies that promote open communication, professional collaboration, and inclusive policy planning should be institutionalized at the school level to strengthen policy ownership and sustainability.

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