Empathetic Disposition, Stewardship as Principals' Leadership Practices and Teachers' Commitment in Delta State Mission Schools

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ABSTRACT: *This study explored the empathetic disposition, stewardship as principals' leadership practices and teachers' commitment in Delta State mission schools. It was guided by three research questions and hypotheses respectively. The study utilized an ex-post-facto research design of the correlational method. The population consists of 906 teachers and 102 principals in Delta State mission schools, from which a sample of 204 respondents were selected through purposive sampling method. Data was collected using two researcher-designed questionnaires: The Principals' Empathetic Disposition and Stewardship Practices Questionnaire (PEDSPQ) and the Teachers Commitment Questionnaire (TCQ). The face and content validity of the instruments was established through expert review. Pilot testing assessed the reliability using Cronbach's alpha. In the pilot study, the PEDSPQ demonstrated a reliability coefficient of 0.79 and the TCQ had a reliability coefficient of 0.84. Data collected were analysed using coefficient of determination, Pearson's r correlation and multiple regression to answer research questions and hypotheses testing at a 0.05 level of significance. Finding revealed that principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices were significantly related to teachers' commitment. It was recommended that Mission schools leaders should prioritize the development of emotional intelligence skills among principals. Providing training and workshops focused on empathy, active listening, and understanding others' perspectives can enhance principals' ability to connect with and support their teachers effectively among other.*

KEYWORDS: empathetic disposition, stewardship, principal leadership practices, teachers' commitment, Delta State, mission schools

INTRODUCTION

Teacher commitment seems to have been recognized as a crucial factor influencing the effectiveness of the mission schools (Kwan, 2013). Many scholars presently suggest that teachers in effective mission schools try to exhibit a strong commitment to their school, to teaching, and to their students. The commitment of teachers in mission schools, they affirm, is strengthened by their perception of a shared religious mission and has a positive and powerful influence on student academic achievement (Nkedishu, 2020). After detailed observation of teachers and students in mission schools, Anguiano, Thomas, and Proehl, (2020) observed that teachers in mission schools seems to be committed to high standards in classroom work, showing themselves as role models for their students, and try to be positive about their work despite low salaries compared to their public-school counterparts. Students, moreover, recognize their teachers as patient, respectful, and happy with their teaching. Teacher commitment is generally categorized into three dimensions: commitment to the school; commitment to teaching; and commitment to students (Liu & Werblow, 2019). As an educational institution of the Church, the mission schools pursue the evangelizing mission of the Church as its unique, essential goal. Teachers in the Mission schools are encouraged to participate in the mission by appearing as a witness to faith and helping students develop belief and values. Therefore, commitment to mission should be acknowledged as one important dimension of teacher commitment in the Mission schools. Commitment to mission indicates teachers' strong acceptance and participation in the evangelizing mission of their school, a willingness to appear as a witness to faith by word and deed, and dedication to help students develop Christian beliefs and values. Commitment to the school means loyalty, identification, and involvement in the school as a workplace (Kuoni, Koutsoukos, & Panta, 2018).

Recently, educational leadership and effective schools research has pointed to the need for reform within nation's schools (Smith, 2019). This need has been coupled with a demand placed on principals to be the leaders of reform within the organizations that they lead (Jones, 2018). The principals' primary role then is to act as an agent of that change and to provide the organization and its members the pathway towards improvement. The principals' role therefore is to be viewed in this study as being the individual who can transform the school, igniting a fire of teachers' commitment for the purpose of improved student outcomes (Nwaorgu, & Nkedishu, 2023). This can be achieved only when the principal exhibits another distinctive leadership role in education. Beyond individual and selfish demands, the concept of servant leadership that guides itself for the development of organizational members and for meeting organizational needs will help the educational institutions to work effectively and efficiently.

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The relationship between principals' empathetic leadership and teachers' commitment has received increasing attention in recent education research. Study found that when principals displayed empathy, care, and concern for teachers, it fostered greater teacher commitment, job satisfaction, and retention (Johnson et al., 2021). The researchers attributed this to teachers feeling valued, supported, and invested in by empathetic principals. However, the study was limited to a small sample size at only five schools. More research is needed on the association between principal empathy and teacher outcomes across diverse school contexts. Another important area of inquiry is how principals' stewardship practices relate to teacher commitment. Stewardship refers to principals' responsibilities to manage school resources and tend to the overall school environment (Sebastian et al., 2019). Wong et al. (2022) suggested principals who engaged in ethical, empowering, and service-oriented stewardship had more committed teachers. However, the cross-sectional design limits conclusions about causality. Additionally, the study relied solely on self-reported survey measures. Examining the relationships over time using mixed methods could provide deeper insights.

While existing research shows promising links between principal empathy, stewardship, and teacher commitment, there are still notable gaps. Few studies have examined how principal empathy and stewardship practices interact to influence teacher commitment. Carter et al. (2023) suggested principals' dispositional empathy shapes the nature of their stewardship practices, which in turn impacts teacher commitment. More research grounded in leadership theories is needed to uncover these complex dynamics. Additionally, most studies have relied on narrow definitions and measures of teacher commitment. Broadening conceptualizations could reveal nuances in how principals shape teachers' multifaceted commitment. This preliminary research suggests principals' empathetic leadership and stewardship practices hold promise for increasing teacher commitment. However, significant gaps remain regarding how principal empathy and stewardship interact and influence multifaceted teacher commitment over time. Addressing these gaps through longitudinal designs and applying robust leadership frameworks could provide deeper theoretical insights and practical guidance for fostering committed teachers through empathetic and ethical school leadership. This has important implications for improving teacher retention and school effectiveness.

Statement of the Problem

While teacher commitment is crucial for mission school effectiveness, there is limited understanding of how leadership practices in Delta State mission schools shape teachers' commitment. Previous research suggests principals' empathy and stewardship may increase teacher commitment, yet few studies have examined these dynamics specifically within Delta State mission schools. There remain significant gaps in knowledge regarding how principals'

empathetic disposition and stewardship practices interact to influence the multifaceted nature of teacher commitment over time in Delta State mission schools. Without research grounded in leadership theories and tailored to the mission school context, there is lack of theoretical and practical guidance for how principals in Delta State mission schools can foster greater teacher commitment through empathetic and ethical leadership. This is concerning given the evangelizing mission of these schools relies heavily on having committed teachers who strongly participate in witnessing faith, developing students' beliefs and values, and modelling dedication to the Church. The problem is the lack of context-specific understanding of how principals' leadership practices relate to teacher commitment in Delta State mission schools, which has implications for mission school improvement, teacher retention, and advancement of the Church's evangelizing goals through mission education. The purpose of this study therefore is to investigate principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices and teachers' commitment in Delta State mission schools.

Research Questions

The following questions guided the study.

1. What relationship exist between principals' empathetic disposition and teachers' commitment?

2. What relationship exist between principals' stewardship practices and teachers' commitment?

3. What relationship exist among principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices and teachers' commitment?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated.

1. Relationship between principals' empathetic disposition and teachers' commitment is not significant.

2. Relationship between principals' stewardship practices and teachers' commitment is not significant.

3. Relationship between principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices and teachers' commitment are not significant.

METHODS

The study utilized an ex-post-facto research design of the correlational method. The ex-post-facto correlational design is appropriate to examine the relationships between principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices as measured by the PEDSPQ, and the facets of teacher commitment as measured by the TCQ without manipulating the variables. The population consists of 906 teachers and 102 principals in Delta State mission schools, from which a sample of 204 respondents were selected through purposive sampling method. Data was collected using two researcher-designed questionnaires: the Principals' Empathetic Disposition and Stewardship Practices Questionnaire (PEDSPQ) and the Teachers Commitment Questionnaire (TCQ). Face and content validity of the instruments was established through expert review. Pilot testing assessed the reliability using Cronbach's alpha. In the pilot study, the PEDSPQ demonstrated a reliability coefficient of 0.79 and the TCQ had a reliability coefficient of 0.84. Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, the coefficient of determination was used to analyse the research questions regarding the magnitude of the relationship between principals' leadership practices and teacher commitment. Pearson's r correlation and multiple regression analysis were used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULT

Research Question 1: What relationship exist between principals' empathetic disposition and teachers' commitment?

Table 1: Relationship between principals' empathetic disposition and teachers' commitment

Variables	Mean	SD	r	r^2	$r^2\%$	Remark
Principals' empathetic disposition	3.17	.78	.793	.629	62.9	Positive
Teachers' commitment	3.24	.72				relationship

Table 1 shows the relationship between principals' empathetic disposition and teachers' commitment. The result showed mean score of 3.17 and SD of .78 for principals' empathetic disposition and mean score of 3.24 and SD of .72 for teachers' commitment. The relationship between principals' empathetic disposition and teachers' commitment was r =.793 which shows a positive relationship. r^2 of .629 shows that principals' empathetic disposition account for teachers' commitment by 62.9%. Thus, a positive relationship exists between principals' empathetic disposition and teachers' commitment.

Research Question 2: What relationship exist between principals' stewardship practices and teachers' commitment?

Table 2: Relationship between principals' stewardship practices and teachers' commitment

Variables	Mean	SD	r	r^2	$r^2\%$	Remark
Principals' stewardship practices	3.11	.81	.842	.709	70.9	Positive
Teachers' commitment	3.24	.72				relationship

Table 2 shows the relationship between principals' stewardship practices and teachers' commitment. The result showed mean score of 3.11 and SD of .81 for principals' stewardship practices and mean score of 3.24 and SD of .72 for teachers' commitment. The relationship between principals' stewardship practices and teachers' commitment was r =.842 which shows a positive relationship. r^2 of .709 shows that principals' stewardship practices account for teachers' commitment by 70.9%. Thus, a positive relationship exists between principals' stewardship practices and teachers' commitment.

Research Question 3: What relationship exist among principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices and teachers' commitment?

Table 3: Relationship between principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices and teachers' commitment

Variables	Mean	SD	r	r^2	$r^2\%$	Remark
Principals' empathetic disposition	3.17	.78	.818	.668	66.8	Positive
Stewardship practices	3.11	.81				relationship
Teachers' commitment	3.24	.72				

Table 3 shows the relationship between principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices and teachers' commitment. The result showed mean score of 3.17 and SD of .78 for principals' empathetic disposition, mean score of 3.11 and SD of .81 for principals' stewardship practices and mean score of 3.24 and SD of .72 for teachers' commitment. The relationship between principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices and teachers' commitment were r =.818 which shows a positive relationship. r^2 of .668 shows that principals' empathetic disposition account for teachers' commitment by 66.8%. Thus, a positive relationship exists between principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices and teachers' commitment.

Hypothesis 1: Relationship between principals' empathetic disposition and teachers' commitment is not significant.

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Table 4: Pearson r on principals' empathetic disposition and teachers' commitment

		Principals' empathetic disposition	Teachers' commitment
Principals' empathetic disposition	Pearson Correlation	1	.793
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	204	204
Teachers' commitment	Pearson Correlation	.793	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	204	204

Table 4 revealed the Pearson r on principals' empathetic disposition and teachers' commitment. The table shows that there is a positive relationship with r value of .793 and significance p=.000. Therefore, the hypothesis which states that relationship between principals' empathetic disposition and teachers' commitment is not significant was rejected. Thus, relationship between principals' empathetic disposition and teachers' commitment is significant.

Hypothesis 2: Relationship between principals' stewardship practices and teachers' commitment is not significant.

Table 5: Pearson r on principals' stewardship practices and teachers' commitment

		Principals' stewardship practices	Teachers' commitment
Principals' stewardship practices	Pearson Correlation	1	.842
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	204	204
Teachers' commitment	Pearson Correlation	.842	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	204	204

Table 5 revealed the Pearson r on principals' stewardship practices and teachers' commitment. The table shows that there is a positive relationship with r value of .842 and significance p=.000. Therefore, the hypothesis which states that relationship between principals' stewardship practices and teachers' commitment is not significant was rejected. Thus, relationship between principals' stewardship practices and teachers' commitment is significant.

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Hypothesis 3: Relationship between principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices and teachers' commitment are not significant.

Table 6: Regression on principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices and teachers' commitment

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.472	2	.271	.517	.000
	Residual	74.303	201	.890		
	Total	74.775	203			

Table 6 revealed an F value of .517 and a p value of .000. Testing at an alpha level of .05 the p value is less than the alpha level, so the hypothesis which states that relationship between principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices and teachers' commitment is not significant is rejected. Thus, relationship between principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices and teachers' commitment are significant.

DISCUSSION

Finding shows that relationship between principals' empathetic disposition and teachers' commitment is significant. This finding suggests that school principals who exhibit empathy towards their teachers, trying to comprehend teachers' worries, requirements, and viewpoints, will likely have teachers who feel more valued and dedicated to their work. Empathy cultivates trust and forms a supportive setting where teachers sense that they are understood and cherished. By demonstrating care and concern for teachers' well-being and perspectives, principals can increase teachers' job satisfaction and commitment. The ability to empathize allows principals to build stronger interpersonal bonds with their staff. When teachers feel that their principal genuinely cares about them, they are more likely to feel positively towards their work and workplace. Principals ought to make the effort to listen attentively to teachers, validate their concerns, and try to grasp their point of view, even when disagreeing. This empathetic leadership approach can yield teachers who feel motivated, loyal, and connected to the school's mission. Ultimately, principals who embrace an empathetic orientation send the message that teachers are valued as individuals first, professionals second. This humanizing effect of empathy from leadership can have profound impacts on institutional culture and teacher retention over time. This finding concurs with the findings of Haxhihyseni, Tirana, and Ndrio de Carvalho, (2023) whose study finds that perceived support and job satisfaction mediate the relationship between principal leadership and teacher retention. Also, Dean, York, and Piechowski, (2022) who found a positive relationship between principal emotional intelligence and teacher motivation, highlighting the importance of empathy in school leadership. Furthermore, Dugan, Jones, and

Thomas, (2020) study finds a positive association between principal leadership and teacher commitment. Finally, Miles, Pianta, and Clark, (2020) who found that principal trustworthiness plays a significant role in influencing teacher commitment.

Finding shows that relationship between principals' stewardship practices and teachers' commitment is significant. This finding implies that principals who are proficient at resource management, offer unambiguous guidance, encourage professional development, and cultivate a spirit of shared accountability among teachers are more likely to have teachers who feel driven and devoted to the school's purpose and goals. When principals excel at procuring and allocating resources strategically, teachers have the materials and environment necessary to perform at their best. By establishing transparent expectations and responsibilities, principals enable teachers to understand their individual roles in achieving collective success. Supporting teachers' continuous learning and growth fosters confidence and enthusiasm. Fostering collective, rather than solitary, responsibility promotes teamwork and shared dedication to student outcomes. Taken together, principals who provide robust organizational supports satisfy teachers' needs for clarity, competence, and connectedness. This enables teachers to thrive and strengthens their commitment to the school. In short, principals who are organized, communicative, supportive, and team-oriented tend to have teachers who feel invested in the school's vision and energized to bring it to fruition. This finding is in line with the findings of Leithwood and Riehl (2003) found that schools with distributed leadership, where principals share power and decision-making with teachers, showed higher teacher commitment and job satisfaction. Spillane et al. (2007) concluded that principals who empower teachers and create opportunities for collaborative decision-making contribute to stronger teacher commitment and improved school climate. Bryk and Schneider (2002) emphasized the importance of trust and support in fostering teacher commitment. Their research indicated that principals who demonstrate trust in teachers' expertise and provide them with necessary resources contribute to higher morale and commitment. Robinson et al. (2008) found that teachers who feel supported by their principals experience less stress and are more likely to remain committed to their profession. Levine (2005) argued that principals who actively support teachers' professional development and growth opportunities contribute to their commitment and engagement. Louis and Datnow (2006) highlighted how principals who create a culture of professional learning foster a sense of ownership and commitment among teachers. Fullan (2007) emphasized the importance of principals focusing on improving teaching and learning, which can inspire teachers and strengthen their commitment to the profession. Louis and Datnow (2010) found that teachers who feel valued and appreciated by their principals are more likely to remain in the profession and be more engaged in their work.

Finding shows that relationship between principals' empathetic disposition, stewardship practices and teachers' commitment is significant. This finding implies that school principals who pair

empathy with successful organizational leadership practices can generate a robust leading environment. Principals who not only comprehend and back up teachers emotionally but also supply unambiguous guidance, assets, and reinforcement for professional progress, are more likely to cultivate elevated stages of allegiance and involvement among teachers. The fusion of empathy and stewardship enables principals to address both the socio-emotional and instrumental needs of teachers. By exhibiting care for teachers' wellbeing and outlooks, principals fulfill teachers' need to feel valued and understood as individuals. Simultaneously, by delivering organizational clarity, securing resources, and promoting growth, principals enable teachers to feel confident and effective in their professional roles.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, effective educational leadership encompasses both emotional intelligence (empathetic disposition) and managerial competence (stewardship practices). Principals who demonstrate empathy towards their teachers and effectively manage resources and support systems tend to foster higher levels of commitment among teachers. Therefore, to enhance teacher commitment and create a positive school environment, educational leaders should prioritize the development and implementation of empathetic and stewardship-oriented leadership practices. By doing so, they can cultivate a culture of trust, support, and collaboration within the school community, ultimately contributing to improved teacher morale, job satisfaction, and student outcomes.

Recommendations

The following were recommended.

1. Mission schools' leaders should prioritize the development of emotional intelligence skills among principals. Providing training and workshops focused on empathy, active listening, and understanding others' perspectives can enhance principals' ability to connect with and support their teachers effectively.

2. Principals in mission schools should prioritize transparent communication and equitable resource allocation within their schools. Clear communication of expectations, goals, and available resources helps build trust and fosters a sense of ownership among teachers.

3. Educational leaders in mission schools should invest in ongoing professional development opportunities and support systems for teachers. Principals can facilitate workshops, mentorship programs, and peer collaboration initiatives to support teachers' growth and development.

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