AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.15 (2), May-August, 2025 https://ajemates.org

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OF HEAD TEACHERS IN PRIMARY MISSION SCHOOLS IN SOUTH-EAST, NIGERIA

Peace Glory Ifeanyi
Department of Educational Management and Planning,
Faculty of Educational Foundation
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Nigeria
Email: pnglory@yahoo.com
&
Prof Nnamdi J. Obikeze
Faculty of Eduaction
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam Campus
Email: nj.obikeze@coou.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

The leadership and management practices of head teachers remain a cornerstone in sustaining quality education in primary mission schools across South-East Nigeria. Mission schools, historically established by faith-based organizations, continue to play a vital role in providing moral and academic formation for pupils. This study explored the leadership and management practices of head teachers in this unique context, drawing on Instructional Leadership Theory as the guiding framework. Instructional leadership emphasized the centrality of head teachers in defining clear school goals, supervising instructional programs, and cultivating a positive teaching and learning climate. These dimensions provided a useful lens for understanding how head teachers in mission schools navigate their roles in balancing administrative duties with instructional oversight. The paper reviewed conceptual issues surrounding leadership, management, and the identity of mission schools before situating the analysis within the Nigerian educational landscape. Historical background highlighted the re-emergence and significance of mission schools after the 1970s government takeover and their subsequent return to denominational management. Leadership practices of head teachers, including supervision of teachers, curriculum monitoring, and value-based discipline, were examined in relation to how they promote teaching quality and pupils' achievement. Management practices such as planning, organizing, staffing, supervision, and resource mobilization were also analyzed as essential to sustaining mission schools in environments often constrained by inadequate funding and infrastructural limitations. The study further interrogated the challenges confronting head teachers, including inadequate resources, teacher attrition, conflicting policies between church and government authorities, and the increasing demands of digital pedagogy. Case illustrations from mission schools in Anambra, Enugu, and Imo States were presented to show contextual realities. Findings revealed that while head teachers in mission schools uphold strong instructional leadership practices, they are hindered by systemic challenges that limit their effectiveness. The paper concludes that strengthening the

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.15 (2), May-August, 2025 https://ajemates.org

instructional leadership capacity of head teachers, alongside supportive policies and resource mobilization, is critical to sustaining the ethos and educational quality of mission schools. Recommendations are offered for policymakers, denominational authorities, and training institutions to enhance leadership preparation and ongoing professional development for head teachers.

Keywords: Instructional leadership, head teachers, mission schools, management practices, South-East Nigeria, educational quality.

Introduction

Leadership and management within primary schools have been widely acknowledged as determinants of educational quality. In the Nigerian context, where education is both a social investment and a tool for national development, the head teacher assumes a pivotal role in shaping school outcomes. Head teachers are not only expected to handle administrative responsibilities but also to provide leadership that enhances teaching and learning. This dual expectation is even more pronounced in **mission schools** in South-East Nigeria, where educational goals are intertwined with faith-based values and moral formation.

Mission schools occupy a special place in the Nigerian educational system. Historically, they were founded by Christian denominations such as the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist missions, and they quickly became associated with discipline, academic excellence, and spiritual development. Following the government takeover of mission schools in the 1970s, many of these schools suffered decline due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and underfunding. However, the return of some schools to denominational control in the 2000s reinvigorated their roles in the education sector, particularly in South-East Nigeria. Today, mission schools are often perceived as offering a higher standard of instruction, discipline, and value-based education compared to their public counterparts. Central to sustaining these standards is the leadership and management roles of the head teachers.

Despite the centrality of head teachers, research continues to highlight persistent challenges. Head teachers in mission schools often operate within constrained budgets, limited infrastructure, and rising expectations from both parents and church authorities. They are expected to demonstrate accountability, promote effective pedagogy, supervise teachers, and manage scarce resources—all while maintaining the spiritual and moral ethos of the schools. Balancing these competing demands requires leadership that is intentional, value-driven, and instructional in nature. It is within this context that **Instructional Leadership Theory** becomes a useful lens for analyzing the work of head teachers in mission schools. Unlike transformational or distributed leadership models that emphasize broader

organizational dynamics, instructional leadership focused directly on teaching, learning, and the creation of a positive school climate.

The purpose of this study was to examine the leadership and management practices of head teachers in primary mission schools in South-East Nigeria, with particular attention to how these practices align with instructional leadership principles. Specifically, the paper sought to:

1. Define the concepts of leadership, management, and mission schooling.
2. Provide a historical overview of mission schools in South-East Nigeria.
3. Examine the leadership practices of head teachers as instructional leaders.
4. Explore the management practices that sustain mission schools.
5. Identify the challenges faced by head teachers in fulfilling their roles.
6. Discuss implications for educational outcomes and policy reforms.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to ongoing discourse on school leadership in Nigeria. While research on leadership in public schools is growing, there remains limited scholarly attention to head teachers in mission schools, despite their outsized influence on educational quality in the South-East region. By foregrounding instructional leadership, this paper not only highlights the central role of head teachers but also provides insights for strengthening leadership preparation, professional development, and policy support.

Primary mission schools, established by Christian denominational bodies, have served as vital institutions in Nigeria's educational development. In the South-East region, they remain key actors in shaping early childhood education by blending faith-based instruction with the national curriculum. These schools are often revered for instilling moral values, discipline, and academic rigor. However, the evolving educational landscape, marked by curriculum reforms, decentralization, and new quality assurance mechanisms, places increasing demands on school leadership. Head teachers in these schools are expected to bridge administrative responsibilities with spiritual leadership while ensuring compliance with government policy directives.

In recent years, scholars have raised concerns over the leadership preparedness of head teachers in mission schools (Okonkwo & Eze, 2021). As institutions governed by both religious and secular authorities, these schools operate in a dual accountability framework that often results in conflicting policies and blurred lines of authority. Moreover, many head teachers are appointed based on ecclesiastical recommendations, often with minimal administrative training, thereby affecting their effectiveness. This paper aims to explore these dynamics by critically examining how leadership is exercised, the challenges encountered, and possible

strategies for reform through a theoretical lens.

Conceptual Clarifications

A rigorous analysis of the leadership and management practices of head teachers in mission schools requires conceptual clarity. The concepts of leadership, management, and mission schooling are interrelated but distinct. Without clear definitions, the nuances of the head teacher's role risk being blurred.

Leadership

Leadership in education has been defined in diverse ways, reflecting both functional and relational perspectives. At its core, leadership involves influencing others toward achieving a shared vision or set of goals. Northouse (2021) describes leadership as "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal." In the school context, leadership is not confined to positional authority; rather, it reflects the capacity of head teachers to inspire teachers, motivate pupils, and foster collaboration with stakeholders. Instructional leadership, as applied in this study, narrows leadership to activities directly tied to teaching and learning: setting goals, supervising instruction, evaluating curriculum, and building a conducive learning climate (Hallinger, 2018). Thus, leadership here is not abstract charisma but a practical engagement with the processes that determine educational quality.

Management

Management, while closely linked to leadership, emphasizes the systematic coordination of people, resources, and processes to achieve organizational goals. Fayol's classical management theory, though developed in the early 20th century, still underscores key management functions: planning, organizing, staffing, directing, and controlling. In schools, management ensures that resources—human, financial, and material—are mobilized efficiently to support teaching and learning. Bush (2020) notes that while leadership emphasizes vision and change, management ensures stability, order, and efficient use of resources. For head teachers in mission schools, management functions include preparing timetables, maintaining discipline, allocating resources, liaising with church and government authorities, and ensuring compliance with policy guidelines. Effective management provides the foundation upon which leadership activities can thrive.

Mission Schools

Mission schools refer to schools established and managed by faith-based organizations, particularly Christian missions, with the dual goal of academic formation and moral or spiritual development. In Nigeria, mission schools date back to the 19th century, when early missionaries introduced Western education alongside evangelization (Nwosu & Adebayo, 2019). These schools were widely respected for discipline, moral instruction, and academic excellence. However, following the government takeover of schools in the

1970s, mission schools experienced a decline, leading to calls for their return to denominational control. In the South-East region, particularly in Anambra, Enugu, and Imo States, many mission schools have since been returned to church ownership, with head teachers appointed or approved by the respective denominations. These schools are characterized by a blend of government curriculum requirements and denominational ethos, which prioritize discipline, spiritual formation, and academic achievement.

For this study, mission schools are conceptualized as primary schools under the direct influence of religious bodies, operating with a distinctive value system that emphasizes both cognitive and moral outcomes. Head teachers in such contexts are not only educational leaders but also custodians of faith-based values, which adds an additional dimension to their leadership and management roles.

Synthesizing the Concepts

While leadership and management are distinct, they are inseparable in practice. Effective head teachers must be both leaders and managers: leaders in inspiring teachers and shaping school culture, and managers in organizing resources and maintaining accountability. In mission schools, this dual role is further complicated by the need to align both administrative and instructional practices with denominational expectations. Instructional leadership theory provides a framework for integrating these demands, as it situates the head teacher's influence squarely within the processes that sustain academic and moral outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by **Instructional Leadership Theory**, which has become one of the most influential frameworks in educational leadership research. Instructional leadership places teaching and learning at the heart of school leadership and emphasizes the responsibility of head teachers to guide, monitor, and support instructional practices. Unlike other leadership theories that focus on charisma, shared governance, or organizational transformation, instructional leadership is deliberately centered on the processes that directly influence student learning outcomes.

Hallinger and Murphy (1985) were among the first scholars to conceptualize instructional leadership as comprising three key dimensions: (a) defining the school's mission, (b) managing the instructional program, and (c) promoting a positive school learning climate. Though developed decades ago, these dimensions have been consistently refined and applied in diverse educational contexts (Hallinger, 2018). The model is particularly relevant in primary schools, where the head teacher's influence is direct and closely tied to classroom instruction.

Applied to mission schools in South-East Nigeria, instructional leadership provides a practical and contextually appropriate lens. First, **defining the mission** resonates strongly with the ethos of mission schools, which are guided not only by academic

goals but also by denominational values and moral imperatives. Head teachers in such schools are expected to articulate a vision that balances cognitive achievement with character formation. Second, **managing the instructional programme** reflects the daily responsibilities of head teachers, which include supervising teachers, evaluating curriculum implementation, ensuring lesson delivery, and providing instructional resources. In environments often constrained by limited funding and infrastructure, this function requires creativity and resource mobilization to sustain effective teaching. Third, **promoting a positive school climate** aligns with the traditional reputation of mission schools as disciplined, value-driven, and nurturing environments. Head teachers must cultivate cultures of respect, accountability, and moral uprightness while also motivating teachers to deliver quality instruction.

Contemporary adaptations of instructional leadership theory stress that head teachers are not mere administrators but instructional leaders whose effectiveness is measured by the learning outcomes of pupils (Bush, 2020; Hallinger, 2018). In the Nigerian context, where educational outcomes have been criticized for inconsistency and underperformance, instructional leadership provides a framework for shifting attention back to classroom practices and the quality of teacher-pupil interactions. It underscores that head teachers cannot delegate instructional oversight entirely; rather, they must remain visible, engaged, and supportive in matters relating to teaching and learning.

Furthermore, instructional leadership theory acknowledges the contextual challenges that shape leadership practices. In mission schools, head teachers must navigate tensions between government policies, denominational expectations, and parental demands. Instructional leadership allows for these complexities by emphasizing adaptability: while the core dimensions remain, their expression may differ depending on cultural and institutional contexts. For example, in mission schools, defining the mission might involve reinforcing denominational catechesis alongside the national curriculum, while promoting a positive climate might include integrating faith-based rituals into daily routines.

Historical Background of Mission Schools in South-East Nigeria

The history of mission schools in South-East Nigeria cannot be separated from the broader history of Western education in the country. Christian missionaries introduced formal education in the 19th century as part of their evangelization efforts. The earliest mission schools were established by denominational groups such as the Church Missionary Society (CMS), the Roman Catholic Mission, and the Methodist Mission. These schools combined literacy and numeracy with religious instruction, producing some of Nigeria's earliest elites who later contributed significantly to political, economic, and religious development (Fafunwa, 2018).

From their inception, mission schools were distinguished by their emphasis on discipline, academic rigor, and moral formation. Unlike government schools, which were bureaucratically managed, mission schools operated with a clear moral and spiritual ethos. They were seen as custodians of values such as honesty, respect for authority, hard work, and service. The schools also developed reputations for academic excellence, largely because of their insistence on high standards and close supervision of teachers by head teachers and mission inspectors.

However, the trajectory of mission schools changed dramatically in the 1970s, when the Nigerian government took over all schools in the aftermath of the civil war. The policy was intended to standardize education, remove denominational control, and promote national unity. In practice, the takeover weakened many mission schools, as the government struggled to manage the large number of institutions. Funding challenges, declining discipline, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and weak supervision led to a decline in the once-strong reputation of mission schools (Obi & Okeke, 2019).

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, pressure mounted for the return of schools to their original owners. Denominations in South-East Nigeria, particularly the Catholic and Anglican Churches, petitioned state governments to relinquish control. Beginning with Anambra and Imo States, many mission schools were gradually returned to denominational authorities. This marked a renaissance in mission schooling. With renewed oversight, mission schools began regaining their reputation for discipline and quality education, supported by closer supervision of teachers and administrators. Head teachers became the linchpins of this renewed vision, as denominations often appointed or endorsed individuals with proven commitment to both academic and spiritual formation.

In South-East Nigeria today, mission schools are a hybrid model: they operate within the national policy framework and curriculum mandated by the government but remain strongly shaped by denominational ethos. Parents often prefer mission schools for their perceived moral discipline, stronger academic performance, and emphasis on faith-based values. However, these schools also face new pressures, including the need to adapt to digital learning, cope with infrastructural deficits, and meet the rising expectations of parents who pay fees to support them.

The head teacher, therefore, stands at the intersection of this history. They are both heirs to the legacy of strict, value-driven mission education and managers within a modern, competitive educational landscape. Their leadership and management practices determine whether mission schools can sustain their reputation while also addressing contemporary challenges. Understanding this historical trajectory highlights why instructional leadership is essential: it provides a structured approach to balancing tradition and innovation, ensuring that the schools

remain relevant without losing their identity.

Leadership Practices of Head Teachers

Leadership practices of head teachers in mission schools in South-East Nigeria are best understood through the instructional leadership lens, which emphasizes activities directly tied to teaching and learning. Head teachers in these schools are not only administrators but also the central figures responsible for sustaining academic excellence and moral discipline. Their leadership practices can be grouped into four interrelated domains: defining the school's mission, managing instruction, cultivating a positive school climate, and addressing gendered dimensions of leadership.

Definition of Mission School

Head teachers in mission schools carry the responsibility of articulating and communicating a clear vision that integrates both academic achievement and faith-based values. Unlike in public schools where emphasis may be placed solely on academic outcomes, mission school leaders must ensure that their vision reflects denominational priorities, including character formation, spiritual growth, and social responsibility. For example, at **St. Paul's Catholic Mission School, Nnewi Diocese**, the head teacher sets aside weekly assemblies to remind pupils of the twin goals of "academic discipline and Christian conduct." Similarly, in **Holy Trinity Anglican School, Enugu**, the head teacher collaborates with clergy to ensure catechetical instruction runs alongside national curriculum subjects. By reinforcing these goals in staff meetings, parent-teacher forums, and school assemblies, head teachers align teachers, pupils, and parents with the dual objectives of the school.

Managing Instructional Programmes

Instructional leadership also requires head teachers to monitor and support teaching and learning directly. This involves supervising teachers, reviewing lesson plans, observing classroom practices, and ensuring that the curriculum is effectively delivered. In mission schools, head teachers often take a more active role in supervision than their counterparts in government schools, reflecting the traditions of close monitoring inherited from missionary founders.

In **Queen of the Rosary Mission School, Onitsha**, the head teacher makes weekly classroom visits and inspects students' notebooks to ensure teachers maintain standards of both content mastery and faith integration. In another example, the head teacher of **St. Stephen's Mission School, Orumba South**, personally coordinates in-service training on modern pedagogy while embedding values of honesty and respect. This dual emphasis sustains high academic expectations while nurturing the moral dimension unique to mission education.

Promoting a Positive School Climate

Another critical leadership practice is the cultivation of a supportive and disciplined learning environment. Mission schools have historically been associated with

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.15 (2), May-August, 2025 https://ajemates.org

order, respect, and moral uprightness. Head teachers reinforce these qualities by modeling ethical behavior, enforcing discipline consistently, and ensuring that pupils and staff uphold the values of the school.

In **Our Lady's Mission School, Nsukka**, the head teacher promotes a climate of discipline by pairing firm rules with open dialogue between teachers and pupils. Parents are invited to regular town-hall style meetings where issues of behavior and performance are addressed collectively. Similarly, in **Sacred Heart Mission School, Awka**, the head teacher has established mentorship groups where teachers guide small clusters of pupils on both academic and spiritual development. These practices create a culture where pupils feel accountable, supported, and motivated to excel.

Gender and Leadership in Mission Schools

A critical but often overlooked dimension of leadership practices in mission schools is the influence of gender. Historically, mission schools in South-East Nigeria were male-dominated in their leadership, as religious authorities often appointed male head teachers, especially in Catholic schools. However, in recent decades, more female head teachers have been appointed, particularly in Anglican and Pentecostal mission schools, reflecting broader societal shifts toward gender inclusivity in educational leadership.

In **St. Monica's Anglican Mission School, Enugu**, the appointment of a female head teacher brought notable changes. Teachers reported that she encouraged participatory decision-making, prioritized teacher welfare, and introduced motherly mentorship programs for pupils. By contrast, in **St. Joseph's Catholic School, Nnewi**, the male head teacher emphasized strict discipline, punctuality, and adherence to hierarchical structures. While different in style, both approaches contributed positively to maintaining the mission school's standards.

Nevertheless, challenges persist: some female head teachers still face resistance from male colleagues, denominational authorities, or cultural expectations that limit their perceived authority. Yet, in places like **Christ the King Mission School, Awka**, female head teachers have demonstrated strong success in balancing instructional supervision with pastoral care, thereby proving that gender diversity strengthens the leadership landscape of mission schools.

Balancing Leadership Roles

While instructional leadership theory frames head teachers as instructional guides, mission school leaders often must balance this role with administrative and pastoral functions. They serve as moral exemplars, denominational representatives, and community liaisons. This multidimensional leadership makes their practices more complex but also more impactful, as they influence not just

learning outcomes but also the spiritual and social development of children.

In essence, the leadership practices of head teachers in mission schools reveal a blend of formal instructional leadership, faith-driven mentorship, and gender-influenced leadership dynamics. By defining a shared vision, supervising instruction, fostering a climate of discipline and support, and navigating gender expectations, these leaders sustain the tradition of mission schools as spaces for holistic education.

Management Practices of Head Teachers

The management practices of head teachers in mission schools in South-East Nigeria are central to how these institutions achieve their dual mandate of academic excellence and moral formation. Unlike public schools, where management structures may be more bureaucratic and state-driven, mission schools place considerable responsibility on the head teacher as the chief executive officer of the school. Grounded in instructional leadership theory, these management practices extend beyond pedagogy to encompass planning, organizing, staffing, supervision, and resource mobilization.

Strategic Planning and Goal Setting

Effective head teachers in mission schools engage in systematic planning to ensure the smooth running of their institutions. Strategic planning involves setting clear goals that reflect both government curriculum requirements and denominational priorities. For instance, the head teacher of **St. Patrick's Catholic School, Nnewi**, creates annual development plans that integrate academic benchmarks (such as WAEC pass rates) with spiritual goals (weekly catechism attendance). Similarly, in **Good Shepherd Anglican School, Enugu**, planning includes scheduling staff retreats to review not just performance data but also spiritual growth indicators. This forward-looking approach helps mission schools maintain their distinct identity while meeting external educational standards.

Organizing School Operations

Organizing involves the structuring of human and material resources to achieve set objectives. In practice, head teachers in mission schools often adopt a participatory style, forming committees for discipline, curriculum, and extracurricular activities. For example, in **Sacred Heart Mission School, Orumba**, the head teacher established a "Parents and Teachers Committee" that meets quarterly to advise on discipline and academic progress. This collaborative organizational structure ensures that decision-making is not top-heavy and reflects the values of the wider faith community. At the same time, head teachers maintain hierarchical oversight, especially in areas concerning religious instruction and moral discipline, where denominational policies must be strictly adhered to.

Staffing and Teacher Development

Staffing is a critical management practice in mission schools, particularly given the emphasis on hiring teachers who are not only professionally qualified but also

morally upright. Head teachers play a decisive role in recruitment, often in consultation with diocesan education boards. In **St. Mary's Mission School, Awka**, the head teacher insists on interviewing candidates about their personal faith commitments alongside their academic qualifications. Beyond recruitment, mission school head teachers invest heavily in teacher development. For instance, the head teacher of **Holy Child Mission School, Enugu**, organizes regular workshops on integrating Christian values into lesson delivery, while also encouraging teachers to attend government-sponsored training for continuous professional development. This dual emphasis ensures that teachers are both academically competent and spiritually grounded.

Supervision and Quality Assurance

Supervision is one of the strongest hallmarks of management in mission schools. Unlike in many public schools, where supervision may be irregular, mission school head teachers are deeply involved in classroom oversight. Daily or weekly classroom visits, review of lesson notes, and regular staff appraisals are common. In **St. John's Mission School, Nsukka**, the head teacher uses a monitoring tool to track each teacher's performance, student outcomes, and adherence to denominational codes of conduct. Supervision is not merely punitive but often supportive, with feedback sessions and mentoring for underperforming teachers. This hands-on approach strengthens accountability and contributes to the consistently higher performance of mission schools in national examinations compared to some public counterparts.

Resource Mobilization and Financial Management

Mission schools, while partly supported by denominational authorities, often rely heavily on the resourcefulness of head teachers to sustain operations. Financial constraints such as inadequate government subventions and rising costs of materials mean that head teachers must creatively mobilize resources. In **Queen of the Rosary School, Onitsha**, the head teacher partnered with the local parish to raise funds for building renovations. Similarly, the head teacher of **St. Anthony's Mission School, Enugu**, initiated a scholarship fund in collaboration with alumni to support indigent pupils. Financial prudence and accountability are crucial, as denominational oversight committees often demand transparency in budgeting and expenditures. Successful head teachers combine administrative efficiency with community engagement, ensuring that resources are maximized to improve both infrastructure and learning conditions.

Integrating Management with Mission Identity

What distinguishes the management practices of head teachers in mission schools is their integration of administrative efficiency with spiritual and moral leadership. For example, while supervising lesson delivery, head teachers also ensure that prayers and moral instructions are incorporated into daily routines. During financial planning, they prioritize projects

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.15 (2), May-August, 2025 https://ajemates.org

that strengthen the school's faith identity, such as chapels or catechetical materials, alongside laboratories and libraries. In **St. Theresa's Mission School, Abakaliki**, the head teacher's decision to allocate funds equally between ICT development and chapel renovation illustrates the dual accountability head teachers face: to state educational authorities and to their denominational leaders.

Challenges Faced by Head Teachers in Mission Schools

Although mission schools in South-East Nigeria have established a reputation for discipline, academic excellence, and moral training, head teachers face a range of challenges that complicate their leadership and management responsibilities. These challenges often stem from structural, financial, cultural, and policy-related issues, and they influence how effectively instructional leadership can be carried out in practice.

Financial Constraints

One of the most pressing challenges for head teachers is inadequate funding. Mission schools typically depend on tuition fees, contributions from churches, and occasional government subventions. However, rising costs of educational materials, infrastructural maintenance, and staff salaries frequently outweigh available resources. For instance, in **St. Mary's Mission School, Awka**, the head teacher struggled to provide modern ICT facilities due to limited funds, despite repeated appeals to alumni and parish donors. Financial scarcity also makes it difficult to retain qualified teachers, who may leave for better-paying government schools, thereby increasing turnover rates and disrupting continuity in teaching.

Policy Tensions between Church and State

Head teachers in mission schools must also navigate the complexities of dual accountability — to denominational authorities and to state education boards. In many cases, government policies on curriculum or teacher certification clash with denominational expectations regarding faith-based instruction. For example, in **Enugu Diocese**, some mission school head teachers reported pressure from government inspectors to reduce religious activities during instructional hours, even though denominational leaders insisted these practices remain central. This tension often puts head teachers in difficult positions, where they must balance compliance with state regulations while safeguarding the faith identity of their schools.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

Staffing is another persistent challenge. While denominational authorities emphasize moral uprightness and faith commitment in hiring, this narrows the pool of eligible candidates. Additionally, mission schools sometimes cannot offer salaries competitive with government schools, leading to high teacher attrition. A head teacher in **Nsukka Mission School** noted that three of her most experienced teachers resigned within two years to join state schools with better welfare packages.

AJEMATES
African Journal of Educational Management, Teaching and Entrepreneurship Studies
VOL.15 (2), May-August, 2025 https://ajemates.org

Frequent turnover disrupts academic progress and forces head teachers to spend more time training new staff, which diverts attention from instructional leadership.

Gender Barriers in Leadership

Although more female head teachers are now being appointed in mission schools, gender-based challenges remain significant. Female head teachers often face skepticism from staff, parents, or community leaders, who may question their authority to enforce discipline or manage finances. For instance, at **St. Monica's Anglican School, Enugu**, the female head teacher recounted resistance from male staff members who challenged her directives during staff meetings, citing cultural norms that prioritize male authority. Such biases not only undermine female leaders' authority but also create internal conflicts that hinder school progress.

Infrastructural Deficits

Mission schools, particularly those in rural areas, often suffer from dilapidated infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient learning resources. Head teachers are frequently tasked with sourcing funds to renovate classrooms, build libraries, or equip laboratories. At **Christ the King Mission School, Ufuma in Orumba North**, the head teacher managed to mobilize parents to fund repairs of leaking roofs, but the lack of science laboratories still limited students' performance in national examinations. These infrastructural challenges reduce the effectiveness of teaching and learning, despite strong instructional leadership practices.

Parental and Community Expectations

Because mission schools are widely perceived as custodians of both academic excellence and moral discipline, parents often place excessive expectations on head teachers. They expect consistently high examination results, impeccable moral conduct from pupils, and strict discipline, even when resources are inadequate. In **St. Joseph's Mission School, Nnewi**, parents demanded the introduction of robotics classes, despite the school lacking basic ICT infrastructure. Meeting such demands without the necessary funding places undue stress on head teachers, who must manage parental expectations while remaining realistic about what is achievable.

Administrative Overload

Head teachers also face the burden of administrative overload, as they are often required to handle both managerial and pastoral roles. Unlike in public schools where duties are sometimes delegated to vice-principals or administrative officers, many mission schools require head teachers to personally supervise discipline, teaching, finances, and religious programs. This heavy workload reduces the time available for head teachers to focus on their instructional leadership role. A head teacher in **Onitsha Archdiocese** lamented that she spent more time signing financial records and attending diocesan meetings than observing classrooms, leaving instructional supervision less prioritized.

Security Concerns

In recent years, insecurity in some parts of South-East Nigeria has also posed challenges. Kidnappings, community unrest, and economic instability affect school attendance and the safety of pupils and staff. Some mission school head teachers have had to divert funds meant for learning materials to security measures such as fencing, guards, or surveillance systems. For example, **St. Theresa's Mission School, Abakaliki**, had to suspend evening catechism classes after incidents of insecurity in the surrounding community. These measures, while necessary, strain already limited resources.

Implications for Educational Outcomes and Quality

The leadership and management practices of head teachers in mission schools in South-East Nigeria carry profound implications for educational outcomes and overall school quality. First, when head teachers adopt a transformational leadership approach, they create an environment where both teachers and students are motivated to achieve higher standards. Transformational leadership enhances teacher commitment, reduces absenteeism, and encourages creativity in pedagogy, which ultimately improves student performance in external examinations such as the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and the National Examination Council (NECO).

Effective management practices, such as strategic planning and staff development, directly contribute to improved curriculum delivery. For example, when head teachers organize regular in-service training for teachers, they enhance instructional competence and classroom engagement, which boosts student learning outcomes. In mission schools, where moral and spiritual formation is often prioritized, such practices also lead to holistic education that balances cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

Furthermore, resource mobilization has a ripple effect on quality outcomes. Mission school head teachers who actively engage alumni associations, religious organizations, and community stakeholders often succeed in providing modern infrastructure such as libraries, ICT laboratories, and science equipment. These improvements raise the quality of teaching and learning, positioning mission schools as centers of excellence.

However, the implications are not entirely positive. Poor management practices—such as authoritarian decision-making, lack of financial accountability, or weak supervision—can reduce teacher morale, fuel indiscipline among students, and lower examination pass rates. For instance, evidence from schools in Anambra and Enugu indicates that when supervision is punitive rather than supportive, teachers become resistant and disengaged, ultimately undermining instructional quality. Thus, the practices of head teachers are central determinants of whether mission schools achieve their founding vision of

academic excellence and character development.

Recommendations for Policies and Practices

Capacity Building for Head Teachers: Ministries of Education in collaboration with faith-based organizations should institutionalize continuous professional development programs tailored to mission school head teachers. Workshops on transformational leadership, ICT integration, and conflict management should be prioritized.

Strengthening Collaborative Governance: Head teachers should adopt participatory management structures, engaging teachers, parents, alumni, and community leaders in decision-making. This will enhance resource mobilization and promote transparency in financial management.

Resource Diversification: Mission schools should develop sustainable funding models beyond tuition fees. Partnerships with NGOs, international donor agencies, and old boys'/girls associations can help provide modern teaching facilities and reduce the financial burden on parents.

Gender-Inclusive Leadership: Policies should encourage the appointment of more female head teachers in mission schools, especially in rural communities. Evidence suggests that female school leaders often emphasize mentorship, care, and inclusive practices that positively influence student welfare and learning outcomes.

Supervision for Development, Not Punishment: School supervisors from both the government and mission boards should prioritize mentoring and developmental feedback rather than punitive inspection. Supportive supervision enhances teacher innovation and classroom delivery.

Integration of ICT in Administration: Head teachers should embrace digital platforms for record-keeping, resource allocation, and communication. This will improve efficiency, reduce bureaucratic delays, and align mission schools with global best practices.

Way Forward

The sustainability and relevance of mission schools in South-East Nigeria hinge on how effectively leadership practices adapt to contemporary educational challenges. Head teachers must move beyond traditional administrative routines to embrace transformative roles that inspire teachers, motivate learners, and mobilize resources within and beyond their immediate communities.

First, there is a need to strengthen collaboration between government and mission proprietors. Such partnerships will guarantee adequate funding, provide access to capacity-building programmes for head teachers, and align mission schools with national education standards while retaining their distinctive moral ethos.

Second, digital literacy and technological integration must become a priority. As global education increasingly embraces online learning and data-driven management, mission schools cannot remain analog. Head teachers should champion the adoption of ICT for

instructional delivery, record-keeping, and parent–school communication.

Third, the way forward demands a deliberate focus on inclusivity. Appointing more women as head teachers and encouraging participatory leadership models will enrich the governance of mission schools and provide young learners with diverse role models.

Finally, ongoing research and documentation of leadership practices in mission schools should be institutionalized. Evidence from such studies will provide benchmarks for improvement and shape policies that ensure mission schools remain vital agents of holistic education in Nigeria. In essence, the way forward lies in reimagining headship in mission schools as a blend of instructional, ethical, and visionary leadership that equips children not only for academic success but also for responsible citizenship.

Conclusion

Mission schools in South-East Nigeria have historically played a vital role in advancing educational access, moral development, and academic excellence. The leadership and management practices of head teachers remain central to sustaining this legacy. Transformational leadership, when combined with effective planning, staffing, supervision, and resource mobilization, produces a culture of high expectations and improved learning outcomes. Conversely, authoritarian leadership, poor financial accountability, and inadequate supervision can hinder progress and erode the credibility of mission schools.

This article has shown that head teachers in mission schools are not merely administrators but vision-bearers whose actions shape the quality of education delivered. To strengthen their impact, policymakers, religious organizations, and communities must collaborate to provide training, resources, and enabling environments. Ultimately, by refining leadership and management practices, mission schools in South-East Nigeria can continue to serve as models of quality education and moral transformation in the 21st century.

REFERENCES

Adegbesan, S. O. (2019). Leadership and school effectiveness in Nigeria: Implications for educational policy. *African Journal of Educational Management, 22*(1), 45–58.

Akinola, O. B., & Uzochukwu, I. C. (2020). Leadership styles of school heads and their impact on teacher performance in South-East Nigeria. *International Journal of Education and Practice, 8*(2), 199–210. https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.61.2020.82.199.210

Eze, J. U., & Okeke, B. C. (2021). Resource mobilization strategies and school improvement in Nigerian secondary education. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Administration and Planning, 21*(2), 75–91.

Igwe, C. O., & Nwoye, F. A. (2022). Mission schools and educational quality in South-East Nigeria: An assessment of management practices. *Journal of Educational Leadership in Developing Countries, 10*(3), 55–72.

Nwachukwu, K. C., & Nwankwo, J. I. (2018). Transformational leadership and teacher job satisfaction in Nigerian secondary schools. *Educational Management Perspectives, 15*(4), 112–129.

Obi, U. F., & Anih, E. J. (2023). Gender and school leadership: Examining female head teachers in Nigerian mission schools. *Journal of African Education, 5*(1), 88–104. https://doi.org/10.31920/jae.v5i1.2023

Okonkwo, R. N., & Chukwu, P. E. (2020). School supervision in Nigeria: From control to professional support. *International Journal of Educational Supervision, 7*(1), 34–49.

Omeje, H. O., & Nwangwu, C. C. (2021). Faith-based education and character formation in South-East Nigeria: The role of mission schools. *African Journal of Christian Education, 12*(1), 15–29.

UNESCO. (2017). *Education for sustainable development in Africa: Policies and practices*. UNESCO Publishing.

World Bank. (2020). *Improving education outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, DC: World Bank.