



Principals' Leadership Variables and Undergraduates Attitudes Towards Practicum Exercise in Secondary Schools

Valentine J. Owan*

Department of Educational Management, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

Ene O. Egbula

Department of Educational Management, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

Usen F. Mbon

Department of Educational Management, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

Festus O. Arop

Department of Educational Management, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

Michael E. Asuquo

Department of Educational Management, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

Blessing I. Nwannunu

Department of Educational Management, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

James E. Okon

Department of Educational Management, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

Abstract

Background: The attitudes of many undergraduates towards practicum exercise is declining in each passing year, affecting the quality of educational leaders produced from higher education. Studies in the past, have documented that there is no significant difference in the attitudes of students with or without practicum experience towards academic activities in higher education. Little or nothing seems to be known at the moment regarding the reasons why there is an indifference in the attitudes of students after completing a practicum course. In response to this gap, we designed this study to assess principals' leadership variables as the presumed cause of undergraduates' declining attitudes towards practicum exercise in secondary schools. **Methods:** A census study was carried out in Cross River State, where the entire 667 secondary school administrators (271 principals and 396 vice principals) were studied. "Principals' Leadership Variables and Undergraduates' Attitudes Towards Practicum Exercise Questionnaire" (PLVUATPEQ), designed by the researchers, was used in data collection. Data collected were analysed using simple linear regression analysis. **Results:** We find amongst others, that principals' leadership styles, communication patterns, decision-making and supervisory approaches significantly predict undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise relatively. Each of these independent variables accounts differently for the variance in the dependent variable based on their unique coefficient of determination. **Conclusion:** It was concluded generally, that principals' leadership variables significantly predict undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. The attitudes of undergraduates towards practicum exercise increases as the leadership styles, communication patterns, decision-making skills, and supervisory approaches of principals improve. The implications of this study are discussed for policy and educational reforms.

Keywords: Practicum; Principals; Leadership; Variables; Attitudes; Exercise; Undergraduates.



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1. Introduction

The effective management of secondary schools in Nigeria is one of the means through which educational goals can be attained. The importance of school administration cannot be overstated because available human and material resources are managed by school principals (Arop *et al.*, 2019). Given the importance of effective school leadership at the secondary school level, it is even more important to think about the future of school management. This calls for a channel to be created that will guarantee continuity in school leadership as generations keep passing on. One of the means through which this can be attained is through proper training of future school administrators who should be able to fill the void that may be created from time to time. Reacting to this, curriculum and policy planners introduced the teacher education reform to help groom teachers and future educational administrators (Arop *et al.*, 2019).

As part of the teacher education programme, undergraduates are expected to be exposed to practical field experience where they can gain in-depth knowledge of practical teaching and school administration. This period of

*Corresponding Author

practical field experience is known as "practicum exercise." Practicum exercise is a field experience designed to offer undergraduates opportunities to link theory with practice. In Educational Management, it is an opportunity offered to undergraduates to spend a minimum of six weeks in a formal school system. The rationale behind practicum is to expose students to the realities of administration through practical demonstration of school management and office practices. It is a form of experiential learning that integrates knowledge and theory learned in the classroom with practical application and skills development in a professional setting. Students on such internship are expected to observe experienced administrators and teachers practise and carry out administrative duties in line with learned principles, ethics, doctrines, and theories of administration (Egbula *et al.*, 2019).

Although this programme is designed to help students understand pragmatically, the realities of school administration, the attitudes of many undergraduates towards this programme are questionable. It is worth stating that many undergraduates do not seem to understand the benefits of embarking on practicum exercise. Manifested in their unwillingness and reluctance to embark on such a life-changing experience, it is very glaring that many undergraduates are not ready for it. Keen observation has also shown that many students on practicum exercise put forth unacceptable attitudes to work in their respective places of primary assignment. For instance, it has been reported by some undergraduates (names withheld) that many of their colleagues, when posted to schools, do not even report, some report without effectively discharging assigned duties, while others are unconcerned about filling their logbooks nor preparing their practicum experience report for submission back to the universities which posted them.

Consequently, most of them end up either paying people to prepare reports for them or copying reports from other colleagues. In other cases, many students deliberately refuse to perform assigned duties while others appear to be perpetual late goers to their assigned schools. In fact, and regrettably, Egbula *et al.* (2019) disclosed there is no significant difference in the attitudes of undergraduates with practicum experience and those without it Egbula *et al.* (2019). This is quite worrisome because practicum exercise should provide an opportunity for individuals to develop skills and acquire competence from a practical environment as opposed to theoretical explanations. The persistent negative attitudes manifested by students during practicum exercise has further affected their attitudes towards study when they return to the university to complete their study (Egbula *et al.*, 2019).

At the moment, little or nothing seems to be known as reasons explaining students' declining interest or poor attitudes towards practicum exercise. Research in this area has also done little to address this issue, perhaps because of its emerging nature. Generally, little or no efforts appear to have been made to address this problem. Rising to this problem, the researchers are wondering whether principals' leadership variables have any relationship with undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. Principals' leadership variables refer to the professional characteristics of secondary school principals that are manifested in the day-to-day running and administration of the school especially in relating with other personnel. School leaders (principals) are the ones overseeing students during practicum exercises while having a shared supervisory duty with the university posting such students.

The administrative variables possessed by school principals could affect the way and manner in which students on practicum would discharge their duties. Such variables include their communication and disciplinary skills, leadership approaches, inter-personal or human relation skills, decision-making techniques, and many others. School administration is individual-based thus, different administrators exhibit different characters and adopt different pattern which suits their personality in running the school. Such differences in personality and leadership lead to differences in working relationship and goal attainment (Owan, 2018b). There are several leadership variables including human relations skills, decision-making skills, disciplinary skills, leadership styles, supervisory pattern, human resource management, motivational techniques, communication patterns, networking strategies, conflict management techniques (Arop *et al.*, 2018; Ejimabo, 2015; Owan *et al.*, 2019; Wilson, 2017).

In this study, the emphasis was laid on four principals' administrative variables including principals' leadership styles, communication technique, decision-making skills, and supervisory approach. These sub-variables were considered in this study because the organization cannot perform maximally, without the manager's leadership style, communication patterns, supervisory effectiveness, as well as the provision/presence of other work-related variables (Madukwe *et al.*, 2019). It was based on this background that this study was undertaken to assess some principals' leadership variables and undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise.

1.1. Principals' Leadership Styles

Principals leadership styles refer to the techniques adopted by secondary school principals in providing leadership to both staff, students and driving the organisation towards goal realization. The leadership styles adopted by a principal is a product of their personality coupled with their academic and administrative orientation. This variable was considered in this study because leadership styles vary from one principal to another. Such variations in styles could influence how practicum students/student-teachers carry out their duties and determine their overall attitude to work. Principals with scientific management orientation could make undergraduates on practicum to be work-efficient through work-driven policies and regular inspection leading to effectiveness. Given that undergraduates on practicum exercise are also pre-practising teachers, the assertion above suggests that their attitudes may be influenced by the type of leadership adopted by school principals. A principal with autocratic leadership approach may be very harsh to student-teachers which may scare them. Such a principal may feel he does not have enough time to attend to undergraduates' notes, practicum logbook, and in assigning administrative duties to practicum students.

Many previous studies have focused on the influence of leadership styles on teachers' job performance (Atsebeha, 2016; Ch *et al.*, 2017; Owan and Agunwa, 2019; Sathiaseelan, 2013; Shamaki, 2015; Wachira *et al.*,

2017). Although these studies did not focus specifically on practicum students (student-teachers), a study found that all the leadership styles, except the directive leadership style, have a positive impact on the teachers' performance (Atsebeha, 2016). Other studies showed that, among the leadership styles, democratic style contributes more to teachers' job productivity than autocratic style (Ch *et al.*, 2017; Sathiaseelan, 2013; Shamaki, 2015). Another study by Kiboss and Jemiryott (2014) reveals that principals' leadership styles have a great impact on the working atmosphere in a school and consequently the teachers' job satisfaction. A significant correlation was also found between the principal's styles of leadership and the teacher's perception of the teaching profession (Wasserman and Yehoshua, 2016). It was further shown that there was a significant relationship between leadership styles and teachers' performance, and that supportive leadership style affects teachers' performance (Wachira *et al.*, 2017).

It has been revealed that the democratic leadership style is the most commonly used leadership style among principals; teachers' job performance was also found to be at a moderate level in schools (Adeyemi, 2011). Teachers' job performance was found to be better in schools having principals using autocratic leadership style than in schools having principals using democratic or laissez-faire leadership styles (Adeyemi, 2011). On the contrary, the study of Owenvbiugie and Ibadin (2017) showed that autocratic and laissez-faire principals' leadership style influenced teachers' job performance to a low extent, while democratic principals' leadership style influenced teachers' job performance to a high extent.

With student academic performance as the dependent variables, the study of Igwe *et al.* (2017) revealed that autocratic leadership style was positively correlated with students' academic performance. Similarly, Paul and Toyin (2017) discovered that there is a significant positive relationship between transformational leadership style and performance of students; a non-significant positive relationship was found between democratic style and performance of students; a negative relationship which is not statistically significant was found between autocratic, laissez-faire and academic performance in selected schools (Paul and Toyin, 2017).

1.2. Principals' Communication Patterns

Principals communication patterns are strategies used in sending and receiving messages, knowledge, ideas or information, to and from members of the organization. Principals' ability to communicate is a key factor in their effectiveness (Herrera, 2010). Effective principals are continuously searching for new strategies and means of communicating with their external and internal publics (Owan and Agunwa, 2019). Besides, principals need to realize that it would take more than verbal rhetoric to effectively communicate the goals and priorities of the school. As leaders, principals' non-verbal communications are equally important in determining the effectiveness of their leadership by positively or negatively influencing the school culture (Omorobi *et al.*, 2020; Oroye, 2019). This sub-variable was also considered inevitable in this study because communication is the bridging across all misunderstanding in the school and a vital tool for effective conflict resolution (Adeyemi, 2011; Arop *et al.*, 2018a; Owan, 2018a). Thus, principals that communicate effectively to student-teachers or practicum students, may build cohesion with them and create a path for effective attitudes to thrive, due to the bond created.

Studies in the past have focused on communication and teachers' job performance and satisfaction (Arop *et al.*, 2018; Hajar, 2016; Ibrahim and Mahmoud, 2017; Jonathan, 2017; Kursunoglu and Tanriogen, 2009). Other studies have also associated the effect of communication on the organisational performance of educational institutions (Akinwale and Okotoni, 2018; Arop *et al.*, 2018). A significant relationship was found by a study between principal-teacher communication practices and teachers' job satisfaction (Hajar, 2016). In the study of Jonathan (2017), a significant positive relationship was found between principals' communication strategies and teachers' job performance in secondary schools. It was also uncovered by Arop *et al.* (2018) that effective communication management has a significant relationship with human relationship, work performance and organizational goal attainment. In another study, Kursunoglu and Tanriogen (2009) discovered that there is a positive relationship between instructional leadership behaviours of principals and teachers' attitudes towards organizational change.

1.3. Principals' Decision-Making Skills

Principals' decision-making skills are the abilities possessed by school leaders which enable them to make choices when presented with several options or alternatives. Effective principals are those that make the right decisions from a pool of alternatives presented before them. This variable was considered in this study because different principals are prone to making different choices if given the same set of options, while the same principal can make different choices from the same set of options at different times. Therefore, the decisions taken by principals vis-à-vis students on practicum exercise could affect their attitudes to work. It can make them enthusiastic and willing to regularly partake in the schools' activities and can also make them lose interest in the school and her activities. The decision of principals, policies, and organisational rules are meant to guide workers on their job activities, such that the work environment could experience a peaceful climate (Ogunsanya, 2012). The decision-making skills of principals may affect undergraduates' attitudes if they perceive such decisions as being unfair, harsh, and unbearable (especially decisions made during conflict resolution).

The result from the study indicated that teaching practice students acquired meaningful work knowledge, demonstrated good working skills with the right attitudes at the workplace, suggesting that the industrial practicum training briefings, practicum curriculum and guidelines have a positive impact on the students' prior practicum attachment to the industry (Ahmad *et al.*, 2013). Using a correlational method, Olcum and Titrek (2015) determined that student-teacher job satisfaction levels were predicted significantly by administrators' decision-making styles. Another study revealed that on-campus teaching practice equips entrants with requisite teaching knowledge, skills, experience, efficacy, professional development and support their learning (Amankwah *et al.*, 2017). The results of

(Uba-Mbibi, 2013) indicated that there was no significant difference between headteachers' decision making and student teachers job performance.

The study of Mgbekem *et al.* (2016) showed that nursing students' experiences, expectations and benefits are significantly derived from teaching practice. It was concluded that teaching practice is a motivating and challenging method that necessitates learning of facts, principles and procedures for effective development of decision-making skills that assist nursing students to assume responsibility (Mgbekem *et al.*, 2016). In a related study, Oroye (2019) discovered that there is a significant relationship between administrative variables such as teachers' job security, decisions making and school climate and teachers' job performance in public secondary schools. Furthermore, Araya (2013) uncovered that student-teachers have a positive perception of the role of the practicum program in promoting their pedagogical skills as well as subject matter knowledge. Although, no significant influence was found between administrative decision-making strategies and the students' outcome even though they achieved their goals (Araya, 2013).

1.4. Principals' Supervisory Approaches

Principals' supervisory approaches are the methods employed by secondary school principals to monitor the activities of both staff and students in the school. In line with this, Madukwe *et al.* (2019) maintained that the principals' attitudes and skills to appropriately monitor, inspect, evaluate the performance of his subordinates and to ensure that such subordinates perform their duties according to prescribe standards expected of them, is what makes the administrator supervisory effective. It follows from the assertion above that students undergoing practicum exercise need thorough supervision from the principals of the assigned schools if appropriate attitudes are anticipated. The supervisory approaches of principals may influence undergraduates' attitudes negatively if they are centred on fault-finding and constant criticism. A principal with a poor supervision approach may offer little or no suggestions that will help practicum students to improve. Such students may find their stay in their places of primary assignment boring and unexciting due to the regular criticism they may be receiving from principals.

Teachers' performance in secondary schools is significantly dependent on the capacity of the principals to effectively conduct adequate and valuable supervision (Nakpodia, 2011), which validates the importance of discipline, record keeping and teaching aids. The results of Mudawali (2017) found a significant difference between actual and ideal supervision practices perceived by the teachers. The practice of supervision conducted by the principal within the framework of professional development of teachers has no significant correlation, but teachers still have positive perceptions toward instructional supervision Mudawali (2017). It has also been revealed among others, that there is a positive relationship between principals' instructional supervisory techniques and teachers' service delivery in public secondary schools (David-west and Kaegon, 2017)

In Pakistan, a study revealed that supervision practices of principal are related to staff development and are indeed helpful in attaining better performance of teachers and their overall growth (Yousaf *et al.*, 2018). More so, Okorie and Nwiyi (n.d) found that the delegation of supervisory function strategy, effective record-keeping strategy and teacher's monthly assessment strategy enhances teacher's effectiveness in secondary schools. Using a qualitative-quantitative one-group research design, Javanbakht (2014) found that the most significant problems of internship courses were cooperating teachers' lack of technology-based teaching materials, as well as having little knowledge in education theories, developmental psychology and learning theories, and not using new and innovative teaching methodologies (pedagogical). Other challenges are lack of opportunity for cooperating teachers to talk with student-teachers about their teaching methodologies and attempt to tackle their potential problems as well as supervisors' lack of provision of a teaching sample for student teachers (attitudinal), and lack of appropriate physical space for implementing new teaching methodologies (physical) (Javanbakht, 2014). It was also shown by Oyewole and Alonge (2013) that a significant positive relationship exists between the experience of principals in performing their instructional supervisory roles and the motivation of their teachers. It was reported in a study that instructional supervisory techniques in terms of classroom visitation, micro-teaching and research approach have a significant influence on teacher's job performance (Dikeogu and Amadi, 2019)

1.5. The Present Study

This study reviewed several works of literature empirically under the sub-variables of interest. The review gave insights to the researchers concerning the topic, especially in ascertaining what areas have been covered by previous studies and where to focus in the present study. It was deduced from the review that efforts have been made by various scholars on related literature about principals' leadership variables such as communication, leadership styles, decision-making, and supervisory approaches. These studies have mostly associated these areas of leadership to dependent variables such as job satisfaction, job performance, attitudes of teachers, teachers' effectiveness and students' performance.

To the researchers' knowledge, no study in the past, have associated principals' leadership variables (such as communication, leadership styles, decision-making, and supervisory approaches) to undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. This suggests that the area of undergraduate attitudes towards practicum exercise has received little attention. The only study in this area only assessed the attitudes of undergraduates after practicum experience and found their attitudes to be indifferent from those of students without the exercise (Egbula *et al.*, 2019). The study did not explain what factors were responsible for this indifferent behaviour, creating a gap for future researches. In filling this gap, this study presumed that the leadership variables of secondary school principals (where these undergraduates had their practicum experience) may have affected them.

Again, with a focus on fulltime secondary school teachers, the majority of the studies found that principal administrative variables positively and significantly influence the outcome of teachers, with only a very few studies contradicting this position. This shows that there is an academic debate in the literature in this regard, calling for more studies to be carried out for further clarification. Since students on practicum exercise are student-teachers, they should be treated as teachers in their places of primary assignment. Thus, the activities of the school management towards in-service teachers are likely to be the same as those extended towards student-teachers. Consequently, findings from studies focusing on full-time teachers are considered as related to the present study. Based on this fact, the researchers also believe that the conclusions reached in this study can also be generalised to fulltime teachers, while also contributing to the ongoing debate. This study has been designed to test the following null hypotheses:

- i. There is no significant influence of principals' leadership styles on undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise.
- ii. There is no significant relationship between principals' communication patterns and undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise.
- iii. Principals' decision-making skills have no significant relationship with undergraduates' attitude towards practicum exercise.
- iv. Principals' supervisory approaches do not significantly influence undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study adopted the Descriptive Survey Design. Descriptive Survey Design is used to obtain information concerning the current status of a phenomenon and to describe what exists concerning variables or conditions in a situation. In this design, the subjects are observed in their natural and unchanged natural environment. This design was considered most appropriate for this study because the study intends to investigate principal leadership variables such as leadership style, communication patterns, decision-making skills, and supervisory approaches and describe these phenomena of interest as they influence the dependent variable (undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise).

2.2. Population and Sampling Techniques

The population of this study comprised all the principals and vice-principals in all the public secondary schools in Cross River State. Thus, the population of this include 667 secondary school administrators (271 principals and 396 vice principals) distributed across 271 public secondary schools in Cross River State. Census approach was employed to study the entire population of 667 respondents in the area of study. Census technique is used in situations where the population to be studied is small or manageable such that, all the elements in it could be studied in its entirety (Arop *et al.*, 2019). This approach was considered appropriate due to the manageable number of principals and vice-principals in Cross River State.

2.3. Instrumentation

The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire titled: "Principals' Leadership Variables and Undergraduates' Attitudes Towards Practicum Exercise Questionnaire" (PLVUATPEQ). The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A elicited demographic variables of the respondents, while Section B elicited information concerning principals' administrative variables and undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. Five items each were used to measure the five variables of the study respectively, resulting in a total of 25 items organized on a four-point Likert-scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. The instrument received face validity from three experts in the measurement and evaluation unit, Faculty of Education, University of Calabar, Calabar. After a pilot study involving 50 participants, the reliability of the instrument was ascertained using the Cronbach Alpha technique, with a reliability coefficient of .885 obtained. This coefficient indicated that the instrument was internally consistent for measurement.

2.5. Procedure for Data Collection/Analysis

Copies of the instrument were administered to the respondents in the respective schools by the researchers. Before commencing administration, the respondents were duly informed of the importance of the exercise and the need to provide honest responses to the instruments. The respondents were also assured that the data requested would be treated with total confidentiality and hence, were advised to personally respond to the items there-in and not to share an opinion with anyone. At the end of the process, copies of the instruments were retrieved from the respondents for analysis without any loss. This represented a 100% rate of return from the administered copies of the instrument. The collected data were prepared on a person by item matrix using a computer spreadsheet program (Microsoft Excel version 2019). One-way Analysis of Variance (One-way ANOVA) and Simple linear Regression Statistical techniques was adopted for data analysis with the aid of Stata statistical software version 15.

3. Results

3.1. Hypothesis one

There is no significant influence of principals' leadership styles on undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. In this hypothesis, the responses to questionnaire items 1 – 6 were used to classify the responses of secondary school administrators into three categories – Democratic, Laissez-faire, and Autocratic leadership styles. The dependent variable was measured continuously at the interval scale of measurement. This made the researchers consider the one-way analysis of variance as the most appropriate statistical technique in comparing the means of undergraduates' attitudes towards learning in schools where principals adopted these three leadership styles. The result of the analysis is presented in [Table 1](#).

Table-1. One-way Analysis results summary showing the influence of principals' leadership styles on undergraduates' attitude towards practicum exercise

Leadership styles	N		\bar{X}		SD
Democratic	210		21.90		6.844
Laissez-faire	264		14.62		2.478
Autocratic	193		9.00		2.775
Total	667		15.28		6.689
Source of variation	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	16917.390	2	8458.695	436.000	.000
Within Groups	12882.055	664	19.401		
Total	29799.445	666			

The results presented in [Table 1](#) showed that undergraduates' attitude towards practicum exercise is favourable in secondary schools where principals adopted democratic leadership styles ($\bar{X} = 21.90$, $SD = 6.844$), followed by schools where principals adopted laissez-faire ($\bar{X} = 14.62$, $SD = 2.478$) and autocratic ($\bar{X} = 9.00$, $SD = 2.775$) leadership styles respectively. A close look at the ANOVA section of [Table 1](#), showed an F-ratio of 436.000, with a p-value of .000, which is less than the .05 alpha level at 2 and 664 degrees of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected, while the alternate hypothesis was upheld. Thus, there is a significant influence of principals' leadership styles on undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. In ascertaining whether the mean difference across various groups was statistically significant, the Tukey pair-wise post-hoc test of multiple comparisons was performed as shown in [Table 2](#).

Table-2. Tukey posthoc tests of multiple comparisons showing the mean differences of undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise based on different leadership styles

I	J	I – J	SE	Sig.
Democratic	Laissez-faire	7.278*	.407	.000
	Autocratic	12.895*	.439	.000
Laissez-faire	Autocratic	5.617*	.417	.000

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The results in [Table 2](#) showed that the comparison of the mean of undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise between schools where principals adopted democratic and laissez-faire leadership styles is statistically significant. When democratic and autocratic leadership styles of principals were compared, the mean difference in the attitudes of undergraduates towards practicum exercise is significant. Lastly, when laissez-faire and autocratic leadership styles of principals were compared, it was discovered that the mean difference in the attitudes of undergraduates towards practicum exercise is statistically significant. Thus, the observed mean differences recorded in [Table 1](#), are all significant across the various categories of leadership styles.

3.2. Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between principals' communication patterns and undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. The independent variable of this hypothesis is communication patterns while the dependent variable is undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. Both variables were measured continuously at the interval scale of measurement. This met the assumptions for the choice of simple linear regression as the most appropriate statistical technique in testing for the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The result of the analysis is presented in [Table 3](#).

Table-3. Simple linear regression results showing the relationship between principals' communication patterns and undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise (N = 667)

R	R ²		Adj. R ²		SE
.666	.444		.443		4.993
Model	SS	Df	M S	F	Sig.
Regression	13223.528	1	13223.528	530.507	.000
Residual	16575.918	665	24.926		
Total	29799.445	666			

B = .730; t = 23.033; p < .05

As shown in Table 3, the results revealed an R-value of .666 indicating that there is a moderate positive relationship between principals' communication patterns and undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. The adjusted R square value of .443 indicates that 44.3% of the total variance in undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise is explained by principals' communication patterns. This implies that the remaining 55.7% of the remaining variance could be explained by other independent variables not included in the model. A close look at the ANOVA section of the regression analysis revealed an F-ratio of 530.507 and a p-value of .000, which is less than the .05 alpha level at 1 and 665 degrees of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was retained. This implies that there is a significant relationship between principals' communication patterns and undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. Thus, the adjusted R² value of .443 earlier presented was not due to chance.

3.3. Hypothesis Three

Principals' decision-making skills have no significant relationship with undergraduates' attitude towards practicum exercise. The independent variable of this hypothesis is principals' decision-making skills while the dependent variable is undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. The independent and dependent variables of this hypothesis were both measured continuously at the interval scale of measurement. The hypothesis was tested at the .05 level of significance using simple linear regression analysis, with the results presented in Table 4.

Table-4. Summary of simple linear regression results showing the relationship between principals' decision-making skills and undergraduates' attitude towards practicum exercise (N = 667)

R		R ²		Adj R ²	SE
.269		.073		.071	6.447
Model	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	2160.653	1	2160.653	51.986	.000
Residual	27638.792	665	41.562		
Total	29799.445	666			

B = .250; t = 7.210; p<.05

The results in Table 4 shows that there is a weak positive relationship (R = .269) between principals' decision-making skills and undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. Principals' decision-making contributed 7.1% to the total variance in undergraduates' attitude towards practicum exercise, with the remaining 92.9% of the total variance explained by other extraneous independent variables which can be studied in the future. A look at the analysis of variance (ANOVA) section of the regression, shows an F-ratio of 51.986 with a p-value of .000 which is less than the .05 alpha level at 1 and 665 degrees of freedom. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis is retained. This implies that principals' decision-making skills have a significant relationship with undergraduates' attitude towards practicum exercise. Thus, the adjusted R square value of .071 that was obtained, was not due to chance.

3.4. Hypothesis Four

Principals' supervisory approaches do not significantly relate to undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. The independent variable of this hypothesis is principals' supervisory approaches while the dependent variable is undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. Both variables in this hypothesis were measured continuously, making it suitable to apply the simple linear regression statistical technique. The hypothesis was tested at the .05 alpha level and the result of the analysis is presented in Table 5.

Table-5. Summary of simple linear regression results of the relationship between principals' supervisory approaches and undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise (N = 667)

R	.681				
R Square	.464				
Adj. R Square	.464				
SE	4.899				
Model	SS	Df	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	13838.376	1	13838.376	576.560	.000
Residual	15961.069	665	24.002		
Total	29799.445	666			

B = .496; t = 24.012; p<.05

The results of the fourth hypothesis presented in Table 5 disclosed that principals' supervisory approaches have a weak positive linear relationship (R = .681) to undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. It was also shown that 46.4% of the total variance in undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise is accounted for, by principals' supervisory approaches. With the remaining 53.6% of the total variance explained by other independent variables not included in the model. The ANOVA section of the regression analysis shows an F-ratio of 576.560, with a p-value of .000, which is less than the .05 level of significance at 1 and 665 degrees of freedom. Given this result, the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis is retained. This implies that principals'

supervisory approaches significantly relate to undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. Therefore, the adjusted R square value of .464 earlier obtained was not due to chance.

4. Discussion

It was established through the first finding of this study that principals' leadership styles have a significant influence on undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum activities in secondary schools. Principals who adopted the democratic leadership style promoted better attitudes amongst undergraduates towards practicum exercise. This is followed by those who adopted laissez-faire and autocratic styles respectively. This finding is unsurprising because a principal who adopts a democratic leadership approach will be inclusive in his administration. This will make him carry undergraduates along and guide them properly during practicum exercise. The same may not be said in cases where principals are very harsh and care less about the activities of undergraduates who are student-teachers in their schools. Such harsh leadership techniques may input fear on the parts of undergraduates who may cease from attending school as a solution to avoiding unfriendly principals. This finding aligns with the results of [Atsebeha \(2016\)](#) which showed that all the leadership styles, except the directive leadership style, have a positive impact on the student-teachers' performance. The data also indicated a statistically significant relationship between the job performance of teachers and the leadership styles employed by the principals. Furthermore, the finding of this study corroborates the result of other studies ([Adeyemi, 2011](#); [Kiboss and Jemiryott, 2014](#); [Sathiaseelan, 2013](#); [Wasserman and Yehoshua, 2016](#)) which all revealed that democratic leadership style of principals has a positive impact on teachers' professional development, working atmosphere in a school and consequently, teachers' job satisfaction.

It was also uncovered in this study that there is a significant relationship between principals' communication patterns and undergraduates' attitude towards practicum exercise. By the implication of the finding of this study, undergraduates devoted favourable attitudes towards practicum exercise in schools where principals communicated effectively than in schools with little or no communication effectiveness. This finding supports the result of [Jonathan, 2017](#) which earlier found a positive significant relationship between principals' communication strategies and student-teachers' job performance in secondary schools. This finding also tallies with the outcome of [Arop et al. \(2018\)](#) that effective communication leads to good human relationship, promotes work performance and organizational communication leads to good human relationship, promotes work performance and organizational goal attainment. Other studies (e.g., [Akinwale and Okotoni, 2018](#); [Kursunoglu and Tanriogen, 2009](#); [Sezgin and Er, 2016](#)) have also discovered previously that principals' communication styles play important roles in the smooth running of schools as well as enhancing teachers' effectiveness.

The third finding of this study showed that principals' decision-making skills significantly relates to undergraduates' attitude towards practicum exercise. This finding may be attributed to the liveliness that may be recorded, when undergraduates undergoing practicum exercise, are given a chance to contribute their inputs towards school growth. Such inputs may stir their intrinsic motivation to work hard and ensure that policies (which they contributed to formulating) are realised. This would improve their attitude to work as they strive to make things work. This result agrees with [Ahmad et al. \(2013\)](#) who indicated through the findings of a survey that teaching practice students acquired meaningful work knowledge, demonstrated good working skills with the right attitudes at the workplace. The result was also favourable and suggested that the industrial practicum training briefings, practicum curriculum and guidelines have a positive impact on the students' prior practicum attachment to the industry. The results further corroborate the findings of [Olum and Titrek \(2015\)](#) that students-teachers and teachers job satisfaction levels were predicted significantly by administrators' decision-making styles.

The fourth finding of this study showed that principals' supervisory approaches significantly relate to undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. This finding shows that an improvement in the supervisory approaches of principals will lead to an improvement in the attitudes of undergraduates towards practicum exercise and vice versa. This finding suggests that principals stand a better chance of improving undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise if they can supervise them and offer proper guidance. During supervision, weaknesses found in undergraduates could be improved. Such improvements would make undergraduates happy, boosting job commitment in their quest to apply newly acquired skills. The fourth finding is similar to the results of [Nakpodia \(2011\)](#) which found that teachers' performance in secondary schools is significantly dependent on the capacity of the principals to effectively conduct adequate and valuable supervision which validates the importance of discipline, record keeping and teaching aids. The study recommended that school principals should routinely adopt reasonable supervisory behaviour to enhance teachers' task in the classrooms ([Nakpodia, 2011](#)). In another study, [David-west and Kaegon \(2017\)](#) revealed among others, that there was a positive relationship between principals' instructional supervisory techniques and teachers' service delivery in public secondary schools.

5. Limitations of the Study

This study showed that principals' leadership variables such as leadership, communication, decision-making and leadership techniques have partial and composite relationships to undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise, but did not control for the effect of other extraneous variables. These other extraneous variables that could mediate the observed effect discovered in this study may include the behaviour of other staff in the school, the personality variation of different practicum undergraduates, and school environmental factors. This has created further gaps for prospective researches to focus on. This study did not explore all the possible principals' leadership variables that can influence students' attitudes towards practicum exercise, limiting the generalisations made to only four of these numerous factors. The effect of other variables needs to be studied in the future to complement the

findings established in this study. Lastly, albeit it was a census study, the geographical area covered is Cross River State in Nigeria with only a few numbers of respondents in the population. Although generalisations can be made to the extent of the scope of this study, it will also be interesting to see results from a larger scope and cross-cultural perspective.

6. Conclusion/Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study it was concluded generally that principals' leadership variables significantly predict undergraduates' attitudes towards practicum exercise. The attitudes of undergraduates towards practicum exercise increases as the leadership styles, communication patterns and supervisory approaches of principals improve. This study implies that many undergraduates will not only manifest negative attitudes towards practicum but may avoid embarking on the exercise in the future if appropriate measures are not used to address their concerns. This may consequently affect the quality of future school leaders produced in higher education for school management. Based on this conclusion, it was recommended that:

- i. Every secondary school principal should adopt a contingent leadership style in relating to staff, student-teachers/practicum students posted to their schools.
- ii. Secondary school principals should make concerted efforts to communicate effectively, school policies, prospects and the role expectations to teachers and students-teachers. Principals should ensure that they receive feedback from practicum undergraduates regarding the administration of the school.
- iii. During practicum exercise, principals should ensure that undergraduates are allowed to attend staff meetings and contribute their ideas towards school growth. Their inputs may increase their active participation in school activities and could be meaningful in providing innovations in the school.
- iv. Secondary school principals should endeavour to supervise practicum students and all their records regularly. Logbooks of practicum students should also be filled consistently by principals to ensure that undergraduates are adequately guided for improved effectiveness.

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