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School Leadership in a High Performing Rural Catholic School in Nigeria

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2017

Abstract

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by

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MA, Warwick University, UK, 2005

BTh, Urban University, Rome, 1998

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Researchers have observed that effective leaders are essential to achieving and sustaining high student achievement in disadvantaged poor rural areas. Poor leadership may negatively influence the academic performance of students. The poor performance of students in disadvantaged rural areas has been a continuous concern for Catholic educators in Nigeria. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the leadership practices that a rural Catholic school principal implemented to improve the academic standards in a disadvantaged environment in Nigeria. This qualitative case study sought to explore the practices of a principal in a Catholic school in the Diocese of Auchi that have improved student performance significantly in a disadvantaged rural area. Leithwood and Riehl's core leadership practices framework served as a conceptual basis for understanding the leadership practices of an effective school principal. The collection of data was through semistructured interviews with 12 participants (principal, 6 teachers, and 5 parents), a focus group with 5 teachers, field notes from direct observations, and documents from the school. Data analysis was thematic and flexible as guided by an interpretative framework. The findings suggest that Catholic school principals in disadvantaged areas need to set direction, have professional development for teachers, focus on the teaching and learning, and create an enabling climate with a positive culture, building Catholic character, good relationships, and stakeholders' collaboration. This study may contribute to positive social change in building best leadership practices in helping students learn in the midst of poverty, sustaining and improving student academic achievement.

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Dedication

This research work is dedicated to my dad, the late Mr. B. B. O. Itaman, who laid the foundation of my education career and interest in leadership, and to all educational leaders and researchers.

Table of Contents

iv

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This study focused on understanding the nature of leadership practices of a principal in a high-achieving Catholic school in a disadvantaged rural setting in Auchi Diocese, Nigeria. Many schools are underperforming in Nigeria because of poverty and poor leadership (Abbas, 2012; Ayodele, Buari & Oguntuase, 2016). Research has indicated that the low socioeconomic background of students' families interferes with school leaders' abilities to improve student achievement (Sang, Chepchieng & Kariuke, 2015). Today, a problem confronting the Catholic school principals is managing challenges and improving academic standards, which Catholic schools are known for in Nigeria. Therefore, in this study, I explored the practices of the principal in a high-achieving Catholic school in a disadvantaged rural area. In the study, I sought to fill the gap in the underresearched area of school leadership in Catholic schools in a poor environment in Nigeria. The social impact of the study may be to contribute to building leadership best practices that will aid school leaders in helping students to learn in the midst of poverty and other challenges. The study may provide information that can contribute to raising student achievement level in disadvantaged areas and thus help in closing the achievement gap, reducing dropout rates, and increasing the rate of students entering the universities. As an introduction, in this chapter, I articulate the background, research problem, purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions of terms, assumptions, scope of the study, limitations, and significance of study.

Background

Meeting and sustaining educational standards is at the core of education policy in many countries. There exists an expectation of the government that all secondary schools in Nigeria must meet the minimum standards in terms of student academic performance. Low-performing schools are the schools failing to meet the minimum standard (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Herman, 2008). Basic characteristics of low-performing schools are poverty, poor facilities, ineffective leadership, unqualified teachers, and disinterested students (Ayodele et al., 2016; Brown, 2012; Ehisuoria & Aigbokhaebho, 2014).

The problems confronting principals are managing challenges and improving academic standards in rural areas. The poor performance of students has been partly attributed to the ineffectiveness of the principals and their inability to define the school mission, set direction, manage the instructional program, and create an enabling climate for effective learning (Ayodele et al., 2016; Hallinger & Lee, 2013). Principals' effectiveness may depend on their ability to cope and manage challenges to improve the academic standards in the midst of difficulties, poverty, and tough environment. Principals' effective management is important because the location of a school and its socioeconomic contexts have been challenges for school leadership to facilitate school success.

In rural areas in Auchi Diocese, students' environments are characterized by families' impoverished economic conditions, unemployment, malnutrition, health problems, migration, low expectations, poor infrastructure, and poor academic

performance (Ehisuoria & Aigbokhaebho, 2014). The World Bank (2015a) claimed that poverty is due to the inability of the government to meet the basic needs of the people such as quality housing, food, education, electricity, water, and clothing. Consequently, the high poverty in this part of Nigeria presents a challenge to the financial support of quality education and realization of high academic standards in the schools in Auchi Diocese (Abbas, 2012).

Children in poverty are often expected to learn without basic facilities (Ehisuoria & Aigbokhaebho, 2014). There are few schools in Auchi Diocese, and most of them are ill-equipped in infrastructure (Ogunu, 2015). Due to the impoverished conditions of the rural setting in Nigeria, funding education effectively without a government subsidy has posed a challenge to the effective management of Catholic schools there (Ekundayo, 2010; Ogunu, 2015). In most schools in Auchi Diocese the staffing is not only inadequate in number but in most places, unqualified as well; the typical student to staff ratio is 45:1 (Bello, 2008; Odo & Ugadu, 2014). There is difficulty hiring qualified teachers and retaining them in the rural areas because of the conditions of service. Often, schools may not have the funds to pay qualified principals and teachers sufficiently to retain them. However, schools need effective principals to succeed in disadvantaged rural areas (Colby, 2014; Ojera & Yambo, 2014; Ross, 2013; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

For decades, researchers have shown that school leaders are essential instruments for school effectiveness and student achievement even in poverty areas

(Arogundade, 2015; Caldwell, 2010; Masewicz, 2010; Merritt, 2016; Wallace Foundation, 2011). Literature indicated that an effective school has a principal who creates and sustains a clear vision and mission, effective school climate (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013), and competent supervision of teaching and learning (Glanz & Sullivan, 2009; Tan, 2012), motivates the teachers, and manages the curriculum (Glanz & Sullivan, 2009; Ojera &Yambo, 2014).

Finally, considering the significant position of leadership in school success, exploring the roles and practices of school principal would be a contribution. More specifically, how Catholic school principals manage to improve and sustain academic standards in the disadvantaged areas despite contextual forces and challenges has not been well researched. Therefore, there was a need to explore the nature, roles, and practices of Catholic school leadership in the disadvantaged rural setting in Auchi Diocese.

Problem Statement

Nearly 65% of children in Nigeria live in poverty (World Bank, 2015b). Research indicated that the low socioeconomic background of students' families interferes with school leaders' abilities to improve student achievement (Sang et al., 2015; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005; Mulford et al., 2008; Ehisuoria & Aigbokhaebho, 2014). Often, such children are distressed and need a lot of support to excel academically (Amatea &West-Olatunji, 2007). For the past few years, there has been poor performance of students in an external examination, the West African Examination Council (WAEC) in Nigeria, especially in the rural areas (Ayodele et

al., 2016; Olaleye, 2013). In the midst of poverty, Catholic education strived to contribute to the moral, spiritual, and academic formation of students throughout Nigeria (Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2014; Ogunu, 2014). Findings indicated that students in Catholic schools in Nigeria have higher academic achievement than those in public schools (Adeyemi, 2008; Arogundade, 2015; Ekundayo, 2010; WAEC, 2009).

Some Catholic schools have higher academic achievement than other Catholic schools in the same impoverished areas (Adeyemi, 2008; Arogundade, 2015; Ekundayo, 2010; West African Examinations Council (WAEC), 2009). Researchers have partly attributed the achievement variation to school principals' leadership quality, roles, and practices, which include defining the mission and vision of the school, setting direction, appropriate management of the instructional program, and the creation of an enabling climate, among other reasons (Akomolafe, 2012; Hallinger & Lee, 2013). This impact of leadership practice agrees with the findings that schools that are successful in high poverty areas have effective leadership (Mulford et al., 2007). Previous research has demonstrated that leadership is an essential factor in the quality of a school and that there is a relationship between school leadership and student success (Arogundade, 2015; Olaleye, 2013; Wallace Foundation, 2012; Yusuf, 2012).

Today, a problem confronting Catholic school principals is managing challenges and improving academic standards for which Catholic schools are known in Nigeria. Despite the challenges, some schools have shown improvement

in disadvantaged poor rural areas by WAEC standards and school ratings (WAEC,

2015). There is less research into the principals' response to the challenges of

disadvantaged contexts in which the schools operate (Imhangbe, 2011; Masewicz,

2010). Therefore, in this study I strived to explore and understand how a school

principal managed to lead and what strategies he adopted in defining the school

vision, setting direction, managing the instructional program, and creating an

enabling climate in a disadvantaged context with widespread poverty, low retention

of quality teachers, and lack of infrastructure (Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2014;

Hallinger & Lee, 2013). This gap in the research points to a need for increased

understanding of the nature of Catholic leadership practices in the disadvantaged

localities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the

leadership practices of a rural Catholic school principal that may have contributed

to the improvement of the academic standards in a school located in a

disadvantaged environment in Nigeria. Qualitative data allowed me to describe how

stakeholders in the community perceived principal leadership practices and what

strategies the principal adopted in a disadvantaged area with widespread poverty,

illiteracy, low retention of quality teachers, and lack of infrastructure. I was

interested in gaining an understanding of how an effective Catholic school principal

met challenges to define school vision, set direction, manage teaching and learning,

and create an enabling climate to attract students to Catholic school despite the challenges posed by poverty.

Research Questions

The overarching research question was:

RQ: What principal leadership practices are perceived by stakeholders to have contributed to the improvement in academic standards in a Nigerian rural Catholic school in a disadvantaged environment in Auchi Diocese?

Subquestions included the following:

SQ1: How does the principal frame and communicate the vision of the school in a rural Nigerian village?

SQ2: How does the principal promote teachers' professional development in a disadvantaged rural high school in Nigeria?

SQ3: How do the stakeholders describe the principal's practices and role in the teaching and learning in the school in rural Nigeria?

SQ4: How does the principal promote a learning climate and enabling working condition for teachers' and parents' collaboration in a disadvantaged rural Nigeria setting?

Conceptual Framework

Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) framework of four core leadership practices necessary for school success and improvement guided this study. The four core practices were setting direction, developing the people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program (Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood

& Riehl, 2003). Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) core leadership practices model has its roots in transformational leadership studies, such as Leithwood, Tomlinson, and Genge's (1996) study that explored the impact of transformational leadership on student outcomes.

By setting direction, a school leader helps to develop the school goals and a commonality of purpose. These actions require creating a common vision for the community, raising new expectations, and communicating these effectively to the followers. Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) practice of setting direction is supported by the findings from Ylimaki, Jacobson, and Drysdale's (2007) and Thomas, Herring, Redmond, and Smaldino's (2013) studies that in disadvantaged contexts, the school principals set achievable goals, communicate, and create a sense of purpose. These principals strive to develop people by influencing behavior toward achieving the set goals and use their practices to model the necessary behaviors for their followers (Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki & Giles, 2005; Thomas et al., 2013; Ylimaki et al., 2007). Such effective leaders offer teachers intellectual stimulation and support (Ylimaki et al., 2007).

Additionally, in redesigning the school, the school leader facilitates the school activities and students' learning process and alters the school culture to one of achieving a shared vision and goals (Jacobson et al., 2005). In this process, the principal modifies the existing structures and creates professional collaboration among the staff and participation in the decision-making process (Ylimaki et al., 2007; Thomas et al., 2013). Finally, the last core principle of leadership practices

focuses on managing both the curriculum and the learning process in the classrooms (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The principal fosters teacher leadership by modeling the appropriate behaviors and encouraging teacher initiative (Ylimaki et al., 2007). A more detailed explanation of this framework is provided in Chapter 2.

Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) core leadership practices model provided a framework for this study because its components of setting direction and developing people could help school principals to promote school success. These dimensions have been shown to assist school principals to sustain high academic standards and student achievement (Garza, Drysdale, Gurr, Jacobson, & Merchant, 2014). In the process of setting direction, principals monitor the implementation of the schools' vision, which may influence teachers' practices and thus impact student achievement (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). The core leadership practices framework relates to this study because school principals need to redesign the school in disadvantaged areas to improve and sustain academic standards. In all, this framework was useful in helping to understand and interpret the findings of the study as I sought to explore how the principal's practices and behaviors promoted school success and student achievement in a Catholic school located in a disadvantaged rural setting in Nigeria.

Nature of Study

The nature of this study was a qualitative case study that explored the practices of a Catholic school principal in a high-achieving Catholic school in the Diocese of Auchi that operates in disadvantaged circumstances. This study

considered qualitative case study as a method and approach of choice because it allowed in-depth exploration, access to detailed data, and fuller understanding of the issue (Janesick, 2011). For this study, I selected a Catholic school that had demonstrated excellent student achievement in WAEC and operated in a poor rural setting. The primary aim of this case study and approach was to capture a detailed description of leadership in the school by collecting data from stakeholders through interviews, focus group, and observation (Merriam, 2009).

I carried out data collection in one selected school and conducted semistructured interviews with the principal, teachers, and parents. First-hand observation in the selected school was enriched by analysis of a focus group interview with teachers to enable me to understand and describe the components of Catholic school leadership. The method of analysis was more interpretative and guided by an interpretative framework (Robson, 2011). I based the analysis of the interview on emergent codes and thematic analysis.

Definitions of Terms

The key terms used in this study are clarified in this section to give understanding and context.

Catholic school: A school established and owned by the Roman Catholic Church with Catholic character aimed at educating the young and carrying out the mission of the church in evangelizing the people.

Catholic character: The distinctive marks of a Catholic school. It means that the school is Roman Catholic; the school community uses the school program,

religious instructions, and observances to teach the values of Jesus Christ as expressed in the Scripture and Catholic doctrine, and the school strives to inculcate the fear of God, values of Catholic worship, and moral teachings in the children, with the mission of raising children with knowledge, faith, and norms of living.

*Diocese***:** Denotes "a section of the people of God entrusted to a bishop to be guided by him with the assistance of the clergy so that, loyal to its pastor and formed by him into one community in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, it constitutes one particular church in which the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church of Christ in truly present and active" (The Canon Law Society Trust, 1983, CC 369, p. 65).

Disadvantaged context: Characterized by high poverty levels among the people, low socio-economic background, inadequate funding, high existing mobility, and lack of infrastructure for effective learning.

*Poverty***:** A lack of basic needs and the means of satisfying the basic needs. Poverty is as a life without the basic necessities of food, clothing, health care, quality education, and housing.

School leadership: Leading a learning community, working with people in a social organization, being ethical, and exercising power with the purpose of achieving school goals.

Successful school: A school that has high attainment of education excellence as measured by scores, graduation rates, and school rating.

West Africa Examination Council (WAEC): A regional examining body for English-speaking West African countries: Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Gambia, and Liberia. It has the responsibility to design and conduct external examinations for West Africa students in their final year in the secondary schools.

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed that the participants would respond to the interview questions with honesty and sincerity. Exploring the views of the participants provided understanding of the leadership practices of the principal. This approach was important in studying school leadership in countries where research is scarce and there was a need to rely on the views and experiences of the participants.

Scope and Delimitations

The research centered on school leadership in one Catholic school in the impoverished rural area in Nigeria. This study was limited to one Catholic school in Auchi Diocese. It focused on Catholic schools in Nigeria.Therefore, there was no intention to generalize findings from this study to other countries of the world. In this study I recognized that there was leadership in public and private schools, but this study focused on school leadership in Catholic schools. Finally, though there were leaders in the primary and tertiary levels, this study focused exclusively on secondary school level of education. This study's focus was delimited to leadership success as it relates to the academic achievement of students. This was the case because Nigeria's educational system is largely examination-oriented (Olaleye, 2013).There were other measures of success in a school that were not considered,

including rates of students attending college, employment rates of graduates, and attendance rates.

Limitations

The nature of the small size of the study limited the possibility of generalization because it focused on one high-achieving Catholic school in a challenging context. Again, being a Catholic priest studying the practices of a Catholic school principal in managing and sustaining academic standards in a disadvantaged context was a limitation to the study. There was the possibility of the participants telling me what they thought I wanted to hear because I am a priest and that could distort and influence the study. To manage this occurrence, I played the role of a researcher and used a locality where I have no influence and supervisory role. Also, I made it clear to the participants the purpose of the study to enable the participants to look beyond my position as a Catholic priest.

Finally, I indicated that the teachers who participated in this study were subordinates of the principal whose leadership was examined and was the unit of analysis of this study. I envisaged that this could constitute an intrusive and limiting factor to the study. I reasoned that the principal might victimize the teachers if such participant should give information not acceptable to the principal and this could constitute a limitation in getting accurate information. Consequently, I protected the participants all through the process and assured them of confidentiality, anonymity, and nontraceability in the research.

Significance of Study

The necessity for this study stemmed from a gap in the literature. I sought to fill the gap in the underresearched area of school leadership in Catholic schools in a poor environment in Nigeria. Pragmatically, the study may provide useful information for relevant bodies on how to improve practice. As an educationist and principal, research in school leadership in Catholic education will hone my professionalism and that of other scholars in this field. Due to the dearth of research in the area of managing a Catholic school in disadvantaged contexts in Nigeria, an investigation into principals' leadership practices in Catholic schools in one disadvantaged area might thus contribute to the theoretical development of this field in Nigeria. It may contribute to the development of national literature on school leadership in Nigeria. It may also contribute to social change by raising student achievement levels in disadvantaged areas, helping to close the achievement gap, and reducing dropout rates

The needs of the students in the disadvantaged environment are remarkably different from the needs of other students (Bacon, 2008). Principals could make the difference by meeting their needs. Hence, Amatea and West-Olantunji (2007) maintained that a school principal could increase student achievement in the disadvantaged area by adopting a specific leadership practice. Therefore, principals need to be aware of their leadership styles and practices and the impacts they have on student achievement (Hagel, 2014). It may be a great contribution to social

change to provide ways of making a difference in the academic life of students in other impoverished environments.

This study may contribute to positive social change for those seeking to build leadership best practices to help students learning in the midst of poverty and disadvantaged contexts to sustain and improve academic achievement regardless of their low socioeconomic environment. The findings from this study may contribute positively to the body of knowledge and assist in the management of other schools in disadvantaged contexts and increase student achievement.

Summary

This chapter has articulated the whole picture of the dissertation by providing an introduction to the research. In doing this, I presented a background to the study in an effort to situate the problem. I further articulated the purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, the nature of the study, and the definition of terms. Finally, I concluded this chapter by stating the assumptions, relevance of the study, the scope of the study, limitations, significant of study, and a summary of the chapter. To strengthen this background, the next chapter will review the literature serving as the background to this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and gain an understanding of the leadership practices and behaviors of a principal in a high-achieving Catholic school located in a disadvantaged rural context in Nigeria. In the study, I strived to make sense of how the principal in this high-achieving school dealt with challenges in order to contribute to and maintain academic standards and high student achievement in a disadvantaged environment. The goal of this literature review was to indicate what the current research had established about leadership practices and behavior that promote high academic standards and outcomes in a disadvantaged rural context.

More specifically, the review focuses on issues and research surrounding how a Catholic school principal manages challenges to improve school achievement in a difficult environment. Finally, the review includes the conceptual framework, school leadership, leadership qualities, Catholic school leadership, leadership styles, leading school in poverty areas, and strategies for enhancing student achievement in a poverty-environment. This chapter concludes with highlights of key findings in the literature and the gaps in the literature.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review was carried out by searching with the following keywords: *leadership, principal, low-socioeconomic status, instructional leadership, student achievement, academic standard, challenging context, disadvantaged, poverty, achievement, student performance, school success,*

Catholic school, mission school, and *faith school leadership.* In the search process, "or" and "and" were put in between the terms. The literature review encompassed peer-reviewed journal articles found in ERIC, ProQuest Digital Dissertations and Theses databases, Education Research Complete, Education Source, Sage Premier, EBSCOhost, books, and Google Scholar. Due to lack of literature on this area in Nigeria and because the Nigerian education system is similar to those of the Western nations, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, literature related to Western nations is included in the review while maintaining a primary focus on education in Nigeria. In this review, I have critically examined the available literature as informed by the conceptual framework and selected those that seemed closely related to my study and aligned with my objectives.

Conceptual Framework

Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) framework of four core leadership practices necessary for school success and improvement guided this study. The four core practices are setting direction, developing the people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Jacobson, 2011). The core leadership practices model has its root in transformational leadership studies by Leithwood and colleagues including a study that explored the impact of transformational leadership on student outcomes (Leithwood et al., 1996), on student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005), and on student success (Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Jacobson (2011) submitted that Leithwood and Riehl's set of core leadership practices encapsulate the leadership

practices that a school principal could employ to translate ideas into actions. In their

study of core leadership practice, Thomas et al. (2013) indicated that in

demonstrating core leadership practices, school principals created shared meaning

about the school vision and work towards achieving the vision.

Jean-Marie and Sider (2014), Handford and Leithwood (2013), and

Jacobson (2011) suggested that Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) core leadership

practices promote student achievement and school success. Using a qualitative

approach, Jean-Marie and Sider explored the leadership practices and behaviors of

eight Haitian school principals and found that the challenges confronting school

leaders in developing states were adopting policies and practices from the

developed world that may not favor their contexts. Also, in their study of leadership

practices of teachers linked to leadership characteristics, Handford and Leithwood

(2013) found that associated with teachers' perceptions of the principal's

trustworthiness were perceptions of the principal's integrity, consistency, reliability,

and competence. Using Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) core leadership practices as a

framework, Jascobson (2011) studied the relationship and impact of school

leadership practices on student achievement. Finally, in employing the core

leadership practices, Thomas et al. (2013) found that school leaders create school

vision, develop the staff for effectiveness in achieving the vision, and support staff

in their activities. I examine each of these four core leadership practices in detail in

the following sections.

Setting Direction

Setting direction entails developing and communicating the school goals and the commonality of purpose (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). These actions require creating a common and compelling vision for the community, raising new expectations, ensuring the acceptance of goals, communicating these effectively to the followers, and monitoring the performance of the school (Day, 2012; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Petrides, Jimes & Karaglani, 2014). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) argued that providing direction for the people is a key function of the leader. The transformational leadership model has this fundamental task enshrined in it, and Bass (1985) called it inspirational motivation, a practice that demands developing new opportunities, articulating, motivating, and inspiring the followers with the vision (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006). There are some aspects of setting a direction that I used in the design of this study. They are identifying and articulating a vision, creating a high-performance expectation for the students and adults, and fostering acceptance of the school vision.

Identifying and articulating a vision. Schools need a well-defined school vision that articulates clear and measurable goals that should focus on student academic progress (Gamage, Adams, & McCormack, 2009; Hallinger, 2013; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Stronge, Holly, & Catano, 2008). Findings suggested that in framing and defining the vision, the school leader needs to ensure that it is understood, inspiring, uplifting, easy to communicate, and shared (Nagy & Fawcett, 2011;

Stronge et al., 2008). Findings indicated that developing a clear vision and building commitment improves student achievement (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Masewicz, 2010). Supporting these findings, in a mixed method study carried out among Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to determine leadership practices that supported student achievement, Valadez (2013) found that a well-articulated vision and mission aided successful Catholic school principals in leading the schools.

Creating high-performance expectation for the students and adults. In qualitative studies that examined successful principals in high-poverty schools in the United States, England, and Australia, Ylimaki et al. (2007) found that the principals set achievable goals, improved the physical environment, and created a sense of purpose. The study suggested that principals in the United States focused on the creation of safe environments and setting high expectations for all students in challenging contexts, while in England, school heads focused on directives and tasks in setting a vision for school improvement in failing schools and disadvantaged contexts (Ylimaki et al., 2007). The school leaders all made an effort to ensure cooperation and alignment of stakeholders to the principal's vision and value (Nagy & Fawcett, 2011; Petrides et al., 2014). Setting direction in schools located in a disadvantaged context in Australia, Ylimaki et al. (2007) found that principals employed shared leadership and distributed leadership while striving to improve the physical school environment and student behavior. Creating a vision for a given school is one of the essential tasks of a school principal and a crucial

instrument for achieving effective incorporation and alignment of school activities to ensure school success (Leithwood et al., 2006).

Fostering acceptance of the school vision. A school leader fosters the acceptance of the vision through an agreement on some key goals to achieve the vision (Leithwood et al., 2006). For the school goal to have motivational value, the school principal needs to lead teachers and other school personnel to own the school vision, and this process requires fostering collaboration among staff in achieving a common goal (Leithwood et al., 2006). In this connection, Yang (2014) suggested that the school leader needs to craft the basic conditions to encourage the stakeholders to achieve common school objectives.

Developing People

Developing the people in the workplace for effectiveness depends on the school principal's trustworthiness and performance (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Developing the people entails building personal and mutual capacity for the teachers through intellectual stimulation and appropriate role models (Jacobson, 2011). Teaching is a profession that needs on-going professional development (Bifuh-Ambe, 2013), and teachers as essential resources in the school need continuing education (Hodgman, 2012). Developing people entails building the teachers intellectual capacity and providing individualized support in the learning process (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). This concept is well articulated in transformational leadership theory by Bass (1985), who indicated that transformational leadership incorporates four I's: idealized influence, inspirational

motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Leithwood &
Beatty, 2008). This suggested that the principals strive to develop people by
influencing behavior towards achieving the set goals and modelling the necessary
behaviors for their followers (Jacobson et al., 2005; Thomas et al., 2013). There are
other aspects of developing teachers that are important to this study. They are
providing intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support, and providing
an appropriate role model.

   Providing intellectual stimulation. School leaders offer an opportunity for
teacher development and enhancement. Effective leaders focus on the capacity
building for teachers to increase their competency (Wagner et al., 2010; Pihie &
Asimiran, 2014). Competency is described as "the repertoire of skills and
knowledge that influences student learning" (Wagner et al., 2010, p. 99). Staff
development will be effective and beneficial if it is job-embedded, classroom-
centered, continuous, and collaborative (Wagner et al., 2010). In a meta-analysis of
peer-reviewed articles from 2000 to 2014 on leadership practices that have
influenced student achievement, Hitt and Tucker (2016) found that there is a need
for schools to engage in a continuous professional development of the teachers to
hone their skills, improve productivity, and sustain academic standards. School
leaders could encourage the spirit of 'teachers as learners' to build capacity for the
staff. The school leader could do this through staff training, visits to other schools
to gather best practices, and sponsoring teachers to conferences and seminars (Hitt
&Tucker, 2016; Ojo & Olaniyan, 2008).

Providing individualized support. School principals provide individualized support by knowing the needs of their followers or staff and raising them to another level of development (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Followers attain a sense of worth and self-actualization when given opportunities to apply acquired skills and knowledge. Building capacity is not only for skill acquisition to achieve school goals, but there is also a need to build commitment and resilience in the work process and dispositions to always use the skills (Leithwood et al., 2006). The principal gives individualized support by showing concern and respect for the staff and being mindful of their feelings and needs (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Additionally, the school leaders show respect by recognizing the individual's roles and contributions towards achieving school goals (Handford & Leithwood, 2013).

Teachers' motivation and stimulation are crucial to effective productivity in the school. In corroboration of this idea, Ojera and Yambo (2014) found in their survey research that the quality of the principal's leadership determined the teachers' level of motivation and the quality of teaching in the classrooms. The role and approach of the principal in motivating teachers is vital to ensuring school improvement and student achievement (Tan, 2012). In examining how principals motivate the teachers, Ahmed (2016) and Tan (2012) found that some principals motivate their staff through salary increment, praise, appreciation, encouraging initiatives, valuing people's contributions, building team relationships among the teachers, and developing an interest in the staff. These sources of motivation may

determine the level of teachers' commitment to school goals (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010).

In carrying out intellectual stimulation, the school leader encourages teachers to look at their work from different perspectives, take intellectual risk, reassess assumptions, and rethink how to do better in their work for more effectiveness (Leithwood et al., 2006). In brief, Leithwood et al. (2006) claimed it would lead to challenging the status quo in the system and other practices, and consequently, promote school success. The transformational leadership model articulates the practices and recommends it for school leaders, especially leaders of schools in disadvantaged contexts (Leithwood et al., 2006).

Providing appropriate role model. Developing the staff requires a school leader to provide an appropriate model through leading by example (Ahmad et al., 2013; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Providing appropriate model suggests that a school leader must demonstrate some degree of transparency in the decision-making process, optimism, hope, confidence, resilience, and consistency in the day to day activities (Leithwood et al., 2006). Findings indicated that successful school leaders modeled behavior that they considered essential in achieving school goals (Belcastro, 2015). Developing people further encompasses Bass's (1985) idealized influence because a leader exercises the influence when he/she serve as a model for behaviors of building trust and respect in the workers (Leithwood et al., 2006).

Finally, literature suggested that while principals in the United States tend to offer expert knowledge of the curriculum and instructional practices to teachers

through professional development and modeling, the school leaders in the United

Kingdom tend to give time and resources to the capacity building of their teachers,

and Australian school leaders tend to use research-based intervention to improve

teachers' performance (Hine, 2013; Ylimaki et al., 2007).

Redesigning the Organization

Redesigning the organization has to do with the working conditions and

situation in which the school operates. Increasing the motivation of staff will yield

little impact without enabling working condition (Leithwood et al., 2006).

Designing the school involves strengthening school cultures, removing hindrances

to academic success, and building collaborative spirit among stakeholders

(Jacobson, 2011). Building a positive collaborative culture and achievement-

oriented cultures are essential to leadership success in disadvantaged context

(Leithwood et al., 2006). The levels of capacities, motivations, and opportunities for

collaborators to collaborate determined the success of school activities (Connoly &

James, 2006; Ojera &Yambo, 2014). Fostering a collaborative culture need building

trust, open communication, and a good relationship (Hitt &Tucker, 2016).

Distributed leadership that encourages participation is required to enhance school

success in disadvantaged context (Leithwood et al., 2006). There were some

essential aspects of redesigning the organization that are relevant to this study, and

they are: strengthening school cultures, building collaborative processes, and

modifying organizational structures.

Strengthening school cultures. The principal enhances positive school climate by creating an enabling environment through the provision and maintenance of basic facilities and used effectively to promote student achievement and school success (Gardner, 2010; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Findings indicated that effective principals in high-performing schools create an enabling environment and set a high expectation for staff and students while holding them accountable for learning (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). In building a positive culture, Ozgan (2011) and Odhiambo and Hii (2012) observed that an enabling environment where the staff can trust the organization and its leadership is important in motivating the teachers. Findings indicated that school that is not built on trust would not succeed (Ozgan, 2011). Similar to these findings, a qualitative study of the influence of principal leadership practices on student achievement in Catholic school, Imhangbe (2011) found that high-performing Catholic schools in Edo State maintained a healthy school culture where the relationship and interaction were cordial, trusted, and homely.

Literature suggested that effective leaders have a significant impact on school climate and culture, create safe and enabling learning environment for students to excel (Davos, 2009; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). In corroboration, in a qualitative case study on the influence of principal leadership on student academic achievement in high-poverty schools in California, Harri (2011) found that the school leaders created a safe, structured environment with enabling climate for students to learn and excel in a high poverty setting. The study further indicated that

structure and systems, collaboration, and shared decision-making processes provide a climate of academic success in the school (Harri, 2011).

Building collaborative processes. In achieving the communal learning, Wagner et al. (2010) and Hands (2014) recommended that the school leaders need to encourage collaboration between teachers and professional learning communities, students learning in groups, and where teachers learn and share ideas. The school needs a collaborative leadership to promote change and development in the school. In analyzing the impact of effective dialogue with the teachers, Ojera and Yambo (2014) found that the principals could have a positive effect on teachers in terms of motivation, satisfaction, efficacy, sense of security, self-esteem, better instruction, and feeling of school support. School effectiveness requires the participation and involvement of the community and the stakeholders to bring about change in school development and student learning (Rajbhandari, 2011; Wagner et al., 2010). Therefore, Ahmed (2016) and Rajbhandari (2011) argued that the school principals need to encourage the participation and involvement of the teachers, parents, and local groups in the school management.

In a qualitative study that explored the driving leadership styles that encourage participation and involvement of stakeholders in school development, Rajbhandari (2011) found that involving the staff in the leadership of the school will bring about a sense of responsibility and accountability among the staff. Also, Rajbhandari (2011) further found that staff participation brings ownership, use of initiative for tasks, commitment, and belongingness among workers. The study

indicated that such involvement is capable of increasing the motivational level and stability among the teachers in a particular school (Rajbhandari, 2011). Additionally, school leaders build a relationship with the communities and get the support of the host communities and parents in the process of promoting school success (Leithwood et al., 2006; Rajbhandari, 2011; Wagner et al., 2010).

Modifying organizational structures. Hine (2013) claimed that it is important to carry out restructuring in the school to ensure improvement. As the schools build their culture, the necessary structures must be provided to hone productivity and success. Such structures include common planning time, teams, groups for problem-solving, teachers' involvement in decision-making, and practice of distributed leadership (Hands, 2014; Leithwood et al., 2006). In the process of designing, the school leaders facilitate the school activities and students' learning process; alter the school culture in achieving a shared vision and goals (Jacobson et al., 2005; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). In redesigning, the principal modifies the existing structures, encourages dialogue, creates professional collaboration among the staff, and change routine procedures (Ylimaki et al., 2007; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013).

Management of the Instructional Program

In managing the instructional program, an effective principal manages both the curriculum and the learning process in the classrooms (Moral, Martin-Romera, Martinez-Valdivia, & Olmo-Extrremera, 2017;Ylimaki et al., 2007). In a multi-case-study of 13 challenging schools in the United States, Australia, and England of

successful principals who made a difference in high-poverty areas, Ylimaki et al. (2007) found that the principals foster teacher leadership by living and modeling the appropriate behaviors and encouraging teacher leadership. Principals manage the instructional process by staffing the school, providing instructional support, supervision, and monitoring of teaching and learning, tracking student progress, and managing instructional time (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). The principal has the responsibility of providing competent and qualified teachers for the school especially in rural poverty areas (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Focusing on instruction in disadvantaged context is essential in ensuring school success and student achievement.

Managing instruction comprises the three roles of the principal: supervision and evaluation of the instructional process, coordination of the curriculum, and monitoring of students' progress (Hallinger & Lee, 2013; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Effective principals are vital in influencing, facilitating, supporting, and impacting on teachers' classroom effectiveness and student achievement (Olaleye, 2013; Tan, 2012). Additionally, effective principal focuses and influences student achievement by deliberately changing classroom practices and adjusting the leadership arrangement in the school to improve teaching and learning (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012; Reitzug, West, & Angel, 2008).The principal does this by clarifying and emphasizing learning goals, defining the learning purpose and outcomes, organizing curriculum, monitoring students' progress and holding the students and teachers accountable for their works (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012; Tan, 2012).

In a quantitative study of the relationship between principals' leadership behavior and school effectiveness in Nigeria, Ekundayo (2010) found that the school leader ensured proper curriculum and instructional supervision by carrying out classroom visits and inspecting all school documents. Supporting these findings, a study on principals' performance of supervision of classroom instruction by Egwu (2015) found that schools in which the principals visit classrooms and show instructional leadership seemed to improve more than schools where principals do not visit classrooms. It reflects the findings from a qualitative study of successful secondary school principalship in disadvantaged contexts by Moral, Martin-Romera, Martinez-Valdivia, & Olmo-Extrremera (2017) which found that school leader who showed leadership in the learning process improved academic performance in disadvantaged area.

The principal as an instructional leader provides visible presence, instructional resource, and communication in the learning process (Imhangbe, 2011; Ojera &Yambo, 2014). Visibly monitoring what takes place in the teaching and learning by the principal, will enhance the learning process and facilitate achievement of school goals (Stronge et al., 2008). Such principals ensured that rules and boundaries in the classrooms are defined, that teachers have access to the necessary materials for teaching, that teachers teach in line with lesson plans, and maximize the teaching time (Stronge et al., 2008). Effective learning requires the principal to ensure that teachers prepare the lessons and make good use of classroom time (Ahmed, 2016; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Nwagwu et al., 2004).

Ensuring that teachers manage their time is essential because maximization of teaching time is crucial to effective teaching and learning at school (Ahmed, 2016; Nwagwu et al., 2004). Focusing on classroom instruction is capable of promoting and improving school success (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). This position found support in the findings from a case study by Norviewu-Mortty (2012) that explored the leadership practices of school principals in disadvantaged rural schools in Ghana that found that principals who focused on teaching and learning improved student achievement in the disadvantaged context in Ghana.

Rationale for the Framework

Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) core leadership practices were considered as a relevant framework for this study because it emphasizes the core leadership practices and functions required of a school principal to improve schools in disadvantaged rural areas. Also, the components of the framework of setting direction and developing people could help school principals to promote school success. Jacobson (2011) argued that principals in high-poverty areas demonstrate core leadership practices by creating an enabling environment, involving parents in school management and encouraging collaboration among stakeholders. These dimensions have been shown to assist school principals to sustain academic standard and student achievement (Garza et al., 2014). In the process of setting direction, principals monitor the implementation of schools' vision, which may influence teachers' practice and thus impact student achievement (Leithwood &

Sun, 2012). The framework supports principals' effort in using different approaches to set direction, develop people, and redesign the school in disadvantaged areas.

This study was influenced and guided by Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) work which provided a framework for the existing knowledge about successful school principal leadership as informed by research. Most importantly, the framework was considered for disadvantaged context because Leithwood and Riehl (2003) maintained that it works in all contexts. Since this study focused on leadership in a school located in disadvantaged rural context, I considered Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) four core leadership practices appropriate for this qualitative study. The four practices guided the research questions, purpose, and method of inquiry. This framework also guided the literature review and was useful in understanding and interpreting the findings from the study as it explored the principals' practices and behaviors that promoted school success and student achievement in Catholic schools in the disadvantaged rural setting.

Review of Related Empirical Literature

Assuming that researchers considered an effective school as a successful school, and successful schools have effective leadership (The Wallace Foundation, 2011), this section analyzes research on effective schools, effective leadership, qualities of the school leader, Catholic school leadership, and leadership styles. It further analyzes leadership in disadvantaged schools and improvement strategies for schools in disadvantaged areas. These concepts were selected because they gave

understanding to the research problem and what is known about leading schools effectively in the disadvantaged areas.

Effective Schools

Lezotte and Snyder (2011) described an effective school as a school with no achievement gaps and with improved student achievement. In capturing the concept of effective school, Lezotte (2009) and Lezotte and Snyder (2011) suggested that there are seven characteristics of an effective school. These characteristics include clear and focused mission, instructional leadership, a school climate that demands high expectations, effective monitoring of student progress, offering a good opportunity to learn on time on task, creating a safe and enabling environment, and maintaining a positive home-school relationship. These characteristics aligned with the components of Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) core leadership practices. An effective school has a principal who ensures and creates clear vision and mission, effective school climate (Thapa et al., 2013) and supervision of teaching and learning (Glanz & Sullivan, 2009; Tan, 2012), motivates the teachers and manages the curriculum (Glanz & Sullivan, 2009; Ojera &Yambo, 2014), and creates enabling environment for learning (Fullan, 2007; Thapa et al., 2013).

For decades, researchers have shown that school leaders are essential instruments for school effectiveness and student achievement even in poverty areas (Arogundade, 2015; Caldwell, 2010; Masewicz, 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2011). In this light, the National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development (2004) and Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) claimed that an effective school

has sound school leadership, leadership team, trust, leadership training and support, and decision-making process informed by data. Ross (2013) focused on similar variables in a qualitative study that examined the behaviors of principals in high-performing poverty schools. Ross (2013) found that capable leadership, support system, viable curriculum, making decisions informed by data, stakeholders' involvement, safe environment, a culture of high expectations, and professionalism enhanced school effectiveness.

Positive school climate characterized an effective school (Colby, 2014). Supporting this, in a qualitative study of 142 teachers and principals in six high-achieving schools in a poverty setting, Reinhorn, Johnson, and Simon (2015) found that teacher collaboration, positive school climate, principal leadership behavior, and high-level of trust characterized effective schools in poverty areas. These findings agree with a qualitative study of an Indiana high-performing school in a poverty area, in which Colby (2014) found that positive school climate, high expectations, effective leadership, community collaboration, behavior strategies, and demonstrations of cultural competence characterized an effective school. Colby's study corroborates with qualities of positive school climate, effective leadership, and high expectations that were found by Barber (2013) in a study of principals in high-performing poverty schools in South Carolina. The implication of these findings is that positive school climate and collaborative leadership may promote school effectiveness (Colby, 2014).

Vision has also been found to associate with effective schools, as shown in a study by Leithwood (2007) and the core leadership practices of Leithwood and Riehl (2003) which note that a shared vision, a unity of purpose, consistency of practice, and leadership that enjoys collegiality and collaboration characterized effective schools (Dawson, 2007; Hallinger & Lee, 2013; Leithwood, 2007).

Effective schools nurture positive culture to promote school improvement (Mulford et al., 2008). In support of this, Mulford et al. (2008) found in a qualitative case study carried out in 21 successful schools in a disadvantaged setting in Australia that successful schools in poverty areas nurtured positive culture, used measurable goals, involved parents, improved the quality of teachers, and re-enforced school goals. The study suggested that high-performing schools in disadvantaged and high-poverty settings nurture positive culture, clear expectation, positive relationship, and supportive structures (Mulford et al., 2008). Also, teamwork, committed teachers, improved results, and strong and focused leadership were considered as features that accounted for student achievement in the disadvantaged locality in the study by Mulford et al. (2008).

Reeves (2009) considered successful schools as schools with high excellent achievement and improvement on student learning in a disadvantaged environment. In corroboration, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) conceptualized an effective school as one that has high attainment of education excellence through improved student academic achievement, teamwork, and effective management regardless its context. Analysis of literature suggests that an effective school is perceived as a

school with competent principal leadership, with committed teachers, a school that supports teachers and students positively, with an enabling environment, and sustained effective climate and culture of learning (Hallinger & Lee, 2013; Reeves, 2009).

The above analysis of literature suggests that an effective principal is essential to school success. As Brown (2012) found in a quantitative study of turnaround schools that leadership, collaboration, school organization, and professional development were essential to ensuring school effectiveness. Since schools that are successful in disadvantaged contexts have been shown to have effective principals, it is important to explore the concept and role of the school leader in creating and sustaining academic standards in the disadvantaged communities.

Effective School Leadership

A critical review of the literature indicates some essential components in school leadership that could lead to a detailed understanding of the concept of leadership in school management. Literature suggested that leadership is a means of exercising influence, as an instrument of goal achievement, a form of persuasion, a process of initiating structure, the outcome of the interaction, the influence of power, and a way of behavior (Leithword, 2012; Northouse, 2013; Odhiambo & Hii, 2012). In this connection, Leithwood (2012) described leadership as "the exercise of influence on organizational members and diverse stakeholders toward the identification and achievement of the organization's vision and goals" (p.3).

Leadership involves a process of influence over a given group with the purpose of achieving a common goal (Northouse, 2013). In a systematic review of leadership practices that promoted student achievement, Hitt and Tucker (2016) claimed that school leaders are those who mobilize and influence groups (teachers, parents, and students) to achieve school goals (student achievement). Leadership has also been found to be concerned with achieving goals, working with people in a social organization, being ethical and exercising power (Donaldson, 2006; Odhiambo & Hii, 2012; Horg & Loeb, 2010; Hitt & Tucker, 2016).

In the past five decades, the concept and understanding of leadership have changed from autocratic, dominance, and social control to democratic, collaborative and shared leadership that enlist the effort and skills of others through influence, persuasion, empowerment, and shared responsibilities (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Northouse, 2013). Various leadership theories and styles underscored these new approaches, and these theories and styles serve as the foundation for the framing of leadership practices and behaviors of school principals (Northouse, 2013; Yusuf, 2012). The description of leadership as a process influenced the change in the concept of leadership as shared and led to the unique perspective and understanding of leadership as distributed (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Northouse, 2013). In this sense, the principal is not seen as one who provides all leadership functions but as one that shares leadership with teachers and subordinates to enhance effective leadership practice and school success (Gronn, 2008).

School leaders can mobilize all available resources to achieve school goals and student high achievement (Donaldson, 2006). Supporting these findings, Hitt and Tucker (2016) and Smith and Piele (2006) claimed that an understanding of leadership must encapsulate the desired ends of school leadership and of empowering others to serve the needs of the students. In agreement, Donaldson (2006) observed that an effective school leadership mobilizes the followers to harness all school practices and beliefs to promote student achievement. This observation suggests that an effective school leader would be one who develops school vision with the followers in line with school goals and values and communicates such visions to the followers with the view of influencing them to achieve school goals and promote school improvement (Hallinger, 2013; Nagy & Fawcett, 2011).

An effective principal is essential in leading and coordinating the teachers and students in schools in poverty areas to achieve success and effectiveness (Kunzle, Kolbe, & Grote, 2010). In corroboration, the Wallace Foundation (2012) claimed that effective leaders determine the performance of schools because they are a key constituent of the successful conduct of any school irrespective of the context. An effective leader is considered dynamic, assertive, result-oriented, flexible yet task-oriented, and democratic in decision-making (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Supovits, Sirinides, & May, 2009). In a mixed method study of school leadership practices in challenging contexts involving four schools and their principals, Masewicz (2010) observed that effective leaders are resilient, vision-builders,

accountable, flexible, and have the ability to manage change. In the study, Masewicz conceptualized an effective leader as a servant with shared leadership who sets a positive instructional climate that impacts student achievement.

Research has indicated that an effective leader shares power and responsibilities with teachers, shows firm leadership, motivates, responds to school change, and achieves goals (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Northouse, 2013; Ojera &Yambo, 2014; Ozgan, 2011; Reitzug et al., 2008). A growing body of research indicates the need for collaborative and participatory leadership and leadership that can share responsibilities with followers to ensure effectiveness (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Hufffman & Hipp, 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; Tan, 2012).

Effective principals build a supportive and collaborative relationship with stakeholders in leading the schools (Gronn, 2008; Ojera & Yambo, 2014). In support of this assertion, Ojera and Yambo (2014) found in a quantitative study of the role of principals' leadership styles in facilitating students' performance in Kenya that involved 150 participants that an effective leader builds a relationship that is open, collaborative, facilitative, and supportive with staff rather than a relationship that is closed, exclusive, and controlling. The study further observed that an effective leader has a sense of direction, has a good relationship with people, has control over teaching and learning process, promotes teamwork, delegates, maintains shared decision-making, and enhance staff development. In their study, Ojera and Yambo found that effective leadership builds a leadership team that is capable of motivating and raising staff morale and enhance performance over time.

Analysis of these findings suggests that leading schools in the disadvantaged areas need leaders that are capable of setting clear goals, articulating the school's vision, and creating positive school climate for effective learning.

There is an indication in the literature that an effective leader has a strong vision of the school, strives to inspire and motive the followers, has good communication, focuses on instructional process, and manages the internal and external environment of the school to impact on the student achievement (Huber, 2004; Nagy & Fawcett, 2011; Ojera &Yambo, 2014; Thapa et al., 2013; Tan, 2012). In a quantitative study of the impact of effective leadership on student achievement in schools in poverty areas, with 64 educators from Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and Iowa, Merritt (2016) found that effective leaders involve others in decision-making, create school vision, stress students' expectation, create school culture, maintain effective communication, and improve student achievement. Analysis of the study suggests that an effective leader is a guardian to the school, a collaborator in the instructional process, and an accommodator of stakeholders in school leadership (Merritt, 2016).

Leithwood and Riehl (2003, 2005) observed that successful principals develop and improve their schools by supporting and sustaining the performance of their teachers and students. In corroboration, Ylimaki et al. (2007) found in a case-study of successful principals in 13 challenging, high-poverty schools in the United States, England, and Australia that successful principals in the challenging contexts set and sustained direction in their schools, and exerted a strong, positive influence

on the teachers and students. The study further indicated that the principals studied

exhibited Leithwood and Riehi's (2005) four core leadership practices (Ylimaki et

al., 2007).

Schools need effective principals to implement school programs and achieve

success (Duke et al., 2006; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Supporting this assertion, in a

qualitative study of challenges facing 19 principals in low-performing schools,

Duke, Tucker, Salmonowicz, and Levy (2006) observed that ineffective leadership

lowers student achievement because there is no effective implementation of school

programs without quality leadership. However, the study suggested that schools

need effective leaders who are motivators, team players, visionaries, listeners, and

good observers to achieve success. Finally, the analysis of effective leadership

suggested that there were qualities and personal attributes that make leaders

effective in managing schools in disadvantaged areas. What are these qualities and

attributes?

Leadership Qualities

For a clearer understanding of leadership, this section of the literature

review examines the qualities of leaders as articulated by the literature and research

findings. In an Australian case study of practices of successful principal, Drysdale

and Gurr (2011) found that successful principals have innate goodness, passion,

commitment, equity, open, flexible, child-centered, and with a strong vision. The

study further showed that successful school leaders promote a culture of innovation,

collegiality, support, collaboration, and trust (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011), as well as

shared decision-making, distributed leadership, and professional development (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2005; Ojera & Yambo, 2014; Wagner et al., 2010).

Principals who succeeded in disadvantaged areas had the quality that enabled them to exercise perfect control of the school (Drysdale & Gurr, 2011; Norviewu-Mortty, 2012). In a qualitative case study of principals' strategies for academic improvement in disadvantaged rural areas in Ghana, which involved four schools, with two high-achieving and two low-achieving school, Norviewu-Mortty (2012) found that an effective leader has the quality and ability to develop a clear vision, honesty, commitment, integrity, exercising perfect control of the school, and a strong passion for the school leadership. The study further observed that successful principals in disadvantaged contexts were committed, open-minded, caring, good listener, team player, inspiring, sympathetic, delegate responsibilities, and friendly (Norviewu-Mortty, 2012). Analysis of these findings indicated that these qualities enabled the principal to lead the school effectively in the disadvantaged areas.

Qualities of effective communication, including being flexible and focused; having clear goals; being knowledgeable in instructional management; having ability to inspire, lead innovations, and manage change; and having situational awareness and good personal relationship with stakeholders have been associated with effective leaders (Imhangbe, 2012; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). In a quantitative study on personal traits of effective school leaders in

Central Coast of California, with data collected from 92 principals, Miller (2015) found that effective leaders possess conscientiousness, extraversion, and openness to experience in leading schools. Analysis of these findings suggested that school leaders need some essential qualities of being conscious of the environment and stakeholders to manage schools effectively and succeed in disadvantaged areas.

Leadership Styles

Researchers broadly classified leadership styles into three: autocratic, laissez-faire, and democratic (DeRue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011; Yusuf, 2012), though more recently, research has shifted to leadership styles like transactional, transformational, distributed, and instructional leadership (Hallinger & Lee, 2013; Leithwood et al., 1996; Leithwood & Janzi, 2008; Northouse, 2013; Yusuf, 2012). Situations and context defined the use of various leadership styles by school leaders (Day, 2004; Hallinger, 2011; Northouse, 2013; Northouse, 2014; Robertson & Miller, 2007; Yusuf, 2012). However, scholars are not conclusive of the appropriate leadership styles that are capable of impacting on student achievement irrespective of the situation, context, and leadership personalities (Hallinger, 2011; Northouse, 2013; Obiwuru, Okwu, Akpa, & Nwankwere, 2011). Some scholars argued that the influence of leadership styles on organizational success is dependent on the environmental factors and the situations (Hallinger, 2011; Itaman, 2007; Northouse, 2013; Obiwuruet al., 2011). In this sense, Hersey and Blanchard (2008) and Hallinger (2011) argued that there is nothing like the best leadership style; rather scholars should concern themselves with the appropriate

leadership style for a specific situation and context. They maintained that the more leaders use the appropriate style for a context, the more effective they become and achieve organizational goals (Hersey & Blanchard, 2008).

Leadership style was found to influence leadership behavior in the school and school success (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Yusuf, 2012). In a quantitative study on the influence of leadership styles on student achievement in secondary schools in Nigeria, with data collected from 50 principals, Yusuf (2012) found that principals' assumptions about human beings, human ways of learning, the context, and human nature informed the leadership styles adopted by principals in the study. These assumptions often form the basis of decision-making and leadership behavior in the school (Yusuf, 2012). The study further observed that democratic leadership style employed by the principal influenced school success, motivated the teachers, and the school achievements. The findings suggested that appropriate leadership style enhances school performance and decision-making process.

Principals' leadership style influences the decision-making process in the school (Yulk, 2005). In corroboration, Avolio and Bass (2002) identified transactional, transformational, autocratic, democratic, and laissez-fair as styles that are capable of influencing the decision-making process in the organization. Coordination, collaboration, and cooperation characterized democratic and distributive styles (Yusuf, 2012). Distributed leadership theory holds that leadership leads to organizational success when "shared across various members of the organization in accordance with contextual variables, needs, interests, and abilities"

(Lindahi, 2007, p. 325). In corroboration, Masewicz (2010) found in a qualitative study on school principals' practices in challenging context that principals who distributed their leadership and shared responsibilities were more likely to succeed in disadvantaged areas. Yulk (2005) argued that autocratic leadership style does not allow participation in the decision-making.

Leadership style has been found to be related to student achievement (Yusuf, 2012). In analyzing the impact of leadership style on student achievements with a quantitative approach, involving 50 principals from secondary schools in Osun State selected with simple random sampling and in employing descriptive analysis of the survey data, Yusuf (2012) found that autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles did not significantly impact on student achievement. Autocratic leadership has the tendency to discourage the teachers' performance and does not promote school improvement (Yusuf, 2012). However, the findings showed a significant relationship between democratic leadership style and student achievement (Yusuf, 2012). Analysis of the findings suggested that such leadership style encourages initiatives among teachers and students; it builds teamwork that impacts on student achievement (Yusuf, 2012).

In expanding the possible conceptual frameworks of leadership, Bass (1985) added transactional and transformational leadership styles. Transactional leadership is a process of clarifying structures, roles, responsibilities and relationships and getting things done on the basis of a straightforward exchange between leaders and followers (Aspinwall, 1998; Itaman, 2007; Leithwood, 1992; Odumeru & Ogbonna,

2013). It developed initially out of a social exchange perspective, emphasizing the implicit social exchange that existed between leader and followers. There are four fundamental characteristics of transactional leadership: (1) leader utilizes contingent rewards in motivating employees. (2) Leaders exercise corrective action when followers fail at meeting performance goals. (3) The followers look up to and depend on the leader. (4) It entails delegating tasks to followers that they must complete (Day & Antonakis, 2012; Northouse, 2014).

Researchers referred to transformational leadership as using the four I's: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1990). A research analysis of 20 studies on transformational leadership observed and associated these qualities with transformational leadership: charisma/vision/inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Leithwood et al., 1996; Harris et al., 2003; Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013; Oluremi, 2008). Bass (1990) built on Burns' work to describe transformational leadership in terms of the impact that it has on followers. Transformational leadership stresses the empowerment of teachers as leaders, building capacity and commitment to change among the teachers (Leithwood & Beatty, 2008; Leithwood & Janzi, 2008; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013). In a quantitative study of how teachers experience principal leadership, Walstrom and Louis (2008) found that transformational leadership behaviors impact positively on school climate, teacher efficacy, and student achievement. In corroboration, Leithwood and Sun (2012) found in a meta-analysis

of the literature on transformational school leadership that transformational leadership style had moderate positive effects on teacher behaviors, student achievement, and school climate. Finally, the analysis of the literature suggests that distributive and transformation leadership styles tend to impact positively on school effectiveness and student achievement (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Masewicz, 2010; Walstrom & Louis, 2008). Considering my research topic, the next section examined the literature on Catholic school leadership.

Catholic School Leadership

As religious institutions, Catholic schools based their leadership on the theological and philosophical principles. That is, its basis of authority is the ethics of care and service, and theologically, has its basis on man's relationship with God (Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2015; Jacobs, 2002). Catholic priests and religious sisters managed most Catholic schools in Nigeria. Catholic schools are major providers of qualitative education service in many countries of the world, Nigeria inclusive (Cardak &Vecci, 2013). Students attending Catholic schools in Australia have been as many as 20% while the United States has 4% (2.16 million) of its students attending Catholic schools (Cardak & Vecci, 2013; Snyder & Dillow, 2012). In Nigeria, 24% of Nigerian children attend Catholic schools, and Catholic school provides quality education for the country (Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2015). There are situations where low-cost Catholic schools are established in poor villages to serve the needs of low-income families and poor children (Tooley, Dixon, & Olaniyan, 2005).

The uniqueness of Catholic school is in its service of care and community spirit (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012). In a qualitative study of stakeholders' perceptions of effective leadership in a Catholic school in Australia, with 50 participants (26 teachers, 12 students, and 12 parents) from one girls' high Catholic school in Sydney, Odhiambo and Hii (2012) observed that Catholic schools are unique because they provide a religious community within the learning community of the school. The study further found that the service of care and pastoral dimension of leadership prevail within the school (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012). Analysis of these findings suggests that the pastoral care includes regular prayers, the teaching of religious values, and social justice activities (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012).

Catholic schools' principals build teacher capacity and collaboration to succeed in disadvantaged areas (Imhangbe, 2011; Ojera & Yambo, 2014). Using a qualitative study on the impact of school leadership on student achievement in Catholic schools in Nigeria, with data collected from 16 participants (4 principals and 12 teachers) from four Catholic schools, Imhangbe (2011) found that Catholic school principals exercised their authority and fostered democratic self-governance in such a way that the principals as instructional leaders empower the teachers through training. The study further suggested that an effective Catholic school principal focuses on the common good rather a self-interest thereby exercising essential authority which enables them to excel in disadvantaged areas. Imhangbe (2011) observed that the principals adopt collaborative and distributed leadership, involve stakeholders in the management and leadership of the schools and impact

on student achievement. The study suggested a link between leadership style and leadership effectiveness with a particular reference to distributive leadership style.

A Catholic school principal gives a unique dimension of school leadership, a dimension Cattaro and Cooper (2007) called "spiritual leadership" (p.76). In support of this assertion, Spesia (2016) observed that Catholic principals add the religious dimension to the array of their qualities, roles, and responsibilities. It is these spiritual and religious components of leadership that distinguish Catholic school leader from non-faith-based school leaders (Sergiovanni, 2009; Spesia, 2016).

Researchers have found the qualities of service and leading by example among Catholic school principals (Cardak & Vecci, 2013; Valadez, 2013). Supporting these findings, Valadez (2013) found in a mixed method study of leadership practices of Catholic school principals that promoted student achievement, with data collected from 50 principals through survey from Archdiocese of Los Angeles that servant leadership style was prevalent in among Catholic school principals. The study further observed that the principals created a culture of reading, hard work, academic success by celebrating students' achievements, and created Catholic identity through leading by example (Valadez, 2013).

In analyzing the spiritual leadership of Catholic school principals, scholars have listed the role of school principals in Catholic schools to include knowing the church documents and making them available to the school community, building

spiritual development of the students, building the Catholic character in the students, teaching the children how to pray, fostering religious education and gospel values, and providing charitable services to the community (Augenstein & Konnert, as cited Imhangbe, 2011; Spesia, 2016; Valadez, 2013). These roles of school leaders suggest that Catholic school leaders are not only expected to be experts in school management and instruction but to be strong and unshakable forces and resources in developing and building the future of the children with faith and moral character (Cook & Durow, 2008; Spesia, 2016).

Finally, the principal needs to have two-level qualifications to run and manage Catholic school in Nigeria. First, the principal needs to meet the requirement of the church of having the Catholic faith to build and sustain Catholic character in the school (Imhangbe, 2011). Also, the principal needs to meet the required qualifications as prescribed by the national policy on education and ministry of education in Nigeria (Imhangbe, 2011). Again, in a qualitative study of Catholic school principal induction, Gross (2017) found Catholic principals need induction, mentorship, peer support network, and clear policy guidance to effectively lead a school. These demands on Catholic school principals merit examining their leadership practices that promote academic standard in disadvantaged areas.

Leadership in Schools in Disadvantaged Areas

Poor children learn with difficulty compared to middle-class children and those from urban areas (Amatea &West-Olatunji, 2007). Leading schools in

disadvantaged context have proved problematic and difficult. In leading schools sited in poverty areas, Bacon (2008) recommended that a principal needs an understanding of the difference between the low socio-economic students and those from the middle and upper class to enhance the academic achievement. For 30 years, Bacon studied the impact of poverty on student achievement in New York and San Francisco and maintained that meeting the needs of children in poverty is capable of building confidence and enhancing students' performance at school (Bacon, 2008). Additionally, principals need to overcome the challenges of recruiting high-quality teachers, low parental involvement in the education of their children, and high mobility among students and teachers, in order to impact on student achievement (Penlington et al., 2008). A study by Reeves (2009) showed that such schools focus on and celebrate academic achievement by creating intervention programs for weak students. Analysis of literature suggested that in such schools, there is a clear evaluation and assessment process to improve standard (Reeves, 2009).

Successful principals in disadvantaged areas were found to create an enabling environment for instructional learning by carrying others along (Groves, 2016). In a qualitative study of leadership characteristics of rural principals and graduation rate in seven high schools, Groves (2016) found that principals who ensured high graduation rate had active listening ears, collaboration, promote a relationship between the school and community. The study further observed that in challenging rural schools, successful principals promoted teacher professional

development, decision-making informed by data, and improved instructional learning environment in the school.

The principals in disadvantaged rural areas improve student achievement by understanding and appreciating the difference between student learning in poverty and those who live in middle and upper-class (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007; Bacon, 2008). Additionally, Amatea and West-Olatunji (2007) found that schools that have excelled in disadvantaged areas have a relevant vision and a mission statement that gave the school direction and stability in poverty and challenging situations. Such schools have strong stakeholders' collaboration, supervision of teaching and learning, a structured program, and maintain a good culture of learning (Amatea &West-Olatunji, 2007; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). In a mixed method study on principal behavior in rural poverty areas, Masewicz (2010) found that successful principal made a connection and involved parents in the management and issues in the schools to make them welcome and not alienated. The study further observed that principals immersed themselves in the situation, showed resilience, and created and communicated the vision to all stakeholders (Masewicz, 2010).

Motivating the staff and celebrating high-achieving students have been found as strategies used by effective principals (Hagel, 2014; Yelland et al., 2008). Supporting these findings, Hagel (2014) found in a qualitative descriptive case study on the roles of the principal in enhancing the performance of students living in poverty, with descriptive analysis of data collected from five principals that the principals who improved student achievement consciously recognized and

appreciated the efforts to study by acknowledging students' successes in front of parents, teachers, and peers. The principals, who were found to give compliments, praise, and acknowledgment, tend to motivate both staff and students and reinforced positive behaviors for more productivity (Hagel, 2014). Also, the study showed that effective leaders in disadvantaged areas shared their vision with stakeholders and carried everybody along, and modeled pedagogy (Hagel, 2014). These findings corroborate findings of a study by Yelland et al. (2008) that found that successful principals model pedagogy and promote effective teaching and learning process to enhance student achievement in poverty environment. The findings suggested that effective principal was involved in setting the direction and redesigning the instructional process (Yelland et al., 2008).

Improvement Strategies for Schools in Disadvantaged Areas

Meeting and sustaining educational standard are at the core policy of many countries. There is the expectation that all secondary schools must meet the minimum standard in term of student academic performance. Schools considered as facing challenging circumstances or failing schools are the schools failing to meet this standard and those serving socio-economically disadvantaged communities (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Herman, 2008). Failing schools are low performing schools needing improvement, help, and intervention (Brown, 2012; Duke, 2006). Poor facilities, ineffective leadership, unqualified teachers, and disinterested students characterized low performing schools (Ayodele et al., 2016; Brown, 2012; Ehisuoria & Aigbokhaebho, 2014).

Scholars have argued that performance measures such as school result are not a sufficient indicator to show that a school is facing challenges (Chapman & Harris, 2004). Hallinger et al. (1996) considered the instructional organization as one of the key mediating variables in assessing leadership impact on student achievement. In their principal effect model, they considered school context as an essential factor in determining the principal effect on school success and student achievement (Hallinger et al., 1996; Masewicz, 2010).

There is a need to consider the context, environment, socio-economic status, parental education, and availability of infrastructure (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Gardner, 2010). In a study on the strategies for improving schools in difficult and challenging contexts in the United Kingdom, Chapman and Harris (2004) found that the first strategy for school improvement in challenging context is by improving the environment. Focusing on infrastructural development will signal to stakeholders and parents that the school is changing and improving (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Gardner, 2010). The principal enhances positive school climate in poor rural areas by creating an enabling environment through the provision and maintenance of basic facilities and used effectively to promote student achievement and school success (Gardner, 2010; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). In corroboration, Thapa et al. (2013) found in a meta-analysis of school climate research that provision of basic facilities enhanced school climate and improved teaching and learning process.

Focusing on student achievement was a strategy found among school leaders who succeeded in disadvantaged areas (Leithwood, 2010; Thapa et al., 2013). In a meta-analysis of articles published within a decade on exceptional, effective practices that helped in closing achievement gap, Leithwood (2010) found in 31 studies that the leadership and district focused on student achievement. They developed wide strong and shared beliefs and vision on student achievement and made an effort to include in the school vision a clear concept of closing the achievement gap and raising the achievement bar. The study further found the schools created student performance standards, use evidence and data for planning, engaged in the professional development of the teachers, and organizational learning to promote student achievement (Leithwood, 2010).

The principals in disadvantaged areas have been found to be proactive as a strategy in encouraging partnerships in meeting school needs (Norviewu-Mortty, 2012). In a qualitative case study of principals' strategies for academic improvement in disadvantaged rural areas in Ghana, which involved four schools, with two high-achieving and two low-achieving school, Norviewu-Mortty (2012) found that successful principals exhibited positive personal attributes and proactive school and community partnership in getting resources to meet the instructional needs and physical development of the schools. Norviewu-Mortty (2012) further observed that Parents Teachers Association (PTA) was involved in the structural development of the school and the recruitment and teachers support program, and the rural schools were found to practice collegial leadership to succeed in poverty

areas. These findings suggested that considering the challenges and lack of funds in disadvantaged areas, principals need to seek the support and collaboration of stakeholders to achieve success.

Principals who have been found to be successful in disadvantaged context built a quality networking and close tie with parents and the community (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Leithwood, 2010; Waltstrom & Louis, 2008). As a strategy, the principal needs to build a link with the host community (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Research suggests that creating a sense of community within the school and relationship with the local community will gain support and loyalty in difficult times (Chapman & Harris, 2004; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Rajbhandari, 2011; Wagner et al., 2010).

Ensuring discipline among students and student intervention are essential in improving student performance in disadvantaged areas (Brown, 2013). In a quantitative study of leadership practices used by principals to improve student achievement in high-poverty areas, with data collected from 304 principals, Brown (2012) found that principals used collaboration, curriculum alignment, discipline, and emphasis on attendance as effective strategies to improve student performance in high-poverty. In the study, Brown (2012) further observed that principals studied adopted student intervention and setting a high expectation for the students as strategies for success in disadvantaged areas.

As an instructional leader, Hallinger and Lee (2013) advocated that a principal in a disadvantaged school needs a thorough supervision of teaching and

learning process. This will ensure that the lesson is structured, appropriate delivery

of the curriculum, and effective assessment of the process of learning (Ahmed,

2016; Chapman & Harris, 2004; Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Additionally, research has

suggested that there is a need for schools to engage in a continuous professional

development of the teachers to hone their skills and improve productivity

(Chapman & Harris, 2004; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Wagner et al., 2010).

Purposeful and stable leadership is essential in managing and improving

schools in disadvantaged areas (Kunzle et al., 2010; Merritt, 2016). In

corroboration, Chapman and Harris (2004) observed that schools in difficult

circumstances might suffer from lack of direction without firm and purposeful

leadership. In their study, Ylimaki et al. (2007) observed that effective principals in

a challenging context provided support for staff, they were creative and flexible.

The principals modeled best practices in instructional issues, redesigned the school

structure, policies, and encouraged collaboration (Ylimaki et al., 2007). Analysis of

these findings suggests that the principals did not allow the poverty condition to

determine the success of the schools rather they were passionate about making a

difference irrespective of the challenges (Ylimaki et al., 2007).

There is a link between poverty and student success (Mulford et al., 2008).

Supporting this finding, Mulford et al. (2008) found in a qualitative case study

carried out in 21 successful schools in a disadvantaged setting in Australia that

poverty negatively influences the standard of education. To achieve and sustain

student achievement in schools in high poverty areas, Mulford et al. (2008)

recommended that the principal needs to make the teachers put in more effort than 'normal.' The implication is that the teachers and the principals will need to work harder and be more committed than their counterparts in more favorable settings. The findings further indicated that schools that succeeded in challenging contexts demonstrate some elements of distributed leadership, instructional leadership, students' participation and engagement, positive school culture, continuous professional development, and parents' involvement (Mulford et al., 2008).

Research indicated that the possible steps in advancing and succeeding in a disadvantaged area would be to create a safe, secure, and child-centered environment for learning (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Ylimaki et al., 2007). Thapa et al. (2013) and Ylimaki et al. (2007) observed that the principals who impacted on student achievement in high poverty areas showed some degree of commitment, passion, and leadership skills. Principals promoted student achievement by giving time to instruction, having clear achievement goals, high expectations for the students and motivation for both teachers and students (Thapa et al., 2013; Ylimaki et al., 2007).

Finally, the above analysis of literature suggested that principals improve student achievement by creating an enabling and safe environment for learning (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Lambert, 2002). It suggested that the principal needs to have the required knowledge, skills, strategies, and leadership tools to positively enhancing and impacting on student achievement (Thapa et al., 2013). These above leadership responsibilities align with Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) four core

leadership practices framework adopted in this study in term of setting direction, developing the people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program.

Summary

This review of relevant literature focused on current studies on Catholic leadership in a high-poverty area by identifying the essential descriptions, practices, and behaviors of a successful school principal in disadvantaged rural areas that are commonly accepted. Through the review of theories and practices of high performing school in poverty areas, the literature suggested that many scholars agreed that principals' leadership has an impact on student academic achievement and school success. The literature showed that there is a nexus between poverty and the educational success of students, and the need to improve low-performing schools in disadvantaged areas.

Literature suggested the necessity for a Catholic school principal to create and build an effective school that could impact on student achievement. However, many scholars are divided on the manner and ways effective principals positively influence student achievement, and which specific leadership style(s) is more likely to impact on student achievement. The gap in the literature was the basis of this research on the practices of Catholic principal that may have contributed to student achievement in disadvantaged area in Nigeria. I will discuss the methodology adopted in this study to address the research problem in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and gain an understanding of the leadership practices of a rural Catholic school principal that may have contributed to the improvement of the academic standards in a school located in a disadvantaged environment in Nigeria. Qualitative data allowed me to describe the stakeholders' perceptions of the principal's leadership and strategies in a disadvantaged area with widespread poverty, illiteracy, low retention of quality teachers, and lack of infrastructure. My interest was in gaining an understanding of how a Catholic school principal met challenges to define school vision, set direction, manage teaching and learning, and create an enabling climate to attract students to Catholic school in the midst of poverty. To achieve this purpose, I articulate in this chapter the research design, research context, researcher's role, participants, instruments and methods of data collection, and data analysis plans. Finally, I address the ethical issues and procedures of establishing trustworthiness.

Research Design and Rationale

A case study was considered in this research because it enabled me to explore the central phenomenon of principal leadership in a Catholic school located in a disadvantaged, rural, natural setting and allow for an in-depth understanding of stakeholders' perceptions and experiences. Such understanding of leadership in a disadvantaged context can assist others in a similar context in managing schools to sustain standards, and contribute to policy and professional practices (Stake, 2010).

In this section, I restate the research question and define the research design and its rationale.

Research Questions

The overarching research question was:

RQ: What principal leadership practices are perceived by stakeholders to have contributed to the improvement in academic standards in a Nigerian rural Catholic school in a disadvantaged environment in Auchi Diocese?

Subquestions included the following:

SQ1: How does the principal frame and communicate the vision of the school in a rural Nigerian village?

SQ2: How does the principal promote teachers' professional development in Nigeria?

SQ3: How do the stakeholders describe the principal's practices and role in the teaching and learning in the school in rural Nigeria?

SQ3: How does the principal promote a learning climate and enabling working condition for teachers, and parents' collaboration in a disadvantaged rural Nigeria setting?

Qualitative Approach

Considering these research questions, I adopted a qualitative method of inquiry (Berg, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Qualitative research entails using interpretive techniques for describing, decoding, translating, and interpreting meanings people attribute to phenomena in the social world (Berg, 2009; Gall, Gall,

& Borg, 2007), including methods such as interviews, case studies, and ethnographic research (Creswell, 2013). In describing qualitative research, Gall et al. (2007) articulated its features to include the construction of reality by participants in a particular situation, the study of human actions in a natural setting, the study of cases, interpretative method, and the use of analytic induction to data analysis.

For better understanding, Creswell (2013) identified five features of qualitative research: a researcher is a primary instrument, there is a natural setting, participants' meaning is the focus, there are multiple sources of data, and there is an emergent design. Other characteristics include an inductive process, nonrandom sample selection, rich description, purposeful and small samples, focus on meaning and understanding, a great deal of time in a natural setting, descriptive data, and interpretative process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Merriam, 2009).

The qualitative method suggests that researchers seek to gain an understanding of a phenomenon of interest from the participants' point of views (Merriam, 2009). Consequently, I preferred a qualitative approach in gaining a better understanding and description of deeper levels of meaning from the context of direct experiences and interpretations of reality. Informed by the literature, qualitative case study enabled me to examine the central phenomenon of principal leadership practices in a Catholic school located in a disadvantaged, natural setting in the rural area of Auchi Diocese in Nigeria.

Case Study Rationale

I employed a single case study to explore and explain how a Catholic school principal managed the challenge of improving the academic standards in a disadvantaged rural area. The instruments I used for data collection were interviews, observation, focus groups, and document analysis.

Considering that my research questions were "how" questions, a case study was employed based on the recommendation of Yin (2009). Yin stated that descriptive case study is an appropriate means to address and answer the "how" questions regarding the understanding of complex social phenomena. In this study, a case study allowed in-depth consideration of a phenomenon in a particular context because it was open and specific to a particular site (Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). For Hall and Hord (2014), the complexity of school leadership lies in the fact that what the leaders say or do may be perceived differently by different people. Considering the impact of perceptions on findings, the data from the interviews were triangulated with data from direct observation, focus groups, and document analysis.

Other Qualitative Approaches Considered

Though phenomenology and narrative studies could have provided rich descriptions that could benefit the members of an organization, in order to answer my research questions, they were not enough to provide understanding of the principal's practices in leading a school in a disadvantaged area. The literature suggested that other stakeholders' views were also important in school

transformation and understanding of leadership practices in a particular school (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Grounded theory was not necessary because I have a suitable conceptual framework: Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) core leadership practices could frame the research design and data collection and contribute to interpreting the data. Finally, an ethnographic study requires too much time as it demands that researchers completely immerse themselves in a particular setting for a prolonged period, which was not within this scope of this study.

Considering my research problem and question, I reasoned that a short-term case study in a school in disadvantaged context using interviews, a focus group, observation, and document analysis to be more appropriate for this study. This allowed an interaction between myself as the researcher and the site, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1988). The next section articulates my role as the researcher who collected and analyzed the data in this study.

Researcher's Role

By the nature of a qualitative study, I as researcher was the primary instrument for the collection of data and its analysis; consequently, there was a possible tendency for researcher bias. In regard to this, Merriam (2009) asserted, "Investigators need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken" (p. 219). Making such explanations and clarification provide readers with a clearer understanding of the interpretation given to the data. Regarding my relationship with the participants, I had no relationship with the school and the participants. Therefore, I did not have any supervisory role over the

participants in the study or at the school. In the data collection, I played the role of

an interviewer, focus group facilitator, document analyst, and observer. An effort

was made to explain to the participants the purpose of this study, which was purely

academic and not designed for assessment of the participants and school rating.

Again, I explained to the participants how the information would be used and

assured them of confidentiality and nontraceability in the research.

As a Catholic priest, I reasoned that considering the amount of respect

people accord a priest in Nigeria, there is every tendency for the participants to give

responses that may not be exact in a bid to please and respect the priest. It was also

possible for the participants to tell a priest what they believe he wants to hear

because of the power and authority of the office. Such tendency can skew the

results of the study. Consequently, I decided to play the role of a researcher, not a

priest, in the interviews and other data collection processes, took off my collar,

dressed in mufti (street clothes), did not introduce myself or sign letters as *Father*

Itaman rather as *Theophilus Itaman*, and made it clear to the participants the

purpose of the study required that the participants strive to look beyond my position

as a Catholic priest. I address other possible biases in the section on ethical issues

and trustworthiness.

Method

In this section, I articulate the criteria used for the selected case and study

site, the population, and the sampling strategy for this study. I further discuss the

sources of data, instrumentation, and protocol for the interviews and observation.

Study Site

For this study, I selected a high-achieving Catholic school operating in a disadvantaged rural area in Auchi Diocese in Southern Nigeria. The selection of the school was based on the school's performance in WAEC over the past 3 years, that it was a Catholic school operating in a disadvantaged rural environment, and that it had a principal who had served not less than 4 years.

The study location was in the Catholic Diocese of Auchi in Edo State, Nigeria. Edo State as an inland state that occupies the central southern Nigeria, with Benin City as its capital. Geographically, Auchi Diocese is in the northern part of Edo State, where the native languages are Etsako, Owan, and Akoko-Edo (Enaikele, 2014). There are three types of religion among the people: traditional religion, Islam, and Christianity. There are 12 Catholic secondary schools in the disadvantaged rural setting of Auchi Diocese of which I selected one for the study.

For this study, I selected St. John's College (a pseudonym), a high-achieving Catholic high school, in Auchi Diocese. St. John's College is located in the southern part of Auchi, and it is a mixed school for boys and girls. It has a population of 630 students with 38 teachers. The school has both day and boarding facilities. Though in a poor environment, it has some basic infrastructure and for the past 3 years, the school has maintained scores of 88% -95% in WAEC results (WAEC, 2015) compared to other schools in the State. WAEC is a regional examining body for English-speaking West African countries (Federal Ministry of Education, 2000).

Sample of Participants

This case study adopted a purposeful, nonprobability sampling (Gall et al.,

2007; Patton, 2015) because it is more feasible and more informative in qualitative

research (Patton, 2015). More specifically, I considered this approach because I

sought an information-rich case of the school and principal and to represent

particular groups—the principal, teachers, and parents—who were in a position to

give in-depth information (Cohen et al., 2007; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Gall et al.,

2007; Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). I selected the principal, six teachers, and

five parents from the school. Therefore, a total of 12 participants were selected.

This approach is necessary and "appropriate when the potential number of cases

within a purposeful category is more than what can be studied within the available

time and resources" (Patton, 2015, p. 268).

Sample Size and its Justification

In this study, 12 participants were involved. In qualitative research, the issue

of sample size is important in the data collection process, and there are no laid

down rules about sample size (Patton, 2015). Hence, Patton (2015) maintained that

"Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's

at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with

available time and resources" (p. 311). The information richness of the cases is the

most important thing in ensuring the validity of qualitative research (Patton, 2002).

Finally, the study considered redundancy or saturation as the primary criterion for

sample size (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Seidman, 2006). It means that sampling

continued until there was no new information, and it makes the sample size open (Patton, 2002; 2015).

Recruitment of Participants

This section articulates the process involved in gaining access to the school and recruitment of participants for the study. To gain access, a letter was sent to the principal, requesting for the permission to use his school as a case for research which involved interviewing the principal, teachers, parents, carrying out observation, and analyzing some documents (see Appendix A). Additionally, an invitation letter was later sent to request the principal to be involved in an interview. The school principal approved the request to use the school for this study.

After obtaining permission from the principal, I attended a general Parents, Teachers Association (PTA) meeting in the school and invited some parents for the interview with invitation letters. Also, I met with the teachers and invited those who have been in the school for a minimum of 3 years who were willing to participate in the interview. Also, the teachers who have administrative roles (Vice Principal, Heads of Departments (HOD), and Examination Official) were invited to participate in the focus group in the school with invitation letters, and these were recruited one after the other until saturation was achieved (Patton, 2015). There were provisions for contact phone number and email address for the participants to confirm their acceptance to participate in the study after reading the consent form. Also, there were follow up by telephone calls and electronic mail to confirm the

acceptance to participate. These participants received a consent form containing all

they need to know about the study, to be filled and signed. This approach was

beneficial to the research in terms of validity, though it was time-consuming.

Data Collection

This section presents the different methods of data collection for this study.

To ensure methodological triangulation and to build confidence in the data and

findings, data collection was through interviews, focus groups, document analysis,

and direct observation. Triangulation in qualitative research is about multi-methods

or multiple approaches within a paradigm (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Maxwell, 2013),

suggesting that the study may employ more than one sampling strategy or multi

types of data in addressing a research question, based on the premise that no single

method can adequately address some research questions (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2014).

Since every approach or method has its limitations, triangulation is often

encouraged (Patton, 2002; Stake, 2006) so that a researcher can examine an issue

from different perspectives. Though triangulation can be time-consuming, it helped

in strengthening the research findings (Patton, 2002). Using a triangulation

approach in data collection also allowed for cross-data checks that could strengthen

the validity and credibility of the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Figure 1

illustrates the process of triangulation in this study:
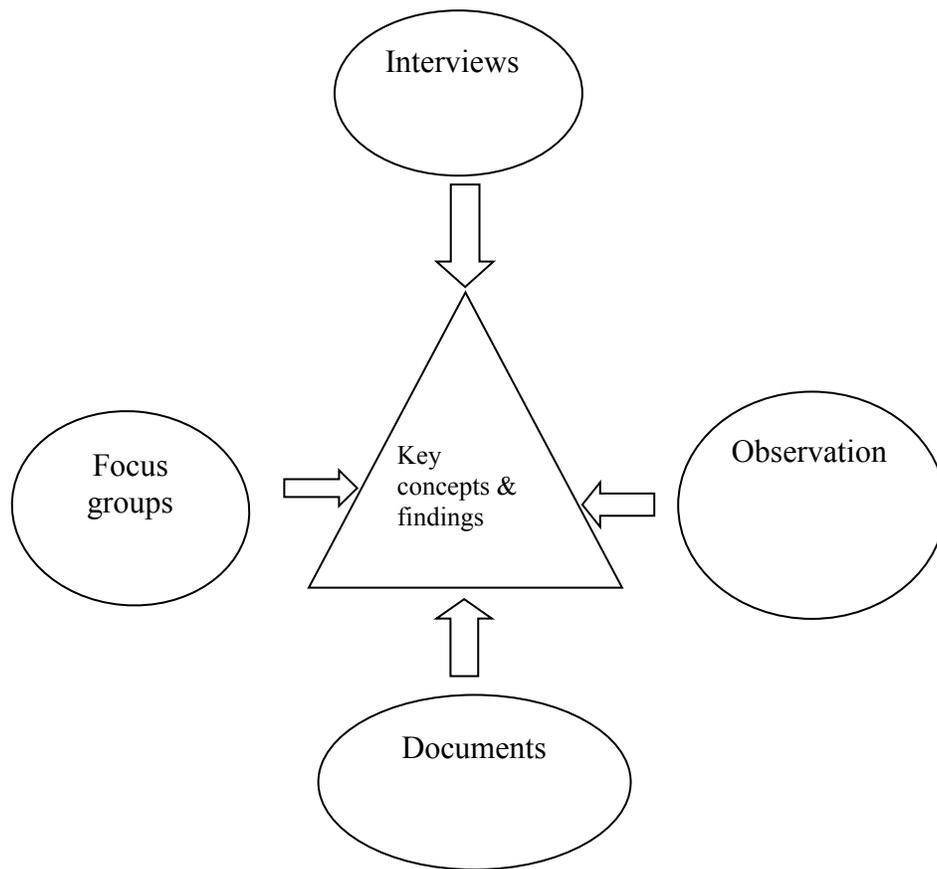
Figure 1: Triangulation.

Interviews. In this study, 12 persons (1 principal, 6 teachers, and 5 parents) were invited to participate in the interview. Some researchers saw interviews as a conversation with a well-defined purpose (Wellington, 2000; Yin, 2014). The interviews focused on the research questions with a view to achieving the research purpose (DeMarrais, 2004). The interview questions were designed to probe the respondents' views, perspectives, experiences, and make meaning out of their encounter with school leadership in disadvantaged context (Seidman, 2006).

In considering the different types of interviews and the research questions, this study employed a semi-structured interview. As required in a semi-structured interview, there were some open-ended questions prepared, and these were modified based on the initial outcomes of the interview process (Janesick, 2011; Robson, 2002). (See Appendices B, C, and D for the interview questions for the three groups – the principal, the parents, and the teachers). The basis for the choice of a semi-structured interview for this study was the fact that it has the advantage of allowing the researcher to modify, omit, or add questions, and change the order of the questions in the process of the interview. It allowed me to probe and expand the interviewees' responses (Opie, 2004; Patton, 2015).

Before the interview, to avoid overlooking important issues and ensure that the interview followed a logical progression, I made a list of key questions to be covered (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003). After the selection of participants, I scheduled interview appointments and conducted face to face interviews on the different agreed dates, which lasted for about 45 minutes each.

Additionally, I conducted the interviews in a comfortable and neutral location that was easily accessible and safe for the participants, such as an empty classroom. Carefully selecting the place for the interview sessions helped in ensuring the safety, protection, and confidentiality of the participants (Creswell, 2013). During the interview, an effort was made to avoid interruption from outside and minimize distractions. There was a record of the interviews with the consent of respondents, and the recorded interviews complemented the notes I took down. The

combined effort ensured that there was no data loss and distortion of facts in the process of transcribing (Cohen et al., 2007; Patton, 2002). Finally, there was a message of appreciation at the end, thanking the participants for their cooperation, understanding, and time.

Focus groups. There was an interview with a small group of five teachers who have administrative roles on the nature of principal's practices and strategies in managing and improving academic standards and how such leadership practices have facilitated teaching and learning in rural Nigerian villages in Auchi Diocese. It reflects Patton's (2015) description of a focus group: "A focus group is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic" (p. 475). It is a discussion group that allows participants to interact, hear each other, and add comments beyond their initial responses, often inspired by the ideas and thoughts of others (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2014). It allowed high-quality data in a social context, with the participants considering their views in the contexts of the views of others (Patton, 2015). For effective group conversation, there were some prepared, open-ended questions which were modified based on the outcome of the discussion process (See Appendix E).

To get the most out of the focus groups interview, a non-threatening environment was created to encourage participants to share their views, with the aim of yielding collective ideas (Cohen et al., 2007; Patton, 2015). Here, I did not act as an interviewer rather as a moderator, to avoid giving the impression of two-way communication. While facilitating, I took some notes and recorded the

discussions. I considered a focus group because it is capable of producing a large amount of data faster, and brings diverse perspectives on the topic of discussion (Patton, 2015). It helped to focus on a particular topic, in this case, principal's leadership in schools located in poverty areas (Patton, 2015).

Observations. In the data collection, there was a direct observation of leadership practices and behaviors in the school. I observed the leadership in the selected school, and in the process, observed the general supervision of the school, distribution of work, the learning climate, and teaching and learning process. These areas of focus were reflected in the observation data collection form (See Appendix G). During the observation, I kept field notes and researcher's reflections guided by data collection form (Creswell, 2013). There was an observation of the following on-site activities in the process:

1. General supervision: Many scholars have identified supervision of school activities as a veritable tool for improving students' learning and achievement (Danielson, 2007; Glanz & Sullivan, 2009; Gordon, 2004).

2. The school climate: I drew on the recommendation of The National School Climate Council (2007) and focused my observation on school life, interpersonal relationships, leadership practices, and organizational structures.

3. The teaching and learning process in the school: The essence of schooling is teaching and learning. Therefore, as a researcher, my

interest was in knowing how the principal facilitated the learning

process in the selected school.

The study considered observation important because employing multiple

sources in the collection of data would enhance clarity, certitude, different

perspectives on the issues, and meaningful triangulation of data (Berg, 2009; Yin,

2014). The data from direct observation was useful in triangulating the data that

emerged during the interview. It suggested that information gathered was useful in

the analysis of data.

The observation also followed the recommendations of Merriam (2009)

based on six criteria that included the physical setting, participants, subtle factors,

activities, and interactions, conversations, and researcher's behavior. These criteria

were further tailored to fit my study context. For instance, the physical setting was

the school; the subtle factors were the unplanned activities in the school and non-

verbal communication among the teachers. Also, my reflection about the school

activities was the researcher's role.

For detailed and fruitful observation, I followed some protocols, and it also

enhanced the validity and reliability of the study. The selected school for

observation was contacted for permission, self-introduction, and to explain the

choice of site, purpose, and nature of the observation. Before the observation, there

was assurance of confidentiality and consent form was signed. Additionally, the

date, place, and time of the observation were confirmed. During the observation, I

carried out the observation silently without interference in the teaching and learning

process, kept field notes and researcher's reflections, and ended with a note of appreciation.

Document analysis. To avoid relying solely on perception, there was objective instruments employed: documents on school's mission and vision statement, publicly available students' results, minutes book for staff meeting, and the school's log book. The log book contains daily records of essential activities of the principal and the key events in the school. However, as Yin (2014) indicated, documentary information is often relevant to every case study topic. With the permission of the principal, I collected some documents from the school and downloaded others from the school's website.

Though it may be difficult to obtain certain documents at times, the study adopted document analysis in this study to assess issues from different angels, helped in the triangulation process, and strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings (Cohen et al., 2007). Most importantly, the documents assisted in addressing the research question on defining the mission and vision of the school in alignment with the conceptual framework. Additionally, analyzing the school's log book gave me some information about the practices of the principal and what the school does that may have contributed to student achievement.

Documents are capable of showing how a situation has evolved, developed, and the changes in students' achievement over time (Burton & Bartlett, 2005). These documents offered multiple perspectives on the problem and provided

background materials for a deeper understanding of leadership practices in defining and communicating the mission and vision of the school (Robinson, 2010).

Instrumentation

There were three interview schedules for this study: one each for the teachers, parents, and principal (See Appendices B, C, D). The issues and themes addressed were similar but adapted and viewed from different perspectives. The questions covered the main research question and the subquestions for this research. The funneling technique helped in sequencing of the topics covered, and the questions were designed to cluster or grouped around the themes or issues on the research questions like the views of the principal, teachers, and parents on principal leadership practices in setting direction; defining and communicating the mission and vision of the school; the views of the teachers on how the principal facilitates teaching and learning; professional development; and parents' views on the learning climate in Catholic schools that made them send their children to Catholic schools. These areas were examined to answer the research questions and to address the main themes and issues under study.

There was a field test in this study to strengthen the trustworthiness and practicability of the interview questions. Walden's Institutional Review Board allows such testing of instruments when there is an assurance of discarding such materials, and the participants are non-vulnerable populations. Field-testing, like piloting, means trying the instrument out on a small scale (Cohen et al., 2007). The field test involved three participants (one principal, a teacher, and a parent); there

was a consideration for accessibility, openness, and non-vulnerability in selecting the participants for the field test. The field test allowed the testing of the interview questions for the principal, teachers, and parents on a small scale, and it helped in eliminating ambiguous, confusing, or insensitive questions; checked clarity; identified redundant questions; and gained feedback on the nature of the questions (Cohen et al., 2007; Maxwell, 2013). Moreover, it enabled me to reflect on the analysis plans (Cohen et al., 2007). A field test was essential in this study because it gave an indication of the results to be expected from the main investigation and enabled me to revise the interview questions used for this study, which enriched and strengthened the findings from this study. The data collected will be stored for 5 years after the study.

Data Analysis

This segment of the chapter focuses on the plan for the analysis of the data for this study. After the data collection, the interviews were transcribed, taken to the respondents for validation to check for accuracy, also called member checking. Also, I ensured proper management and organization of data. There were filling of data from the interviews, focus groups, and observations according to the pseudonyms assigned to the participants for the purpose of analysis and confidentiality (Seidman, 2006). I stored the data in a folder on the computer and with backup folders on a thumb disk, and these are kept safe in my house.

First Level of Analysis

Thematic analysis and editing approach to qualitative analysis were the basis of the analysis of the interview. The analysis followed Yin's (2009; 2014) five steps of data analysis: compile, dissemble, reassemble, interpret, and conclude. The data analysis for this study was carried simultaneously along with data collection process, also called continuous comparison, as recommended by Merriam (2009). The analysis began by reading the transcripts and field notes in relation to my study.

Coding. In the first level of analysis, the specific analytic techniques for coding was used and then, from the codes, construction of categories for the purpose of analyzing data from different sources. As recommended by Charmaz (2006), the transcribed interview data were coded using line-by-line coding and using words to keep the codes active and close to the data. A paragraph style was adopted, and the answers given by the different respondents to a particular question were brought together under one or more codes.

After the coding, there was a construction of major categories that were responsive, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitizing, and congruent (Merriam, 2009). The constant comparative method recommended by Merriam (2009) and Stake (2006) were used for the interviews, focus group, document data, and observation data, which requires comparing differences and similarities among the categories in a bid to determine the significant categories.

Second Level of Analysis

The second level of analysis explored the data across all sources of evidence to determine themes, emerging patterns, and relationships. Discrepant cases were handled by comparing and contrasting the data from the individual participants in the interviews and from my observations as guided by Stake (2006). This was done several times so that the main themes relating to the research questions were identified with the interview data, and it was carried out with data from all three groups of respondents (principal, parents, and teachers). The themes from the principal's interview were then triangulated with that of data from the teachers and parents. While focusing on the content, the views of the teachers were compared and contrasted with the views of the parents in another level of analysis. The analysis process highlighted the differences and similarities between cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2014). Where there were discrepancies between the different views, further clarification was sought from a number of sources or in search of rival explanations within the data (Yin, 2009; 2014). This method of analysis was more thematic and flexible as guided by an interpretative framework (Robson, 2002). Finally, the data and verbatim quotes from the respondents were used to strengthen the presentation of the findings from this study.

Ethical Issues – Establishing Trustworthiness

This section articulates the ethical considerations in this study. The question of ethics in research is a highly complex issue, stemming from the tension that exists between two sets of related values held by the society: the right to research

and acquire knowledge and the right of individual research participants to self-determination, privacy, and dignity. The alignment of the right of the individual and right to research is what Cohen et al. (2000) referred to as "the cost/benefit ratio" (p. 60). It is believed that greater consideration must be given to human rights. In this light, in the administration of the interviews, some ethical issues were considered knowing that interviews can be intrusions into the life of the respondents in terms of the time taken to complete it, the sensitivity of the questions, and possible invasion of their privacy (Cohen et al., 2007). To ensure that ethical issues were properly considered, the research proposal was examined and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Walden University with approval number 04-03-17-0408566. The role of the IRB helped to ensure sound ethics in this research. Therefore, this section examined privacy and confidentiality, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Privacy and Confidentiality

The concept of privacy and confidentiality centers on unwanted disclosure of information about the participants. In this regard, the usefulness of the research will be explained to the participants and guaranteed them. To ensure confidentiality and non-traceability in the research (Lindsay, 2010), pseudonyms were used instead of actual names of the participants. Finally, it was made clear to the participants how harmless the research was to them, that they were free to withdraw at any point, and how the information will be protected from the principal or any other person in case they were afraid of what the authority may do. Efforts were made to

ensure that the interviews were conducted in a non-threatening manner and environment, codes were used, and data were carefully stored and protected (Cohen et al., 2007).

Credibility

Validity refers to the degree to which scientific observations actually measure or record what they purport to measure (Cohen et al., 2007; Sanders & Liptrot, 1993). The idea of validity hinges around the extent to which research data and the methods for obtaining the data are deemed accurate, honest and on target (Fuchs, 1980). "Internal validity seeks to demonstrate that the explanation of a particular event, issue or set of data which a piece of research provides can actually be sustained by the data" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.135). Merriam (2009) saw internal validity as credibility, the alignment of research findings with the reality. The implication is that whether quantitative or qualitative, the findings must accurately describe the phenomena being researched. In doing this, the soundness of research design and credibility of the data were ensured through field test. Efforts were made to ensure the clarity of the kind of claims made and that there was enough evidence to support such claims.

In making certain of credibility, I made an effort to ensure, as Creswell (2013) noted, that the weight of evidence was persuasive enough to justify the findings and to seek the opinion of others to ensure that the description and interpretation were right. I made an effort to ensure that the research was worthy of trust; I had a good understanding of my research topic, and I documented every step

in my research process (Creswell, 2013). I made sure to provide a detailed description of the procedure that I followed. Such rich description included abundant, interconnected details about the study (Creswell, 2013).

I further ensured credibility by using triangulation of methods in data collection and member checking (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). There was a rigorous method in the interview process and a systematic analysis of the data (Patton, 2002). Also, interpretation was explicit, vivid, and thorough in providing an accurate interpretation of participants' meaning. There was documentation of codes from different sources of data and triangulation of the information or data to enhance the analysis (Creswell, 2013).

The credibility of the findings was further strengthened through a thorough examination of discrepancies in the data especially where data run counter to the themes, relationship, and patterns in the analysis. Such examination was important because negative or discrepant information affects the credibility of qualitative study (Creswell, 2013). Peer review enhanced the credibility of this study, as qualitative doctoral students, my chair, methodologist, and a respondent were employed to review the findings. I also adopted the strategy of reflexivity of Merriam (2009) by reflecting on myself as a researcher with the view of eliminating biases brought into the study. An effort was made to ensure that bias did not influence or shape the findings (Patton, 2002) and where these occurred, they were openly acknowledged.

Transferability

In this study, transferability was ensured by providing rich, thick description of data to present the analysis and interpretation (Merriam, 2009). This was done by giving a detailed description of data collection, analysis, and findings. However, there was no intention to pursue the transfer of findings from this study, rather I will leave the transferability to the readers and other researchers to determine. It agrees with the assertion of Marshall and Rossman (2016) that "The burden of demonstrating that a set of findings applies to another context rests more with another researcher who would make that transfer than the original researcher" (p. 261).

Dependability and Confirmability (Reliability)

Dependability in my qualitative research was ensured by using a good tape recorder during the interview and producing rounded transcripts. It was further strengthened through multiple coding to analyze the data (Creswell, 2013). In a bid to establish dependability and confirmability, there was auditing of my research process (Creswell, 2013). The auditing was in the form of member or participants checking of the transcripts and interpretation. A second eye in the research process was allowed to ensure the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2013) through peer review and debriefing.

Reliability as Merriam (2009) asserted, is the "extent to which research findings can be replicated" (p. 221). Reliability is essentially a synonym for consistency and replicability (Cohen et al., 2007). To ensure reliability in this study,

there were different strategies employed such as triangulation of multiple sources, peer review, and clarification of bias in the study. Again, detailed data collection and analysis protocols were provided to strengthen the reliability of this study (Yin, 2009). The interviews were carefully taken through field test, and necessary alterations were made to make things more translucent. Finally, Yin (2009) suggested that one prerequisite for ensuring reliability is to document the procedures followed. In this study, all procedures and detailed descriptions of how the research was conducted were carefully outlined.

Summary

This chapter defined the methodology employed in this study and presented the rationale for the decisions made in the research process. In it, I justified the qualitative case study approach employed. Moreover, the chapter articulated the research questions and the rationales for adopting interviews, document analysis, and observation as methods of data collection and the plan for data analysis. It further considered the research population and the sampling methodology. The chapter provided an explanation on the research design and structure, and how the research study was conducted. Moreover, it articulated the method of analyzing the data and its justification. It further discussed the triangulation and integration of data from different sources, thereby ensuring the triangulation of both methods and participants in the study. Finally, I explored validity, reliability and the ethical issues and considerations involved in this research. The findings from this study will be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and gain an understanding of the leadership practices of a rural Catholic school principal that may have contributed to the improvement of the academic standards in a school located in a disadvantaged environment in Nigeria. The study focused on gaining an understanding of how an effective Catholic school principal met the challenges to define school vision, sets direction, manage teaching and learning, and create an enabling climate to maintain a high academic standard in a Catholic school despite the challenges posed by poverty.

The overarching research question was:

RQ: What principal leadership practices are perceived by stakeholders to have contributed to the improvement in academic standards in a Nigerian rural Catholic school in a disadvantaged environment in Auchi Diocese? Subquestions included the following:

SQ1: How does the principal frame and communicate the vision of the school in rural Nigerian villages?

SQ2: How does the principal promote teachers' professional development in Nigeria?

SQ3: How do the stakeholders describe the principal's practices and role in the teaching and learning in the school in rural Nigeria?

SQ4: How does the principal promote a learning climate and enabling working condition for teachers, and parents' collaboration in a disadvantaged rural Nigeria setting?

In this chapter, I describe the research participants, the data collection procedures, the analysis, and the thematic results. I further present evidence of the trustworthiness of the study while examining the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study. Finally, I end the chapter by presenting a summary of the results that address the research questions.

Setting and Participants

This qualitative case study was carried out in St. John's College (a pseudonym), a high-achieving Catholic high school that has existed for 32 years in the southern part of Auchi Diocese. The Catholic Diocese of Auchi is situated geographically in the northern part of Edo State, Nigeria. Edo State, as an inland state, occupies the central southern Nigeria, with Benin City as its capital. St. John's is a Catholic school operating in a disadvantaged rural environment with excellent results in WAEC tests over the past 3 years and with a principal who has served for 9 years. St. John's College is a mixed school for boys and girls with a population of 630 students from Basic 7 to SS 111 and 38 teachers, with both day and boarding facilities. Though the school has people of different faiths, they all work and pray together as a community.

The school is situated in a serene environment in a poor rural community. The institutional double gate signals seriousness and sense of security in the school.

The gate carries the name and the logo and motto of the schools. Though in a poor environment, the school compound is large with basic infrastructure. The administrative block has two staff rooms, principal's office, two vice-principal's offices, offices for three heads of department, the administrative secretary's office, the guardian and counselor's office, and the accountant's office. There are staff rooms, one for science teachers and the other for art teachers, arranged to allow the teachers work together as a team.

The school had a strong and supportive PTA that had contributed to the development of the school and worked collaboratively with the school management. I collected the data a week after the school received an award for academic excellence from WAEC. The participants were excited and willing to share their understanding of the causes for their success, and this may have influenced the participants' responses during the study.

During the data collection, I interviewed 12 persons. I interviewed the school principal, Okosun, (pseudonym) who had spent 9 years in the school. I also interviewed six teachers, four male teachers and two female teachers. They had spent 6, 8, 9, 4, 5, and 4 years respectively at the school and they were all experienced teachers who specialized in various disciplines or subject areas. I used Rose, Idemudia, Peter, Victoria, Ogbeide, and Sam as pseudonyms for the teachers. Additionally, I interviewed five parents, two males and three females, who I referred to in this study as Okonobor, Odion, Arhedo, Paul, and Ogbenbe, and they had experienced the principal for a minimum of 2 years. I also had a focus group

discussion with five teachers who had administrative roles, two female teachers and three male teachers: the vice principal, heads of departments, and an examination official.

Data Collection

Upon receiving the IRB approval number 04-03-17-0408566, I collected data for this study from the interviews, a focus group, observation, documents on school vision, the logbook, and the staff meetings minutes book. For each of the data collection sources, I followed strict protocols to strengthen the reliability and validity of the findings from the study. During the data collection, I obtained permission to address the school community in one of their regular meetings in the school hall on the nature of the research and the observation, assured them of their privacy, and explained how I would use the information. In this section, I describe each of data collection protocols and procedures for the interviews, focus group, document collection, and direct observation.

Interviews

With the approval letter from the principal to conduct the research in the school, I contacted the teacher participants who met the criteria for participation with letters inviting them to participate in the study. Consent forms were provided to those who expressed interest in the study to read and sign. Once the consent forms were returned, I fixed the dates for the interviews in agreement with the participants, and I conducted the interviews. Also, after addressing the parents at the PTA meeting, I contacted the parents who met the criteria with invitation letters

and gave consent forms to those who agreed to participate. Twelve people were interviewed: the principal, six teachers, and five parents. The interviews with the principal and teachers lasted for 2 days and the interviews with parents for 2 weeks, instead of one week as planned. I asked them open questions in the interviews (see Appendices B, C, & D for the lists of questions). All interviews took place in the conference room in the school, except the interviews with two parents, which took place on the phone based on the request of the participants. The interviews lasted for 40 to 50 minutes. I digitally recorded the interviews with the permission of the interviewees. Apart from the difficulty in getting some parents to be available for the appointment, which led to interviews on the phone, there was no unusual circumstance during the data collection.

Focus Group

After meeting and sending invitation letters to teachers with administrative roles (vice principal, heads of departments, and examination official), I gave consent forms to those who indicated interest for signature. Upon the return of the consent forms, I conducted the focus group discussion on the agreed date. Five teachers were involved in the group discussion that lasted for about an hour. The focus group discussion took place in the conference room in the school, and I recorded it with the permission of the participants. With open questions, the interactive discussion was vivacious, and it yielded a great deal of data. (see Appendix E for the list of questions).

Document Collection

In the process of data collection, and with the permission from the principal, I scheduled an appointment to review the school handbook, the minutes of staff meetings, and logbook. I examined and analyzed the school vision and mission statements as contained in the school handbook and reviewed the principal's activities from the logbook and minutes book. The document analysis took place both in the school and in my office because I was able to take a copy of the vision statement home, took a photograph of some important portions of the documents, and photocopied some relevant aspects of the handbook and logbook. The process of document analysis lasted for one week, and as I read the documents, I took some notes on relevant information in my researcher's notes and the document analysis form (see Appendix F for document analysis form).

Observation of the Principal's Activities

I observed the principal's leadership and school activities for 2 days during the school hours, and I analyzed these activities for practices. The data collection was guided by an observation data collection form and by taking notes (see Appendix G). During the observation, I was silent and avoided interrupting the school activities. In the process, I observed the physical setting, the principals, teachers, and students, activities, interactions, and the teaching and learning process. The planned observation of the staff meeting was not possible because of the postponement of the meeting. However, the minutes of the staff meetings gave me the needed information on the proceedings of the meetings.

Data Analysis

In the data analysis, I followed the four steps strategy suggested by Miles et al. (2014). The four steps included familiarization, data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. In this section, I also review how I handled any discrepant data.

Familiarization

In the first level of analysis, the familiarization stage after the data collection, I transcribed the interviews and the focus group discussions. I took them to the respondents for member checking to ensure appropriate representation of their views, and they were satisfied with the accuracy of the transcripts. I did follow-up interviews with three teachers and two parents, and there was no substantial additional information to the data collected at the first interviews, which signals saturation. I followed the advice of Tufford and Newman (2012) by bracketing my prior knowledge about the phenomena to enable me to perceive the phenomenon clearly. For a proper organization, I filed the data according to the pseudonyms assigned to them. Using continuous comparison recommended by Merriam (2009), I carried out the data analysis simultaneously along with data collection in the first level of analysis.

Data Condensation

The analysis started by reading the transcripts and field notes. In the first circle of condensation, I made notes on the margins, highlighted some information on transcripts, identified keywords and phrases, and used shorthand codes, line by

line, on the data passages along the margins, as recommended by Charmaz (2006). In this level of analysis, in the process of dissembling and reassembling as recommended by Yin (2014), all the responses by the interviewees to a particular interview question were brought together for coding. I compared the views and responses of the three groups of interviewees (principal, teachers, and parents). I then searched for similarities and differences in them through constant comparison, and I noted a few discrepant cases.

The coding process started by searching for words and phrases frequently used by the participants. In the second circle of condensation, I used a two-level process. In the first level, I identified 50 keywords and terms from all interviewees, focus group participants, and documents as indicated in the list in Appendix I. This list was refined to determine the 30 most frequently used words to form the codes, and I categorized them into a smaller set of codes relating to the research questions. In the process of condensing the keywords and terms to determine codes, I brought some words together such as *teaching and learning, planning and implementation,* and *school vision*. Finally, the significant words listed in Appendix I were brought together in Table 1 under the main themes. I analyze these themes in the results section.

Table 1

Subcodes and Merged Codes Under the Main Themes

Main themes	Setting direction	Continuous professional development	Teaching and learning process	School climate	Leadership in a disadvantaged area
Subcodes	Communication of vision	Teacher Motivation	Instructional program	Enabling environment	Distributive and democratic leadership
	Setting high expectation	Leading by example		School culture	Sustaining the academic standard
				Catholic character	Positive influence of school leadership practices
Merged codes	School vision	Role model	Supervision	Positive relationship	Staff Commitment
			Evaluating the instructional process	Collaborative leadership	
			Coordinating the curriculum	Decision-making	
			Slow learners' class	Team-work	
			Individualized learning	Planning and implementation	
				Discipline	
				School as a family	
				Spiritual development	

Data Display

According to Miles et al. (2014), data display entails the organization of information such as keywords, terms, codes, and themes. Data display helps in exploration, ordering of data collection, description, and explanation (Miles et al., 2014). In this study, I used data display to organize the keywords, codes, themes, ordering of data, and description. I used tables for data display as showed in Appendix I for keywords from interviews and Table 2 (see below) for merged codes and sub-themes under the main themes. The final stage of drawing and verifying conclusion involved my analysis of the data display of the results towards making recommendations (Miles et al. 2014).

In the second level of coding, to narrow the codes, I combined the codes *school vision* with *setting direction* as a theme. Also, I clustered the following codes: *supervision, evaluating the instructional process, and coordinating the curriculum* into teaching and learning process as the main code, while merging *individualized learning* and *slow learners' class* into the instructional program as a sub-code. In the process, I merged the code *enabling environment* with *school climate* as a code, while clustering *team-work*, *decision-making,* and *planning and implementation* into *collaborative leadership* as a subcode. Additionally, I merged the codes *discipline* and *school as a family* with school culture while merging *spiritual development* with *Catholic character* as a subcode. Finally, I merged the codes *staff commitment* with sustaining the academic standard as a subcode.

In the second level of analysis, I explored data from all sources, interviews, documents, focus group, and observation, compared for similarities and discrepancies to determine patterns and relationship (Yin, 2014). I triangulated the codes from the interviews with codes from the focus group, documents, and observation. I went through the process of comparing for differences and similarities several times, and I identified the main themes that were capable of addressing the main research question and subquestions. The process of re-coding and condensing of code in the second level, led to the themes and subthemes as indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

Emergent themes

Themes	Sub-themes
School vision	Communication of vision
	Setting high expectation
Continuous professional development	Teacher Motivation
	Leading by example
Teaching and learning	Instructional program
School climate	Enabling environment
	School culture
	Catholic character
	Positive relationship
	Collaborative leadership
Leadership in a disadvantaged area	Distributive and democratic leadership
	Sustaining the academic standard
.	Positive influence of school leadership practices

In the analysis process and presentation of the results, I used verbatim quotes from the data to illustrate and emphasize the key findings in this study. Finally, my data analysis indicated and confirmed that I had reached saturation and triangulated and confirmed findings, and so, it is not clear that observing the staff meeting would have added further information.

Discrepant Data

During the interview and focus group, all the participants demonstrated that they were capable of giving the needed information about the leadership practices in the school and all participants gave similar responses to the interview questions. However, when I asked about teachers' involvement in the decision-making, while some teachers interviewed agreed that there was collaboration and teachers were involved in the decision-making process, Rose, Peter, and Ogbeide shared that teachers were not involved in the decision-making. As Peter said, "Though there are committees, teachers are not involved in the decision-making." This discrepancy became clearer with Victoria's view: "It is not possible to involve all the teachers in every decision." Again, when I compared their views with the document analysis on the minutes of staff meetings, I saw evidence that the principal had made decisions after some deliberations and with views of the teachers considered.

There were also discrepancies in the responses as to whether the teachers were motivated. Some teachers said that they were motivated, as Rose noted "I am self-motivated," but Ogbeide and Sam shared that the teachers were not adequately motivated and there were no motivational programs for teachers in the school.

When I compared data across data sources, both the documents (logbook and staff minutes book), and focus group indicated that there were motivational programs such as 13th month salary, interest-free loans, award for best teachers, celebrating teachers' birthdays, and identifying with staff members when one is celebrating marriages, funerals, and other ceremonies. It was interesting to hear Peter saying that "teachers are never satisfied, and they will always ask for more."

While all other participants believed that the principal sets high expectations and standards for the school, Peter noted that the "school principal does not seem to set standard rather maintains what he met. It is as if he believed that the standard he met was good enough." However, both the interviews with the principal and the focus group indicated that the principal sets high standards and expectations, focusing more on school performance. Most focus group participants felt that the principal sets the standard by telling the teachers and students what the school expects of them in the next term or session and what they must accomplish. Finally, all the focus group participants perceived that the school principal sets a high standard for the school by demanding the best or nothing from the students in their academics and other activities such as quiz competitions, paper presentations, and club projects.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

This section articulates and presents the implementation and adjustments of ethical considerations, other issues on trustworthiness, and how I generated high-quality data and findings, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this study. To establish

confidentiality and non-traceability in my study, I used pseudonyms for the school

and the participants. With the consent form, I made it clear to the participants the

nature of the research. I made it clear that it was voluntary and they were at liberty

to withdraw at any point. I indicated how the information would be protected and

used. I ensured that I conducted the interviews in a non-threatening manner and

environment, used codes, and carefully stored data. During the data collection, I

ensured that I reached saturation. To this end, I used redundancy, with no new

information forthcoming, to determine saturation (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010). In

ensuring trustworthiness, I considered credibility, dependability, confirmability, and

transferability.

Credibility

In this study, I ensured that there was enough evidence to support claims I

made by collecting data from multiple sources: interviews, focus group,

observation, and document analysis. To ensure credibility, I triangulated data from

the various sources, documented codes from different sources, and employed

member checking (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). I further strengthened the

credibility of the findings by carrying out a thorough examination of discrepancies

in the data across sources as indicated in the section on discrepant data in this

chapter. I employed peer review to enhance the credibility of the study by asking

two qualitative research doctoral students, my chair, and methodologist to review

the findings. Finally, to ensure credibility, I documented all procedures and detailed

thick descriptions of how I conducted the research as indicated in this chapter (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009).

Dependability and Confirmability

In ensuring dependability, I made a conscious effort to use a good tape recorder during the interview. I also ensured that the transcripts were a true representation of the views of the participants and audited by allowing the participants to check the transcripts and interpretation (Creswell, 2013). To further strengthen the dependability in this study, I used multiple coding for data analysis (Creswell, 2013). Again, I provided detailed data collection and analysis protocols to strengthen the reliability of this study (Yin, 2009). Finally, I triangulated data from various sources—interviews, document analysis, focus group, and observation—to ensure dependability and confirmability of this study.

Transferability

There is no intention to pursue the transfer of data from this study; rather, I will leave the transferability to the readers and other researchers to determine. This idea agrees with the view of Marshall and Rossman (2016), "The burden of demonstrating that a set of findings applies to another context rests more with another researcher who would make that transfer than the original researcher" (p. 261). In this study, to ensure transferability of this study by other researchers, I provided rich, thick description of data to present the analysis and interpretation (Merriam, 2009). This study yielded enough findings through a thorough analysis, and I present the findings in the following section.

Results

The basis of this analysis was the research questions for the study: What principal leadership practices are perceived by stakeholders to have contributed to the improvement in academic standards in a Nigerian rural Catholic school in a disadvantaged environment in Auchi Diocese? I organized the presentation of the results by emerging themes as they relate to the main research question and subquestions. I generated five main themes from the interviews, focus group discussion, documents analysis, and observation data, which I list in Table 2 with their sub-themes that address the general research question and subquestions regarding leadership practices.

Theme 1: Leadership Practices in a Disadvantaged Area

Most focus group participants described leadership as a process of managing and directing people, motivating others to achieve a set goal, vision, and mission of the school. Information from participants suggested that leadership in a school in a disadvantaged area involves managing, mobilizing, directing, and inspiring others to work towards achieving a set goal. For instance, the teachers interviewed, Peter, Sam, and Rose, perceived that their principal, as a leader in a disadvantaged area, shared his vision with stakeholders, directed, motivated, inspired, and carried everybody along in achieving school goal. Most participants felt in their views that the principal collaboratively worked with others as a team while leading by example and managing the available resources to achieve set goals. As Rose expressed, "the principal tried to manage the available resources to achieve school

goals." Further analysis led to sub-themes related to leadership practices, which were distributive and democratic leadership, sustaining the academic standard, and positive influence of school leadership practices.

Distributive and democratic leadership. All the participants in the focus group discussion expressed their views that the leadership practices in the school were distributive and democratic because the principal shared duties and responsibilities among different departments, committees, administrative staff, and stakeholders. During the observation, I noticed that in the school, there are heads of departments, Examination and Assessment Officials, Admission Official, and Vice Principal who have different roles and played their parts, and worked together as a team to achieve the school goals. Some focus group participants perceived that the leadership in the school is distributive because the principal shared duties for staff and with different departments. They added, "We all have different roles, play our parts, and work as a team. We have heads of school, heads of departments, examination and assessment official, admission official, and vice principal. We always work together as a team to achieve the school goals."

The teachers interviewed, Peter, Rose, and Sam described the leadership of their principal as democratic, collaborative, and distributive. According to an interviewee, Sam, "The principal deals with the staff as an individual…. He adopts democratic and distributive styles and very open to the teachers. He delegates duties to the teachers." Rose was the only one who felt that the principal is not

accommodating; other participants perceived the principal as a leader who is strict, open, straightforward, flexible, accommodating, and shares leadership with others.

Sustaining the academic standards in a school in a disadvantaged area. In this study, most participants shared that the schools in the disadvantaged areas need a principal who has passion, skills, and commitment to leadership. Some interviewees felt that the principal is succeeding and able to sustain the standard because he has the training, qualification, passion, and commitment to his job. They added that training is important for the school leaders because as Sam noted, "no school can be better than its principal."

In the interview, the principal Okosun suggested that as part of his leadership practices in the disadvantaged area were to work harder and do extra work, and search for qualified teachers and make an effort to retain them through motivation. The principal added, "I tried to seek the cooperation of the community, the collaboration of the stakeholders, and build a network of relationship." In the interview with the teachers, Idemudia, Sam, Victoria, and Peter noted that they perceived that the principal has the practice of involving the teachers in the decision-making to motivate and retain them.

Analysis of the minutes of staff meetings suggested that it was discussed how to sustain the academic standards at St. John's College. The record in the minutes indicated that the principal planned with the staff to interact with the students, create monitoring teams to supervise the learning process, build confidence in the students, and carry out duties professionally. During the meeting,

as stated in the minutes book, the school staff resolved to "teach the students that excellence is attainable." The staff agreed at the meeting that all science teachers must carry out the practical part of their subjects and made good use of the laboratories. Another way the school planned to sustain the standard was upgrading and equipping the library. In the interviews, the teachers felt that to sustain the reading culture and maintain the standard, there is a need to teach the students about library science and the use of the library.

When asked what significant factors may have accounted for the school's high student performance and its sustainability, the interview and focus group participants said one or more of the following:

- Regarding this leadership of the principal and management team: most interview participants perceived the principal as a leader with vision and commitment. As Victoria noted, "the principal directed the school and set the tone and standard of the school." All the focus group participants felt that the purposefulness and vision of the leadership of the principal might have contributed.

- Regarding the quality and commitment of the teachers: Some of the participants felt that the principal seeks and retains quality teachers, and uses qualified teachers to handle the different subject areas. Rose shared, "The quality of teachers contributed. They work hard for the school to succeed." Sam added, "The teachers go the extra mile to ensure that they teach the students well by using appropriate scheme of work and

method." According to the teachers in the focus group, they always

ensured that they prepared their lesson notes and made good use of

lesson time. Idemudia noted, "The teachers try to give their best because

they are motivated and involved in the management of the school."

- Regarding effective teaching and learning process: All interviewees

 suggested that the school focuses on teaching and learning and the

 process is supervised by the principal and some teachers assigned to

 help in the supervision. A teacher interviewed, Idemudia expressed that

 "The principal is involved in the teaching and learning process through

 supervision. He works with the Assessment Official to supervise the

 teachers and students." A parent, Odion noted, "the principal seems to

 supervise the teachers and students to ensure that the teachers marked

 the students' notes and students kept their notes." Sam added as he

 expressed his view, "the principal is highly involved in the teaching and

 learning process. He goes to the classroom and makes some inputs and

 corrections. He checks teachers' notes, and teaching materials, and

 ensures that students' notes are complete and marked."

- Regarding this hard-working nature of the students: The teachers

 interviewed felt that the students studied hard and worked in group

 studies to excel. Victoria perceived that the students had confidence in

 themselves, and the school leaders continued to build that confidence in

 the students that it is possible to excel. Most focus group participants felt

that the students are committed to their studies and willing to read on

their own. As Ogbeide noted, "The students make good use of study

time and work hard on their studies."

- Staff professional development: Most participants perceived that the

  staff training might have also contributed to the success in the school.

  As Rose noted, "the principal continues to build teachers capacity to

  enable them to perform effectively." All the focus group participants felt

  that staff training contributed to the students' high performance.

- Adequate facilities and learning materials especially textbooks for

  students: Some participants felt that learning facilities and textbooks

  were available for the students, and this may have helped them to excel.

  An interviewee, Sam shared that "There are adequate learning materials

  especially text book and functioning library for the students." Also,

  some focus group participants perceived the good use of the library as a

  contributing factor. A parent, Arhedo shared, "The school used the

  appropriate curriculum and standard textbooks for the students."

The positive influence of leadership behavior. Data analysis suggested

that the principal's practices and behavior have positively influenced the students'

behavior and academic performance in St. John's College. The parents interviewed

affirmed the positive changes that they had observed in their children and which the

children learned from the school and the principal's practices. According to a

parent, Arhedo, "my son now comports himself, works hard, has good manners,

knows how to greet others, and pray." Another interviewee, Ogbenbe, observed that his daughter is now prayerful, and always checked the expiring date of any product before eating it, and behaved like an adult.

Narrating her experiences and observations of her daughter, Okonobor shared that the principal had "influenced my child positively and she liked doing charity, helping others, caring for younger ones and had the desire to read." Okonobor added, "my daughter said, my principal told us that charity is the only way to success in life, and she told the Dad that I would read medicine and specialize in heart diseases to help and save lives, not for money." Other parents observed that their children had copied the principal, and they tried to imitate the character and behavior of their principal. The children learned from the school how to cook, keep the house in order, and avoid being late to activities.

Finally, the interviewees felt that the school gave holistic education to the students and had attracted the parents to send their children to Catholic school even in their poverty. Academically, Odion noted that his "son had developed an interest in the personal studies. He carries books to read at home without being told, and has improved academically." Expressing his observation, a parent, Paul shared, "Son has improved academically, and I am happy putting him in this school."

Theme 2: Setting Direction

While rearticulating and explaining the vision statement to me, the principal suggested that the school community has been inspired and built on Christ as a community of love following the spirit and vision of the founder. The vision

statement involves what the school can do to build a godly nation, developing creative potentials, and promoting communal learning. In developing the creative potentials of the students, Sam, Rose, and Ogbeide perceived that the school principal strived to create an enabling environment and a conductive atmosphere to enhance the creative potentials of all stakeholders for the benefit of the children.

Articulating vision. Both the interview and focus group participants suggested that the principal sets direction by articulating and reviewing the school vision and goals, and ways of achieving the vision of the school. Victoria and Andrew were of the view that in trying to build a godly nation, the principal strived to promote prayer life, discipline, and with a committee to implement discipline in the school. In an interview with a parent, Arhedo shared that "The principal has always made an effort to ensure that the vision of the school is achieved through policies and by building the fear of God in the children and this made them obedient to the school rules." During the interview with the school principal, Okosun shared, "I tried to explain the vision and made it understandable to the school community and linked it to the daily activities of the school. Also, I tried to align all activities with the vision of the school."

Data suggested that the principal tries to foster a commitment to the vision by involving the stakeholders in the review of the vision statement of the school in line with the present happenings. For instance, some of the focus group participants shared that a committee, including alumni, was set up by the principal during the 10th anniversary of the school to review the school vision. According to most focus

group participants, another way the principal tried to foster the acceptance of the vision is by making the students write their honor code in line with the vision and mission of the school and recite it on the assembly ground every day. For example, the honor codes require the students to pledge with all dignity and pride to be good ambassadors and shining light of the school in all they do. Often, some of the focus group participants added, the teachers teach and remind the students in the classes the vision of the school and the need to live by it. Other aspects of the theme of setting direction include communicating the vision and setting high expectations.

Communicating the vision. Under the theme of communicating the vision, I found many references in the data to the school principal's efforts to communicate the vision and make all stakeholders aware of it. Victoria noted that the "principal often speaks about the vision during meetings and on the assembly ground, and organized seminars on the vision and mission of the school." During their interviews, Peter, Rose, Sam, Paul, and Ogbenbe shared that the principal communicated the vision to stakeholders through meetings, assemblies, seminars, letters to stakeholders, teacher induction processes, the disciplinary committee, and the website. As a parent, Paul noted, "The principal communicates the vision to parents through letters and meetings. He emphasizes the school goals during meetings and encourages all to work towards it." In addition, the document analysis of the minutes of staff meetings suggested that "the principal welcomed the new staff members and took them through the school policy while stressing the vision and mission of the school."

Stressing how he communicated the vision, principal Okosun shared,

> At every meeting with the staff, I stress the vision of the school and
>
> encourage them to work towards achieving it. I also organize seminars for
>
> the teachers and the students on the school's vision and mission. I made an
>
> effort to print the vision statement on a sign post for all to see and read. The
>
> PTA meetings are also used to discuss and give an understanding of the
>
> school's vision to all stakeholders.

Finally, some focus participants observed that the principal seems to communicate

the vision of the school at meetings and through newsletters and keeps reminding

the students and staff of the need to live by it.

Setting high expectations. The interview data suggested that the principal

sets measurable goals and high expectations for both the students and teachers.

There was a discrepancy in the views of the participants on whether or not the

principal set high expectations. All but Peter felt that the principal sets high

expectations and standards. Interviewees Rose, Sam, Victoria, Idemudia, and

Ogbeide and the focus group participants perceived that the principal always set

high standards and expectations. In his view, an interviewee, Ogbeide, noted, "The

principal always set standards and encourages everybody to meet the WAEC

standard…. After evaluating the term, he will set a new standard that all must work

on especially those areas that the students failed in the previous term." Finally, most

focus group participants perceived that the school principal tried to set a high

standard for the school by demanding the best from the students in their academics

and other activities such as quiz competitions, paper presentations, drama, and club projects.

Theme 3: Continuous Professional Development

The participants in this study suggested that effective teaching requires on-going professional development, and it is the work of the principal to ensure capacity building for the teachers. All participants felt that there was continuous professional development of the teachers in St. John's College. Document analysis on the logbook indicated that the principal organized staff training to promote professional development every September at the beginning of the academic session and it lasts for a week. All the teachers interviewed suggested that there are regular programs in the schools for teachers' professional development. As Sam noted,

> There is always program for training for the teachers. There was a seminar on leadership last week, and a consulting firm came to train the staff on teaching and learning process, and professionals are invited to facilitate the capacity building and development.

The views of the interviewees suggested that the professionals handle the training and the training programs are job-related.

The school minutes book suggested that the principal encouraged the teachers to improve their professional development and become certified teachers. They were encouraged to take up programs in the university and do further programs to enhance their professionalism. An interviewee, Peter shared that he was currently doing a postgraduate diploma program with the encouragement he

got from the school. A teacher interviewed, Ogbeide said, "There is always training for teachers. The principal organizes seminars, programs, and sends some staff to attend workshops and conferences to educate the teachers for effectiveness."

All the teachers interviewed felt that the training programs were beneficial to them and had enhanced their effectiveness. While listing the benefits of the training, both the principal and the teachers interviewed felt that the program impacted them positively and it has improved their class management skills, preparation of lessons, document keeping, relationships with students and stakeholders, teaching method, handling of examination classes, and the ability to train others. As Peter noted, "I have benefited …. I have learned how to prepare my lesson plan, and lesson notes professionally through the training. I learned about student and teacher's relationship." Another teacher, Sam added, "I have benefited from the training, and it has empowered me to do my work effectively. Even now, I try to train others from what I gained." Two aspects of professional development discussed during the interview include leading by example and motivating the staff.

Leading by example. It was the perception of the teachers interviewed, and all the focus group participants, made up of teachers with administrative roles, that the school leader strives to contribute to teachers' professional development by providing an appropriate model through leading by example. The interviewees, Rose, Peter, Ogbeide, and all focus group participants perceived their principal as a role model because he is seen doing those things he told the teachers and students to do, including, in their different observations, being punctual, well dressed,

available, disciplined, and ensures others are, and doing the right things. Sam

shared, "The principal tries to lead by example; he is always on time and available

and wants all teachers to follow that way." In all, the participants perceived the

principal as a school leader who made an effort to lead by example by being

punctual, disciplined, treating all equally, and trying to do the right thing always for

others to emulate.

Motivating the staff. Both the interviewees and the focus group

participants suggested that stimulating and motivating the teachers is crucial to the

effective development and productivity in the school. The participants seem to

believe that the principal played a vital role in motivating the teachers to ensure job

effectiveness and student achievement.

When I tried to find out how the principal motived the teachers, most focus

group participants felt that principal motivated them by involving them in the

management of the school and giving awards and recognition to the dedicated

teachers to inspire others to work harder. They perceived that the principal ensured

this by celebrating and recognizing the outstanding teachers, ensuring that the

school paid salaries and allowances on time, and encouraging the PTA to give gifts

and appreciate the teachers. Also, the interviewees perceived that the teachers were

motivated when the school's principal identified with the staff at the moments of

sorrows or celebrations, and by giving them interest-free loans. Rose noted, "There

is a motivation; the school leader celebrates excellent teachers, gives gifts during

birthdays and marriages, and visits families when they put to birth." The analysis of

the minutes book suggested that to motivate the teachers, the principal sponsored

the staff on an excursion, increased their salary and allowances, paid 13th month

salary, and gave Christmas gifts to the teachers. As indicated in the minutes book,

"In partnership with the PTA, every staff will be paid 13th month salary in

December every year by the school to appreciate your contributions and motivate

you to put in your best for the children."

Some of the teachers interviewed suggested that they were motivated,

though one said he was self-motivated while two noted that there were no

motivational programs in the school, including Peter who shared,

> There is no motivation among the teachers. I think it is not training or
>
> seminars we need but motivation, considering the rising cost of things. As
>
> the school ensured the welfare [well-being] of students and built structures,
>
> they need to consider teachers' welfare [well-being], he added.

There were discrepancies in their views on motivation, but Sam noted, "There is

motivation for the teachers; teachers are never satisfied."

Theme 4: Supervision of Teaching and Learning

The findings from this study tend to suggest that the school leader is

involved in the teaching and learning process by supervising and evaluating the

instructional process, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring of students'

progress. According to the views of the interview participants, the principal seems

to make an effort to ensure that the teachers follow and implement the curriculum,

cover the scheme of work, write their lesson notes, use appropriate teaching method in the class, use the teaching time effectively, and mark the students' notes.

All the focus group participants shared their observations of aspects of the principal's management of the instructional process, such as by designing the timetable, providing learning materials, ensuring that teachers followed the scheme of work, and implemented the curriculum. They added that principal provided the textbooks and carried out inspection and supervision. As Sam remarked, *"The principal is highly involved in the teaching and learning process. He goes to the classroom and makes some inputs and corrections. He checks teachers' notes, and teaching materials, and ensured that students' notes were complete and marked."* During the direct observation, I could see the principal moving around, checking the classes, making corrections, supervising the teaching and learning process. At a point, he stood by a particular class, watched the teacher teach, and gave feedback to the teacher.

Finally, findings suggested that the principal assessed the teachers and students, and the teaching process. In their observation, the participants shared that the principal checked and evaluated all results and gave feedback to the teachers, students, parents, and stakeholders. As a teacher interviewed, Idemudia shared, "The principal works with the Assessment Official to supervise and evaluates the teachers and students." Another aspect of the supervision of teaching and learning discussed during the interview as part of leadership practices include managing the instructional programs for effective learning.

Managing the instructional program. All the interviewees offered examples that described the principal's various instructional programs to improve learning in a poor rural area, and they included extra lessons, individualized learning, motivational talks, and re-teaching with more time given to poor performing students. The analysis of the staff minutes' book indicated that the school had a program for students who failed and poor performing students were made to stay back during the holidays, and individualized lectures were given to the students to improve their performance.

During the interview, Peter confirmed this, noting, "There is an extra lesson for the students and individualized learning for weak students. There is an extra lesson in Mathematics and English language in the school for all. The principal organizes motivational talk for the students to improve performance." A parent, Ogbenbe stated, "My child told me that they have individualized learning, and the teachers teach the students with a different method." Another parent, Arhedo noted that he had no confidence in the extra lesson because for him, it was a way for the school to make money; however, other parents shared that extra lessons and individualized learning have helped many children.

Finally, as the participants suggested, another instructional program introduced by the principal was class teacher interactive forum for the students. All the focus group participants shared that in the interactive forum, the teachers were expected to discuss with the students in the various classes, find out their problems, and report the findings to the principal and they felt that the forum made it easy to

know the students' problems and address them. As Victoria expressed, "I enjoyed having an interactive forum with my students because it allows me to hear them out and attend to their problems."

Theme 5: School Climate

The results from this study indicated that most interview participants perceived that in redesigning the school, the principal seems to promote and enhance the positive school climate by creating an enabling environment and providing basic facilities, collaboration, positive relationship, and a school culture that could facilitate student achievement and school success. In creating enabling environment, some teacher participants perceived that the principal ensured the beauty, orderliness, and cleanliness of the school environment. As Victoria mentioned, "The principal tries to keep the school clean and beautiful; makes the school environment conducive for learning by providing facilities and structure." Another teacher interviewed, Ogbeide added, "The principal tried to make the school environment beautiful, clean, with the provision of water, and ventilation. He ensured that the place is organized and safe for both the students and the teachers." Other parts of the school climate discussed during the data collection as part of the leadership practices include the school culture, Catholic character, positive relationship, and collaborative leadership.

Positive school culture. The analysis of the school documents suggested that St. John's College was "a value-oriented institution" (School Handbook). It was the perception of most interview participants that the school emphasized

spiritual values that could bring about unity and love in the school community. The teachers interviewed perceived the school as a community of learners characterized by love, trust, unity, prayer life, orderliness, and positive relationship. Data further suggested a culture of togetherness, openness, trust, and respect for one another in the school. As Peter noted, "there are openness and unity.… There is a good relationship between the teachers and the management. They relate freely, and there is trust in the school community." Some interviewees felt that the school principal emphasized Catholic character and spiritual values that could bring about unity and love in the school community. An interviewee, Ogbeide shared that "There is a Catholic character; the religious built the spirituality of the students, and they attend Masses, prayers, and station of the cross." Most participants perceived the school culture to include discipline, respect for the rights of others, support for each other like a big family, and hard work. As an interviewee, Sam noted, "Our way of life is hard work and discipline."

As part of the culture, a parent, Odion noted, "the students are brought up in all round formation, morally, spiritually, academically, and socially." As a Catholic school, most focus group participants felt that the school stressed discipline, moral, spiritual life, unity, and family life. The teacher participants perceived that there was a high moral standard in the school, and the school was like a family. As Victoria shared, "The school has a good culture. We always see ourselves as learners, stress togetherness, discipline, and we all act as a team."

The interview participants suggested that there were order and organization of activities; there was time for everything. From the view of Ogbeide and observation data, the children seem to know what to do at a given time, and there were signs and directions for different activities. The document analysis of the school handbook articulated school rules, rewards, and punishment, and Ten Commandments of living in a school community. The handbook stated how things were done in the school, for example, "if you open it, close it; if you turn it on, turn it off; if you break it, fix it; if you borrow it, return it, if you don't know, ask" (School Handbook). The school handbook articulated the general rules and regulations that ensured discipline in the school. As all the focus group suggested, the high level of discipline among the students might have contributed to the school success. When asked what would you consider as two of the most significant factors that have accounted for high student performance in this school? Most focus group participants mentioned the factors to include the good use of the study time, discipline, and hard work.

The teacher interviewees tended to suggest that the principal gave every teacher the opportunity to develop his/her skills and be heard. An interviewee, Victoria shared, "The school has a good culture. We always see ourselves as learners and help each other to learn. Punctuality is a watchword, and we all act as a team." In alignment with the vision of the school, teachers interviewed perceived that all stakeholders saw themselves as a learner, and the school principal stressed

communal living, developing a positive relationship, celebrating achievements, demonstrating positive role models, and mutual respect in the school community.

Data from the interviews and document analysis suggested that the school principal made an effort to promote cultural awareness among the students to enable them to know their root, culture, language, ceremonies, food, dancing, and heritage. As Peter noted, "the school organizes cultural day yearly to inculcate cultural values in the students." Finally, in sustaining the school culture, Rose suggested that the principal ensured that everything is working and with a high maintenance culture.

Catholic character. The participants' responses suggested the presence of Catholic character in the school and practices. Analysis of the staff minutes book suggested that the principal reminded the teachers that as a Catholic school, the school must follow the Catholic character and the Catholic spirituality. The document analysis suggested that the Catholic character is the distinctive marks of a Catholic school. It means that the school is a Roman Catholic; uses religious instructions and observances to teach the values of Jesus Christ as expressed in the Scripture and Catholic doctrine. The teachers interviewed felt that the school principal strived to inculcate the fear of God, values of Catholic worship, and moral teachings in the children. As Ogbeide shared, "There is a Catholic character, the religious built the spirituality of the students, and they attend Masses, prayers, and station of the cross." Most participants perceived that the school has the mission of raising children with sound knowledge, faith, and norms of living in the society.

All the focus group participants expressed their views that God comes first, and the principal emphasized prayer life in the school. For some of the interviewees, the document on the logbook, and minutes book, the spiritual development, and activities in the school include prayers, daily Holy Masses, meditation, charitable works, and Stations of the Cross. It was the perception of the interview participants that the school had a strong culture of togetherness and prayers. Confirming the spirituality, a parent, Okonobor shared, "I have observed that the students are very prayerful, have a fear of God, disciplined, and knowing why they are in the school – academic success."

Positive relationship. In the interview with Peter, Sam, the principal, and Rose, they felt that principal allow love and friendship to govern the working relationship. As Peter mentioned, "There is a good relationship between the management and staff. There are openness and unity. . . . We relate freely, and there is trust in the school community." There was a seminar on the relationship among staff as Sam noted and the staff tried to live together as one and in unity. During the observation, from the way the principal related with the teachers and students, I perceived a cordial relationship and people working together as a family and a team. The staff could not pass each other without greeting and with a good expression on their faces. Idemudia added, "We do things in the school as a community or family, and promote love in the school community."

Collaborative leadership. The results from this study suggested that collaborative practices seem to pervade the school leadership. Although Rose

suggested, "there is a cold collaboration because the principal does not carry the teachers along," other participants felt that there were collaborative practices in the school. As Ogbeide said, "There is collaboration in the management, sometimes, it is difficult to involve the teachers in every decision-making process . . . So, the principal does not involve the teachers in every decision." Most of the focus group participants felt that though everyone cannot collaborate on financial matters, there was a strong collaboration in administrative issues in the school. The analysis of the minutes of the staff meetings suggested that in the decision-making, the principal seems to allow others to contribute to it, and their views were respected. From the analysis of the minutes of the staff meeting, there were some indications to suggest that the staff reached most decisions through deliberations. The teachers seem to have been involved in the decision-making process as suggested by the meeting proceedings. However, as Peter noted, "On some issues, the principal has the final say."

The teacher participants perceived that there was collaboration because there were departments, and the principal shared duties with the teachers, teachers were involved in the decision-making, planning, and implementation, and there were committees with responsibilities. The teachers interviewed felt that there was a distribution of works among the teachers in the school. Apart from teaching their subject areas, the principal gave the teachers other administrative duties such as supervising the students, conducting the assembly, examination official, heads of departments, and the sports director. While articulating how he might have built a

culture of trust and collaboration, the principal Okosun noted, "I made an effort to create an opportunity for stakeholders to collaborate in school management. I created various departments and offices and distributed the school works among [with] the staff." Most participants in the interviews and focus group perceived that the collaboration in the school leadership build commitment, ownership, sense of belonging, and improvement in the school.

During the focus group discussion, some participants suggested that the parents as stakeholder were encouraged to participate in the education of their children. The participants shared that the principal organized lectures for the parents to know their roles in achieving the vision of the school. Also, from the participants' views, the Open Day was another opportunity for parents to collaborate in the education of their children. Here, both the teachers and parents worked together for the good of the children during the Open Day. The logbook and staff minutes book analysis suggested that the school operated Open Day, which enabled parents and teachers to examine and discuss the academic performance and challenges of the individual student. For a parent, Arhedo, "Open Day has helped to promote collaboration in the education of our children."

Finally, some participants suggested that questionnaires were often sent to parents to give their observations about their children during the holidays. During the interview with a parent, Odion shared, "The principal tries to encourage collaboration in students' formation. Parents are allowed to give their observations about their children, and are invited to participate in the decision-making through

PTA. The PTA comes up with projects and suggestions to help the school." All the interviewees perceived that there were possibilities that parents partnered with the school in the different programs or events and participated in the school activities. In the school document, the handbook suggested that parents were to collaborate with the school authority in the formation of the students by supporting, giving good examples to their children, participating in school activities, and in the development of the school.

Summary

A critical analysis of the data from the interviews, school documents, focus group, and observation provided sufficient findings to address the research questions. The main research question is "what principal leadership practices are perceived by stakeholders to have contributed to the improvement in academic standards in a Nigerian rural Catholic school in a disadvantaged environment in Auchi Diocese? To this question and its subquestions, the stakeholders described the leadership practices that might have contributed to high academic standard in St. John's College to include: effective leadership that is democratic, distributive, and collaborative and leadership practices of being straightforward, kind, and flexible, setting direction, communicating vision to stakeholders, ensuring staff development, supervision of teaching and learning, and creating instructional program to enhance poor performing students. The other practices include leading by example, building relationship, setting a high expectation, motivating the teachers, creating enabling climate, promoting school culture, building Catholic

character, ensuring discipline, and building confidence and spirit of hard work in the students.

Finally, the participants suggested that a principal in a disadvantaged area would need to be committed, hire qualified teachers, provide continuous professional development for the teachers, motivate them, seek for stakeholders' collaboration, supervise teaching and learning, and provide all-round formation for the students. In all, I will interpret these findings in the next chapter, and it will lead to the conclusion and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and gain an understanding of the leadership practices of a rural Catholic school principal that may have contributed to the improvement of the academic standards in a school located in a disadvantaged environment in Nigeria. The study focused on gaining an understanding of how an effective Catholic school principal met the many challenges such as those posed by poverty to define school vision, set direction, manage teaching and learning, and create an enabling climate to maintain high academic standards in a Catholic school. This study used a qualitative case study as method and approach of choice because it allowed in-depth exploration, access to detailed data, and a fuller understanding of the issue (Janesick, 2011). The primary aim of this case study was to capture a detailed description of leadership in the school by collecting data from the stakeholders through interviews, focus group, and observation (Merriam, 2009). In this chapter, I give a summary of the findings from the study and discuss the interpretation of the findings. I also present the limitations, recommendations, and implications for social change.

Summary of Findings

There were five main themes that emerged from analysis of the data from this study to understand leadership practices in a Catholic school in a disadvantaged area. I used the themes in the organization of my findings toward answering the research questions. The main RQ was: What principal leadership practices are perceived by stakeholders to have contributed to the improvement in academic

standards in a Nigerian rural Catholic school in a disadvantaged environment in Auchi Diocese? To answer this question and its subquestions, I analyzed the documents, observed data, and descriptions by the stakeholders of the leadership practices that may have contributed to high academic standards in St. John's College, which included effective leadership that is democratic, distributive, and collaborative. Others practices were (a) setting direction, (b) communicating the vision to stakeholders, (c) ensuring staff development, (d) supervision of teaching and learning, (e) school climate, and (f) creating an instructional program to enhance poor performing students. The study further revealed other practices including (a) leading by example, (b) building relationships, (c) setting high expectations, (d) motivating the teaching, (e) promoting school culture and Catholic character, (f) ensuring discipline, (g) and building confidence, and a spirit of hard work in the students.

In the next section, I interpret these themes that emerged from the analysis of the data from this study in relation to the literature review and conceptual framework. Also, I make an effort to draw the interrelationships among the themes while addressing the research questions.

Interpretation of the Findings

The key findings from this study aligned with the literature that informed the conceptual framework for this study. The five main themes found in the data aligned with Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) four core leadership practices necessary for school success and improvement (Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005).

The four core leadership practices include setting direction, continuous professional development, teaching and learning, and school climate, and leadership. The first four themes aligned with the Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) four core leadership practices, while the fifth theme on leadership in the disadvantaged area aligned with findings in the empirical literature such as Jacobson (2011), Kunzle et al. (2010), Leithwood and Riehl (2005), Masewicz (2010), Merritt (2016), and Mulford et al. (2008). Table 3 presents the summary of the themes and sub-themes alignment with the conceptual framework of Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) four core leadership practices.

Table 3

Alignment of Themes and Subthemes with Conceptual Framework

Themes	Alignment with Conceptual Framework and Key Research Studies
Setting direction (school vision): Communication of vision Setting high expectations	Setting direction (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003)
Continuous professional development: Leading by example Motivating the staff	Developing the people (capacity building) (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003)
Positive school climate: School culture Positive relationship Collaborative leadership Catholic character	Redesigning the organization (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005) Literature – Catholic character (Imhangbe, 2011; Spesia, 2016; Valadez, 2013)
Supervision of teaching and learning: Managing the instructional program	Managing the instructional program (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005)
Leading in a disadvantaged area: Distributive and democratic Leadership Sustaining the academic standard Positive influence of school leadership practices	Leading in a disadvantaged area (Leithwood &Riehl, 2003) Literature – Leadership in a disadvantaged area (Kunzle et al., 2010; Masewicz, 2010; Merritt, 2016; Mulford et al., 2008).

I interpret the themes and subthemes in the context of the conceptual framework and the research literature on leadership in disadvantaged rural areas.

Setting Direction

A school dream is the vision of the school, the ideal condition, and what the school would expect to see if all issues were addressed and resolved (Nagy & Fawcett, 2011). Every organization strives to collaboratively articulate its vision statements that should guide its actions and its future (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This case study revealed that the principal and stakeholders of St. John's College collaboratively articulated and reviewed the school vision in setting the direction for the school. For example, both the interview and focus group participants suggested that the principal set direction by articulating and reviewing the school vision and goals in collaboration with the stakeholders, as well as proposing ways of achieving the vision of the school and student achievement. The findings reflect a qualitative study that examined successful principals in high-poverty schools in the United States, England, and Australia, in which Ylimaki et al. (2007) found that school heads focused on directives and tasks in setting a vision for school improvement in failing schools in disadvantaged contexts.

This current study found that the participants felt that having a vision may have contributed to the success of the school. The findings from this study also confirm the findings from a mixed method study carried out among Catholic schools in Archdiocese of Los Angeles regarding leadership practices that supported student achievement, in which Valadez (2013) found that a well-

articulated vision and mission aided successful Catholic school principals in leading the schools. All the focus group participants felt that the purposefulness and vision of the leadership of the principal contributed to high student performance. The findings suggest that a well-articulated vision statement assisted the school principal in effectively leading the school.

The findings from the study also affirm the findings of Leithwood and Riehl (2003; 2005) used for the conceptual framework in that that setting direction entails developing and communicating the school goals and the commonality of purpose. For instance, Victoria noted that the "principal often speaks about the vision during meetings and on the assembly ground, and organized seminars on the vision and mission of the school." Also, the similarity between this study and Yang's (2014) study is in the manner of fostering commitment through communication of school vision. The findings reflect the findings from a case study by Yang (2014) on a principal's transformational leadership in school improvement that showed the school leader needs to craft the basic conditions to encourage the stakeholders to be committed, achieve common school objectives, and have vision. The responsibility of crafting and fostering a commitment to the vision was seen in the practices of the principal Okosun in this study as he collaboratively reviewed and communicated the vision statement to the stakeholders.

As a subtheme from the analysis of the participants' views and the documents analysis, the findings from this study suggest that in the perception of the interviewees, the principal set high standards and expectations for both the

students and teachers. Ogbeide shared that the "school principal sets new standards that all must work on in each term by demanding the best or nothing from the teachers and students in their academics and other activities." The findings reflect Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) core practices for setting direction by creating high-performance expectations and Ylimaki et al.'s (2007) case study of principals who made a difference in challenging high-poverty schools, that the principals set achievable goals and created a high sense of purpose. What was unique in this current study was the usage of school motto to set goals and standards. The study suggests the need for school leaders to purposefully craft an inspiring school motto and vision to achieve and sustain standards.

Continuous Professional Development

The conceptual framework for this study suggested that a leader's work of developing people entails giving the teachers intellectual capacity building and individualized support in the learning process (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). In affirmation, the participants in this study perceived that there were staff training and individualized support for the teachers in St. John's College. Analysis of all interviews and focus group data and documents in the logbook suggested that the principal organized staff training to promote professional development at the beginning of the academic session. The findings also agree with the findings of a qualitative study of teachers' trust in school leaders by Handford and Leithwood (2013) that an effective principal develops the people in the workplace for building capacity and competence (Pihie & Asimiran, 2014; Wagner et al., 2010).

The findings from this study suggest that the teachers' perceived that their professional development improved their productivity and effectiveness. All the teachers interviewed as well as the focus group participants felt that the training programs were beneficial to them and had enhanced their effectiveness. For instance, while listing the benefits of the training, both the principal and the teachers interviewed felt that the program impacted them positively and had improved their class management skills, preparation of lessons, document keeping, relationships with students and stakeholders, teaching method, and the ability to train others. These findings confirm the findings from a meta-analysis of empirical articles from 2000 to 2014 on leadership practices that have influenced student achievement in which Hitt and Tucker (2016) found that schools that engaged in continuous professional development of the teachers honed teachers' skills, improved productivity, and sustained academic standards. However, I could not carry out a longitudinal analysis of student academic performance because of the study design. Therefore, I only addressed the teachers' perceptions of the value of professional development.

The conceptual framework of this study and the empirical literature indicated that developing the staff requires a school leader to provide an appropriate role model through leading by example (Ahmad et al., 2013; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). The findings from this study suggested that the principal provided an appropriate role model in the school through leading by example to enhance teachers' behavior and professional development. These findings regarding

modeling behavior are somewhat similar to the findings from a mixed method study of leadership practices of Catholic school principals who promoted student achievement from Archdiocese of Los Angeles, in which Valadez (2013) found that the principals created Catholic identity and modeled behavior through leading by example.

Developing people entails giving the teachers individualized support in the learning process (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005). The findings from both the interviewees and all the focus group participants suggested that stimulating and motivating the teachers are crucial to the effective development and productivity in the school. Most participants felt that principal motivated the teachers by giving individualized support, encouraging hard work, and teachers' involvement in school leadership. The findings are similar regarding teachers' involvement to the findings from a qualitative study that explored the driving leadership styles that encouraged participation and involvement of stakeholders in school development, in which Rajbhandari (2011) found that teachers' involvement in school leadership increased the motivational level and stability among the teachers. The findings from this study also reflect the findings from a survey research regarding individualized support in which Ojera and Yambo (2014) found that the quality of the principal's leadership contributed to the teachers' level of motivation and the quality of teaching in the classrooms.

Though there were discrepancies in the findings on motivation, the data from this study suggested the principal motivated the teachers by giving them

interest-free loans, involving them in the school management, salary increment, awards, and individualized support. These findings reflect the findings from a quantitative study of instructional practices in secondary schools in Ethiopia by Ahmed (2016) and Tan (2012) that some principals motivate their staff through salary increment, praises, appreciation, encouraging initiatives, valuing people's contributions, building team relationships among the teachers, and developing an interest in the staff.

Managing the Teaching and Learning Process

Leithwood and Riehl (2005) indicated that principals best manage the instructional process by staffing the school, providing instructional support, supervision, and monitoring of teaching and learning, tracking student progress, and managing instructional time. In affirmation, the findings from this study suggest that Okosun also managed the teaching and learning process by supervising and evaluating the instructional process, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring of students' progress. All the interview and focus group participants felt that the principal manages the instructional process by carrying out duties such as designing the timetable, providing learning materials, implement the curriculum, and carry out inspection and supervision. These findings reflect Leithwood and Reich's (2003) model and the findings by Hallinger and Lee (2013) and Hitt and Tucker (2016) that managing instruction comprises the three roles of the principal: supervision and evaluation of the instructional process, coordination of the curriculum, and monitoring of students' progress.

The findings from the participants in this study suggested that the school has been successful because the principal supervises the curriculum, visits the class to monitor teaching and learning, and ensures the appropriate use of teaching time. Norviewu-Mortty (2012) also explored the leadership practices of school principals in disadvantaged rural schools in Ghana and found that principals who focused on teaching and learning improved student achievement in the disadvantaged context in Ghana. Norviewu-Mortty's (2012) findings are exemplified in the practices of Okosun as the participants perceived that the principal's involvement in teaching and learning, class visits, and supervision of the instructional process have contributed to the high performance in the school. These findings also confirm the findings by Egwu (2015) and Ekundayo (2010) that the school leader ensured proper curriculum and instructional supervision to improve school achievement by carrying out classroom visits and inspecting all school documents, as did Okosun in this study.

Finally, the interviewees in this study perceived that the principal practices instructional leadership and have various instructional programs to improve learning in a poor rural area. These practices and programs include extra lessons, individualized learning, class teacher interactive forum, and re-teaching with more time given to poor performing students. The parents interviewed perceived that these programs and principal instructional leadership had improved the performance of their children. These steps taken by the principal are examples of what Eguw's (2015) quantitative study of principals' performance of supervision of

classroom instruction found that schools in which the principals visit classrooms and show instructional leadership with instructional programs seemed to improve more than the schools where principals do not visit classrooms.

Positive School Climate

The Leithwood and Riehl (2003) core leadership practices indicate that redesigning the organization entails enhancing the working conditions and situation in which the school operates. Confirming this framework, the findings from the study suggested that the participants felt that the principal promoted and enhanced the positive school climate by creating an enabling environment and providing basic facilities that could facilitate student achievement and school success. For example, Victoria shared, to achieve positive climate, "the principal tried to keep the school clean and beautiful; created an enabling environment for the staff to work, and made the school environment conducive for learning by providing facilities and structure." The provision of basic facilities to ensure effectiveness in St. John's reflects the findings of a meta-analysis of school climate research, in which Thapa et al. (2013) found that provision of basic facilities enhanced school climate and improved teaching and learning process. What was obvious in the findings is that the participants felt that positive school climate contributed to the school success in the disadvantaged area. The findings confirm studies by Barber (2013) and Reinhorn, Johnson, and Simon (2015) as well as a qualitative study of an Indiana high-performing school in a poverty area by Colby (2014), that positive school climate characterized effective schools, as perceived in St John's College.

The findings suggest St. Johns was a family and a motivated team, as the teachers interviewed perceived the school as a community of learners characterized by love, trust, unity, orderliness, and positive relationship. These findings are similar in terms of trust to the study by Ozgan (2011) and a qualitative study of key stakeholders' perceptions of effective school leadership by Odhiambo and Hii (2012) which found that an enabling environment where the staff can trust the organization and its leadership is important in motivating the teachers. The participants perceived that the school is succeeding because of the culture of trust that builds motivation and commitment. Still stressing trust, the findings further agree with a quantitative study of the relationship between organizational justice, confidence, commitment, and organizational behavior by Ozgan (2011) that a school without trust will not succeed. Other aspects of school climate discussed in this study include positive relationship, collaborative leadership, Catholic character, and leadership in a disadvantaged area.

Positive relationship. Findings from this study suggested that the school principal stressed communal living, developing a positive relationship, celebrating achievements, demonstrating positive role models, and mutual respect in the school community. As the principal and Peter shared, love and friendship govern the working relationship in the school, and there was a good relationship between the management and staff. These findings reflect the findings from a qualitative study of the influence of principal leadership practices on student achievement in Catholic schools in which, Imhangbe (2011) found that high-performing Catholic schools in

Edo State maintained a healthy school culture where the relationship and interaction were cordial, trusted, and homely. Though the culture of mutual respect found in this study was not part of the study by Imhangbe (2011), there is a link between a mutual respect and positive relationship as the former build the latter. A critical analysis and interpretation suggest that the findings in this case study are similar to the findings from a meta-analysis of empirical articles from 2000 to 2014 on leadership practices that have influenced student achievement, in which Hitt and Tucker (2016) found that there is a need to build trust, have open communication, unity, and a good relationship in fostering a collaborative culture and school success.

Collaborative leadership. The findings from this study suggested that there was collaboration in the school because the principal involved the stakeholders in the management of the school, decision-making, and administrative issues. For example, as Ogbeide and most focus group participants shared, there was collaboration in the management and administrative issues in the school. These findings confirm the findings from a qualitative study of leadership practice in Catholic schools in which Imhangbe (2011) found that the principals in Catholic schools adopted collaborative and distributed leadership, involved stakeholders in the management and leadership of the schools and impacted on student achievement. The findings further reflect the findings by Barber (2013), Colby (2014), and Reinhorn, Johnson, and Simon (2015) that collaborative leadership characterized effective schools in poverty areas.

Considering the impact of collaborative leadership, the participants perceived that collaboration in the school leadership builds commitment, ownership, and a sense of belonging among stakeholders and brings about change and school effectiveness. These findings are similar to a qualitative study that explored the driving leadership styles that encourage participation and involvement of stakeholders in school development, in which Rajbhandari (2011) found that involving the staff in the leadership of the school will bring about a sense of responsibility and ownership, use of initiative for tasks, commitment, belongingness among workers, and accountability among the staff.

Catholic character. As a Catholic school, the participants suggested that the Catholic character and Catholic spirituality were taught and practiced in the school. Ogbeide and the focus group participants suggested that the school principal strives to inculcate the fear of God, values of Catholic worship, prayers, and moral teachings in the children, with the mission of raising children with knowledge, faith, care, and right values. Regarding building Catholic identity in the children, the study reflects the findings from a mixed method study of leadership practices of Catholic school principals who promoted student achievement from Archdiocese of Los Angeles, in which Valadez (2013) found that the principals created Catholic identity and modeled behavior. The findings from my study further confirm the findings from a qualitative study of stakeholders' perceptions of effective leadership in a Catholic school in Australia, in which Odhiambo and Hii (2012) found that Catholic schools are unique because they provide a religious community

within the learning community of the school by providing service of care and

pastoral life which include regular prayers, the teaching of religious values, and

social justice activities.

In this study, participants felt that school principal taught the students

prayers, religious values, and practice of charity. These findings reflect the study by

Odhiambo and Hii (2012) and the literature that the role of school principals in

Catholic schools include building spiritual development of the students, building

the Catholic character in the students, teaching the children how to pray, fostering

religious education and gospel values, and providing charitable services to the

community (Augenstein & Konnert, as cited in Imhangbe, 2011; Spesia, 2016;

Valadez, 2013). By implication, these findings suggest that there is a spiritual

dimension in managing and leading Catholic school because it requires teaching the

students spiritual and moral values with gospel teachings.

Leadership Practices in a Disadvantaged Area

The findings from this study align with the literature and Leithwood and

Riehl's (2003) core leadership practices that could improve student performance in

disadvantaged areas. When asked what leadership practices enhance school

performance in the disadvantaged area, the data from the participants in the study

suggest that the school principal shared the vision and work collaboratively with the

stakeholders to achieve school goals. For instance, Peter, Sam, and Rose perceived

that their principal, as a leader in a disadvantaged area, shared his vision with

stakeholders, directed, motivated, inspired, and carried everybody along in

achieving school goal. The findings confirm a qualitative study by Hagel (2014), which found that effective leaders in disadvantaged areas shared their vision with stakeholders and carried everybody along, and modeled pedagogy. As a targeted skill and practice in both studies, the findings suggest that school leaders might need to set direction and motivate stakeholders towards achieving school goals by sharing their vision with stakeholders.

In their perception, all the participants in the focus group discussion expressed their views that the leadership practices in the school were distributive and democratic because the principal shared duties and responsibilities among different departments, committees, administrative staff, and stakeholders. For example, Peter, Rose, Sam, Odion, Paul, and Ogbenbe described the leadership of their principal as democratic, collaborative, and distributive, and they felt that these practices had influenced teachers' motivation and improved student performance. These findings affirm a qualitative study on school principals' practices in challenging context, in which, Masewicz (2010) found that principals who distributed their leadership and shared responsibilities were more likely to succeed in disadvantaged areas. This study further reflects the findings from a quantitative study on the influence of principals' leadership styles on students' academic achievement by Yusuf (2012) that democratic leadership style employed by the principal influenced school success, motivated the teachers, and the school achievements. The findings from these studies suggest that there is a perceived

impact of leadership practices on teachers' performance and school success in this study, and in the studies by Masewicz (2010) and Yusuf (2012).

In this study, the participants felt that the schools in the disadvantaged areas need a principal who has passion, skills, and commitment to leadership. The interviewees perceived that their principal is succeeding because he has training in school leadership, passion, and commitment to leading the school. These findings are similar to the findings from an Australian case study of practices of successful principal, in which, Drysdale and Gurr (2011) found that successful principals have innate goodness, passion, commitment, equity, open, flexible, child-centered, skills, and with a strong vision. The findings further reflect the findings from a study of the leadership practices of school principals in disadvantaged rural schools in Ghana by Norviewu-Mortty (2012) that an effective leader has the quality and ability to develop a clear vision, commitment, exercising perfect control of the school, and a strong passion for the school leadership. This study also confirms the findings by Imhangbe (2011), that leadership training and qualification are vital for effective management of schools. While this study is similar to Imhangbe (2011) on the perceived impact of leadership training, it reflects the study by Drysdale and Gurr (2011) and Norviewu-Mortty (2012) regarding commitment and passion. By implication, the findings suggest that strong, purposeful leadership with passion, training, and commitment is essential in sustaining academic standards in disadvantaged schools (Kunzle et al., 2010; Merritt, 2016).

This study found that quality teachers with commitment, who are ready to do something extra, are important in sustaining academic standards in the disadvantaged area. The participants felt that despite the difficulties in getting qualified teachers in a rural area, the principal was able to hire, train, motivate, retain, and make the teachers put in extra of their time, energy, and knowledge to achieve the goals. Though these findings cannot be generalized because of its design compared to Mulford et al.'s (2008) study, the findings are similar to the findings from a quantitative study of successful principalship of high-performance schools in high-poverty communities by Mulford et al. (2008) that sustaining student achievement in high poverty areas the principal needs to make the teachers put in more effort than 'normal.' What is unique in my findings was the need to hire, train, motivate, and retain qualified teachers to achieve school goals. The implication of these findings is that the teachers and the principals will need to work harder and be more committed than their counterparts in more favorable settings.

Most interview participants felt that another strategy for academic success in the school was the supervision of teaching and learning by the principal. All the focus group participants and Odion perceived that there was a proper supervision, assessment, and evaluation of the teachers and students in the learning process. For example, Sam shared, "The principal is highly involved in the teaching and learning process. He goes to the classroom and makes some inputs and corrections…" This study affirms the findings by Leithwood and Riehl (2005) that principals manage

the instructional process by staffing the school, providing instructional support, supervision, and monitoring of teaching and learning, tracking student progress, and managing instructional time. Again, the findings from this current study are similar to the findings from a quantitative study of the relationship between principals' leadership behavior and school effectiveness in Nigeria, in which Ekundayo (2010) found that the school leader ensured proper curriculum and instructional supervision by carrying out classroom visits and inspecting all school documents. The findings also reflect the findings by Ahmed (2016), Hallinger and Lee (2013), and Hitt and Tucker (2016) that a principal in a disadvantaged school needs a thorough supervision of teaching and learning process to ensure that the lesson is structured, appropriate delivery of the curriculum, and effective assessment of the learning process. What makes this current study different from the studies above was the need to assess and evaluate the teachers and students in the teaching and learning process.

The participants in this study perceived that the school has the basic facilities, learning materials, and the enabling environment for learning. For instance, Ogbeide, Victoria, and most focus group participants felt that the principal provided the needed infrastructure and enabling environment to promote learning in a disadvantaged rural area. These findings reflect the findings from a meta-analysis of empirical articles from 2000 to 2014 on leadership practices that have influenced student achievement, in which Hitt and Tucker (2016) found that the principal enhances positive school climate in poor rural areas by creating an enabling

environment through the provision of basic facilities, and by ensuring their maintenance and usage to promote student achievement and school success.

Data analysis suggested that the principal's practices and behavior have positively influenced the students' behavior and academic performance in St. John's College. The parents interviewed affirmed the positive changes that they had observed in their children and which the children learned from the school and the principal's practices. For example, a parent, Okonobor shared that the principal had "influenced my child positively and she liked doing charity, helping others, caring for younger ones and had the desire to read." These findings reflect the findings from a qualitative study that examined successful principals in high-poverty schools in the USA, England, and Australia, in which Ylimaki et al. (2007) found that successful principals in the challenging contexts set and sustained direction in their schools, and exerted a strong, positive influence on students. This study further confirms the findings from a qualitative study of rebalancing quality education in a democratic society by Belcastro (2015) that successful school leaders model behavior that they considered essential in helping students achieve school goals. The findings from this study are similar to that of Ylimaki et al. (2007) and Belcastro (2015) regarding principal's ability to bring about positive change and modeling positive behavior to achieve school goal. However, this study was limited to one brief case study of one rural Catholic school. Therefore, in the next section, I describe the limitations in this study before making my recommendations and discussing the implications for social change.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is its small size. Using a single case that focused on one high-achieving Catholic school in a disadvantaged area limits the possibility of generalization to a broader population. The study design eliminated my ability to carry out a longitudinal analysis of student academic performance. Therefore, with a case study, I only addressed the teachers' perceptions of the value of professional development on their effectiveness and school performance.

Another limitation of this study was my inability to have a direct observation of the staff meeting because of the indefinite postponement of the meeting. I expected that the meeting could afford me of the opportunity of observing the decision-making process and interactions among the staff and school leader. However, I addressed this limitation by taking an in-depth analysis of the minutes of the staff meetings for the past 3 years in the school which gave me rich information on the decision-making process in the school. The data analysis indicated that I had reached saturation, and so, it is not clear that observing the staff meeting would have added further information.

The third limitation was that as the sole researcher or instrument in the study, I was concerned with researcher bias. I ensured that I aligned by research plans with the literature to minimize the influences of my personal opinions and bias. I made an effort to ensure interview protocols were non-biased, and I allowed my chair, methodologist, and colleagues who are qualitative researchers to review

my data to ensure that open coding reflected the data and are capable of addressing the research questions.

As a Catholic priest studying the leadership of a Catholic school principal in a disadvantaged area, I brought another limitation. There was the possibility of the participants telling me what I want to hear because I am a priest and this could distort and skew the outcome or result of the study. I managed this limitation by conducting this study in a neutral diocese where I am not known as a priest and have no supervisory role. Also, I played the role of an interviewer, focus group facilitator, document analyst, and observer. I played the role of a researcher, not a priest in the interview and other data collection process, took off my collar, dressed in mufti (street clothes), did not introduce myself or signed letters as *Father Itaman,* rather as *Theophilus Itaman*, and made it clear to the participants the purpose of the study and how I will use the data.

Finally, there was a limitation in the study because the teachers who participated in this study are subordinates of the principal, whose leadership I examined in this study. I reasoned that the principal might victimize the teachers if such participants should give information not acceptable to the principal and this could constitute a limitation in getting accurate information. I addressed this limitation by protecting the participants all through the process and assured them of confidentiality and did all I could for non-traceability in the research. I used pseudonyms for the school and the participants, conducted the interviews in a non-threatening manner and environment, used codes, and carefully stored the data.

Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and gain an understanding of the leadership practices of a rural Catholic school principal that may have contributed to the improvement of the academic standards in a school located in a disadvantaged area in Nigeria. The literature review in this study indicated that little research existed in the leadership practices of a Catholic school principal in challenging areas in other parts of the world though not in Nigeria. The findings of this study suggest that Catholic school principals in the disadvantaged areas need specific core leadership practices – setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional process - that could improve the academic standards despite the challenges posed by poverty and rural environment.

The findings of this study suggested that the principal in the Catholic school used as a case study, implemented the core leadership practices to improve school and enhanced student achievement in a disadvantaged area by setting direction, developing people, managing the instructional process, and redesigning the school. Almost all the participants in this study perceived that the principal effectively practiced core leadership practices to improve and sustain academic standard in a disadvantaged area in Auchi Diocese. Therefore, I recommend that principals in disadvantaged areas use the core leadership practice to ensure effectiveness.

To further expand this current study, multiple case studies on Catholic school leadership in disadvantaged areas that focus on the theory and practice of

Leithwood and Riehl's (2003) four core leadership practices may be useful and beneficial in further suggestions for effective management and leadership of low-performing schools in disadvantaged areas. A similar study could be carried out to compare leadership practices in Catholic schools and government secondary schools in the same disadvantaged environment. Such studies would benefit the government and other educational bodies.

Finally, I recommend using a quantitative methodology to examine and analyze the relationship among rural socioeconomic factors, religious values, and student achievement in a disadvantaged area in Auchi Diocese. Such a study may be beneficial to the Catholic school leadership and secondary education in Nigeria.

Implications for Social Change

The findings of this study may contribute to positive social change by helping to build leadership best practices in Catholic school that could improve and sustain academic achievement and reduces dropout rates notwithstanding students' low socioeconomic environment, particularly making a difference in the academic life of students in a disadvantaged environment in Auchi Diocese.

School leaders may gain useful information on how to improve practice in a Catholic school in a disadvantaged area. The study might hone the school leaders' professionalism in using the core leadership practices identified in this study to set direction in a Catholic school in a disadvantaged area and communicate the vision to the stakeholders. The findings might help the school principals in developing teachers' professionalism, managing teaching and learning, and redesigning the

Catholic schools in disadvantaged areas by providing enabling climate and stakeholders' collaboration.

The findings of this study might give parents information and insight into their roles and importance in contributing to student achievement and school success. Parents' involvement and collaboration may improve and strengthen the partnership with the school and the education of the students.

The findings of this study may also assist in the management of the schools by school leaders through distributive and collaborative leadership in disadvantaged areas and increase student achievement. Considering the dearth of research in the area of managing Catholic school in disadvantaged areas in Nigeria, the findings of this study might contribute to the development of a field of study in Nigeria.

To improve practice at similar schools, I recommend that school principals make an effort to use the core leadership practice to set direction and articulate the vision for the school. All the participants in this study felt that the school needs a principal with a vision and who can articulate and set the tone and standard of the school. It was the perception of the participants that the school leader needs to communicate the vision to the stakeholders, and all stakeholders need to work with the vision statement to achieve school the goal and improve student achievement.

I also recommend that school leaders in Catholic schools in disadvantaged areas need to develop people through professional development by training the teachers in seminars, workshops, and conferences. Considering the difficulties involved in getting quality teachers in the rural areas, the findings suggest that the

school leaders need to build the capacity, model behavior, and motivate the available teachers to enhance student achievement. The teachers interviewed felt that the school's professional development has helped them to improve practice and carried out their work effectively. Such training could be provided by professionals and experienced teachers within the school to share knowledge in specialized areas to improve the school.

Another recommendation is that the school leaders should focus on instructional process. Teaching and learning are the hubs of schooling; therefore, the findings suggest that there is a need for principals' involvement through supervision and curriculum management to improve student academic performance. All the participants in this study perceived that school leader managed the teaching and learning by supervising and evaluating the instructional process, coordinating the curriculum, and monitoring of students' progress. The findings suggest that the principal's involvement has led to various interventions and instructional programs to improve the performance of low performing students.

My fourth recommendation is for the school principal to create positive climate and culture by providing an enabling and safe environment for learning to improve performance. The participants interviewed perceived that the principal promoted and enhanced the positive school climate by creating an enabling environment and providing basic facilities that could facilitate student achievement and school success. Considering the schools in disadvantaged rural areas, findings suggest that it is important for the school leaders to build positive relationship and

collaboration with the stakeholders and the host community. The principal felt that he created an opportunity for stakeholders to collaborate in school management and involve the teachers in the decision-making process, and this process has helped in the effective management of the school.

My final recommendation hinges on the perceptions of the participants that the schools in the disadvantaged areas need effective leaders with passion, skills, required training, and commitment to school leadership to sustain the standard. Findings suggest that such school leaders might need to practice distributive and democratic styles to achieve school goals in the disadvantaged areas. As perceived by all the participants in the focus group discussion, the leadership practices in the school were distributive and democratic, and this may have enhanced effective management of the school and improve student performance because the principal shared duties and responsibilities among different departments, committees, and stakeholders.

Conclusion

Many school principals faced challenges in leading, improving, and sustaining schools in disadvantaged rural areas. Though no researcher has used the core leadership practices in their studies of Catholic schools in the disadvantaged area in Nigeria, findings have suggested that the principal of St. John's College implemented the core leadership practices to promote and improve schools in the disadvantaged area. I have learned from this study that school leaders would be well advised to consider core leadership practices to set direction, develop people,

manage the instructional process, and to redesign the school to improve performance and sustain academic standards in a disadvantaged area.

Findings in this study suggested that a school principal in a Catholic school in the disadvantaged rural area might need to have the skills to set direction, articulate the vision for the school, and communicate it to stakeholders to enable them to own and strive to achieve the school vision. If Catholic schools in disadvantaged rural area must compete in prolific global society and sustain standards, the school principals might need to focus on the teaching and learning, manage and supervise the learning process, have professional development for teachers, motivate, involve the teachers in the leadership of the school, and create enabling climate with positive culture, Catholic character, good relationship, and stakeholders' collaboration. These findings suggest that this research could provide a model for partnered efforts in reforming, improving, and sustaining academic performance in low-performing schools to guide the next generation in addressing Catholic school educational problems in disadvantaged areas.

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Appendix A: Principal's Permission to Conduct Study and Invitation to Participate

in the Study

Dear Sir,

I am, Theophilus Itaman, a doctoral student at Walden University, and I wish to request your permission to conduct my research in your school - St. John's College. My research focuses on exploring the principal's practices in a high-achieving Catholic school such as St. John's College. The study seeks to explore the perceptions of the principal's strategies and practices that may have contributed to students' high performance in the disadvantaged area. I hope that you will graciously grant me the permission to carry out face-to-face interviews with some of your teachers and yourself and focus group interview with some teachers. Also, I will need your permission to collect other data that will involve two to three days direct observation of school activities and interactions, and examination of some school's documents. Additionally, I will be seeking parents' participation in interviewing.

I want to assure you that the safety of the participants and the confidentiality of their contributions to this study will be highly protected and guarded. The authorization is voluntary, and the participants will be at liberty to withdraw at any point without penalties. A copy of the summary of the findings from this study will be sent to you and all participants.

I will appreciate your approval to conduct this study in your school. I will call to do a follow-up to this letter, and I will be glad to answer or clarify any

question or concern you may have at any time. You could contact me via email:

theophilus.itaman@xxxxxxxxx or xxxxxxxxxxxx. If you agree or approve of it, kindly

communicate with the above email address, and a consent form will be given to you

to sign before the study. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Theophilus Itaman

Appendix B: Interview Questions for the Principal

This qualitative study seeks to explore the leadership practices of a Catholic school principal in a high-achieving Catholic school in the disadvantaged area in Nigeria.

1. Tell me about your roles in the school?

2. Could you describe some of the leadership practices you adopted at the beginning of your principalship here? (Can you tell me how many years ago that was?)

3. Have you had any reason to change your leadership practices? If so, can you describe the change or changes you made?

4. Are there ways you have tried to set the direction in the school? Can you tell me about them?

5. Could you describe how you have communicated the school vision to the stakeholders? Can you tell me about them?

6. Are there ways you have tried to set a high expectation for the students and teachers? Can you share with me about them?

7. Are there programs or training you have implemented to improve the professional development of your teachers? Can you tell me about them?

8. How would you describe the benefits of the professional development program for the teachers?

9. Are there ways you attempt to meet the needs of the individual teachers to motivate them? Can you tell me about them?

10. How would you describe an implemented instructional program(s) and practice(s), if any, that may have contributed to student high-achievement?

11. How would you describe the ways you have created an effective culture and working condition for your teachers? How did you sustain it?

12. In what ways do you think you lead by example in the school?

13. What modifications and restructuring have you done in the school to enhance collaboration and school success?

14. How would you describe your supervision and evaluation of teaching and learning process in the school?

15. What would you consider as two of the most significant factors that have accounted for high student performance in this school?

16. What advice do you have for school principals in disadvantaged areas?

17. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding leadership practices that may have contributed to your school effectiveness in poverty area?

Information about the setting

a. How old is this school?

b. How long have you been a principal in this school?

c. Tell me about your education and qualification?

d. School's population

e. Number of staff

Appendix C: Interview Questions for the Teachers

1. Tell me about your roles in the school?

2. How would you describe the specific leadership practices adopted by your principal when he first took over the leadership of this school?

3. Are there ways the principal tried to set the direction in the school?

4. Which of your principal's leadership practices communicate the school vision to the parents and students? Can you tell me about them?

5. Are there ways your principal tried to set a high expectation for the students and teachers?

6. Are there programs or training that your school principal has implemented to improve the professional development of the teachers?

7. How would you describe the benefits of the professional development program to the teachers?

8. Are there ways that your principal attempts to meet the needs of the individual teachers to motivate them? Can you tell me about them?

9. How would you describe an implemented instructional program(s) and practice(s), if any, that may have contributed to student high-achievement?

10. How would describe the ways that your principal created and sustained an enabling culture and working condition for teachers?

11. How would you describe the culture or how things are done in this school?

12. How would you describe the ways your principal tried to lead by example in the school?

13. What sort of modifications and restructuring has your principal made to enhance teachers' collaboration and school success?

14. How would you describe your principal's supervision of teaching and learning process in the school?

15. What would you consider as two of the most significant factors that have accounted for high student performance in this school?

16. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding leadership practices that may have promoted school effectiveness in this school?

Thanks for your time and cooperation

Appendix D: Interview Questions for the Parents

1. How would you describe the leadership of the principal of this school?

2. Are there ways the principal tried to set the direction in the school?

3. Which of the principal's leadership practices communicate the school vision to the parents? Can you tell me about them?

4. In what way or ways would you say that the principal has contributed to the teachers' effectiveness? Can you share with me about them?

5. How would you describe the ways the principal tried to lead by example in the school?

6. How would you describe the culture or how things are done in this school?

7. How would you describe the ways that the principal created and sustained an enabling culture that attracted parents to send their children to this school?

8. What sort of modifications and restructuring has the school principal made to enhance parents' collaboration in the school?

9. How would you describe an implemented instructional program(s) and practice(s), if any, that may have contributed to student high-achievement?

10. How would you describe the principal's involvement in the learning process in the school?

11. What would you consider as two of the most significant factors that have accounted for high student performance in this school?

12. In what ways, if any, would you say that your child's character and academic performance have been influenced and improved by the school leadership? Can you tell me about it?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding leadership practices that may have promoted school effectiveness in this school?

Thanks for your time and cooperation

Appendix E: Interview Questions for Focus Group

(Teachers will answer these questions)

1. How would you describe the leadership in this school? How collaborative is the leadership? Can you discuss this?

2. What is the nature of the distribution of leadership in this school?

3. What would you consider as the contributions of your principal to the success of the school?

4. Are there ways the principal tried to set the school goals? Was the process collaborative?

5. How does the principal encourage acceptance and achievement of the goals?

6. Are there ways your principal has set or tried to set a high expectation for the students and teacher? Can you discuss something about them?

7. How would you describe the commitment of the teachers and students? Would you say that school vision contributed to the commitment?

8. How would you describe the teacher profession development in the school? (Job-embedded, classroom-centered, and continuous).

9. To what extent would you say that the principal is a role model?

10. How does the principal ensure teachers' motivation?

11. How would you describe the culture or how things are done in this school?

12. How does the principal encourage a collaborative culture in the school?

13. How would you describe the stakeholders' participation and involvement in school activities and development?

14. How would you describe the principal's involvement in the teaching and learning process in the school?

15. What does your principal do in managing the instructional process in the school?

16. What would you consider as two of the most significant factors that have accounted for high student performance in this school? Can you share with us?

17. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding leadership practices that may have promoted school success in the disadvantaged area?

Thanks for your time and cooperation.

Appendix F: Document Analysis Form

Areas of Focus	Observation/ Reflective Notes
Length of Time	
Place	
Purpose	
Physical Setting: School compound, classrooms, staff room, offices, and structural arrangement. The learning climate	
Participants: Principal, Students, teachers, and parents.	
The activities and interactions: Relationship, practices, behaviors, collaboration, staff meeting	
Conversations: Staff meeting, decision-making process	
The principal: The general supervision of the school	
Teaching and learning process	
Researcher's behavior	
Emerging Themes	
Personal Interpretation of Observation	

Appendix G: Observation Data Collection Form

	Documents	Information/Researcher's Note
1	School handbook	
2	Staff minutes book	
3	Logbook	

Appendix H: Alignment of Interview Questions with Research Questions

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	*INTERVIEW QUESTIONS*
The overarching research question: What principal leadership practices are perceived by stakeholders to have contributed to the improvement in academic standards in a Nigerian rural Catholic school in a disadvantaged environment in Auchi Diocese?	1. How would you describe the leadership in this school? How collaborative is the leadership? Can you discuss this?(Focus group) 2. How would you describe the leadership of the principal of this school?(Parents) 3. Could you describe some of the leadership practices you adopted at the beginning of your principalship here? (principal, Teachers) 4. Have you had any reason to change your leadership practices? If so, can you describe the change or changes you made? (Principal) 5. What is the nature of the distribution of leadership in this school? (Focus group)

	6. What would you consider as the contributions of your principal to the success of the school? (focus group)
	7. What would you consider as two of the most significant factors that have accounted for high student performance in this school? (principal, Teachers, Parents, focus group)
	8. What advice do you have for school principals in disadvantaged areas?
	9. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding leadership practices that may have contributed to your school effectiveness in poverty area? (principal, Teachers, Parents, focus group)
	10. In what ways, if any, would you say that your child's character and

	academic performance have been influenced and improved by the school leadership? Can you tell me about it? (parents)
	(All other interview questions for the sub-research questions will contribute to the main question)
Sub-research questions	*Interview questions*
1. How does the principal frame and communicate the vision of the school in rural Nigerian villages?	1. Are there ways you have tried to set the direction in the school? Can you tell me about them? (principal, Teachers, parents) 2. Could you describe how you have communicated the school vision to the stakeholders? Can you tell me about them? (Principal, Teachers, parents) 3. Which of the principal's leadership practices communicate the school vision to the parents? Can you tell me about them? (parents) 4. Are there ways the principal tried to set the school goals? Was the

	process collaborative? (Focus group)
	5. How does the principal encourage acceptance and achievement of the goals? (Focus group)
	6. Are there ways your principal tried to set a high expectation for the students and teachers?(Teachers, principal, Focus group)
	7. How would you describe the commitment of the teachers and students? Would you say that school vision contributed to the commitment? (Focus group)
2. How does the principal promote teachers' professional development in a disadvantaged rural high school?	1. Are there programs or training you have implemented to improve the professional development of your teachers? Can you tell me about them? (principal, Teachers)
	2. How would you describe the teacher profession development in the school? (Job-embedded, classroom-

	centered, and continuous). (Focus group)
	3. How would you describe the benefits of the professional development program for the teachers? (Principal, Teachers)
	3. In what way or ways would you say that the principal has contributed to the teachers' effectiveness? Can you share with me about them? (Parents)
	4. Are there ways that your principal attempts to meet the needs of the individual teachers to motivate them? Can you tell me about them? (Teachers, Principal)
	5. How does the principal ensure teachers' motivation? (Focus Group)
	6. In what ways do you think you lead by example in the school? (Principal, Teachers, parents)
	7. To what extent would you say that the principal is a role model? (Focus

	group)
3. How do the stakeholders describe the principal's practices and role in the teaching and learning in the school?	1. How would you describe an implemented instructional program(s) and practice(s), if any, that may have contributed to student high-achievement? (Teacher, Principal, Parents) 2. How would you describe your supervision and evaluation of teaching and learning process in the school? (Principal, Teachers) 3. How would you describe the principal's involvement in the learning process in the school? (parents, Focus group) 4. What does your principal do in managing the instructional process in the school? (Focus Group)
4. How does the principal promote a learning climate and enabling working condition for	1. How would you describe the ways you have created an effective culture and working condition for

teachers' and parents' collaboration in a disadvantaged rural setting?	your teachers? How did you sustain it? (Principal, Teachers) 2. How would you describe the culture or how things are done in this school? (Parents, Teachers, Focus group) 3. How would you describe the ways that the principal created and sustained an enabling culture that attracted parents to send their children to this school? (parents) 4. What modifications and restructuring have you done in the school to enhance collaboration and school success?(principal, teachers) 5. What sort of modifications and restructuring has the school principal made to enhance parents' collaboration in the school? (Parents) 6. How does the principal encourage

	a collaborative culture in the school? (Focus group) 7. How would you describe the stakeholders' participation and involvement in school activities and development? (Focus group)

Appendix I: Frequency of Key Words

Leadership	183	Supervision	84
Vision	142	Inspection	36
School	131	Relationship	73
Collaboration	63	Positive influence	45
Democratic	64	Leading by	87
Distributive	78	example	162
Training	56	Setting direction	144
Professional	115	Leadership	32
development	89	practices	26
Environment	54	Team-work	53
Enabling	34	Planning	86
environment	67	Implementation	94
School climate	86	Discipline	23
Motivation	97	Curriculum	43
High expectation	62	Co-ordination	79
Disadvantaged	34	Family	68
Poverty	46	Spiritual	34
Decision-making	98	development	25
Teaching	186	Evaluation	41
Learning	197	Slow-learner	96
Achievement	69	Individualized	48
Role model	53	learning	21
Communication	78	Sustainability	32
Catholic character	59	School culture	45
Instructional	162	PTA	9
Commitment		Stakeholder	
School climate		Mission	
		Curriculum	
		Meeting	