

PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP AND STUDENT PERFORMANCE IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the leadership styles of principals who were successful in achieving good results consistently in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) in Edo State, Nigeria. No previous studies have examined leadership styles and the link to student performance as measured by public examinations in Edo State. The transformational leadership model was used to conceptualize the leadership styles of principals in this study. It was hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between transformational leadership behaviors of principals and overall performance of students. Analysis of principals' leadership style was conducted using the transformational Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X Short. The findings demonstrate support for the hypothesis relative to five dimensions of transformational leadership and student's performance in the SSCE. The study also shows that transformational leadership is an important element of school improvement. Hence, the findings have important implications for education professionals and administrators with respect to planning for leadership development and preparation of teachers in Edo State.

INTRODUCTION

The differential scholastic achievement of secondary school students in Nigeria has been a source of concern to educators, government and parents. This has been a concern because of the importance of education in the development of the country. Education is the key to human and capital development and it is also the key to national development. The mass failure of secondary school students in recent years in public examinations such as the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) which is conducted by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) is indicative of the fact that secondary school education in Nigeria has fallen drastically (Adebule, 2004). For example, the poor performance of students in SSCE and NECO exams registered an average failure rate of 72 per cent, 74 per cent, 74 per cent, and 75 per cent in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011, respectively (Adesulu, 2014). Less than 30 per cent of over a million students who sat for the examination within the last six years obtained credits in five subjects including English Language and Mathematics (Adesulu, 2014). Parents and stakeholders in education are in total agreement that the government's lack of adequate investment in education is yielding the undesirable dividend (Ekundayo, 2010). Asikhia (2010) believe that the falling level of academic achievement is attributable to teachers' non-use of verbal reinforcement strategy. The attitude of some teachers to their job is reflected in their poor attendance to lessons, lateness to school, unsavory comments about students' ability that could damage their ego, poor method of teaching and the likes affected students' academic performance (Aremu & Sokan, 2003). The search for the causations of poor academic achievement is unending and some of the factors that have been put forward are: motivational orientation, self-esteem/self-efficacy, emotional problems, study habits, teacher consultation and poor interpersonal relationships (Adeyemi, 2008).

The foundation for the development of human capital is primary and secondary education. Much of the outcry for the poor performance has been blamed on the students. Thus the problem has been decontextualized from the school, its teachers and the principals. The reasons for the poor performance were projected onto poverty of the students, their parents, families, communities and environment (Adeyemo, 2005). It is evident that the schools continue to grapple with the issue of how to best serve an ever increasing student population.

Despite the disheartening results from the schools, there are some schools which have consistently produced very good results in Edo State. Parents try hard to get their children admitted into such schools. A review of the literature reveals that there has been little investigation into the leadership styles of principals and the link to students' performance in public examinations in Edo State. The importance of the role of principals and their impact on the school cannot be overlooked. Principals have a very unique role in schools' organization. Principals are managers and the job of managing involves among other things, the provision of leadership for men and women, coordinating both human and material resources to ensure the achievement of organizational goals (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). The fundamental goal of the school is to enhance teaching and learning process.

This study investigated the leadership styles of principals who were successful in enhancing students' academic achievement in public examinations such as the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). Specifically, the study aimed to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and student performance in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) in secondary schools in Edo State.

Leadership plays an important role in any organization to achieve particular goals. It is the ability of leadership that harnesses human and material resources to create productivity. Leadership is therefore of paramount importance in any organization to the extent that without it goals may be difficult to attain (Lipham, 1964). Leadership is defined as a process of social influence where leaders induce followers to apply their energies and resources toward a collective objective (Bolman & Deal, 1977). Ogunsayin (2006) stated that leadership is a position of dominance and prestige accompanied by the ability to direct, motivate and to assist others in achieving a specific purpose. Cheng (1996) found two general elements in the concept of leadership. First, leadership is related to the process of influencing others behaviors. Secondly, it is related to the development of goals and achievements.

Leadership is of particular importance in educational administration because of its far reaching effects on the accomplishment of school programs, objectives and attainment of educational goals (Peretomode, 1991). Educational leadership refers to the leadership that provides direction and expert advice on developments of learning, teaching and curriculum, emphasizes relevance to education in management, diagnoses educational problems and encourages professional development and teaching improvement (Cheng, 1994). The significance of educational leadership is due to the belief that the quality of leadership makes a major difference to school and student outcomes. There is also increasing recognition that schools require effective leaders if they are to provide the best possible education for their learners (Ibukun, 1997). Educational leaders worldwide search for ways to grow schools as learning centers that can effectively nurture and sustain the development of students. Leadership that supports student learning is critically important in this process

The behavior of leaders has been identified as one of the major factors influencing the productivity of subordinates in any organization and the school system is not an exception (Babayomi, 2006). Without leadership, an organization can best be described as a scene of confusion and chaos. When leadership in an organization is effective, there is progress, however, when the leadership is defective, the organization declines and decays. In order to build strong teacher commitment towards the realization of school goals, principals must provide strong, directive leadership in setting and developing school goals, creating a unity of purpose, facilitating communication and managing instruction (Purkey & Smith, 1983). Strong leadership embodied in the principal is instrumental in setting the tone of the school (Scheerens & Creemers, 1989; Weber, 1971).

At the head of leadership in secondary schools in Nigeria is the principal, who administers the school with other teaching and non-teaching staff. The principal is regarded as the chief executive who is responsible for all that happens in the school. The principal manages both human and material resources to ensure the achievement of organizational goals. Thus, the

position of the principal in the school is unique because without it, the school cannot function properly (Obilade, 1998). The secondary school system in Nigeria is riddled with series of problems such as violence, insecurity of life and property, poverty, inadequate funding, poor academic performance of students, cheating in examinations and poor attitude of teachers to teaching (Ofoegbu, Osagie & Clark 2012). Unfortunately, these problems go on unabated in the schools. A significant challenge for principals is to identify the situations in their schools, such as school culture, how it affects the students and the type of leadership behaviors principals adopt in order to choose a path for the improvement of the schools. The principal is the critical person when it comes to efforts to improve the quality of the school. Since a school is known to be an instrument of change and reform in the society, the principal is pivotal in driving reforms and changes (Uyanga, 2008). This responsibility is very obligatory and principals are expected to be the catalysts for change and deploying managerial skills for implementing change within the school. Thus, the principal is the key supporting agent for change to achieve success in the school. Hence the principal's behavior has a very positive relationship to school effectiveness. It is against this backdrop that this study set out to examine critically the leadership styles of principals who have succeeded in producing good results in public examinations despite the plethora of problems besetting the secondary school system in Nigeria. The paper provides useful information on learning from success as leverage for a professional learning community.

CONCEPTUALIZING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The concept of transformational leadership was introduced by Burns (1978) to describe the process by which leaders affect radical change in the outlook and behavior of followers. Bass (1985) extended Burns work and applied it to various types of organizations. He defined a transformational leader as one who motivates followers to do more than they were originally expected to do. He postulated that transformational leaders influence others to transcend their own self-interest for the good of others, the organization, or country. Transformational leaders are responsible for performance beyond expectations as they transit a sense of mission, stimulate learning experiences and arouse new ways of thinking (Hater & Bass, 1988). Schein (1978) described behaviors associated with transformational leaders as integral to creating and influencing organizational culture. Those who displayed leadership that is transformational contributed positively to the achievement of business unit goals (Howell & Avolio, 1993). Yammarino (1994) defined transformational leadership as the one which motivates followers to do more than they are expected to do in a way that upgrades the individual's level of awareness of the importance and value of outputs and how they are produced. Yukl (1998) described transformational leadership as the process of greatly affecting and changing the individual's attitudes, behaviors, beliefs and commitment of the individual to the organization's tasks, aims and strategies. The following is a description of transformational behaviors provided by Avolio, Waldma and Yammarino (1991)

Charisma

Charisma depicts the impression of the employee of the leader in terms of the power of influence, self-confidence, trust in others, consistency and ideas which individuals make an effort to imitate. Thus, leaders become a target of admiration, respect, sense of responsibility, confidence, growing optimism and discussion by the followers.

Idealized Influence

Idealized influence includes the leaders' values, beliefs, moral considerations, moral behavior and selfless acts. It is also the extent to which the leader articulates goals and arouses followers' interests. Establishing a common vision is an integral part of idealism. A transformational leader plays a role in helping others consider the future. This happens when

inspiration is produced through conformity of personal values with the groups' interests. Transformational leadership implies being tolerant and risk-sharing with followers.

Inspirational Motivation

A leader sets an example for followers. He or she communicates vision, encourages hard work and expresses important goals. Transformational leaders motivate others through purposeful tasks that tend to be challenging. Team spirit is excited by arousing enthusiasm and optimism. Transformational leaders try to build relations with their followers via interactive contact which serves as a cultural link between them. This leads to a change in the values of both parties towards a common ground. The leader creates crystal clear vision of the future in his followers through realization of expectations and demonstrating commitment to goals and common vision. This dimension is measured by the leaders' ability, confidence in his or her values and vision.

Individualized Consideration

The leader provides constant interactions and combines individuals' needs with the organizational function. He or she shows personal interest in followers' requirements of growth and achievement. To do this, a leader acts as a referee and supervisor. The leader helps develop the follower's abilities towards high levels of potential. A leader must consider individual differences between followers in terms of their requirements and desires. The positive effect of individualized consideration and transformational behaviors lies in empowering followers. This can be measured by the leader's interest in the followers' needs for development and growth and the leader's care in training them and guiding them.

Intellectual Stimulation.

Transformational leadership stimulates individuals to be able to be creative and excellent by introducing ideals and early solutions to problems. However, it highlights rationality and new approaches for followers. It also re-evaluates old beliefs and values and looks at difficulties as problems that need to be solved and seeks logical solutions to these problems. Transformational leaders do not criticize followers in public for their mistakes. Rather, they provide them with challenging tasks and encourage them to solve problems.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study investigated the leadership styles of principals who were successful in producing good results for students in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE), a public examination administered by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) over a period of six years (2006-2011). It was hypothesized that transformational principals employed techniques with creative and innovative approaches to curriculum and instruction that contributed to high student performance. Transformational leaders operate out of a sense of duty and commitment, that is, a critical understanding of the need to advocate for excellence in their students. This article reports on the findings of the study that examined the link between transformational school leadership and student achievement.

Studies of effective leadership in secondary schools are more important than ever, given the gaps that currently exist in the performance of students in secondary schools in Edo State and in Nigerian schools in general. Therefore, a study of transformational leadership and its relationship to students' performance was of significant importance given that many schools in Nigeria continue to demonstrate the confluence between achievement and mass failure. Findings could have important implications for practicing educational professionals, as well as colleges of education relative to leadership development and teacher preparation.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present and future implications of the academic performance of students in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) have been a source of worry to the public and stakeholders in the education sector. Secondary school education is important as a preparation for living successfully in the society and for higher education. However, it seems that the secondary schools are not living up to the expectations in meeting these objectives. Secondary school education in Nigeria is riddled with challenges of various dimensions and magnitude, all of which combine to suggest that it is in a state of despair (Ajayi, 2002; Omoregie, 2005). Observation in the secondary school system shows that the style of leadership of a principal could have a serious impact on the performance of students in public examinations such as the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). Therefore, the problem investigated was how principals' leadership style impacted students' performance in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) in Edo State.

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

Nigeria is endowed with enormous natural resources which if properly exploited will be beneficial to its citizens (Asiodu, 2012). As has been demonstrated by all nations which have achieved rapid economic growth and development, education is the key to unlocking the country's enormous potential. It is the driver of development. A successful transformation of the education sector depends on the roles and decisions taken by the leaders. Hence, studies of effective leadership in the secondary school setting are more important than ever, given the poor performance of secondary school students in externally administered examinations. Therefore, a study of the transformational leadership style and its relationship to students' achievement was of significant importance in view of the fact that many of the secondary schools in Edo State continue to record poor performances in the Senior School Certificate for students' achievement in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) Examinations (SSCE) not only in Edo State but also all secondary schools in other states in the country.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The central research question that guided the study is:
What is the relationship between transformational leadership and student achievement in secondary schools in Edo State, Nigeria?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive research design. The study population comprised all the 283 public and private secondary schools in Edo State, Nigeria. Out of this population, a sample of five schools was taken. The schools were selected on the basis of student achievement data in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) for the past six years (2006-2011) as illustrated in Table 1. The criterion for the selection was the percentage of the number of students who scored credits and above in five subjects including English and Mathematics. This is the minimum requirement for admission into the universities in Nigeria (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1981). In fact, one of the schools selected for the study, Lumen Christi International High School, Uromi, Edo State has won the National trophy for the best performance in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) in the entire country three times, in 2007, 2009 and 2011 (Olugbile, 2012)

A purposive sampling technique was used to select 20 teachers per school for the study. Selection was based on five years teaching experience and two years' work experience with the current principal. This will enable the teachers to effectively assess the leadership behavior of their principals vis-a-vis teaching and learning in the schools. In addition, all the principals of the schools were included in the sample. These principals and teachers were the respondents in the study. The identity of the respondents was safeguarded.

Five postgraduate students in the researcher's department were employed to administer and collect the questionnaires. The data gathered were collected and analyzed using inferential statistics and descriptive statistics to examine the variables of the study, transformational leadership and student achievement.

Research Instrument

The instrument used for this study was the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X Short developed by Bass (1985) and Avolio and Bass (1997). The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X Short is the most widely used instrument to measure transformational and transactional leadership in the organizational and behavioral Sciences (Tejeda et al, 2001) and is considered the best validated measure of transformational and transactional leadership (Kirkbride, 2006; Ozaralli, 2003). It is for these reasons that this instrument was chosen to measure transformational leadership in this study. The interaction of the dimension of transformational leadership and student achievement was of specific interest to this study. The analysis of principals' leadership style was conducted using the transformational subscales of The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X Short. Student achievement data were collected from the Ministry of Education, Benin City, Edo State. There were twenty-five questions that measured the five factors of transformational leadership using a five point Likert scale as a means for the participants to record their responses. The possible responses included: 0 = Not at all, 1 = Once in a while, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Fairly often and 4 = Frequently, if not always.

With regards to the reliability and validity of the instrument, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) as conducted by Tejeda, Scandura & Pillai (2001) found high internal reliability for the five subscales which measure transformational leadership. Coefficient alpha for the five samples were consistently above .70

Table 1. Students' Performance in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE)

Year	Schools				
	Lumen Christi	UDSS	Edo College	Idia	Presentation
	%	%	%	%	%
2006	100	94	87	72	74
2007	100	92	84	75	78
2008	100	96	82	72	70
2009	100	93	85	70	75
2010	100	96	86	78	77
2011	100	97	88	73	76

Source: Statistics Office, WAEC, Benin City, Nigeria (2013)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research question of the study are presented in Table 2 and Table 3. A discussion of the findings will follow. In order to determine the principals' leadership behavior, the data collected were analyzed using inferential statistics and descriptive statistics to examine the variables of the study, transformational leadership, and student achievement.

Table 2. Transformational Leadership Percentage Scores of Sampled Principals.

Transformational Leadership Dimension	%
Charisma	78.5
Intellectual stimulation	73.2
Individual consideration	68.9
Idealized influence	81.5
Inspirational motivation	65.2

Table 3. Means and standard deviations of five dimensions of transformation leadership (N = 105)

Variables	Mean	S.D.
Charisma	3.79	0.24
Intellectual stimulation	3.53	0.22
Individual consideration	3.36	0.34
Idealized influence	3.86	0.26
Inspirational motivation	3.27	0.51

Table 4. Test of relationship between principal's leadership behavior and student performance.

Variables	N	r-cal	r-table
Principal's leadership	105	0.352	0.250
Student performance	105		

$p < 0.05$

Research Question: What is the relationship between transformational leadership and student achievement, particularly in secondary schools in Edo State, Nigeria?

The results of this study indicate the presence of four dimensions of transformational leadership, charisma, intellectual stimulation, idealized influence and individual consideration as predictors of student achievement for the selected secondary schools in Edo State. Tables 2 and 3 show that 78.5 % 9 (Mean = 3.79, SD = 0.24) of the respondents agreed that charisma was demonstrated by the ability of the principals to act with sense of responsibility and discuss what was important and valued in the school. The relationship between charisma and student achievement was that the principals were able to create a shared vision that focused on high achievement and overall school improvement. The findings suggested that transformational principals in the study may have recognized the need to work hard in order to boost achievement among the students. Charisma among these principals occurred through the persistent expression of their most important values and beliefs (Jackson, 2000).

Tables 2 and 3 show that with regards to intellectual stimulation, 73.2 % (Mean = 3.53, SD = 0.22) of the respondents agreed that the principals in the sample were encouraging and supportive of teachers' creativity and innovations, creating a context of high expectations for the students.

With regards to individualized consideration, Tables 2 and 3 show that 68.9 % (Mean = 3.36, SD = 0.34) of the respondents agreed that the principals encouraged and supported teachers to develop their skills by approving in-service training, conferences and workshops. This behavior has helped the teachers to perform their duties better for the benefit of the students. The principals also demonstrated that they cared for the students. This attitude was instrumental in developing the teachers' and students' self-efficacy which in turn enhanced student performance in external public exams.

Tables 2 and 3 show that with regards to idealized influence, 81.5 % (Mean = 3.86, SD = 0.26) of the respondents agreed that the principals emphasized group and leader participation in the making of policies and setting goals. The principals in the sample were able to inspire others to set goals and helped teachers and students to accomplish these goals. Decisions about the school were arrived at after consultations and communication with both teachers and students. The principals tried to make the students feel important in the school. The respondents agreed that the principals' leadership enhanced a high degree of morale for the teachers and the students.

With regards to inspirational motivation, Tables 2 and 3 show that 65.2% (Mean = 3.27, SD = 0.51) of the respondents agreed that the leaders were able to inspire others to set goals, help teachers and students accomplish those goals by constantly prodding them. That is, by actively engaging the teachers to teach their subjects and actively engaging the students in the learning process. The findings showed that transformational leadership approach has the potential to engage all stakeholders in the achievement of educational objectives. The aims of the leader and followers coalesce to such an extent that there is a harmonious relationship and a genuine convergence leading to agreed decisions (Henderson, 2002). The findings suggest that the principals in this study directly influenced the behavior of their teachers and the teaching processes employed to promote student learning.

Pearson -r correlation was employed to determine the relationship between the principal's leadership behavior and student performance. The result obtained from the analysis (Table 4) shows that the value of r-calculated (0.352) is greater than the r-table value (0.250) at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is significant relationship between principal's leadership behavior and student performance. This result affirms the preceding findings. The reason for this may be that when principals provide good leadership, it will facilitate a conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning that will enhance student performance.

Teachers are the center piece of any educational system. No educational system can rise above the quality of its teachers. Teachers who have low morale are not likely to perform as expected in the school system. The numerous problems permeating the entire educational system in Nigeria such as persistent poor academic performance of students in public examinations, indiscipline and examination malpractice may suggest that teachers have not been performing their jobs as expected (Ajayi & Oguntoye, 2003). Fadipe (2003) posited that teachers, apart from students are the largest most crucial inputs of an educational system. They influence to a great extent the quality of the educational output. Teachers' irregular promotion, low remuneration, (when compared to other public workers) and societal perceptions of the job have dampened the morale of teachers. Corroborating this fact, Obineli (2013) stated that staff promotion helps to boost the morale of teachers and motivates them to work, thereby increasing productivity and efficiency and also enhancing job satisfaction. When teachers are not motivated, their level of job commitment may be low and the objectives of the school may not be accomplished. Along with the preceding facts, the study found that the morale of the teachers in these high performing schools was very high. This is supported by the fact that transformational leadership was instrumental and motivational in developing teachers' and students' self-efficacy as evidenced by

Leithwood and Juntzi (1999). It was observed that there was communication and interaction between the teachers and the students in these schools.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study supported the hypothesis of a positive relationship between the principals' transformational leadership style and student achievement in the Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE). The findings specifically demonstrated the dimensions of charisma, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration and idealized influence as predictors of school achievement in the schools sampled. These principals have a thorough understanding of vision as a means to achieve school goals and objectives. They were able to get the teachers and students excited about school goals and cause them to be committed to the goals of the school. They employed creative and innovative approaches to curriculum and instruction that helped to bring about the high student achievement in these schools. The principals were inspirational in leadership. Thus, the principals in the sample through specific dimensions of transformational leadership had a positive effect on students' achievement in the secondary schools investigated. Hence the study has shown that goal focused leadership is ultimately an enabling attribute.

The results of the present study may have some implications for principals, teachers and students in other secondary schools. Identifying the leadership style of successful principals would provide data that could be generalizable across the secondary school system in Edo State. This will be a tremendous support to the challenging situations found in most of the secondary schools in Edo State and generally in Nigeria. Understanding one's leadership style is extremely valuable and a prerequisite to developing leadership in others. To this end, it is imperative for principals in non-performing schools to engage in self-reflection. That is, they should explore their own leadership style as a means to supporting the development of their schools and enhancing the performance of teachers and students. Students' academic performance is what members of the society use mainly to measure the effectiveness of schools.

The foregoing has implications for educational planning. Education is the main key to economic development of a country (Chen & Dahlman, 2004). A society which does not gear itself to learning will find it difficult to progress in economic and social development. It is the education received through the acquisition of specific skills that will enable the individual to function effectively and efficiently in the society (Fadipe, 2011). A major aim of educational planners is to determine the skills gap which needs to be filled to improve the efficiency of the national economy. The principals in the non-performing schools are producing shortages of manpower in many fields of human activity in Nigeria. The impact of educational planning to manpower planning cannot be overemphasized (Obasan & Yomi, 2011).

It is, therefore, incumbent upon the principals in the non-performing schools to change their leadership styles in order to improve the performance of their students in public examinations. To this end, it is recommended that educational planners in the Ministry of Education should sponsor and organize conferences, seminars, and workshops set on a framework for leadership development for principals in all the secondary schools (both public and private) in Edo State.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

During the study, it was observed that apart from the leadership style of the principals, these schools had some characteristics that contributed to the high performance of the students. For example, Lumen Christi which has won the National trophy for best performance in SSCE three times is a private Catholic secondary school for boys located in a rural community with a boarding house facility. In this school, there is evidence of school discipline. Presentation is a private Catholic secondary school for girls with boarding house facility. In a boarding facility, students live a regimented life. This helps in the upbringing of the students in their formative years.

Edo College is an old, very special public secondary school for boys located in the city. It is unlike the many other public secondary schools the government took over and control in recent times. It has walls around it so the students cannot wander off the campus. Teachers live on campus to enforce discipline. The University Demonstration Secondary School (UDSS) is a private school located inside the University of Benin campus. It is a mixed school for boys and girls with no boarding house facility. Parents drop their children in the morning and pick up their children at the end of the school day in the afternoon. There is less interaction between the boys and girls. The students are under the watchful eyes of their teachers during school time. There is no doubt that these students are influenced by the academic atmosphere. In fact, many of the students gain admission and attend the university. These schools have an atmosphere that is conducive for learning as the classes are generally small, about forty students in a class. The recommended ratio is one to fifty (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1981). These schools operate with strict disciplinary climates. All these private schools are more expensive than the public schools. Future research will investigate the influence of such environmental factors on the performance of students in all the secondary schools in Edo State.

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