

Principals' Administrative Skills for Secondary Schools in Plateau State, Nigeria

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Received: November 6, 2014; Date Revised: January 24, 2015

ABSTRACT - *This study investigated the necessary skills needed by principals in the effective administration of schools at secondary school level. The issue of poor academic performance of students in Nigeria could be attributed to poor administrative skills of school administrators. The poor performance was however, as a result of the multi-faceted problems facing the system in Nigeria such as: inadequate funding; inadequate facilities; low morale of teachers; poor supervision of schools and frequent changes in educational policies. The roles of the principal in meeting these challenges were examined as the chief executive who manages the school finance and who can use his ingenuity to raise fund to complement government's efforts; a motivator and a change facilitator. This study was carried out in some selected schools in Jos North Local Government in Plateau state. Principal Administrative Skills Survey Questionnaire (PASSQ) was used to obtain information. Some of the recommendations include: The modern-day school principals should be knowledgeable, professionally and administratively competent. Government should make provision for sponsoring principals and organising conferences for them to serve as a means for professional growth as well as incentives to the principals; Principals must define objectives with teachers as teachers would be committed in their job to ensure that the objectives are achieved as they participated in deciding the objectives.*

Keywords: *Principal, Administrative Skill, Secondary Schools, Plateau State and Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION

The role that education is expected to play in a society is multi-faceted. It is expected to build the character of the learner, to get him informed about what is worthwhile, socially acceptable,

desirable and purposeful about himself, his environment and society. It is also expected to make the individual worth living and worth living with (Tella, 1990). Education is not only a social service, but an instrument of political socialization that informs the learner as to his privileges and basic human rights (Taiwo, 1980).

Secondary school is that sector of the education pyramid that usually comes immediately after primary education. It also comes before tertiary education. It is at this age of education that students are prepared for the Polytechnics, colleges of education and Universities. Within the framework of the New National Policy on Education (FRN.2004), secondary schools shall last for six years, broken into two distinct parts that are perfectly correlated with the ground works of the first three years – Junior Secondary School (J.S.S) –dovetailing into the next three years of Senior Secondary School (S.S.S). The aims and objectives of secondary education make it clear that the future of any nation depends quite considerably on the quality of education it provides for its citizens.

It must be stressed that education cannot be an instrument par excellence for achieving national development where the secondary education is not effectively managed to accomplish its aims and objectives. In the administration of secondary schools, the principal is central. He is the man at the helm of the affairs who receives all praises (in terms of success) and blames (in terms of failure). According to Ibukun (1999), the job of the school principal in Nigeria has progressively become more complex and highly hazardous. In order to cope with the ever-rising challenges of the system, the school principal must be ready to see himself as a change agent. According to Ajayi (2002a) and Omoregie (2005), secondary

education in Nigeria is riddled with crises of various dimensions and magnitude all of which combine to suggest that the system is at fault. It is against this background that this paper examined the necessary administrative skills needed by principals for effective administration of secondary schools.

There are essentially three (3) administrative skills that are pertinent to effective school management. These are Leadership skills, personnel management skills and Financial management skills. Under Leadership skills, principals are expected to be able to define the objectives and goals for the schools and also to coordinate and supervise learning and teaching activities in classrooms. The ability to communicate ideas and delegate duties and responsibilities are some of the Personnel management skills needed. The ability to prepare school budget and keep proper and accurate financial information are skills needed under financial management skills.

Theoretical Framework

The System Theory is considered most relevant to this study. This systems theory was formulated in 1920 by Bertalanffy. The system was seen as a series of interrelated and interdependent parts in such a way that the interaction of any part of the system affects the whole system. That is, one part of the system must interact and depend on the other parts around it to function effectively. The system theory is relevant to education system because education system (school) is a system and the concept of interaction and interdependence of parts with the education system like all other social systems has identical properties with the other system (Kelechukwu, 2011).

The system approach believes that system is made up of parts which are differentiated in some ways but are connected to make up the whole through the interaction between its component parts and with the external environment. The school as an open system cannot exist in isolation. It must exchange energy and information with its environments. Every system is "loosely connected" with many other sub-system or sub-units. For instance, the educational system is loosely coupled by the following elements: teacher-materials, school boards, administration-classrooms, process-outcome, teacher-teacher, parent-teacher and teacher-student.

The principal as the administrator represents a crucial component of the social system. This implies that the principal as the chief executive of the school deals with people at all times and is bound to get along with them. For the principal to perform his

administrative role very well, he is expected to ensure that he exhibits the qualities required of him so as to achieve secondary school objectives and goals as stipulated in the National Policy (FRN, 2004).

This brings to the limelight the ideas of principal's administrative performance. It is anticipated that when special attention is given and the principals do their works very well, the productivity is likely to be high.

Roles of Principal as an Administrator

School administration involves managing, administering the curriculum and teaching, pastoral care, discipline, assessment evaluation and examinations, resource allocation, costing and forward planning, staff appraisal relationship with the community, use of the practical skills necessary for surviving the policies of organisation such as decision-making, negotiation, bargaining, communication, conflict handling, running meetings and so on (Ojo, 1999). All these tasks can be reduced to the following: planning, organising, directing, supervising, and evaluating the school system. These activities are those of the school principal who must ensure they are all directed towards efficient and effective teaching and learning in the school so as to be able to produce quality outputs.

By implication, the principal of a school is a planner, director, controller, coordinator, organiser, adviser and a problem-solver (Maduabum, 2002). The principal is the person on whose shoulders rest the entire administration, success or failure of the school. The principal identifies and set goals and objectives of the school, which of course, must be in line with the national objectives, analyses tasks and share responsibilities of the staff according to specialization and expertise (Uyanga, 2007).

Several studies have discussed the administrative roles of principals. (Iheukwumere, 2006,2) stated that within the secondary school system, the principal stands out as the chief executive of the school, he is also the school administrator, the instructional leader, the personnel manager for both the pupils (students) and staff personnel. The principal is also the finance and physical facility manager. The principal is expected to maintain a good relationship with the immediate community and also ensure a continuous contact with the ministry of education in the area in which the school is situated. There are several categories of administrative task areas in the school system. There are pupil personnel, staff personnel, instruction and curriculum development, school

finance and business management, school plant and other general tasks.

The principal is standard setter, one who leads in the development of an aspiration and expectation on the part of both teachers and pupils to do good work. He assists the teachers with their problems of improving methods, materials and evaluation and thus provides a good measure of quality control. Principals can help teachers improve their testing techniques and develop their ability to analyse and interpret data. The principal as an administrator needs to possess certain administrative skills to effectively perform his duty.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Secondary education in Nigeria where youths are to be prepared for useful living and higher education has not been able to realize its objectives. It appears that the administrators charged with the task of utilizing the available scarce resources to attain the secondary school objectives are not competent. Hence, there is need to investigate the necessary administrative skills needed by secondary school principals for effective school management.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this is to identify the necessary administrative skill needed by principals for effective schools' management.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been asked to guide the study:-

1. What are the instructional leadership skills needed by principals for effective schools' administration in Jos North Local Government of Plateau State?
2. What are the personnel management skills needed by principals for effective schools' administration in Jos North Local Government of Plateau State?
3. What are the financial management skills needed by principal for effective schools' administration in Jos North Local Government of Plateau State?

METHOD

Research Design

The study adopted a survey design. Principal Administrative Skills Survey Questionnaire (PASSQ) was used to obtain information through a thirty (30) item questionnaire on instructional skills, personnel management skills and financial skills needed by principals for effective administration. Three research

questions were formulated to guide the study. Mean scores of principals' opinion were used to answer the research questions.

Participants

Fifty secondary schools were selected by random sampling from selected secondary schools located in Jos North Local Government of Plateau State, Nigeria (24 Private secondary schools and 26 Government secondary schools). The principals in these schools were the sample used for this study. Thirty two female and eighteen male principals were used for this study. All are graduates in Education.

Instruments

The researcher developed a questionnaire called Principal Administrative Skills Survey Questionnaire (PASSQ) which served as the main instrument for data collection. The PASSQ consisted of two sections. Section A seeks information on the personal data while section B is a thirty (30) item questionnaire developed by the researcher with a four point rating scale. The questionnaire items were arranged in three clusters (Instructional leadership skills, Personnel Management skills and Financial Management skills) to elicit information regarding the administrative leadership skills needed by principals. Likert Scale (Four point rating) was used. Nominal values were given to each of the four-point Likert Scale used (i.e Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Agree=3, Strongly Agree=4).

Data Collection

The researchers administered and collected the instrument from the respondents during the principals' meetings. This technique helped the researchers to reduce the chances of the questionnaire being misplaced or not returned by the respondents. However, out of the fifty copies of the questionnaire distributed, forty-nine were collected. This amount to 98% return rate.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics such as Mean was used to analyse the data. Using the Likert Scale, by Agreed or Disagreed, we mean the participant is in support or not in support of the item in the questionnaire respectively. By Strongly Agreed or Strongly Disagreed, we mean the participant is in total support or not in total support of the item respectively.

RESULTS**Table 1.** Instructional leadership skills needed by principals for effective schools' administration

S/N	Items	Collected Mean	Assumed Mean
1	Principal in co-operation with his teachers define objective for the school and each department and unit	3.35	2.5
2	Principal jointly with teachers select learning experience method and procedures to employ in achieving the objective	3.14	2.5
3	Principal assign subject and class to teachers according to qualification and competence.	3.72	2.5
4	Principal allocates time to subjects	3.31	2.5
5	Principals makes available facilities accessible to all teachers	3.68	2.5
6	Principal ensures that the staff in different units and work position work co-operatively and not antagonistically for the common goal of the school	3.83	2.5
7	Principal supervises the teachers' lesson plan	3.29	2.5
8	Principal supervises teaching and learning activities in the class room	3.52	2.5
9	Principal evaluates the planning and implementation of curriculum programmes.	3.10	2.5
10	Principal assist teachers to try new research findings.	3.21	2.5

From Table 1, the calculated mean of all Personnel Management Skills needed by principals for effective schools' administration are above 2.5 which is the assumed mean. Any mean that is above 2.5 is

considered as an important skill. Hence, all are considered important skills because the mean of all the mean points are above 2.5.

Table 2. Personnel management skills needed by principals for effective schools' administration

S/N	Items	Collected Mean	Assumed Mean
1	Principal models behaviours he expects from others	3.81	2.5
2	Principal identifies what motivates his staff.	3.71	2.5
3	Principal communicates effectively with his staff.	3.81	2.5
4	Principal recognizes the effort of his staff.	3.77	2.5
5	Principal delegates duties and authority to capable staff.	3.83	2.5
6	Principal involves staff in decision-making and matters concerning them.	3.63	2.5
7	Principal praises in public, criticizes only in private	2.76	2.5
8	Principal motivates, encourage and cajoles his staff.	3.41	2.5
9	Principal encourages and enables appropriate professional development of staff.	3.39	2.5
10	Principal defuses tense situations and negotiates a solution.	3.63	2.5
11	Principal does not take side in conflict resolution.	3.83	2.5

Table 2 reveals that principals perceived all the items as instructional leadership skills needed for effective schools' administration as all the items had calculated mean score that is above 2.5 which is above the assumed mean of 2.5 cut-off point on a four-point scale. Item 6 had the largest mean score of 3.83. This implies that the principals involve staff in decision making and matter.

The study (in Table 3) revealed that all the financial management skills are needed by the principals for effective schools' administration. Each of the items had a mean score above the 2.50 cut-off points on a four point Likert scale. Item 9 had the highest mean score of 3.87, showing that principals give true and fair view of the financial position of the school.

Table 3. Financial management skills needed by principals for effective schools' administration

S/N	Items	Collected Mean	Assumed Mean
1	Principal jointly with the management staff and heads of departments and units, prepares budget for the school	2.68	2.5
2	Principal priorities financial allocation according to needs	3.29	2.5
3	Principal plans and sources for funds for school improvement.	3.27	2.5
4	Principal ensures that budget reflect agreed goals and objectives	3.49	2.5
5	Principal delegates the mechanism of financial matters to capable staff	3.14	2.5
6	Principal keeps close check on financial matters delegated to staff	3.43	2.5
7	Principal works within the constraints of the school budget	3.63	2.5
8	Principal keeps accurate financial information about the school	3.75	2.5
9	Principal give true and fair view of the financial position of the school	3.87	2.5

DISCUSSION

This study found that the instructional leadership skills needed by principals for effective school administration include: principal co-operation with teachers in defining objectives for the school, selecting learning experiences, methods and procedures to achieve the objectives; assigning subjects and classes according to qualification and competence, allocating time to subjects; making facilities accessible to all teachers according to need. The skills also included principals ensuring that all staff work co-operatively for the common goal of the schools, supervising lesson plan, teaching and learning activities, evaluating the plan and implementation of curriculum programmes and assisting teachers to try new findings.

These findings are not surprising because the success of any human endeavour depends on the competencies and skills possessed by the personnel who perform the tasks necessary for the achievement of purpose or objectives. The findings of this study agreed with Mgbodile, (2000) who reported that for effective school administration, school administrators must possess and employ planning and decision-making skills, leadership competencies, supervisory skills and skills for school climate management.

This study also found that personnel management skills needed by principals for effective schools' administration to include: principal identifying what motivates his staff, recognizing the efforts of his staff, motivating the staff, involving staff in decision-making on matters concerning them, communicating effectively with the staff, delegating duties and authorities to capable staff, encouraging appropriate staff professional development.

These findings equally are not unexpected as indeed successful administrators are those who know how to motivate their staff to gain their cooperation

and loyalty. These findings agreed with Ibukun (2003) who affirmed that there is no amount of capital injection into Educational System without a change of altitude, better skill acquisition and overt commitment on the part of the teaching force that can produce the much-desired change in school performance. These findings also agreed with Adegbemile (2004) who reported that encouraging staff professional development help teachers to improve on their weaknesses. Other personnel management skills needed by principals for effective schools' administration, as revealed in the results of the study are: principal modeling behaviours expected from others, principal defusing tense situation and negotiating solutions, not taking side in conflict resolution. These findings agreed with Ngoka (2000) who reported those behaviours that demonstrate leadership competency and conflict management skills which include among others: sets expectations, models behaviours expected from others, does not take side, negotiates to achieve resolutions while timely resolution of conflicts brings harmony, cooperation, unity, job satisfaction and good job performance.

It was the opinion of the principals that the financial management skills needed by principals for effective schools' administration are: prioritizing financial allocation according to needs, ensuring that budgets reflect agreed goals and objectives, delegating the mechanism of financial matters to capable staff, keeping close check on financial matters delegated to staff, working within the constraints of the school budget, planning and sourcing for funds for school development, keeping accurate financial information about the school and giving true and fair view of financial position of the school. These findings were so because such financial management skills are needed by the school principals to make them

effective in planning, sourcing and utilization of school funds.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the instructional leadership skills needed by principals for effective schools' administration include among others: principal co-operating with teachers to define objectives, principal providing facilities, supervising lesson plans, teaching and learning activities, evaluating curriculum plan and implementation. It was also shown from the results of the study that the major personnel management skills needed by principals for effective schools' administration are: principal motivating staff, encouraging staff professional development, communicating affectively with staff, resolving conflicts.

It was equally revealed from the findings of the study that the financial management skills principals needed for effective schools' administration among others include: principal preparing budget jointly with the management staff, sourcing for funds, keeping accurate financial information, giving true and fair financial position of the school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The modern-day school principals should be knowledgeable, professionally and administratively competent, as well as resourceful so as to complement the efforts of the government towards achieving the goals of the schools.

Government should make provision for sponsoring principals and organising conferences for them to serve as a means for professional growth as well as incentives to the principals. Government should refrain from frequent changes in educational policies as policies which are ambiguous with marked difference from the existing ones may leave school principals confused.

Principals must define objectives with teachers as teachers would be committed in their job to ensure that the objectives are achieved as they participated in deciding the objectives. Principals must keep accurate financial information of the school. By giving true and financial position of the school would serve as "curtain raiser" for the non-governmental organizations, PTA, individuals and government to give out funds for school development.

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