

Principals' Graduate Qualification: A Plus for Secondary School Effectiveness in Nigeria

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Abstract - This study examined the place of graduate qualification in principal appointment process in Nigeria. It also investigated the influence of principals' graduate qualifications on secondary school effectiveness in Nigeria. Using the descriptive survey design, the study adopted multi-stage sampling technique. Three instruments: "School Effectiveness Questionnaire for Principals" (SEQP), "School Effectiveness Questionnaire for Teachers" (SEQT) and a semi structured Interview Guide were used in the study. The study found that: graduate qualification had no influence on selection to the post of principal as it was not one of the requisite qualifications for appointment as principal; that quality of the school principal in terms of qualification possessed had positive influence on school effectiveness. Incorporation of relevant post graduate certification as part of requirement for principal appointment was recommended.

Keywords: Principals' Graduate Qualification, Principal appointment, Secondary School, School effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

School effectiveness is the extent to which school accomplishes the objectives set for it. Generally, there is no consensus on the definition of the concept by researchers; however, the success of a school can be viewed from different perspectives using internal performance indicators, operating indicators, external performance indicators, or staff productivity indicators. These indicators could also be categorized as input, process and outcome indicators. It is generally agreed that school effectiveness can be correlated with student success, usually academic outcomes [1],[2], [3], [4]. These academic outcomes have been found to be influenced to a large extent by

school climate[5]. Therefore within the context of this study, a school is regarded as being effective if it has a positive school climate and school processes consistently result in observable positive outcomes among its students over a period of time [6]. Positive outcomes in this context are measured by academic achievement of students in the commonest standardised external examination in Nigeria, the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE).

Qualification is the training or acquisition of a degree or any certification which a prospective principal gets in addition to teaching skill, experience and other knowledge. It could be described as the condition or standard which must be adhered to before a Candidate for the principalship can apply for the job. Qualification can also be defined as the extent of preparation, certification, background in content, field, and advanced degrees [7]. It is expected that this qualification will make the person suitable and competent for the job of the assigned school leader, the principal; this competence in turn will help such a principals achieve effectiveness in his/her school.

In developed countries, principals' appointment policy requires specialised pre-service preparation and qualification as mandatory or recommended for entry to principalship position[8], [9],[10].The type of pre-service qualification in countries where such training is mandatory or recommended varies and leads to a range of credential options: postgraduate degrees, partial credit towards Masters Degree programmes and earning of a license [9]. The providers of these credentials are Universities (Australia, Hong Kong, Finland), Institutes affiliated to Universities (Canada) and Institutes set up for this purpose, controlled by the National Education Ministry (Singapore, Finland).

In the aforementioned countries, the principal is seen as the overall school leader. Appointment to the position of principalship reflects this perspective. On the contrary, in some European countries such as Greece, also in most African countries, including Nigeria, the position of the secondary school principal is not seen as one which entails a role change from classroom teacher to school leader but as an extension of the role of the teacher [11], [12]. The functions of the principal as the school leader are definitely divergent from that of the classroom teacher. It is obvious that the principal who ought to play a key role in the school, both as an instructional and personnel leader, needs training different from that of the teacher to carry out the functions attached to the position of headship efficiently and effectively. Changes in role expectations need new training to match the new role [13], [14],[15].

The basic entry requirement of most tertiary institutions in Nigeria, (the expected destination of secondary school graduates) is a minimum of five credits including English and Mathematics, in the West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) or similar examinations. This means that for transition to the tertiary level of education, Students must possess this minimum requirement in relevant subjects. Given this fact, the effectiveness of a secondary school in Nigeria can be measured by the percentage of students that make a minimum of five credits including English and Mathematics in their SSCE, among other factors.

Research evidences on secondary education in Nigeria [16], [17], [18], [19] have shown that there is an unwavering deterioration in the quality and efficiency of secondary school education delivery (this is more pronounced in the public education sector). The downward trend of student performance in the West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) conducted by West African Examination Council (WAEC) is an attestation. The WASSCE is the most common standardised ordinary level examination in Nigeria with the widest international coverage and acceptability. For these reasons, WASSCE was chosen as the standardised test

for measuring students' achievement in this study. Students in Lagos, Ondo and Osun States (States sampled in this study) secondary schools had pass rates as listed in Table 1.

In 2011 and 2012, May/June WASSCE results for the whole country showed that 30.99% and 38.81% of the candidates that wrote the examination achieved five credit grades including English and Mathematics [20],[21]. Comparatively, 36.57% and 31.28% obtained credits in five subjects, including English Language and Mathematics in 2013 and 2014 respectively [22]. Only 38.28% of all the candidates who sat for WASSCE in 2015 obtained five credits and above including English and Mathematics [23]. The percentage of the candidates that passed in 2015, is still lower than the number of candidates that passed in 2012. The sharp rise in the pass rate in Lagos State for 2014 had been credited to projects focused on enhanced learning outcomes that were carried out in the State for better school output; this involved the training of Principals among other activities [24], [25].

Principal Appointment Criteria and Process: An overview

In the United Kingdom, the responsibility for the appointment of the secondary school principal lies with the governing body of each school. The body commissions an appointment panel for the recruitment and selection of principal, with the Local Education Authorities (LEA) playing supervisory roles [26]. Applicants are judged impartially against their perceived ability to do the job.

There is no hard lined prerequisite for candidates to qualify for school headship because "the requirement for heads to have Qualified Teacher status was dropped in 2001" [27], p.1. The other prerequisite of possessing the National Professional Qualification for Headship became optional on the 8th of February, 2012. The status of the aforementioned as requirements for the post of principal, currently depend on what the governing body of a school decides to go with. Research has shown though, that 85% of governors that were surveyed still regard these qualifications as "must have" or "good to have" [28].

Table 1. Students' pass rate in May/ June WASSCE (2003-2014)

State/Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2010	2014
Lagos	30.10%	30.13%	34.33%	11.99%	8.87%	11.98%	9.11%	45.68%
Ondo	21.20%	19.43%	10%	5.66%	8.24%	7.75%	30.17%	32.40%
Osun	13.78%	8.48%	7.87%	6.99%	4.92%	6.32%	5.55%	19.54%

Source: Akinola, 2013; West African Examination Council, 2014)

In Singapore, the principal appointment policy is designed and operated centrally by the Ministry of Education (MoE). In this part of the world, only teachers become principals. At every level of teachers' career, they are examined closely and assessed based on their performance. Those who are found to have leadership potential among them are "encouraged to follow the leadership track" [29]. Promotion decisions in Singapore, according to [29], depend on teachers' "performance, knowledge, experience, potential, readiness to perform at a higher level, availability of vacancies and recommendation of supervisors" (p.328). Once teachers have been placed on the leadership track, they are exposed to formal leadership preparation and development at different levels of their career. Vice principals who aim to become principals go through the senior programme of the National Institute of Education which is the only institute in Singapore that is charged with the provision of formal leadership programmes. This institute works closely with the Ministry of Education. The stringent and cooperative method of leader selection in Singapore has led to a selection process based on merit [29].

The Decree on teaching personnel qualification in Finland stipulates that a principal must have a graduate degree, teaching qualification for the desired school level, sufficient teaching experience and either a graduate qualification in school administration or "proven sufficient skill in educational administration" [30]:320.

In South Africa, it was found that principals' qualifications ranged from matric and a certificate, up to honours degree, the equivalent of a first degree in Nigeria. Though the Educators Employment Act 76 of 1998 stipulates that the only educational requirement a principalship candidate must have is a Relevant Equivalent Qualification Value (REQV). Promotion from teaching level should proceed through the grade levels before getting to principal position. This means that to qualify for the principalship position, a candidate must have attained the management cadre by becoming a Head of Department and then, a Deputy Principal before moving to the school leadership position. This is not always the case as some candidates were found to have been appointed as principals from the lowest levels of teaching cadre because of political influence that was exerted on the promoting body. Principals are selected, interviewed and recommended on behalf of the States by the Governing Bodies of the Schools [31].

Principal Graduate Qualification and School Effectiveness

Acquisition of the skills that principals need to achieve school effectiveness has been linked to preparation for leadership and attainment of ensuing graduate qualification[11], [32], [33], [34], [35], [9]. Lack of the requisite administrative competencies on the part of principals which led to ineffectiveness of schools has been ascribed to lack of preparation for the position [11], [36], [37]. It has become a norm that to have successful leadership in schools, there must be leadership development [38]. Specifically, [39], also [40], found relationships between principal preparation and the climate of the schools they led.

In some developed nations, graduate qualifications in educational administration, educational leadership, other related courses and specific training are used as prerequisite for appointment to the principalship position in secondary schools. Schools where such principals led were reported to be effective in terms of high performance in educational outcomes as measured by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCED) programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)[10], [41]. The stringent method of principal selection in Singapore has been discovered to have contributed to the educational success of the country [29].

The [10] study discovered that one of the policies and practices that influenced the performance and outcomes of secondary students in Finland positively was the fact that all teachers were required to obtain a postgraduate qualification as a prerequisite for employment. Principals were then appointed from the crop of successful and effective teachers after leadership preparation training. The leadership preparation training are organised by the National Board of Education or Universities. In a similar study, [42], found courses taken during training for leadership to be one of the sources of Finish principals' positive leadership practices and as a result, the effectiveness of their schools.

In Vietnam, where only 0.2% of principals earned Bachelors or Masters Degrees in education and 40% of them received their principalship training in short term courses, it was found that principals ascribed the problems they encountered in the bid to achieve effectiveness of their schools to either not having received training or insufficient training through short term courses before placement to the post of principal[43].

The study was hinged on the integrated psychological theory of [44] which postulates that to be effective, leaders must be individuals who are developed technically and psychologically. Since self-development is not realistic, such individuals will have to undergo specific training in school leadership. The training will result in the acquisition of graduate qualification, leadership presence, knowledge and skills. This is because at the end of graduate or similar leadership training, the principal or aspirant to the position of principal would: have developed technical know-how and skills of leadership, understood what he/she had been trained on about leadership behaviours. The Candidate would be able to master his/her inner psychology to adopt the new unfamiliar behaviours taught during training. As a result of the adoption of unfamiliar behaviours learnt during training, instead of assuming behaviour in accordance to entrenched hidden beliefs and old habits of the pre training period, the principal will exhibit new behaviour which is the outcome of the cultivation of the right attitude towards other people, which was incorporated through training. All these, according to [44] are the consequences of development of personal/inner level of leadership. This can be attained through graduate training and qualification.

The development of the inner level of leadership which will enable the principal deliver effective leadership to teachers, non-teaching staff and students (followers) that are being led will according to the theorist, have a rippling effect, which will result in the attainment of the other two levels of leadership (public and private). Training for and attainment through qualification, of all three levels of leadership will lead to shared (combination of the leader and followers) motivating values of education that will cause the achievement of positive school effectiveness.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Positive relations between possession of graduate qualification in similar fields by principals in Nigeria and the effectiveness of their schools are doubtful. This study therefore

1. determined the place of graduate qualification in the process of public secondary school principal appointment in south western Nigeria; and
2. investigated the influence of principals' qualifications on effectiveness of public secondary schools in south western Nigeria.

METHOD

The study employed the survey research design. All the public secondary school principals and teachers in south western Nigeria were the population of the study. Multi-stage sampling technique was used in the selection of sample. Using simple random sampling technique, three states (Lagos, Ondo and Osun) from the six in south western Nigeria were selected. Across the three States, 97 public secondary schools were picked. These were selected through proportionate stratification using the six educational districts of Lagos State and the six educational zones of Ondo and Osun States as strata. After stratification, schools were selected from each of the Local Government areas under all the educational zones and districts proportionately, using purposive sampling technique. The pre-condition for inclusion of any school in the study was that the principal must have worked in the school for at least four years. This was to ensure that such principal's influence through academic qualification had influenced effectiveness of the School. Furthermore, three teachers who had spent at least two years each were purposively selected from each school to give neutral assessment of their principals. The Heads of Personnel Unit of the Teaching Service Commission (TESCOM) in Ondo and Osun States as well as that of a randomly selected District office in Lagos state were interviewed. In all, the study sample consisted of 97 principals, 291 teachers and three heads of the Personnel Unit.

Data for the study were gathered using three self-designed instruments. These were 'School Effectiveness Questionnaire for Principals' (SEQP), 'School Effectiveness Questionnaire for Teachers' (SEQT) and a Semi Structured Interview Guide for TESCOM and District officials. Secondary data in form of students' results were also collected from the Schools Department of the Ministry of Education in each of the sampled states. To ascertain validity of the instruments, consultations were made with two Professors and one Senior Lecturer from Faculty of the Researchers. The experts asked the Researchers to reconstruct some of the items that were ambiguous and rearrange some to look less exam- like. These helped to reveal the validity of the instruments in terms of relevance to subject matter, appropriateness of language, clarity of purpose and coverage of content areas. To ensure reliability, the Cronbach's Alpha reliability test was done. This gave the values: 0.76 for SEQP, 0.68 for SEQT and 0.84 for the interview guide. This implied a high level of

reliability of the instruments. Schools results were also collected from the schools Department of the Ministry of Education in the sampled states to corroborate data on results collected from the sampled schools. Where there was a difference in the collected results, the results analysis collected from the Ministry was used and the one from the school was discarded. The researchers wrote down responses to the interviews. The interviews were also tape-recorded to ensure an accurate account of conversations.

RESULTS

Research Question: What is the place of principals' graduate qualification in the appointment process of public secondary school principals in south western Nigeria?

The interview revealed that selection of principals was done in stages in the States. The first stage being written examinations for all teachers who had spent a minimum of between 12 and 13 years as public secondary school teachers in the states. These candidates should ideally be in the management cadre (level 13). Where the crop of teachers on level 13 was not enough to fill the available vacancies, teachers on level 12 were reported to be given consideration. After the written examination, successful candidates for the principal position were subjected to oral interviews. They were all assessed on the basis of points obtained.

Interviewees affirmed that graduate qualification gave no added advantage to candidates as it was not one of the requisite qualifications for the position of principal. A first degree, preferably in Education and length of service as teacher were the major qualifications required for promotion to the principal position. When there were ties in the number of points obtained by candidates, the date such candidates were appointed as teachers were used. When this was not sufficient the date such candidates obtained their first degrees was used to generate additional points for them. The interview further revealed that teachers with strong backing from politicians with enough clout could be made principals without meeting the aforementioned criteria.

Principals Graduate Qualification and School Effectiveness

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between the climate of schools where principals

possessed graduate qualifications and where principals did not possess graduate qualifications.

To ascertain the differences between the two school types, those that had principals with graduate qualifications and those with principals without graduate qualifications, the responses of the sampled principals and teachers to the questionnaire items were analysed using the t-test statistics. Table 2 presents the results.

Table 2. School Climate and Graduate Qualification

School Climate	Teachers (N=291)		Principals (N=97)			
	\bar{X}	Sd	t-value	\bar{X}	Sd	t-value
Graduate Qualification	5.73	1.66	2.88	45.12	8.30	1.74
No Graduate Qualification	5.35	1.76		45.12	8.30	

Not Significant; $df_{(t,p)} = 289, 95$; $P_{(t,p)} \leq .05$ t-critical $_{(t,p)} = 1.980$

Table 2 shows a cross section of teachers and principals perceptions on the climate of schools where principals possessed graduate qualifications and where principals did not have graduate qualifications. The Table shows that teachers computed t-value ($t=2.88$, $df=289$, $p \leq .05$) is greater than the critical t-value (1.980). As a result, hypothesis one was rejected. The results show that there is a significant difference between the climate of schools where principals possessed graduate qualifications and schools where principals did not have graduate qualifications. This implies that climate of schools where principals possessed graduate qualifications ($\bar{X} = 5.73$) were found to be better than those schools where principals did not have graduate qualifications ($\bar{X} = 5.35$). On the other hand, principals computed t-value ($t=1.74$, $df=95$, $p \leq .05$) is less than the critical t-value (1.980). This implies that according to Principals, the premise in hypothesis one holds.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between principals' possession of graduate qualification and students' academic performance.

To test this hypothesis, principals' possession or non-possession of graduate qualifications was compared with the percentage of their students' who had five credits and above, including English and Mathematics in WASSCE results. Data collected from the 97 sampled schools and the Ministry of Education were analysed using the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation of graduate qualification and academic performance

N=97, df=95		
Variables	Graduate Qualification	Academic performance
Graduate Qualification	1	.825
Academic performance	.825	1

Significant, $P \leq .05$

Table 3 revealed a significant relationship between principals' graduate qualifications and academic performance of students. This finding shows a very high and positive correlation ($r=.825$, $df=95$, $P \leq .05$) between principals' graduate qualification and students' academic performance in the sampled schools. This implies that principals' graduate qualification had positive influence on academic performance of students.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference between effectiveness of schools where principals possessed graduate qualifications and where principals did not possess graduate qualifications.

To ascertain the differences in the two school types, school climate data and academic performance data were compounded and analysed using the t-test statistics. Summary of the analysis is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Summary of t-test Statistics on schools effectiveness and possession of graduate qualifications (N=97)

School Effectiveness	\bar{X}	Sd	t-cal	P
Graduate Qualification	57.16	9.35	2.74	$\leq .05$
No Graduate Qualification	57.08	7.26		

Not Significant, $df=95$, t -critical= 1.980

Table 4 shows that computed t-value ($t=2.74$, $df=95$, $p \leq .05$) is greater than critical t-value (1.98). Thus, hypothesis 3 was rejected. This therefore confirms the assumption that a significant difference exists between effectiveness of schools where principals possessed graduate qualifications and where principals did not possess graduate qualifications. This implies that the qualification of principals influenced school effectiveness.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed that graduate qualification is not a requirement for appointment to the position of a

school principal in Nigeria. Possession of the qualification did not give any added advantage to candidates. Even in situations where there was a tie in number of points obtained in the written examination and oral interviews by candidates, rather than consider additional qualifications, the date of appointment of such teachers into the teaching pool of the State was used to allot additional points. Where this did not work, the first of the candidates to obtain a Bachelor's degree was given more points. Preference is given to the use of date of appointment as a teacher, as a condition for promotion to principal. This shows that the number of years as a teacher, which should ideally be between 12-13 years is an important requirement for elevation to the post of a principal, while graduate qualification did not have any place in the principal appointment process. This finding is similar to that of [31] where a teacher needed to have the basic qualification and move through the ranks from classroom teacher till he/she becomes principal. This is contrary to the findings by [10],[30], where a principalship candidate had to possess a graduate degree to qualify for appointment.

This study also showed that though there were laid down procedures and processes for the appointment of a principal, the guidelines were not strictly adhered to. Candidates who did not meet the standard requirements, especially in the area of number of years of experience as teacher were appointed Principals as long as they had enough political clout. This is similar to [31] finding, where candidates were appointed as principals from the lowest levels of the teaching cadre because of political influence.

This study, using the data collected from teachers found a positive difference in the school climate of schools where the principals had graduate qualification when compared to schools where principals did not possess graduate qualification. This finding corroborates findings of [40] and that of [41], who found positive relationships between principal preparation and the climate of their schools. Using the data collected from principals, this study found no significant difference in the schools where principals had graduate qualifications and where they did not possess graduate qualifications. The difference in the findings using data collected from teachers and principals might be due to the weakness of the questionnaires which respondents filled according to what they felt were expectations of the Researchers and not the real situation on ground.

This study also found that schools where the principals had graduate qualifications recorded positive academic outcomes in WASSCE examinations. This finding shows that possession of competences that led to good performance of students in examinations could be ascribed to what the principals learnt in the course of their preparation for the graduate qualification. This finding corroborates the results of various studies where lack of requisite leadership skills and competences were ascribed to lack of preparation for the position of principal [11], [37], [38]. It also supports the findings of [10], [43], [30] where courses taken during training for graduate qualification were found to be sources of positive leadership practices of principals which resulted in high performance in external examinations by their students.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

It can be concluded that possession of graduate qualification by school principals makes a significant positive difference in the achievement of school effectiveness in terms of positive school climate and academic outcomes of students. Graduate qualification is indeed a plus for secondary school effectiveness in Nigeria. However, the particular graduate qualifications that influenced school effectiveness most still need to be examined.

Given the fact that possession of graduate qualification made significant positive difference to effectiveness of schools, it is recommended that the particular fields of qualifications that resulted in effectiveness of schools should be investigated. These particular fields should then be incorporated into the requirements for promotion to the position of school principal. For the principals who are already in schools, TESCOM and District heads should arrange for workshops and other types of in-service training as is done in the United Kingdom, Finland and Singapore to enhance principal capacities as school leader.

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