

Conceptual Review of Communication Practices, Administrative Competence and Effective Performance of Principals in Nigeria

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Abstract

Communication practices and administrative competence as the hallmark for effective performance of principals in Nigeria is the focus of this paper. It is not enough to keep the communication practices and administrative routine in public secondary schools in particular as a doctrine but to be necessary tools to achieve set goals of the school system especially in this era of global competitiveness. This paper is based on conceptual review. Reviews of several literature indicates that public secondary schools' principals can have a great interpersonal and managerial skills if they can work on their skills based on recommendations. Therefore, based on the study's reviews, it is argued that, although other factors may be at play to affect principals' effective performance, the leadership style of the principals has a significant impact on communication practices, administrative competence, and performance in public secondary schools in Nigeria. The paper assessed the need for good communication practices, administrative competence and effective performance of principals and recommended the way forward to achieving effective performance of principals in Nigeria.

Keywords: Administrative competence, Communication practices, Leadership effectiveness, Performance, Principal, Public secondary school.

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Introduction

The progress of a country is significantly influenced by the level of quality its educational system has. Therefore, the role of principals in ensuring academic achievement in a system of education cannot be overstated. The country's educational goals are laid forth in the National Policy on Education along with how they relate to society and individual needs. Therefore, secondary education is the period of education that follows basic education but precedes university education. The Nigeria National Policy on Education states that the goals of secondary education are to prepare students for higher education and for fulfilling lives in society. As a result, secondary education serves the dual purposes of absorbing primary school graduates and producing workers for both the labour market and tertiary institutions.

In order to assist the nation's educational advancement, the national education policy established particular aims and objectives, and the school administrator has a significant role to play in achieving these goals (NPE, 2013; Chukwu, Nweke, Ezepue, Aneke, Uwakwe, Ezeaku & Boh, 2021). In secondary schools, these duties include general task supervision, instructional leadership, school-community connections, and effective administration of staff members, including teachers and students. All of these activities support teachers in doing their duties more successfully. However, some academics are concerned about how successfully the principals are performing their tasks (Robson, Deo, Bassett & Howse, 2019). For example, Nkwoh (2011) argued that while principals' administrative responsibilities in private secondary schools were somewhat effective in areas like "financial and school administration, staff and students' personnel administration, and instruction and curriculum development," they were ineffective in public secondary schools, particularly in school planning (Basima, 2021).

The degree to which the secondary school is able to serve all other educational levels and the labour market, both numerically and qualitatively, determines the total success of principals' execution of these duties. Therefore, it is essential to handle the secondary system well. The organisational structure within the secondary school system demonstrates that the principal is in charge and serves as the institution's chief executive and chief financial officer (Karakose, Yirci & Papadakis, 2021). It is significant to note that the principal also serves as the *primus inter pare* (first among equals), and as such, is in charge of carrying out the system's many administrative and educational tasks. As a result,

according to Ibukun (2019), the principal's primary responsibility is to foster an environment that will allow the teachers to effect the required changes in the students. This assertion is supported by the observation made by Ijaiya (2010) that teachers in Nigeria express a desire for more participation in decision-making. The way the principle interacts with other staff members has a big impact on how effective they are. Abah (2018) asserts that a school's leadership, culture, and mission are all strongly influenced by the personality and abilities of the administrator. Additionally, the administrative role in academia is crucial. The school reflects the principal's personality, as can be seen from the above, and the principal can make or destroy a school. The secondary school is a human enterprise created to enhance individuals' capacities, dispositions, and all-around greatness (Chabalala & Naidoo, 2021). Such an institution needs to be led by an excellent administrator in order to accomplish the goals. The manager is typically recognised as the principal in secondary schools, whether they are public or private, and in Nigeria, this person is in charge of the institution. It is preferred that such employees possess the skills and qualities necessary to fill administrative responsibilities.

According to a study by Obilade (2018), a teacher's work performance can be summed up as the responsibilities they carried out within a specific time in the school system to achieve organisational objectives. Similar to this, Peretemode (2010) argued that an employee's level of involvement in the day-to-day operations of the company determines how well they perform their job. Principals can promote successful performance of their teachers by understanding their requirements and attempting to satisfy or meet them, as per the Peretemode's theory that employees behave differently under different circumstances.

The dilemma faced by the present-day Nigerian (public) secondary school principals' educational accountability leaves a lot of mystery to unravel. However, with the growth of the secondary schools both in number and in proportion with the population it serves, there has been a parallel increase in growth in the authority and reasonability of the principal. Hence, the principal as the chief executive of schools has multifarious tasks to accomplish for successful administration of the school system. Hence, the principal needs to play an effective and efficient leadership role in order to enable the principal influence the individuals and groups in the organisation goals. The principal also manages the human and non-human resources, presides over a complex

network of interpersonal relationship to keep and maintain high quality of committed personnel through communication practices and administrative competence for effective performance.

The duty of ensuring that communication practices, administrative competence for effective performance can be measured through effective teaching and learning and these place lies with the principal (Aondona, 2019), who employs various supervisory strategies such as classroom visitation, classroom observation, mentorship, workshop and micro-teaching to ensure effective and efficient service delivery. According to Osakwe (2010), instructional supervision is the art of over-seeing the teaching and learning process in order to ensure that the school is administered, managed and led in an effective manner to achieve the educational objectives. In secondary schools, the principal plays a critical role in the programme of instructional improvement through effective and efficient supervision of teachers' classroom instructional display. Through classroom visitation, classroom observation, mentorship, workshops and micro-teaching supervisory techniques, the principal is faced with the responsibility of supervising teachers generally to improve their instructional effectiveness.

Osakwe (2010) adds that principals supervise and monitor teachers' competences no matter how proficient, they are deemed to be so as to provide students with quality learning. As important as instructional supervision is to the development of quality education, it has been observed that school principals often devote more of their time attending to visitors than supervising instruction (Weller, 2001). Consequently, interference of administrative functions seems to be an appendage to instructional supervisory functions of the school principals in achieving instructional objective of the school. It is, therefore, unfortunate that instructional supervisory functions recognised as the cardinal role of the school principal could be over-looked in the midst of a variety of roles not limited to communication practices, administrative competence and effective performance of principals in secondary schools.

Communication practice is therefore the process of conveying messages or information from one person to another is also a cardinal role used by school principals in managing educational institutions. According to Asemah (2010), communication is a very important tool used by management to exchange ideas, thoughts and opinions with employees. This can provide a basis for dismantling any element of

distrust in employees. The author adds that the staff of any school want to know what the school management is doing about the various matters affecting their welfare and their work. Communication is therefore, the only way in which the school principal can eliminate suspicion and promote confidence in the staff. The principals' effectiveness to some extent is perceived to hinge on the manner in which decisions and policies of school management are communicated to teachers and students in the school organisation. If the decisions and policies are communicated effectively through the appropriate channels, the principal may be perceived to be effective in the discharge of his/her duties through administrative competence, but if not, he/she may be perceived otherwise.

Subsequently, Mohammed, Edu and Etoh (2020) clearly elucidated that the effective performance of any system largely depends on the nature of its administrative setup as well as control. The realization of goals and objectives of an organisation cannot be entirely suspended from its administrative skills and competence. In this aspect, they further contended that the school principal who stands at the epicentre of all activities is saddled with so many tasks to perform, ranging from effective delegation of authorities, to staff training and students' management as well as students' performance management. Therefore, this paper addresses communication practices, administrative competence and effective performance of principals in Nigeria.

Communication Practices Described

Concepts are the fundamental assumptions or details of an occurrence or phenomenon. The fundamental principles and information on the transfer of messages from one person or group of people to another comprise the concept of communication. That is, disseminating knowledge throughout the educational system for efficient administration. This represents an attempt to define the term "communication." Cole (1996) stated that the act of developing, transmitting, and interpreting ideas, facts, views, and feelings can be referred to as communication. According to him, communication is the process of ideas, facts, views, and feelings being created and transmitted in the form of a message from one person (the encoder), and the message being translated and interpreted by another person (decoder). For instance, in a school context, a principal might construct a message

in the form of an item and deliver it to the teachers through the heads of departments. Based on the information and concepts, these items are translated and interpreted.

Peretomode (2010) affirmed that communication, at any point in time within an organisation, is successful to the extent that the sender of a message and a receiver have a very similar comprehension of the content of the message. Meaning that for encoder to create a message and for a decoder to translate it, there must be a sound knowledge of facts and ideas about the message. He also buttressed the fact that communication does not take place unless the receiver correctly interprets the information being transmitted. Nevertheless, communication is not effective until the message is properly and accurately decoded by the receiver.

Eric and Osazuwa (2019) considered communication as an event that occurs whenever people assign meaning to each other's behaviours. A school manager, however, needs to take caution and ensure that wrong interpretations are not assigned to information communicated especially in behaviour. There have been cases where actions of school managers are misconstrued for lack of interest in the students' welfare. For example, a principal of a school having an audience with the deaf and dumb students on issues relating to the student's welfare. The students on their part saw the principal's action/behaviour as lack of interest in them. This heated up their relationship which eventually led to the chasing out of the said principal from the school by the students.

Communication is an active task and a purposefully shared experience involving two or more people and the school administrator should see it as such. The school administrators interact with many different people during the day (Chukwu, *et al.*, 2021), including other administrators, teachers, parents, and students etc. The ability of an administrator to contribute to the improvement of the school system will depend on his or her communication skills. For example, communication is essential for: understanding roles and assignments; planning and carrying out learning activities; coordinating approaches with students; providing information to teachers on student progress and behaviours; and building a positive relationship with students, teachers and other staff.

Effective communication promotes awareness of others' interest and needs. Being aware of the necessary skills that will encourage open communication is important when working with others (Abiodun-

Oyebanji & Edu, 2017). Consequently, issues such as road blocks to communication, using accepting language and listening strategies which will relay information that lead towards more positive interactions with others will be examined.

School Principals and Communication Practices

It seems logical to assume that a successful school principle will be reflected in teachers' satisfaction with the institution. Principals have realised that the human element, which involves effective communication and the capacity for successful communication, is one of the most fundamental elements for school success as a principal and as an institution (Chukwu, et al., 2021; Banka, 2016). The relationship between principal communication and teachers' job happiness has been thoroughly studied by researchers on school organisation and communication.

Ismail and Hapsoro (2020) investigate if a principal's communication affect teachers' job satisfaction. The indicators used for the study assessment were feedback, awards, supports, the school's mission, and its goals. The results showed that the respondents' (teachers') perceptions of the effectiveness of their principal's communication and their level of job satisfaction were consistent. The results show that work happiness and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of principal communication are significantly correlated.

The results of research on the transformational leadership of school administrators showed that teachers' job satisfaction was positively and significantly correlated (Achinivu, Handsome, Ayomide, Enobong, & Johnson, 2017). Therefore, in secondary schools where school leaders were viewed as transformational, staff job satisfaction was high and performance progress was higher. To determine the direct impact of school administrators' transformational leadership on staff turnover, some school accomplishments, and the indirect impact of teachers' job satisfaction on the relationship between principals' transformational leadership and teachers' turnover and job performance, the structural equation model (SEM) was used as the study's instrument. Bacu (2020) asserts that principal who adopt transformational leadership approach in management of the school were more likely to encourage and promote the personal teacher efficacy. Meaning that transformational is likely to impact on all the activities in the school and mostly on teachers' professional development and self-fulfillment which

the crux for high productivity in the organisation. It is in light of this, that Bacu (2020) consider this kind of supports as variable for teachers' job satisfaction.

Anderson and Turnbull (2016) opine that workers' job satisfaction is associated with principal communication pattern and staff perception of the principal's human relation and management ability. The implication here is that communication practice in any organisation like the school is very vital to the survival and smooth running of the organisation (Asemah, 2010; Adeyemi, 2011). Through the use of language, mankind has been able to record past history and to transmit its culture from one generation to the other. This transmission exercise lies on communication process without which managerial, administrative and academic functions will not be possible in the school. Without effective communications, organisations will not be what it is, and functions will not be carried out effectively towards goal achievement (Nakpodia, 2010). However, with the use of communication, man has helped himself or herself to build societies and other social groupings, which contribute to his survival and to more enjoyable patterns of living. In all organisations, the transfer of information from one individual to another is necessary (Nakpodia, 2010). It is the means by which behaviour is modified, change is effected, information is made productive and goals are achieved. Without communication, the organisation cannot exist, for there is no possibility of others. Communication from the viewpoint of Nakpodia (2011) is to effect a change and influence action towards the welfare of the enterprise. Therefore, the need for an effective channel of communication becomes imperative for the attainment of the organisational goals. This means that communication is the means by which people are linked together in an organisation.

The communication process follows a systematic procedure. It is a give and take method involving the sender and the receiver (Asemah, 2010; Nakpodia, 2011). Usually, the sender must have an idea to put across which makes it a 3-way grid – the sender, the message and the receiver. For better communication in school, the principal must, first and foremost, conceive an idea and relate such idea to his staff and expect response. In the school system, the principal does not work alone. He/she has to share information, transfer ideas and feelings through communication to enhance the collective co-operation of others within the school. The school principal must not only communicate downward management in thoughts and in decisions but also upward

reactions and development in the ranks. In order to persuade, instruct, direct, request, inform and stimulate, the principal must engage in upward and downward communication. Hence, the importance of upward flow of communication in an educational organisation cannot be under estimated. It helps education administrators to get a feedback from the people that might be affected. These people represent an important source of ideas for improvement (Basima, 2021).

The communication network is seen as being very significant to the life of the school. This is because it is a major avenue through which the school personnel get an opportunity to identify and appreciate what the school is doing, the atmosphere in which it operates, what is expected from the school and the public. On the bases of these, principals design programmes that could make or mar the school system. Communication is thus important in an organisation schools because it constitutes one of the chief means through which organisational members work together. It also helps to hold the organisation together by making it possible for members to influence one another and to react to one another. In secondary schools, it is with the help of communication that the principal is able to influence his subordinates.

According to Nakpodia (2010), communication has been a great concern to school administrators. This is because a break in communication brings about a great havoc in the school system by way of administration. Most times, messages are not decoded properly such that the intended meaning is not interpreted correctly. Teachers do not put in their best into effective teaching as a result of lack of satisfaction emanating from communication gap between them and the principals in the schools and these breeds mix feelings concerning the leadership role of the school head.

Annie and Mpho (2014) observe that some school heads do not communicate with their teachers on issues that affect instruction or other aspects of school management. Even though the school heads are seen as the most important and influential personalities in any school; it is the way they communicate with their teachers that will assist teachers to know what is expected of them and cooperate with the management to enable it attained it pre-determined goals. The authors also stress that it is the school head that creates organisational conditions under which people are motivated to do their best.

Principal's Administrative Competence

Every society can be transformed by education, which is why it should be highly valued. It is the process of acquiring the knowledge and abilities needed to support growth in all areas and sectors of life, including those of individuals, groups, and organisations. According to Egwu (2016), the principal is a leader who must organise, direct, and monitor school operations to ensure their success. The principal is the primary administrator of a secondary school, and as such, he or she is responsible for making efficient use of a variety of resources through implementing management concepts and procedures. The school administrators at all levels must assure the best administration of the human, material, financial, and time resources if the education system is to achieve its national policies and goals.

Nkwoh (2011) observed that school principals must possess a wide array of competencies in order to lead schools effectively towards the accomplishment of educational goals, which has led to changing expectations of what leaders need to know and must be able to do. Competency as opined by Carol and Edward (2004) is the successful performance of a task through the use of knowledge, skills, attitude and judgment. It is the ability and required skills to accomplish given task. Managerial competency is the possession of necessary skills to effectively manage resources for productivity.

Heller (2012) outlines functions of school administrators to include management of instructional programmes, staff personnel administration, students' personnel administration, finance and according to Ibara, (2014) financial management in school are the ways and means usually employed to provide the financial resources involved in running educational institutions. It is the function of the school heads to manage the financial resources of the schools. The common factor in these definitions of financial management is that a connection is made between the management tasks and the financial aspects of a school.

Effective Performance of Principals

Principal effectiveness can be defined in terms of how student learning is affected, either directly or indirectly through mediating factors. This emphasis on performance is consistent with a lot of recent ideas in school administration. Jekayinfa (2017) notes that many studies focus on output variables when discussing performance. In their investigations, Sebastain and Allenworth (2016) also assessed how well the groups

performed on the main task that was given to them. Additionally, while talking about management approaches, performance is also thought of similarly. He contends that a school principal's effectiveness should be evaluated in light of his personal qualities.

Additionally, Lipham (2016) noted that when assessing administrative success, individuals tended to focus too much on judging the outcomes of specific leaders rather than administrators. These findings are noteworthy; they suggested that the relationship between performance and the entire educational system may be the most crucial factor. Here, the issue is not only how a particular leadership endeavour turned out, but also how well the organisational unit performed over time.

Many academics emphasise output variables while discussing performance. The idea of administrative effectiveness rests only on leadership, however according to Adesina (2006), there isn't a legitimate and trustworthy tool for evaluating secondary school principals' success. Since they are in positions of authority, principals can be directly seen and evaluated based on how instructors, students, and parents of the students perceive their behaviour. The success of pupils on various attainment tests and exams serves as the benchmark for evaluating a teacher's efficacy.

Effective Performance of Principals in Public Secondary Schools

The topic of students' diminishing academic performance in Nigerian secondary schools has drawn a lot of interest from those involved in education. Therefore, the efficacy of teachers and principals as they carry out their jobs affects the quality of education and students' performance. The primary criterion for evaluating a school's performance as a principal is now its academic performance.

Principals try to achieve this mainly by improving the performance of their teachers through better communication, motivation, building up their confidence and providing them resources (Frederickson, 2008; Eren, 2014; Grissom, Kalogrides & Loeb, 2014). In view of that, the principals can present themselves as effective leaders only when they are good at getting the best out of their teachers and building their capacities so as to prepare them for the tough challenges present in their academic performances (Andreas, 2012).

To do this, principals must train themselves in leadership techniques that enhance teachers' job performance, such as instructional

supervision, the provision of instructional materials, communication, teacher involvement in decision-making, discipline, performance evaluation of students, and community relations (Orphanos & Orr, 2014). This is due to the fact that teachers' opinions of their principals' leadership styles affect both their academic success at the school and their professional development (Liang, Liu, Wu & Chao, 2015).

In every country in the world, young adults choose their careers at an important point in their secondary education. Because of this, secondary school administrators, whether they work for the public or private sector, are constantly under pressure to deliver successful outcomes in both developed and developing nations, such as Nigeria. In order to increase teachers' performance, it is important to look into the various aspects of the relationship between teachers' opinions of their school principals and their performance in a variety of cultural learning and teaching contexts.

Management of Public Secondary Schools

Management has been viewed and described differently by different scholars. These scholars look at management from various points of view depending on the objectives to which an organisation is set to achieve. The basic reason for the diversity in definition arises from the fact that most human endeavours apply themselves to management. According to Markson (2001), management is the field of human behaviour in which managers plan, organise, staff, direct and control human and financial resources in an organised group effort in order to achieve desired individual and group objectives with optimum efficiency and effectiveness.

According to Ibrahim (2003), management involves the sum total of all activities undertaken to achieve the goals and objectives of an individual or an organisation. It also includes the integration of efforts, design of organisational structure, acquisition or judicious use of resources, motivation of people, providing leadership, planning strategies, controlling, innovating and creating an environment in which individuals and group's goals can be achieved. Mayer (2001) states that management implies a social process involving a sequence of events and planning, organising, coordinating and controlling. All these events if well-coordinated and structured could not only result in judicious use of the limited resources available, but also ensure that the right objectives or desired outcomes are accomplished.

Therefore, management implies all activities put in place to achieve the goals and objectives of an individual or organisation. It is an integration of individuals' or group's efforts, the designing of organisational structure or framework and strategies towards achieving a corporate goal. Yalokwe (2002) defines management as the process of planning, organising, leading and controlling the efforts of organisational members and using all other organisational resources to achieve set goals. The author further states that management involves the achievement of goals set for the organisation. This means that managers of any organisation, be it a commercial bank or a school tries to attain specific ends. These ends are unique to each organisation. The set goals of a school might be to equip students with balanced education that will enable them to earn a living. The main goal of a commercial bank might be to provide quality financial services to the people at a profit. Whatever is the goal of the organisation concerned, management is the process by which the goals can be attained.

In Nigeria, secondary education occupies a significant place in the educational pyramid. It stands in the middle between primary and secondary education. It refers to the type of education that students get after completing their elementary school or in preparation for tertiary study. It is designed for students in the 11 to 17 age range. Secondary education is the starting point for aspiring professionals as well as the basis for identifying and categorising the various vocations. Secondary education in Nigeria only lasted five years prior to independence till 1982 (Peretomode, 2010). Following five years, those who met the requirements were permitted to complete the two years of the Upper School Certificate, which qualifies them for higher education.

As a result, the system supported two years of seniority and three years of juniority. However, the curriculum was expanded and extended to six years once it was realised that this level of education needed to be improved with science and technical topics. It is impossible to overstate the significance of this educational stage. Whereas the senior secondary certificate was awarded following successful completion of a national examination, the junior secondary certificate was based on continual assessment (The West African Council Examination [WAEC]). Nowadays, The National Examination Council Examination, an organisation separate from WAEC, conducts comparable exams at the conclusion of the six-year period (NECO).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The administrative leadership competence in terms of good communication practices and the ability to prepare planning according to the opinion of the sub-division head is generally owned by the leaders who is the principal of the school.

However, the ability to formulate these plans still needs to be improved upon to enhance a better performance of principal. The principal needs to show several aspects of capabilities to improve administrative competence. Therefore, this paper also provides recommendations for conducting various kinds of training to improve the ability of administrative leaders in planning. The principal as the main administrative figure in the school must not rely on one or a particular pattern of communication always to communicate with the staff members.

School principals should embrace different types of communication and explore different channels of communication to communicate with the staff to keep the communication line active. Mutual relationship is a very vital aspect of a healthy school system; hence, the principal should endeavor to establish or improve on interpersonal relationship with the staff. Develop workable communication strategies that will encourage effective communication and support all in the school to learn the basic communication skills.

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