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Secondary School Administration in Anambra State Today: Challenges and the Way Forward

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Abstract

The study, a descriptive survey research design was used to identify the challenges that impede secondary school administration today in Anambra State. The population of the study was all the 259 public secondary school principals in the state. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. A 20-item questionnaire was used for data collection. Analysis was done using mean scores and t-test. Data analysis revealed that principals are challenged by poor knowledge of public accountability and poor knowledge of Information Communication Technology (ICT among others. It was recommended that government should increase the principals' responsibility for educational accountability to enable them administer their schools efficiently and effectively and achieve the predetermined goals.

Introduction

Today, the society is in a state of continual change, with one change leading to another. According to Grimmett and Echols (2000), the society has become increasingly confused, fragmented and discontented. This is because the rapid pace of change has affected all institutions without exception. There is contestation everywhere. In the educational institutions, students' and teachers' culture has changed dramatically thus, influencing their attitudes to teaching and learning respectively. The old learning, skills, attitudes, instructional materials, equipment and methods are quickly getting obsolete,

irrelevant or inadequate. As the society witnesses these rapid changes, education has been pointed out as the only instrument of salvation.

Education, as the foundation of all societies and the globally competitive economies, is the most efficient way through which a society can face the challenges of today and tomorrow. It is the best instrument for reducing poverty, inequality, improving health, enabling the use of technologies, creating and spreading knowledge (The World Bank Group, 2004). It is a positive preparation for life and in life (Achumonye, 2006). Suffice it to say that well administered education would equip the individuals with the capacity to understand and adapt to the new problems and the changing situations, awaken intellectual curiosity, encourage their spirit of inquiry and make them inventive, self-reliant and resourceful.

Hitherto, Nigeria has recognized that her educational system has deteriorated due to a number of reasons. In order to address this undesirable situation, she has embarked on a reform of the entire educational system in order to provide not only access, but also to improve the quality and efficiency of education in the country. Thus, the federal government was forced to make curricula changes that would guide the changes and innovations through education accordingly. This is evident in the National Policy on Education 2004 statements. For instance, there is the introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into the school system, repositioning of science, technical and vocational education in the scheme of national education, general contextual change to reflect the state of professional practice in education among others and the promise to provide necessary infrastructure of ICT in the school system in recognition of the roles of ICT in advancing knowledge and skills in the modern world. (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004:5).

It is expected that as the society quickly changes, new skills, new methods, new attitudes, new instructional materials and equipment should be provided in the schools. Thus, the expectation that school administration today, should be effective and involve to a large extent, functions which require modern management techniques, that is, a combination of skills required for managing not only human, financial and material resources but also time and change. Undoubtedly, effective school administration is indispensable today for effective realization of the educational policy statements. In fact, there can be no meaningful/ purposeful self and national growth and sustainable development in the society without effective school administration. It is the

school administrator that gives direction to education policy implementation and change management. The school administrator has the onerous task of leading efficiently and effectively in the development and management of the school resources. He ensures satisfactory standards in the maintenance of the school environment. As an administrator of a school, he plays a leading role in improving the quality of teaching and learning. He constantly keeps in view the educational goals of the school and ensures the whole school activities are geared towards achievement of the educational goals.

Against this backdrop, the society expected the school administrators to quickly adjust or adapt to the changes and innovations as an attempt to achieve equilibrium. Consequently, pressure is mounting everyday on the school administrators to improve on the quality of their schools' graduates to meet the global trend. Parents and other education stakeholders accuse principals of not being conscientious in their work. The teachers are not even left out; hence some parents are employing the services of part-time teachers to enhance their wards' performances at school. But this practice has not helped the matter either. Performance of students especially in external examinations like Senior School Certificate Examinations (SSCE) today continues to go down. A good example is the very poor performance of students at the recently released 2009 SSCE result; hence the wonder of many parents and other concerned Nigerians on whether school principals are effective in their day-to-day administration of schools. It must be appreciated that school effectiveness depends on the nature of the school environment and largely on the quality of school administration provided by the individual school principal. In the same vein, it is not known the extent such intervening variables as gender influence the school administration. Although Akaria (2007) reported that no significant difference was found between male and female principals in their art of principalship, consensus opinion showed that female principals are better than their male counterparts.

While speculations are wide spread that principals are not professionally committed to their duties in the schools, it is not immediately clear the extent the principals are provided with adequate number of human and material resources or whether there are problems challenging them in their bid to administer their schools effectively.

Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to identify the factors that challenge effective administration of secondary schools in Anambra State today and the possible strategies for the way forward to effective secondary

school administration as well as ascertain whether gender determine effective school administration.

Research Questions

- i. *What challenges hinder effective secondary schools administration today in Anambra State?*
- ii. *What are the strategies for the way forward to effective secondary school administration today in Anambra State?*

Hypotheses

- i. *There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the challenges that hinder effective secondary school administration today.*
- ii. *Gender is not a significant factor in the principals' mean ratings on the strategies for the way forward to effective secondary school administration today in Anambra State.*

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population was the 259 principals in the government owned secondary schools in the six education zones of Anambra State. The six education zones are: Aguata, Awka, Ihiala, Nnewi, Ogidi and Onitsha.

The only instrument employed for data collection was a Today School Administration Challenges Questionnaire (TSACQ) constructed by the researcher. The instrument consisted of two parts. Part 1 was designed to gather demographic information about the respondents. Part 2 of the instrument was a 20-item 4-point Likert management scale designed to elicit information on the challenges that hinder effective secondary school administration today and the strategies for the way forward.

The instrument was face validated by four experts, two from Measurement and Evaluation and two from Educational Foundations and Administration of Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe. Their corrections and suggestions were incorporated into the final draft of the TSACQ.

The reliability of the instrument was tested using the responses of 20 principals in Delta State, a different state from the state of study. The data collected were analyzed using Cronbach Co-efficient Alpha. The result of the analysis showed a reliability co-efficient value of 0.81. Therefore, the instrument was considered adequate for the study.

The researcher employed a face- to- face mode of questionnaire administration on the respondents. This ensured a hundred percent return of the questionnaire administered on the respondents. Data collected were later statistically analyzed using mean rating and Standard Deviation. The hypothesis was tested using t-test at 0.05 level of significant.

Results

Research Question 1: *What challenges hinder effective secondary schools administration today in Anambra State?*

Data on the Table 1 revealed that all the items rated above the acceptable mean of 2.50. The conclusion therefore, is that all the listed variables are challenges impeding school administration today in Anambra state.

Research Question 2: *What are the strategies for the way forward to effective secondary school administration in Anambra State?*

Table 2 showed that the principals irrespective of gender agreed to the six items on the table as shown by their mean scores which are above 2.50, the decision level. This shows that the items are possible strategies for the way forward to effective secondary school administration in Anambra State.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female principals on the challenges that hinder effective secondary school administration today in Anambra State.

Analysis on Table 3 revealed that with 257 degree of freedom, the calculated t-value of 1.11 is less than the table (critical) value of 1.96 at 0.05 confidence level. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. This is an indication that gender has no significant effect on the mean scores of principals' responses on the challenges of today school administration in Anambra State.

Hypothesis 2

Gender is not a significant factor in the principals' mean ratings on the strategies for the way forward to effective secondary school administration today in Anambra State.

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the principals on the strategies for the way forward to effective secondary school administration. This is deduced from the fact that the computed t-value for the items are independently less than the critical t of 1.96 with 257 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The major findings of the study revealed that school administration today is still a very challenging task in view of the fact that the principals scored 2.59 and above in all the 14 factors identified as challenges that hinder effective secondary school administration in Anambra State on Table 1. Under such condition, it will be difficult to break even.

Table 1 revealed that there is uncomfortable condition of service, weak and inadequate financial, human and material resources provision, increased population of students, which most probably, occasioned crowded classrooms. Evidently, personal visit to most of the schools and observation confirmed that the state government left the school administrators with scarce resources. Lack of school resources is a canker worm. It causes set back in the principals' effectiveness. No wonder private educational institutions are being over-populated, hence their branches in all corners of the state because wealthy parents have to enroll their wards in those private schools, which are adequately equipped with current equipment and facilities. This condition is disheartening, as the principals cannot work effectively without these resources, especially as it concerns finance. There is acute shortage of teachers, yet the few available number of teachers in the schools are stressed, not motivated and inadequately paid hence, they become disenchanted with their duties. The consequent effect is nothing but poor quality of instruction and performance on the part of teachers and students respectively as well as low school effectiveness on the part of the school administrator, which is against the spirit of international effort of secondary school reform movement. Notably, quality of education children receives bears direct relevance to the availability or lack of human and material resources. Grimett and Echols (2000) observed that the increased

workload, the low pay and the adversarial conditions all combine to make school administration unattractive and potentially harmful to personal health and lifestyle.

The ignorance exhibited by both male and female principals when they noted poor knowledge of public accountability (item 2) as one of the challenges in the process of administration is relatively pathetic because it does affect them. For instance, in the 1999/2000 sessions, some principals due to mismanagement of funds were demoted to classroom teachers and others suspended by the then chairman of the Anambra State Education Commission by Barr. Nsobundu. Also, in 2001/2002 sessions due to misappropriation of funds some principals were demoted. Presently, parents grudge that most of the principals extort money from the students and utilize such money for what they don't know. Most importantly, the principal should have responsibility for the efficient financial management of the school. This is because he is the head of the school and effective administration of the school is facilitated by finance. Also, education stakeholders would want him to give account of his services in the school with the education stakeholders' money.

Table 1 also revealed impatience/inability to identify staff weakness and strengths, poor knowledge of interpersonal relationship etc as administrative challenges. These are negative tendencies, which predispose challenges to effective administration in any organization. Therefore, any principal challenged by these would be overstressed coupled with the load of works he/she does. In other words, increased pressure from the staff will definitely lower his work performance level. Teachers should be intellectually and emotionally involved in the running of the school. The principal cannot possibly run the school alone. If he wants the administration to be successful, he should establish a good interpersonal relationship with his subordinates and integrate them easily in decision making of the school. In other words, the principal should strike a balance between being production centered and teachers/people centered, that is working towards achieving the goals of teaching and learning and at the same time meeting the needs of his teachers, who are the life blood of the school. His school should be characterized by free communication so that relevant information can flow freely and help in monitoring the progress being made in the school. An effective school administrator co-ordinates the processes by which the standards of

performance and achievement within the school are monitored and assessed and makes it more effective.

Moreover, Table 1 showed that most of the principals have poor ICT knowledge, poor information management and record keeping as evidenced by the high Mean Ratings respectively. The finding is in line with Nzewi (2009), Agbulu, Adejoh & Itoyokyaa (2008) who noted that lots of Nigerian teachers are yet to acquire the simple skills of ICT to enable them benefit from the enormous wealth of information derivable from ICT. That we are in an information technological age is not an over statement. Thus, these principals are disadvantaged and cannot reflect favourably any aspect of ICT nor supervise its utilization in the teaching-learning situation and this will probably affect the products of secondary education level in the state. Principals' knowledge of ICT is very vital because the influence of ICT in the realization of educational goals is enormous. No wonder the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria is pleading for fund from the federal government to train teachers on ICT usage (NTA, 2009). Proper knowledge of ICT develops and enhances educational administration and management. This is because with the computers the principal can easily maintain students' and staff records, register students, keep inventory of school property supplies and other school activities and easily retrieve and update such records when necessary. This is in line with Ozoji (2003) who said that information technology is useful in the area of assessment and record keeping. Proper ICT knowledge would enable the principals keep accurate records, proper accounting as well as manage information effectively as it concerns instructional content and delivery methods. In consonance, Nwobi (2000), Ajagbe and Madaki (2006) opined that ICT provides a systematic process of disseminating information and knowledge that could move the society forward.

Furthermore, Table 1 revealed that there is a high rate of indiscipline among the students. With the recent Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, students' population increased outrageously in the schools. This is no gainsaying and unfortunately, this trend in our secondary schools has not been matched with commensurate increase in financial, human resources and infrastructures provisions for the schools. Thus, so many students are packed in a classroom; hence stuffed and rowdy that the principals are handicapped and find it difficult to check these students. In the words of Ololube (2005), Nigeria is on the wrong side of international effort of secondary school

reform movement where school effectiveness and quality improvement is an effort in the 21st century. The place of a principal in the school cannot be over-emphasized. It is unique and the principals should be helped to achieve quality education in that level of education.

Table 2 revealed that the respondents generally agreed on the strategies for the way forward to effective secondary school administration in Anambra State. This is an indication that the respondents believe that the strategies if adopted would be a way forward to effective school administration. This finding complements Olawale (2000) who noted that strategies for effective management in educational institutions include effective information management, provision of adequate number of modern equipment, materials and facilities.

On the influence of gender, the hypotheses were tested using t-test and the calculated t-value were less than the critical value for the two analysis on Tables 3 and 4. The researcher therefore, had to accept the two null hypotheses and concludes that the challenges that hinder effective secondary school administration and the strategies for the way forward are not gender dependent. This is in line with Akaria (2007) earlier report that no significant difference was found between male and female principals' in their art of principalship.

Conclusion

The secondary school administrator is the highest official. He has the ultimate authority and responsibility for everything done in the school. In fact, no school can be above its principal in terms of goal-achievement. Effective school administration requires committed principal, who is adequately motivated to perform his duty. Adequate number of teachers and other resources are necessary for the achievement of goals. Challenges of educational administration today are enormous and there is high demand for administrative services without commensurate in flow of resources that would enable success in this effort. Unfortunately, the school administrator in this changing time has almost nothing with which to do his work. Besides, with the increased work load, low pay, adversarial conditions and changed nature of schools' management, he needs to know not only how to administer but also what to administer. He should be exposed to the theories and practices of modern school administration develop and modify techniques and skills in the solution of modern problems by co-operative action (team spirit) and as well be familiar with the principles and procedures of effective

administration in the face of the likes of the challenges and pressures aforementioned.

However, Ukeje, Akabuogu and Ndu (1992) as if they know the school administrators today will be in this dilemma contended that the tasks are immense, the problems enormous, various and variegated but with adequate planning, conscientious efforts, national conscientiousness and progressive leadership, the future is bright.

Recommendation

The existence of challenges is quite natural in life. The point here is that school administrators and the various governments should brace up and realize the implications of non-commitment to their various roles to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in school administration in the state.

1. Both the state and federal government need to take greater responsibility and treat secondary education with the seriousness it deserves through proactive provision of modern instructional materials and equipment as well as recruitment of more trained and qualified teachers, who are no doubt the vital force in educational effectiveness at the classroom instructional level.
2. Government should organize and sponsor seminars to equip principals with the current teaching methods and equipment. Hence, principals will be enabled to provide opportunity for teachers' growth and development
3. Government should set aside adequate fund for running of schools at this level to be monitored by the supervisory bodies as well as organize seminar for principals on proper accountability and responsibility in handling public funds.
4. Education stakeholders and non-governmental organizations should organize workshops and seminars for principals on the various concepts and the practical aspects of application of ICT as well as provide computer sets in the schools.
5. Principal/vice should frequently visit classrooms and hold development conferences with teachers and regularly review teachers' productivity and curriculum programme with a view to improving them.

6. Principals today should engage in regular and purposeful interpersonal relationship with the staff, endeavour to understand the different productivity patterns, how they affect teachers' works and also learn to accept occasional unproductive days of slump to aid effectiveness.

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Table 1: Mean Ratings of principals on the challenges that impede effective school administration today in Anambra state (By Gender)

Challenges		Female Principals			Male Principals		
		X	SD	Dec	X	SD	Dec
i	Poor knowledge of interpersonal relationship	2.92	1.06	A	2.84	1.03	A
ii	Poor knowledge of public accountability	2.78	1.10	A	2.74	1.10	A
iii	Unavailability of modern materials, equipment and facilities	3.23	1.02	A	3.28	1.19	A
iv	Increased school population and poor funding	3.36	0.85	A	3.19	1.01	A
v	Impatience/inability to identify staff weaknesses/strengths	2.85	1.00	A	2.78	1.10	A
vi	Weak and inadequate financial support from the government	2.81	1.09	A	2.96	1.31	A
vii	Inadequate number of qualified and competent teachers.	2.75	1.02	A	2.90	1.28	A
viii	Limited access to quality books for quality teaching and learning	2.59	1.08	A	2.70	1.07	A
ix	Poor knowledge of ICT	3.05	1.12	A	2.76	1.06	A
x	Uncomfortable condition of service	3.34	1.07	A	3.56	1.07	A
xi	Poor information management and record keeping	3.78	0.45	A	2.83	1.11	A
xii	Poor security measures.	2.86	1.81	A	3.36	0.85	A
xiii	Improper/irregular monitoring and supervision of schools	2.63	1.03	A	2.74	1.02	A
xiv	High rate of indiscipline among the students.	3.64	0.56	A	3.05	1.01	A
	Grand Mean	2.81	1.09		2.76	1.06	

Key: x = mean scores **SD**= Standard Deviation

Table 2: Mean ratings and Standard Deviation on the strategies for the way forward to effective school administration. (By Gender)

Strategies		Female Principals			Male Principals		
		X	SD	Dec	X	SD	Dec
i	Advanced Information Communication Technology and software skills	3.50	0.46	A	3.26	0.88	A
ii	Skills for effective interpersonal relationship	3.86	0.45	A	3.50	0.50	A
iii	Team work and management skills	3.01	0.67	A	3.42	0.50	A
iv	Increased responsibility for educational accountability	3.20	0.52	A	3.10	0.98	A
v	Effective information management ans record keeping	2.90	0.77	A	3.20	0.71	A
vi	Provision of adequate number of modern equipment, materials and facilities.	3.67	0.56	A	3.29	0.67	A
Grand Mean		3.47	0.67		3.27	0.75	

Table 3: t-test analysis of the differences in the mean perception scores of principals on the challenges that that hinder effective school administrtrion

Source of variation	N	x	SD	Df	t-cal.	T-crit	Dec
Male principals	106	2.81	1.09	257	1.11	1.96	Ho
Female principals	153	2.76	1.06				Accepted

Table 4: t-test comparison of the mean ratings of male and female principals regarding the strategies for the way forward to effective school administration

Source of variation	N	X	SD	Df	t-cal	T-crit	Decision
Male principals	106	3.46	0.67	257	1.07	1.96	Ho
Female principals	153	3.29	0.71				Accepted