

Principals' Leadership Skills and School Effectiveness: The Case of South Western Nigeria

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Abstract

The study sought to find out the leadership skills possessed by Principals of public secondary schools in south western Nigeria and the relationship between these leadership skills and school effectiveness in terms of student academic achievement. The descriptive survey research design was employed for the study. 154 Principals and 770 teachers, who were purposively selected, participated in the study. Findings revealed that secondary school principals in south western Nigeria possessed technical, interpersonal, conceptual and administrative skills. A significant relationship was found between principals' leadership skills and school effectiveness. The level of adequacy of possession of leadership skills for school effectiveness was not examined. Training for possession and exercise of principals' leadership skills at sufficient levels to influence school effectiveness was recommended. Within school barriers to the influence of principals' leadership skills on school effectiveness were also recommended for removal.

Keywords: *principals' leadership skills; student academic achievement; school effectiveness*

1. Introduction

School effectiveness is the extent to which the set goals or objectives of a school programme are accomplished. A school would be regarded as effective if "school processes result in observable positive outcomes among its students, consistently over a period of time" (Iyer, 2011, p.4). The parameters for measuring the effectiveness of a secondary school include the level of discipline tone of the school, school climate, teachers' performance and the number of students who successfully pass their school leaving certificate examinations (Purkey and Smith, 1983; Hargreaves, 1995; Uline, Miller & Tschannen-Moran, 1998; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli & Pickeral, 2009).

The most common ordinary level examinations in Nigeria for students, who are still in school, are the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE) conducted by West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) in May/ June and June/July of every year. The British Council also conducts Cambridge International General Certificate Secondary Education Examination (IGCSE) in Nigeria though limited to the affluent few. WAEC was chosen as the standardised test for use in this study because it has a wider coverage, outside Nigeria than NECO which is more of a Nigerian national examination, though both have international acceptability.

Most tertiary institutions in Nigeria set the baseline of minimum entry requirements for their schools at five credits; including credit grades in English and Mathematics at the Ordinary Level (O'level) examinations. This means that students who want to proceed to tertiary institutions from secondary schools must possess this minimum requirement in relevant subjects for entry. This is against the backdrop of the second goal of secondary education, as specified in the National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2004), which states that the secondary level of education is meant to prepare individuals for higher education. Given this fact, the effectiveness of a secondary school in Nigeria can be measured by the number of students that make a minimum of five credits including English and Mathematics in their Ordinary Level Examinations, among other factors.

Recent research (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2000; Awwalu & Yusof, 2012) on secondary education in Nigeria has shown that there is an enduring deterioration in the quality and

efficiency of secondary school education delivery in Nigeria. As a result, school success is not achieved (Nigerian Education Sector Analysis, (NESA), 2007). This is evidenced in the downward trend of students' performance in external examinations over the years. Students in the States sampled in this study, Lagos, Ondo and Osun States had pass rates as listed in Table 1

Table 1: Students' Pass Rate in May/ June WAEC Examination

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

Source: West African Examination Council (2010)

The May/June WAEC results for the whole country showed that 30.99% out of 1,540,250 and 38.81% of 1,695,878 candidates that wrote the examination obtained five credit grades including English and Mathematics in the year 2011 and 2012 examinations respectively (Uwadiae, 2011; Uwadiae, 2012) As a result of the poor performance of secondary school students in external examinations, principals were indicted by the Minister of Education (Oyebade, 2010). Some state governments even went as far as querying the principals in their states over the poor examination results returned by schools in the states (Oyebade, 2010). This allegation of principals might have been spurred by research evidence which had shown principal leadership to be second only to teaching in its impact on student performance, and the fact that teaching is carried out by teachers, resources under the control and supervision of principals.

Educational leadership has been found to be an important characteristic of school effectiveness (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Kythreotis, Pashiardis & Kyriakides, 2010). This leadership is portrayed by the leadership skills the principal as the educational leader of the school exhibits. A skilled and competent principal is one who facilitates the use of the inputs to the school, in order to ensure the achievement of desired goals. She/he is the one who oversees all the processes involved in the running of the school for overall effectiveness. Skill, according to Gregory (2001), is used to denote expertise developed in the course of training and experience. The common factor for the different types of skills according to Gregory (2001) is that the leader has to match the demands of a particular task to the appropriate skill necessary for the effective achievement of the task.

Leadership skills are "the learned ability to bring about pre-determined results with maximum certainty often with minimum use of time..., energy or both" (Knapp, 2007, p.1). Educational reform efforts in developed countries, have focused on the significance of the leadership role and skills of the principal for the achievement of school effectiveness (Sergiovanni, 1994; Short and Greer, 1997; Kochamba and Murray, 2010).

Katz (1955), the first researcher to propose the skill approach to leadership, discovered that effective leadership depends on three basic skills: technical, human or interpersonal and conceptual. Mumford, Zaccarro, Harding, Jacobs and Fleishman (2000) proposed a five component skill based model of effective leadership which had problem solving skills, social judgement skills and knowledge skills at the core of its components. Hoy and Miskel (2000) ascertained technical, interpersonal, conceptual and administrative skills as skills that the principal as the school leader should possess for school success. Peterson and Van Fleet (2004) suggested ten categories of skills essential for effectiveness. They were technical, analytic, decision making, human, communication, interpersonal, conceptual, diagnostic, flexible and administrative skills. Mumford, Campion and Morgeson (2007), identified four general categories: cognitive, interpersonal, business and strategic skills. Another set of researchers, Leithwood and Duke, (1999); Murphy and Louis, (1999); as well as Richter, (2006), were of the opinion that leadership skills are divided into three domains: transformational, managerial and instructional. The various sets of researchers found differing categories of leadership skills which were not all related, to be essential for the achievement of organisational effectiveness.

Principals as leaders who are in a position to influence others must have the skills that will make them take advantage of that position (Schlechty, 1990). We can therefore conclude that school effectiveness would depend on the competence of a principal. To be competent as school leaders, principals need the requisite leadership skills.

Generally, many studies (Adelabu and Akinwumi, 2008; Arong & Ogbadu, 2010; Duze, 2011; Sofowora, 2010) have been carried out on the falling standard and quality of education in Nigeria but very little research work has been carried out on the leadership skills possessed by the principals of Nigerian secondary schools and the relationship

between possession of leadership skills and school effectiveness.

2. Principals' Leadership Skills and School Effectiveness

Ross and Gray (2006) found transformative leadership skill to be necessary for school effectiveness. According to the researchers', transformative skill is a global skill comprising three skills: the principals being able to identify and sustain a vision of the school which is interpreted as conceptual skills by other researchers; intellectual stimulation of other members of the school this can only be done by a person who knows the educational processes of a school), using a combination of the technical and interpersonal skills; and individual consideration for others; the interpersonal or human skill. The use of these skills was discovered to enhance school effectiveness by increasing teacher commitment and motivating them to achieve school goals.

Also in South Carolina, Kochamba and Murray (2008), in their study on critical leadership skills needed by principals for the achievement of school effectiveness found technical, human relations, conceptual and transformative leadership skills critical for the achievement of school effectiveness. In Hong Kong, Pang and Pisapia (2012), found a link between strategic thinking skills (a component of conceptual skill) and effectiveness of schools. Richter, Lewis and Hagar (2012), found transformational, managerial and behaviour management skills to be essential ingredients Principals need for the achievement of effective schools. In a related study on effective schools in developing countries, Hoppey and Mcleskey (2013), discovered that the Principal who had interpersonal skill; viewed his primary role as that of providing support for his teachers so they could put in their best to teaching, achieved school effectiveness. The study was hinged on the path-goal theory of leadership by House (1971) which postulates that for leaders to be effective, they must have the ability to clarify the path to successful achievement of goals for followers; they must also, be able to remove obstacles on the path to achievement of organisational goals for the followers. To clarify the path, the principal must know the processes involved and have the vision on how to achieve the goals of the school. To be able to remove obstacles to achievement of school goals from the path of the followers, the principal must have the necessary skills to know when there are obstacles, what to do and how to do it.

Principal's leadership skills are crucial in ensuring academic achievement of students. The poor academic performance of south western Nigerian public secondary school students in external examinations cast doubts on the possession of leadership skills by their principals This study therefore seeks to find out if the principals of public secondary schools in south western Nigeria possess leadership skills and the relationship between the leadership skills they possess or lack and school effectiveness.

This led to a research question:

Which leadership skills do principals of south western Nigerian public secondary schools possess? The research hypothesis is:

There is no significant relationship between leadership skills possessed by principals' and school effectiveness.

3. Methodology

To determine the leadership skills to be examined in this study from the myriad identified by different researchers, and considering the fact that the identified skills were found in cultures different from that within which this study was undertaken, a pilot survey was used to collect information from teachers and principals on the leadership skills required by principals for school effectiveness. This revealed 17 skill entries. These were then matched with the skills found in Literature. They aligned with the four skill classification of Hoy and Miskel (2000). As a result, the technical, conceptual, interpersonal and administrative skills were assessed as the skills required by the principal as the school leader in this study.

The survey research design was adopted in this study. The multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the sample. Three out of the six states in south western Nigeria were randomly selected for the study. 154 senior secondary schools were selected for the study. The selection of the schools was done through proportionate stratification; using the six educational districts of Lagos State and the six educational zones of Ondo and Osun States as strata. 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 make sure that it is the particular principal's leadership skill that was being related to the effectiveness of the school and not that of a principal that had left the school. Furthermore, five teachers who had each spent at least two years with the particular principals were purposively selected from each of the schools to be sure that data on principals, given by such teachers were as accurate as possible. In all, the study

sample consisted of 770 teachers and 154 principals.

Two instruments were used to collect data for the study namely: 'School Effectiveness Questionnaire for Principals' (SEQP); and 'School Effectiveness Questionnaire for Teachers' (SEQT). The instruments were constructed with some of the items measuring principals' leadership skills in the SEQP adapted from the American National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), 21st Century School Administrator skills Self Assessment Questionnaire for Instructional Leaders. Some of the items in the SEQT were obtained from the NASSP Observer Assessment Questionnaire.

The SEQP contained items that elicited information on principals' demographic variables, analysis of their students WAEC results for five years (years 2008-2012), leadership skills they possessed and school effectiveness. The NASSP instrument contained only items that sought to measure principals' leadership skills but the questionnaire for the study was modified in order to measure other variables used to measure school effectiveness in this study. The SEQT sought information from teachers on the leadership skills their principals possessed and how the skills influenced school effectiveness. It also elicited information from the teachers on the climate ratings of their schools and the performance of the teachers themselves. The items on all the questionnaires were rated on a Three-point Likert-type rating scale of "Always", "Sometimes", and "Never" which were coded 2, 1 and 0 respectively.

Data were collected from multiple sources to avoid many of the problems afflicting leadership research (Ross & Gray, 2006). The different sources of data collection were also to supplement as well as compensate for the limitations of data collection methods and sources used in the study (Noor, 2008). Data on leadership skills of the principals were collected through self assessment by the principals themselves and balanced by collection from teachers as observer assessment because principals' responses could be biased because of the self assessment nature of the instrument used. Data on teachers' performance and school climate were sought from principals and teachers. This was to take care of any bias that might have occurred in the information given by principals. Secondary data in the form of students results (WAEC 2008-2012) were collected from WAEC office. This was done to cross check the result analysis of the schools given by their principals.

To ensure validity of the instruments, the researcher gave them to experts who reviewed their relevance. To assess reliability, each of the instruments was administered on four principals and forty teachers from four schools not included in the final sample used in the study. The resulting responses were used to obtain the internal consistency reliability coefficients (SEQP- Cronbach's alpha=0.86 and split-half= 0.80; and for SEQT- Cronbach's alpha= 0.89 and split-half= 0.78).

The instruments were administered by the researcher and three trained research assistants. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents in their schools. In most cases the principal and teachers questionnaires were collected a few days after administration, to allow them time to complete the questionnaires because of their work demands. Data collected for the study were analysed using frequency counts, percentages and Pearson's Product Moment correlation coefficient to test the hypothesis.

4. Results

4.1 Research Question 1: Which Leadership Skills do Principals in South Western Nigerian Secondary Schools Possess?

To answer the research question, the leadership skills that the respondents indicated principals as possessing through their answers to the items on the SEQP and SEQT were extracted and descriptively analysed. A principal was said to possess a skill in which he had a score of not less than 60%. It was found that a principal could possess more than one skill. Table 2 presents the result of principals' self assessment. Teachers' perception of leadership skills possessed by principals is also shown in Table 3.

Table 2: Leadership Skills Possessed by Principals (n= 154)

Leadership Skills possessed by Principals	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Administrative Skill	16	10.4	10.4
Technical and Conceptual Skills	10	6.5	16.9
Technical and Interpersonal Skills	14	9.1	26.0
Technical and Administrative Skills	16	10.4	36.4
Conceptual and Interpersonal Skills	20	13.0	49.4
Conceptual and Administrative Skills	21	13.6	63.0
Interpersonal and Administrative Skills	20	13.0	76.0
Technical, Conceptual and Administrative Skills	20	13.0	89.0
Conceptual, Interpersonal and Administrative Skills	17	11.0	100.0
Total	154	100	

Table 3: Teachers' Perception of Leadership Skills Possessed by Their Principals (n= 770)

Leadership skills	Frequency	Percentage
Administrative	86	11.2
Technical and conceptual	44	5.7
Technical and Interpersonal	93	12.0
Technical and Administrative	55	7.1
Conceptual and Interpersonal	106	13.8
Conceptual and Administrative	94	12.2
Interpersonal and Administrative	107	13.9
Technical, Conceptual and Administrative	106	13.8
Conceptual, Interpersonal and Administrative	79	10.3
Total	770	100

From a comparison of the details in Tables 2 and 3, it could be observed that most of the sampled principals of the schools involved in the study claimed to possess more than one leadership skill. This claim was affirmed by the teachers who evaluated principals' possession of leadership skills as observers.

4.2 Research Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between principals' possession of leadership skills and school effectiveness

To investigate a possible relationship between the leadership skills possessed by principals and the effectiveness of their schools the leadership skills that the sampled teachers perceived to be possessed by their principals were correlated using the data on the effectiveness of the schools as recorded by the teachers that were used as sample in the schools. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation matrix of Relationship between Each of Leadership Skills Possessed by Principals and School Effectiveness

Skills possessed by Principals	School Effectiveness		
	\bar{x}	SD	r
Technical Skill	23.9	3.9	.414
Conceptual Skill	32.9	5.1	.538
Interpersonal Skill	27.0	4.5	.614
Administrative Skill	18.8	2.7	.507

Correlation is significant at 0.05, N=770, $r_t = .062$

Table 4 showed administrative skill as having an average contribution of $\bar{x}=18.8$ to school effectiveness with conceptual skill having $\bar{x} = 32.9$, the highest contributing variable to school effectiveness. Analysis of data showed strong positive correlation between principals' possession of conceptual skill (.538), interpersonal skill (.614), administrative skill and school effectiveness. Interpersonal skill had the highest level of relationship with school effectiveness. Though technical skill had a positive relationship with school effectiveness, the relationship was rather low when compared to the benchmark of 0.50.

5. Discussion

This study revealed that secondary school principals in south western Nigerian secondary schools possessed technical, conceptual, interpersonal and administrative skills. Administrative skill was found to be the most prevalent among the principals. More than half of the principals also had the conceptual skill. The number of principals who possessed the technical skill in any form was less than half of the sampled principals. The technical skill was the leadership skill possessed by the least number of principals. This finding was rather unexpected considering the state of the schools, especially the public schools in terms of the poor academic achievement of their graduates. Alternatively, the respondents (principals and teachers) might have made wrong claims of possession of leadership skills by principals. This might be a reflection of the weakness of the questionnaire, where respondents sometimes respond according to what they regard as expectation. Principals could also possess these skills but be unable to exercise them probably because of some intervening influences operating within the school system.

It is believed that principals possess and exercise these skills but other factors within the school system such as inadequacy of resources, human and material, which was observed during field work and at other times, may be responsible for the ineffectiveness of the schools. It shows that poor performance might be attributed to other problems in the system, not to lack of leadership skills.

Significant positive relationship was found between principals' possession of leadership skills and school effectiveness. This finding corroborates Kochamba and Murray's (2010) finding that principals need a multitude of skills to achieve school effectiveness. It also supports the Supovitz, Sirinides and May (2010) study which found that principals possession of leadership skills led to promotion of a healthy school climate, fostered collaboration and communication around instruction, influenced academic press of the school and as a result had positive effect on school effectiveness.

6. Conclusion

It can be concluded that principals of secondary schools in south western Nigeria possess leadership skills and that the possession of these leadership skills have significant relationship with school effectiveness. However, the adequacy of the level of possession of these possessed skills for high school effectiveness was not measured in this study. Also, intervening variables that might affect the influence of these leadership skills on school effectiveness were not examined.

7. Recommendations

Given the fact that the principals in this study were found to possess the leadership skills required for the achievement of school effectiveness but still did not have effective schools, it would be worthwhile to investigate the

variables that might have interfered with the expected positive influence of leadership skills on school effectiveness. The level of the adequacy of the skills for the achievement of school effectiveness could also be investigated. It is also recommended that training to hone the leaderships skills to higher levels, as such will enhance school effectiveness is necessary.

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