



EQUITY SKILL FOR EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

There is a strong relationship between administration and the issue of equity in education. The term equity refers to the principle of fairness but it is often used interchangeably with the related principle of equality. Equity encompasses a wide variety of educational models, programmes and strategies that may be considered fair, but not necessarily equal. This study therefore, aimed at investigating the relationship between leadership principle of equity and secondary school administration in Rivers State. To achieve the stated aim, four research questions and four hypotheses guided the study. A correlational design was adopted for this study and the population comprised 1311 principals and vice principals in secondary schools in Rivers State with a sample size of 210. Instrument for data collection was a 20-item questionnaire titled Equity as a Leadership Skill for Effective School Administration (ELSESA). Mean and standard were used in answering the research questions while the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significance level. The findings revealed that significant and positive relationship exist between the dimensions of equity and effective school administration.

Keywords: Equity, Educational Equality, Leadership Skills, Administration, Secondary School.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Ndu-Ogbujim C. J. (2020). Equity skill for efficient and effective school administration. *International Journal of Institutional Leadership, Policy and Management*, 2(1), 160-171.

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INTRODUCTION

Research in the field of education is asked to tackle various topics, involving reflection at various levels depending on the issue being studied. At least two possible routes can be followed: firstly, that of studying scholastic world, the individual, actors who "live in the and therefore teachers, pupils, parents and families, and many others; and secondly, studying the scholastic world as a whole, therefore including all research that can be defined as system research.

Study conducted on equity in scholastic systems falls into this second research group, which aims to consider the situation at the macroscopic level, and which provides a general overview of the scholastic system in terms of its relationships with other spheres. To a greater extent even than education, equity is related to various aspects of the life of a community: in fact,

reflecting on equity means focussing on the issues of social segregation, racism, gender or status discrimination or on other forms of potential discrimination.

The scholastic environment provides various interpretations of the concept (which will be considered below): the concept is associated with access to school and to resources, to the quality and to the diffusion of knowledge, but it may also refer to the institutional responsibility of governments and of the school to compensate for the inequalities that exist outside the scholastic environment, in such a way as to guarantee better opportunities for disadvantaged individuals or groups of individuals. Many researchers in the field of education (Bottani & Benadusi, 2006; Giancola, 2009) agree on the fact that the issue of equity is a crucial topic for the study of education systems. Meuret (2006) states that “it can therefore, be said that, for the quality of education policies, but also for the quality of the political debate on education, it is important to evaluate the scholastic system” (p. 41). The general opinion in both Europe and the United States, has moved toward focussing more on the task and responsibility of the school in deciding the future of the community, and, in line with a general change in the outlook for the condition of children, there is a stronger conviction that the concept of justice must be applied to all citizens irrespective their age. In relation to this, in a 2004 study, Meuret cites a number of surveys and research projects conducted in the first few years of new millennium, including those by (Fauconnier & Deloy, 2000; Hutmacher, Cochrane & Bottani, 2001).

Leaders in education face diverse challenges in today’s competitive and changing environment. Evolving demands from superiors, financial challenges, staff and students create turbulent environment in which administrators must thrive. One of the keys to being an effective leader in this situation is the application of the necessary leadership skills. However, leaders in educational institutions are often times people that do not have formal leadership experience; as such, their formal preparation and skill development are practically non-existent, and consist mainly of on-the-job training. Since leadership skills are abilities that can be developed, formal training should be in place before the entrusting of administrative duties though this might not always be the case. One critical area leaders and seasoned administrators in education have struggled with over the years is on the issue of equity and equality.

Education has long been recognized as a basic human right. It is a critically-important requisite for the productivity and well-being of individuals and for the economic and social development of entire societies. Because of this, the importance of equal access to education has been emphasized repeatedly in international conventions. In education, the term equity refers to the principle of fairness. While it is often used interchangeably with the related principle of equality, equity encompasses a wide variety of educational models, programmes and strategies that may be considered fair, but not necessarily equal. It has been said that “equity is the process; equality is the outcome,” given that equity which implies what is fair and just may not, in the process of educating students, reflect strict equality what is applied, allocated, or distributed equally. Inequities occur when biased or unfair policies, programs, practices, or situations contribute to a lack of equality in educational performance, results, and outcomes.

Along with a commitment to educational attainment, it is imperative for policymakers to harness their power to make equity-focused policy decisions. All students should be afforded the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their future goals, yet inequities in the education system continue to stifle those opportunities for many students. Educational equality means that all students receive equal access to the same educational pathways. While this is a laudable goal, simply leveling the field is not enough. Government is

required to strive for equity in educational opportunities, providing all students with the unique supports they need to succeed.

A focus on equity takes into consideration the varying personal experiences and social identifiers that impact students' educational opportunities, including race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, family background and others. To address these inequities, education leaders must first understand that diverse students have diverse needs. Government at all levels has the power to advance educational equity by targeting resources and crafting policy that challenge the status quo.

Administrators have a tremendous responsibility to take care of many logistical and managerial tasks at their school on a daily basis. The growing numbers of students seeking for quality education continue to place demands on administrators at all schools and on each level. Ultimately the task for any administrator is trying to provide efficacy of learning in his or her respective school. Efficacy is the ability to articulate values in practice that connect to strong ethical foundations of justice grounded in our laws and society.

Although it may seem to be a daunting task, collective efficacy is vital to the overall success of the school. Administrators must be able to successfully handle logistical tasks such as scheduling and classroom assignments as well as managerial duties such as staff development and training. These play a critical role in leading to equity throughout the school. A plethora of training, knowledge, and resources is needed to assure that all stakeholders know their level of involvement in the collective efficacy of the school.

At its foundation, school leadership for equity is grounded in efficacy, action, and reflection. Productive action is an artifact of equitable practice that consists of high-leverage steps to improve outcomes for every student. Leaders for equity are educators who gracefully stand up and stand for others, demonstrate courage, and take risks to forge improvement. They are grounded by the confidence that they are doing the right thing. They participate in reflection on their practice in accord with others. Leaders for equity are focused on the significance of their work and are motivated by learning in action.

Although equity is attracting growing explicit attention in development discourse, and despite its being of widespread intuitive value, it is often seen as somehow less relevant than some other issues, such as efficiency, economic growth or cohesion and remedying conflict in education. For many governments, development agencies and stakeholders in education, policies that would promote equity are often low on the agenda. There may be a variety of reasons for this. One suggestion is that considerations of equity, inequality of opportunity and redistribution go against the political grain of what has been the most prominent and influential paradigm in educational development over the years.

Statement of the Problem

School administrators are faced with the daunting challenge of satisfying the needs of students as well as members of staff. Hence, the attitudes of administrators toward equity not only affect policy but also influence teachers' beliefs and practices as well as students' overall performance. In modelling those beliefs through daily interactions with staff members, students, and parents, administrators must be willing to confront certain stereotypes. Strong leadership is forged on being consistent and fair when it comes to dealing swiftly and appropriately with the negativity that may come with sensitive issues, and by also treating all stakeholders, students, staff, and parents fairly, equally and with respect. This is achieved by cultivating certain leadership skills

and prominent among those is the principle of equity. Hence, putting the problem statement of this study in a question form “What is the relationship between leadership principle of equity and effective school administration”

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between leadership principle of equity and effective secondary school administration in Rivers State. However, the specific objectives of this study include:

- to examine the relationship between leadership application of fairness and positive change in the administration of secondary school in Rivers State.
- find out the relationship between leadership application of equity and staff’s motivation in the administration of secondary school in Rivers State
- to ascertain the relationship between leadership application of equity and students’ performance in secondary school in Rivers State
- to determine the relationship between leadership application of equity and attainment of educational goals in secondary school in Rivers State

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- What is the relationship between leadership application of fairness and positive change in the administration of secondary school in Rivers State?
- What is relationship between leadership application of equity and staff’s motivation in the administration of secondary school in Rivers State?
- What is the relationship between leadership application of equity and students’ performance in secondary school in Rivers State?
- What is the relationship between leadership application of equity and attainment of educational goals in secondary school in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypothesis further guided this study:

- H0₁ Significant relationship does not exist between leadership application of fairness and positive change in the administration of secondary school in Rivers State?

- H0₂ There is no significant relationship between leadership application of equity and staff's motivation in the administration of secondary school in Rivers State?
- H0₃ There is no significant relationship between leadership application of equity and students' performance in secondary school in Rivers State?
- H0₄ Significant relationship does not exist between leadership application of equity and attainment of educational goals in secondary school in Rivers State?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

One way to understand an equitable relationship between a leader and his subordinates is to study the theory that underlies equity. One of the most explicit and rigorously developed models explaining how individuals evaluate social exchange relationships is John Stacey Adam's "Equity Theory" developed in 1965 (Cosier & Dalton, 1983). Equity works like a system with inputs and outputs. Adam's (1965) "Equity Theory" describes what equity is in relation to a system. The inputs are factors that a person has accomplished (i.e., past experience, education, and work) and perceives to be worthy of some return. The outputs are the returns to the individual's job investment (Cosier & Dalton, 1983). For example, Person p that has worked for company for 40 + years and has helped to improve the reputation of that company views his work as an input. Whereas an output would be how person p is treated by his superior or how person p is compensated. In all of our cases, we will denote equity and inequity in the context of fair or unfair actions in treating other fellow human beings, rather than equity or inequity in the philosophical aspect of equal in terms of qualifications, status, and/or rank. Equity (i.e., fairness) and inequity (i.e., unfairness), are determined by the ratio between inputs and outputs. In a modelling context, inequity exists for Person (p) whenever he perceives the ratio of his outcomes (O) to inputs (I) and the ratio of other's (o) outcomes to other's inputs are unequal (Adams, 1965, p. 280). According to Adams (1965), inequity exists when either of these relationships holds true:

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Equity

Equity in education is a measure of achievement, fairness, and opportunity in education. The study of education equity is often linked with the study of excellence and equity. Based on a broad understanding of its usage in various disciplines and backed up by work on equity in moral and political philosophy. One qualification is needed: equity is a normative concept, one which has a long history in religious, cultural and philosophical traditions (World Bank, 2005) and is concerned with equality, fairness and social justice, topics which are also the subject of fierce debate among educators. Equity in education, in its ideal sense, refers to the principle that all students are afforded equal educational opportunities. As a guiding principle, equity sets a high standard for how students' educational opportunities across the nation ought to be provided. In practice, however, nothing is ever that simple.

The term "Equity" is often confused with Equality, when speaking about education. Equality refers to treating people the same under the law; equity, on the other hand, refers to

giving people the treatment they need. While everyone may be considered equal under the law, individual needs vary person to person. Equity is the attempt to provide different treatments to suit different students' needs in a fair manner. Although the desire to provide equal "Educational opportunity" to all students is noble, there are challenges associated with the successful implementation of this ideal at the ground level.

There will always be debates about the precise meaning of equity, and it is likely that a number of conceptions will compete to be the 'correct' definition. In order to explain the concept of equity we must present one particular point of view but the topic can be approached from many different points of view. Equity is based on the idea of moral equality, the principle that people should be treated as equals. This is the idea that, despite many differences, all people share a common humanity or human dignity and, as a result of this, we must consider how each of them should be treated. This is not the same as treating people equally, rather, it is the idea that all count in the moral calculus.

Once we accept moral equality, this means that when we behave in ways that affect any other people our actions should be morally justifiable. There are certain standards of moral justification, which must in turn govern a leader's actions with respect to serious and non-trivial decisions. Two are particularly important: relevance and consistency. Relevance is about a certain kind of connection between the way in which a leader treats a person and some feature of the person themselves, that some important features of the person have a bearing on the way they are treated. Consistency is about a certain kind of connection between the reasons lying behind how we treat different people (or the same people on different occasions), meaning that they are compatible, they hold together and they are not contradictory. Equity in education means that personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not obstacles to achieving educational potential (fairness) and that that all individuals reach at least a basic minimum level of skills (inclusion). In these education systems, the vast majority of students have the opportunity to attain high level skills, regardless of their own personal and socio-economic circumstances.

Equality in education is a complex and controversial issue that transcends the field of education and is subject to unique political, economic and cultural factors. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2007) suggests that "affair and inclusive system that makes the advantages of education available to all is one of the most powerful lever to make society more equitable" (p.10). This belief is generated from its mission, which is to "promote the policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world" (OECD, 2014). In 2007, the OECD put forward ten practical steps which, it was hoped, would reduce school failure and make society fairer. The report offers an important, comparative perspective on how different countries have handled equity in education. It identified three key are as essential to the delivery of equity in education: the design of education systems, classroom practices, and resourcing. All countries have unique features in their education system. It is important to explore equity issues from a 'within country' perspective as well as from a comparative perspective.

Equality in education is not just the average amount of education provided but, also, its distribution across the population. Levin (2003) argues the aim of government policy "cannot and should not be equality in the sense that everyone is the same or achieves the same outcomes" (p.5). Infact, a state does not have the capacity to ensure that every citizen will achieve the same level of outcome or satisfaction in education. It is, however, able to create reasonable opportunities for people to develop their capacities and to participate fully in society. In other

words, a state has the potential to be equal, enabling and empowering for all individuals (Lynch & Baker, 2005). As yet, opportunity is not distributed fairly and therefore, individuals are not afforded an equal chance to compete in society.

Horizontal and Vertical Equity in Education

First, when comparing any two students, we can recognize that there is a great deal that they may have in common or in contrast with one another. Horizontal equity refers to the equal treatment of equals. In schools, the educational opportunities provided to two comparable individuals ought to be the same. So if two students both qualify for similar special education needs, those needs are provided for in an equal fashion. Or if two students score the same on a placement test, they would be placed in the same setting.

Vertical equity, on the other hand, considers the equal treatment of unequal. This means that schools make sure that they provide Student A with the necessities for his educational needs, while Student B who has different educational needs – is equally provided for. At the classroom level, teachers attempt to meet this need via differentiation, such as providing students who have different reading levels with different classroom texts intentionally meeting those diverse levels. Across a school or district, vertical equity is the attempt to provide each demographic subgroup with the materials and services needed by that group. This opens up challenges as districts try to be fair with opportunities and allocation, yet are providing different resources to sources to various individuals.

Performance Equity

What is the minimum standard of performance we expect each individual student to achieve? On paper, we could easily insist that Student A and Student B, no matter how different, should both successfully accomplish a minimum set of skills and knowledge. But in practice, helping both students to cross that finish line may prove challenging. The backgrounds, intelligences, environments, dispositions, and unique needs of each student contribute to where each student begins a school year and how far they progress during it. Is it equitable to demand that both students achieve the same end point?

The problem of performance equity is exacerbated by the question of who gets to decide the standard of performance and how it will be measured. Should a teacher decide? Should a school, a district, or a state decide? What if different people come to different conclusions about what the minimum standards are? While we want all students to achieve, it is difficult to nail down exactly what it means to “Achieve” in concrete terms, and then to reliably insist that all students, no matter who they are, earn that achievement

Monetary Equity

While schools and districts strive to provide equitable systems of financial allocation, disparities will always remain. For instance, is it fair to provide Student A with more funding toward their educational needs than Student B if Student A’s needs are more diverse or expensive?

But consider how educational funding is also often outside of a school’s control. If funding is based off of the community where the school is, then schools in lower socioeconomic communities have fewer dollars allocated towards them than a school in a wealthier

socioeconomic community. As long as there is socioeconomic segregation, there will be a disparity between how much money any two communities have at their disposal for their schools.

If schools from poverty-stricken communities receive fewer resources from that community, is it fair for a state to provide more resources to that school to help students overcome the challenges associated with an impoverished background, even if it means taking those dollars from a different community? These are not merely educational issues, but economy and political ones as well.

METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a correlation survey research design which sought to collect data on the opinions of the participants. The population of this comprised 1311 principals and vice principals in secondary schools in Rivers State. Simple random sampling technique was used to sample 210 participants for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a 20-item researchers' developed questionnaire titled: Equity as a Leadership Skill for Effective School Administration (ELSESA), covering all the dimensions the study sought to investigate. This questionnaire contained two parts; part 'A' and 'B'. Part 'A' contained demographic information about respondents such as Sex, Age, marital status, year of teaching experience, etc., while part 'B' contained 20 items. The face and content validity of the instrument was established by three experts, two from the Department of Educational Management and Policy and one from the Department of Educational Foundations (Measurement and Evaluation Unit), Faculty of Education, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The suggestions and inputs of the experts were reflected on the final draft copy of the instrument. A reliability coefficient of 0.76 was obtained through test-re-test method. Hence, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient was used to test the earlier formulated research hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed by the researchers together with a research assistant who was briefed on how to distribute and retrieve the copies of the instrument.

RESULTS

H₀₁: Significant relationship does not exist between leadership application of fairness and positive change in the administration of secondary school in Rivers State.

Table 1: Analysis of significant relationship between leadership application of fairness and positive change in secondary school administration

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	Cal. r-value	Crit. r-value	Decision
Fairness	210	87.3	21.2	208	0.247	0.129	H ₀₁ Rejected
Positive Change	210	63.2	12.3				

Table 1 above, showed that r-calculated value is 0.247 while the r-critical value is 0.129. Since the r-calculated value of 0.247 is greater than the r-critical value of 0.129 at 0.05 level of significant and 208 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis is rejected. This therefore means that

there is a significant relationship between leadership application of fairness and positive change in secondary school administration.

H0₂: There is no significant relationship between leadership application of equity and staff's motivation in the administration of secondary school in Rivers State.

Table 2: Analysis of the significant relationship between leadership application of equity and staff's motivation in the administration of secondary school.

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	Cal. r-value	Crit. r-value	Decision
Principle of Equity	210	89.3	24.2	208	0.226	0.129	H0 ₂ Rejected
Staff's Motivation	210	94.2	26.3				

Table 2 above, showed that r-calculated value is 0.226 while the r-critical value is 0.129. Since the r-calculated value of 0.226 is greater than the r-critical value of 0.129 at 0.05 level of significant and 208 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis is rejected. Research hypothesis two was rejected as well, therefore, there is a significant relationship between leadership application of equity and staff's motivation.

H0₃: There is no significant relationship between leadership application of equity and students' performance in secondary school in Rivers State.

Table 3: Analysis of significant relationship between leadership application of equity and students' performance.

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	Cal. r-value	Crit. r-value	Decision
Principle of Equity	210	83.3	24.2	208	0.230	0.129	H0 ₃ Rejected
Performance	210	92.7	35.7				

From table 3 above, the r-calculated value is 0.230 while the r-critical value is 0.129. Since the r-calculated value of 0.230 is greater than the r-critical value of 0.129 at 0.05 level of significant and 208 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis is rejected. Similarly, research hypothesis three was rejected. By implication, there is positive and significant relationship between leadership application of equity and students' performance.

H0₄: Significant relationship does not exist between leadership application of equity and attainment of educational goals in secondary school in Rivers State.

Table 4: Analysis of significant relationship between leadership application of equity and attainment of educational goals

Variables	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	Cal. r-value	Crit. r-value	Decision
Principle of Equity	210	95.4	24.2	208	0.257	0.129	H ₀ Rejected
Educational Goals	210	98.2	26.3				

From table 4 above, the r-calculated value is 0.257 while the r-critical value is 0.129. Since the r-calculated value of 0.257 is greater than the r-critical value of 0.129 at 0.05 level of significant and 208 degree of freedom, the null hypothesis is rejected.

DISCUSSION

Findings revealed that there exists a significant and positive relationship between leadership application of fairness and positive change in secondary school administration. This implies that when leadership is based on fairness, equality and equity. These findings are in line with Stamans, Sheskin and Bloom (2017) which points to evidence that, in general, people value fairness over equivalence. There are situations in which people view equal treatment as fair, but other situations in which they view unequal treatment as fair. This suggests that, when it comes to ‘equity’, fairness trumps equality. School leaders play a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment. Effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling.

Also leadership application of equity has direct relationship with staff’s motivation. An individual’s motivation level is correlated to his perception of equity, fairness and justice practiced by the management. Higher is individual’s perception of fairness, greater is the motivation level and vice versa. While evaluating fairness, employee compares the job input (in terms of contribution) to outcome (in terms of compensation) and also compares the same with that of another peer of equal cadre/category.

The success of the education system depends upon an equal or fair distribution of inputs, processes and outcomes among participants in education with different characteristics. Findings from this study showed that leadership application of the principle of equity has direct correlation with students’ academic performance as well as attainment of educational goals. School leaders can play a key role in improving learning outcomes and attainment of goals by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, students as well as the school climate and environment.

CONCLUSION

A focus on equity takes into consideration the varying personal experiences and social identifiers that impact students’ educational opportunities, including gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family background and others. To address these inequities, education leaders must first understand that diverse students have diverse needs. This study established the positive correlation between the principle of equity and the dimensions studied. Overall, the administrator’s role in building equity in the school is a collaborative effort. It requires large amounts of training and focus by all the stakeholders who are involved. The climate and culture

of the school will be molded in a positive way if the administrative team channels their energy in ways that enhance the improvement of student learning and achievement as well as empowering teachers by simply cultivating the principle of equity and equality.

Recommendations

Based on the finding and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- School leaders should ensure that students and staff are treated fairly, equally and equitably;
- Equity should be at the heart of development programming which could potentially have further benefits on the attainment of educational goals;
- The government should prioritize universal access to education and improve their quality by improving their delivery and strengthening educational institutions;
- Government expenditure should favour disadvantaged group; and
- School administrators should ensure that there is no difference in outcome based on factors for which people cannot be held responsible.

Ethical Considerations of the Study

The ethical considerations of this study are as follows:

Every one's work that was included in this study was acknowledged. Respondents' identities were concealed and the information obtained was handled with utmost confidence. No research data was misrepresented.

Contributions to Knowledge

The paper will be of immense importance to future research in to the subject matter of this study. The issues of equity and equality have been in the front burners for a long time, and needed a serious and long term solutions for efficient and effectiveness administration of secondary schools in Rivers State and beyond. This becomes avertable source of that solution. Government and other employers of lenders will find this work very helpful in advancing equity and fair play in the administration of secondary schools.

Suggestion for Further Studies

The researcher was limited to Port Harcourt, and wished that further studies should be carried out in Rivers State and beyond.

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