



MANAGING PRINCIPALS' CORE ACTIVITIES AND SECONDARY EDUCATION DELIVERY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The concern of this study is to investigate managing principals' core activities and secondary education delivery in Nigeria. It was undertaken as a correlational research design. Three (3) research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study was 283 principals in the 283 public Senior Secondary Schools in Rivers State 200 principals constitutes the sample of the study. The census sampling techniques was used in this study. Two (2) instruments titled 'Managing Principals Core Activities Questionnaire' (MPCAQ) and 'Secondary Education Delivery Questionnaire' (SEDQ) was used to elicit information from the respondents. Experts in the field of study validated the instrument. Reliability of the instrument was by test-retest method and reliability coefficient of 0.76 was obtained indicating that the instruments were reliable and consistent. The researcher and five (5) trained research assistants administered 283 copies of the questionnaire to the respondents. The research questions were answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) and also, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 of significance. The findings reveals that there is a significant relationship between the independent variables (technical skills, conceptual skills, human relation skills) and dependent variable (Secondary education delivery). Conclusively, for effective school operation, principals need to blend both the technical skills, conceptual skill and human relation skills to achieve predetermined educational objectives. It was recommended among others that principals should learn to involve staff and students in the decision-making process for effective secondary education delivery.

Keyword; Managing Core Activities, Technical Skills, Conceptual Skills, Human Relation Skills, Secondary Education Delivery.

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INTRODUCTION

There is no human endeavor that does not seek for proper management for its proper functioning to achieve desired optimal results. All types of organization—schools, hospitals, Churches, business enterprises, government establishments, whether profit –making or non-profit making requires good management to effectively and efficiently function. Managing is one of the most vital human activities that all organizations do as people work together for the accomplishment of a coveted goals.

David-West and Kaegon (2017) opined that management of all levels co-ordinate the human and material resources through the functions of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling the activities of subordinates for the purpose of achieving predetermined objectives. For the scholars it is getting things done with and through others. It is the school managers responsibility to ensure that activities of subordinates are effectively streamlined aimed at effective teaching and learning process. To get subordinates to put in their best efforts, the principal has to understand the emotional, physical and intellectual needs of their subordinates. The individual needs of the subordinates which yearn for satisfaction by the organization, need to be balanced with the organizational needs (goal congruency).

The principal need be in a good position to perform a variety of tasks like administrative, secretarial, clerical, information technology work. A good school principal is one who can effectively perform the core activities for effective secondary education delivery. Awujo (2001) contend that manager who cannot take care of the technical activities of the organization promote unconducive working environment tantamount to the attainment of stated organizational goals. The principal should have the ability and knowledge to use a variety of techniques in the work situation.

The conceptual skills present knowledge or ability of a school manager for more abstract thinking. The principal can easily see the whole through analysis and diagnosis of different states and predict the future. The conceptual skills will help the school managers to look outside the box so as to make quality decision that will satisfy overall educational goals. At every point in time in the school system, the principals must take quality decisions in the school. The necessity to decides is everyday preoccupation of management in all types of organizations. David-West and Abraham (2017) posited that principals needs to decide to choose from alternative course of action in order to achieve a given educational objectives. The decision process is influenced by the unique environment of the decision maker, his organizational position, available knowledge and experience in decision making. An intelligent decision is one which yields the best intelligent response to a situation. Absence of a decision is a decision. This means that a decision not to act or postpone a major decision is a decision. The principal must make decision to make things happen. Robert-Okah (2014) agreed that decision making is a process which one goes through in order to be able to pass intelligent judgment and terminate controversy. The conceptual skills make for effective decision-making process aimed at effective teaching and learning process.

The human relation skills or interpersonal management skills present a school manager's knowledge and ability to work with people at all levels. One of the most critical management tasks is to work with people. Without people, there will be no need for the existence of management and school managers. These skills will enable principals to become leaders and motivate both the staff and students for better accomplishments. It makes for more effective and efficient use of human potential in the school system. The skills are essential for all hierarchical levels in the school organization. Okonoma (2000) opined that the human relation skill

encouraged more employee participation and communication within the organization. Its focus is based on the fact that human beings are the most important element in any organization and have complex behavioural patterns.

A smart school manager is one who enthusiastically work with the human element in the education industry and motivate them to perform for the accomplishment of coveted institutional goals. The principal must have the ability to interact in a healthy manner with others and build strong relationships. Human relation skills involve the process of creating systems and communication channels to enable group employee relationships as well as strong one-on-one relationships. It includes the process of training the employee (teaching and non-teaching staff) for specific roles, addressing their needs, resolving conflicts between employees or between management and employee and creating a positive workplace culture.

Statement of the Problem

The secondary school system cannot effectively operate without the staff and students. The school principal is expected to blend the technical skills, conceptual skills and human relation skills for effective secondary education delivery. Over the years, it appears principals' ability and knowledge to perform variety of specialized task are lacking due to their inability to maintain cordial relationship with staff and students, inability to understand the emotional, physical and intellectual needs of staff, and not involving the staff and student in the decision-making process, which may affect staff productivity and overall achievement of predetermined educational objectives. Thus, cause one to ask the question, are the principals effectively blending the core activities in the school for effective secondary education delivery?

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate managing principals core activities and secondary education delivery in Nigeria post primary schools. Specifically, the study sought to:

- Examine the relationship between principals' technical skills and secondary education delivery.
- Determine the relationship between principals' conceptual skills and secondary education delivery.
- Determine the relationship between principals' human relation skills and secondary education delivery.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

- To what extent does principals' technical skills enhance secondary education delivery?
- To what extent does principals' conceptual skills enhance secondary education delivery?
- To what extent does principals' human relation skills enhance secondary education delivery?

Hypotheses

Th following hypotheses were tested in this study:

- There is no significant relationship between principals' technical skills and secondary education delivery.
- There is no significant relationship between principals' conceptual skills and secondary education delivery.
- There is no significant relationship between principals' human relation skills and secondary education delivery.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was based on the system's theory developed by Ludwig Von Bertalanfy in 1950. Bertalanfy who founded the system's theory and continued to write about systems until his death in 1972, contends that it is a series of interrelated, inter-connected and inter-dependent parts such that the interaction of any part (sub-system) affects the whole system. For the system to be maximally open requires that school manager should continuously strive for a conscious and sustained effort to relate with others in the school system for effective secondary education delivery. Every system is loosely connected with many other sub-systems or sub-units. For instance, the educational system is loosely coupled by the following elements: principal-schools Board, teacher-principal, teacher-teacher, parent-teacher and teacher-student and soon. The relevance of the system's theory simply attempts to look at the school as a unified, purposeful system composed of interrelated, interdependent and interconnected parts such that without the functioning of one part, the others are affected. The principal should respectfully and harmoniously work with members of staff and students so as to achieve desired educational goals.

Relevance of this theory to this study is that a systems approach helps principals see problems as exciting opportunities. These problems offer potential ways to innovate and develop your creativity. Rather than shy away from difficult issues, your employees turn into active problem solvers. A systems theory is hence a theoretical perspective that analyzes a phenomenon seen as a whole and not as simply the sum of elementary parts. The focus is on the interactions and on the relationships between parts in order to understand an entity's organization, functioning and outcomes.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Principals' Technical Skills

The role of school principals in sustaining secondary education in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. The principals are the leaders, controllers and custodians of the academic and extracurricular activities in the school. The principals coordinate the human and material resources through the functions of operating the core activities of the school (technical skills) for the purpose of achieving stated educational goals. The technical skills are the knowledge and capabilities to perform specialized tasks even when the people assigned to do it are absent. Technical skills are knowledge of proficiency in activities involving methods, processes, and procedures aimed at effective teaching and learning process. Ayeni and Akinfolarin (2014) argues that it can be learned and practiced. For the scholars it can be acquired through practical implementation or required activities and tasks. The technical skills can be developed through learning and practical experience.

As the name implies, technical skills give the school management knowledge and ability to use different techniques to achieve what they want to achieve. Nnabuo (2001) sees these skills as not related only for machines, production tools or other equipment, but also, they are skills that will be required to increase performance, design different method of teaching and supervision of instruction and other services to improve the quality of teaching and learning process.

The principal who developed the technical skills through education and experience possesses a perfect solution of challenges in the school system. The skills are most important for first- level managers (messengers, cleaners, clerks, secretary, and laboratory attendant and so on) but not something with high significance level to the top managers (school administrators) but of necessity to be knowledgeable on the core activities of the school. As we go through a hierarchy from the bottom to higher levels, the technical skills, lose their importance if and only if the staff assigned to it are alive to their statutory duties. Suffice it to mention that the principal need to have these skills for the effective operation of the school system. The technical skill is very vital key to the achievement of optimal educational results.

Principals' Conceptual Skills

Principals' conceptual skills as propounded in 1974 by a psychologist Robert Katz when he renamed three management skills; technical human, and conceptual. The conceptual skills present knowledge, ability or capability of school management for more abstract thinking. It helps the principal to look outside the box for quality decision making process that will satisfy the overall educational objectives. The conceptual skill is very key in the effective administration of the school system (Nnabuo, 2001). For effective operation of the school system, decisions have to be made to achieve coveted goals. Nwachukwu (1988) simply put, absence of a decision is a decision. An intelligent decision is one which yields the best intelligent response to a situation. The principal at every point in time in the school system must make decision to make things happen. Nwankwo (2014) agrees that conceptual skills are ability that allow an individual to better understand complex scenarios and develop creative solutions. From a management perspective, Awujo (2001) maintain that conceptual skills are valuable because those who have them can approach complicated workplace situation in a variety of different ways. It includes the ability to view the organization as a whole, understand how the various parts are interdependent, and access how the organization relates to its external environment. These skills allow a principal to evaluate situations and develop alternative course of action.

Bush and West- Burnham (2004) opines those conceptual skills are thinking skills which let a manager grasp complex ideas and come up with answers for difficult problems. These skills are valuable because they allow people to find many solutions for different challenges through deliberate thought and abstract reasoning. These types of skill might allow school managers comprehend relationship between different departments' link them to the functioning of the entire school system, and optimize how these elements interact. Katz (2001) contends that these skills are able to put the company (i.e., the school system) itself in the bigger picture, plan its growth, see potential obstacles, and develop contingency plans on the basis of their concepts.

Nwachukwu (1988) and Okoroma (2000) asserts that the necessity to decide is everyday preoccupation of management. David-West and Kaegon (2017) affirms that principal who are the leaders' controllers and custodians of the academic and extracurricular activities need to decide and continue to decide on the alternative course of action and come up with goal-oriented

solution for the accomplishments of predetermined educational objectives aimed at changing the behavioural pattern of the learner. Conceptual skills reside in the decision-making process allowing the principal to break complex issues into smaller component to see how they are interconnected and to draw conclusions. Awujo (2001) agrees that making the right decision may be a hard nut to crack especially when faced with complex situation. Conceptual skills are vital to both managers and leaders. This means that the school system that exist for good and continue to exist for the sake of the good of the learner must be rooted in right decision-making process at every point in time for the attainment of coveted education objectives.

Principals' Human Relation Skills

Human relations are the skill or ability or capability to work effectively and efficiently through and with other people. Human relations include a desire to understand other abilities in the organization. In all aspects of life, educational managers deal with other people. No matter what one does in the work situation or how well one does in a given task in the organization, the relationship with others is key to success or failure of any organization. Katz (2001) confirms that human relations are not a study in understanding human behaviour in order to manipulate others. Good human relations means being real, positive and honest. Practicing effective human relations means being yourself at your very best. Learning better human relations skills is not a cure-all. Human relation is not just common sense. In the broadest sense, the study of human relations has two goals namely: personal development and growth, and the achievement of an organization's objectives.

Human relation skills are mostly soft skills that help build and maintain healthy and balanced relationships at work. Employees' interpersonal relationship influences an organization's success, and it helps manage and guide these relationships. Effectively employed human relation skills can improve employee retention rates, productivity and creativity. Each of these elements is integral to the continued success of any organization. Abraham (2003) contends that workers should be seen as human beings. School principals should recognize the worth and dignity of human element in the school in relationship with the teachers, non-teaching staff and students to achieve coveted educational goals. The principal should know when to make decision on his own, and when others should join him to take decision, or even decide for him (depending on the situation). Okoroma (2000) puts simply school administrator must know when and how others can be permitted to make decision for him or for themselves.

Ololube (2019) believe that managers at all levels should encourage employees to take additional responsibilities and provide employees with the flexibility to grow and mature. To establish a good human relationship in any organization, Robert-Okah (2014) articulated that the administrator who is the supervising leader should be democratic in dealing with his subordinates by doing among others the following:

- Deal with teachers individually and collectively with a view to finding out their problems, seeking avenues to help them, and getting involved or promoting their welfare; and
- Recognize the abilities of members both as individuals and as a group and ensure that individual and group contributions are acknowledged and possibly reinforced.

The focus of human relation skills is based on the fact that human beings are the most important element in organization and have complex behavioral patterns which the school principals should appreciate at every point in time in the school system. A smart school principal is one who enthusiastically work with people and motivate them to perform in the workplace.

METHODS

This study adopted the correlational research design which determines the relationship between the independent and dependent variables as identified in the study. The population of the study was made up of the 283 public senior secondary school principals in Rivers State. The sample of this study was 200 public senior secondary school principals. The census sampling technique was used. The researcher used two (2) instruments titled “Managing Principals’ Core Activities Questionnaire (MPCAQ) and Secondary Education Delivery Questionnaire (SEDQ) to elicit information from the respondents. The instrument was validated by the researcher and other experts in the field of study. Reliability was by test- retest method. 20 copies of the questionnaire were administered to vice principals who are not part of the study. After two weeks, it was administered again. The two administrations were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation formula(r) and a correlation coefficient of 0.76 was obtained. This implies that the instrument was consistent, reliable and good for the study. A total of 283 copies of the instrument was administered to the respondents by the researcher and five (5) trained research assistants. At the end, 200 copies of the questionnaire were retrieved and used for data analysis, representing 70.6% return rate. The research questions were answered by Pearson Product Moment correlation (r) and the hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (r) at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent does principals’ technical skills enhance Secondary education delivery?

Table 1: Correlation results indicating relationship between PTS and SED

Variable	n	$\sum x^2$	$\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r	Result
Principals’ Technical Skills						
Secondary Education Delivery	200	74.09	78.43	77.1	0.81	Positive Relationship

Table 1 shows the Calculated r-value 0.81 which indicates positive correlation between principals’ technical skills and secondary education delivery in public post primary schools in Rivers State. Thus, principal knowledge and proficiency, learning and practicing on the job, practical experiences, doing variety of task and possessing a perfect solution to challenges in school positively relate to secondary education delivery.

Research Question 2: To what extent does principals’ conceptual skills enhance secondary education delivery?

Table 2: Correlation results indicating relationship between PCS and SED.

Variable	n	$\sum x^2$	$\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r	Result
Principals' Technical Skills						
Secondary Education Delivery	200	70.6	78.43	75.17		Positive Relationship

Table 2 shows a computed coefficient of 0.76 represents positive correlation between principals' conceptual skills and secondary education delivery in public post-primary schools in Rivers State. Thus, engaging in decision making process, carrying subordinates along, priority to teaching and school effectiveness have positive result on secondary education delivery.

Research Question 3: To what extent does principals' human relation skills enhance secondary education delivery?

Table 3: Correlation results indicating relationship between PHRS and SED

Variable	n	$\sum x^2$	$\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	r	Result
Principals' Technical Skills						
Secondary Education Delivery	200	70.41	78.43	71.66		Positive Relationship

Results from table 3 show that the calculated coefficient of r-value 0.88 reveals positive correlation between principals' human relation skills and secondary education delivery in public post-primary schools in Rivers State. The result shows that people-oriented leader, democratic leadership, applying the principle of goal congruency, healthy interaction leading to strong relationship, worker productivity have positive result on secondary education delivery.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho 1: There is no significant relationship between principals' technical skills and secondary education delivery.

Table 4: Correlation results indicating relationship between PTS and SED

Variable	n	r	r-crit	df	p	z-cal	z-crit	Remark	Decision
PTS	200								
SED		0.76±0.500	0.05	198		2.82	±1.96		sig.

In table 4, the null hypothesis tested at 0.05 level of significance was rejected. This indicates that the hypothesis presenting r-value 0.81 and z-cal 2.82 greater than r-crit ±0.500 and z-crit ±1.96 respectively clearly affirms that the subsisting relationship between PTS and SED was significant. This reveals that there is a significant relationship between PTS and SED in public post-primary schools in Rivers State.

Ho 2: There is no significant relationship between principals' conceptual skills and secondary education delivery.

Table 5: Correlation results indicating relationship between PCS and SED

Variable	n	r	r-crit	df	p	z-cal	z-crit	Remark	Decision
PTS	200								
SED		0.76±0.500	0.05	198		2.15	±1.96		sig.

Table 5 null hypothesis tested at 0.05 level of significance was rejected. This implies that the hypothesis presenting r-value 0.76 and z-cal 2.15 greater than r-crit ±0.500 and z-crit ±1.96 respectively vividly shows that the subsisting relationship between PCS and SED was significant. This reveals that there is a significant relationship between PCS and SED in public post-primary schools in Rivers State.

Ho 3: There is no significant relationship between principals’ human relation skills and secondary education delivery.

Table 6: Correlation results indicating relationship between PHRS and SED

Variable	n	r	r-crit	df	p	z-cal	z-crit	Remark	Decision
PTS	200								
SED		0.88±0.500	0.05	198		2.31	±1.96		sig.

In table 6, the null hypothesis tested at 0.05 level of significance was rejected. This indicated that the hypothesis presenting r-value 0.88 and z-cal 2.31 greater than r-crit ±0.500 and z-crit ±1.96 respectively clearly affirms that the subsisting relationship between PHRS and SED was significant. This shows that there is a significant relationship between PHRS and SED in public post-primary schools in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION

The relationship between principals’ technical skills and secondary education delivery

The findings reveal a positive relationship between principals’ technical skills and secondary education delivery in public post-primary schools in Rivers State. This implies that principal’s knowledge and proficiency learning and practicing on the job, practical experiences, doing variety of task and possessing a perfect solution to challenges in school positively relate to secondary education delivery. The test of hypothesis one indicates that there is a significant relationship between principals’ technical skills and secondary education delivery in public post-primary schools in Rivers State. In line with the findings, Ayeni and Akinfolarin (2014) argued that these skills can be acquired through practical implementation of required activities and tasks by the school manager. Thus, Katz (2001) and Nnabuo (2001) endorsed that the technical skills are not related only for machines, production tools or other equipment, but also, they are skills that will be required to increase performance, design and other services aimed at effective teaching and learning process. This is to say that the technical skills which is the core activity of any organization need to be performed effectively for the survival of the organization. The school principal need to learn how to clean, sweep, type documents file documents so on (when the need arise) to keep the school system going. All these put together makes for school effectiveness. Awujo (2001) puts it simply as managers who take care of the technical activities

of the organization cannot promote unhealthy working environment tantamount to the attainment of stated organizational goals. This is why Katz (2001) maintains that the manager need to have the ability and knowledge to use a variety of techniques in the work situation to organizational effectiveness.

The Relationship between Principals' conceptual skills and Secondary Education Delivery

The findings equally reveals that a positive relationship exist between principals' conceptual skills and secondary education delivery in public post-primary schools in Rivers State. This means that engaging in decision making process, carrying subordinates along, priority to teaching and learning process, consistent decision making and aiming to achieve school effectiveness have positive result on secondary education delivery. The test of hypothesis two shows that there is a significant relationship between principals' conceptual skills and secondary education delivery in public post-primary schools in Rivers State. This finding coincides with the study of Katz (2001) which shows a significant relationship between conceptual skill and the motivation of their subordinates. The scholar maintains that organizational leaders need to take quality decision that will spur their subordinates to effectively perform and to achieve stated organizational goals. This is why Okoroma (2000) and Abraham (2003) puts simply, the principal should know when to make decision on his own and when others should join him to take decision or even decide for him (depending on the situation". Bush and West-Burnhan (2004) and Nwankwo (2014) agrees that conceptual skills are abilities that allow an individual to better understand scenarios and develop creative solutions aimed at the attainment of predetermined objectives. The principal must at every point in time at the organizational hierarchy make decisions. Absence of a decision is a decision (Nwachukwu, 1988). An intelligent decision is one which yields the best intelligent response to a situation. Awujo (2001) puts simply, those who have them can approach complicated workplace situation in a variety of different ways which involves the ability to view the organization as a whole, understand how the various parts are interdependent and assess how the organization relates to its external environment. In their study, David-West and Kaegon (2017) endorsed that the principal who is the leader controller and custodian of the academic and extracurricular activities should be in a good position to co-ordinate the human and material resources via quality decision making process for effective teaching and learning to take place geared towards changing the behavioral pattern of the learner. This is to say that the principal need to evaluate situations, develop and choose alternative course of action for effective secondary education delivery.

The relationship between human relation skill and secondary education delivery

The findings went further to show the existence of a positive relationship between principals' human relation skills and secondary education delivery in public post-primary schools in Rivers State. Thus, people-oriented leader, democratic leadership, applying the principle of goal congruency, healthy interaction leading to strong relationship, workers productivity positively achieves secondary education delivery. The test of hypothesis three indicates that there is a significant relationship between principals' human relation skills and secondary education delivery in public post-primary schools in Rivers State. In line with the findings, Nwachukwu (1988) believes that effective use of human relationship in any organization will aid management have the ability to work effectively through and with others in realizing the organizational goals.

The scholar posits that human relations are mostly soft skills that help bind and maintain healthy and balanced relationships at work. This means that effectively employed human relation rates, productivity and creativity is key to the continued success of any organization. Okoroma (2000) affirms that the human relation skills encouraged more employee participation and communication with the organization. The scholar agrees that in the dealing with people, administrators must know when to make decision for himself and when and how others can be permitted to make decision for him or for themselves. That is, the school administrator must have the capability to work with people and enthusiastically move them towards the attainment of stated educational objectives. Robert-Okah (2014) inferred that to establish a good human relationship in any organization, the administrator who is the supervising leader should be democratic in dealing with his subordinates. A smart school principal therefore, is one who work with people happily, honestly, and harmoniously to achieve effective secondary education delivery. Good human relations means being real, positive and honest. In the same vein, Ololube (2019) asserts that managers at all levels should encourage employees to take additional responsibilities and provide employees with the flexibility to grow and mature. Human beings as the most important resource in any organization need to be harmoniously organized, directed and controlled for the purpose of achieving desired organizational objectives.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it was concluded that at every point in time in the education industry, the principals who are the leaders, controllers and custodians of the academic and extra-curricular activities need to effectively blend both the technical skills, conceptual skills and human relation skills for effective teaching and learning process aimed at effective secondary education delivery.

Recommendations

- Principals should learn to blend both the technical skills, conceptual skills and human relation skills for effective secondary education delivery.
- Principals should involve the staff and students in the decision making process that concerns them.
- To build strong relationship at the workplace, the principal should interact in healthy manner devoid of rancor and acrimony.
- The principals should learn to do variety of task happily, honestly and harmoniously for the school system to move forward.
- For successful operation of the school system the principal should maintain goal congruency-balancing the individual needs and the organization needs.
- The staff should be alive to their statutory duty for effective secondary education delivery.
- Government should reward best performing principals to spur others to perform.

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