

THE UTILITY OF CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT
OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: THE CASE OF OKRIKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF
RIVERS STATE OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the preparation of prospective principals before they assume the post of school principal in Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers State of Nigeria. There are seven secondary schools in the local government authority with two principals and two vice principals in each school except Sports Institute, Isaka that has two principals and one vice principal. The total population used for the study is 27 representing all the principals and the vice principals and the instrument used was questionnaire. Three research questions elicited responses from the respondents on whether they received any type of training before assuming the post of a principal; the relationship that exists between him/her and the staff and how long would they like to be kept on the job. The study recommended among other things that prospective principals should, after graduation from the university, be given six months or one year of intensive training to enable them achieve success.

Keywords: School, CPD, Okrika, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

Principals of schools are looked upon as administrators whose duty is to plan, organize, communicate and control activities in their various schools. They make use of human, material and capital resources of an institution to achieve organizational goals and set objectives. The principal as an instructional leader focuses on so many duties such as teaching and learning functions of the school; defining and communicating the schools vision and mission etc. Hallinger (2003) described instructional leadership as strong, directive leadership focused on curriculum and instruction from the principal, which should not preclude consideration of other complimentary roles. Regrettably, what is going on in the school system did not show that some of these principals really understand what leadership stands for or do not portray it as they are performing their various tasks.

Leadership means to lead, to show others how to do things the right way. Stogdill (1950) defined leadership as the process of influencing the activities of an organized group towards goal setting and goal achievement. Lipham (1964) stated that leadership could be taken as initiation of a new structure or procedure for accomplishing an organization's goals and objectives. Koontz, O'Donnell and Weihrich (1980) defined leadership as influence, the act or process of influencing people so that they will strive willingly towards the achievement of group goals. Ukeje and Okorie (1990) stated that leadership has been identified by researchers

as a crucial factor I institutional effectiveness as well as a major factor in the determination of the success and progress not only of an institution but also of a nation. From these definitions, one can see that nobody can give what he does not have the wherewithal to execute them.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Principals and teachers are the eyes and ears of parents in an educational institution. The principals are mandated to execute the affairs of the schools to their best knowledge and ability in order to achieve educational goals. This can only happen if the principal is well versed with what leadership stands for and other duties associated with it. Where there is poor leadership one should not expect magic to occur in the school system. The principal is an umbrella cushioning all the staff in the school. He is expected to show good leadership by doing things the proper way, communicating to the staff and students and letting the school community be abreast with changes in the education sector thereby implementing it at the right time.

Unfortunately, some of these principals are found wanting and one stands to ask whether they are prepared for such a vital post in educational sector. Inefficiency and ineffectiveness of principals send a very bad signal to the institution such as indiscipline among staff and students, cheating and poor academic performance in external examination, turning school property to private use, poor emotional school climate and others. The above debilitating and nauseating social phenomenon therefore call for questioning. The researcher deems it necessary to investigate the preparations given to the principals before they assume the position of principalship.

2. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

The success of any establishment depends, among other things, on the leadership exhibited in that workplace. Quality leadership is determined by the products of an institution which are able to hold their own in the comity of nations. Leadership development ought to encourage boundary-breaking thinking. This implies that leaders are reflective, interrogating and challenging their own and other's assumptions, and entrepreneurial with a view to progressing schools from traditional sites of learning to innovative, more enlightened and inclusive ones (Scott and Rarieya, 2011) In an attempt to find out "what types of mistakes do leaders tend to make", Bulach, Boothe and Pickett (1997), asked 375 Georgia educators who were enrolled in graduate programmes to list and rank the types of mistakes their administrators made.

Fifteen categories of mistakes were identified: poor human relations skills, poor interpersonal communication skills, a lack of vision, failure to lead, avoidance of conflict, lack of knowledge about instruction/curriculum, lack of ethics or character, forgetting what it is like to be a teacher, inconsistency, showing favoritism, failure to hold staff accountable, failure to follow through, snap judgments, and interrupting with public- address-system announcements. Davis (1997) was of the opinion that principals who were abrasive, arrogant, aggressive, uncaring and inattentive to the needs of others were far likely to lose their jobs. According to him, such characteristics impeded the development of support among teachers, parents and community agencies. Bulach, Boothe and Pickett (1997) maintained that principals' other mistake was inability to motivate staff. According to them, many administrators did not know how to motivate staff except through position, reward and coercion.

The job of the principal is very challenging. The principal has to have passion and vision, and use that to encourage other teachers and then achieve success. Training of prospective principals involves various activities like problem-based learning and role playing which would help the aspiring principals to study the use of data to measure school performance, methods of examining school's tone, culture and climate; understanding the linkages between standards, the curriculum and performance assessments (Ruszkowski www.cscglobal.com). They are meant to learn how to allocate school resources such as, time, money and staff. They should be taught how to support the school vision; create avenues of developing staff in order to improve student learning. Prospective principals should be taught that there is not just one way of solving problems; other options should be employed to put things right. Observations had it that principals of schools are not properly prepared for the job they are meant to do and this is because more attention is being paid to the theory aspect neglecting the skills that the prospective principals need to translate that knowledge into practice. In support of this, Schmuck (1988: 6) wrote that:

“Universities... have traditionally provided sound academic preparation while offering only minimal attention to transforming theory into practice. Moreover, the academic course work in personnel evaluation, law, business management, clinical supervision, and public relations, although competently presenting technique and technical knowledge, offers little opportunity to use that knowledge in coping with real people in real schools”.

Aspiring administrators require spending long hours, reading, writing and contemplating potential solutions to problems. Anderson (1989b) maintained that beginning principals in Oregon and Washington reported of fragmented time, feelings of being overwhelmed, and the time demands of the principalship as an entry-year surprise. Researchers like Marrion(1983); Anderson(1989b) found that newly employed principals were critical of their pre-service training for failing to prepare them for the rapid-fire pace of a principal's job.

McCormick (1987: 9), citing the 1986 National governors Association report “Time for Results”, said that the certification of principals is currently not based on results, but on educational requirements. “Too often, a candidate's ability to provide instructional leadership does not have to be demonstrated and is not even considered.” The National Governors Association report recommends that public schools become more actively involved in the preparation of principals by making clinical experiences a key element in training, certifying, and hiring.

In 1989, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration published its agenda for reforming the preparation of school administrators. The Board, among other things, recommended the raising of standards for entrance to preparation programmes, ensuring the quality of faculty, requiring a doctorate in educational administration for administrators in charge of a school or school system, devoting one full-time year each to academic residency and to field residency, and establishing formal relationships between universities and school districts to create sites for clinical study and field residency. The Board also advocated establishing a national professional standards board to administer a national certification examination that states would require candidates for licensure to pass.

In 1990, The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) made a report on: “Principals for 21st Century Schools”, reaffirming that “major Surgery” is needed in

preparation programmes for school principals. The Leadership in Educational Administration Development (LEAD) suggested that changes in administrator training programmes are needed in three areas: the syllabus, the setting and the process. According to Mojkowski (1991:11), the setting is in connection with technical skills such as resource acquisition and management and information use with a heavier concentration on people management skills, such as creating dissonance, encouraging risk taking, and forging interdependencies and,

“Training administrators for restructuring schools must prepare them to unleash and direct their powerful people resources toward the mission, goals and improvement priorities of the schools...He also suggested that the appropriate setting for developing leaders are within schools that are restructuring or planning to restructure. Such contexts provide a fertile environment for blending theory with practice and for forming a learning community within the school....”

At the same time, Mojkowski stated that education and training process should integrate learning and work; emphasize action-oriented, problem-solving approaches to training; focus on the development of teams and be comprehensive, coherent and continuous.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on descriptive survey designed to identify the quality of principals Okrika Local Government Area of Rivers state. Okrika have seven public secondary schools. Each secondary school has junior and senior sections. The senior section has one principal and one vice principal. The same thing applies to the Junior Section of the school. All the principals and their vice were used for the study. The main instrument for the study is questionnaire. The questionnaire titled “Empowerment of would-be-principals” that contained twenty item questions, well structured, open-ended and options were used for the study. The instrument was face and content validated by colleagues in the Department of Psychology, Guidance and Counseling. A pilot test was carried out with the use of test-retest technique within an interval of one week. This was to test for reliability and consistency. The questions were written in simple English Language to avoid ambiguity.

4. DISCUSSION

The study found that 81.5% of the principals did not receive any form of training before they made principals of secondary schools and 18.5%) were undecided whether briefing was part of the training. On the whole 27 principals and Vice-principals were used for the study. In table one, the study revealed that 22 (81.5%) did not receive any formal training before they were made principals of school. 5 (18.5%) were undecided but asked in their questionnaire whether skeletal briefing is part of the training.

This simply indicates that many principals were not duly prepared for the enormous task given to them. The United States Department of Education (1987: 112) stated that the role of the principal is one of the most influential positions affecting school effectiveness. It further stated the familiar adage “so goes the principal, so goes the school” which characterizes the importance of a principal’s leadership. It is essential that ministries of education develop a comprehensive set of induction procedures for orienting and supporting newly hired principals.

Daresh (1987a) emphasized that aspiring administrators need to spend a great deal of time reflecting on and analyzing the skills they learn in the field and the activities in which they are engaged. Consistent with Marion's (1983) findings, Anderson (1989b:7), found that newly employed principals were critical of their pre-service training that failed to prepare them for the rapid-fire pace of a principal's job.

Some type of relationship exists between the principal and staff. This finding shows that a lot of factors must have contributed to the unhealthy situation. It could be that the principal was seen by the staff as not qualified to assume that position so they decided to make administration very difficult for him. It could emanate from the attitude of the principal towards the staff. It boils down to the fact that the principal was not prepared formally for that post. This falls in line with Bridges (1977:8) findings that "periods of emotional tranquility are punctuated by episodes of emotional turbulence" in a manager's workday. According to Bridges one principal stated, "I had no training for dealing with it and you need it".

The National Association of Elementary school principals (NAESP, 1990), stated that for principals of 21st century schools "major Surgery" is needed in their preparatory programme. It is important to emphasize that school administrators deal with emotions constantly and prospective principals should be educated on that. Amanchukwu (2003) emphasized that education managers should take the "lead" in employing humane and caring climate of education by encouraging leaders to be responsive to others, providing a more humanistic, heart-focused work-site for sensitively leading cross planning, organizing and monitoring education.

5. CONCLUSION

The study has re-enforced previous literature and several empirical studies that suggests that good governance and good quality education and human resources management are keys to sustainable development hence both governance and education are two-sides of the same coin. It further reiterate that, the training and retraining of prospective school principals and key staff, is vital to the overall efficiency and effective of the entire educational system and would sustain higher quality for human and material development (see Amanchukwu, 2002). The paper thus recommend as follows:

- That school principals should undergo six months or one year intensive training in order to prepare them for the turbulent situations that occur in the school system.
- Selection of principals should be on merit and not on any other means.
- In-service training should be compulsory for all principals

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