Principals' Leadership Attributes: A predictor for Secondary School Effectiveness

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Abstract

The anticipation to certify the effectiveness of secondary schools education in most of the third world countries today is determine by the principals' Leadership Attributes which could be quantified based on the leadership training acquire by most principals. This paper examines the influence of Principals' Leadership Attributes as a predictor for Secondary School Effectiveness towards students' academic achievement. The study using secondary schools information with discusses analysis of existing supportive literature on the subject matter for its theoretical foundation to explore the principals' Leadership Attributes and its contribution to School Effectiveness. With the principals' Leadership Attributes which is mostly needed among schools principal in this ever changing world to sustain the Secondary Schools improvement and effectiveness also determines the growth and development of a nation. This paper revealed that, not much substantial packages are put in place to improve the Leadership Attributes of principals among secondary schools in Nigeria most especially in Niger State North Central part of the country. This paper concluded that, leadership training for school principals will assist in improving their Leadership Attributes to overcome the numerous challenges facing most school principals nowadays and thereby contributes immensely towards the effectiveness of secondary schools in Niger state.

Keywords: Principals' Leadership Attributes, School Effectiveness, Leadership Training, Niger State.

Introduction

Principals' leadership attributes plays a vital role towards student's achievements and general school effectiveness. Studies have shown that, principals' leadership attributes is concerned with the overall improvement and effectiveness of the school, and the academic success of every student (Goldring & Pasternack, 1994).

However, the contemporary educational environment has proven to be the greatest challenge for majority of school principals in leading their schools to meet up with the required proficiency levels of student achievements as well as general effectiveness of the school (Matibe, 2007). Meanwhile, professional leadership training is very vital for school principals in order to enable them to develop and improve their leadership Attributes to meet up with the necessary demands of secondary schools in Niger State (Mathibe, 2007).

The interest towards strong educational leadership in 21st Century is based on the certainty that, principals' leadership Attributes in schools makes a substantial difference to student achievement and the effectiveness of secondary schools. The contemporary global perception about the sustainability and effectiveness of the secondary school is that, principals' leadership training is highly significant in order to provide the best possible Leadership Attributes that would reward high educational achievement on students. Many countries are apprehending that their main resources are their citizens, for a country to peak up the race and compete with other nation in terms of development depends progressively on the growth of a highly skilled personnel. This requires highly trained principals and dedicated teachers (Bush, 2009).

Education as field of study has finally embrace school leadership as an essential ingredient in reform, worthy of investment in its own right. Principals are faced with escalating challenges based on the various demands from different classes of students, states and districts, to meet up with these demands and reform, school principals should be well prepared to change their leadership attributes towards schools effectiveness, not just manage buildings and budgets (Mitgang, 2012).

Principal is in better position to safeguard the outstanding teaching and learning in every classroom within the secondary schools. In fact, principals' leadership attributes is a factor succeeding the quality teaching among school towards influencing teaching and learning condition. A research conducted by university of Minnesota and Toronto accentuated that, based on the data analysed from 180 schools in nine state of United State of America, there is no particular school improving its student achievement in the absence of strong educational leadership (Mitgang, 2012).

Stanford University's Linda Darling-Hammond, a leading education scholar and national reform voice, emphasizes the profound impact good leaders have on teaching quality: "It is the work of the school principals that enables teachers to be effective. The ability of the teachers to use what they know in other to produce successful students depends on the influence of the principals' leadership attributes. And it is the principal with good leadership attributes can retain high quality staff, teachers' decisions about whether to stay in a school depends on the quality of administrative support (Mitgang, 2012).

Principal as a school leader

Principal as a school leader "needs to be prepared to deal with the complex nature of the principal's responsibilities and unavoidable social, economic, technological, political and cultural problems that can serve as barrier to improvements efforts." The relationship between the principals and their subordinate staff are of utmost importance. However, they lead both internal constituencies and external constituencies to influence the environment and get support for the development and effectiveness of school programs (Isaacs, 2003). The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) was one of the first organizations to look into necessity of principals' leadership proficiencies.

They emphasized the ability of the principal as school leader must be able to accomplish the followings:

- Design effective learning environments for a wide range of students
- Develop teams, delegate responsibilities and include team members from the community.
- Comment orally and in writing with acute sensitivity to a diversity of public.
- Motivate students and staff to reach high expectations.
- Use technology to assist in instructing students and to manage the school.
- Evaluate programs and be accountable for student learning.
- Value and integrate culturally diverse students and staff into the life of the school,
- Work within the political forces which shape schooling (Cunningham, 2000).

Secondary Schools in Nigeria

The first secondary school in Nigeria was established in 1859 by the Christian missionaries, certain reforms taken into consideration in the early days of secondary education up to the late 1980s (Arikewuyo, 2009).

There were three types of secondary schools in the country, and such includes the secondary modern school, secondary commercial school and secondary grammar school. The secondary modern school was a three-year program, which offered a general education program, mostly in humanities, for primary school leavers, who could not pass the competitive examination to the secondary grammar school. The secondary commercial school was a four-year course, which focused on commercial oriented subjects such as business studies, commerce, shorthand, typewriting, accounting and bookkeeping. The products of commercial and modern schools were allowed to proceed to the secondary grammar school to spend three years instead of the normal five-year duration. The secondary grammar school was a five-year duration school, which offered a range of subjects, including humanities, social science, technical, vocational and science subjects, leading to the award of West African School Certificate (WASC) (Arikewuyo, 2009).

All of these categories of secondary schools aimed at producing desirable and productive citizen that would contribute to the development of the nation (Arikewuyo, 2009).

This is synonymous to the aim of the present secondary schools in Nigeria. The Federal Government of Nigeria in 2004, highlighted in the National Policy on education, that the broad aims of secondary education is to prepare students for useful living within the society and preparing them for higher education (Ekundayo, 2010).

To achieve the above expectation, there is need for an effective school leader that would energise the activities of the teachers to maximise the utilization of their potential towards high student's achievement.

Needs for principals' leadership training in Niger state

Over the years, principals of secondary schools in Nigeria have been accused of various lapses and offences. They are said to be inefficient and accused of failing to provide direction and adequate leadership for their schools as a result of the inadequate leadership, managerial and administrative training. Thus this attributed to the falling standard of education which is highly related to the inefficiency of the principals (Arikewuyo, 2009).

Principals' leadership training has a great relationship with quality leadership behaviour which is extremely essential for school improvement and student outcomes. Principals' leadership behaviour is second only to classroom teaching as an influential factor to pupils' academic achievements (Hallinger, 1998). Quality teaching contributed about 75% while principals' leadership behaviour contributed about 25% to student achievements. 25% of principals' leadership has a significant impact in influencing teachers to deliver their 75% teaching abilities and skills to bring about quality teaching in the school. They conclude that: "There is not a single documented case of a school successfully turning around its pupil achievement in the absence of leadership" (Leithwood, Kenneth, Christopher and Hopkins, 2006).

The essentiality behind the principals' leadership training and development is to modify the behaviour of the school principals to meet up with the yearning aspiration of challenges facing the school principals as a result of the escalating pressure and complex nature of their roles (Leithwood *etal*., 2006). In many countries, school leaders begin their professional careers as teachers and progress to headship via a range of leadership tasks and roles, often described as "middle management" (Bush, 2009). He further noted that, principals continue to teach following their appointment, particularly in secondary schools. This leads to a widespread view that teaching is their main activity.

Bush, (2009) assert that, the perception of principals to emerge after long teaching experience and teaching qualification cannot actually be a solution to the responsibilities of the present days principals, they need extra skills in leadership, management, and administration. Although in the twenty-first century, there is a growing realisation that principal ship is a specialist occupation that requires specific preparation. The reasons for this paradigm shift include the following:

- Recognition that leadership training is a moral obligation
- Recognition that effective leadership training and development make a difference
- The expansion of the role of school principal
- The increasing complexity of school contexts

Leadership training as a moral obligation

Watson, (2003) assert that, additional responsibilities imposed on the principals, and the greater complexity of the external environment, increase the need for principals to receive effective training for their demanding role. Being qualified only for the job of classroom teacher is no longer appropriate and cannot be the only measure for filling in the vacuum of challenges facing school principals. As this view has gained ground, it has led to the notion of "entitlement." As professionals move from teaching to school leadership, there should be an entitlement for them to be trained to enable them to develop the leadership skills for the effectiveness of their job (Watson, 2003).

Requiring individuals to lead schools, which are often multimillion-dollar businesses, manage staff, care for children meeting up the demands of the stakeholders , without specific preparation, may be seen as foolish, even reckless, as well as being manifestly unfair for the new incumbent (Bush, 2009).

Effective leadership training makes a difference

The belief that specific professional training makes a difference to the quality of school leadership is underpinned by research on the experience of new principals (Bush, 2009). Research with first-year principals in USA and England, identifies the "culture shock" of moving into principal ship for the first time without actually having the leadership training, many new principals "flounder," as they attempt to juggle the competing demands of the post offer to them (Sackney & Walker, 2006). Leadership development is a "strategic necessity" because of the intensification of the principal's responsibilities (Brundrett, 2006).

Leadership training and development based on the view that leaders are "made not born." Those who appear to have "natural" leadership qualities acquired them through a learning process, systematic preparation are more likely to produce effective leaders rather than inadvertent experience. There is a widespread belief that specific preparation makes a difference (Avolio, 2005).

Heck, (2003) uses the twin concepts of professional and organisational socialisation as a lens to examine the impact of training. Professional socialisation includes formal training, where it occurs, and the early phases of professional practice. Organisational socialisation involves the process of becoming familiar with the specific context where leadership is practised.

The expansion of the role of school principal

The additional responsibilities imposed on schools' principals in many countries make great demands on them, especially the pioneer among them. These demands emanate from two contrasting sources.

Firstly, the accountability pressures facing principals are extremely great and growing, in many countries. Governments, parents and the wider public expect a great deal from their schools and these expectations are transmitted directly to the principals (Walker, 2006).

Crow, (2006,), explained that, the pressures facing principals in developing countries are very different and even having heavy obligation than those in the world's richest nations, in many countries in Africa principals manage schools with poor buildings, little or no equipment inadequate teachers, lack of basic facilities such as water, power and sanitation, and some learners are facing the challenge of hunger (Bush, 2009).

Secondly, the role of school principals is expanding as a consequence of the devolution of powers from local, regional or national bureaucracies to school level in many countries. England and New Zealand, say that, the "single largest change" in both countries has been the introduction of site-based management, linked to increasing accountability, leading to principals being positioned as "the public face of the school." (Watson, 2003). He added that, similar trend in Europe, arising from increasing demands from local communities to have a greater say in the ways they are governed. Watson, (2003) added that devolution produces increasing complexity in the role of the head of the school and heightened tensions for principals.

The increasing complexity of school contexts

Rapid changes around the world with rise in global economic leads to wide spread recognition that education holds the key to becoming, and remaining, competitive. Inevitably, this has led to increased accountability pressures on site-based leaders, who have to deal with increasing complexity and unremitting change (Hallinger & Heck, 1998).

Contribution of technological and demographic change to the complexity, affecting school leaders and comments that these changes must also impact on the nature of leadership preparation (Crow, 2001).

Principals' leadership training processes in Niger state

There are numbers of processes involved in principals' leadership training, such includes the followings: Experience, Mentoring, Coaching, Facilitating and Classroom training.

Work experience is broadly defined, as means of including specific action of learning, it provides a mechanism to gain knowledge of the job, specifically allowing one to improve their analytical and conceptual understanding of the position he occupied. It also improves self-awareness by allowing one to understand what actions lead to favourable results and what action leads to unfavourable once (Brett, 2010). Mumford, (2000) described experience as a process where an individual leader moves from simple knowledge structures and skills to complex and integrated structures and skills. In sum, experience appears to be a necessary component of principals' leadership training (as cited in Brett, 2010). Principals in Nigeria must have long years of teaching experience, before they can meet up the condition of principal ship, which resulted to the acquiring of some basic skills (Arikewuyo, 2009).

Classroom training: Appear to have a greater impact on knowledge acquisition, but depending on the structure of the educational process, classroom training can also provide both formal and informal feedback, which can then impact the skills, knowledge and self-awareness to the school principal. (as cited in Brett, 2010). Classroom training is seems to be the most useful technique for increasing individual knowledge, which could lead to performance improvement and also has the potential to increase self-awareness (Brett, 2010).

Mentoring: This often led to increase in knowledge and self-awareness, a mentor is typically someone within the organization who assists in impacting skills and knowledge to the learner/trainee. Mentoring refers to a process where an experience person within the organisation provides individual support to another professional (Bush, 2006).

Coaching: This has similar outcomes with mentoring, but the individual involve in the transfer of knowledge comes outside the organization. The coaching aspect of training is critical to principals' leadership, as it allows the school

principals the opportunity to discuss the leadership skills and techniques learned in the classroom and how they are applicable to their various schools (Conger, 2003).

Facilitation: This is the programmes provided by the English National College for School Leadership (NCSL) and is often one of the widely applauded dimensions of such programmes. It is particularly effective where the facilitators have specific knowledge of the contexts in which participants work (Bush, 2006).

Component of Principals' leadership training and development program

Cranston, (2008) added that, the major goal is to provide the principals and assistant principal with an opportunity to hone existing skills and to acquire new skills needed for the principal ship through a unique mentoring experience with five components:

➢ Advanced Leadership Seminar Series
➢ Partnering with a Mentor Principal
➢ Seminar Related Field Experiences
➢ Partnering with a Cohort Member
➢ Networking Sessions

Advanced Leadership Seminar Series: A series of Advanced Leadership Seminar session's scheduled throughout the year provides stimulating learning opportunities including: reflective readings in current professional literature and research; Socratic dialogue and discussions; and a sharing of experiences, insights, concerns, and successes. The content of the seminars serve as the lens through which aspiring principals can focus on the current needs of principals, their changing roles as school leaders, the development of more effective instructional programs, school-wide efforts and leadership Competencies (Cranston, 2008).

Seminar Related Field Experience: Assistant principals in the Advanced Leadership Seminar series will participate in small group seminar related field experiences involving full day site visits to mentor principal schools (Cranston, 2008).

Partnering with Mentor Principal: The Mentor Principal participates in some seminar sessions, will communicate via phone/e-mail; will visit the assistant principal in his/her home school; and arrange for school inter-visitations. All these activities will be designed to promote an on-going relationship built on collegiality, trust, adult learning strategies, and sensitivity to individual needs. Assistant Principals travel to mentor school sites as a network, and are encouraged to communicate within their group (or with colleagues in their seminar cohort) to share experiences and resources, and to follow up on program activities (Cranston, 2008).

Partnering with a Cohort Member: Each assistant principal is expected to self-assess their School Leadership Competencies, based on this self-assessment each person will develop certain Goals for the school year to enhance their professional competencies.

The assistant principals then select a peer from the group to function as their support person throughout the year. The paired buddies are expected to contact each other at least twice per month to support and encourage each one another, as they work toward attaining their year-long professional goals (Cranston, 2008).

Networking Sessions: Networking sessions are designed to facilitate and maximize opportunities for the ALPAP (Advanced Leadership Program for Assistant Principals) participants to engage in informal discussions with their colleagues around topics not covered in the seminar sessions. During the initial seminars, participants are asked to indicate areas and topics for further exploration. A series of sessions are then scheduled for after-school meetings with mentor principals and/or the ALPAP coordinator and Leadership Coach facilitating. Participants attend a minimum five networking sessions (Cranston, 2008).

Participant Testimonials: "I was motivated by the thought of learning more. I want to be the best principal I can. I want to constantly explore opportunities to further extend my knowledge and expertise in the area of leadership." "The seminar was very inspirational and motivational, identifying and sharing how to become an effective and successful leader." "I walked away from the seminar realizing that I, as a leader, must have a clear vision and be able to articulate and share my vision with my school community (Cranston, 2008).

Overview of the Study

Globally, interest in leadership training and development is predicated on the wide spread assumption that it will lead to the positive change of principals' leadership behaviour and it is highly related to the school improvement, and student achievement, which is very identical in Nigerian context; where the national policy on education in 2004 explains the aim of education in Nigeria is to produce productive citizen that would add value to the national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). The empirical evidence of principals leadership training is very scanty and therefore to assess the impact becomes very difficult due to the inadequacy of the empirical proves. The purposes of educational leadership are wide and varied. The efficacy of leadership activities needs to be tested against all these varieties of criteria in other to obtain a comprehensive assessment of its impact, which tend to be difficult and complex (Hallinger & Heck, 1996) .

Principals' leadership behaviour is widely accepted as the second most important factor affecting student achievement after quality classroom teaching, it is an antecedent variable that proves its indirect influence towards students achievement. This makes it difficult to assess the nature and extent of principals' leadership to student outcomes (Hallinger *etal*., 1996).

Conclusion

In the past decade, there has been a global trend towards more systematic provision of leadership training and development program, particularly for the development of principals' leadership attributes, it is noted that in 1980, "no nation in the world had in place a clear system of national requirements agreed upon frameworks of knowledge and

Standards of preparation for school principals". In the twenty-first century, many countries are giving this a high priority, recognising its potential for the improvement of principals' leadership attributes towards school effectiveness (Hallinger etal., 1996).

Principals' leadership training is very vital towards attributing positive changes to leadership attributes of the school principals. It is generally accepted that effective leadership is vital for successful schooling and where there is failure, poor leadership attributes is often a major contributory factor. Given the importance of educational leadership, principals' leadership training should not be left to chance. It should be a deliberate process designed to produce the best possible leadership for schools and colleges. The trend towards systematic training of secondary schools and college leaders in changing their attributes towards the effectiveness of secondary schools has advanced to the point where the argument is widely accepted (Bush, 2006).

This trend is encapsulated most powerfully by the countries like France, Singapore and South Africa. Candidates undertake "centralised" training and learning program before becoming principals and receive national accreditation on successful completion of the activity. Much of the development work is work based, recognising that leadership practice takes place in schools. Increasingly, current or former principals are involved in designing, leading and delivering leadership programmes, showing that "craft" knowledge is increasingly respected (Bush 2006). He further added that many countries; principals' leadership training is no longer an optional activity in other to improve the principal' leadership attributes of which eventually contributed to school effectiveness. Rather, new principals require certification to practise, so that teachers, parents, school communities and governments can be satisfied that their schools will be led by qualified people.

Therefore, it is crucial to further investigate this principals' leadership training as it is the sole training that can make a difference in the leadership attributes of the principals in secondary schools. If we want our principals to take the Niger state education system to the desirable level, principals must be supported in every possible way to ensure their success in leading their schools to be effective the through changing their leadership attributes.

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