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CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY PRINCIPAL IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ISUIKWUATO LGA OF ABIA STATE

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated the Challenges Encountered by principal in improving students' academic performance in secondary schools, in Isuikwuato LGA; of Abia State. The study used descriptive survey design. The sample composed of 10 schools out of 20 public schools in Isuikwuato. Sample size is 300, 30 teachers from each of 10 schools. The researcher collected data using questionnaires. Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results were presented in summary form using Frequency distribution tables, and bar charts. The study established that there was an association between the school's performance and its principal's Instructional management practices. Findings also revealed that principals used several approaches in supervising the implementation of instructional practices. Some approaches like use of students to monitor teacher lesson attendance and visiting class to observe a teacher were rarely used. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education and (SEMB), provide more learning materials and facilities like science laboratories and libraries.

Keywords: Principal, Students and Academic Performance

Introduction
A growing body of evidence underscores a significant and positive relationship between effective leadership and student learning and achievement. Leadwood, et al (2004), states that among school-related factors; leadership is second only to classroom instruction in its contribution to student learning. The head teacher's skills in school management influences the behavior of the school in terms of how teachers teach, how much students learn and the overall school performance. This is because the significant properties of key decisions made within the schools are made with the consent of the head teacher (Charles et al, 2012). Many scholars have acknowledged that the role of school principal is the most significant in enhancing school performance and students achievements (Kearney, 2005; Garage, 2009. It has been found that effective leaders develop school climates and cultures that help motivate both the students and teachers leading to the creation of better teaching and learning environments (Gamage et al, 2012). Besides, in most school systems, the principal is required by the systematic authorities to improve student learning and is held accountable for it by building commitments in developing a shared vision for motivating and energizing the teachers and students (Ross and Gray, 2006, cited in Gamage et al, 2012).

The principal has the pivotal role of providing the leadership for the school and its wider community. Review of research on the principal's role in school effectiveness concluded that "strong administrative leadership was among those factors within a school that make a difference in student learning" (Poirier, 2009). The principal's role is a complex one, which includes being accountable to the public, building community relations, dealing with crises and political issues, overseeing discipline, enhancing instruction, resolving managerial problems and creating school culture. The principal's unique role in the school is that they have an influence on student achievement (Poirier, 2009).

This study was guided by the systems theory of organizations developed by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in the early 1950s. Systems theory is an alternative to the classical and neo-chapter, the author proposes to explore the literature to examine whether there is sufficient evidence to sustain this claim from classical organizations theories which the researcher felt cannot suffice because of their emphasis on schools as fragmented and closed social units independent of external forces (Backer, 1973, cited in Oso and Onen, 2005). The only meaningful way to study an organization (including a school) is to regard it as a system (Oso and Onen, 2005).

Schools are social systems in which two or more persons work together in a coordinated manner to attain common goals (Norlin, 2009). This definition is useful, for it specifies several important features of schools: (1) they consist, ultimately of people (2) they are goal-directed in nature (3) they attain their goals through some form of coordinated effort and (4) they interact with their external environment. Social systems theory generally deals with open systems because it is almost impossible to envisage a social system, such as a school, that is not interactive with its environment (Owen & Valesky, 2011). They hold the view that an education institution is an open system that receives resources (inputs) from the environment and transforms (process) them into products (outputs).

It has been reported that the leadership behavior of a principal and his/her role as instructional leader has a significant impact on creating more effective schools leading to higher levels of student achievements (Quirin, 2002). As instructional leader, the principal is the pivotal point within the school who affects the quality of teacher instruction; the height of student achievement and the degree of efficiency in school functioning. Findley and Findley (1992), state that "If a school is to be an effective one, it will be because of the instructional leadership role of the principal" Research on effective schools indicates that the principal is pivotal bringing effective schools.

Gamage et al (2009) claim that although the principal must address certain managerial tasks to ensure an efficient school, the task of the principal must be to keep focused on students' achievement. If our goal is to have effective schools, then, we must look at ways to emphasize instructional leadership. Various instructional activities that influence students' performance include provision of teaching and learning resources supervision of teaching/learning processes, visiting classrooms and checking teachers and students work, employment of teachers, motivating students' progress and promoting teachers' development among others. Principals influence classroom instruction by supplying teachers with necessary resources. Providing resources includes more than just monetary resources and materials.

According to Duke (cited in Luneburg,2010) providing resources includes (a) Scheduling, (b) Developing (the school calendar, (c) Hiring and correctly placing teachers, (d) Adopting textbooks and (e) Purchasing necessary materials to support instruction." Principals influence student achievement through helping teachers acquire necessary resources to support instruction. Since head teachers play a significant role in school due to their varied tasks and roles, their tactful fulfillment of their roles together with their constant supervision of the teachers determines the level of teacher input and academic achievement of the students. Gorton et al (2007) says that because of their key role in school improvement, principals need training that prepares them for the multiple expectations that are on their shoulders today. Marwinga, (2010) however, asserts that most of the head teacher are not well prepared for their present jobs hence do not execute their tasks and roles are expected leading to poor student's performance. The reasons for this poor performance cannot be easily discerned without focused investigation.

Poor performance among secondary schools in the sub-county undermines students' chances of joining institutions of higher learning and jeopardized opportunities for job placement and thus reduces the student's active participation in national development. As earlier noted principal play a significant role in determining academic performance in a school due to their varied tasks and roles. It was important therefore to investigate the role of the principal in promoting student's performance in Isuikwuato.

Research Questions

One research question guided the study.

What challenges do principals encounter in their effort to improve students' performance?

Research Method

This study will be a descriptive survey; the study will investigate the role of Principal in promoting academic performance in secondary schools in Isuikwuato local government area of Abia state. Public secondary school in Isuikwuato which had presented candidates for the WAEC examination between 2010-2013. The Local government has 5 girls' boarding schools, 5 boys' boarding schools, 4 mixed boarding school and 6 mixed day the district has more mixed day schools than single sex boarding schools. The sample for this study thus consisted of 10 schools was purposively selected from 20 schools 30 teachers from each of the selected schools, giving a total of 300 respondents. The researcher opted for the questionnaire for data collection because of its Effectiveness in eliciting the respondents' feelings, beliefs and experiences. One of the criteria a measuring in instrument must meet is that of validity. A reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained for the teachers' questionnaires. The respondents were assured of strict confidentiality in dealing with the responses. The head teachers and the teachers were given about one hour to fill-in the questionnaires. Results were presented in form of frequency tables, bar graphs, pie chart and percentages from which inferences and conclusions were drawn.

Presentation of Results

Table1: Challenges encountered by principals in improving students' performance

Challenges encountered by principals	HPS N=3	APS N=3	LPS N=4
Teachers not attending classes	0%	33.3%	75%
Inadequate TSC teachers	33.3	66.7%	100%
Teachers not completing syllabus in time	0%	33.3%	75%
Admission of students with low marks at WAEC	0%	33.3%	100%
Strikes and high students indiscipline	0%	33.3%	50%
Inadequate textbooks and revision books	33.3%	66.7%	75%
Inadequate science laboratories	33.3%	66.7%	75%
Lack of time to check teachers' schemes and Records of work	33.3%	33.3%	25%
Lack of time to check students' work	33.3%	0%	25%
Lack of parents' commitment to paying fees	33.3%	66.7%	100%

The finding from table indicates that the entire principal encountered some challenges in one way or the other. The effects of these challenges however were different for the different principals. High performing schools rated in adequate textbooks and revision books (33.3%), inadequate science laboratories, (33.3%), lack of time to check teachers' schemes and records of work (33.3%), lack of time to check students' work (33.3%) as the main challenges. The average performing schools

rated inadequate TSC teachers (66.7%), inadequate textbooks and revision books (66.7%), lack of parents' commitment to paying fees (66.7%) as

Discussion of Findings

The demographic information of the responds was based on gender, education, and qualification and teaching experience. The research report had four objectives. The first objective of the study sought to investigate the instructional leadership activities the principal engages in to improve student' academic performance WAEC in Isuikwuato, the study established that the principal's instructional leadership activities have a positive impact on the students' academic performance. The principals of high performing schools were rated as better instructional leaders than their counterparts in average and low performing schools. This is because majority of the respondents (90%) rated the principals of high performing schools as good instructional leaders. while 50% of the principals of the average and low performing schools were rated as average instructional leaders. A general assessment however, rated all principal in Isuikwuato as good and average instructional leaders. Some of the instructional leadership activities they engaged in to improve students' academic performance were provision of textbooks and other learning and teaching materials, ensuring that all subjects have enough teachers, ensuring that teachers have schemes and records of work and checking student' notes and assignments among others.

The second objective of the study was to determine the approaches the principal used to supervise instruction in order to improve student's academic performance. The researcher established that the most common approaches used by the principals to supervise instruction were ensuring that teachers have scheme of work, lesson notes and fill records of work. This approach was used by 70% of the principals of the high performing school. There are 50% of the principals of the average performing school and 30% of the principals of the low performing schools. The other approach was advising teachers on curriculum matters and teaching method. This approach was used by 70% of the principals in the three categories of schools. Making frequent class visits to check student notebooks was also widely used by the principals. This approach was used by 90% Of the principal of the high performing schools 70% of the principal of the average performing schools and 60%of the principals of the low performing schools. The researcher established that some approaches such as making classroom visits to observe teacher, holding a productive discussion with the teacher after class visit, and instructing class prefects to mark teachers who attend lessons and those who do not attend; were rarely used by the principals to supervise instruction. This is possibly because the use of these approaches may imply that the principal has little confidence in the teachers. Thus the use of these approaches may create a very negative attitude towards the role of the principal as instructional supervisor and consequently undermine academic performance.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that all the principals in Isuikwuato faced various challenges like parents not paying school fees, indiscipline cases, inadequate learning/ teaching materials and inadequate number of trained teachers, admission of students with low waec marks, teachers failure to attend all their lessons, teacher not completing the syllabus in time and principals lacking time to check teachers' professional documents, and students work. Some of these challenges such as parents not paying school fees, inadequate number of trained teachers, and admission of students with low WAEC marks were however, more prevalent in low performing schools. These challenges have played a big role in undermining the school academic performance.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of this research, the following recommendations are made:

I. The ministry of education should undertake development projects that will empower schools by availing learning materials for

example text books and facilities like science laboratories and libraries.

II. ES should deploy/ employ more teachers to the secondary schools in Isuikwuato LGA, in order to relieve the current teacher of the work load and ensure timely syllabus coverage as this will significantly impact on students' performance.

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