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ASSESSMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES IN IMO STATE OF NIGERIA: *FOCUS ON CONTRACT AWARDS*

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this study was to assess principals' financial management practices in secondary schools in Imo State by specifically ascertaining extent principals apply the Imo State financial instructions in award of contracts. One research question and one null hypothesis guided the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The area of this study is Imo State. The population for this study comprised 790 respondents made up of 395 principals and 395 bursars in the State. The entire population of the study was used in the study. A questionnaire developed by the researchers was the instrument used for data collection. Two lecturers in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University validated the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined by administering copies of the questionnaire on 30 respondents made up of 15 principals and 15 bursars in secondary schools in Anambra state. Data were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha and a reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained for the instrument. The researchers administered the instrument directly to the respondents with the help of three research assistants. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question while t-test was used to test the hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that the extent of principals' application of financial instructions in the award of contracts in Imo State is low. Accordingly, it was recommended among others that the Imo State Ministry of Education should conduct regular training of principals especially on processes of awarding and execution of contracts, contract fund disbursement and contract appraisals.

Keywords: Assessment; Finance; Management Practice; *Contract Awards.*

Introduction

Education plays important roles in the society and it is a tool for adjustment, civilization and development. Education is also one of the means of improving students' capabilities, characters and preparing them for useful living in the society. The acceptance of education as the means for upward social mobility has increased and the role of education in national development has also received considered attention from government, private sector organizations and individuals. In Nigeria, education is provided at three levels namely: primary, secondary and tertiary. The focus of this study is on secondary education.

The principal is the executive head of a secondary school. He is responsible for coordinating all school activities ranging from student enrolment, planning of the school time table, keeping of school records, updating his staff with information from the ministry of education, instructing the students, making budgetary and fiscal plans, sourcing for fund to run the school and managing the available funds to run the school with the aim of realizing the educational goals and objectives. The principals also award, supervise and monitor contracts in the school. Contracts in the schools are funded subventions and internally generated revenues.

In the secondary school system, the principals depend on school fees as a source of generating fund for the school. Other sources of funds include government's monthly or quarterly subvention and parents-teachers association (P.T.A.) levies. Irrespective of all the sources of funds available to secondary school principals, some school activities and programmes may not be handled effectively because of lack of adequate or mismanagement of funds.

Contracts in the schools could be awarded for the provision of infrastructural facilities, laboratory equipment, computers, power plants, audio-visual aids and stationeries among other facilities that enhance the operation of the school. Lack of efficient management of these facility provision contracts can frustrate school programmes and ultimately abort educational goals and objectives. Osuala (2017) opined that the financing of education is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders. The school principal is expected to complement government's effort by diversifying their income basis and utilizing the available funds judiciously in contract execution for the attainment of educational goals.

In contract supervision or management, efficient financial management helps to enhance prudence in spending funds and provision of relevant facilities and motivation of personnel to create conducive teaching and learning environment. To be able to do this, the financial officer engages in some financial management practices for efficient execution of the contracts. According to Munge, Kimani and Ngugi (2016), financial management practices in contract execution is concerned with the principal's decisions on how to source for funds for the contract, how to control financial resources through financial control in the course of contract execution , prudent allocation of financial resources and accountability measures for proper contract appraisal. In the view of Kaguri, Njati and Thianine (2014) financial management practices in the context of contract awards are the processes that involve planning and preparation of financial reports on the contract and budget control in contract execution. Given this background, the researchers some reviewed works on contract awards in the school system.

Amirize and Ololube (2018) conducted a study on contract award strategies for effective administration of public secondary schools in Rivers State. The study was guided by four research questions

and four hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey research design was utilized for the study. The population of the study comprised all the principals in senior secondary schools in Obio/Akpor and Port Harcourt City Local Government Areas in Rivers State and all were used for the study. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire and Cronbach alpha was used for the reliability test. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions and chi-square was used to test the hypotheses. The study found out among others that there are significant relationships between principals' contract award strategies, accountability, factors that hinder, and factors that strengthens an effective administration of secondary schools. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that accountability as a strategy for effective fund management should be made to take precedence in the award of contracts as a means for effective administration of school.

Again, Amanchukwu and Oligbi (2018) conducted a study on time management practices adopted by principals for effective contract award and execution in school administration in secondary schools in Anambra State. Three research questions guided the study and three hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all the 256 secondary school principals in Anambra State. There was no sampling as the entire population was considered manageable and was used. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire and Cronbach alpha was used for the reliability. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions and z-test was used to test the hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed among others that principals agreed that they establish priorities, schedule and manage meetings for effective contract award and execution in school administration.

Ikegbusi (2016) also investigated contract award management competency needs of principals for effective execution of contracts in the administration of secondary schools in Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey design was employed in the study. The population of the study comprised all principals of public secondary schools in South East, Nigeria. Stratified random sampling techniques were used to sample 100 principals for the study. Questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. Mean and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions, while t-test was used in testing the hypotheses. The findings of the study among others revealed that recognizing the efforts of staff, motivating staff, delegating duties and authorities, involving them in decision-making among others are contract execution and personnel management skills needed by principals for effective management of contracts in secondary school administration. It was recommended among others that to improve the contract management competency of principals', seminars, workshops and conferences have to be organized by Ministry of Education.

Furthermore, Onuma and Eze (2016) carried out a study on mechanism for improving contract award skills of school principals for effective school administration in Nigeria. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 260 principals in public secondary schools in Anambra State and all were used for the study. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions and t-test was used to test the hypotheses. The study revealed among others that the application of listening skills, verbal and non-verbal skills, and feedback skills in contract award can improve the managerial communication skills of school principals in contract award and execution. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that Ministry of Education should organize seminars, workshop and conferences on contract award skills for principals to acquire skills for the management of contracts in their schools.

Statement of the Problem

The present state of some secondary schools in Imo State is quite deplorable; most books in the library are obsolete, there are outdated pieces of equipment in the laboratories and school buildings are yearning for renovation. It seems all these could be attributed to poor financial management practices by principals in the State. There are speculations and accusations that some principals award school contract to their family members and incompetent companies. The result could be poor contract execution or fund mismanagement. Consequently, this appears to adversely affect the provision of learning facilities for the implementation of the school programmes. In the light of the above, **t**he purpose of this study was to assess principals' financial management practices in secondary schools in Imo State by specifically ascertaining extent principals apply the Imo State financial instructions in award of contracts.

Research Question

One research question guided the study:

1. To what extent do principals in Imo State apply the State financial instructions in their award of contracts?

Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and bursars on the extent principals apply the Imo State financial instructions in their award of contracts.

Research Method

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The area of this study is Imo State and the population for this study comprised 790 respondents made up of 395 principals and 395 bursars in the 395 secondary schools in the three education zones in Imo State. The entire population of the study was used in the study. A questionnaire developed by the researchers

based on the Imo State financial instructions which regulate financial practices of principals and other public officers in the State was the instrument used for data collection. The instrument is structured on a four point scale of very great extent (VGE) =4 points; great extent (GE) =3 points; low extent (LE) 2=points; and very low extent (VLE) =1. Two experts who are lecturers in the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University validated the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was determined by administering copies of the questionnaire on 30 respondents made up of 15 principals and 15 bursars in secondary schools in Anambra state using single administration method. The data were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha. The reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained for the instrument. The researchers administered the instrument directly to the respondents with the help of three research assistants. All copies of the administered instrument were properly completed, retrieved and used for data analysis. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question using the following range of means:

Range of Means	**Value /Interpretation**
3.50-4.49	Very Great Extent (VGE)
2.50-3.49	Great Extent (GE)
1.50-2.49	Low Extent (LE)
1.00-1.49	Very Low Extent (VLE)

In similar vein, t-test was used in testing the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

Presentation of Results

Research Question: To what extent do principals in Imo State apply the State financial instructions in their award of contracts?

Table 1: *Mean ratings and standard deviation scores of principals and bursars on the extent of principals' application of financial instructions in their awards of contracts.*

S/N	ITEMS	Principals (N =395)			Bursars (N =395)		
		Mean	SD	Decision	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Advertise contracts through the states tenders' boards.	2.70	1.04	Great Extent	2.59	1.17	Great Extent
2	Allow the state tenders board to receive contract bids by bidders.	2.29	1.02	Low Extent	2.15	1.03	Low Extent
3	Allow the state tenders board to examine contract bids received on behalf of SEMB.	2.41	1.04	Low Extent	2.21	1.08	Low Extent
4	Collect 10% from contactors before signing the contract agreement.	2.46	1.11	Low Extent	2.21	1.06	Low Extent
5	Inflate the cost of some contracts.	2.58	1.12	Great Extent	2.54	1.11	Great Extent
6	Award contracts directly to bidders.	2.57	1.01	Great Extent	2.67	1.17	Great Extent
7	Award contacts to some members of SEMB.	2.21	1.06	Low Extent	2.28	1.12	Low Extent
8	Award contracts to government officials.	2.05	1.03	Low Extent	2.31	1.02	Low Extent
9	Award contracts directly to companies owned by members of the state executives.	1.96	1.14	Low Extent	2.09	1.05	Low Extent
	Mean of Means'	**2.36**	**1.03**	**Low Extent**	**2.34**	**1.08**	**Low Extent**

As shown on Table 1, the mean ratings of both principals and bursars for items 1, 4 and 5 were between 2.50 and 3.49 indicating there was great extent of principals' application of financial instructions with respect to the items. On the other hand, mean rating of items 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8 by both principals and bursars were between 1.50- and 2.49 indicating low extent of principals' application of financial instructions with respect to the items.

The pooled standard deviation scores for principals and bursars which stand at 1.03 and 1.08 respectively indicate convergence of their responses and thus their responses are close to the mean scores. The mean of means' scores of 2.36 and 2.34 for principals and bursars respectively which fall within the range of 1.50-2.49 indicated that the extent of principals' application of financial

instructions in the award of contracts in Imo State is low.

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and bursars on the extent principals apply the Imo State financial instructions in their award of contracts.

Table 2: *t-test of the mean ratings of principals and bursars on the extent of principals' application of financial instructions in award of contracts.*

Variables	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal.	t-crit.	Df	∝	Decision
Principals	395	2.36	1.03	0.57	1.96	788	0.05	Not Significant
Bursars	395	2.34	1.08					

Result as shown on Table 2 revealed that the t-calculated value of 0.57 is less than t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 788 degree of freedom. Thus, the null hypothesis is not significant. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and bursars on the extent of principals' application of financial instructions in their award of contracts in secondary schools in Imo State.

Discussion of Findings

The results of this study revealed that the extent of principals' application of financial instructions in award of contracts in secondary schools in Imo State. It was revealed that the extent of principals' application of financial instructions in the award of contracts in Imo State is low. Further findings indicated that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and bursars on the extent principals apply financial instructions in the award of contracts in secondary schools in Imo State.

The findings of the study indicated that the principals did not fully comply with the Imo State financial instructions in the award of contract. If the principals could follow the financial instruction in budgeting, one wonders why they did not fully follow the same instruction in awarding of contracts. This, if not properly checked, is very dangerous to the secondary school system. Where principals do not follow laid down instructions for awarding contracts in the schools, it is most likely that the contract so awarded might not be well executed. Mohamad and Mohamad (2013) found that due process in awarding of contract is the foundation for contract execution and accountability in monitoring processes. The findings of this study disagreed with Junge, Bosire and Kamau (2014) who found that school managers complied fully with guiding principles in awarding contracts. This disagreement in the two findings could be as a result of difference in geographical location. Principals in geographical location where Junge, Bosire and Kamau's study was conducted might have adequate knowledge and skills in awarding contracts. This finding implies that principals in secondary schools in Imo State to a low extent keep to the rules guiding contract awards. This limits

principals' ability to supervise or monitor contracts in the school.

Further findings indicated that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and bursars on the extent principals apply financial instructions in awarding contracts in Imo State. This disagreed with the finding of Onuselogu (2010) which reported that there was a significant difference in the mean ratings of principals, vice principals and bursars on principals' financial accountability in contract execution. The difference in findings could be attributed to difference in geographical location and time span. Within the space of 12 years, there might be changes in principals' contract management practices.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that principals to a low extent apply the financial instructions in contract awards in secondary schools in Imo State. This implies that principals have not adequately applied financial management practices as outlined in chapter three of the Imo State Financial Instructions of 1998 in the award and execution of contracts in secondary schools in Imo State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Secondary school principals in Imo State should endeavour to comply with the provisions of the state financial instructions in the award and execution of contracts. This will make them prudent in managing contract funds.
2. The Imo State Ministry of Education should conduct regular training of principals especially on processes of awarding and execution of contracts, contract fund disbursement and contract appraisals.

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