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PRINCIPALS' COMMUNICATION SKILLS AS PREDICTORS OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated principals' communication skills as predictors of effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State. Three research questions were answered while corresponding three were tested. The study adopted a correlation research design with a population of 285 principals in 285 public secondary schools in Rivers State. The sample size of 143 principals was drawn to represent 50% of the population. The sample size was arrived at through simple random sampling technique. Two instruments, Principals' Communication Skills Scale (PCSS) and Effective Leadership Scale (ELS) were used for data collection. The instruments were face validated by three experts. The internal consistency reliability coefficients of 0.88 and 0.81 were computed for Principals' Communication Skills Scale (PCSS) and Effective Leadership Scale (ELS) through Cronbach alpha. Linear regression was used to answer the research questions while t-test associated with linear regression was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. It was found that principals' communication skills are necessary and indispensable in the achievement of effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, verbal communication skills can predict effective leadership to a high extent, written communication skills can predict to a very high extent while listening communication skills can predict effective leadership to a low extent. It was recommended that principals should constantly make use verbal communication skills. More so, written communication skills should be used by principals in matters of rules and regulation as well as in the documentation of schools' programmes and activities. Finally, the school principals should effectively make use of listening communication skills in their meetings and assignment of responsibilities to the subordinates.

Keywords: Principals' Communication Skills (Verbal, written and listening skills) and Effective Leadership

Introduction

Leadership is an integral function of the school principals in their day-to-day running of the school programmes and activities. Leadership plays an unquantifiable role in the school growth and development. Therefore, Akpan (2010) defined leadership as the systematic behavioural approaches

employed by a leader to influence subordinates towards goal achievement. Leadership is the process of directing, coordinating and persuading members of a group towards the achievement of some set goals and objectives (Baporikar, 2017). Furthermore, Baporikar stressed that leadership is the process of making a team of people in knowing their initiatives in order to align with mutual benefit of turning the vision into reality. As elaborated by Dixon (1994), leadership is no more than exercising such an influence upon others that they tend to act in concert towards achieving a goal, which they might have achieved so readily had they been left on their own devices. Leadership in the school system can be seen as educational leadership. To this end, Asaju, Aroma and Mukaila in Ololube (2014) opined that education leaders determine the direction, safety and prosperity of institutional cultures and changes through ensuring that excellent policies are made. More so, school leadership is seen as a dual-focused management approach that works towards what is best for the school and individuals (Igbogi, 2018). Leadership that is performed by the principals can be seen as principals' leadership.

Principals' leadership deals with taking up the responsibility of directing, coordinating and persuading members of his/her group towards the achievement of desired goals and objective. Principals' leadership is a process whereby the actions of others are influenced so that they work willingly toward the achievement of institutional or organizational goal (Bello, Ibi & Bukar, 2016). According to Ward (2019) it is the art of motivating a group of people in the school to act towards achieving a common goal. To Obiwuru, Okwu and Akpa (2011) it is one of the factors that play significant role in enhancing or retarding the interest and commitment of the individuals in the school.

Effective leadership entails the achievement of desired result in the leadership process. According to Obiwuru, Okwu and Akpan, effective leadership is the use of leadership styles and strategies in moving subordinates to the achievement of organizational goals and objectives. More so, Bello, Ibe and Bukar, saw effective leadership as the ability of the leaders to work through the led in the achievement of results. On the other hand, ineffective leadership is embedded with lack of leadership clue and responsibility. More so, it is also the inability to apply appropriately the inherent or acquired leadership skills in the discharge of statutory duties. It is the failure of the leaders or school principals to set in motion leadership strategies that can spur the led into the achievement of school goals and objectives (Igbogi, 2018). More so, a good number of principals in the secondary schools in Rivers State find it very difficult to demonstrate effective leadership (Manafa, 2018). This is manifested in their inability to harmonize their staff towards the achievement of assigned task which may be necessitated by poor supervision, inspection, poor leadership quality as well as the means and ways of communication. This study focused on the role communication skills can

play in the achievement of effective leadership in secondary schools.

Communication can be seen as the process of conveying information from the sender to the receiver. More so, communication is the mutual understanding between the management and the subordinates (Manafa, 2018). Interestingly, communication that exists between the management and staff helps them to be actively involved in in the school programmes and activities (Uche, Nwabueze & Ememe, 2009). Effective communication is when the message is properly communicated by the send and well received by the receiver. Effective communication requires some levels of communication skills. Communication skills can be seen as tools that are necessary to remove the jinx in effective communication (Singh, 2014). Communication skills can be classified as verbal skill, written skill, listening skill, among others.

Verbal communication skills can be seen as the avenue of relating information to one another through verbal means. According to Okorji (2016), verbal communication is the type that makes use of verbal medium to transmit information. Verbal communication skills are very important in the school system because it can help the school principals to properly communicate instructions or information to the teachers in a face-to-face approach. Verbal communication skills involve the appropriateness in the selection of language that can be used for the audience, speaking at a moderate pace, not too fast or too slowly, speaking confidently but with modesty, summarizing key points made by other speakers, supporting statements with facts and evidence, tailoring messages to different audiences, telling stories to capture an audience and using humor to engage an audience (Doyle, 2020). The school principals can use verbal communication skills to settle conflict, assign responsibilities as well as to give pieces of advice to the teachers. It was empirically proven that verbal communication skills have association with leadership behaviours of the school principals (Doyle, 2020). More so, it was reported that verbal communication skills are determinants of principals' administrative leadership quality (Okorji, 2016). The use of verbal communication skills may require written communication skills.

Written communication skills are germane in the conveying of information mostly when the physical or face-to-face contact is not needed. Therefore, written communication skills are the ability to clearly present information in words, drawing, songs, graphic design and video (Ayeni, 2016). More so, written communication skills take the forms of letters, memoranda, annual reports, procedure manuals, notes, newsletters and other publications (Oboegbulem & Owurah 2011). Written communication skills can help the school principals to convey evidential information that can last for a long period of time because of its documentary nature. If the written communication skills are not properly applied, it may misrepresent ideas thereby misinforming the receivers. The

effectiveness in the leadership activities of the principals can be as a result of effective written communication skills' applicability (Ayeni, 2016). It was further found that written communication skills are indispensable in the school management and administration (Oboegbulem & Owurah, 2011). Written communication skills depend to a large extent on the attentiveness and listening abilities of the school personnel.

Therefore, listening communication skills are rudiments in quality reception of information from the sender. To this end, it was opined that listening communication skills enables the receiver to understand the content of any message (Moulesong, 2010). In the same vain, good listening skills helps one in keeping to the rules of discussion and engagement (Barnes, 2015). It can also allow the head to tune into existing conflicts and hear very aptly what the matter is for effective administrative processes (Grover, 2017). Furthermore, effective listening skills are instrumental in the generating of new ideas from the issue of discussion, developing problem solving skills, conflict resolution skills, engagement in meaningful interaction, and proper manifestation of attentiveness (Covey, 2018). Based on the badground information of this study, it is suggestive that communication may have a role to play in the achievement of effective leadership in the schools by the school principals. The research is worried and investigated to find out the extent principals' communication skills can predict effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Leadership is the heart of effective administration in the school system. Leadership plays a significant role in the coordination, supervision, and management of human and material resources. It is worrisome to note that most of the school principals lack the required leadership qualities to enable them discharge their statutory functions. This is shown in the inability of some of them to get the teachers motivated, committed and focused in their teaching activities. These poor leadership quality and application may be attributed to factors like lack of administrative strategies, poor communication skills, among others. Therefore, the researcher is worried whether leadership issues as experienced in the schools in Rivers State are as a result of communication challenges. Hence, the problem of this study in a question form is, what is the extent of prediction of principals' communication skills on effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State?

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in this study.

1. What is the extent of prediction of verbal communication on effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State?
2. What is the extent of prediction of written communication on effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State?
3. What is the extent of prediction of listening communication on effective

leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. Verbal communication does not significantly predict effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State.
2. Written communication is not a significant predictor of effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State.
3. Listening communication is not a significant predictor of effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Method

The study adopted a correlation research design with a population of 285 principals in 285 public secondary schools in Rivers State. The sample size of 143 principals was drawn to represent 50% of the population. The sample size was arrived at through simple random sampling technique. Two instruments, Principals' Communication Skills Scale (PCSS) and Effective Leadership Scale (ELS) were used for data collection. The Principals' Communication Skills Scale (PCSS) has two sections of A and B. The section A elicited demographic information from the respondents such as their designation and schools. The section B of Principals' Communication Skills Scale (PCSS) has three clusters. Each of the clusters has 10 items making a total of 30 items. The second instrument, Effective Leadership Scale (ELS) has 15 items that measured the principals' effective leadership. The instrument was face validated by three experts, two from Educational Administration and Planning in the Department of Educational Foundations, and one in Measurement and Evaluation from Science Education, all from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The internal consistency reliability coefficients of 0.88 and 0.81 were computed for Principals' Communication Skills Scale (PCSS) and Effective Leadership Scale (ELS) through Cronbach alpha. Linear regression was used to answer the research questions while t-test associated with linear regression was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule is thus: Very Low Extent 0-25, High Extent 25.9-50, High Extent 50-75, Very High Extent 75.9-100

Presentation of Results

Research question 1: What is the extent of prediction of verbal communication skill on effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State?

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Table 1: linear regression on the extent of prediction of verbal communication skill on effective leadership

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Decision
1	.75[a]	.57	.56	High extent

Very Low Extent 0-25, Low Extent 25.9-50, High Extent 50-75, Very High Extent 75.9-100

Data on table 1 revealed that the regression and regression square coefficients are 0.75 and 0.57. The coefficient of determinism of 57% revealed that verbal communication skill predicts to high extent effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State. It is worthy to note that the 43% variance in effective leadership is not accounted by verbal communication.

Research question 2: What is the extent of prediction of written communication skill on effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 2: linear regression on the extent of prediction of written communication skill on effective leadership

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Decision
1	.99[a]	.99	.99	Very high extent

Very Low Extent 0-25, low Extent 25.9-50, High Extent 50-75, Very High Extent 75.9-100

Data on table 2 revealed that the regression and regression square coefficients are 0.99 and 0.57. The coefficient of determinism of 99% revealed that written communication skill predicts to a very high extent effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State. It is worthy to note that the 1% variance in effective leadership was not accounted by written communication.

Research question 3: What is the extent of prediction of listening communication skill on effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State?

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Table 3: linear regression on the extent of prediction of listening communication skill on effective leadership

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Decision
1	.50[a]	.25	.24	Low Extent

Very Low Extent 0-25, Low Extent 25.9-50, High Extent 50-75, Very High Extent 75.9-100

Data on table 3 revealed that the regression and regression square coefficients are 0.50 and 0.25. The coefficient of determinism of 25% revealed that listening communication skill predicts to a low extent effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State. It is worthy to note that the 75% variance in effective leadership was not accounted by listening communication.

Hypothesis 1: Verbal communication does not significantly predict effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 4: t-test associated with linear regression of the prediction of verbal communication on effective leadership

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	5.89	2.10		2.81	.01
	Verbal communication	.85	.06	.753	13.57	.00

Table 4 showed that the t-test value associated with linear regression is 13.57. The hypothesis is significant because the significant value of 0.00 is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Therefore, verbal communication significantly predicted effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State

Hypothesis 2: Written communication is not a significant predictor of effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State.

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Table 5: t-test associated with linear regression of the prediction of written communication on effective leadership

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.10	.13		.78	.44
	Written communication	.99	.00	.999	258.10	.00

Table 5 showed that the t-test value associated with linear regression is 258.10. The hypothesis is significant because the significant value of 0.00 is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Therefore, written communication significantly predicted effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State

Hypothesis 3: Listening communication is not a significant predictor of effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 6: t-test associated with linear regression of the prediction of listening communication on effective leadership

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	34.00	6.39		5.32	.00
	Listening communication	.47	.17	.50	3.09	.00

Table 6 showed that the t-test value associated with linear regression is 3.09. The hypothesis is significant because the significant value of 0.00 is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Therefore, listening communication significantly predicted effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State

Summary of Findings

The summary of the findings are presented as shown below:

1. It was found that verbal communication significantly predicted effective leadership to a high extent in secondary schools in Rivers State.
2. The finding showed that written communication significantly predicted effective leadership to a very high extent in secondary schools in Rivers State.
3. The finding revealed that that listening communication significantly predicted effective leadership to a very low extent in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

It was found that verbal communication significantly predicted effective leadership to a high extent in secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings of this study is supported by the of Doyle (2020) who reported that the school principals use verbal communication skills to settle conflict, assign responsibilities as well as to give pieces of advice to the teachers thereby enhancing their administrative responsibilities. Still in support of the findings of this study, Doyle further reported that verbal communication skills have association with leadership behaviours of the school principals. In corroboration with the findings of this study was the report that verbal communication skills are determinants of principals' administrative leadership quality (Okorji, 2016). The implication is stemming from the fact that verbal communication skills are very important in the school system because it can help the school principals to properly communicate instructions or information to the teachers in a face-to-face approach. More so, it involves the appropriateness in the selection of words and language that can be used address the audience without any form of negative provocation.

Also, the finding of this study showed that written communication skills significantly predicted effective leadership to a very high extent in secondary schools in Rivers State. The finding of this study is buttressed by the submission that written communication skills are associated with effectiveness in the leadership activities of the principals (Ayeni, 2016). In tandem with the findings of this study was the report that written communication skills can predict school principals' management and administration functions (Oboegbulem & Owurah, 2011). The implication of this result is traceable on the fact that written communication skills are germane in conveying of information mostly when the physical or face-to-face contact is not needed. It also implied that written communication skills allow the school principals' to clearly present information in words, drawing, songs, graphic design and video for effective school organization and administration.

Furthermore, the finding revealed that listening communication significantly predicted effective leadership to a very low extent in secondary schools in Rivers State. This finding is buttressed by that of Moulesong (2010) who found that listening communication skills are instrumental to the receiver in understanding the content of any message (Moulesong, 2010). The findings were further corroborated by the submission that good listening skills help the by the teachers help the principals in keeping to the rules of discussion and engagement (Barnes, 2015). Based on the functionality of effective listening skills, it was found that the principals make use of effective listening skills to tune into existing conflicts and hear very aptly what the matter of discussion is for effective administrative processes (Grover, 2017). Furthermore, effective listening skills are instrumental in the generating of new ideas from the issue of discussion, developing problem solving skills, conflict

resolution skills, engagement in meaningful interaction, and proper manifestation of attentiveness (Covey, 2018). Therefore, listening communication skills are rudiments in quality reception of information from the principals in order to bring about effective school leadership.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concluded that principals' communication skills are necessary and indispensable in the achievement of effective leadership in secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, verbal communication skills can predict effective leadership to a high extent, written communication skills can predict to a very high extent while listening communication skills can predict effective leadership to a low extent.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

1. Principals should use verbal communication skills since it significantly predicted effective leadership to a high extent in secondary schools in Rivers State.
2. Written communication skills should be used in matters of rules and regulation as well as in the documentation of schools' programmes and activities.
3. The school principals should effectively make use of listening communication skills in their meetings and assignment of responsibilities to the subordinates.

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