Staff Relationship Strategies and School Effectiveness in Public Secondary Schools: Depicting Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of staff relationship strategies adopted by school principals and their effectiveness in Kwara State Public Secondary Schools (KSPSS). The study population comprises principals and teachers from the 64 public secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis, where 20 were selected randomly. From each of the 20 schools, ten teachers were selected randomly using a convenience sampling method while the school principal and a vice principal in each sampled school were purposively selected. Questionnaires were used to obtain data from 240 respondents. The descriptive statistics technique was used to answer the research question while the hypotheses which were formulated were tested using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. The result shows a high level of school effectiveness in Ilorin metropolis' public secondary schools. Furthermore, the four hypotheses tested showed strong positive relationships between: communication and quality leadership, shared goals and school discipline, motivation and staff satisfaction, and career development or work balance and student academic performance. It was concluded that public secondary schools in Ilorin metropolis are effective and that a strong relationship exists between staff relationship strategies and school effectiveness. The study recommends that schools should improve on their organised environment to increase its contributions to school effectiveness.

Keywords: Staff relationship; school effectiveness; quality leadership; organised environment

Introduction

Management of people at work is an integral part of the management process. Proper staff management is an important determinant of the success or failure of any educational institution (Ofoegbu and Ofoegbu 2017). The survival and prosperity of an educational institution in today's competitive environment depends mainly on the quality of its staff. This quality is a reflection of a principal's knowledge of the tasks which need to be performed by teachers, requiring engaging, competent staff (Worlu *et al*. 2016). Industrial actions usually embarked upon by teachers, especially in the public secondary schools, are becoming a worrisome phenomenon in the

educational sector. This is due to the fact that several times within an academic session classes have been shortened down in response to government failure to make adequate provisions for effective job performance. Among many the factors that ultimately lead to workplace conflict within the secondary schools is the issue of poor staff relations (Nwosu 2017). The continued existence and sustainability of schools in a competitive environment requires the provision of a stimulating staff-management relationship. The fulfilment of effective staff relationships will ultimately lead to staff commitment and their increased involvement and in turn result in heightened school effectiveness (Worlu *et al.* 2016).

Staff relationship strategies come in many forms and they have been found to be an important ingredient in effective schools. Effective use of communication among staff members goes a long way to bringing teachers to understand the school goals, just as the use of motivational strategies encourage teachers to do more for the organisation. When good workplace relationships exist among teachers, the teachers, students, and principals feel secure and satisfied, which will, consequently, lead to higher school performance. The level of commitment from teachers and overall school effectiveness is a function of staff relation strategies employed by school leaders in both public and private secondary schools. School effectiveness requires "confidence, trustworthiness, respect, commitment, analytical thinking, conceptual thinking, and drive for improvement, information seeking initiative, flexibility, accountability, and passion for learning among the stakeholders in the school community" (Ramberg *et al.* 2018:5). All these factors constitute an important foundation for promoting the quality of teacher relationships with students.

The success or failure of any school depends greatly on the type of leadership it has, and the relationship strategies adopted by the leader. Leaders translate all other resources in schools into visible services. It is important that schools pay extra attention to their staff in order to attain optimum efficiency and effectiveness in the workplace. School administrators take specific measures to facilitate employee performance growth over time. Administrators' management strategies intend to ensure optimal performance and enforce the productivity of employees and that of the organisation at large. However, public secondary schools in Kwara State are plagued with inadequate staff participation in school decision making, insufficient welfare services, long working hours, poor relationships with supervisors and colleagues, and low teacher morale, which has made these schools prone to incessant industrial action, class boycotts by teachers, and poor levels of job commitment and performance. The generally low level of public-school effectiveness in KSPSS is a result of poor staff relationships between school leaders and staff has especially prompted this study.

A school's viability or effectiveness is the degree to which the set objectives or goals of a school programme are practiced. A school would be viewed as successful if school forms bring about observable positive results reliably over some undefined time frame. The parameters for measuring the effectiveness of a secondary school includes the level of discipline tone in the school, the school's climate, teacher performance, and the number of students who successfully pass their school-leaving certificate examinations (Cohen *et al.* 2009). The characteristics of effective schools differ depending on the methodology, considerations, and theoretical starting points. Ekundayo (2004) proposes five salient features of effective schools that recur in most studies: a strong administrative leadership, high student achievement, a conducive atmosphere for learning, an emphasis on skill acquisition, and the regular monitoring of students' progress.

Recent investigations have set a more noteworthy accentuation on school principals regarding their ability to verbalise a dream for the school and to make the mutual significance and shared objectives which the school is expected to achieve in this vision. Some parameters for measuring school effectiveness include staff satisfaction, student academic performance, school discipline, and quality leadership. It is within this context that the topical study sets out to investigate staff

relationship strategies as a factor that contributes to school effectiveness, specifically in relation to the Kwara State in Nigeria.

Relevant Prior Contributions

Psychologists agree that many aspects of behaviour are determined by motivation (Fieldman, 2017). This is why motivation is often described as those factors which energise and give direction to one's behaviour. Usually, a motivated person engages in an activity more vigorously and more efficiently than an unmotivated one (Latham 2005). Nwosu (2017) presents motivation as a concept for a very complex phenomenon which influences almost every sphere of an organisation, ranging from the behaviour of an employee on the job, to the organisation's stability. Each educational institution endeavours to rouse their labourers or tutor them in order to push the establishment forward. To rouse or motivate essentially means to encourage someone to enact a certain activity or activities. It has to do with making individuals work productively without being coerced.

Persuasive and motivational methodologies embraced by school principals can emphatically or adversely affect the attainment of the school objectives. Producing exceptionally energetic, cognisant, and reliably successful classroom teachers should be the objectives of every school administrator. Motivation depends very importantly on the goals which are to be achieved and the enabling conditions for achieving them. Principals should strive to instil self-generated factors that influence teachers' behaviours (intrinsic motivation), because, more often than not, they have little or no influence over external motivation (extrinsic motivation), such as increased pay or promotions. Staff motivation has always been a perennial problem for school administrators because of their inability to exercise powers over external things that could motivate workers in their work environment. The shortage of these extrinsic motivations leads to job place avoidance and, at times, employees leaving the organisation (Vinay, 2014). Generally, workers come to organisations with expectations of their personal needs being met by the organisation. The extent to which such needs are met determines the workers' levels of motivation and, hence, their performance and commitment to work (Locke and Latham, 2004).

A major school effectiveness variable is one's organised environment. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) identify three major leadership practices; developing people and enabling teachers and other staff to do their jobs effectively; offering intellectual support and stimulation to improve work; and providing models of practice and support, setting directions for the organisation, developing shared goals, monitoring organisational performance and promoting effective communication, and redesigning the organisation by creating a productive school culture or by modifying organisational structures. Brueckners and Burton (2005) recognise the impact that an enabling environment has on the morale of teachers and their job satisfaction as well as their classroom performance. The key factors in this study were: workload (number of pupils and work time), condition of classrooms, level of collegial and management support, location, living arrangements, and distance to work. In countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, and Zambia, it is noticeable that teachers in rural areas do complain of poor working conditions.

Effective teacher development contributes to increased productivity, greater job satisfaction, and lower turnover. It can enhance the understanding of their work and creates a greater ability to cope with changes in the organisation. Thus, a principal needs to facilitate their teachers' development to increase efficiency. Effective teacher development has been acknowledged to have short and long-term benefits in resource management. Principals in effective schools, therefore, involve themselves in ensuring that teachers get opportunities for in-service training. It is important for the school principal to be aware of the training needs of the teachers. As an instructional pioneer, the principal improves the instructional programme in his or her school by guaranteeing that instructors have the necessary training.

Furthermore, the form and way of communication used in a given school affects the way people interact, and it has an impact on the general atmosphere of the school, which in turn might affect the general quality of instruction that students receive (Akinola 2013). Communication influences the way people behave in organisations. As such, school principals are expected to set direction, set school goals, and prepare everyone for the attainment of said goals. Successful school leaders set and communicate the direction for their schools. Setting and negotiating directions in schools has a great impact on teachers and a good school leader employs the most effective means of communicating the school directions and goals to the teachers in order to get their support (Latham, 2005). With appropriate communication patterns, school principals may be in a good position to realign and modify teachers, students, and school community attitudes towards achieving school goals.

It should be noted that a school's overall performance is a function of both teacher and student input, and it is usually described based on the marks obtained by the individual students and their overall school performance in the subject. Since the hallmark of a school's effectiveness is determined by a student's performance, the authors of this study argue that both the latter and the former are capable of being influenced by relationship management strategies, especially teacher development programmes. In a similar vein, according to Abdulkadiroglu *et al*. (2020), if the goal is to improve educational effectiveness, parents' choices must result in rewards for effective schools and sanctions for ineffective ones. The authors contend that school choice may lead to improvements in school productivity if effective schools are rewarded and ineffective ones are punished. This mechanism requires parents to choose schools based on causal effectiveness rather than peer characteristics.

A Conceptual Model on Staff Relationship Strategies and School Effectiveness

A conceptual model for the study was proposed by the authors, based on the school effectiveness models of Creemers (1994) and Scheerens (1993). The Creemers model explains variance in outcomes in terms of essential factors of learning theory, such as time, opportunity, and quality. Placing more emphasis on the classroom and teacher, Creemers (1994) focuses on the teaching-learning process in the classroom, where all the factors or variables that contribute to educational outcomes exist. The quality of instruction in the classroom depends on three components, namely curriculum, grouping procedure, and teacher behavior. Amongst them, the most important factor is teacher behaviour, because all other factors depend on how a teacher runs his or her lesson. In other words, it is how teachers implement the curriculum that determines student outcomes, not the curriculum itself. Even grouping which positively influences outcomes can be realised through the teacher's ability. The Scheerens model discusses factors associated with student outcomes in school in terms of education production function. Their models account for the relationship amongst clusters within the educational system.

Considering the above, the conceptual model of this study, depicted below as figure 1, highlights the relationship between staff relationship strategies and school effectiveness.

Figure 1: Proposed conceptual model on staff relationship strategies and school effectiveness

A staff relationship strategy is seen as an important means of bringing teachers into school programmes through effective communication. Communicating with teachers regularly will help them grasp the mind-set of school leadership and align with their plans and programmes regarding student academic accomplishments. Communication provides an effective channel of feeding information back to management about the progress and problems teachers might have encountered in the class. When principals carry their staff along using effective communication channels in the school, the staff will feel cared for and repose high confidence in the school leadership, and thus see school programmes and activities as their own. Sharing school goals and aspirations with teachers gives them a sense of belonging and encourages them to be a part of the attainment of said goals and aspirations through shared responsibility exhibited through staff commitment and discipline.

The effective use of motivation as a relationship strategy in schools produces staff that feel loved, cared for, and appreciated. These feelings tend to increase their commitment towards school activities and the attainment of school goals. School goals at this level are expressed and measured by how well students perform in both internal and external examinations. Effective staff motivation engenders satisfied and accomplished staffers. A school head that is proactive in staff career development will constantly show concern for staff welfare, a conducive workplace, and a secure and warm school climate, for which they will always in return receive the required support from teachers working under them. This support and commitment will be displayed through their preparedness to embrace innovation and change in the school system.

Based on the conceptual model above, the study raised one research question on the level of school effectiveness in KSPSS and formulates four hypotheses which will be explored to fully grasp the relationship between staff relationship strategies and student academic performance in KSPSS. These hypotheses were all null hypotheses emphasising no significant relationship between communication strategies and quality leadership in KSPSS, no significant relationship between shared goal strategies and school discipline in KSPSS, no significant relationship between motivational strategies and staff satisfaction in KSPSS, and no significant relationship between career development or work balance strategies and student academic performance in KSPSS.

Methodology

This study adopts the correlation research design. This design is considered appropriate because it allows the use of correlations among variables in assessing the theoretical propositions about the variables. The population of this study comprises all teachers, principals, and vice principals of KSPSS. Specifically, the study involves schools in the Ilorin Metropolis. Thus, 20 schools were selected randomly through a lottery method from the 64 public secondary schools in Ilorin Metropolis. From each of the schools, ten teachers were selected using the convenience

sampling method to make up a total of 200 respondents, while in each sampled school one school principal and one vice principal were purposively selected from the 20 sampled schools to participate in the study. The total sample for the study, therefore, stands at 240.

The research instrument titled, "Staff Relationship Strategies and School Effectiveness Questionnaire" was used to obtain information for the study. The four-point Likert Scale was adopted because respondents' specific opinions are essential. In establishing the validity of the questionnaire, experts in the researcher's area of study at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria, were consulted to validate content of the drafted items. Based on the comments and suggestions from these experts, items that seemed to be misleading or vague were either modified or removed to ensure clarity. To affirm the reliability of the questionnaire the internal consistency Cronbach Alpha method of testing reliability was used. The instrument was administered to 20 teachers and four principals selected outside the sample area and the analysis yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.67. Descriptive statistics was used to describe the demographic characteristics of the respondents and in answering the research questions raised in the study while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) coefficient was used in testing the formulated hypotheses at an alpha level of 0.05.

Results and Discussion

As earlier mentioned, this study is interested in the level of school effectiveness in KSPSS and formulates four hypotheses to be able to fully grasp the relationship between staff relationship strategies and student academic performance in KSPSS. These hypotheses are all null hypotheses, emphasising no significant relationship between communication strategies and quality leadership in KSPSS, no significant relationship between shared goal strategies and school discipline in KSPSS, no significant relationship between motivational strategies and staff satisfaction in KSPSS, and no significant relationship between career development or work balance strategies and student academic performance in KSPSS.

Responses on school effectiveness in KSPSS were summed and subjected to mean analysis. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Level of School Effectiveness in KSPSS

S/N	Variables	Mean	SD	Remark
1	School Discipline	16.23	1.89	High
2	Quality Leadership	15.35	1.32	High
3	Staff Satisfaction	15.59	1.76	High
4	Organised Environment	12.00	0.86	High
	Grand Total	**14.79**	**0.86**	**High**

Keys: Low Level = 01 – 11   High Level = 12 – 20

Results in Table 1 show the level of school effectiveness in KSPSS. As shown in the table, the level of school effectiveness in KSPSS is high, with grand mean score of 14.79.

Hypothesis One

H_1: There is no significant relationship between communication strategies and quality leadership in KSPSS.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of the Relationship between Communication Strategies and Quality Leadership in KSPSS

Variables	N	X	r - cal.	p-value	Remark

Variables	N	X	r - cal.	p-value	Remark
Communication Strategies	240	17.84			
			0.18	0.00	Significant
Quality Leadership	240	15.35			

Results in Table 2 show an r-calculated value of 0.18 and significance value of 0.00, which is less than 0.05 (0.00 < 0.05). Since 0.00 is less than a 0.05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis was not accepted. This means that there was significant relationship between communication strategies and quality leadership in KSPSS.

Hypothesis Two

H$_{O3}$: There is no significant relationship between shared goal strategies and school discipline in in KSPSS.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of the Relationship Between Shared Goal Strategies and School Discipline in KSPSS

Variables	N	X	r - cal.	p-value	Remark
Shared Goal Strategies	240	15.64			
			0.28	0.00	Significant
School Discipline	240	16.23			

Results in Table 3 show an r-calculated value of 0.28 and significance value of 0.00, which is less than 0.05 (0.00 < 0.05). Since 0.00 is less than a 0.05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there was significant relationship between shared goal strategies and school discipline in KSPSS**.**

Hypothesis Three

H$_3$: There is no significant relationship between motivational strategies and Staff Satisfaction in KSPSS.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of the Relationship between Motivational Strategies and Staff Satisfaction in KSPSS

Variables	N	X	r - cal.	p-value	Remark
Motivation Strategies	240	11.79			
			0.64	0.00	Significant
Staff Satisfaction	240	12.00			

Results in Table 4 show an r-calculated value of 0.64 and significance value of 0.00, which is less than 0.05 (0.00 < 0.05). Since 0.00 is less than a 0.05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there was significant relationship between motivational strategies and staff satisfaction in KSPSS.

Hypothesis Four

H_{O4}: There is no significant relationship between career development/Work balance strategies and student academic performance in KSPSS.

Table 5: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of the Relationship between Career Development/Work balance Strategies and Student Academic Performance in KSPSS

Variables	N	X	r - cal.	p-value	Remark
Career Development /work balance Strategies	240	12.15	0.21	0.00	Significant
Students' Performance	240	39.22			

Results in Table 5 show an r-calculated value of 0.21 and significance value of 0.00, which is less than 0.05 (0.00 < 0.05). Since 0.00 is less than a 0.05 alpha level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there was significant relationship between career development/work balance strategies and student academic performance in KSPSS.

This study investigates staff relationship strategies and school effectiveness in KSPSS. It was revealed that the level of school effectiveness in KSPSS was high. This means that the levels of staff satisfaction, secured school environments, school discipline, and quality leadership in KSPSS were high. This result confirms the findings of Odeyemi and Roland (2015) who report a high level of school effectiveness in public secondary schools in Nigeria. Staff satisfaction denotes having a pleasurable and positive emotional state of mind after the careful appraisal of one's job experiences (Locke 2004).

Nwankwo (2014) also holds the view that the more the needs of the workers are met in an organisation, the more they are motivated to work harder. It, therefore, follows that a satisfied worker in an organisation is operating at two levels of satisfaction, namely the satisfaction of his own needs and the satisfaction of the needs of the organisation. In a proper work balance, professional development of teachers and effective staff training programmes are critical to creating an effective school (O'Brien and Macbeath,1999). As such, every school head should regard the continuous training and retraining of its teachers as an essential part of its task; schools should continue to review their effectiveness to reassure stake-holders of their responsibility. Principals often serve as the conduit through which teachers can achieve their career and personal goals.

The study shows a significant connection between staff relationship strategies and school effectiveness in KSPSS. This means that good staff relationship strategies promote school effectiveness in KSPSS. This is, however, only possible where the teachers and the school principal work in relation to the staff relationship strategies in place in their respective schools. According to Hameed (2009), there is a significant association between staff relationship strategies and school effectiveness. Good staff relationships, especially in schools, ensures that employees are given the necessary information and guidance in the performance of their duties (Brigid, 2013). The school principal performs many tasks within a short duration of a school day. Their tasks range from dealing with the parents of a sick pupil to attending to teachers' and students' needs. The most crucial of all these tasks involves providing ongoing support to teachers and other school staff members (Wilson 2007). A supportive relationship allows principals to perform all roles and responsibilities in an effective and professional manner, thus, creating mutual trust and confidence through an exchange of information that produces a working environment that is conducive to high quality services.

Staff relationship strategies within the reach of school principals includes career development strategies, communication strategies, motivation strategies, and shared goal and work balance strategies. Staff relationships have become a vital ingredient for enhancing performance and the productivity of an organisation. The management and co-ordination of human activities has become the cornerstone for achieving organisational survival. Staff relationships largely focus on the prevention of conflict and solving problems in the workplace (Aluko 2007). The relationship can be between fellow workers, between a worker and their superior, or between two members of school administration. When employees share a good relationship with each other, they are able to deliver their best to the organisation. In business management, it is usually referred to as employee relationship management. In other words, the management of interactions with employees with the aim of achieving set business goals and objectives (Leigh 2010).

Good work balance implies proper synergy between work and lifestyle. Good work balance involves separating work from pleasure and knowing when to deal with health-related issues as well as family matters. A satisfactory work balance is capable of dictating the job satisfaction of an organisation's staff. Odeyemi and Roland (2015) consider staff satisfaction as the degree to which personal needs, both material and psychological, are realised by the individual while performing the task assigned to them. According to Odeyemi and Roland (2015), individuals commonly seek job satisfaction. Workers want pleasant superiors and colleagues, responsibilities, interesting work security, adequate pay, adequate status with prospects for promotions, tasks which are commensurate with their abilities, and pleasant surroundings with good working conditions. A look at the above concept poses a challenge to personnel managers, including principals of secondary schools, as many factors can influence the job satisfaction of workers, including teachers.

The results revealed that there is a significant relationship between staff communication strategies and quality leadership in KSPSS. This means that good communication strategies should promote the cross-fertilisation of opinions between the school head and the staff. It should foster mutual understanding and allay unwarranted fear within the school management and the staff. Adequate and purposeful communication strategies will bring about quality leadership in work environments. This result is in line with the earlier work of Akinola (2013), who found that good leadership communication correlates with quality management. Adopting a power influence model of communication for different school circumstances would be a plus for any school principal. Direct power that involves persuading people to implement tasks which they would ordinarily not have been willing to do would be appropriate in propelling lazy teachers to work; while indirect power, that involves setting agenda and programme for teacher professional growth and progression, would motivate teachers with positive attitudes to work more (Waheed 2012). Principals need to make themselves available to staff members, whether they are busy or not. They need to provide needed advice, directions, support, and other forms of assistance whenever possible. They need to communicate and converse with their staff responsibly and effectively when the opportunity presents itself. If a principal establishes a pattern of not being available, teachers may lose confidence and trust in their leadership (Wilson 2007).

The study also finds a striking relationship between staff motivational strategies and organised public secondary schools in Kwara State. This means that motivation leads to an organised school environment. This result is possible where staff comport themselves as a result of the motivational indices available in their schools. Nwosu (2017) has correctly argued that motivation triggers good behaviour. Thus, it is established that there is an interconnection between shared goal strategies and discipline. This means that when organisational goals are shared, there is discipline in the work environment. Also, there is a strong relationship between career development strategies for teachers and high student performance in KSPSS. This implies that when the staff members of a school are given the opportunity for career development, it improves the academic performance of their students. This coincides with Ekundayo's (2004) view that the advancement of the career

of teachers influences student performance. Lastly, this foregrounds an association between good work balance strategies and staff satisfaction in KSPSS. In other words, good work balance strategies promote staff satisfaction. This is in tandem with earlier studies by Nwankwo (2014) and Taiwo (2010) that state that there was a significant association between good work balance strategies and staff satisfaction.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the level of school effectiveness in respect to the staff relationship strategies adopted by principals in KSPSS was high. The study also noted that there was a significant relationship between communication strategies and quality leadership in KSPSS, motivational strategies and staff satisfaction in KSPSS, shared goal strategies and school discipline in KSPSS, and career development or work balance strategies and high student performance in KSPSS. Nonetheless, the study recommends, first, that school administrators should continue to work harder at creating a better organised school environment, especially reinforcing a productive school culture so that its mean contribution to school effectiveness can increase. Also, it is hoped that school administrators do not relent in the uses of various staff relationship strategies that work for them and rather equip themselves with emerging trends in human resources management.

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