

# PRINCIPALS' DECISION-MAKING AND INTERPERSONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

*The study examined principals' decision-making and interpersonal skills required for effective administration of public secondary schools in Delta State. The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of all the 15,183 principals and teachers (438 principals and 14,745 teachers) in public secondary schools in the eleven (11) educational zones of Delta State, Nigeria. A sample size of 948 principals and teachers (164 principals and 784 teachers) were drawn using proportionate simple random sampling technique. A validated questionnaire instrument titled "Principals' Decision-making and Interpersonal Skills for Effective Administration of Public Secondary Schools Questionnaire' (PDISEAPSSQ)" was used to generate data. The instrument yielded a reliability index of 0.83 using Cronbach alpha statistical test. The research questions were analysed and answered using mean and average mean, whereas the research hypotheses were tested using z-test statistics at 0.05 alpha level. The findings of the study revealed that principals in the public secondary schools in Delta State applied decision-making and interpersonal skills to high extent in the performance of their administrative functions. Recommendations made included that principals should learn how to delegate tasks, encourage staff through job enrichment, empowerment and also learn how, when and where to apply the appropriate leadership styles in varying situation that arise in dynamic school environment. This will enable them (principals) to concentrate on more important tasks while at the same time giving teachers opportunities to grow. The government should regularly organize training and retraining of staff via seminar, workshops and symposium. This will further enhance the skills of principals for effective performance of their duties.*

**Keywords:** Decision-making, Interpersonal, Skills, Effective, Administration,

## INTRODUCTION

Education has been recognized globally as a tool for fast-tracking socio-economic and political development of nations. Secondary education in Nigeria is the second level of education with broad goals of preparing the young primary school leavers to become useful citizens that are capable of contributing meaningfully to the development of the society, and for preparing the secondary school students for tertiary education particularly for those who want to advance their academics [Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2014].

Secondary schools are tools for secondary education; they are led by the principals who performs the managerial functions of planning, organizing and coordinating the activities of the school, in collaboration with the vice-principals, dean of studies, heads of department, house masters, librarian, form masters, teachers and others for the purpose of achieving the goals of secondary education. The fundamental aim of principalship is to install a leadership that will not only mobilise the efforts of the staff towards accomplishing the objectives set by

school, but also to have an arrow-head capable of performing administrative tasks of coordinating the programmes of the school in areas of providing instructional aids, ensuring that task performance procedures are followed, establishing and observing personnel policies and hiring practices, resourcing for finance, motivating staff, planning for the health and safety of students and staff, building and renovating structures, working with curricula and providing conducive atmosphere that supports goal attainment. In this regard, the principals need certain managerial and leadership skills to perform the above and other functions effectively. This is why it is important for school administrators to go through the rigours of training in educational administration, so that they can acquire the relevant managerial skills required to manage human and material resources under their jurisdiction.

Skill has been defined as the ability to perform a particular task satisfactorily; it could be manually, mentally or both. Unlike individual natural abilities such as talent and aptitude, skill is acquired or developed through training, education, apprenticeship, coaching and experiences (Koontz, Cannice & Weihrich, 2010). The job of management requires quite a number of important skills including but not limited to collaboration skill, conceptual skill, decision-making skill, finance resourcing skill, cognitive skill, analytical skill, interpersonal skill and emotional intelligence skills among others (Koontz, Cannice, & Weihrich, 2010; Cole, 2004). Managerial skills refer to those acquired abilities and capabilities that facilitate the task of management. They help the manager to effectively co-ordinate and manage the affairs of an organization in order to achieve its set goals.

Studies have established that managerial cum leadership skills can be learnt by principals through personal development and seminars, conferences, workshops and so on (Igbozuruike, Abinusawa & Okoli-Ernest, 2017), having effectively refuted the previously held notion that leadership skills are inborn (Katz, 2002). This implies that principals can enhance their competencies via in-service and on-the-job trainings, especially in key areas of decision-making and interpersonal relationships.

Decision-making is central to management. It is everyday preoccupation of managers in all types of organisation. Decision-making involves premising, identifying alternative actions and evaluating them in the light of the objectives aimed at and choosing best alternative course. Decision-making skill is, therefore, the ability to identify the problem, collect relevant data necessary for understanding the problem, devising alternative courses of action based on the data analysed and making a rational choice from the options so as to solve a problem or accomplish set objectives. Cole (2004) observed that decision-making might be affected by emotions, sound judgement or two of them combined. Cole further stated that people with managerial or administrative roles require among other things, to see decision making as vital part of their responsibility. Regardless of the degree of closeness a principal has with any staff, decisions that are in the best interest of the school must be made in the light of existing information.

Teachers are central to the implementation of the school curriculum. It is therefore virtually inconceivable to grasp the rationale justifying the inconsequentiality of teachers' input in the decision-making process. Given that teachers are part and parcel of education milieu and play a key role in accomplishing the school goals, it is therefore pertinent to involve them and consider their views in the decision-making process. Studies have shown that sharing information with teachers, delegating duties to them, empowering them and showing them that their efforts contributed to successes, creating an enabling environment for cross-fertilization of ideas are all ways of involving the teachers in decision making. When the teachers are allowed to participate actively in the decision-making, it will foster unparalleled commitment from the staff (Wadesango & Bayaga, 2013; Ndu, 2004). Wadesango & Bayaga

(2013) noted that allowing teachers to take part in decision-making exercise ensures that the decisions made are most likely to be implemented. They further stated that involving teachers in making decisions enhances mutual trust between management and teachers, promotes overall school productivity and fosters collaboration since everybody is carried along. The importance of participatory decision-making is all encompassing; teachers tend to accept responsibility for the additional task readily so long as they are given a reasonable stake in making decisions related to the work assigned to them (McGrath, 1992). It is possible that some teachers or staff may have reasonable knowledge even greater information about an issue than the school head; it is only through participatory decision making that such teachers or staff can bring out the informed idea. More importantly, collaborative decision-making may not achieve the intended result if there is no harmony among the staff. In this regard, interpersonal skills are usually employed by the principal in fostering productive relationships among members of school community.

Interpersonal skill is a vital aspect of motivation; it is the ability to show concern, trust and respect for other staff in the school. Socializing and connecting with staff tend to give them the confidence to follow the principal, and do what the principal assigned them to do. It centres on helping people to see that they can meet their needs while contributing to the aims of the organisation where they are working (Memisoglu, 2015). This presupposes that staffs are members of a social system with needs, dignity, ethics, and are members of religious and ethnic groups and associations, with different skills, knowledge, desires, psychological and temperamental variations that tend to shape their attitudes and behaviours. Unless an administrator understands the complexities and uniqueness of people, he may misinterpret the assumptions concerning motivation and communication. The understanding of the intricacies of human personality and how they interact within an individual is vital to effective leadership (Koontz et al., 2010; Peretomode, 2010; Nadi, Saedian, & Abadi, 2013). Ghalandari, Ghorbani, Jogh, Imani and Nia (2012) further stated that interpersonal skill helps an administrator to invigorate the desire of employees to work cohesively to attain the organisational goals. Katz (2002) asserted that interpersonal skill implies having knowledge of one's perception on a matter, being sensitive to the views of or understanding of others. A principal with interpersonal skill is a situational administrator, who discerns situations quickly and adjusts his inclinations to foster stability and promote cohesion. The principal's interpersonal attitude could be in the form of friendship, warmth, rapport, affinity, trust, respect, showing faith in the teachers and empathizing with them and other staffs. These behaviours when purposely applied in combinations produces a connection between the principal and employees, which will, in turn, be an efficacious tool in motivating the workers to increase their productivity. Okorie (2012) quipped that the principal must moderate these behaviours if the goals of the school are to be attained, pointing out that if the principals' interpersonal actions and reactions are not mixed with some element of power, the effectiveness of the school might be in jeopardy.

For the principal to ensure that his /her staffs are properly motivated, he should recognise the complexity of peoples' psychology with respect to their needs, and how to satisfy these needs among the staff of the school. When the staff needs are attended to, the drive to work is elevated. On the contrary, studies have shown that satisfying the worker's needs alone does not guarantee sustained commitment from the employees, rather involving them in critical decision making make them to be more responsible and dedicated to duty. For instance, engaging the teachers and other administrative staff (vice-principal, bursar or head of department) in job enrichment, delegation, and empowering them elicit their commitment to duty, because they will want to take credit for a job well done (Ndu, 2004).

## **Statement of the Problem**

The cardinal role of school principals is to manage human and material resources of the school to achieve set educational objectives. This can only be achieved if the staffs are well-coordinated, motivated and empowered to do their jobs. This is why it is essential that school principals must have the required skills to interface with the staff constructively in order to inspire motivation and productivity among them. This however, may not be achieved if the principals lack critical skills, such as interpersonal and decision-making skills, with which they can use to bring staffs on board, and excite team spirit within their ranks.. In this light, it is unclear whether principals have and apply those skills in the performance of their duties, especially when one considers the observable low morale and commitment on the part of teachers and the declining academic achievement of students as a result. This study therefore examined the extent public secondary schools principals applied decision-making and interpersonal skills in the performance of their duties.

## **AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The aim of the study was to examine how principals apply managerial skills of decision-making and interpersonal abilities in the administration of public secondary schools in Delta State. Specifically, the objectives of the study were:

1. To determine the extent to which principals apply decision making skills in performing managerial functions in public secondary schools in Delta State.
2. To find out the extent to which principals apply interpersonal skills in performing managerial functions in public secondary schools in Delta State.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions guided the study;

1. To what degree do the Principals apply decision-making skills skill in performing managerial functions in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State?
2. To what extent do the Principals apply interpersonal skills in performing managerial functions in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State?

## **HYPOTHESES**

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

1.  $H_{01}$ : There is no significant difference between the mean scores of experienced and less experienced teachers on the extent Principals apply decision-making skills in performing managerial functions, in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State.
2.  $H_{02}$ : There is no significant difference between the mean scores of Principals and teachers on the extent principals apply interpersonal skills in performing managerial functions, in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of all the 15,183 principals and teachers (438 principals and 14,745 teachers) in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. A sample size of 164 principals and 784 teachers (598 experienced and 186 less experienced teachers) were drawn using proportionate random sampling technique. A validated questionnaire instrument titled “Principals’ Decision-Making and Interpersonal Skills for Effective Administration of Public Secondary Schools

Questionnaire' (PDISEAPSSQ)" was used to generate data. The instrument had reliability index of 0.83 using Cronbach alpha statistical test. The instrument adopted a modified four point Likert scale of Very Great Extent, Great Extent, Low Extent and Very Low Extent. It was face-validated by an expert from Department of Educational Administration and Planning, University of Port Harcourt. The instrument consisted of two sections; Section A was design to elicit demographic data of the respondents, while section B included 29 items questionnaire items structured to obtain responses from the respondents. Data generated were analysed with the aid of SPSS version 21. Research questions were answered using, mean and aggregate mean. The criterion for acceptance was  $x \geq 2.50$  whereas z-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level

## RESULTS

**Research Question One:** To what Extent Do The Principals Apply Decision-Making Skills In Performing Managerial Functions in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State?

**Table 1. Mean and average mean scores of experienced and less experienced teachers on the extent principals apply decision-making skills in performing managerial functions in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State**

S. No	Description of items	Mean of Teachers		Average Mean	Remarks
		Experienced	Less Experienced		
1	Principals make decisions based on available data and information.	3.00	3.00	3.00	High extent
2	Principals consider all the available alternatives before making decision.	2.84	2.99	2.92	High extent
3	Principals involve teachers in decision-making.	2.63	2.84	2.74	High extent
4	Principals seek the views of teachers on important matters before taking decision.	2.84	2.95	2.90	High extent
5	Principals seek the opinion of teachers before assigning subject/task to them.	2.79	2.82	2.81	High extent
6	Principals empower teachers to make decisions on less important issues.	2.67	2.56	2.62	High extent
7	Principals' decisions are consistent with short and long term plans.	2.89	2.70	2.80	High extent
8	Principals at times inaugurate committee to advice him/her on some matters.	2.69	2.67	2.68	High extent
9	Principals often seek for superior knowledge on issues before taking decision.	2.66	2.71	2.69	High extent
10	Principals always identify problem before looking for solution.	3.01	2.92	2.97	High extent
11	Principals evaluate the extent decisions taken achieved objectives.	2.77	2.83	2.80	High extent
12	Principals take decisions that are in the best interest of the school.	3.02	3.22	3.12	High extent
13	Principals consider the implication of alternative choices ahead of decision-making.	2.93	2.91	2.92	High extent
<b>Aggregate</b>		<b>2.83</b>	<b>2.85</b>	<b>2.84</b>	

Table 1 above showed that the respondents concurred on the itemized statements bordering on decision-making skills of principals as revealed in items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13. The aggregate of the average means score of 2.84 indicates that principals in Delta State secondary schools applied decision-making skill to high extent.

**Research Question Two:** To what extent do the principals apply interpersonal skills in performing managerial functions in public secondary schools in Delta State?

**Table 2. Mean and average mean of principals and teachers on extent to which principals apply interpersonal skill in performing managerial functions in public secondary schools in Delta State**

S/ No	Description of items	Principals	Teachers	Average Mean	Remark
14	Principals help teachers to become efficient by acknowledging and praising their successes.	3.02	3.04	3.03	High extent
15	Principals inspire team spirit among teachers via effective communication.	3.12	3.04	3.08	High extent
16	Principals encourage healthy relationship among teachers to build cohesive team.	3.09	2.82	2.96	High extent
17	Principals do not scorn those with less knowledge about a subject/issue.	2.69	2.63	2.66	High extent
18	Principals recognize exceptional performance by staffs/students and celebrate such persons.	3.13	2.92	3.03	High extent
19	Principals make sure that staff and students are treated fairly and impartially.	3.01	3.00	3.01	High extent
20	Principals encourage two-way communication by giving the staff time to express themselves.	3.03	2.95	2.99	High extent
21	Principals show concern for staffs' situation and welfare.	3.10	2.96	2.96	High extent
22	Principals do not allow their concern for staff negatively affects work performance.	3.13	2.81	2.97	High extent
23	Principals apply reward and punishment to get better results.	3.29	2.95	3.12	High extent
24	Principals control their emotions even when offended.	2.57	2.72	2.65	High extent
25	Principals explore all peaceful means in conflict resolution.	2.99	3.00	3.00	High extent
26	Principals work with all staff irrespective of race and tribe.	2.98	3.01	3.00	High extent
27	Principals motivate staff to encourage commitment and achieve results.	3.00	2.96	2.95	High extent
28	Principals are friendly and approachable.	2.92	2.79	2.86	High extent
29	Principals empower teachers with job-enrichment.	2.69	2.52	2.61	High extent
	<b>Aggregate</b>	<b>2.98</b>	<b>2.88</b>	<b>2.93</b>	

In table 2 above, the respondents agreed in all the items 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29 with average means of 3.03, 3.08, 2.96, 2.66, 3.03, 3.01, 2.99, 2.96, 2.97, 3.12, 2.65, 3.00, 3.00, 2.95, 2.86, and 2.61. Given the aggregate mean score of 2.93, the extent to which principals applied interpersonal skills is high.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of experienced and less experienced teachers on the extent of principals' application of decision-making skills in the administration of public senior secondary schools in Delta State.

**Table 3. z-test analysis of the between the mean scores of experienced and less experienced teachers on the extent of principals’ application of decision-making skills in administration of Public Senior Secondary Schools in Delta State.**

S/ No	Comparing Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Sig. Level	Remark
1.	Experienced	598	2.83	0.79					
2.	Less Experienced	186	2.85	0.88	782	0.27	1.96	0.05	Not Significant (H <sub>0</sub> accepted)

Table 3 reveals that the z-calculated value is 0.27 and is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 782 degrees of freedom and 0.05 significance level. Hence the null hypothesis which states, that there is no significant differences between the mean scores of experienced and less experienced teachers on the extent principals apply decision-making skill in performing managerial functions, in public secondary schools in Delta State, is accepted.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant difference between the mean assessment of principals and teachers on the extent of principals’ application of interpersonal skill in the administration of public secondary schools in Delta State.

**Table 4. z-test analysis of the difference between principals and teachers on the extent of principals’ application of interpersonal skill in administration of public secondary schools in Delta State**

S/No	Comparing Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Sig. Level	Remark
1.	Principals	164	2.98	0.80					
2.	Teachers	784	2.88	0.79	946	1.46	1.96	0.05	Not Significant (H <sub>0</sub> accepted)

Table 4 reveals that the z-calculated value of 1.46 is less than the z-critical value of 1.96 at 946 degrees of freedom and 0.05 significance level. Hence the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant different between the mean assessment of principals and teachers on the extent principals apply interpersonal skill in performing managerial functions is accepted.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The result and findings of this study have shown that majority of the principals applied decision-making skills in the administration of their respective schools. The high average mean score of 2.84 indicates that principals in Delta State secondary schools recognized the centrality of decision and applied decision-making skills in taking decisions. The approaches of decision-making which include; making decisions based on available information and alternatives, involving staff and seeking for their views, empowering the staff to make less important decisions, using committees and seeking for superior knowledge among others are all-important in making organizational decisions. This finding is in agreement with McGrath, (1992) and Ndu (2004), who independently reported that when decisions are taken in collaboration with those that the decision affects, the chances of hitch free implementation is increased. Conversely, this finding contradicts Wadesango & Bayaga (2013) findings, which state that administrators do not involve the staff in making decisions on matters affecting staff, even when the staffs have expressed willingness to participate in the processes. The result also showed that teachers with varying experiences indicated that they were consulted prior to taking important decisions affecting them and their work. Also the study found out that, there was no significant differences between the views of experienced and less experienced teachers on principal’s decision making approach. This is particularly good

because, involving teachers in decision-making irrespective of their experiences gives them sense of belonging and value. The relevance of participatory decision-making has been buttressed and hence principals should endeavour to incorporate teachers more in decision-making processes. Psychologically, when teachers are involved in decision-making processes, they will be more willing to commit to such decisions given that they participated in its conception.

These findings of the study showed that principals of public secondary schools in Delta State apply interpersonal skills in coordinating the affairs of their respective schools. This reflects in high means of both principals and teachers in the items assessing the skills (interpersonal). The high average mean score of 2.93 in table 2 indicates that school administrators actually apply interpersonal skills in their interactions with staff. This finding is in agreement with the study conducted by Nadi et al (2013), which reported that efficient school administrators apply human skills or interpersonal skills in order to engender the needed connection between the administrator and the staff, from which motivation and productivity ensue and enhanced. More so, the finding of this study is in accord with Memisoglu (2015) who reported that secondary school principals applied managerial skills more effectively in administration of schools. The findings further showed that there was no significant difference in the mean scores of principals and teachers on the extent principals applied interpersonal skills in performing their administrative functions. Ghalandari et al (2012) reiterated that application of interpersonal skills aims at creating a working environment that promote harmony, enthusiasm and energizes the teacher to increase his productivity. The principal is responsible for ensuring enabling climate in school environment; their actions and inactions communicates and matters a lot. To this end principals should ensure that they are communicating the right information to the staff. Studies have shown that humanitarian aspect of leadership is an essential factor that endears followers to love their leader and willing to do the bidding of the leader (Okorie, 2012; Ghalandari, 2012).

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings, the study concluded that principals in the public secondary schools in Delta State applied decision-making and interpersonal skills to high extent in the performance of their duties. If this high rate of application of managerial skills is maintained and improved upon, the quality of secondary education in Delta State will be heightened.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

1. Principals should learn how to delegate tasks, encourage staff through job enrichment and empowerment. This will enable them (principals) to concentrate on more important tasks while at the same time giving teachers opportunities to grow.
2. The government should regularly organize training and retraining of staff via seminar, workshops and symposium. This will further enhance the skills of principals for effective performance of their duties.
3. Principal should learn how, when and where to apply the appropriate leadership style in varying situations that arises in dynamic school environment.



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