

REFOCUSING PRIMARY SCHOOLS ADMINISTRATION THROUGH APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

This study aimed at determining the appropriate communication forms for repositioning primary school administration. In conducting the study, four research questions were used. The survey research design was used. A researcher-developed questionnaire was used for the study and was subjected to expert validation and reliability. Population covered seventy-six (76) head teachers and one thousand, three hundred and sixty-three (1, 363) primary school teachers who were teaching in the 76 state-government owned primary schools in the area. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 30 head teachers and 275 teachers. Mean scores were used to provide answers to the research questions. The findings showed that head teachers and teachers in Nnewi Education Zone of Anambra State could regularly communicate using appropriate communication patterns, channels, and skills. The implications of the findings and recommendations were stated.

Introduction

One of the greatest challenges of administration of primary education in Nigeria today is the fostering of effective communication that would enhance the repositioning this level of education. Eheazu (2005), noted that repositioning implies putting primary education in a better position to achieve its goals and purposes. The need for repositioning primary education becomes more crucial when one considers the fact that primary education is the bedrock upon which other levels of education are built. By implication, whatever happens at this level can either make or mar the entire education enterprise (Ayodele, 2004). In the light of this, the establishment of an appropriate communication pattern, channel, and skills in a school system is a fundamental task, which needs to be approached by all school administrators.

Communication is vital for organizational management especially the school (Vale, 2005). The school as a social institution where people interact for training involves a lot of human interactions to realize its pre-determined goals. The achievement of such goals and the execution of activities are possible through effective communication between individuals in the school system. However, that some school administrators have been greatly criticized for neglecting effective communication in their schools. Addressing the importance of communication in the school set up, Cole (2004), warns that qualified and dedicated teachers could be frustrated and rendered unproductive due to lack of communication in the school organization. Anohu (2004), stated that some teachers and head teachers are in conflict because of the way in which the head teachers communicate information the teachers, which makes some teachers to fail to comply with most directives issued by head teachers. Ocho (2002), reported that confrontations, tensions, and disagreements among head teachers, teachers and students exist in some schools and have been mostly associated with negative results such as communication gap, indiscipline, closed, organizational climate, and staff truancy and individual rivalry among staff. Besides, in some schools there is lack of free flow of information exist, consequently causing distrust due to lack of communication, suspicion as a result of the existence of non-interaction and school administrators relegate various forms of administrative communication to the background (Uzoechina, 2004). Some head teacher only inform teachers of some set goals but do not make clear expectations of implementation, outcomes and rewards, and do not give guidelines on standards of achievement. Some head teachers only inform teachers of major decision issues without actually involving them in the communication process. Even when teachers go to them for clarifications, they do not listen to teachers nor make clarifications to help them understand what they are expected to do. They are not flexible and considerate to teachers. When teachers do not understand what is expected of them, the tendency to be committed to goal implementation may not be high, and this affects efficient administration of primary schools.

Given the dangers of these anomalies to the realization of Nigerian primary education goals, it becomes important to evolve strategies for repositioning school communication towards effective school administration. The purpose of this study was therefore to find out the appropriate communication, which head teachers could use in primary school administration.

Research questions

This study sought answer to the following research questions:

1. What type/pattern of communication should head teachers and teachers use in schools?
2. How often should head teachers communicate with their teachers?
3. What channel of communication should be used in schools?
4. What communication skills should head teachers¹ use in primary school administration?

Research Design

This study was a survey, which aimed at eliciting responses on appropriate communication for repositioning primary school administration in Nnewi education zone of Anambra State. This research was designed to elicit responses from a sample of head teachers on the appropriate communication patterns, frequency, channels and skills for primary schools. Population of the study

One thousand, four hundred and thirty-nine (1,439) serving primary school staff in Nnewi Education Zone were the population for the study. Based on data obtained from the Personnel Department, Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board, Awka in February 2006, the target population for this study consisted of all the seventy-six (76) head teachers and one thousand, three hundred and sixty-three (1,363) primary school teachers who were teaching in the 76 state-government owned primary schools in Nnewi Education zone as at the time of this study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for this study was 305 respondents comprising 30 head teachers and 275 teachers selected through proportionate stratified—random sampling technique. Stratification was done at school level. The schools were stratified according to the four local Government Education Authorities in the zone. From each Local Government Education Authority, approximately 40 percent of the schools were selected, and all the head teachers in these school participated as respondents. From each of the selected schools, 40 percent of the teachers totaling 275 were randomly chosen.

Instrument for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire titled "Appropriate Communication for Primary Schools (ACPS)" was used to collect data. The instrument was presented in sections. Section 'A' of the questionnaire contained information on personal data, which helped in determining the status of the respondent (head teacher or teacher). Sections B to E contained twenty-nine (29) items. Section 'B' centered on patterns of communication, section C was frequency of communication, section D was on communication channels and, section D was on communication skills. The respondents (head teachers and teachers) were required to indicate their opinions to questionnaire items drawn on four points rating scale. Their responses were structured from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree [A], Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

Validation and Reliability of the Instrument

To ascertain the validity of the instrument, the draft of the instrument was submitted to experts in Educational Administration and Planning who criticized and made amendments for modifications, which were effected before the final version was prepared.

To test for reliability, the Crombach alpha procedure was applied: In doing this, pilot study was carried out in ten (10) primary schools in Onitsha Education Zone of Anambra State using split half method. The mean rating for each item were coded and subjected to statistical analysis. The ACPS yielded a coefficient alpha value of 0.81, which was considered satisfactory for the study.

Method of Data Collection

The instrument was personally administered on the respondents by the researcher. The completed copies of the questionnaire were collected immediately to avoid loss of the instrument. All the 305 copies distributed were retrieved.

Method of Data Analysis

Mean scores were calculated and used in answering the research questions. Values were assigned to the opinion of respondents as follows:

1. Strongly Agree 4 points
2. Agree 3 points
3. Disagree 2 points
4. Strongly Disagree 1 point

The mean of 4, 3, 2, and 1 was calculated to be 2.5. Two levels of decisions were made as follows; any mean score below 2.5 was rejected while any mean above 2.5 was accepted,

Results

Research Questions 1: What pattern/type of communication should head teachers and teachers use in schools?

Table 1: Mean Scores on Pattern/Type of Communication

s/ N	Items	Teachers' Mean	Decision	Head teachers' Mean	Decision
1.	Teachers should receive instructions from their immediate superiors.	3.23	Accepted	2.82	Accepted
2.	Head teachers should insist on presenting conflicting issues and reaching compromise with teachers.	3.16	Accepted	2.64	Accepted
3.	Grievances, complaints and requests should be made known to head teachers through the assistants.	3.56	Accepted	3.22	Accepted
4.	Teachers should be allowed to discuss directly with the principal.	3.12	Accepted	3.00	Accepted
5.	Teachers should communicate verbally with their superiors only.	1.95	Not Accepted	2.00	Not Accepted
6.	Head teachers must always use written information.	1.46	Not Accepted	2.13	Not Accepted
7.	Information should always go down to teachers without allowing them to communicate upwards.	1.22	Not Accepted	2.33	Accepted
	Section mean	2.53	Accepted	2.59 :	Accepted

The data in table 1 above showed that, the mean scores for items 1—4 exceeded 2.50, while the means for items 5-7 were below 2.5. This indicates that in the opinions of teachers and head teachers, teachers should receive instruction from their immediate superiors, head teachers should insist on presenting conflicting issues and reaching compromise with teachers, grievances, complaints and request should be made known to principal through assistant head teachers and teachers are allowed to discuss directly with the head teachers.

In summary, section 'A' of the questionnaire has a section mean of 2.59 for head teachers and 2.53 for teachers. The respondents agreed to the motion that a particular type/pattern of communication should be used by head teachers and teachers

Research Question 2: How often should head teachers communicate with their teachers?

Table 1| Mean Scores for the Frequency of Communication

s/ N	Items	Teachers' Mean	Decision	Head-teac hers' Mean	Decision
8.	Teachers should always be summoned for staff meeting to air views and contribute to the growth of the school.	3.55	Accepted	3.08	Accepted
9.	Every decision reached on goal implementation should always be documented and . timely communicated to teachers.	3.42	Accepted	3.24	Accepted
10	Queries should be always sent to defaulting teachers.	3.59	Accepted	3.38	Accepted
11	Teachers should be regularly reminded of their responsibilities through daily briefings	3.62	Accepted	3.60	Accepted
12	Newsletters should often be used to inform teachers of their responsibilities.	3.01	Accepted	2.75	Accepted
13	Written information should always be pasted on notice boards	3.47	Accepted	3.42	Accepted
14	Teachers should regularly be reminded of new policies through mernos and notices.	3.71	Accepted	3.56	Accepted
	Section Mean	3.48	Accepted	3.42	Accepted

The responses to all the items above exceeded 2.50 in both the teachers¹ and head teachers' columns. This shows that, both head teachers and teachers agreed that al the listed items should be the ways in which head teachers should frequently communicate with teachers.

In summary, section 'C' of the questionnaire had a section mean rating of 3.48 from the head teachers' and 3.42 from the teachers' responses. These showed that head teachers should communicate with their teachers regularly.

Research Question 3: What channels of communication should be used in primary schools?

Table 3: Mean Scores of Communication Channels

S/N	Items	Teachers' Mean	Decision	Head teachers' Mean	Decision
15.	Information should be received through verbal means	3.37	Accepted	3.38	Accepted
16.	Message should be circulated through written means	3.19	Not Accepted	2.94	Accepted
17.	Head teachers should send pupils to orally communicate vital information to teachers.	2.45	Not Accepted	2.14	Not Accepted
18.	Information should be remitted through telephones (intercom)	3.69	Accepted	3.24	Accepted
19.	Vital information should be relayed through the grapevine.	2.22	Not Accepted	2.24	Not Accepted
20.	Head teachers should adopt open door policies to encourage free communication	3.56	Accepted	3.48	Accepted
21.	Head teachers should adopt both formal and informal communication systems.	2.81	Accepted	3.00	Accepted
22.	Circulars from external bodies and head offices should be made available to teachers.	3.56	Accepted	3.14	Accepted
23.	Head teachers should visit teachers in class and staff rooms and give them vital information.	3.25	Accepted	3.31	Accepted
24.	Staff meetings should be held regularly for briefing on school affairs	3.44	Accepted	3.50	Accepted
	Section Mean	3.15	Accepted	3.04	Accepted

The data in table 3 above showed that, only items 17 (Head teachers should send pupils to orally communicate vital information to teachers) and 19 (Vital information should be relayed through the grapevine) had mean ratings below 2.50. This indicates that, the two channels of communication should not be used as appropriate communication channels. The rest of the items scored above 2.50 indicating that they should be used as appropriate channels of communication in the schools.

In summary, the section mean had a mean rating of 3.15 and 3.04 for head teachers and teachers respectively. This means that both the teachers and head teachers agreed to the communication channels listed in this section.

Research Question 4:What communication skills should head teachers use?

Table 4: Mean Scores of Communication Skills

S/N	Items: Head teachers should use	Teachers Mean	Decision	Head teachers' Mean	Decision
25.	Visionary skills in discussing the school's vision for improving pupils' academic performances with teachers.	3.19	Accepted	3.01	Accepted
26.	Strategic skills in discussing his strategic plans for improved pupil discipline	2.79	Accepted	3.12	Accepted
27.	Motivational skills in supporting teachers to talk about their grievances.	3.01	Accepted	2.11	Not Accepted
28	Empathic skills in listening to teachers' problems and advising	3.07	Accepted	3.01	Accepted
29.	Information skills in providing vital information, guidelines, and patterns of job performance.	3.48	Accepted	3.21	Accepted
	Section Mean	3.11	Accepted	2.89	Accepted

The data in table 4 above showed that all the items scored above 2.50 in the teachers' column. This indicates the teachers' support for the entire items as effective communication skills. In the head teachers' column, apart from item 27 (motivational skills in supporting teachers to talk about their grievances), the rest of the items scored above 2.50. This means that the head teachers disagreed that they should use motivational skills in supporting teachers to talk about their grievances but agreed that they should apply the rest of the communication skills.

The section mean has a mean rating of 3.11 and 2.89 for teachers and head teachers' respectively. This means that the respondents agreed that most of the above stated head teachers in communicating with teachers should adopt skills.

Discussion of Findings

The presentation and analysis of data relating to the first research question showed that communication pattern should flow from top to bottom. This implies that teachers should receive instruction from head teachers, assistant head teachers and sectional heads as well as send information to pupils, messengers and other subordinates. This study also revealed that teachers should not only communicate verbally with their superiors and head teachers should not insist on only written communication. This finding agrees with Anohu (2004), who noted that appropriate communication could be written or oral. Since communication is the life wire of every organization, teachers should be allowed to receive information and send them to their subordinates.

The data relevant to the second research question revealed that teachers should always be summoned to staff meeting to air their views and make their grievances, complains and request known to school administrators. This means that communication is the fundamental element of administration. In addition, necessary information should be regularly passed across to teachers to remind them of their responsibilities and defaulting teachers should always be warned through written or verbal queries. It is noted that the head teachers should also regularly communicate to teachers through the use of newsletter, memos and posting of necessary information on the notice board. Head teachers that use regular communication may be characterized as " transactional" (Blake and Mouton 1985:12). They are very strong on schedules, communicate clear and precise information and they expect teachers to keep to goal requirements. According to Uzoechina (2004), as they do this, teachers avoid getting into their trouble and consequently, engage in more disciplined behaviour. Transactional administrators by virtue of their leadership behaviours regularly communicate vital information to guide teachers' actions and inactions to ensure strict conformity to set standards and task requirements.

Furthermore, the data relevant to the third research question revealed that among various strategies to be adopted by the head teachers for effective communication, the use of mass media and grapevine for information was rated unsuccessful. The use of telephone/intercom, though recommended is not popular in third world country like ours. Therefore, it creates a gap in communication between head teachers and teachers. As this study revealed, head teachers should regularly visit the class and staff room as this helps them to identify various problem confronting their staff and pass vital information across to teachers. This would entail the application of consultative and participatory principles in their administrative strategies to help create a level ground for free communication. Where head teachers adopt participatory approaches to communication, it means that they would not alienate staff who at the end of the day, would be expected to implement school goals. This finding is line with Coch and French (2006) who examined the degrees of the participation in an organization and found that the greater the participation, the better the communication and the better were relationships between the boss and immediate subordinates.

Similarly, the data relevant to the fourth research question revealed that head teachers should use more of creative communication skills in schools. Head teachers should articulate the vision of the school with respect to pupils' academic performances, discuss his strategic plans for improving discipline and request teachers to analyze and suggest strategies for reducing dropout rates. When they do these, then one would expect teachers to work with head teachers towards attaining school goals. As Cole (2004) noted, unless goals are properly articulated and their implementation strategies made clear enough, such goals might not be achieved. This finding agrees with that of Coch and French (2006), who found that head teachers should verbalize support in encouraging teachers and facilitate free flow of communication between regular teachers and oilier line staff. Such greater participation led (o significantly favourable attitudes by subordinates towards management and more levels of goal attainment.

Implications of the findings

The findings of this study imply that where head teachers do not highlight and discuss their strategic goals for school improvements, no matter how creative the decisions and visions are, such goals may not be attained. Therefore, head teachers should endeavour to articulate, highlight their goals for school improvements to teachers and then support and mobilize teachers and community members to help in implementing the goals.

Another implication of this study is that communication should not be the exclusive preserve of the head teachers. Teachers often demand their voice in decisions concerning individuals, groups, or the entire school. Where such involvement is not forth coming, low level of goal attainment might persist. Where the head teachers only inform teachers of vital decisions but failed to clearly intimate teachers on expectations and standards in a manner conducive for the achievement of school objectives, low levels of goal attainment result. This implies the need for head teachers to routinely use persuasions, invitations, teachers' forum, clarifications, information, and interactions in schools administration. Recommendations.

1. . Head teachers should use their creative abilities to create attainable visions and goals for their schools.
2. Head teachers should endeavour articulate, highlight their goals for school improvements to teachers and then support and mobilize teachers and community members to help in implementing the goals.
3. Rather than making staff meetings, grounds for issuing orders, head teachers should employ the use of regular close discussions, interactions, and brainstorming on vital issues of school administration during the meetings.
4. In-service training on communication skills should be regularly organized for head teachers and staff. This is a task for the Anambra State Universal Basic Education Board and Ministry of Education.

Conclusion

From the findings of the study the researcher concluded that effective communication would enhance the repositioning of the primary level of education. This is in line with the opinion of vale (2005) that communication is vital for organizational management especially the school. Thus, school administrators should establish, appropriate communication pattern, channel and skills in the school system. Effective communication among individuals in the school system will no doubt help the school to achieve her predetermined goals.

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