STRATEGIC PLANNING COMPETENCIES UTILIZED BY PRINCIPALS IN MANAGING EMERGING ISSUES IN SECONDARY EDUCATION IN ANAMBRA STATE OF NIGERIA

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Abstract
The study was aimed at determining the strategic planning competencies utilized by secondary school principals in Anambra State. One research questions and two null hypotheses were formulated. The study was a descriptive survey involving all the 268 principals and 268 vice-principals in the public secondary schools in Anambra State. Data were collected through a 8-item researcher-developed questionnaire, structured on a 4-point scale that ranged from very high extent to very low extent. Means scores were used in answering the research questions. The t-test was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings indicated that principals utilized strategic planning competencies to a low extent going by the mean ratings of principals and vice-principals. There were also no significant differences between the mean ratings of less and more experienced principals on their utilization of the strategic planning competencies. Poor utilization of strategic planning competencies by principals implies that it is either that principals were not adequately trained and prepared to strategically manage schools for effective results or that the training they received were no longer adequate to meet the challenges of emerging issues in secondary school management. It was thus, recommended among other things that as a result of rapid increase in knowledge, scientific and technological advancement, encouragement should be given for principals to attend conferences within and outside the state where they will acquire more strategic planning competencies.

Introduction
Strategic planning involves planning fundamentally for an organization's success under challenging circumstances. According to Stoner and Freeman (1994), strategic planning is the process of selecting an organization's goals, determining the policies and strategic programmes/projects necessary to achieve specified objectives en-route to the goals and establishing the methods necessary to assure that the policies and strategic programmes are implemented. Bedian (1987), contributed that, strategic planning focuses on enterprise long-term relationship to its environment.

Strategic planning competencies are the skills, talents, abilities, and actions which managers (including principals) initiate to make decisions that affect or are intended to affect, the organization (school) as a whole over a period of time. It spells as what is to be achieved, how it is to be achieved, who is to achieve it and the constraints to its' achievement considering the resources available. Wright, Kroll, & Parnell (1996), viewed strategic planning competencies as the ability for continuous and collective exercise of foresight and taking informed decisions about the future or as the formulation of basic organizational missions, purposes, objectives, policies, and programme strategic lo achieving stated objectives, which include the method necessary to ensure that plan/strategies are implemented. Strategic competencies are needed for a systematic articulation of the proposed goals and objectives of an organization, the how and the means with which to achieve the stated goals. Owuchekwa (2000:6), highlighted 9 basic strategic planning competencies as: Ability to formulate organizations' long-term goals, missions and purposes. Ability to identify current objectives and strategies for effective planning. Ability to analyse environmental changes and plan to adapt to the changes.

- Ability to analyse the organizational resources, strengths and weaknesses, and deal with problems, given the available resources and skills.
- Ability to determine strategic opportunities and threats in an environment, ability to determine the extent of change required in current strategy.
- Ability to engage in strategic decision-making.
- Ability to establish methods necessary to assure that policies and strategic programmes are implemented. Ability to control and monitor progress of strategic actions.

These nine competencies are intended to help principals determine their targets, capabilities and a realistic programme for maintaining targets and capabilities. This can help improve managerial and educational effectiveness. Utilization of strategic planning competence is the principals’ ability to appropriately strategize and plan school goals and missions, raise and manage funds, coordinate staff-student activities, effectively organize time, and enhance curriculum implementation.

Emerging Issues in Nigerian Education System Requiring Strategic Planning
Many emerging issues in the Nigerian education environment provide the rationale for advocating that principals utilize adequate strategic planning competencies. One is that considering the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system, and Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme, secondary education had been experiencing some problems as a result of policy gaps. The issue of gaps in the institutional capacity to deliver secondary education of a sound quality is obvious as Durosaro (2004) noted that most institutions do not have the vision whether written or unwritten nor a mission statement to guide their activities. Some principals-claim to be unaware of certain policy directives and regulations making them not to work towards the realization of the goals enunciated in educational policies.
Another issue of concern in the management of secondary education in Nigeria is that of inadequate funding. According to a World Bank survey on Nigeria (2002), the federal expenditure on education seems to be below 10 percent of its overall expenditure. For instance, between 1997 and 2002, the total share of education in total federal expenditure ranged between 9.9 percent and 7.6 percent with the trend showing a downward plunge (World Bank, 2002). The result is inadequate funding evidenced by dilapidated building in schools lack or laboratory equipment, dearth of instructional materials, and insufficient human resource management (Okoye, 2004).

The rise in enrolment trends is also another emerging issue. Enyi (2001), noted that the Nigerian Education system is witnessing a rapid expansion at all levels. Such expansion increases its need for more school physical facilities, more staff, and more resources to meet the ever-growing number of students that are progressively enrolling for secondary school education. Consequently, Ogunu (2000), worried that schools are becoming more populated with small classes that having up to forty and seventy students assigned to one teacher. Since government alone cannot provide all the necessary facilities, resources and management needed in the schools, principles must employ their strategic planning competencies to plan for more ways of generating funds for school.

One wonders whether the secondary school principals in Anambra state utilize the strategic planning competencies to move their schools forwards in the face of these issues. Principals are usually appointed based on experience. Many of them receive little or no training on strategic planning competencies, on the assumption that their prior knowledge and experience have adequately prepared them. Since some of these principals have less years of experience than others, they might not have received adequate exposure to the strategic planning competencies and their experience, might affect the extent of their utilization of the strategic management competencies. Besides vice-principals work directly with the principals and act on behalf of the principals most of the times in carrying out these functions. Hence, they should be able to say what competencies the principals possess and fail to possess. It becomes crucial to empirically investigate the strategic planning competencies utilized by the principals in relation to their job experience. Hence, thus study.

Research Questions
The following research question guided the study:
I. To what extent do secondary school principals in Anambra State utilize strategic planning competencies?

Hypotheses
Two null hypotheses was tested at the 0.05 significance level:
1. Principals and vice-principals do not differ significantly in their mean rating of the strategic planning competencies utilized by principals.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of less experienced principals on their utilization of strategic planning competencies.

Research Methods
Research Design
The research design adopted in this study was a descriptive survey. Akuezuilo and Agu (2003), defined a survey as a method of obtaining information from various groups or persons mainly through questionnaire or personal interviews. The researcher used this design to collect information from a specified population, through a questionnaire on the strategic planning competencies of secondary school principals in Anambra State.

Population for the Study
The population of this study consisted of all the principals and vice-principals in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Five hundred and thirty six (536) respondents consisting of the entire 268 principals and 268 vice-principals (administration) in the public secondary schools in the State, made up the population. This number was based on a data collected from the Post Primary Schools Service Commission (PPSSC). Since the population of the study is small, a census survey involving all the 536 respondents was used to avoid sampling errors and bias.

Instrument for Data Collection
A researcher-developed questionnaire entitled "Principals' Strategic Planning Competencies Assessment Questionnaire (PSMCAQ)" was used to collect data. The questionnaire was designed for both principals and vice-principals. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part 1 contained two open-ended statements that sought information on the respondents' job designation, and education zone. Part 2 comprised of eight items that were concerned with strategic planning competencies. Respondents were required to rate the extent of
principals' strategic planning competencies on a 4-point scale that ranged from: Very high extent (4 points), High extent (3 points), Low extent (2 points) and Very low extent (1 point).

Validation of Instrument
Two experts who were lecturers in educational management and policy, and an expert in measurement and evaluation from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka validated the instrument. The experts made several corrections that included modifications of some of the items, the research questions and the rating scale. The corrections from the experts were effected in the final copy of the instrument.

Reliability of Instrument
The instrument was pilot-tested using 10 principals and 10 vice principals from 10 secondary schools in Enugu State. The scores of the respondents were subjected to statistical analysis based on the Cronbach alpha procedure for testing reliability. A co-efficient of 0.76 was obtained, which was considered satisfactory for the study.

Method of Data Collection
The researcher and six research assistants visited the respondents in their offices and distributed 536 copies of the questionnaire as appropriate. They allowed each respondent some hours to respond to the items before retrieving the filled questionnaire. Repeated visits were made for respondents who could not promptly respond. At the end of the exercise, only 264 out of the 268 principals returned their copies. Four did not complete theirs even after several repeated visits from the researcher. Also, four vice-principals did not return their copies. Thus, eight copies were lost and only 528 copies representing 98.5 percent were retrieved and used for data analyses.

Method of Data Analysis
Mean ratings were used in analyzing the questionnaire items for answering the research questions: The responses of principals and vice-principals to each item were calculated using mean scores. Then the section mean- in each column was calculated. The decision rule for interpreting the mean scores of the data was that 2.5 is the cut-off point for accepting an item as the degree of strategic planning competence utilized by the respondents. The organized data was then analysed using t-test for the hypotheses in order to uphold or reject the null hypothesis. The t-test was used because it is the statistical test that can determine whether a difference exists between two means and whether a significant difference exists at a given probability level.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Research Question One: To what extent do secondary school principals in Anambra State utilize strategic planning competencies?

Data relating to research question one was analyzed and presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean Ratings of the Items Relating to the Extent of Principals' Utilization of Strategic Planning Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/NO</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Planning clear visions and goals for the school.</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>Low extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Considering the needs of teachers and students when planning for resource provision.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Planning job schedules to permit maximum use of skill and discretion by staff.</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>High extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Planning with school staff to prioritise strategies for policy implementation.</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>Very low extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Planning for improved students' achievement standards, in line with educational policies.</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>Very low extent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Brainstorming and designing with staff,</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>Very low extent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
strategies for improved parental involvement in school management.

6 Planning supervision to identify staff potentials and weaknesses in performing tasks. 1.63 Very low extent

7 Planning special projects for motivating students to study hard and desist from examination malpractice. 1.92 Very low extent

Section mean 8

1.81 Very low extent

1.93 Very low extent

In table 1, only item 2 (considering the needs of teachers and students when planning for resource provision) got a mean rating of 2.68, which is above the cut-off point of 2.50. This indicates that the principals utilized strategic planning competencies in considering the needs of teachers and students when planning for resource provision to a high extent. The section mean obtained for the entire items was 1.93. This mean score was below the cut-off point of 2.50. By these analyses, one can say that secondary school principals in Anambra State utilized strategic planning competencies to a low extent. Ho: Principals and vice-principals do not differ significantly in their mean rating of the strategic planning competencies utilized by principals.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of less experienced and more experienced principals on their utilization of strategic planning competencies.

89 principals (33.71 percent) of the principals who indicated that they possessed a maximum of five years of experience as principals were regarded as less experienced, while 175 (66.29 percent) that indicated that they possessed more than five years of experience as principals were regarded as more experienced.

The result presented in table 3, reveals that the calculated t value of 6.83 is higher than the table
Discussion of Findings

In the results of research question one, it was found out that principals are really incompetent in a range of strategic planning tasks. Apart from utilising competencies in planning school goals and visions and considering the needs of staff and students in resource provision, as the principals claimed, the extent of the utilization of the rest of the strategic planning competencies was low. The vice-principals did not rate the extent of principals' utilization of any of the competencies high, indicating that in the vice-principals' views, secondary school principals in Anambra State lacked strategic planning competencies.

In addition, hypothesis one showed that there was no significant difference between (he mean ratings of principals and vice-principals on the strategic planning competencies. This goes on to buttress that the extent to which principals utilized the strategic planning competencies was quite low. In null hypothesis two, it was found that there was a significant difference between the mean ratings of less experienced and more experienced principals in the sense that more experienced principals utilized more strategic planning competencies than the less experienced ones did. This finding is consistent with Igwebuike (2003), who reported that job experience is a significant factor in principals' competence. A reason for this finding might be because due to their longer years of experience, the more experienced principals have understood the centrality of strategic planning competencies in school management. Hence, they made more efforts to strategically plan some programmes more than their less experienced counterparts. However, both less and more experienced principals are guilty of lack of strategic planning. Less and more experienced principals perform below optimal expectations in strategic planning for school management.

By admitting their low extents of utilization of strategic planning competencies, the principals have shown that they are yet to be ideally positioned and prepared to plan for managing emerging issues in their schools through the optimum use of targets, standards and scarce resources. Without these strategic planning competencies, principals might be handicapped in terms of setting school goals, allocating resources to staff and students based on need, result-oriented supervision, efficient job scheduling, raising academic standards, and curbing examination malpractices, which are among the essential things needed to turn around secondary schools in Anambra state. In a related study, Nwafor (2003), found out that secondary school principals did not plan their administrative functions and that is why they are ineffective administrators. There is an adage that says "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail". It can thus, be said that a situation where secondary school principals in Anambra State did not sufficiently possess requisite strategic planning competencies, their extent of engineering school improvement is highly limited.

Recommendations

Consequent upon the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. As a result of rapid increase in knowledge, scientific and technological advancement, encouragements should be given for the principals to attend conferences within and outside the state where they will acquire more strategic planning competencies.
2. Continuous training opportunities should be given to all principals through seminars and workshops to expose them to modern trends and skills in strategic planning.
3. There should be periodic evaluation of principals’ strategic planning competencies and an introduction of reward system for excellence and commitment to duty for the principals.
4. Levels of possession of strategic planning competencies should be considered in appointing principals.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study as presented, analyzed and discussed before now, it was concluded that principals are highly lacking in strategic planning competencies. This indicates that principals might not be competent enough to manage the schools given the emerging issues, which secondary schools presently face. If the principals who must take the lead in planning their schools to meet the challenges of emerging issues in secondary school management, do not possess sufficient or an appreciable degree of strategic planning competencies, then they are not capable of planning effectively for the future growth of their schools. Hence it is an imperative that principals should possess a high deal of strategic planning competencies, which will help them in prioritizing strategies for coping with emerging issues in secondary school management.

References


