

HUMAN RELATIONS APPROACH TO JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION IN EBONYI STATE: THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

Uzoma Aja-Okorie, (Ph.D)

Abstract

In view of the prevailing challenges faced by school administrators in ensuring quality school administration, there is need for a leadership reform. This discourse has attempted to present the underscoring necessity in utilizing human relations approach in school management by school administrators (principals), as a basis for effectiveness and efficiency. It was also shown in relative term as the most effective style of leadership in school administration, considering that school management has become increasingly complex. The paper therefore advocates the adoption of human relation approach in school administration in order to ensure quality control of staff and students, as well as a full realization of educational goals.

The history of indigenous and western education in Nigeria has undergone some metamorphoses both in the management, policy formulation, content and methods. Before the advent of western education in Nigeria, there were teaching and learning activities, which were carried out through informal and non formal education. Then came the pre-colonial era in Nigeria, which marked the period when western education was used as a medium to propagate Christianity and Muslim religion, in the south and the north respectively. This trend witnessed the emergence of different educational edicts in the three different regions, otherwise known as the development of regional education laws in the pre-colonial independence (Ojelabi, 1981).

The headship of schools was strictly under the supervision of the colonial masters, who were accountable to the Queen of England. The teachers who worked within this period used rote learning method in delivering their lessons. The schools were run under strict disciplinarian approach and staffs (teachers) were taught to have faith in the dignity of labour and hard work. Corporal punishment was widely used as means of controlling staff and students in the school system. The post-colonial era (1960 – 1970) was not significantly different in administrative styles and management of schools. The Nigeria-Biafra civil war disrupted Nigeria educational policies for the period of about three years, particularly in the eastern part of the country. In spite of these limitations of the early Christian schools, education was still seen as a means of social emancipation and avenue for economic improvement (Fafunwa, 1975).

Irrespective of the varying administrative styles over the different epochs in Nigerian secondary school system, the main aim of education has been perceived as an act of acquiring knowledge, learning skills and developing right attitude to be able to function optimally in the society. It is a process of equipping oneself in order to become useful and relevant in the society (Aja-Okorie, 2002). The educational sector is one of the pillars of any nation in the socio-economic development of its citizenry. It is equally seen as a cornerstone of every development forming basis for literacy acquisition. The importance of education in every society therefore cannot be overemphasized.

On the other hand, the school itself provides the platform for acquiring these educational experiences. The school system as a formal organization and like every formal organization, require elements of administration, which are necessary ingredients for the smooth running of schools. Some of these elements are clear statements of aims and objectives, hierarchy of authority, unity of command, delegation of authority, division of labour and effective communication and co-ordination. It therefore requires human beings to coordinate these activities for the attainment of educational goals. This realization requires delicate approach in human resource development and effective management. It is on this premise that the concept of human relation and approach become imminent in effective personnel management.

The Roles of School Administrators, Overtime

Social scientists, scientists and feminists have made various attempts to present different concept of what administration is and how it works. It has been described in the context of how men and women perform certain tasks in order to realize set goals in any given social context. The task of administration is to plan strategies for the organizational effectiveness. At the same time, educational administration involves harnessing both human and material as well as financial resources for the realization of educational goals. School administrators are put in charge of schools to make sure that educational activities are managed in such a way that the educational goals and objectives of schools under them are achieved.

The Traditional Role of School Administrators

In descriptive terms, the change in the roles of principals who are referred to as school administrators in Nigeria secondary schools have undergone some metamorphosis, which are profound too. For instance, the principals who managed schools under colonial masters performed their headship functions under a highly centralized system of government where their performances were unified and closely monitored by the colonial masters. The main goal of the early Christian and Muslim education was to win the "heathen" in Nigeria to God and Allah through education. Under this system appointment of principals was most often done without due consideration to appointees having professional skills. The management of schools solely depended on the missionaries, who hired and fired erring principals and teachers without reference to any local authority. The most popular approach of leadership style was based on authoritarian principles. This approach had its flaws as well as benefits. While management was result oriented it neglected the human relation approach in administration. However, the overall management of schools and staff appeared easier because of low population rate. The proportion of students' ratio to teacher ratio was considerable and plausible.

The Contemporary Functions of the School Principal

At the same time there have been profound changes in the role of the principal given the administrative challenges of past period of administration. Management of schools has become increasingly complex and Nwankwo (1982) reports that those who will administer schools must have both adequate experience and proper administrative training in order to cope with the challenging context of school administration. The school administrators have no longer the monopoly of decisions about the school system's input both human and material. Governments, parents and other external agencies make decisions about funds, equipment, student admission and programmes. It is to cope

Human Relations Approach to Junior Secondary School Administration in Ebonyi State: The Role of the Principal

with these challenges created by different policies that human relation approach is advocated for school principals.

The principal is appointed to manage a secondary school. When appointed he becomes the general overseer whose main duty is it to ensure the proper running of the school in terms of staff and students' welfare, development and implementation of educational programmes, provision of proper instruction, school community relations, discipline and proper keeping of school records. Other duties include students' admissions, proper documentation of school finances and ensuring that that learning atmosphere is conducive. The responsibilities of co-coordinating of activities to ensure efficiency form the basis for the appointment of a school principal. However, his ability to discharge his official duties effectively depends largely not only on his organizational principle and ability to maximize it for the purposes of achieving educational goals but also in his ability to partner with his subordinates.

Ebonyi State and Junior Secondary School Administration

Federal Government Educational initiatives on free and compulsory primary and secondary school education policy statement was vigorously adopted by Ebonyi State government at its' inception to address issues on high illiteracy rate among youths in the young state. The Ebonyi state Universal Basic Education board (UBEB) was designated with this function of managing educational policies and programmes of primary and junior secondary schools in the state. The new policy intervention made it mandatory for the appointment of some headmasters from primary schools as principals as well as separate principals for the Junior Secondary Schools to manage these two levels of education.

It is worthy of note to state that through this laudable programme, there was improvement in area of education emancipation of the people of Ebonyi state who before now were regarded as an educationally backward state. Furthermore, this programme created rare opportunity for class room teachers to become "heads" who ordinarily would have still remained classroom teachers. Despite all these benefits and spill over there has been heated debate on the quality of manpower produced as well as quality of leadership particularly at the junior secondary schools.

Nonetheless, there appears to be a general belief among most Nigerians including "Ebonyians" today particularly with those who are interested in the educational sector that the "standard" of education is falling. Those who believe in this, perhaps, controversial issue possibly mean that the level of academic performance of students in public schools is declining when compared with past standards. The increasing demand on education requires administrative competence in providing good working relations with teaching staff whose duty it is to affect desirable teaching and learning. Good leadership style connotes dedication and commitment. For instance, when staff needs and welfare are not carefully considered, resentments and lack of job satisfaction begin to breed. Severed relationship between members of school authority and the rest of school personnel may lead to unsolved conflict in the school. Conflict can manifest between following groups; the principal and staff, the principal and students, school authorities and students as well as the teacher and the students. Administrators who ignore the human elements in work places have continued to receive criticisms for being too goal oriented. It was in order to curtail deficiencies and take account of human elements that the later approach became more desirable in organization

management. However, most of our school administrators who belong to the old thought still get saddled with the responsibility of managing the human and material resources in the school.

Human Relations as an Alternative Approach to School Administration

Human relations approach in administration is an innovative practice born out of the need to fully attend to the welfare needs of the staff of the organization as a means of ensuring maximum cooperation from the staff for the purposes of realizing organizational goals.

Nonetheless, there are other organization strategies such as Weber's bureaucratic principle in administration and the scientific approach to mention but a few that are utilized in the distribution of administrative tasks, staff selection and retention considered to be fruitful in the running of an organisation. Despite the merits associated with some of these strategies in administration such as in intensifying results, some critics are of the opinion that the welfare of staff is often undermined.

The resultant effect on administration strategy as fostered by the efficiency movement brought about a new line of thought which revealed that the psychological aspects of administration was vital for optimal participation and goal achievement in an organization. Follet, a prominent pioneer of the new line, in National Society of Education (1964) was cited in (Edem, 1987: 56) as stating thus,

is not just the production and distribution of manufactured articles. It is to give an opportunity for individual development and self-actualization through better organization of human relationships. The process of production is as important for the welfare of society as the product of production.

This balance, she maintains, is not achieved through an utter disregard for efficiency with its emphasis on productivity, goal attainment, discipline, and authority relationships but through integrating them with other factors which takes into account human feelings, needs, and satisfactions. This when applied to education; means that welfare programmes for teachers are as important as the classroom teaching process itself and those good conditions of service for teachers can contribute to their efficiency. The principal who manages his school with this principle in mind would always negotiate on behalf his staff to make sure that their welfare packages are attended to as a matter of need.

Follet perceives administration as a shared responsibility, asserting that organizational structures should permit a free interplay of ideas in order to minimize the rigidity of hierarchical structures, but warning that shared responsibility should not be construed as being synonymous with laissez-faire and an absence of focal points of reference. Rather the administration, in its attempt to utilize the efforts of all in the organization, should use fixed responsibilities to locate and correct mistakes.

Furthermore, Follet introduces the concept of conflict. The administrative process, she argues, is not without conflict, which can be solved in three ways:

- (i) domination in which victory is unilateral (one sided),
- (ii) compromise in which each side agrees to make concessions and to forego cherished rights in order to narrow down areas of disagreement; and finally
- (iii) integration in which neither side claims victory.

Human Relations Approach to Junior Secondary School Administration in Ebonyi State: The Role of the Principal

Conflict between by teachers in a school system and management can be resolved through management decision prevailing over the decision of staff. This can be resolved through persuasion by management in accepting their decision. Both staff and management may alter their original stand by way of compromise in order to resolve dispute. The problem can be resolved where staff forgoes some of the items in their demands to accommodate management interest without undue pressure and persuasion.

Analogy between the Principles of Efficiency Movement and Human Relations in Administration

Efficiency movement emphasizes getting the most of the worker, even at the extent of requiring him to insubordinate his interests and needs to those of the organization. Human relations emphasizes more on the humanitarian aspects which seek to satisfy the needs of the worker, minimize his frustration, and increase the level of his job satisfaction.

The viewpoint of efficiency movement is exclusively task-oriented while human relations are task-and-person oriented. The basic difference in viewpoint between these two styles of administrative principles emanates from the fact that the former emphasizes cohesion to achieve result while the latter tries to use subtle persuasion by first being conscious of the welfare and the needs of the individuals within the organization as a strategy for achieving result.

It is worthy of note here that in as much as making sure that “work” is not compromised in administration, a good administration should however be task-and-person-oriented. As a school principal, he must expect efficient performances from his teachers but at the same time be conscious in realizing that they are human beings whose welfare and problems must be catered for. The school administrator (principal) therefore enthusiastically works hard towards making sure that the welfare of teachers and students are protected by still making sure that his teachers are duty conscious and result-oriented.

Operational Areas of School Administration

In practical term, the scope of school management focuses on the mandatory operational areas of school management needed for the achievement of educational goals and objectives. School administrators have the duty to procure and manage human, financial and material resources for effective implementation of the school programmes and for the maintenance of the school. Lipham and Hoeh (1974) as was cited in Obi (1998) maintained that school managers are expected to play the following roles:

- staff management,
- school facilities and equipment management,
- keeping accounts,
- delegation of duties,
- public relations; and,
- personnel discipline.

Staff Management: The ideal school manager identifies and indicates the staff needs of the school as well as the specific type of personnel needed to meet the needs. He collaborates with appropriate

authorities in making decisions relating to school personnel. He deals with issues relating to the recruitment, orientation, supervision and retention of teachers. According to Lipham and Hoeh (1974) as was quoted in (Obi, 1998), staff recruitment, selection and assignment should be designed to maximize the degree of role-personality compatibility in the employment process to the improvement of staff, which includes leadership in supervisory activities that will bring about increased effectiveness in leadership and maximum personal satisfaction of every staff member. To meaningfully supervise the staff the administrator must be aware of when, why, what and how to evaluate them. This approach focuses on using supervision as an approach to monitoring educational activities in order to correct mistakes rather than inspection method, which is tilted towards positive approach for erring staff.

School Community/ Public Relations: School managers will ensure that they maintain effective interrelationship with the community and external agencies. Because schools system is an open system and a social organization, it should thrive on effective interrelationship within it and with its relevant publics. He should encourage good school-community relationship through involvement in Parents Teachers Association and other relevant groups. Maintaining good rapport with the community where the school is located has added advantage in form of financial support and cooperation from members of the public.

In fostering a sound programme of school community relations the school administrator must become intimately acquainted with the values, expectations, needs and aspirations of the local community including Parents Teachers Association, Old Students Association etc. He has too, through such interactions, sold the school programmes to the outsiders. At the various levels of our educational system, the participation of the community in school administration has been officially recognized and entrenched.

Students' Administration: This involves rendering those services which affect positively the welfare of the students. Schools are built for the interest of the students. If student services are not provided for and are not adequately supervised, their effects may have disastrous consequences on the educational programmes. No principal alone can provide these services. So he has to delegate some of these functions to his assistants. On what should constitute these service, Akumah (2008) highlights the following: school attendance and its related problems, orientation of new students, admission, classification, assignment of students to educational programmes, evaluation and reports of pupils progress, guidance and counseling programmes and so on. Class teachers are assigned to perform some of these functions while the principal performs supervisory functions in ensuring that there is quality delivery in school programmes.

The school climate must be such that will allow every student to increase his feelings of satisfaction, sense of belonging, identification and achievement in the present and projected life situations. Where an atmosphere is conducive, the students will function better and at the end will benefit from their learning experiences.

Conclusion

From the above discussion one sees that there is a positive relationship between effective management and school's success. The scope of school management is all encompassing and shows

the importance, which different aspects of management function make towards school effectiveness. It portrays the leader as being in the centre and the coordinator of the various functions. To a large extent, the manager can make a great difference between organizational success and failure. This also suggests that good leadership qualities can be learned or acquired by training and education.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are necessary for effective administrative processes in school business at this level.

- (1) Administrators need to be properly guided through training and skill development in order for them to be able to provide leadership or direction that ensures smooth interrelatedness and interaction of all staff and students.
- (2) They should be able to embrace management approach that emphasizes flexibility without compromising job ethics.
- (3) Staff motivation by providing a variety of rewards as way of stimulating performance need to be emphasized.
- (4) Administrators should be more concerned in creating a sense of involvement, closeness and cooperation in school.
- (5) Administrators need to participate more often in service training to up grade their skills in human management.
- (6) The external school supervisors need to provide more supervision support services during their exercise as this would enable school administrators show supportive behaviours to their staff.

References

- Aja-Okorie, (2002). *Factors associated with gender disparity in enrolment patterns in Nigerian Universities*. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Akumah, E (2008) *Educational Administration: Managerial issues and problems*. Enugu: Celex Publishing Co.
- Avard, G.F. (1960). *Administration of changing secondary schools*. New York: Macmillan Co.
- Edem, D.A. (1987). *Introduction to educational administration in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Fafunwa, A.B. (1975). *New perspectives in African education*. London and Lagos: Macmillian
- Nwankwo, J.I (1982). *Educational management*. London :George Allen and Unwin
- Obi, E (1998). *Educational management theory and practice*. Enugu: Jamoe Enterprise (Nig).
- Ojelabi, A. (1981). *Education laws and national policy on education: a guide to school management*. Ibadan: Valuta Education Publishers.

Questioning Exercise

This section deals with questioning time. Brainstorming on some of these questions will not only evaluate their level of understanding of the topic, but will also ensure participation and idea sharing among the participants. Therefore the following under listed questions are to be addressed by the participants:

- (a) How do we achieve qualitative education through effective (effectual, useful) and efficient (proficient, well-organized) leadership?
- (b) How will the school administrator (principal) take initiative in order to achieve the school's objective?
- (c) How will the principal direct and coordinate the activities of teachers to achieve the school's objectives?
- (d) How will the principal manipulate the situational variables for the good of all the staff and students in the schools?