
Primary School Head Teachers' Competencies in Conflict Management and Staff Appraisal
Functions in Niger State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study determined the competencies of head teachers and by extension their capacity building needs in conflict management and staff appraisal functions in primary schools of Niger State, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. The study employed the use of descriptive survey design and used researchers designed questionnaire termed Head Teachers' Competency Questionnaire (HTCQ). The population of the study was all 3066 head teachers of public primary school of Niger State from which 378 were stratified randomly selected as sample for the study. Weighted Mean were used as statistical tool for analysis of the data collected from the field. The findings of this study revealed that head teachers' competencies in conflict management and staff appraisal were below expected performance. Specifically, the study revealed that head teachers in Primary Schools need capacity-building in conflict resolution techniques and methods of appraisal staff performance (evaluation). Researchers therefore recommends that capacity-building workshops and trainings should be organized for head teachers to address these deficiencies in their performance for effective goal achievement of universal basic Education Programme in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Primary education occupies an important place in the Nigerian education system because it serves as a foundation upon which the rest of the education system is built. The Nigeria primary school head teacher occupies a unique position in the educational system. His main task today includes; interpreting policies, executing instructional programmes and managing school personnel (both teaching and non-teaching) (UNICEF, 2013).

In spite of appeals by various bodies and studies for professional training of

primary school heads, the country has continually using teaching experience as a major yardstick for appointing head teachers (Arikewuyo, 2009). In this regard, government is paying more attention only to training of teachers and giving less emphasis on capacity-building of head teachers. This situation of things in primary schools seems to have resulted into several challenges in most public primary schools in Nigeria.

The experience and observations of the researcher, from the reports of the supervisors on the effectiveness of head teachers in public primary schools in Niger

State revealed that many of these head teachers are faced with numerous administrative and leadership problems and challenges which seems difficult for them to solve. Some of these problems are conflict among teachers and between staff and management, indiscipline among students and teachers, poor school-community-relation as well as poor staff appraisal and staff development mechanisms.

It is believed that when head teachers are well equipped with necessary competencies and skills, they could be more effective, knowledgeable and qualified to facilitate continuous improvement in human resource management (Mathibe, 2007). For head teachers to be well equipped with these required skills they need to be well trained professionally as human resource managers (Dessler 2005).

To ensure the organization of professional development programmes for head teachers, there is the need to identify the capacity-building needs of head teachers as human resource managers. Identified capacity-building needs will serve as baseline upon which professional development programmes for head teachers will be based. Thus, this research seeks to assess the competencies of head teachers in conflict management and staff appraisal functions with a view to identifying their capacity-building needs in these two areas.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to determine the level of competencies possessed by head teachers in conflict management and staff appraisal responsibilities in public primary schools to serve as a basis for organizing capacity building programmes to meet their

needs as effective school managers and administrators.

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To determine competency of head teachers in adopting conflicts resolution mechanisms in primary schools of Niger State.
2. To examine competency of head teachers in staff appraisal functions in primary schools of Niger State.

Research Questions

In line with the above objectives, the following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent are head teachers competent to resolve conflicts in primary schools of Niger State?
2. How competent are Head teachers in staff appraisal methods in primary schools of Niger State?

RELATED LITERATURE

Human Resource Management is the management of people in working organizations. It is also frequently called personnel management, employee relations and manpower management (Human Resource Management, 2010). Human resource management represents a major sub-system in the general management system. It is quite different from financial or materials resources. Human resource management functions include recruitment, training, supervision/monitoring, motivation, promotion and finally retirement of staff with the organization (Human Resource Management, 2010).

The burden of human resource management in primary schools is largely vested in the hands of the head teachers. This is because, head teachers are the chief

administrators of their schools. It is believed that when the head is bad, the whole body could be contaminated (UNICEF, 2013). According Tsiakkiros (2005), the basic human resource management responsibilities of the school heads include: resolution of conflict, staff appraisal (supervision/monitoring), forestalling of indiscipline, staff development and fostering of school-community relations. To enable head teachers to perform these responsibilities effectively, there is need for constant professional development of their skills and competencies (Dessler, 2005).

The first step in professional development and capacity-building training approach for head teachers focuses on the identification of the core competencies that a head teacher needs to have in order to be able to fulfill the assigned task. A comparison of the required core competences with pre-existing competencies of the head teacher, leads directly to the identification of the training curricula. Thus, the head teacher need to have access to quality professional development that continuously builds the head teacher's capacity to improve on his administrative task (Dessler, 2005).

Although a number of studies which provided clues to this work are available,

there is none that specifically assess the competencies of head teachers in terms of human resource management in primary schools of Niger State. Thus, the study becomes unique to be conducted.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the use of descriptive survey design. This involved the selection and collection of data from a group of respondents who were considered representative of the population. The area of the study was Niger state which is among the 36 states in Nigeria. It has three (3) geographical zone, namely: Niger South (Zone A), Niger East (Zone B) and Niger North (Zone C). The state has a total of 25 Local Government Areas.

The population of this study comprised of all the head teachers in public primary schools of Niger State. The total population was 3066 (Niger State Universal Basic Education Board, 2016). Using 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error with Research Advisors Sample Size Table (2006) as a guide, 378 head teachers was selected as sample. The study employed stratified random sampling technique to arrive at sample used. The 3 geography zones of the state were used as strata. Table 1 below showed the sample selected.

Table 1: population and sample of the study

Zones	No of Head teachers	No of sample selected
Niger South (Zone A)	1,206	130
Niger East (Zone B)	1,249	150
Niger North (Zone C)	611	98
Total	3066	378

Source: field study, 2017

The instrument used for data collection was researchers' designed

questionnaire named Head Teachers' Competency Questionnaire (HTCQ). The

questionnaire was divided in to two parts. Part A sought personal information of the respondents while part B sought information on the subject matter of the study. Part B was arranged in to sections as follows:

Cluster A – Human Resource management approaches required by head teachers; Cluster B – Resolution of conflicts among staff and students, Cluster C – monitoring of staff effectiveness (Appraisal functions), Cluster D – forestalling indiscipline in schools; Cluster E – Fostering of school community relations; Cluster F – Staff development programmes. Each questionnaire items have four response options of High Performance (HP), Average Performance (AP), Low Performance (LP) and No Performance (NP).

The instrument was administrated on the respondents at Zonal levels where the head teachers assemble for a workshop on capacity building on record keeping organized by Niger SUBEB. This made it easy for the retrieval of the questionnaires thus all the administered questionnaires were successfully retrieved.

The analysis was done as follow:

1. The weighted Mean of items under the four response options of “competency performance” was calculated (\bar{x}_p). In order to obtain the weighted Mean under this, each of the items under the 4-point response options of: Competency was assigned the following values
Response options, Rank, Real limit
 High Performance (HP) = 4, 3.50-4.00
 Average Performance (AP)= 3, 2.50-3.49
 Low Performance (LP) = 2, 1.50-2.49
 Not Performance (NP) = 1, 1.00-1.49
2. The researchers’ expectation in performance was that every head teacher should perform to the level of decision

mean (\bar{x}_d) which is 2.50. Therefore, the performance mean values (\bar{x}_p) was subtracted from the decision mean of 2.50. The difference gave the value that indicated the level of improvement or capacity building needed by Head teacher in each item. This is referring to as performance gap (PG). i.e. $PG = \bar{x}_d - \bar{x}_p$.

- a. Where $\bar{x}_d - \bar{x}_p = 0$, that is neutral it indicated that these was no need for capacity building on the item because was equal to the level at which head teachers could perform the item.
- b. Where the difference was positive ($\bar{x}_d - \bar{x}_p = +$), it indicated that the competence of Head teachers was low on the item because the level of expected performance was greater than the level at which the head teacher could perform the item.
- c. Where the difference was negative ($\bar{x}_d - \bar{x}_p = -$), it indicated that the competency of head teachers was satisfactory on the item because the level at which the head teacher could perform the item was greater than the expected performance. That is head teachers could perform the skill to the level at which it was required or even above.

All the analysis was done using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 20.0.

RESULTS

Data collected from the field are hereby presented below. The purpose was to answer research questions formulated to guide the study.

Research Questions 1: To what extent are head teachers competent to resolve conflicts in primary schools of Niger State?

Table 2: Mean and Performance Gap analysis on conflict resolution techniques in primary schools

S/No	For conflict resolution in the school, Head teacher	Mean (M)	Performance Gap (PG)	Remark
1.	Enforce rules and regulations in the school to minimize conflict among staff.	2.38	0.12	CBN
2.	Encourages harmony, cooperation and team work among staff and students.	2.05	0.45	CBN
3.	Avoids in intervening in personal issues among staff at certain times.	2.25	0.25	CBN
4.	Uses consultations and dialogue in resolving disagreements in the school	2.34	0.16	CBN
5.	Compromises his stand on issues at certain times to resolve disagreements.	2.40	0.10	CBN
6.	Organizes in-house workshops for staff on conflict management.	2.09	0.41	CBN
7.	Uses committees to settle conflict	2.43	0.07	CBN
8.	Involves the community to resolve conflict in the school.	2.43	0.07	CBN

N = 378

Decision mean (\bar{x}_d) = 2.50

CBN = Capacity Building Needed. PG = Performance Gap.

The data presented above revealed that the entire eight skill items had their performance gap values ranged from 0.10 to 0.45 and were positive. The positive value indicated that competency of head teachers of primary schools in Niger State in the area of conflict management is low which means

that Head Teachers identified needed capacity building in all the eight items of the conflict resolution techniques.

Research Question 2: How competent are head teachers in staff appraisal function in primary schools of Niger State?

Table 3: Mean and performance Gap Analysis on Staff appraisal methods in primary schools

S/N	For monitoring staff effectiveness, the head teacher:	Mean (M)	Performance Gap (PG)	Remark
9.	Regularly monitors staff and pupils attendance in school	2.38	0.12	CBN
10.	Visits classes to monitor teaching and learning	2.36	0.14	CBN
11.	Check deficiencies in work behaviour of staff of scheduled intervals	2.40	0.10	CBN
12.	Uses staff appraisal to identify high performing ones	2.40	0.10	CBN
13.	Uses staff appraisal to reward high performing teachers as a morale booster to others	2.27	0.23	CBN
14.	Provides feedback on teaching effectiveness of staff	2.35	0.15	CBN

S/N	For monitoring staff effectiveness, the head teacher:	\bar{x}_p	$\frac{\bar{x}_d - \bar{x}_p}{(P.G)}$	Remark
15.	Uses appraisal information for recommendation for promotions	2.37	0.13	CBN
16.	Uses staff appraisal to plan and organize appropriate in-house workshops for staff improvement	2.04	0.46	CBN

The data on table 4 showed that all the 8 skill items had their performance gap values ranged from 0.10 to 0.46 and were positive. The positive value indicated that competency of head teacher of primary schools in Niger State in the aspect of staff appraisal methods were below expectation and thus needed capacity building in all the 8 items in appraisal methods.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The following findings emerged from the study:

1. Head teachers in primary schools of Niger State needs capacity building in the area of conflict resolution mechanisms.
2. Head teachers in primary schools of Niger state need capacity building on staff appraisal (monitoring and evaluation) methods.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In research question one, the researchers sought to know the extent to which head teachers were competent to resolve conflicts in primary schools of Niger State. The finding of this study is in agreement with the views of Ikoya and Akinsende (2009) that developing an effective strategy of conflict management in the school requires major actors in the education enterprise working in harmony

and unity which requires technical skills in conflict management strategy.

This finding was further strengthened by Bohlinger (2005) who stated that conflict is part of school life, especially when there are competing visions of what ought to be in schools, incompatible interests collide on daily bases or through the introduction of change. The scholar thus suggested that school heads need to be well equipped with necessary skills to manage conflicts in their schools. To achieve this, Bohlinger (2005) advised that it might be necessary to bring in a facilitator or resource person to demonstrate conflict management styles to school administrators.

The finding was also in conformity with the findings of Olaitan, Alaribe and Umeh (2010) in a study on competency improvement needs of instruction in teaching soil conservation tillage practice to students in schools of Agriculture in South Eastern States, Nigeria. The author discovered that instructors required competency improvement in certain area of their job.

The finding agrees with the results of Okotoni and Okotoni (2006) who conducted a study on Conflict Management in Secondary School in Osun State, Nigeria. The Author discovered that majority of the school administrators were not knowledgeable in conflict management and that there was clear absence of laid down

procedure for conflict management in most schools. The Authors suggested that principals should be given the opportunities to attend in-service training, conferences and workshops as a way forward towards updating their knowledge in conflict resolutions and in any areas where they were found deficient

The finding of the study regarding monitoring of staff effectiveness (appraisal) procedure, is in agreement with the views of Nwachukwu (2005) who stated that appraisal feedback would help the employees know their strength and weaknesses and how management perceives their contributions individually to the organization.

The finding also agrees with the findings of Aguolo (2007) in a study on competency improvement needs of supervisors of teachers in primary schools of Federal capital Territory, Abuja. The researcher found out that supervisors of Primary Schools needed improvement in all the supervisory skills to enable them become more effective as supervisors in the performance of their roles. This finding is further in agreement with the discovery by Umar (2011) in a comparative study of supervisory styles of Head Teacher in Private and Public Primary Schools in Minna Metropolis, Niger State.

The researcher discovered that possession of specialized skills in supervision determines the competency of Head Teachers in internal supervision of their schools. The findings of the above researchers in their various studies helped to add more credibility to the findings of this study on assessment of Head teachers' competencies in conflict management and staff appraisal functions in primary schools of Niger State, Nigeria.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that competency of head teachers in primary schools of Niger State, Nigeria in the area of conflict resolution mechanism and staff appraisal function were low. This means that head teachers need capacity building in this aspect of human resource management.

Therefore, in the light of the findings and conclusions, above, the following recommendations were made:

1. Niger State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) and Local Government Education Authorities (LEAs) should take the issue of capacity-building of head teachers seriously to enable them discharge their responsibilities effectively and efficiently.
2. The identified two main clustered items (conflict management and staff appraisal) in human resource management where head teachers require capacity building should be utilized as baseline in developing intervention programmes for retraining the head teachers in Niger State, Nigeria.

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