



RESEARCH ARTICLE

SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND EFFECTIVE SCHOOL COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND REMEDIES

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the nexus between school Principals and effective Community relations in Nigeria; highlighting some major roles Principals play in establishing effective school community relations. The researchers adopted qualitative and content analysis methods that compelled them to gather data from secondary sources. The study examined; school Principals Leadership styles and behaviors that enhance effective school community relations, constraints to cordial school community relations and ways school community relations impact on students learning outcomes. The paper revealed some potential remedies to the factors that hinder Principals realization of effective school community relations. The researchers concluded that appropriate Principal leadership style, behavior and competent administrative knowledge and skills are paramount determinants of conducive school community relations for students' success. And that some Nigeria secondary schools' Principals lack positive leadership behaviors as well as adequate administrative knowledge and skills to drive effective school community relationships.

Keywords: School headship, education, leadership, community relations, education outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

A harmonious interaction between schools and their communities is vital element of a successful educational system. School-community relations refer to the interactions, between school, parents, community members, and local organizations that aim to promote students learning, well-being, and academic achievement. Nevertheless, the interactions are not always collaborative or partnership oriented. Effective school -community relations is essential in many dimensions of school business apart from fostering a sense of ownership and leveraging community resources to promote students' holistic success.

The dynamic and complex nature of community landscape where schools are domicile makes it impossible for school to isolate itself and hope to make remarkable progress. This reality therefore, suggests it to be an integral part of external environment. The School success is largely dependent on supports it receives from the surrounding communities. When school and community work together, they can create a network of support that benefits students, families, and the broader society.

The relevance of school-community relations cannot be swept under the carpet. The symbiotic nature of school community relations if sustained, is admmissive and indeed inexcusable. Such relationship is associated with improved students' outcomes which includes their impressive academic performance, encouraging social harmony experienced and extends to teachers' motivations that enhance excellence in teaching and learning.

However, building and maintaining cordial school-community relations can be challenging. The challenges may be rooted in the social, economic and cultural dynamics of the environment where school is domicile. It is therefore, crucial that any such problem identified be properly handled otherwise, it is likely to deter parents and other education stakeholders from being positively engaged in school community task. Despite the bogus challenges that may confront the Principals' efforts towards establishing and maintaining effective school community relationship, he should conceive the project as an imperative for students' success and the overall conducive school climate as well as ensuring relative peaceful community.

This paper will explore the concept of school-community relations, the roles of school Principal in ensuring good school community relations, benefits, barriers, and strategies for building effective relationship between school and their communities, discuss practical approaches for school to engage with their communities. By understanding the complexities of school community relations, educators and policy makers can work together for more supportive learning environment that benefit students, families, and communities alike.

Effective School community relations requires deep understanding of the needs, concerns, and values of all the stakeholders, including parents and other community members, local organizations etc. School must be willing to listen, adapt, and judiciously, respond to the needs of their communities while also communicating their own needs and priorities.



The nexus between School Principal and effective school community relations has been an age long concern of education policy makers and other stakeholders in Nigeria educational system. Unfortunately, many public schools still find it difficult to relate cordially with their host communities. This incidence has continued to discourage the realization of the much-desired students learning outcomes and general school development.

The study therefore, is poised to investigate the obstacles to establishment and sustenance of effective school community relations under the headship of school Principal and how to provide potential remedies to the problem.

Research Questions

The understated research questions are considered necessary in this paper:

1. What Leadership styles and behaviors are relevant for school Principal to ensure effective school community relations?
2. What factors constraint Principal from building and sustaining cordial school community relations?
3. How do school community relations impact on students learning outcomes?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The researchers adopted Systems theory to guide this study. The theory as propounded by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1972), views organizations as complex systems that interact with their environment. Ludwig contended that there is interconnectedness of components and dynamic relationships between them. That means, it is not enough to understand the parts, but also important to understand the relationships among the parts. That systems theory is a Logico-mathematical field whose task is the formulation and derivation of those principles that are applicable to all systems. The systems approach according to Carzo and Yanouzas (1967), is based on the notion that all organisms including humans in an organization are systems. A system consists of subsystem that interacts rather than isolating each other. Nevertheless, Systems are either closed or open systems. Katz and Kahn (1966), described open systems which school is one of them as that which depends on the environment for the inputs and release of their outputs.

In the context of school community relations, the systems theory is useful to comprehend the interactions between school and its' surrounding communities as well as analyzing the impacts of socio-economic and cultural forces on school functioning. Simply put, the theory is relevant to the study as it provides a functional tool for understanding strong link between school and its' community elements. It emphasizes the need for school leadership to be responsive to school external environment and adapt to changing situations. Hence, by applying this theory to the study, the researchers will expose to school managers some critical



variables in interaction in school community relations and aid them to adjust their leadership styles to ensure cordial school community relations.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers gathered data from various sources such as relevant textbooks, Journal articles, official government publications, online resources and direct observation. Qualitative and Content analysis techniques are used by the researchers to analyze data collected. The techniques are adopted primarily for objective, systematic and qualitative analysis and interpretation of data.

DISCOURSES

School Principal Leadership styles and behaviors

The extent of effective school community relations no doubt is a function of the Principal leadership style and behaviors. The both factors can serve as centripetal and centrifugal energies that can either promote or mar harmonious school community relations. School heads, demonstrate diverse leadership styles as well as they manifest various behaviors in the course of their performance of administrative functions which maintenance of school community relations is one of them. It is therefore, relevant to examine some common principal leadership styles, behaviors, and how they impact on school community relations and leadership styles are examine in what follow.

a. Democratic Leadership style: This leadership style demonstrates respect for every person in the organization or group. The style encourages sharing of responsibilities among organization members to the extent it upholds respect for members irrespective of their sex, age or status. Those with the Leadership style base decision-making on consultation, deliberation, and participation among members of the group.

b. Autocratic Leadership style: It is leadership style in which production is emphasized even at the expense of human considerations “hard-boiled autocracy”. Decisions are made exclusively by the leader. Leaders with Autocratic impulse, like McGregor’s Theory Y, hold the view that human beings in an organization are weak, unwilling to work, incapable of self-determination, and have limited reasoning; therefore, they must be directed, coerced /forced into action, dictated to, pushed, to work.

c. Laissez-faire leadership style: The leadership takes more of a passive disposition towards organizations’ problems or that of the group members. It is largely characterized by “anything goes” or I don’t care attitude. Bass and Avolio (1997), addressing the issue of laissez-faire supervisory style stated that it occurs when there is an absence or avoidance of leadership. In this case he stressed, decisions are delayed and reward for involvement absent. No attempt is made to motivate followers or to recognize and satisfy their needs.



d. Transactional Leadership style: In this case, leaders who are notable with such style, are conscious of organizational needs and the needs and expectations of the members. It does not relegate any of the two needs. Leaders with such style emphasize both production and also need to demonstrate consideration for the members. Newell (1978) stated that Transactional leadership is thus a process through which the task and human dimensions of organization are reconciled and integrated.

e. Transformational [functional] leadership style: It entails that leaders with such style are less exceptional and less revered by the organization. Such Leaders tend to emerge in situations where things appear to need a savior. Perhaps, those with such style of Leadership usually emerge as leaders given the demands of the functional situation. Hence, the propelling force behind the emergence of leaders with transformational leadership style is a function of “expectation-interaction-goal achievement” in a group. Transformational leader approximates the most common type of leader, i.e one who emerges, is nominated or identified from among colleagues because of his expected technical, social, economic, political competencies or skills considered vital for moving the group towards greater heights (Nwankwo, 2014). Bass [1985], noted that transformational leaders have a clear view of the future and they are able to achieve a step change in the performance of their followers.

As regards behaviors of leaders for effective performance of their functions in an organization such school, it is important to note that their behaviors have strong influence on the leadership style they identify with and which invariably impacts on their effectiveness as well. In other words, behaviors of leaders can hardly be separated from their leadership style. Marks, Stoops and King-Stoops (1978), considered the following behavioral components vital for successful leadership:

- a. sensitive to the feelings of others while being at once considerate, helpful, responsive, and friendly;
- b. loyal to his ideas and respectful to the belief, rights, and dignity of others;
- c. strong in his feelings of self- confidence and the ability to identify easily with his co-workers, including those who supervise him and his supervisees;
- d. consistent, generous, humble, honest, modest and fair in dealing with others;
- e. enthusiastic informing others about the policies and regulations of the school system;
- f. understands the need to avoid envy, jealousy and is willing to take blame for his mistakes;
- g. firm but not proud or stubborn in making judgements and decisions;
- h. understands the complexity of his environment (social, political, cultural, economic) in order to use effectively rather than to exploit the situations, etc.



i. apparently sincere, straight forward, approachable, easy to talk to, alert to get the best out of people without aggressiveness, encouraging, open to suggestions, warm, inspiring, relax and have sense of humor;

j. willing to learn, to improve himself, and to encourage others to learn;

The outlined behaviors of leaders mean that they should possess excellent character, intelligence and also be filled with vitality and above all, acknowledged as a responsible personality.

Constraints to School Principal Realization of Cordial School Community Relations

There are myriads of obstacles confronting Principals efforts towards achieving healthy school community relationships. The factors are either Principal, community, school oriented and acting solely to impact on the principal efforts or a mixture of the factors working against cordial school community relations. Some of these factors include;

a. Change phobia: Principal may be resistance to involving external stakeholders in decision process. Resistance to change within the school can be a barrier to establishing and maintaining effective school community relationships (Ajayi, 2017).

b. Negligence or abandonment of community inputs to the school: Where community members observe that their contributions are often neglected by the school head, it will lead to their withdrawal of trust in the school head and consequently disconnect them from the school activities.

c. Limited parent involvement in school programs: In some communities, maybe due to ignorance or as a result of tight schedule or less value placed on education, parents hardly identify with school in their localities irrespective of the Principal efforts to draw their attention to the school. They perhaps, place higher value on their business over their children education.

d. Local politics: The dynamics of politics in the community where school is domicile may encourage or destroy school community relations. Anyaogu (2016), asserted that communities prefer to work with school administrators of their choice. Where that is not achieved they make the school ungovernable through petitions, confrontation and antagonism in resolving issues and taking decision against the administrator, staff and students.

e. Principal leadership style: Autocratic leadership style associated with some school heads does not promote community support to the school. This style and others alike that tend to impose school will on the community end up disconnecting viable community members from school thereby deny school opportunity to harness viable resources from the community which otherwise, would have added values to the school.



f. Communication barrier: School head as the spokesman of the school is expected to possess competent communication skills necessary to attract the attention of the community to the school. Such communication skills as good listening skill, ability of being polite in presenting issues and making the right choice of communication media and language to reach out to the community etc are good enough to make community members desire to collaborate with school. Where the Principal is lacking in good communication skills, the end result is grave disconnection with school external environment which is detrimental to the survival of the school. It is no wonder Wilson (2021), stated that in the digital age, communication plays central role in managing school community relationships.

g. School head behavior: Positive character of any school head towards the community, no doubt will readily attract viable energies and influential community members close to the school. Anything short of good conduct on the part of the principal will put school in a tight corner in any attempt by the principal to bring community members close to it. There are Principals that are disrespectful to the community leaders and other influential persons in the community. In likewise manner, some of them do not regard the community cultural values. They criticize the culture of the community than they try to adapt to the cultural reality of the school external setting they found themselves. Such Principals are mostly concerned with activities within their schools. In other words, they exhibit initiating structure leadership behavior other than consideration leadership behavior. Okunamiri and Ndom-Uchendu (2011), in their study revealed that Principals in Abia state with consideration leadership behavior are effective in the administration of secondary schools while those with initiating structure behavior are not.

h. Insubordination among school staff: Teachers sabotage Principals they perceive as not exhibiting good behaviors towards them. Aghenta (1976), had earlier observed that most Principals regard their position as a status symbol for dominating and ill-treating their teachers and students. Hence, Okunamiri and Ndom-Uchendu, (2011), frowned at such behavior of Principals and held that the situation could lead to teachers' frustration, sagging of morale and withdrawal of support to the Principals. In the context of this study, the situation is capable of initiating teachers act of insubordination towards the Principal thereby cause him to lose staff support necessary to realize cordial school community relations. This is because teachers play sensitive role in school community relationship both as members of Parents Teachers Association and community. When teachers give evil reports to the school host community members, about their principal, it is usually difficult for him to erase such and secure collaboration from them in his efforts to establish effective school community relationship.

Ways School Community Relations Impact on Students Learning Outcomes.

School community relations impact on student learning outcomes in diverse ways. These include:



1. Enhance teaching learning environment: School community relations characterized by peaceful atmosphere offers students opportunity to engage in their studies hitch freely. Learning is most likely to take place in students when the environment of teaching and learning is free from tension. Brown (2020), asserted that school community connections foster a sense of belonging and support which in turn can lead to improved attendance rates, better classroom engagement, and enhanced academic achievement. In his view Hernandez (2022), noted that schools that embrace community engagement as part of their administrative strategy are better positioned to address the specific challenges faced by their students, whether they are related to language, culture or socio-economic disparities.
2. Improve students' confidence: Engagement of community by school fosters sense of confidence in students which as well boost their deep interest and commitment to academic work which is very central to students' academic performance.
3. Leverage students financial burden: Positive school community relation provides opportunity for students to enjoy significant financial assistance from philanthropist domicile in the community, by means of offering scholarship to well behaved, academic outstanding students as well as indigent ones. Relevant textbooks may also be provided to school to equip their library in likewise manner school laboratories will be equipped through community efforts. These energies are tailored towards promoting quality education for students.
4. Provide expanded learning opportunities and resources: Community involvement with schools promotes increased resources and learning opportunities for students. In other words, collaborative School Community relations assure students' diverse learning opportunities. Adewale (2018) noted that schools actively engage with their communities can access resources beyond the classroom. Such resources may include mentorship and expertise knowledge from diverse academic fields, guest lectures that tend to enrich students learning experiences and prepare them for practical life challenges. Global educational trends emphasize the need for school to collaborate with their communities to ensure that educational experience is not confined in the classroom but extends into the fabrics of the society at large (UNESCO, 2017).

Principal Roles in Ensuring Effective School Community Relations

Fostering good school –community relations is one of the professional responsibilities of the school head. The school head has vital roles to play in maintaining good school-community relations.

- a. He should develop staff appreciation of the importance of good school community relations: School head should develop coordinated positive program for school community relations.



b. He should be able to act as the spokesman of the school in community affairs; give information about the school to the public; interpret system-wide policies and develop supplementary policies with staff, secure, present and interpret school and community information for staff use; develop a coordinated and positive program for community relation; and encourage joint school-community discussions of policies, problems and issues as they relate to the school.

c. Have clear knowledge of power structure in the school host communities: Ukeje [1992:411], stated that; the principal must identify the power structure within the community. He must find out who the influential people are within the community since it is through such people he can reach the community at large.

d. Demonstrate sound knowledge of the history of the school and host community. In the views of Anyaogu (2016), the school head must understand the history of the school and the community, the dos and donts, their need, problems, and expectations. Okeke and Uwazuruike (1997), agreed with the above view, when they held that school head should also have pertinent information about the community, the likes and dislikes.

e. Furthermore, establishment of cordial and diverse communication links/mechanism: The school head needs to establish and maintain effective diverse communication networks so as to reach all and sundry in the community and attract their positive attention to school programs. It will also provide the school staff, students and education stakeholders in the community with ample opportunities to engage in uninterrupted discussions that will be of mutual benefits to school and community programs.

According to Akubue, Ndu, Ocho and Okeke [1997], the school administrator has to play two major roles of:

a. Making the school come to the community. This entails making available to the community school services like choral and cultural group, school bands etc. during community ceremonies. He must make staff and students ready to appreciate the need for good school community relationship.

b. Making the community come closer to school. The school head could attract and bring community members closer to school so as to tap their human and material resources for the benefit of the school. This can be achieved by inviting parents, prominent members of the community and politicians to witness, participate and speak to students during school activities like school inter-house sports, Founder's Day celebration, exhibition of agricultural produce and art work, awards of certificate and honor to deserving students, graduation and sent-off event, launching of school magazine which may contain historic information about the community and its people.



In addition to above roles of Principal, it is pertinent to note that the principal may send teachers to the community to perform prominent functions in community development in consideration of teachers' quality as change agents in the society or as community builders.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Some Principals in Nigeria secondary schools do not exhibit positive leadership behaviors as well as they lack adequate administrative knowledge and competent skills to drive effective school community relationship. Hence, pragmatic Principals' role that is founded on sound administrative knowledge and skills, situational leadership style and good behaviors remain a focal point of departure in the hope of realizing effective school community relations. Principals are obliged to regularly and objectively reexamine their leadership styles and behaviors and readily eliminate behaviors that negate healthy school community relations. There is the need for their adjustment of leadership styles when necessary to ensure prevalence of cordial school community relations in Nigeria. This is paramount in recognition of the fact that choice of leadership style which aims to promote school managers' effectiveness in their pursuit for healthy school community relationships, just like in any other organization, is adjudged by prevalent situation.

Recommendations

In view of the data collected, analyzed and conclusion drawn in this study, the following suggestions are hope to offer practical guide to school Administrators, Policy makers, and influential community members, on how to strengthen school community partnership to enhance educational outcomes in Nigeria.

School Principals should prioritize consideration leadership behavior in the administration of secondary school.

Government should regularly organize compulsory workshops and seminars centered on the development of Principals administrative skills and knowledge for school and community progress.

Government should enact policy that makes possession of Master of Education Administration/Management or higher degree from related academic field of study, a compulsory qualification to attain the position of a Principal. This is to ensure that anybody in such position is well equip with relevant knowledge and skills that aid effective and efficient Secondary School administration/Management.

Proper orientations on the need for collaboration of members of school external communities and Principals/Schools should be ensured by appropriate government agencies. This will



promote the concerned commitment to voluntary positive inputs to the task of establishing healthy school community relations.

Principals should be committed to demonstration of good behaviors towards their staff and members of school host community. Such behaviors expected of them include; respect for persons, humility, and generosity.

School Principals should make influential members of the school external environment feel being respected. This can be achieved by regularly involving them in decision making as it concerns development of school.

Competing Interest

The authors declare that no conflicting interest exist in this manuscript.

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