

MAXIMIZING QUALITY PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY EDUCATION: A CASE FOR RE-EXAMINATION OF PRINCIPAL SELECTION AND EVALUATION MECHANISMS

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Abstract

Using policy documents and review of literature, this paper studies the processes of selection of public secondary school principals, and their evaluation mechanism in Anambra State of Nigeria, and as well assesses these in line with the global practices and current realities. This study identified exemplary practices in principal selection and evaluation in the United Kingdom and North Carolina. An adaptation of these practices, we believe, will lead to the desired improvement in the quality of principals in the secondary schools in Anambra State in particular and Nigeria in general.

Introduction

That leadership is tied to the success or failure of any entity has precipitated the need for effective selection and evaluation practices capable of sieving only those that can deliver good results to sustain the progress of the organization. Secondary education is one area where selecting the right people for leadership is very critical. Even more critical is the need to provide consistent improvement through effective evaluation. It is so because secondary education has been assigned the task of preparing people to be useful in their society and for higher education. Incidentally, trends in secondary schools over the years show that secondary education in Nigeria is still very far from providing a strong link between the recipients and higher education and much less a means of useful living in the society by way of employment. It would seem that inspite of the reforms initiated by successive governments; the situation has tended to deteriorate.

A number of scholars have noted the gross contribution of school principals to the success or failure of their schools. Crosswell and Elliot (2003) observed that "school leaders carry the dual accountability to both the education system and the school on their shoulders" (p.2). Indeed the school principal determines the tempo of work of both teachers and students in his school. Evidence has shown that the principal's leadership behaviour can have tremendous impact on the reputation of the school. Oluremi (2008) observed that school principals are blamed for non-performance of their duties and their failure to exhibit appropriate leadership behaviours to solve the perennial problems besieging education system. This blame may not be out of place for scholars have noted the lack of competence of some school principals in Nigeria. For instance, Ijaiya (2004), reported the dismissal of ten school principals from service by Kwara State Government due to their involvement in examination malpractice during the 2003 Senior Secondary Certificate Examinations (SSCE). The 2005 Education Diagnosis of the Nigeria Federal Ministry of Education also revealed that greater percentage of the secondary school principals do not have any provision for vision and mission statement, code of conduct for students, year activity calendar, code of conduct for teachers, school strategic plan, in-house teacher development activities and students' target setting.

Although this has been a source of worry to stakeholders in education, little attention has been adverted to the leadership quality in secondary schools, particularly the process of

selecting and evaluating principals. This work therefore aims at examining the possible loopholes in principal selection and evaluation in Nigeria through the exposition of the various international exemplary practices of principal selection and evaluation.

Principal Selection and Evaluation in Anambra State, Nigeria: Current Practices

The Selection:

Studies have shown that school principals are very critical to the accomplishment of school goals. New School Ventures (2008), holds that the knowledge, skill and the disposition which a school principal brings to the leadership affect nearly all facets of the learning environment and as such, time and money should be invested in preparing the people responsible for principal selection. In line with this realization, education and policy makers have repeatedly pointed out the need to aggressively recruit and select highly qualified candidates but have given less attention to principal evaluation (Lashway, 2003). In Nigeria, literature on these two vital areas of assuring quality leadership in secondary education has remained little and gloomy. Indeed no government's educational policy has given specific attention to the selection of secondary school principals. The school principal's position is seen as the extension of the teacher's classroom, worthy of no distinct attention both in policies and in the Teachers' Manual.

This position reinforced the practice of selection based only on the length of teaching experience (Mulkeen, Chapman & Leu, 2005; Arikewuyo, 2009). Authors' interaction with Directors in the State's Post Primary School Commission further affirmed this policy of basing the selection of secondary school principals mainly on teaching experience. In line with this practice, teachers progress through the following principalship ranks; Principal Grade I, Principal Special Grade I and Principal Special Grade II. The principals are selected from the highest rank who may already be serving as vice principals. Where a vice principal is considered, the principal's recommendation is considered in the decision to appoint or not to appoint the vice principal to the post of school principal. This appointment is centrally conducted by the state post primary school commission. As such recruitment process of advertisement, application, short-listing, interview and appointment of successful applicants is not followed. Thus these modes of election are most times fraught with lobbying and politicking as being in the highest rank in the principal cadre does not assure one of being a principal.

This method of principal selection has been criticized by a number of educators. Specifically, Obilade and Ajayi (cited in Arikewuyo, 2009) observed that competent teachers who were promoted to principal positions may not exhibit high level of competency in necessary areas of secondary school administration. Indeed, Dadey and Harber, (cited in Mulkeen, Chapman & Leu, 2005) posit that weakness of school leadership is often reinforced by the mechanisms for the selection of school principal which is often based on long years of experience in teaching, reward for good performance or ideological compatibility with the existing political orientation of government.

The Evaluation

Scriven (1999) defined evaluation as a systematic way to determine the merit, worth or significance of a programme or a person. According to Boulmetis and Dutwin (cited in Johnson, 2005) evaluation is systematic process of collecting and analyzing data to determine if something was effective in its purpose. They further defined personnel evaluation of principals as measurement of merit and worth in a given context that produced an improvement in job performance. For Boulmetis and Dutwin, improvement in job performance of school principals should be the outcome of principal evaluation. This agrees with formative evaluation which is tied to providing feedback required for remediation as

against summative evaluation which produces certain absolute decisions about a person's job performance. These decisions may come in the form of rewards, termination, promotion, demotion as well as decisions on principals' tenure and compensation. The summative evaluations rarely bring about professional growth or change in principals' performance (Peterson, 1991; Fontana, 1994 cited in Johnson, 2005).

The relevance of principal evaluation could be gleaned from the report by Davis and Garner (2005) which notes that superintendents' and principals' evaluation serves the following purpose: a motivational tool, an aid in planning and goal setting, a tool for development decision, an aid in communication with personnel, students, the community and the Board of Trustees, a help to ensure good education for students and a tool for accountability. Specifically, Johnson (2005) maintained that personnel (principal) evaluation provides the opportunity to identify and correct problems and encourages successful job performance. To guide the conduct of effective evaluation of principals, scholars have identified elements of effective principals' evaluation as preparation (articulating procedures, policies, and purpose); data collection (using multiple data sources); and follow-up (providing feedback and generating professional growth plans), evaluation processes anchored in explicit standards that make the expectations clear to the district as well as the principal, that which distinguishes levels of proficiency as well as involves the principal in determining the criteria (Leiyhwood, Begley & Cousin 1994, Reeves cited in Lashway, 2003)

Principal evaluation in Nigeria appears not to be backed by any policy document. The authors are not aware of any distinct policy document on principal evaluation standards and criteria in Nigeria. As such the evaluation process is not guided by any leadership standard. It is done basically for promotion – summative in nature. It has been observed that principal evaluation is carried out every term, that is, three times in a year. Criteria for the scoring of principals include: clinical supervision performance scores of teachers (usually by education supervisors) which constitutes 60%; Annual Performance Appraisal Report (APER) which constitutes 30%; and total school performance scores during general school inspection which constitutes 10%. Generally, principals who score highly are promoted. Low performing principals are not demoted but are not considered for professional development programmes. Those who perform below exception are sometimes transferred to schools in remote areas.

Principal Selection and Evaluation: Some International Examples

Over the years, issues of principal selection and evaluation have been increasingly gaining attention of respective governments worldwide. Understanding the implication of principal selection process for the success of any school, Blackmorre and Barty (2004) stated that "It is about making a collective investment for the future, a desire to deal well for the students and a fear of the unknown - tied up in questions about who we are and what we want to be" (p.4). Appreciating this position, most countries have developed policies and standards for ensuring that the future of the schools and the children therein are placed in the hands of the most qualified people. The international examples discussed below are among those whose principal selection and evaluation mechanisms have proved effective in sustaining students' academic achievement and public confidence in the quality of secondary education they offer. Specifically, the United Kingdom and North Carolina have been identified as having achieved sustained growth in students' academic achievement (Higham, Hopkin & Ahtaridou, 2007, Davis & Garner, 2005).

Selection of Principals

United Kingdom: In the United Kingdom the process of principal selection is left to the Governing Body of individual schools and it is perceived as one of their most important and significant roles. In the case of government maintained schools, the governing body is

made of parent governors; staff governors that include teaching and support staff; local authority governors (appointed by the Local Authority); community governors (appointed by the governing body to represent community interests). The selection process involves the Governing Body setting up a selection panel but the decision on whom to appoint rests with the governing body following recommendation from the appointment panel. All headship posts must be advertised nationally through such media as the newspapers, websites, vacancy amongst others. The National Council for school Leaders encourages governors, when appointing new leaders, to take the opportunity to think deeply about the challenges facing the school, their aspirations for the future and the changes that may occur in their community and the education system more generally. Such analysis can then be used to create a demanding but realistic description of the role and the type of head teacher (principal) required (Blackmore and Barty (2004).

Governing bodies are also encouraged to offer candidates the chance to show their full capabilities and personality. This may mean a two-day selection process with visits, interviews, presentations and or an assessment of the specific skills required in the job description (Higham, Hopkins & Ahtaridou, 2007). Describing the United Kingdom's principal selection process further, Blackmore and Barty (2004) note that selection is no longer restricted to written application and interview, but a short-listed applicant may be asked to meet the school staff and conduct a meeting with them or they may be asked to engage in debate with a student panel. The system has developed so that the selection of a principal involves a lot more than asking five people on a panel to make a choice. The process is more open and participatory. In a research that further exposed the details of this process, Thody, Pashiardis, Johnson and Papanoum, (2007) explained that candidates must also make presentations and often take part in role plays and in-tray exercises. This type of interview enables the candidate to find out if they want to lead a particular school as well as enabling the school to find out if the candidate suits them.

North Carolina: The North Carolina General Assembly Statutes chapter 115, section (c)(3) provides that the selection of school administrators including secondary school principals should be done by the Local Board of Education and it further provides that the process of this selection is through election. The initial contract between a school administrator and a Local Board of Education shall be from two to four years, ending on June 30 of the final 12 months of the contract. In the case of a subsequent contract between a principal or assistant principal and a Local Board of Education, the contract shall be for a term of four years. As such the position of principals here is tenured.

A summary of the principal selection practices in the above cited examples appears to have more standard-based, pragmatic and performance oriented approaches. Selection processes that entail a wide spread advertising and interview are more likely to attract quality candidates and a greater chance of selecting quality leaders for the secondary schools. Of particular interest is the case of United Kingdom which involves more interactive sessions between the candidates and their potential schools, affords the school community the opportunity to have a hand in the selection of their leaders. Although the selection of the right people as school principals is of immense importance, equally important are the policies and practices designed to improve the quality of those selected. And this is the achieved through evaluation.

Principal Evaluation

United Kingdom: In the United Kingdom, head-teacher evaluation lies with the Governing Body. This process is set in the school's Governing Body Statutory Guidance. It stipulates that the Governing Body should appoint between two and three governors to be reviewers of the head teacher. No governor who is a teacher or other members of staff at the

school can be appointed as a reviewer. The governing body should also appoint an external adviser for the purpose of providing it with advice in relation to the management and review of the performance of the head teacher. Where a local authority has already appointed a school improvement partner (SIP) for a school, the governing body should use the SIP for the purpose of providing such advice. A performance review should take place every school year. The statutory guidance sets out that at the beginning of each performance cycle, all the reviewers and the external adviser shall arrange a meeting with the head-teacher to consider and determine the following; the head-teacher's objective; the arrangements for observing the head-teacher's performance in the classroom (where appropriate); any other evidence which will be taken into account in judging the head-teacher's performance; the support that will be provided to the head-teacher; the performance criteria; the timescales for the achievement of the objectives and within which support will be provided; the head-teacher's training and development needs and the actions which may be taken to address them.

At the end of the performance cycle, these criteria will be reviewed with regard to: the head-teacher's job description; any relevant pay progression criteria. The evaluation is both formative and summative in nature. Continuous professional development is provided for the head-teacher, while his overall performance will determine his pay, his retention or removal.

North Carolina: The North Carolina General Statutes No.115C-286.1, provides that Local school administrative units shall evaluate all principals and assistant principals at least once each year. Either the superintendent or the superintendent's designee shall conduct the evaluation. The State Board of Education shall ensure that the standards and criteria for the evaluations include the accountability measure of teacher retention, teacher support and school climate. The State Board shall revise its evaluation instrument to include these measures. A local board shall use the performance standards and criteria adopted by the State Board unless the board develops an alternative evaluation that is properly validated and that includes standards and criteria similar to those adopted by the State Board.

North Carolina uses a performance-based evaluation. The North Carolina State Board of Education commissioned the Principals' Executive Program (PEP) to study and formulate the current administrators' evaluations that are in use in that state. These evaluations are used for assistant principals, and central office administrators. Aligning state and district requirements for administrator certification formed the constructs. The state requirements include; professional standards, state goals and professional development requirements. The district (Board of Trustees) has established local needs included in the evaluation. This allowed the district to still form the basic evaluations that fit their specific needs. The objectives of their evaluation are to assess performance of the district, i.e., progress toward district goals, and to promote personal and professional growth (n.d., North Carolina Department of Education).

Summarily, North Carolina's principal evaluation is focused on: evaluating what has already been accomplished, documentation of performance of the school (provided by the person being evaluated), measurements of performance. The superintendent is allowed to authenticate the evaluation process. The performance domain is not a rating scale. A system rubric is used as a tool for guidance in the self-assessment phase of the evaluation. North Carolina provides two different forms of evaluation for principal. There is a long form for less experienced principals (those who have held a principalship for 3 years or less) and a short form for experienced principals. Her principal's evaluation is performance-based and aligned towards developing improvement plans for areas of deficiencies. The principal's performance evaluation standards include: vision, instructional leadership, effective management, school/ community relations, ethical behaviour' interpersonal skills, staff development and principals' professional development.

Conclusion

An analysis of the cited examples of principal selection makes clear a number of things. First, principal selection has mostly been decentralized giving more room for the consideration of school peculiar characteristics. Secondly, a wide range of qualified candidates are given the opportunity to apply by extensive publicity given to vacancies and intensive interviews conducted based on the stated principal's job-specific criteria. Thirdly, members of the school community are given opportunity to participate in selecting their principals, especially in the case of the United Kingdom. In terms of principal evaluation, principals know the leadership standard upon which they are evaluated and are expected to make their own self-reflection based on these leadership standards. There exists a plan for the principal's professional improvement where deficiencies are identified.

These features are absent from Anambra state (Nigeria) principal selection and evaluation policies and practices. The practices not only lose sight that it is not every teacher who rises up to principalship rank that possesses leadership ability, but also do not see evaluation as a means of improving performance. It is quite obvious from the state of our secondary schools that there is urgent need for improvement in the caliber of leadership. Insights from these exemplary practices discussed in this work give the impetus required to pursue this goal and by so doing improve the performance of our principals, teachers and students.

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