

**MECHANISM FOR IMPROVING THE MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION
SKILLS OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOL
ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: *This study examined the mechanism for improving the managerial communication skills of school principals in Anambra State of Nigeria. Two research questions and two null-hypotheses guided the study. Survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 269 school principals. The entire population were studied. The instrument was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was validated by three experts in Educational Administration Ebonyi State University. The reliability was determined using Cronbach Alpha to determine the consistency which yielded 0.75 alpha coefficient. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using t-test statistics. The findings revealed that application of listening skills: verbal and non-verbal skills, written skills and feedback skills in communication can improve the managerial communication skills of school principals. It was recommended that Ministry of Education should organize seminar, workshop and conferences on communication skills for principals to acquire skills for the management of their schools.*

KEYWORDS: Administration, Communication, Communication skill, Management and Information

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a complex process as it involves all the senses, experiences, emotions and intelligence of people (Simon, 2000). In fact, it is the totality of all the things that one person does to create understanding in the mind of another person. Principals of secondary schools are confronted with situations that involve a lot of communication exercise on daily basis. How effective they become depends largely on their ability to apply the appropriate communication skills in their daily interaction with their students, staff, parents and stakeholders. Coordinating the efforts of people towards the achievement of objectives and goals in any establishment has to do with administrative communication skills as its main trust. Without communication, there will be no good organization. Adewale (2001), reported that organizations requires understanding, if it should achieve its goal. The aim of communication is much more than the mere transmission of ideas, it must result in the transmission of meaning that leads to action(s). It is the flow or exchange of information within people or a group of people.

The primary aim in school administration is the improvement of teaching and learning process. Therefore, all the activities and efforts of the school must be tailored towards employing adequate communication skills. Some of the communication skills include; listening skill, verbal and non-verbal skill. In order for the school administrator to achieve

this, he or she must inevitably interact with various groups and individuals within the school, community and with people outside the school utilizing desired communication competence and skills.

For effective administration of any establishment, especially the school system, communication is central and a sine qua non to school management. Hence, in the absence of application of effective communication, a vagary of individualistic and personal goals may most likely mar the organizational objectives. This will inevitably result to stagnation of activities of the teaching-learning process and reduced school tone with resultant poor academic performance of both the students and the schools. Effective communication is essential ingredient for the secondary school principals for effective administration.

Adequate applications of communication skills are imperative in decision-making. The administrator that knows his onion should be able to define problems, generate and evaluate alternative courses of action, implement decisions, control and evaluate results formatively and summatively using the right communication skills. Ahija (2007) the principal also interacts with public and private organizations as well as law enforcement agencies. In all these interactions, the principal has to establish rapport with all to promote conducive atmosphere necessary for effective teaching and learning.

The principal is expected to maintain a school climate conducive to students' achievement and learning, school growth, in addition to overseeing the enforcement of school rules and regulations, as well as the meting out of disciplinary measures when indicated (Ukeje, Nwagbara and Okorie, 1992). They maintained that students these days demand more careful handling while Akubue (1997) aptly remarked that a good administrator should be able to communicate with the students all the time. Each of these situations demands proper application of effective communication skills like selection of adequate verbal or documented responses that can help diffuse a tense interaction or situation. The tone of voice set in each communication situation goes a long way to establish the feeling for the entire institution and its environment (Kelley, 2003). The principal does not necessarily have to follow the bureaucratic chain of command, but can make use of the more effective methods or channels of communication for a particular situation.

A School administrator should be able to define feelings of happiness, anger, displeasure, confidence and fear. This is only possible where the principals are able to apply communication skills appropriately and as situation demands. A problem ensues, if the head of the school fails to know that he is communicating principally for information sharing through which the institutional goals are defined and members given sense of purpose and direction (Dostal, 2007). The principals, in such a situation, finds it difficult to pay attention when subordinates or visitors are speaking, or respond in a more cautious ways to issues and give feedbacks based on content and context of the subject under discussion. In a situation where the principals lack the communication skills there is every tendency that there will be misunderstanding between the principals and the teachers as well as the students.

Managerial communication skills in the context of this study simply mean the various techniques that the principal can use to effectively communicate to people. The managerial communication skills include, listening skill, verbal and non-verbal skills, written skills, and feedback skills. Listening skill is the ability of someone who may be the communicated to pay attention to the communicator in order to decode the message property. Verbal skill is the ability of the communicator to be outspoken so that the communicate can hear and

understand the message being communicated. On the other hand, non-verbal skill is the ability of the communicator to decode unspoken words, gestures, signs, body expressions such as eye contact and facial movement. Written skill in the context of this study means the ability of the communicator to document whatever information that is needed to be passed to the others, and feedback communication skill means, the ability of the communicatee respond appropriately to the message being communicated.

The principals of the schools should possess the above enumerated communications skills for smooth management of the schools, but it has been observed that in most of the secondary schools in Anambra state the secondary schools principals lack the basic managerial communication skills.

Okeke (2004) observed that in Anambra state, most school principals fall short of the desirable managerial skills required for effective administration of schools. As a result of this, many principals are always in conflict with their staff and students which in most cases have led to break down of law and order in the school. The question that arises is, what are the means that can be applied to improve the managerial communication skills of the secondary School principals for effective order school administration?.

It is on the guest to provide the answer to the above questions that this research is design to determine the mechanisms for improving the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals in Anambra state of Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

In any organization like educational institution where communication exists on daily basis, a lot of problems are generated to administrator and entire system as a whole. According to Okeke (2004) some principal fall short of adequate communication skills competence and so communication gap of one form or the other is created. In a situation where neither the teacher nor student is carried along, there must bound to be chaos and disorder. Unfortunately, some principals exercise authoritarian types of leaders style more often, they tend to engage on downward type of communication, taking decision alone, disregarding subordinate view points and sometimes scaring people away by their aloofness and superior airs which militate against application of adequate communication skills and competence. Therefore, it becomes necessary to determine appropriate mechanism to improve the secondary school principal's managerial communication skills for effective school administration.

Purpose of the Study

This main purpose of this study was to determine the appropriate mechanism for improving the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals in Anambra, state of Nigeria.

The study, specifically sought to:

1. Determine the application of listening skills in communication for improving the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals.
2. Determine the application of verbal and non-verbal skills in communication for improving the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals.

3. Determine the application of written skills in communication for improving the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals
4. Determine the application of feedback skills in communication for improving the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How would the application of listening skills in communication improve the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals?
2. How would the application of feedback skills in communication improve the managerial communication skills, of the secondary school principals?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at an alpha level of 0.05 of significance:

- H₀₁:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the female principals and the male principals on the application of listening skills in communication for improving the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals. ($p < 0.05$)
- H₀₂:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the male and female principals on the application of feedback skills in communication for improving the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals ($p < 0.05$)

LITERATURE /THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The concept of communication abound but all more or less denoted interaction and purpose fullness, this study focused an application of listening skills, verbal and non-verbal communications skills, written skills and feedback skills for improving managerial communication skills in secondary school administration by principals in Anambra State.

Some theories that guided the study include:

Social penetration theory. The theory was developed by Altman and Tailor in 1963, this theory emphasized developing relations in what the theorists described as “relational closeness” which progresses from superficial to intimate in some gradual and progressive fashion through self – disclosure (Littlejohn, 2002). Self disclosure entails making oneself transparent to others through communication, that is, when one tells others things about oneself which helps them to see uniqueness as a human being.

Culpert in Miler (2005) distinguishes self disclosure as the voluntary communication that reveals more private, sensitive and confidential information from self-description which entails communication that levels public “layers”. Hence, self disclosure can leave one or more persons vulnerable because of the intrusion into the “private” of the individual. The

social penetration theory that requires transparency through self disclosure is important in administrative communication because when or discloses self to others, it helps them to see uniqueness in their relationship with him as human beings.

In summary, the social penetration theory therefore applies very much to this study as the principals of the secondary schools need to be transparent in their relationship with their staff and students. Self-disclosure invariably build trust, which is imperative, if there should be effective communication within the system. A good leader does not fear taking risks which is what openness can expose one to. They should utilize appropriate communication skills and establish “safe: intimacy that should move the system forward by encouraging free flow of information. This theory is relevant to this study because the theory involves relationship, and thus study focuses in relationship between two individuals involving communication. The two individuals are the communicator and the communicate or the receiver of the message.

Interpersonal Reductionship Theory

This theory of interpersonal relationships was propounded by Baxter and Montgomery (2001) presumes that “beginning of interpersonal relationships are fraught with uncertainties” (Littlejohn and Foss, 2008). They stated that, when strangers meet, their primary focus is on reducing their levels of uncertainty in the situation. Their levels of uncertainty are located in both behavioural and cognitive realms, that is, they may be unsure of how to behave (or how the other person will behave), and they may also be unsure of what they think of the other and what the other person thinks of them. Further, people’s uncertainty is both at individual and relational levels. People are highly motivated to use communication to reduce their uncertainty in developing relationships.

According to these theorists, we learn by use of passive, active and interactive strategies. In passive, we observe the person; in active, we ask others about the person we are interested in or set up a situation to observe the person or talk with him; while in interactive, we communicate directly with the person. Therefore, principal should aim at reducing the uncertainty that exist at their first meeting so as to gave way for worthwhile relationships. This theory is relevant to this study because the theory talks about human relationship which is the focus of this study.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a survey research design which sought the opinion of the respondent on mechanism for improving the managerial communication skills in secondary school principals in administration in Anambra State. The Choice was necessary because this research used questionnaire to collect data used for this study.

The study was conducted in Anambra state of Nigeria. There are five education zones in Anamba State: Aguata, Awka, Nnewi, Ogidi and Onitsha. All the five education zones were covered in the study. The populations for the study were 260, which comprised all the secondary school principals in the five education zones in Anambra state. In Aguata Education Zone, there are (50) Secondary schools; in Awka Zone, there are sixty-three (64), In Nnewi, they have fifty (50) secondary schools while in Ogidi there are sixty three (63) and Onitsha Education Zones has thirty-three (33) secondary schools. There was no sampling

because the whole population was used for the study because the population was of a manageable size.

The researcher developed questionnaire titled Managerial Communication Skill Questionnaire (MCSQ) which served as an instrument for data collection. The instrument was validated by one specialist in measurement and evaluation and two experts in Educational foundations, all in Ebonyi State University Abakaliki. They assess the instrument based on the content, coverage, relevance of each item, correctness of statement and suitability of the items. The reliability of the instruments as determined by carry out a pilot text and had a Cronbach's Alpha reliability co-efficient of 0.75 indicating high level of internal consistency of the items. Mean scores with standard deviation were used to answer the four research questions while t.test statistics was used to test the hypotheses formulated.

FINDINGS/RESULTS

The results of the study were based on two research question and two hypotheses that aided the study

Research Question 1

How would application of listening skills improve the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals?

Table 1: Mean with Standard Deviations of the Respondents on the Application of Listening Skills for Improving the Managerial Communication Skills of the School Principals.

S/N	Item Statements	SA	A	DA	SD	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
1	Skill to pay attention to a staff when communicating by the principal	72	180	05	03	3.23	0.53	Agree
2	Ability to listen and pick the main content of discussion by the principal	144	108	06	02	3.51	0.58	Agree
3	Patience to listen to aggrieved staff who is complaining	146	110	03	01	3.54	0.54	Agree
4	Ability to listen to the students complaints against each other	62	180	16	02	3.16	0.55	Agree
5	Skill of the principal to listen to the students when complaining against the teachers.	34	198	17	11	2.98	0.60	Agree
6	Zeal to hear every staff during a staff meeting	108	72	66	14	3.05	0.94	Agree
7	Patience to listen to parents and guardians on the complaints about the school.	90	126	36	08	3.14	0.76	Agree
8	Paying attention to the complaints of the parents teachers association on issues affecting the school	108	140	10	02	3.36	0.59	Agree
9	Principals ability to have a fare hearing between any staff or students before passing judgment.	126	108	16	10	3.34	0.76	Agree
10	Listening to the complaints and suggestions of staff both teaching and non-teaching before taking decision	128	107	17	08	3.36	0.74	Agree
	Grand mean			3.26				

Table 1 reveals that all the items had their mean scores above the cut of point of 2.50 with their corresponding standard deviations ranging between 0.53 and 0.94. This indicates that the respondents agreed that the application of listening skills improve the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals' administration in Anambra State of Nigeria.

Research Question 2: How would the application of feedback skills in communication improve the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals?

Table 2: Mean with Standard Deviation of the Respondents on Application of Feedback Skills for Improving the Managerial Communication Skills of the Secondary School Principals.

S/N	Item Statements	SA	A	DA	SD	\bar{X}	SD	Remarks
1	Ability of the principal to feedback teachers the decisions of the ministry of education on the school progress	198	36	20	06	3.63	0.72	Agree
2	Skills of feeding back the staff on the outcome of decisions on improvement of the school	79	127	50	04	3.08	0.74	Agree
3	Ability of the principal to communicate to any staff any matter before action is taken against such staff.	64	163	28	05	3.10	0.64	Agree
4	Ability of the principal to feed back the students on any decision of the school that may affect the students	75	143	38	04	3.11	0.69	Agree
5	Ability of the principal to feed the PTA back on any project and programme of the schools	60	190	04	06	3.16	0.55	Agree
6	Principals' ability to properly feed back the visitors to the school if there is any change in the school administration	54	109	72	26	2.97	.075	Agree
7	Ability of the principal to feed back to the staff on any request or demand	58	150	39	13	2.97	0.75	Agree
8	Ability of the school principal to feed back any issue or complain reported to him/her by any staff or students	63	148	40	09	3.01	0.73	Agree
9	Skill of the principal to properly communicate to the students and staff on any new change being brought to the school	80	135	38	07	3.10	0.74	Agree
10	Skill of the school principal to promptly respond any emergency in the school.	158	90	08	04	3.54	0.63	Agree
	Grand mean					3.16		

Table 2 shows that all the items had their mean scores above the cutoff point of 2.50 with their corresponding standard deviations and grand mean of 3.16. This is an indication that the respondents agreed that application of feedback skills in communication improve the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals in Anambra state.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the male and the female principals on the application of listening skills to improve the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals ($p < 0.05$).

Table 3: t-test Analysis on the Mean Responses of the Respondents on Application of listening Skills to Improve the Managerial Communication Skills of the Secondary School Principals. (N=260)

S/N	Item statements	(\bar{X}_1)	(\bar{X}_2)	S^2_1	S^2_2	t-cal	t-tab	Remark
1	Skill to pay attention to a staff when communicating by the principal	3.24	3.25	0.54	0.62	-0.01	1.96	*
2	Ability to listen and pick the main content of discussion by the principal	3.61	2.56	0.58	0.66	0.50	1.96	*
3	Patience to listen to aggrieved staff who is complaining	3.18	3.19	0.62	0.71	-0.1	1.96	*
4	Ability to listen to the students complaints against each other	2.63	2.74	0.60	0.73	-1.10	1.96	*
5	Skill of the principal to listen to the students when complaining against the teachers.	3.10	3.08	0.71	0.85	0.20	1.96	*
6	Zeal to hear every staff during a staff meeting	3.18	3.19	0.92	0.74	-0.10	1.96	*
7	Patience to listen to parents and guardians on the complaints about the school.	3.38	3.62	0.81	0.74	-2.40	1.96	*
8	Paying attention to the complaints of the parents teachers association on issues affecting the school	3.33	3.38	0.77	0.82	0.50	1.96	*
9	Principals ability to have a fare hearing between any staff or students before passing judgment.	3.55	3.41	0.74	0.67	1.40	1.96	*
10	Listening to the complaints and suggestions of staff both teaching and non-teaching before taking decision	3.62	3.60	0.73	0.70	0.20	1.96	*

df = 258

* = No significant difference

** = significance difference

Table 6 reveals that all the items had their t-calculated less than the t-critical of 1.96 at 258 degree of freedom, at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null-hypothesis was accepted. This implies that the opinions of the male principals did not differ from the female principals on application of listening skills to improve the managerial communication skills of secondary school principal's administration.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the male principals and the females on the application of feedback communication for improving the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals ($P < 0.05$).

Table 4: t-test Analysis on the Mean Responses of the Respondents on Application of Feedback Skills for Improving the Managerial Communication Skills of the Secondary School Principals in Anambra state.

S/N	Item statement s	(\bar{X}_1)	(\bar{X}_2)	S ² ₁	S ² ₂	t-cal	t-tab	Remark
1	Ability of the principal to feedback teachers the decisions of the ministry of education on the school progress	3.64	3.71	0.72	0.78	-0.70	1.96	*
2	Skills of feeding back the staff on the out come of decisions on improvement of the school	3.07	3.08	0.77	0.69	-0.10	1.96	*
3	Ability of the principal to communicate to any staff any matter before action is taken against such staff.	3.10	3.06	0.68	0.70	0.40	1.96	*
4	Ability of the principal to feed back the students on any decision of the school that may affect the students	3.12	3.14	0.69	0.71	-0.20	1.96	*
5	Ability of the principal to feed the PTA back on any project and programme of the schools	3.18	3.16	0.48	0.50	0.20	1.96	*
6	Principals' ability to properly feed back the visitors to the school if there is any change in the school administration	3.79	3.69	0.93	0.89	1.00	1.96	*
7	Ability of the principal to feed back to the staff on any request or demand	3.98	3.88	0.98	0.92	0.71	1.96	*
8	Ability of the school principal to feed back any issue or complain reported to him/her by any staff or students	3.06	3.10	0.70	0.70	-0.40	1.96	*
9	Skill of the principal to properly communicate to the students and staff on any new change being brought to the school	3.02	3.06	0.73	0.74	0.40	1.96	*
10	Skill of the school principal to promptly respond any emergency in the school.	3.64	3.56	0.68	0.60	0.80	1.96	*

df = 258

* = No significant difference

** = significant difference

Table 9 reveals that all the items had their t-calculated less than the t-table at the degree of freedom of 158 and at 0.05 level significant. Therefore, the null-hypothesis was accepted. Therefore the was no significant difference between the opinions of the male principals and that of the female principals on the application of feedback skill for improving the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals in Anambra State.

DISCUSSION

Application of Listening Skills for Improving the Managerial Communications of the Secondary School Principals

One of the findings of the study is that application of listening skills helps to improve the managerial communication skills of the secondary school principals. The respondents agreed that skills to pay attention to the teachers by the principals, ability to be patient when any teacher or student is complaining and the real to hear from any teachers. Complain improves the communication skills of the principals. This finding is in line with Souza (1995) who reported that listening provides a strong element in leadership of secondary school principal the administration.

He further explains that leaders who take time to listen to his subordinate make good leaders. He further reiterated that administrators who listens attentively to people when communicating get the messages well and acts well and avoids misunderstanding. The finding is also in agreement with Brown and Oke (2009) who reported that listening is not just a matter of hearing sound, but it involves catching the patterns of thought by the listener, especially the administrators who give meaning to the words or phrase. Daniel (1995) reported that some school principals who do not have listening skills and do not care to listen to their staff end up in making mistakes which always mare their administration. This finding is also in line with Dimbleby and Burton (1992) who were of the opinion that when leaders pay attention and listen to their subordinate it gives room for the leader to get and digest the message properly for necessary actions. The statement of Dimbeky and Burton implies that knee listening by the leader gives the leader good opportunity to hear the complaints and messages of the subordinate which will help the leader to communicate very well in his or her decision making. This also implies that a school principal who possesses a good listening skill will definitely carry out effective management of the school through effective communication. Principals who take time to listen to their teachers and students tend to manage their schools better than those who do not take time to listen but interrupt the speaker, which leads to hasty conclusion and decision on the part of the leader. This finding is also in agreement with Dostal (2007) who explained that the ability of a leader to listen to his subordinate is the beginning of wisdom in administration. This implies that the ability of the leader to give a listening ears to the subordinate makes the leader a good managerial his or her manager in communication.

Application of Feedback Skill in Communication for Improving the Managerial Communication of the Principals

The study also revealed that application of feedback communication skill helps to improve the principal's managerial communication skills. In the table above the ability of the principal to feedback teachers the decisions of the Ministry of Education had 3.63, ability of the principal to communicate to staff before any action is taken had 3.10, principals' ability to feedback any staff's demand had 2.97 and generally the grand mean on the feedback skill was 3.16, which is above the cutoff point of 2.50. These, the respondents agreed that can improve the managerial communication skills of the principals. This finding is in agreement with Ahija (2007) and Ikedingwu (2001) who reported that in communication process, feedback is essential. They explained that it is only when there is feedback that communication will be effective. This implies that it is only when the communicate must have responded to the communicator that the ingredients of the communication or the message can be properly

decoded. The ability of the principal to respond to the demands and messages of the teachers and students improves his managerial communication. Good administrators rely much on the feedback of the subordinates for necessary actions. Any communication without feedback renders the message communicated ineffective. (Ahija, 2007). He further reported that feedback in communication is vital for the school administrator to carry out his/her managerial communication. This implies that when the school administrator makes use of feedback from his teachers and students, such administrator will always do well in school administration.

Education implication of the study

This study has numerous educational implications. For instance the study revealed that application of listening skills, verbal and non-verbal, written and feedback skills help to improve the managerial communications of the secondary school principals. This implies that for the school principals to carry out effective communication in their administration, the principals should apply listening, verbal non-verbal, written and feedback skills. Furthermore, educationally, the findings of this study implies that in the school system, the principals should always listen to the teachers and students, circulate information by writing, verbally speak to the teachers and the students as well as responding to the teachers and students on any matter presented to his office for conducive teaching and learning environment, which will ensure effective academic achievement

It also implies that both the teachers and the students should pay good attention and listen to their principals and always explain and speak out whenever they have any issue to discuss with principal. Additionally, the implications of the findings of this study imply that communication is vital in the school system so far as administration and management of the schools concerned.

CONCLUSION

In the school system, especially in the secondary schools in Nigeria, the head of the secondary school is the principal. The principal sees to the daily management of the school. The principal communicates to the teachers and students as well as the non-teaching staff every time. Sometimes misunderstanding, misinterpretation and break down of law and order occurs as a result of breakdown of communication between the principals, students and the staff. The ability of the principal to effectively manage the school is the function of his ability to communicate to the subordinates. For the principal to improve his managerial communication skills, he has to apply listening skills, verbal, non-verbal, written and the use of feedback in communicating to the teachers, students and other staff, so that the messages can be properly decoded. The ability of the principal to respond to the demands and messages of the teachers and students is important in order to take appropriate decision. A good administrator relies much on the feedback of the subordinate for necessary actions. Any communication without feedback renders the message communicated ineffective. The empirical analysis of the data collected for this study has clearly showed that when the school principals apply the skills of listening, use of verbal and non-verbal communication, application of written skills and feedback skills, the managerial communication skills and feedback skills, the managerial communication skills of the principals will improve his administration greatly.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research encountered numerous limitations when carrying out this research work. For instance, it was extremely difficult for the researcher to visit the secondary school located in the rural areas in Anambra state, as a result of bad roads secondly, some of the respondents claimed to be too busy which required persuasion and several visits to encourage them to respond.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The following further studies are suggested.

1. Challenges to effective communication among the students and teachers for effective academic achievement in secondary schools in Awka Education zone of Anambra state
2. Strategies for improving conflict management in secondary schools administration in Enugu state.
3. Role of Parent's Teachers Association (PTA) in the operation of private secondary schools in Anambra state of Nigeria.

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