

Demographic Characteristics and Administrative Effectiveness of Secondary School Principals in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Principals are institutional leaders who carry out specific duties in the daily administration of secondary schools. However, certain demographic characteristics such as age, gender, experience, educational qualification and marital status could impact school principals' administrative effectiveness. This study investigated demographic characteristics and principals' administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study. A correlational research design was adopted for this research. The population was made up of one thousand six hundred and fifty (1,650) teachers in the one hundred and nineteen (119) public secondary schools in Benue State. The sample for this study consisted of three hundred and eighty (380) respondents comprising of principals and teachers from the three Senatorial Districts of Benue State. Multi-stage sampling technique was used for selecting the sample. The instrument used for data collection were self-designed questionnaire titled "Principals' Administrative Effectiveness Questionnaire (PAEQ)". The Cronbach alpha reliability statistical method was used to compute the internal consistency of the instrument. The reliability coefficient of 0.892 was obtained from the trial test. Pearson Product Moment correlation were used to analyse the data collected for the study. The study found that there was significant positive correlation between the principals' age, gender and educational qualifications and administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. It recommended among others that the government should place premium on age in the appointment of secondary school teachers as principals. The government at all levels should also formulate policies that would encourage gender balance.

Keywords: Demographic characteristics, Administrative effectiveness, Secondary school principals, Educational leadership, School administration

Introduction

Education and human capital development are key drives of global economic development and competitiveness. Educational organisations are established to produce competent and adequate human resources for the development of nations. Education is viewed by Ofojebe and Nnebedum (2016) as a vital tool for the inculcation of the right values and skills necessary for the development of individuals and society at large. This role of education explains why many nations place

education on the concurrent list and give a substantial percentage in their budgetary allocations. Babatunde (2014), avers that education is the backbone of development in any nation and that it serves as a tool for a united, independent, wealthy and egalitarian society. There are three tiers of education in Nigeria: primary, secondary and tertiary.

The secondary education system in Nigeria as described by the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013), is a crucial link between primary school, tertiary education and the labour market. Secondary education has a strategic importance to Nigerian development and capacity building process, because 60% of Nigeria's population is made up of students of secondary school age and young people in general (Bregman & Stallmeister, 2002; Lewin, 2004). This underscores the need for improved secondary education which is closely linked to effective school management. Secondary education is the gateway between primary and tertiary education in Nigeria; it is the level, at which students take the subjects that qualify them for professional or vocational programmes at higher education level. The main objective of secondary education as encapsulated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) are to: Provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background. Offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles. Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades. Develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of the world's cultural heritage. Inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence. Foster national unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity. Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour, and appreciate those values specified under Nigeria's broad national goals. Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial, and economic development.

The effectiveness of the principal is a critical attribute that determines the success of secondary school administration in Nigeria. As the head of the school, the principal plays a central role in planning, coordinating, and overseeing the day-to-day activities of the institution. The principal's effectiveness influences not only the implementation of educational policies but also the motivation of teachers and the academic achievement of students. In this context, *effectiveness* refers to the degree to which a principal achieves set educational goals and maintains a conducive learning environment. Sullivan (2011) defines effectiveness as the ability to develop strategic plans, recruit and manage personnel efficiently, coach and motivate staff, and ensure the achievement of desired outcomes. Administrative effectiveness, therefore, encompasses the overall direction and management of the school. It involves organizing and directing both human and material resources to support teaching and learning in alignment with the goals of secondary education and the needs of students, teachers, and society. An administrator's capacity to forecast problems shows the effectiveness of the principal. The basic purpose of principal administrative effectiveness therefore, is to enhance the smooth-running of the school, resolve conflicts before it becomes escalated, ensure positive school climate, good communication style, ensure principles and practice of administration, develop and implement plans, policies and programmes geared towards the educational objectives (Chinda, 2015).

The principal's administrative effectiveness is therefore expressed in the ability of the principal to create and sustain a friendly educational climate, ensure accountability, manage personnel and, influence decision-making that guarantees success in the educational system (Aja-Okorie, 2016; Igboke, Okorji, & Asiegbu, 2016). As asserted by Ereh and Okon (2015), principals' administrative effectiveness is the extent to which the set goals and objectives of a school

programme are accomplished through the administrative practices of the principals. Ereh and Okon (2015), listed some indicators of a principal's administrative effectiveness as accountability, performance improvement, curriculum development, personnel management, monitoring, and evaluation. In this regard, principals' administrative effectiveness is the ability of the principals to exercise leadership roles, efficiently harness human and material resources, translate educational policies into outputs objectively, and, positively influence teachers, students, and other stakeholders of the school community in the actualisation of pre-determined educational objectives.

The ability of secondary school principals to perform well in management services greatly depends on the principals' personal attributes. The principal's demographic characteristics include the age of the principal, gender, years of experience as a teacher, intelligence, educational qualification and marital status amongst others. Age is the length and time a man has lived from birth (Sturman, 2010). It is the length of time during which, a being or thing has existed; the length of life or existence to the time spoken of or referred to. The age of a person could enhance the person's management skills, or performance since age and experience could go together. In the Nigerian setting, according to Ibukun (2011), age has been considered with other factors such as qualification and experience in the appointment of teachers into the position of a principal with the belief that these factors would make some individuals more effective than others. Research studies have included gender as an important factor in job performance. Gender according to Pollard and Morgan (2002), refers to the socially constructed expectations for male and female behaviours which prescribe a division of labour and responsibilities between males and females. While some studies showed an evidence of male superiority over females in task performance, (Uko, 2002), others reported that females perform better in school administration. (Daresh & Male, 2000).

Educational qualification according to Akpan (2007) is the knowledge and skill acquired after a period of training and instruction by seasoned experts. Professional training exposes one to knowledge, skills, and values needed for effective job performance. Though educational qualification has some research evidence in support of its potential in improving a principals' job performance (Nwangwu, 2006). Ogbaji and Oti (2006), aver that educational qualification of principals has no impact on their job performance. It is therefore, important that the relationship between educational qualification and principals' administrative effectiveness be investigated. Experience according to Sturman (2000), is the culmination of context-based events that a person perceives. It is the professional growth as a result of a period of continued work, training and retraining on the job and other related processes. Sturman further states that experience has some level of influence on principals' job performance. It has been suggested by Nwangwu (2006) that experience assists in developing the required social and intellectual skills, in learning how to work closely with other people and in finding out about individual interests and differences. This indicates that experience may be related to performance.

However, Achunine (1998) observes that the length of time one stays on a job does not necessarily make one efficient; and argued that professional training is a more important factor than on-the-job experience in an administrator's job performance. According to Nwosu (2009), the methods of selection of secondary school principals in Nigeria, which does not consider these demographic and personality variables is unsatisfactory and gives room for concern. The consequence of this anomaly is that most of the school principals grope around and often use trial and error method in the daily school management. This gives rise to low staff morale and poor work attitude that may

affect their performance. Therefore, there is a need to examine the relationship between these demographic characteristics and principals' administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in Benue State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The effectiveness of school principals is pivotal to the success of secondary education, as their leadership directly influences school climate, teacher performance, and student outcomes. However, despite the acknowledged importance of administrative effectiveness, there is growing concern over variations in the performance of principals across schools in Nigeria in general and Benue State in particular. Some principals are able to foster high-performing learning environments, while others struggle with basic administrative duties. One possible explanation for this inconsistency lies in the demographic characteristics of the principals themselves, such as gender, age, educational qualification, teaching experience, and years of administrative service. These variables may shape leadership styles, decision-making ability, communication patterns, and capacity to handle school resources. Yet, there is limited empirical evidence in the Nigerian context to support or refute these assumptions. Although previous studies have been conducted on the relationship between principals' demographic variables and administrative performance, no study to the best knowledge of the researcher related the variables to principals' administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. Most educational reforms and professional development programmes fail to account for how these personal attributes influence effectiveness. Without a clear understanding of the relationship between demographic characteristics and administrative effectiveness, policies for recruitment, training, and promotion of principals may continue to be based on assumptions rather than evidence. This gap in knowledge makes it difficult for educational stakeholders to implement targeted strategies that enhance school leadership. Therefore, this study fills that empirical gap in literature. Thus, the study seeks to investigate the extent to which demographic characteristics influence the administrative effectiveness of secondary school principals, with the aim of providing insights that can inform policy and practice in secondary school management.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the demographic characteristics and administrative effectiveness of principals in secondary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. In specific terms, the study sought to:

- i. examine the relationship between principals' age and administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in Benue State, Nigeria;
- ii. determine whether there is any difference between male and female principals' administrative effectiveness in secondary schools; and
- iii. Ascertain whether there is any difference in principals' administrative effectiveness based on educational qualification in secondary schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between principals' age and administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in Benue State, Nigeria?

2. Is there any difference between male and female principals' administrative effectiveness in secondary schools?
3. Is there any difference in principals' administrative effectiveness in secondary schools based on educational qualification in Benue state, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The three hypotheses were hypothesized and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between principals' age and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in Benue State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference in the administrative effectiveness of male and female secondary school principals in Benue State, Nigeria.
3. There is no significant difference in the administrative effectiveness of secondary school principals based on educational qualification in Benue State, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on the Trait Theory of Leadership, which emphasizes the influence of individual characteristics on leadership effectiveness. The Trait Theory, one of the earliest theories of leadership, was initially proposed by Thomas Carlyle in the 1840s, and further developed by scholars such as Ralph Stogdill (1948, 1974), Mann (1959), and Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991). The central assumption of this theory is that certain innate or acquired traits distinguish effective leaders from others. These traits may include intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, sociability, age, gender, educational background, and professional experience. According to Stogdill (1948), leadership is not merely a function of traits alone but a complex interaction between individual traits and situational demands. However, his findings still affirmed that personal characteristics significantly influence leadership potential. Later, Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) argued that traits such as drive, motivation, honesty, cognitive ability, and expertise are essential components of effective leadership.

In the context of this study, the Trait Theory is relevant because it provides a theoretical basis for examining how demographic characteristics such as gender, age, and educational qualification may relate to or influence the administrative effectiveness of secondary school principals. It suggests that these personal attributes could either enhance or limit a principal's capacity to lead effectively, make sound decisions, motivate staff, manage resources, and create a productive school climate. Thus, this theory guides the investigation into whether principals' demographic characteristics are significantly associated with their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools. It also supports the notion that identifying and understanding these traits can help in the selection, training, and development of more effective school leaders.

The Concept of Principalship

Principalship describes a person in the rank of a principal in any given organisation, school, institution or office. In an educational institution, principalship refers to the position of a head teacher, principal, governing or highest ranking or presiding officer of any school (Drake & Roe, 2003; Igbokwe, 2015). Sindhi looks at school principalship as a well-established position that provides instructional leadership by coordinating curricula, co-curricular programmes, and administrative roles and is responsible for the general administration of the school. They are

responsible for the supervision, monitoring, assessment, evaluation and, dissemination of current information on educational issues and, modern teaching techniques to teachers to stimulate them for scholarship and best practices in curriculum delivery. Principals are those who are expected to perform administrative functions, including planning, organising, supervising, staffing, evaluating, coordinating, leadership and, purchasing and, maintenance of instructional materials, equipment and facilities (Uzoigwe, 2013).

Principals are usually identified by what they do in an organisation or precisely, what they do in schools; they are responsible for the smooth running of schools and play multifaceted roles in setting the direction of secondary schools (Adeniyi, 2014). They are defined by their functions and, roles. Roles assigned to principalship are management roles because it is a management position. The principals' roles can be examined from a number of perspectives, according to Lunenburg (2010), namely: leadership functions, administrative roles, management skills, task dimensions, human resource activities, and behavioural profiles of effective versus successful administrators. Principals carry out four basic leadership functions to enhance performance and achieve administrative effectiveness. These four basic functions are planning, organizing, leading, and monitoring. The four leadership functions of a principal are interrelated (Lunenburg, 2010).

Conceptualising Administrative Effectiveness

Effectiveness is the ability to plan, organise and coordinate many and often-conflicting social energies in a single organization so adroitly (Adams in Besong, 2001). It implies that, it is the right and duties attached to an individual irrespective of the gender of the incumbent. Effectiveness is equivalent to achievement muted by incumbent administrator or principal of secondary school. It implies that, it is an antecedent of function or role's achievement of the principal. It could be identified as a plan proposed in advance and accomplished later but within a stipulated time or duration of school. Ipaya in Besong (2001) notes that effectiveness is a part of the function assumed by someone, a set of specific responsibilities, assumed by a professional in a setting.

Administrative effectiveness has been defined differently by different authors, due to its complex nature. Some researchers defined administrative effectiveness as the positive response to administrative actions to accomplish the stated goal (Akomolafe, 2017). Even though, administrative effectiveness is defined as the product of a series of complex nested relations and an interaction pattern (Cammock, 2016). An administrator's capacity to forecast problems shows itself, as a result of the characteristics and behaviours in his personal relationships and consulting criteria. In leading a group, leadership is regarded as effective (Adeniyi & Omotoso 2014). Effective administration requires a balance of skills among many dimensions (Cammock, 2015) and these dimensions and parameters are influenced to a different degree by personal, organisational and environmental contextual factors.

Principals' Administrative Effectiveness

Principals' administrative effectiveness is the degree to which secondary school principals achieve goals and objective of their schools, which involves coordinating both human and material resources and, using them systematically for the achievement of educational objectives. (Adeniyi, 2014). Adeniyi and Omotoso (2014), note that administrative effectiveness for principals in secondary schools deals with the ability of school principals to carry out administrative tasks related to instructional management, internal relations, organization management, administration, students' performance and school community relations toward achieving the school goals and objectives. Akomolafe (2012) avers that principals' administrative effectiveness is the

administrative performance in decision making, delegation of duties to subordinates, and setting good examples and motivating the teachers and students alike to create a conducive working environment to accomplish school goals and objectives to enhance subordinate performance for school success.

Relatedly, principals' administrative effectiveness is a prudential means of getting the expected end in the educational system. That is to say that it the ability of the principal to carry out his roles so well as to achieve the expected educational goals and objectives. Wallace Foundation (2013) pinpoints five effective functions of any principal as shaping a vision of academic success for all students, creating a climate hospitable to education, cultivating leadership in others, improving classroom instruction (to enable teachers to teach at their best and students learn at their utmost), and finally, managing people, data and processes with the goal of school improvement. An effective principal should be someone who is able to promote an atmosphere of respect and trust and makes the teachers and students have a sense of belonging (Adeniyi, 2014). Some of the indicators of principals' administrative effectiveness include high productivity, morale (high motivation) turnover rate of teachers, degree of integration, maximization of individual potentialities, maximum utilization of available resources and value contribution to the society (Adegun, 2005).

Methodology

A correlational research design was adopted for this research. The population consists one thousand six hundred and fifty (1,650) teachers in the one hundred and nineteen (119) public secondary schools in Benue State. The sample for this study consisted of three hundred and eighty (380) respondents comprising of principals and teachers from the three Senatorial Districts of Benue State. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the sample. The instrument used for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire: "Principals' Administrative Effectiveness Questionnaire (PAEQ)". The questionnaire items were subjected to face and content validity by three experts in Educational Management and Tests, Measurement and Evaluation at the Benue State University, Makurdi. The responses from these experts were subjected to quantitative content validity. The Cronbach Alpha reliability statistical method was used to compute the internal consistency. The reliability coefficient of 0.89 was obtained from the trial test, implying that the instrument for data collection was internally consistent. Pearson Product Moment correlation was used to test hypothesis 1, while independent sample t-test was used to test hypotheses 2 and 3. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between principals' age and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Matrix of Principals' Age and Administrative Effectiveness

Variables	N	Principal's Age	Administrative Effectiveness
Principal's Age	380	1	.932**
Administrative Effectiveness	380	.932**	1

Note. N = 380. **p < .01

Table 1 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation conducted to examine the relationship between principals' age and their administrative effectiveness. There was a strong, positive correlation between the two variables, $r(378) = .932$, $p < .01$, indicating that as principals' age increases, their administrative effectiveness also tends to increase.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the administrative effectiveness of male and female secondary school principals in Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 2: Independent Sample t-test of the Difference between Male and Female Principals Administrative Effectiveness

	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	t	Sig (2-tailed)	Result
Administrative Effectiveness	Male	200	92.85	7.57	378	3.29	.001	Rejected
	Female	180	84.41	9.00				

Table 2 shows the independent samples t-test conducted to compare PAEQ scores between male and female students. The results indicated a statistically significant difference in scores, $t(378) = 3.29$, $p = .001$, with male students ($M = 92.85$, $SD = 7.57$) scoring significantly higher than female students ($M = 84.41$, $SD = 9.00$).

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the administrative effectiveness of secondary school principals based on educational qualification in Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 3: Independent Sample t-test of the Difference in Principals' Administrative Effectiveness based on Educational Qualification

	Ednl. Qual.	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df	t	Sig (2-tailed)	Result
Administrative Effectiveness	Bachelor's Degree	160	74.86	7.73	378	3.29	.001	Rejected
	Master's Degree ⁺	220	82.53	8.02				

Table 2 shows the independent samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in PAEQ scores based on educational qualification. The results showed a statistically significant difference between respondents with a bachelor's degree ($M = 74.86$, $SD = 7.77$) and those with a master's degree or higher ($M = 82.53$, $SD = 8.03$), $t(378) = 3.29$, $p = .001$. Respondents with higher academic qualifications scored significantly better on the PAEQ.

Discussion

This study explored the demographic characteristics and administrative effectiveness of secondary school principals in Benue State, Nigeria. The first major finding of the study revealed a very strong positive correlation between principals' age and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in Benue State. This indicates that as principals grow older, their effectiveness in school administration tends to improve. The result supports the earlier study by Onubuleze (2018), which found a favorable association between age and administrative efficiency, suggesting that older principals often possess greater experience, maturity, and decision-making capabilities. However, this finding contrasts with the result of Karakose et al. (2021), who found only a weak positive correlation, suggesting that effectiveness is more a function of personal growth and professional development than of age alone.

The second hypothesis examined whether gender influences administrative effectiveness, and was tested using an independent samples t-test. The results showed a statistically significant difference between male and female principals in favour of males. This finding is consistent with Onubuleze (2018), whose research revealed a significant link between gender and successful school management. However, this result contrasts with the findings of Mukinya (2013), who reported no significant influence of gender on principals' appraisal duties in Kenyan secondary schools. Oni (2014) also argued that effectiveness depends more on individual traits than on gender. Hence, although gender-based differences were observed in this study, effective leadership is ultimately determined by individual competence, emotional intelligence, and leadership style, rather than gender alone.

The third hypothesis focused on the role of educational qualification in determining administrative effectiveness. This was also tested using an independent samples t-test, and the result indicated a significant difference in favour of principals holding postgraduate degrees. This finding is in line with that of Walson et al. (2020), who reported that professionally qualified principals (e.g., holders of NCE, B.Ed., M.Ed.) outperformed those without such qualifications in terms of instructional leadership. Ogunode (2023) similarly found that highly qualified school managers performed better in leadership roles. Phytanza and Burhaein (2020) further emphasized that educators with degrees in education demonstrate greater skill and competence. However, Ogbaji and Oti (2006) reported no significant relationship between academic qualification and principals' performance. Despite this contradiction, the present study affirms that higher academic and professional qualifications contribute significantly to administrative effectiveness in secondary school leadership.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that principals' demographic variables, namely age, gender, and educational qualifications, have significant relationships with administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. Age was positively correlated with effectiveness, while both gender and academic qualification showed statistically significant differences in effectiveness as determined by independent t-tests. These findings suggest that certain demographic factors may enhance or influence a principal's leadership capacity and should not be overlooked in appointment, training, and evaluation processes. In essence, effective school leadership is shaped not only by personal attributes but also by structural factors such as age, education, and gender-related opportunities.

In light of the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Government authorities and education boards should consider age and administrative experience as important criteria in the appointment of school principals. Given the positive relationship between age and effectiveness, older and more experienced educators are likely to demonstrate better leadership in school management.
2. Policy frameworks should be developed and enforced to promote gender equality in school administration. Both male and female educators should be given equal opportunities to serve as principals. Additionally, school stakeholders should foster a collaborative environment that supports effective leadership regardless of the principal's gender.
3. The Benue State Ministry of Education should set and strictly enforce minimum educational and professional qualification requirements for prospective principals. Preference should be given to candidates with degrees in education and relevant postgraduate qualifications, as these contribute significantly to effective school leadership.

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