

Professional Training of Secondary School Principals in Nigeria: A Neglected Area in the Educational System

M. Olalekan Arikewuyo, Ph.D.
Institute of Education Olabisi
Onabanjo University

*Florida Journal of Educational
Administration & Policy*

Summer 2009
Volume 2, Issue 2

The paper examines the professional training of Principals of secondary schools in Nigeria. The study observes that teaching experience appears to be the major yardstick that is being used currently to promote teachers to the rank of school Principals in the country. After drawing experiences from some other countries on how Principals are trained and appointed, the paper concludes that teaching experience should not be the only yardstick for appointing Principals of secondary schools in Nigeria. As school administrators, the principals need to be formally trained before they assume administrative positions. The paper therefore suggests that the National policy on Education should be amended such that potential principals would attend mandatory leadership courses at the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) before they assume managerial positions. It further proposed that NIEPA should expand its programmes to provide the opportunities and avenues for such training.

Keywords: Professional, Training, Secondary School, Principal, Nigeria.

Introduction

Secondary education not only occupies an important place in the Nigeria education system, it also serves as the link between the primary and tertiary levels. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) defines secondary education as the education the child receives after primary education and before the tertiary stage. The Junior Secondary School (J.S.S.) has also become an integral part of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Programme of the federal government. The junior secondary school is free, compulsory and universal. Statistics shows that while enrolment at public secondary schools was 6,279,562 in 2004, it stood at 6,397,581 in 2005 (Federal Ministry of Education, 2006). However, while enrolment is increasing, the number of secondary schools in both years remains the same. Thus, since the junior secondary school is now free and compulsory, many parents, who, hitherto could not afford to send their children to school, are now doing so. This also means that government at federal and state levels now need to plan more on basic education, especially the junior secondary school level. The total number of secondary schools was 13,846 in the years under review.

The broad goals of secondary education, according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004), shall be to prepare the individual for:

- a. useful living within the society; and
- b. higher education.

In specific terms, secondary education shall:

- a. provide all primary school leavers with the opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background;
- b. offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, opportunities and future roles;
- c. provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;
- d. develop and promote Nigerian languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage;
- e. inspire students with a desire for self improvement and achievement of excellence;
- f. foster national unity with an emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity.
- g. raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labor, appreciate those values specified under our broad national goals and live as good citizens;
- h. provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development. (pp: 18-19).

At the head of every secondary school in Nigeria is the Principal, who is regarded as the Chief Executive and responsible for all that happens in the school (Oyedemi and Fasasi, 2006). As the Chief Executive, the Principal assigns duties to those who could perform the duties, though all responsibilities still reside in him/her as the accounting officer. However, Obemeta (1984) sees the Principal as a manager, administrator, an exemplary leader, counselor, a public officer, a nurse and even a messenger. In specific terms, Arikewuyo (1999) viewed the functions of the Principal as follows:

1. providing leadership for curriculum development;
2. providing leadership for instruction improvement;
3. creating an environment conducive for the realization of human potentials;
4. influencing the behavior of staff members; and
5. supervising instructional activities in the school system. (p.70).

The Commonwealth Secretariat (1993) also adduced the functions of the Principal to include the following:

1. manage and deploy school resources efficiently;
2. allocate school accommodation appropriately;
3. ensure satisfactory standards of maintenance and cleanliness of school facilities;
4. organize staff development in school;
5. guide curriculum implementation and change;

6. manage the developmental appraisal system, whole school evaluation and new integrated quality management system;
7. create a professional ethos within the school by involving staff members in decision making, and
8. manage restructuring and redeployment of teachers. (p.35).

In carrying out these functions, Wong and NG (2003) contended that Principals are to demonstrate his/her ability to lead through:

- professional knowledge;
- organizational and administrative competence;
- ability to work out a good school policy and put it into effect;
- skill in the delegation of authority;
- ability to understand the professional problems of teachers, and give professional guidance; and
- ability to establish good working relationships with staff and parents (p. 37).

Earlier, Cranston (2002) listed the skills and capacities, which a Principal is expected to possess as follows:

ENHANCED SKILLS AND CAPACITIES

- Generally, various aspects of strategic leadership – people, school, educational.
- Generally, various aspects of management – facilities, budgeting, staffing, accountability.
- Leading, visioning, cultural change.
- Knowledge of state, national and international educational developments.
- Knowledge of wider organizational and development issues beyond education section.
- Capacity to manage and developments (educational and otherwise).
- Capacity to make, manage and lead through uncertainty.
- Interpersonal, people skills – communication, collaboration, consultation, negotiation, persuasion, conflict management.
- Capacity to empower and delegate effectively, leading to multiple leadership roles.
- Capacity to manage time effectively, identify and act on priorities.
- Capacity to operate in a culture of higher pressure and greater job demands.
- Capacity to identify skill deficiencies.

Aside the functions outlined above, studies have also been conducted on how principals have been performing these roles. From the works of Gaynor, (1994), Condy, (1998) and Halliday (1999), many of the day-to-day management issues are very practical, but of critical importance. In most cases, working to reduce teacher absenteeism is a major priority. In Kenya, principals viewed school fees and money matters as their major concerns (Kitavi and Westhuizen, 1997). Other challenges facing the principals include the incidence of sexual and physical abuse of girl students by teachers, while school heads have a particular

role to play by working to change the culture of violence and establish a more caring, participatory and democratic school environment, (Leach and Machakanja, with Mandoga, 2000). In another study carried by Akpa (1990) in Nigeria, principals ranked the responsibilities they performed in the following order: staff and students management, liaison officer, coordinating and financial management. The study discovered that academic and instructional activities including curriculum development, teaching and instructional supervision were treated with less vigour. This finding was further corroborated by Mulkeen, Chapman, DeJaeghere and Leu (2007), who found that principals in most African countries do not have regard for instructional supervision and thus viewed it as not part of their duties. Though Togneri (2003) has discovered that principals focus more on administrative parts of their role, there is still strong evidence to show that they play an important part in ensuring instructional quality. As a matter of fact, ensuring that quality instruction goes on in the school should be a major part of the administrative functions of the school Principal.

However, it has been discovered that while some countries have been making efforts to practically train Principals of Secondary Schools, Nigeria seems to have not. Despite calls by various bodies and scholars for professional training of school heads (Obemeata, 1984; Ajayi; 1987; Arikewuyo, 1997), the country has continually been using teaching experience as the major yardstick for appointing Principals.

Therefore, the aim of this paper is to take a cursory look at this major gap in Nigeria's educational policy and proposes ways by which Principals of Secondary schools could be professionally trained before they assume administrative positions.

Structure of Secondary Education in Nigeria

Secondary education has made a remarkable progress in Nigeria since 1859 when the Christian missionaries established the first secondary school. Essentially, some reforms have taken place in the sector. For example, in the early days of secondary education up to the late 1980s, there were three types of secondary schools in the country. They were: the secondary modern school, secondary commercial school and secondary grammar school.

The secondary modern school was a three-year program, which offered a general education program, mostly in humanities, for primary school leavers, who could not pass the competitive examination to the secondary grammar school. The secondary commercial school was a four-year course, which focused on commercial oriented subjects such as business studies, commerce, shorthand, typewriting, accounting and bookkeeping. The products of commercial and modern schools were allowed to proceed to the secondary grammar school to spend three years instead of the normal five-year duration. The secondary grammar school was a five-year duration school, which offered a range of subjects, including humanities, social science, technical, vocational and science subjects, leading to the award of West African School Certificate (WASC).

This tripartite secondary school system continued until the early 1980s when secondary commercial and modern schools were scrapped by the government. The 1980s also witnessed the commencement of another National Policy on Education, which divided secondary education into both the junior and senior secondary. The junior and senior secondary were of three-year duration each. Initially, both schools were under the same

school setting. However with the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999, the junior secondary school became part of the nine-year basic education programme and has since been separated as an independent school, under a separate principal.

The headship of secondary schools in Nigeria is usually a product of the teaching force. Teachers, who have spent a minimum of ten years in service, are usually appointed as principals and vice principals of secondary schools. Sometimes two vice principals, one for administration and the other for academic are appointed for bigger schools. Thus years of experience remain the major yardstick for appointment into the position of principals. Up till now, the secondary school system does not take administrative qualification and criteria into consideration for appointment into leadership positions in schools.

Over the years, heads of secondary schools in Nigeria have been accused of various lapses and offences. They are said to be inefficient and accused of failing to provide direction and adequate leadership for their schools. The falling standard of education in the schools has also been attributed to the inefficiency of the principals. (Obemeata, 1984).

All these inefficiencies, lapses and ineptitude on the part of secondary school principals in Nigeria are often attributed to their lack of professional training, as they do not possess the necessary managerial qualifications and skills needed to administer the schools. Thus promotion and seniority have failed to provide the prerequisite necessary for eligibility into managerial positions.

Theoretical Framework

The Peter Principle presents a theory, which explains the effect on an employee's effort, of a promotion to a new and different job, which has a new set of demands. Peter and Hull (1969) argued that since past performance is continually used to predict future performance, eventually, people are promoted to a job where they would not be effective. Peter and Hull declare that *in a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence.* (p.26).

The Peter Principle is the concept that in bureaucratic organizations, new employees typically start in the lower ranks, but when they prove to be competent in the task to which they are assigned; they get promoted to a higher rank, which in some cases are managerial. The process of climbing up the hierarchical ladder can go on indefinitely, until the employee reaches a position where he/she is no longer competent. The result is that most of the management levels of a bureaucracy will be filled by incompetent people, who got there because they were quite good at doing different and usually but not always easier work than they are currently expected to perform.

In other words, workers, managers and administrators tend to be promoted to the level of their incompetence. Many workers and managers do so well and are rated so highly in earlier jobs that they are promoted to higher positions, which often requires skills that they do not possess, until they reach a level where their performance is poor and where they are no longer effective (Obilade, 1986).

Though many scholars have criticized the Peter Principle for being "rather pessimistic", they still agree that this principle represents more truth than fiction (Koontz, O'Donnel and Weihrich, 1980; Mitchel, 1982). They agree that there is a real danger of

promoting an individual beyond his or her level of competence. This principle underscores the need to scrutinize the process of staff recruitment and promotion. It also calls for attention to the problems that can arise when past performance is used to predict future performance on a job that is substantially different from the one the individual is leaving.

The Nigerian Civil Service, including the educational system relies mostly on years of experience and promotion to elevate people from one cadre to the other, especially from the classroom to the managerial level. The danger here is in promoting an individual from a position of competence to a position of incompetence. There had been cases of individuals who performed well enough in lower positions, but who later occupied positions too difficult for their competencies. Obilade (1986) further reported that in the Nigerian school system, individuals who have been competent teachers or heads of departments often get promoted to the post of the Vice Principal. In this position, they relate well with teachers, students and parents and were intellectually competent. Sometimes, they gained further promotions to the rank of school Principal. Usually, these people had never had to deal with officials of State School Board or Ministry of Education; nor had to handle so many students by themselves. Several of them are soon regarded as incompetent Principals since it was apparent that they lacked the required skills to work with such high officials and deal with the student body as well as the resulting administrative problems.

Thus, since it has been observed that experience alone cannot provide the necessary yardstick for the appointment of Principals, it is necessary to search for more corrective theory. The contingency theory of leadership appears to be quite relevant in the search for effectiveness in organizations. The theory proposes the adoption of training programs that prepare leaders to function effectively in specific organizational situations. This approach throws more light on how administrators in the Nigerian school system could be trained to perform effectively. The premise of the contingency idea is that performance is contingent upon a proper match between the individual's competencies, skills and talents and the job (Mitchell, 1982).

Principal Training and Preparation in Other Countries: Implications for Nigerian Educational System

In early 1980s, the government of Hong Kong began to consider the need for professional preparation for the potential Principals of schools and required all senior teachers to undergo training in management and related issues before they were appointed as Deputy Principals. By March 1991, the government launched a School Management Initiative (SMI) in all Hong Kong schools. The concern was to provide a framework for school-based management and effective schools. This was because it was realized that many Principals are insufficiently experienced and inadequately trained for their task. It was also discovered that because proper management structures and processes are lacking, some Principals are insufficiently accountable for their actions and see their post as an opportunity to become "little emperors with dictatorial powers in the school", (Wong & Ng, 2003).

In the late 1999, the Education Department of Hong Kong further proposed that all Principals and potential Principals must undertake a needs assessment, an attitudinal and paradigm change and attend core modules including learning and teaching; human resources

development; financial management; strategic management, and for newly appointed Principals, school administration. After a lot of several objections and modifications, the Education Department restructured the plans. Today, in Hong Kong, it is now established that not only newly appointed Principals need training, the serving Principals (after three years of service) are required to attend training courses. Thus, from September 2003 onward, all potential Principals need to attend training programs in school administration and must obtain a certificate issued by the Education Department before they are appointed as school heads (Wong and Ng, 2003). The implication of this is that Principals are now professionally trained and thus be able to administer their schools efficiently.

In Singapore, between 1965 and 1975, school Principals duties consisted largely of supervising routine tasks that were mainly non-professional and often clerical in nature. From the mid-seventies, there was greater openness and more public discussion of education policies between schools, the ministry and the public. As the Ministry of Education worked towards school improvement efforts in the eighties, Principals were gradually given more autonomy to decide on internal operations of their schools. They were accountable for ensuring the well being of their students and staff, and improving the annual academic results of their students cohorts (Wee and Chong, 1990). By the late 1980s, the job demands on Principals had changed drastically. Principals were no longer to function as passive managers but as “Chief Executive Officers” responsible for designing the future of their schools. They were increasingly expected to respond to the growing dynamism and unpredictability of the external school environment and steer their schools forward as innovative leaders. In 1985, the Ministry of Education therefore began to provide for the formal training and preparation of school leaders by requiring potential Principals to attend a leadership-training course, the Diploma in Educational Administration, designed and conducted by the Institute of Education. By that time, the selection of candidates for school leadership became a matter of great importance to the Ministry of Education. This led to a change in the process by which prospective Principals were identified and groomed. (Chew, Stott and Boon, 2003).

Generally, in Singapore, the system of identification and promotion for school headship is complex and influenced by the interplay of several factors besides the educational qualification and job performance of eligible education officers. There are a number of paths that teachers aspiring to become Principals can take to advance their careers beyond the classrooms. The usual pattern for accession to principal ship is one where education officers begin their careers as classroom teachers. They must demonstrate their effectiveness as teachers first and be identified by their Principals for leadership responsibilities at the school level in committees or as heads of department in their school organization. If they prove themselves to have leadership qualities, this could lead to their appointment as Vice Principals. At this stage of their teaching career, they could expect to be nominated by their Principal to attend a formal training programme designed for prospective Principals and conducted by the National Institute of Education, Singapore. Such a recommendation would have to be endorsed by the Ministry of Education. This ministry applies other selection criteria to determine the suitability of candidates for Principalship (Chew, Stott and Boon, 2003).

In the United Kingdom, former Prime Minister Tony Blair in 1998 announced the setting up of the National College for school leadership (NCSL). Basically, the purpose of the

College is to improve the lives and life chances of all children and young people throughout the country by developing world-class school leaders, system leaders and future leaders. The corporate goals of this college are: transform children's achievement and well being through excellent school leadership; develop leadership within and beyond the school; identify and grow tomorrow's leaders and create a fit for purpose National College. Essentially, the NCSL since its establishment has been organizing various courses for potential administrators in the educational sector. (National college for school leadership, 2008). For example, the Associate Head teacher Programme aims at encouraging deputy head teachers to step up into headship in schools in challenging contexts, through a combination of hands-on-experience, national development days and external mentoring support.

From all indications, various countries have been making efforts at giving professional training to teachers who wish to make a career in school headship. Outcomes from the reviewed countries indicate that years of experience and seniority no longer account for all that is needed to appoint people into administrative responsibilities. Unfortunately, experience in many African countries, shows that the mechanisms for recruiting teachers to become principals is unsystematic and have not been based on professional criteria (Mulkeen; Chapman; DeJaeghere &Leu, 2007). It therefore called for the establishment of a national or regional institution that specializes in advanced degrees or certification on educational leadership to address the problem.

Nigeria: The Way Forward

From all indications, the professional training of school administrators, particularly Principals of secondary schools has not been given any serious attention in Nigeria's educational policies. This is because of the general belief that experienced teachers can be promoted to the rank of principals of secondary schools. As a matter of fact, teachers who have spent a minimum of ten years of teaching experience are usually promoted as principals and vice principals. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) says, "*all teachers in educational institutions shall be professionally trained. Teacher education programs shall be structured to equip teachers for the effective performance of their duties*" (pp.39-40). Invariably, the government is paying attention only to the training of teachers. No mention has been made of the training of heads of schools. The popular assumption is that those who would be Principals and School heads should rise to the position from among the products of teacher education. Indeed, length of teaching experience is the major yardstick in the appointment of Principals of schools. What the policy makers fail to realize, perhaps is that teaching and school administration are not necessarily the same thing. School administration is an art, and, like all other arts, has its intricacies, which must be learnt and mastered by anyone who wants to make a success of the system.

The above situation about Nigeria further confirms the observations that despite the enormous expectations of school principals, many are poorly prepared for the task. Dadey and Harber (1991) and deGrauwe (2001) quoted a 1990 study of 31 African countries as concluding that only three of them had comprehensive training programs in educational planning, administration and management. Even where training programmes are provided, they are sometimes criticized for being unsystematic and inadequate in content and coverage,

lacking follow up and failing to address the real needs of supervision. Though Adams (1998) discovered that most of the training focused on how to budget, analyze data or design an evaluation, Mulkeen; Chapman; DeJaeghere & Leu (2007) argued that the more profound problem in the preparation of principals is that even if they have strategic planning skills, they often lack a firm understanding of the education system. They do not know what inputs and processes can reasonably be expected to contribute to increased student learning. Lacking this, principals are left to react to daily events and ongoing political pressures. Consequently, in many African countries, the mechanism for recruiting teachers to become principals is unsystematic and not necessarily based on professional criteria.

With the continuous increase in enrollment in secondary education in Nigeria, especially with the division of schools into junior and senior secondary, which has impacted on increased enrolment, it is pertinent that those who would head the schools must be formally trained. The problem of administering the schools is now becoming more complex than it used to be. Students and parents are now becoming more aware of their rights and obligations within the educational system. The entire society's structure has changed tremendously and this has also entered the system of the educational setting. To that extent, it is a wrong assumption to think that any educated person can head the school. Consequently, the days of amateur Principals are gone. For a variety of reasons, secondary schools are increasing in size and their organization is getting more complex. It is therefore, necessary to have Principals who have some management skills. Furthermore, according to Bernbaum (1976), the managerial function of the secondary school Principal is becoming more important. Management by objective and a conscious style of management are essential in any school.

As a matter of fact, the changed conditions in secondary schools require Principals to be trained and equipped with necessary skills in school administration, so as to be able to make scientific and detailed decisions. It is in this regard that Hughes warned that: *it is no longer possible to believe that practical experience alone constitutes valid management training. Too many costly mistakes can occur while experience is being acquired, and, in any case, the quality of experience can vary widely (p.5).*

Similarly, the American Association of School Administrators (Hoyle, Fenwick and Betty, 1985) contended that school administrators need to develop skills in the following areas: designing, implementing and evaluating school climate; building support for schools; developing school curriculum; instructional management; staff evaluation; staff development; allocating resources; as well as educational research, evaluation and planning. In addition, the Association states that administrators must possess a thorough understanding of the learning process, as well as the ability to communicate and cooperate with people of diverse cultures, positions and perspectives within the school and the community.

The time has therefore come for meaningful management training programmes for principals of Nigeria's secondary schools. According to Ajayi (1987), some of the ineptitude, inactivity and failure of our school system to meet the needs and aspirations of the populace could be traced to poor leadership. Indeed, a good teacher does not necessarily make a good school head.

The Federal Military Government of Nigeria, in 1992, established the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) in Ondo, Ondo state. The aim is to give professional training to all those who are involved and want to make a career in educational planning and administration. Invariably, the Institute is expected to train head teachers of primary schools, Principals of secondary schools, heads of tertiary institutions, inspectors, local education officers, etc. But a look at the 2008 programme of the Institute shows that it only organizes two and three day's workshops and seminars for principals and other educational leaders. This is not just sufficient. There is the need for NIEPA to develop training modules and organize resident long-term training programs and courses for aspiring secondary school Principals. This is the practice in Hong Kong, Singapore and United Kingdom. In fact, possession of certificates issued at the end of such training programmes, should be one of the yardsticks for appointing Principals of secondary schools in Nigeria. In fact, Mulkeen; Chapman; DeJaeghere & Leu (2007) discovered that this situation is not limited to Nigeria alone. In a study among some other African countries, it was discovered that many secondary school administrators are ill prepared to meet the demands posed by the changing nature of their jobs. They further argued that organized and systematic training in educational leadership and effective and transparent management that goes beyond the occasional workshop presently offered in most systems is urgently needed for principals in Africa. NIEPA, as presently constituted is only organizing workshops and seminars for heads of schools, (NIEPA 2008). But the Institute needs to go beyond this and develop into what Mulkeen; Chapman; DeJaeghere and Leu (2007) called an institution that specializes in advanced degrees or certification for educational leadership.

However, this could only be possible if the government gives the necessary legal impetus to the training of school heads. In this case, government would have to legislate for a policy that would make it mandatory for whoever wants to make a career in secondary school Principalship to attend training courses in school administration at NIEPA.

Conclusion

The importance of training in the entire educational system cannot be ignored. However, it has been observed that the Nigerian government has only recognized the "professional training of teachers" in the National Policy on Education. The popular belief is that any "experienced" teacher, who has been teaching in the school for about ten years or more is competent to administer the school. This argument is no longer tenable. Not all teachers can be school administrators. Therefore, anyone who wants to be involved in the art of secondary school Principalship needs to be equipped with the necessary skills. This can only be possible if those concerned are trained. As a matter of fact, Mulkeen; Chapman; DeJaeghere & Leu (2007) in the World Bank study found that most teachers agreed that to become principals, they have to work hard and be disciplined in order to prove their abilities. The teachers noted that it was helpful to be in another position of responsibility, such as head of department, before applying to be head teacher. Teachers also agreed that they need to pursue further studies to be qualified to manage a school. These data, in the view of the researchers suggest that the process by which principals are selected is not based on qualifications to administer and manage a school, but rather they are selected based on prior

positions held or their performances as teachers. Indeed, several teachers in the study commented that they were not interested in becoming principals.

This World Bank study has thus reaffirm the position that teaching experience, rather than professional qualification and competence are currently being used in promoting teachers to managerial positions in Nigeria and many other African countries. There is therefore the need to amend the National Policy on Education in order to accommodate this recommendation. In addition, the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) needs to be legally strengthened, just like the National Institute of Education in Singapore, in order to carry out this responsibility.

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Summer 2009
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The Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy is published biannually, in Fall and Spring by Educational Administration & Policy at the College of Education, University of Florida. The contents of the journal may be located at www.fjeap.org, or by visiting the College's webpage www.education.ufl.edu/leadership.

The Florida Journal of Educational Administration & Policy is an online, blind, peer-reviewed journal published by Educational Administration & Policy at the University of Florida's College of Education. The journal seeks to serve as an outlet for poignant and rigorous research and study, as well as provide a venue for quality research reviews and thought provoking commentaries. Manuscript submission is open to all, with a special invitation to graduate students. For more information regarding the Journal, submission guidelines and the review process please visit the website www.education.ufl.edu/leadership.

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