Roles and Actions of School Principals in Managing Curricular Reforms in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the roles and actions of school principals in managing curricular reforms. Three research questions guided the study. A 22-item questionnaire was used for data collection. A stratified random sample of 80 principals and 1678 secondary school teachers in Anambra State took part in the study. Data was analysed using mean scores, and findings indicated that principals have not manifested appropriate instructional leadership roles. They do not provide adequate leadership actions and they do not discuss with teachers on how inventive creativity should be made an explicit goal of teaching and learning. It was also found that principals do not work jointly with staff and expert consultants to implement ICT use. Finally, principals and teachers agree that leadership power is so crucial for teachers' roles and actions in curricular reforms in educational invention processes. Among the recommendations made were that principals should improve on instructional leadership roles, initiate transforming leadership actions and align their leadership power to stimulate schools' implementation of curricular reforms..

INTRODUCTION

Invention, innovation and creativity are and always have been defining features of human existence. All over the world, societies, businesses and technologies are changing rapidly, and this development has led to the creation of what is today commonly labelled the knowledge society. Curriculum issues, either in an explicit or an implicit manner, are inextricably linked to current thinking and action on educational concerns and reforms around the world. Ajibola (2008) pointed out that experiences of educational innovations almost all over the world have shown that curriculum is at the same time a policy and a technical issue, a process and a product, involving a wide range of institutions and actors. Mintrom (2000) described innovation as ideas or practices that are new within the context of the school. Curriculum innovation includes any idea, practice, object or method that is introduced to bring changes in curriculum and programme development; and teaching and learning. It also includes the introduction of new educational technologies; assessment and quality assurance procedures.

The Nigerian education system has witnessed several curriculum innovations within the past few decades. As Obanya (2003) stated, the decades that followed World War II have witnessed greater importance being given to school curriculum on the basis that it is instrumental for enhancing the creativity, productivity and economic prosperity of the people and their nations. These curriculum innovations translate national and educational objectives into curricula and teaching objectives through the development of curricula content and materials. These innovations are designed to help individuals attain cognition, acquire process skills and develop scientific attitudes which will enable them to think critically, manage and use available resources, to effectively adapt to their environment, assume responsibilities and fulfil domestic, economic, social, and political roles.

Teaching and learning in schools are expected to be in line with the demands of curriculum innovations. Principals are the driving force behind any school and, it is argued, the key to improving the quality of the learning process (Billard, 2003). As Mitchell & Sackney (2000) stated, principals engage in the process of implementation of curriculum reforms every day of their school leadership life as they initiate curriculum changes and implement decisions on educational inventions improvement. However, the principal does not need to be construed as the expert in educational matters or the superior of the teachers. Instead, authors (Grimmett, 1996; Reitzug, 1997) contended that

the curriculum and instructional leadership role of the principal is more appropriately configured as the facilitator of a process of collaborative inquiry, problem solving, and school development.

Studies have shown the leadership power is crucial in schools' implementation of curriculum reforms (Sleegers, Geijsel & Van den Berg, 2002). Spillane (2005) noted that team building, teacher empowerment, delegation of authority, garnering support for schools programmes, use of Information Technology, and increased community participation in provision of curriculum resources are parts of the implementation of curriculum reforms process. Geijsel, Sleegers, Stoel & Krüger (2007) found that the use of leadership power is crucial for continuous nurturing and promotion of knowledge and skills of teachers through curriculum and instructional leadership. A number of instructional support strategies, such as "making suggestions, giving feedback, modeling, using inquiry and soliciting advice and opinions from teachers, and giving praise" (Blase & Blase, 1999:367) are available for principals' use. Similarly, Grimmett (1996) noted that principals should play five key leadership roles and actions in curriculum and instructional leadership: instructional support, collaborative inquiry modeling collegiality and experimentation, focusing teacher talk on action, helping teachers to frame their inquiry, and connecting action with pupils' learning. Providing leadership for the implementation of curriculum reforms also involves a process of increasing the focus on schools visions, decisions, communities, communication processes and students' outcomes by improving the capacity of teachers and others to work together. Hence, it is not about reducing leadership power, but about pulling together an organizational unit so that all individuals are empowered to initiate and participate in a trusting, team and computer-mediated environment. Principals are expected to lead schools' resource provision, teaching and learning activities for the curriculum reforms. But the question is, how do they use their leadership power to achieve this?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to find out the roles and actions of school leaders in leading the process of implementation of curriculum reforms of secondary schools inventions. Specifically, the study seeks to identify:

1) the instructional leadership roles that principals play in curriculum reforms,
2) their leadership actions, and
3) how crucial leadership power is for teachers' roles and actions in implementing curriculum reforms.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided the study:

1) What instructional leadership roles do principals use their power to play in schools' implementation of curriculum reforms?
2) What actions do school leaders take in schools' implementation of curriculum reforms?
3) How crucial is the leadership power for teachers' roles and actions in implementation of curriculum reforms?

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was a descriptive survey. This design is appropriate for this study, which collected data from secondary school principals and teachers in order to determine the roles and actions of school leaders in managing curriculum reforms in schools.

Population and Sample for the Study

The study population comprised 268 principals, and 5,587 secondary school teachers in Anambra State as at February 2008. The sample consisted of 1,758 respondents selected using the proportionate stratified–random sampling technique. The secondary schools were stratified on the basis of the education zones where they are located. From each education zone, approximately 30 percent of the principals, and teachers were randomly selected. On the whole, 80 principals, and 1678 teachers were selected for the study.

Instrument for Data Collection

he researcher used a questionnaire titled – Leadership for School implementation of Curriculum Reforms Questionnaire (LSCQ). The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part A has one open-ended statement that elicited background information on the respondents' job designation (principal or teacher). Part B comprised 22 items on leadership in school implementation of curriculum reforms on a four point scale of: strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1).

Validation of Instrument

The instrument was validated by two experts in educational management and policy and an expert in curriculum studies in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Their suggestions led to some modifications in the questionnaire.

Reliability of the Instrument

Kuder Richardson's formula 21 (KR-21) was used to determine reliability. The researcher administered the LSCQ on 10 principals and 30 teachers from secondary schools in Delta State. After analysing the responses, a coefficient of 0.85 was obtained and considered adequate for the study.

Method of Data Collection

Copies of the questionnaire were administered on the sample with the help of ten teachers who did not participate in the study. At the end of the exercise, 17 copies were lost and only 1741 copies (99.03%) were retrieved and used.

Method of Data Analysis

Mean scores were used in analyzing the data for the research questions. The items were assigned the following points: Strongly agree: 3.50-4.00; Agree: 2.50-3.49; Disagree: 2.00 -2.49 and Strongly disagree: 1.00-1.99. A mean up to 2.50 was accepted.

RESULTS

Table 1: Principals and Teachers Mean Responses on Roles of Leadership Power in implementation of curriculum reforms in schools.

In my school, the leadership:	$\overline{X}$ Principals	Decision	$\overline{X}$ teachers	Decision
1 empowers staff to initiate and participate in decision-making on needed changes in curriculum.	3.00	agree	3.53	Agree
2 mandates subject heads to ensure that their teams implement school vision for curriculum innovations.	3.42	agree	3.15	agree
3 counsels teachers to change unethical conducts observed during supervision	2.15	disagree	1.03	disagree
4 schedules teachers to teach with computers	1.13	disagree	1.13	disagree
5 convinces parents teachers association to provide computerised infrastructure for the school	2.12	disagree	2.07	disagree
6 insisting on building high moral standards of curriculum delivery	3.17	agree	2.68	agree
7 demonstrating expertise knowledge in instructional assessment problems	2.11	disagree	1.11	disagree

In Table 1, principals and teachers agree with items 1, 3 and 6 but disagree with the rest of the items. Hence, principals only use their leadership powers to play the role of empowering staff to initiate and participate in decision-making in implementation of curriculum reforms, mandate subject heads to ensure team implementation of school vision for curriculum innovations, insisting on building high moral standards of curriculum delivery.

Table 2: Principals and Teachers Mean Responses of Actions of School Leaders in implementation of curriculum reforms.

In Table 2, items 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7 score above 2.50 in the columns for principals and teachers. This indicates that principals and teachers unanimously agree that principals provide leadership actions in these items. Items 4 and 6 score less than 2.50 indicating that principals do not these.

	In my school, the leadership:	$\overline{X}$ Principals	Decision	$\overline{X}$ teachers	Decision
1	Plan with teachers to implement pilot curriculum materials	3.14	agree	3.22	Agree
2	Communicates clear visions and goals for instructional innovations.	2.89	agree	2.57	agree
3	give sufficient support to staff initiative and self-discovery on curriculum changes	3.70	agree	3.51	agree
4	discusses with teachers on how inventive creativity should be made an explicit goal of teaching and learning	1.53	disagree	1.11	disagree
5	Brainstorms and implements with staff, strategies for improved students' achievement standards	3.76	Agree	2.81	Agree
6	Works jointly with staff and expert consultants to implement ICT use (computers, internet, e-mail) in schools.	1.90	disagree	1.12	disagree
7	Conducts regular supervision to identify key principles and concepts that teachers need to learn as part of a core curriculum in any subject domain	3.21	agree	2.56	agree

Table 3: Principals and Teachers Mean Responses of How Crucial Leadership Power is for Teachers' Roles and Actions in Curricular Reform Implementation.

	The use of leadership power is crucial in that it may:	$\overline{X}$ Principals	Decision	$\overline{X}$ teachers	Decision
1.	motivate teachers to implement curriculum changes in schools.	3.82	agree	3.77	Agree
2.	help teachers to know the consequences of non-compliance with curriculum directives	3.13	agree	3.19	agree
3.	make a leader willing to take decisions on curriculum changes and to justify them for teachers' acceptance.	3.44	agree	3.51	agree
4.	help a leader to mentor teachers to improve their pedagogical skills.	1.23	disagree	1.21	disagree
5.	help teachers improve their communication skills for effective teaching.	3.16	agree	3.17	agree
6.	make teachers co-responsible for teaching and learning decisions, and committed to delegated power and authority.	3.71	agree	3.23	agree
7.	make teachers to discuss students' learning problems with their parents in non-threatening manner	2.71	agree	3.65	agree
8.	make staff to desist from examination malpractice with students	3.64	agree	3.81	agree

In Table 3, principals and teachers unanimously disagree with item 4 (help a leader to mentor teachers to improve their pedagogical skills), and agree with the other items. By this analysis, principals and teachers agree that leadership power is very crucial in the roles and actions of teachers in implementing curricular reforms.

DISCUSSION

It was found that the head teachers provided curriculum and instructional leadership to a little extent. The curriculum and instructional leadership provided by the head teachers include: empowering staff to initiate and participate in decision-making on needed changes in curriculum; mandating subject heads to ensure that their teams implement school vision for curriculum innovations, insisting on high moral standard for curriculum implementation. Other areas were largely neglected. This finding agrees with (Aghadiuno, 2008) who found that head teachers in Anambra State did not engage in instructional leadership practices.

This finding is surprising because principals are expected to provide leadership in curriculum and Instruction (Blasé and Blasé, 1999). The fact that principals did not provide a high extent of curriculum and instructional leadership might have adverse impact on curriculum and instruction in education for all. This is because where principals who should direct teachers paid less attention to curriculum issues; there is the tendency for teachers too to pay less attention on curriculum issues. Where this situation persists, less is achieved in terms of efficient curriculum delivery in schools. This finding also confirms that of Ajibola (2008) who found principals wanting in a range of curriculum pedagogy skills. Geijsel, et al. (2007) also found that the role of leadership power has been underutilised in schools in the Netherlands. Besides, Ofojebe (2008) found that hierarchical structures such as vice-principals, dean of studies and subject heads which might undermine principals' use of power to lead the process of implementation of curriculum reforms in schools for the curriculum reforms.

The findings also indicate that principals take actions such as: planning with teachers to implement pilot curriculum materials; communicating clear visions and goals for instructional innovations; giving sufficient support to staff initiative and self-discovery on curriculum changes; brainstorming and implementing with staff, strategies for improved students' achievement standards; and conducting regular supervision to identify key principles and concepts that teachers need to learn as part of a core curriculum in any subject domain. However, this study found that Anambra State principals do not discuss with teachers on how inventive creativity should be made an explicit goal of teaching and learning nor work jointly with staff and expert consultants to implement ICT use (computers, internet, e-mail) in schools. ICT use was almost zero! This finding deviates from that of Leithwood, & Jantzi (2006) who found that school leaders use clear communication of tasks, in-depth discussion of external information and ICT to implement reforms. Where principals do not discuss with teachers on how inventive creativity should be made an explicit goal of teaching and learning, the possibility of the teachers implementing inventive curriculum strategies requirements is in doubt. And without ICT implementation in schools, the schools are not being lead in a way to position staff and students for curricular reforms.

Finally, it was found that while principals disagree that leadership power can help a leader to mentor teachers to improve their pedagogical skills. By agreeing with the rest of the items, principals and teachers affirm that leadership power is so crucial for teachers' roles and actions especially in this era of curriculum reforms. This finding agree with those of previous researchers that leadership power can enhance curriculum implementation, teacher commitment and responsibility to delegated authority, teacher compliance with principals directives and teacher respect for parents (Sleegers, et. al, 2002; Geijsel et al, 2007, Ofojebe, 2008). This being the case, leadership power can be a driving force for school implementation of curriculum reforms and inventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Principals should make use of their leadership power to play their roles for schools implementation of curriculum reforms.
1. The State government should engage the services of experts in curriculum and instruction to train principals on current trends in curriculum and instruction for inventions.
2. Universities should review their educational leadership/administration /management courses in line with contemporary demand of curricular reforms.
3. Principals should engage in those leadership actions capable of fostering change in teachers, parents, communities and students towards improved curriculum delivery.

4. Principals should engage in crucial instructional leadership practices so they can positively influence the roles and actions of teachers in the process of school implementation of curriculum reforms.
5. The State Education Commission and   Ministry of Education should organise seminars on school implementation of curriculum reforms for principals
6. Principals should regularly attend conferences organised by universities and professional bodies to acquire more knowledge on best practices for school implementation of curriculum reforms.

CONCLUSION

Principals' leadership is a high priority issue for curricular reforms in this age of inventions. In this study, the principals did not sufficiently provide instructional leadership and support to teachers. This implies that the principals have not provided the enabling environment for effective curriculum and instruction in education for all. This might be responsible to the slow rate of invention being experienced in secondary schools in Anambra State. As educational reforms throughout the globe continue to emphasize curriculum innovation and inventions, secondary school leaders need to pay serious attention to leading the process of schools' implementation of curricular reforms.

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