EXTENT OF PRINCIPALS' IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITY CARE, SAFETY AND CONDUCIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE

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Abstract
This study investigated the extent of principals' implementation of quality care, safety and conducive learning environment in the administration of secondary schools in Anambra State. Two specific purposes, two research questions, and two hypotheses guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 5,515 and a sample of 1,300 was drawn from the population using stage sampling procedure. A 19 item questionnaire developed by the researchers titled "Principals' Quality Care and Safety Questionnaire" (PQCSQ) which was validated by three experts was used for data collection. The internal consistency of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach's Alpha and this yielded reliability coefficient of 0.81 and 0.86 for two sections of the questionnaire. Mean was used to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significant level. The findings revealed that Principals to a high extent, ensure that quality care and safety are provided and that school environment is conducive for learning in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Principals and teachers however, differ significantly in their mean ratings of the extent principals ensure provision of quality care and safety, and conducive school environment. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended among others that principals of secondary schools should always ensure that the provision of quality care and safety is paramount in the school. They should also make available basic tools for promoting health and safety as well as ensure teaching of safety and security skills to staff and students in the school.

Keywords: Provision, quality care, safety, conducive environment, school administration

Introduction

Education is seen as a crucial tool for national and personal development in every country. This is because the level of a nation's literacy determines her extent of development. In Nigeria, Education is seen an as an instrument per excellence for national development (Federal Ministry of Education (FME) 2004). Therefore, if education in Nigeria would play its role as an instrument par excellence for national development, then it must have quality, that is fitness for purpose. Quality education is the systematic management, monitoring and evaluation procedure adopted to ensure that the learning environment and the curriculum programme of educational institutions meet the specified standards to achieve the set goals and produce outputs that will satisfy the expectations of the society (Ayeni, 2012). Quality

education can be achieved through a sound, standard and improved educational management emanating from effective quality assurance.

Quality assurance is a systematic management and evaluation of school administrators, teachers, school environment, students and other educational input and processes towards attaining set objectives to ensure quality educational output (Ayeni and Afolabi, 2012). Nwizu (2011) saw quality assurance in education as those actions that educational institutions undertake to ensure that they attain required standard of education in order to provide quality manpower for national development. The Federal Ministry of Education (2012) in its quality assurance handbook stated that quality assurance involves the process of monitoring, assessing and evaluating according to agreed standard, and communicating judgments obtained to all concerned in order to ensure quality and integrity, public accountability and consistent improvement.

Quality assurance in education aims at preventing problems and ensures that the products of the system conform to the expected standards. This can only be achieved through effective quality assurance practices. According to Fadipe (2009) and Adegbesan (2011), quality assurance practices are steps taken by schools to ensure high quality instructional delivery. It also involves all actions taken by schools to provide required standard of education that will be relevant to the needs of the learners and society. Quality assurance practices can be seen as processes adopted by schools to ensure high academic standards in meeting the challenges of globalization. These include quality of teaching and learning, quality of curriculum, quality of care and safety, quality of the learning environment as well as the effectiveness of leadership and management among others. However, for the purpose of this study, attention will be focused on the two most important practices namely; quality of care and safety and quality of learning environment. Other quality assurance practices are dependent on these two because it is only when the environment is safe and conducive that other practices can take place.

Quality assurance practices are the responsibility of all stakeholders in the school system, but Principals are the chief coordinators of all activities. It is expected that Principals ensure that the learning environment is safe for teachers and students. School safety can be seen as the protection of human and material resources from threats, risks and dangers emanating from within and outside the school. The Federal Ministry of Education (2013) explained that the quality of learning environment is concerned with how safe the learning environment is and how it contributes effectively to learner's progress and achievement. Provision of care include access to portable water, medical facilities, Guidance and Counselling services, documented school rules and sanctions as well as efforts to curb truancy.

Apart from being safe, the Principal should also ensure that the school learning environment is conducive for learning. Conducive school learning environment deals with the overall school surroundings including school facilities such as staff and students' convenience, sport facility, water and recreational facility. Others include, school cleanliness and beautification, planting of economic and ornamental trees and flowers. The Federal Ministry of Education (2015) stated that the school learning environment should be conducive with respect to its location, layout, fencing, general security and aesthetics. Learning facilities including the classrooms, laboratories, workshops, multipurpose hall and library should be equipped and furnished for learners' use to improve learning.

The delivery of high-quality secondary education is very vital for the development of students' potentials and necessary skills for national development. Principals by virtue of their position as the chief executives of secondary schools are responsible for directing, stimulating and controlling both human and material resources within the school to enhance the delivery of quality secondary education. Principals ought to be knowledgeable in the functions and principles of management. Uzoechina (2016) highlighted such critical functions like: directing, stimulating, controlling both human and material resources to enhance the delivery of quality secondary school education. Other functions of management enumerated by Uzoechina included planning, organizing, coordinating, communication, evaluation, decision making and leadership. Being well grounded in these management functions may increase Principals' effectiveness in the implementation of quality care, safety and conducive learning environment in secondary schools in Anambra State. However, observable situation in public secondary

schools in Anambra State appear to suggest that Principals appear to be grappling with management challenges such as poor learning environment, lack of teamwork, poor communication skill, poor instructional supervision, poor monitoring of students' academic progress and poor students' evaluation (Duze, 2018).

Furthermore, the environment of most secondary schools in Anambra State runs short of aesthetic appeal without appropriate beautification. Most often, the schools are overgrown with grasses which are dangerous for both staff and students (Mbanefo, 2023). Principals seem to focus undue attention to administrative duties to the detriment of their role as instructional leaders, thereby limiting their much needed visible presence in the classrooms to observe teaching and learning activities. These problems which appear to have emanated from poor implementation of quality assurance practices by secondary school Principals in the State necessitated this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the extent of principals' implementation of quality care, safety and conducive learning environment practices in the administration of secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically the study determined the extent to which Principals ensure that:

1. Quality care and safety are provided in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. school environment is conducive for teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Anambra State

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do Principals ensure that quality care and safety are provided in public secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. To what extent do Principals ensure that school environment is conducive for teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Anambra State?

Hypotheses

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

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Principals and teachers on the extent to which Principals ensure that quality care and safety are provided in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of Principals and teachers on the extent to which Principals ensure that school environment is conducive for teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Method

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study which was carried out in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. A population of the study was made up of 5,515 consisting of 266 principals and 5,249 teachers. From the population, a sample of 1,300 was drawn from the population and used for the study. A 19 item questionnaire developed by the researchers titled "Principals' Quality Care and Safety Questionnaire" (PQCSQ) which was validated by three experts was used for data collection. The questionnaire was structured on a four point scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE) Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE) weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1. The internal consistency of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach's Alpha and this yielded reliability coefficient of 0.81 and 0.86 for two sections of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was considered reliable in line with Nworgu (2015), who stated that if the co-efficient obtained for an instrument is up to 0.70 and above, the instrument should be considered good enough to be used for a study. Direct administration and retrieval method was used for data collection. A total of 1,300 copies of the questionnaire were administered while 1,120 were retrieved and was used for data analysis. The return rate was approximately 92% which the researchers considered satisfactory for the study. Mean was used to answer the research question while t-test was used to test the hypothesis. For the research

question, a mean rating of 2.50 and above was interpreted as High Extent while mean rating of less than 2.50 was interpreted as Low Extent. The null hypothesis was rejected where the calculated t-value was greater than critical value whereas the null hypothesis was not rejected where the calculated t-value was less than the critical value. All analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.

Results

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the Extent to which Principals Ensure That Quality Care And Safety Are Provided In Public Secondary Schools In Anambra State

S/N	To what extent do Principals:	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	maintain safe school environment for teachers and learners.	2.70	.76	High Extent
2.	provide first-aid facilities within the school for emergencies.	2.49	.73	Low Extent
3.	ensure that food vendors within the school are properly checked to ascertain their food is hygienically prepared.	2.50	.75	High Extent
4.	ensure teaching of safety skills to the learners.	2.75	.74	High Extent
5.	provide fence around the school to avoid intruders.	2.79	.70	High Extent
6.	ensure provision of qualified security guards in the school.	2.46	.67	Low Extent
7.	ensure training of staff to understand their responsibilities for responding to violent situations in the school.	2.87	.71	High Extent
8.	review school facilities for safety.	2.79	.73	High Extent
9.	maintain safe school environment for all other staff.	2.50	.70	High Extent
	Cluster Mean	**2.65**	**.72**	**High Extent**

The analysis displayed in Table 1 indicate the mean ratings of respondents on the extent to which Principals ensure that quality care and safety are provided in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The cluster mean of 2.65 and standard deviation of .72 indicate that Principals to a high extent ensure that quality care and safety are provided in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The item by item analysis indicates that the respondents rated item 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and 9 to a high extent with mean ranging from 2.50 to 2.87. The respondents on the other hand rated item 2 and 6 to a low extent with mean of 2.49 and 2.46. The standard deviation scores for the items ranged from .67 to .76 indicating that the respondents' mean ratings were closely related.

Table 2: Mean Ratings of Respondents on the Extent to Which Principals Ensure That School Environment Is Conducive For Learning In Public Secondary Schools In Anambra State

S/N	To what extent do Principals:	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	ensure that school buildings areas are clean	2.57	.85	High Extent
2.	ensure that school environment is aesthetic in nature	2.84	.75	High Extent
3.	make school playground safe for the learners to carry out their activities	2.66	.82	High Extent
4.	provide shades around the school compound	2.54	.79	High Extent
5.	provide water facilities for use in the school	2.52	.81	High Extent
6.	make sure classroom are regularly swept for learning.	2.64	.85	High Extent
7.	provide waste bin for the collection of refuse.	2.47	.96	Low Extent
8.	provide ornamental trees and flowers in the school surroundings	2.28	.79	Low Extent
9.	provide staff convenience in the school	2.24	.84	Low Extent
10.	provide students' convenience in the school	2.58	.97	High Extent
	Cluster Mean	**2.53**	**.84**	**HE**

Table 2 shows the mean ratings of respondents on the extent to which Principals ensure that school environment is conducive for learning in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The cluster mean of 2.53 and standard deviation of .84 indicate that Principals to a high extent ensure that school environment is conducive for learning in public secondary schools in Anambra State. The analysis of the items indicates that the respondents rated item 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10 to a high extent with mean ranging from 2.52 to 2.84. The respondents on the other hand rated item 7, 8 and 9 to a low extent with mean of 2.47, 2.28 and 2.24. The standard deviation scores for items ranged from .75 to .97 indicating that the respondents' mean ratings for the items were closely related.

Table 3: t-test Comparison of Principals and Teachers Mean Ratings of The Extent to which Principals Ensure That Quality Care and Safety Are Provided in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State.

Source of variation	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t-cal	*P*-value	Remark
Principals	261	2.93	.33	1118	11.49	.000	Sig
Teachers	859	2.57	.47				

Table 3 shows that the mean score for Principals (M=2.93, SD=.33) was significantly greater than that of the teachers (M=2.57, SD=.47); t (1118) =11.49, p=.000. The null hypothesis of no significant difference between the two groups on the extent to which Principals ensure that quality care and safety are provided in public secondary schools in Anambra State was therefore rejected.

Table 4: t-test Comparison of Principals and Teachers Mean Ratings of The Extent to which Principals Ensure That School Environment Is Conducive for Learning in Public Secondary Schools in Anambra State.

Source of variation	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	df	t-cal	*P*-value	Remark
Principals	261	2.79	.36	1118	9.38	.000	Sig
Teachers	859	2.45	.54				

The analysis in Table 4 shows that the mean score for Principals (M=2.79, SD=.36) was significantly greater than that of the teachers (M=2.45, SD=.54); t (1118) =9.38, p=.000. The null hypothesis of no significant difference between the two groups on the extent to which Principals ensure that school environment is conducive for learning in public secondary schools in Anambra State was therefore rejected.

Summary of Findings

1. Principals to a high extent ensure that quality care and safety are provided in public secondary schools in Anambra State
2. Principals to a high extent ensure that school environment is conducive for learning in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
3. There is a significant difference in the mean ratings of Principals and teachers on the extent to which Principals ensure that quality care and safety are provided in public secondary schools in Anambra State.
4. There is a significant difference in the mean ratings of Principals and teachers on the extent to which Principals ensure that school environment is conducive for teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Anambra State.

Discussion

Extent to which Principals ensure that quality care and safety are provided in public secondary schools in Anambra State

This study found that Principals ensure that quality care and safety are provided in public secondary schools in Anambra State to a high extent. This finding is not surprising because of the current security situation around the country. During the period between December, 2020 and September, 2021, over 1000 school students have been abducted in Nigeria. These incidents highlight a worrisome development in the country's security crisis. Principals of secondary schools are particularly disturbed as over 96% of these figures are from secondary schools alone. Principals therefore have been urged to step up security and safety situations in their schools to reduce these ugly occurrences. This may have influenced the finding of this study. This finding is in contrast with the finding of Ike (2015), Onuorah and Nwankwo (2020), Onuorah, Eziamaka and Ofojebe (2020) that Principals to a low extent apply safety measures in the school. As stated earlier, Principals of secondary schools in Anambra State seem

to have improved in their safety measures because of the growing state of insecurity in all parts of the country. The finding of the corresponding hypothesis shows that Principals and teachers differed significantly in their mean ratings of the extent to which Principals ensure that quality care and safety are provided in public secondary schools in Anambra State. This finding implies that the mean scores for Principals and teachers were not the same, Principals' mean score was significantly greater than that of the teachers. Principals rated themselves higher than they were rated by teachers in this area. The finding of this study is not in support of Maduabuike (2011) and Pontso and Bongani (2016) that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of Principals and teachers regarding care, guidance and safety measures adopted in public secondary school. Again, the difference between these findings may be as a result of differences in area of the study as well as the time at which these studies were carried out.

Extent to which Principals ensure that school environment is conducive for teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Anambra State

Another finding of this study indicated that Principals to a high extent ensure that school environment is conducive for learning in public secondary schools. According to the Federal Ministry of Education (2015) the school learning environment should be made conducive enough for learning with respect to its location, layout, fencing and aesthetics. The finding of this study is consistent with that of Visscher and Coe (2002), Goddard and Goddard (2009) and Ejionueme and Oyoyo (2015) who found that quality learning environmental practices were applied to a high extent in secondary schools. The finding of the corresponding hypothesis showed that Principals and teachers differed significantly in their mean ratings of the extent ensure that school environment is conducive for learning in public secondary schools. This implies that the mean score for Principals was greater than that of the teachers. Principals rated themselves higher than they were rated by the teachers in terms of ensuring that school environment is conducive for learning. This difference may be attributed to difference recorded in self-rating situation whereby people rate themselves higher in terms of possession or exhibition of positive traits and behavior than others.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concluded that Principals to a high extent, ensure that quality care and safety are provided and that school environment is conducive for learning in public secondary schools in Anambra State. Principals and teachers however, differ significantly in their mean ratings in the areas of quality care and safety, and the conducive nature of school environment.

Recommendation

1. Principals of secondary schools should always ensure that the provision of quality care and safety is paramount in the school. They should make available basic tools for promoting health and safety as well as ensure teaching of safety and security skills to staff and students.
2. The researchers also recommend that for school environment to be conducive for learning, Principals should always ensure that school surroundings are neat, tidy as well as beautified with ornamental flowers and trees. Staff and students' convenience, sports and recreational facility including water should also be made available within the school.
3. Finally, the State Government should increase the funds that are allocated to public secondary schools. This will empower Principals to carry out their duties more efficiently in order to sustain quality assurance practices that engender quality education in the State.

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