

EDUCATION LAW AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study examined Education law and community participation in financial management of secondary schools in Rivers State. The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The population of study comprised 50 senior officers of Rivers State Ministry of Education and 247 secondary schools principals in the State. A sample of 120 respondents were used for the study; comprising 30 Ministry of Education officials and 90 secondary schools principals. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled 'Education Law and Community Participation in Financial Management of Secondary Schools in Rivers State Questionnaire' (ELCPFMSSRSQ). The validated instrument has a reliability co-efficient of 0.80. The Findings of the study revealed the challenges in the way of full implementation of School-Based Management Committee (SBMC) system. The challenges included lack of government support for SBMC system, poor finance management skills among the members and weak operational framework in membership selection. Recommendations made among others included that, Rivers State government should modify and streamline operational framework of SBMCs with a view to making it to be more functional and responsive to individual secondary school needs.

Keywords: Education law, community participation, financial management, SBMCs, secondary schools, Rivers State.

INTRODUCTION

Community schools are the places where children learn to become better individuals in the future. The community school helps to re-enforce social relationships and communal cohesion among the members of the community. In community secondary schools, the principal, teachers, ancillary staff, parents and community leaders work together to create conducive learning environment for helping students to develop academically, morally and spiritually. A continuous involvement of the community members in governance of the community school will give rise to shared responsibility among the stakeholders, especially in areas of school financing and funds raising mechanisms for sustainable school development and enhanced learning outcomes on the part of students.

It is against this backdrop that the federal government directed all primary and secondary schools to institutionalize School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) in 2005, to bridge the gap between schools and the communities they serve. The cardinal objectives of SBMCs is to mobilize the communities to participate actively in school development planning and managerial decision-making process for enhanced resource utilization and academic achievement of students, through the support of Education Sector Support

Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN). The members of SBMCs are drawn from religious and local organizations, Old-boys/girls associations, community leaders, parents, school principal and teachers among others (Tayo, Olayiwola & Adewole, 2013). The active participation of those stakeholders in the past helped in building new schools, maintenance of school facilities and financial management of the schools. Communities' participation is an important pathway for accelerated development in formal and informal educational institutions in Nigeria (Francis, 1996). Precisely, the involvement of parents and stakeholders in community school management will not only help in improving the quality of education, but will also engender ownership sentiment among the community members, strengthen institutional support base and expand resources generation avenues for the school (Perkins, 1995 as cited in Francis, 1996).

Participatory school management builds social capital and trust through reciprocal interactions between the school and the community, which the school leadership can take advantage of in times of need. Social capital is the concept used to refer to the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not in the same organization (Ostrom, 1996). By this form of social action in support of community school, the matrixes within which the school synergize with the community is formalized and harnessed for maximum contribution of the community to the school development financing. The benefits of involving the community members in financial management of the school are persuasive. To start with, it makes the community to know the financial position, needs and constraints of the schools, the knowledge of this information will heighten the sentiment of the community members and make them to feel responsible for the school's development. This synergy in community school management is more advantageous to the schools, especially in situations of financial shortages, delayed subvention and budget cuts on the part of the government. In situations like those mentioned, the established mutual interface between the school and the community leaders in financial management, could serve as reliable social capital for mobilizing financial resources needed to keep the school functioning optimally.

Community participation helps to connect various families, stakeholders and associations who in effect shares responsibility for sound and qualitative education of their children. A strong working relationship between the school and community leaders could be formalized and leverage on to attract development funds from local organization, philanthropists and government. This partnership has become increasingly relevant in the light of conspicuous inability of the government to finance secondary education adequately (Agabi, 2012).

The involvement of community members in school management started since the colonial era, during which School Management Committees (SMCs) were at the centre of community school management. The committees spearheaded fund raising drives, which is essential for improving the learning condition of the school. Then, communities were more involved in community school management through Parents Teachers Association (PTA), District Education Committees (DEC) and Village Education Committees (TEC) in Rivers State. Their involvement in community school management was essential for "promoting, encouraging and sustaining communal interest and participation in the running of schools in the villages"(Peretomode, 1992 p. 170). However, this partnership declined considerably since 1970s and 1980s following the government takeover of all schools. More so, the enactment of the Decree 3 of 1991 further eroded the vital institutional mechanism for effective community participation in school governance in Nigeria. The decree established new managerial relationships that undercut community participation in school decision-making process (Peretomode, 1991).

With the return of democratic government in 1999 and global reforms in education, the importance of participatory school management was re-emphasised, resulting in reinstatement of School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) through the directives of National Council on Education (NCE) in 2005. The directive mandates all primary and secondary schools to create and institutionalize SBMCs, as a way of ensuring that local communities participate actively in school management process (Federal Ministry of Education (FME), n.d). Although the management of secondary schools in Nigeria is scheduled in concurrent list of 1999 Constitution, which effectively gave the state governments exclusive responsibility of funding and managing secondary schools, apart from unity schools. However, observations and studies have revealed that many secondary schools manifest dilapidated infrastructure and learning facilities (Igbozuruike, Ebonu, & Onu, 2017). Agabi (1991) assert that one of the most threatening problems of quality education in developing countries is inadequacies in finance. This is because the government alone cannot finance education adequately, thus the support of private sector and nongovernmental organizations is imperative

Emphasizing the indispensable role of finance in organization operations, Ebong (2013:201) described finance as the "fuel and lubricant which propels any business or social organization or activity...". Thus, financial management in school setting is the process of mobilizing funds and utilization it prudently for effective and efficient organizational operations (Ebong, 2013). The cardinal aim of financial management is to ensure that there is sufficient money at all time to facilitate problem-solving in the school. Referring to Babalola and Ayeni (2009), Nwakudo (2014) stated that the rationale for financial management are (i) for proper accountability; (ii) for mobilization of funds and (iii) for effective and efficient allocation of funds. The school authorities must work closely with the community leaders, stakeholders and parents in sourcing for financial resources. This will strengthen the effectiveness of SBMCs in areas of school development planning and budget control. The committees also reprimand or recommend sack of erring teachers, mobilize parents for students enrolment and make inputs in curriculum planning and implementation methodologies, assist in procurement of text books and school facilities, evaluate students' learning outcomes and appraise teachers performance among others. In addition, Chivore in Nyandoro et al (2013) remarked that SBMCs is responsible for opening and managing savings account for the school, in which all school finances are saved and transacted from. Moving forward, the government should consider revitalizing the District Education Committee (DEC) and Village School Committee (VSC) system or better still, operationalize the SBMCs system as a pathway for encouraging communal participation in school financial management. In doing this, Owmondah (2017) submitted that the head teacher must cultivate and sustain the goodwill of the host community, noting that the most effective way of enlisting the community's support is through involvement of the parents, local leaders and other stakeholders in the community in financial management of the school.

The challenge of initiating and coordinating SBMCs could be tasking and daunting, especially where community members are indifferent about public institutions and properties. A community that regards community school as merely government school tends to ignore the importance of good school-community relationship, and also fails to recognize how such partnership could enhance learning outcomes of students and accelerate economic and social development of the community. Pointedly, the Decree 3 of 1991 empowered the Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) to coordinate the affairs of community schools in liaison with State Primary Education Board (SPEB), with little or no legal framework for community participation. Even so, there are areas of concern with respect to implementation SBMCs; for instance the legal and operational frameworks of the SBMCs is weak and

vague; the system does not provide modalities for the training and mentoring of committee members on financial management skills, neither does it provide fundamental processes to follow in mobilizing funds for school improvement. More so, the operational mechanism was not precisely defined and the participation of women and children was not properly captured (Federal Ministry of Education (FME), n.d).

Furthermore, a study carried out in South Africa reveals that the decentralized school management system or local school committee management approach does not guarantee efficiency and effectiveness. There are some instances where schools management were very participatory, yet finance management problems persisted (Abu-Duhou, in Nyandoro, Mapfumo & Makoni, 2013). The reasons for the inefficiencies credited to lack of financial management delegation skills, institutional culture and individual actors' circumstances (Nyandoro et al, 2013). Here in Rivers State, the PTA enjoys considerable support from the Commissioner of Education, who approves PTA levies for students, but the SBMCs does not enjoy that sort of financial support for its activities and meetings. These drawbacks tend to weaken the operationalization of SBMCs system. However, the extent these implementational setbacks impinge on the effectiveness of SBMCs varies from state to state and community to community due to peculiarities of various communities in Nigeria. Nevertheless, some states seem to have made some modifications to the SBMCs system before they adopted it. In Rivers State, the SBMCs was adopted but its effective functioning did not last for long, as preliminary observations reveals. It is against this background that this paper examined the SBMCs system in the state, with a view to identifying its operational challenges and remedial strategies.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Education Reform Act of 2007 recognized School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) system as a pathway to effective school management, and mandated principals to liaise with host community in managing the affairs of the school. The SBMCs are supposed to be part of decision-making process, assisting in funds mobilization, ensuring that the generated or received donations are rationally utilized. However, observations indicate that many SBMCs are either not functional, ineffective or contributory to observed managerial inefficiencies in secondary schools in the state. More so, some school heads often mismanage the subventions from the government amid poor state of infrastructural facilities as evident in many community secondary schools. What could be the problem? Could it be that the SBMCs are no longer functioning or could it be that the committees were not given enabling environment to operate? The researchers are therefore bothered to determine the challenges of SBMCs and strategies for improving the involvement and effectiveness of SBMCs in financial management of the community secondary schools in Rivers State.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

The aim of the study was to find out the challenges of School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) in financial management of schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives are to:

1. Find out the challenges of School-Based Management System in secondary schools in Rivers State.
2. Determine the strategies for promoting School-Based Management system in secondary schools in Rivers State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the challenges of School-Based Management System in secondary schools in Rivers State?
2. What are the strategies for promoting School-Based Management system in secondary schools in Rivers State?

HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were tested in the study:

Ho1: There is no significant difference between the mean assessments of ministry officials and principals on the challenges of School-Based Management System in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between the mean assessments of ministry officials and principals on the strategies for promoting School-Based Management system in secondary schools in Rivers State

METHODOLOGY

The study employed the descriptive survey design. The population of study comprised of over 50 senior officers of Rivers State Ministry of Education and 247 secondary schools principals in the State. A sample of 120 respondents were used for the study; comprising 30 ministry officials and 90 secondary schools principals. The purposive and stratified simple random sampling techniques were used to select the respective elements of the sample. The instrument used for data collection was titled 'Education Law and Community Participation in Financial Management of Secondary Schools in Rivers State Questionnaire' (ELCPFMSSRSQ). The instrument had two sections; section A was structured to generate personal data of the respondents, whereas section B contained 14 items that assessed the variables studied. The instrument was scaled using 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA) =4points, Agree (A) =3points, Disagree (D) =2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1point. The validated instrument has a reliability co-efficient of 0.80. The copies of the instrument were administered to the respondents and retrieved on completion. Data generated were analysed using mean and average-mean scores of the responses of the respondents. Items whose mean scores is ≥ 2.50 were accepted, whereas those with $x \leq 2.50$ were rejected. z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

FINDINGS

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question One: What are the challenges of School-Based Management System in secondary schools in Rivers State?

In table 1 below, the respondents agreed in items 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 with average means scores of 2.77, 2.68, 3.12, 3.03 and 2.64 respectively. Items 2 and 7 were disagreed by the respondents. The grand average mean score of 2.70 is strong and higher than the criterion mean score of 2.50. This implies that, the agreed items are the challenges of SBMCs operations in the state.

Table 1. Mean and average mean of responses of the respondents on the challenges of School-Based Management System in secondary schools in Rivers State

| S/n | Description of Items | Means | | Average Mean | Remarks |
|-----|---|-------------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| | | Ministry Official | Principal | | |
| 1 | School-Based Management Committees (SBMCs) lack government support. | 2.70 | 2.84 | 2.77 | Agreed |
| 2 | The SBMCs members lack decision-making skills. | 2.27 | 2.41 | 2.34 | Disagreed |
| 3 | SBMCs members lack financial management skills. | 2.43 | 2.92 | 2.68 | Agreed |
| 4 | There is lack of explicit guidelines on SBMCs membership selection process. | 3.00 | 3.24 | 3.12 | Agreed |
| 5 | The functions of SBMCs and PTA often overlap. | 2.81 | 3.03 | 3.03 | Agreed |
| 6. | There is lack of school principals commitment to SBMCs system. | 2.77 | 2.51 | 2.64 | Agreed |
| 7. | The operational framework of SBMCs system is not straightforward. | 2.32 | 2.52 | 2.42 | Disagreed |
| | Grand Mean | 2.61 | 2.78 | 2.70 | |

Research Question Two: What are the strategies for promoting School-Based Management system in secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 2. Mean and average mean of responses of the respondents on strategies for promoting School-Based Management system in secondary schools in Rivers State

| S/n | Description of Items | Means | | Average Mean | Remarks |
|-----|--|-------------------|----------|--------------|---------|
| | | Ministry Official | Teachers | | |
| 1 | Sensitization of the public on the importance of SBMCs in school management | 3.02 | 3.22 | 3.12 | Agreed |
| 2 | Regular training of SBMCs members on rudimentary financial management skills via seminars. | 3.06 | 2.92 | 2.99 | Agreed |
| 3 | Definition and delineation of the roles of SBMCs and PTA in school management process | 3.31 | 3.37 | 3.34 | Agreed |
| 4 | Ensuring that SBMCs are accountable to society. | 2.84 | 2.67 | 2.76 | Agreed |
| 5 | Involvement of people who have resource mobilization skills into the membership of SBMCs | 3.20 | 3.13 | 3.26 | Agreed |
| 6. | Ensuring that school principals are committed to supporting the operations SBMCs | 3.28 | 2.92 | 3.10 | Agreed |
| | Grand Mean | 3.11 | 3.03 | 3.10 | |

Table 2 shows that all the items were agreed by the respondents. This is because items 1 to 6 have average mean scores of 3.12, 2.99, 3.34, 2.76, 3.26 and 3.10, which are all higher than 2.50 criterion level. The grand average mean score of 3.10 is also strong. Thus, this implies that the itemized strategies can be adopted for strengthening School-Based Management (SBMCs) system in secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Test of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean assessments of ministry officials and principals on the challenges of School-Based Management System in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 3. z-test analysis of the difference between the mean assessments of the principals on the challenges of School-Based Management System in secondary schools in Rivers State

| S/No | Respondents | N | Mean | SD | Df | z-cal. | z-crit. | Sig. Level | Remark |
|------|-------------------|----|------|------|-----|--------|---------|------------|---------------------------|
| 1. | Ministry Official | 30 | 2.61 | 0.78 | | | | | Not Significant |
| 2. | Principals | 90 | 2.78 | 0.92 | 118 | -0.99 | 1.96 | 0.05 | (H ₀ accepted) |

The table 3 above reveals that at 118 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level significance, the z-test analysis yielded z-cal. of -0.99. The z-crit. of 1.96 is higher than the z-cal (-0.99), thus the above null hypothesis is accepted.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the mean assessments of ministry officials and principals on the strategies for promoting School-Based Management system in secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 4. z-test analysis of the difference between the mean assessments of the respondents the strategies for promoting School-Based Management system in secondary schools in Rivers State

| S/No | Respondents | N | Mean | SD | Df | z-cal. | z-crit. | Sig. Level | Remark |
|------|-------------------|----|------|------|-----|--------|---------|------------|---|
| 1. | Ministry Official | 30 | 3.11 | 0.82 | 118 | 0.46 | 1.96 | 0.05 | Not Significant (H ₀ accepted) |

The table 4 above reveals that at 118 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level significance, the z-test analysis yielded z-cal. of 0.46. The z-crit. of 1.96 is higher than the z-cal (0.46), thus the above null hypothesis is accepted.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings of the study revealed the challenges in the way of operationalizing SBMCs system in the state. The challenges included lack of government support for SBMCs system, poor finance management skills among the members and weak operational framework in membership selection, as well as the overlapping roles of PTA and SBMCs in school management. These findings are in agreement with FME (n.d) report; the body observed that SBMCs operational guide is hazy and does not properly provide framework for launching SBMCs system into the mainstream of school governance; this undermines the implementation and effectiveness of SBMCs. The study also revealed that no significant difference existed between the mean assessments of ministry officials and principals on the challenges of SBMCs system in secondary schools in Rivers State. This finding is in accord

with Nyandoro et al (2013) who noted that mismanagement and lack of financial management skills among the committee members are some of the impediments to effective operation of SBMCs. These challenges can be overcome if the government and community leaders can work together in reviving SBMCs system. To achieve this, the government, stakeholder and parents should be educated on the important role of SBMCs in effective community school management. This will require developing a framework for finance driven school-community partnership and establishment of institutional structures, determination of partners, and definition of roles, policies and objectives as well as devising strategies for mobilizing funds from potential sources. This may seem simple, but it demands effective internal consultations, coordination and harmonization of collective efforts of the various partners, including community leaders, local organizations, traditional rulers and school principal, teachers, women groups and Local Government Education Authority's (LGEA) support. This will lead to setting up of SBMCs, whose membership should include school officials approved by LGEA, representatives of community leaders, local organizations, philanthropists, leaders of women groups, etc. Key to success of this lies with efficient coordination of the multi-level functional relationships and sound consultation and communication between the various partners through vibrant intermediary networking and purposeful leadership. The role of the principal in cultivating goodwill and interfacing with community leaders, parents and other stakeholders apart from PTA members is also essential.

The study further showed the strategies for promoting School-Based Management (SBMCs) system in secondary Schools in Rivers State. They include sensitization of the public on the importance of SBMCs in school management, regular training of SBMCs members on rudimentary financial management skills via seminars, definition and delineation of the roles of SBMCs and PTA in school management process and ensuring that SBMCs are accountable to the society. Others are, involvement of people who have resource mobilization skills into the membership of SBMCs and ensuring that school principals are committed to supporting the operations of SBMCs. These findings are in line with Owmondah (2017) who stated that sustainable financial management of the schools is contingent on the involvement of community members in decision-making process. Owmondah further noted that the principals should endeavour to cultivate the goodwill of the host community in order to obtain their support always. Also, the study showed that no significant difference existed between the mean assessment of ministry officials and principals on the strategies for promoting SBMCs system in secondary Schools in Rivers State. This implies that the respondents' opinions were in accord that the itemized remedial strategies will facilitate effective operation of SBMCs in the state. This further suggests that effective functioning of the committees will not only create platform for diversifying the sources of community schools' finance, but will also afford the school authorities ample avenue for mobilizing financial resources by leveraging on built social capital. Apart from financial support and finance resourcing initiatives associated with community participation in school management, other benefits that accompany schools-community partnership include technical assistance, training, operational support and private sector investment in the school (Tayo et al, 2013).

CONCLUSION

Based on finding, this study therefore concludes that SBMCs is not effective in Rivers State. The strategies for strengthening it include, sensitization of the public on the importance of SBMCs in school management, regular training of SBMCs members on rudimentary financial management skills via seminars, definition and delineation of the roles of SBMCs and PTA in school management process and others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Rivers State government should modify and streamline operational framework of SBMCs with a view to making it to be more functional and responsive to individual secondary school needs.
2. The Ministry of Education should clearly spell out how membership of the committees are to be selected and the criteria for selections.
3. The school principal should endeavour to cooperate with SBMCs while community leaders should sensitize their followers to participate in and contribute to community school development.

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