# PRINCIPALS' TECHNICAL AND CONCEPTUAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The study examined principal's technical and conceptual skills required for effective administration of public secondary schools in Delta State. The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of all the 15,183 principals and teachers (438 principals and 14,745 teachers) in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. A sample size of 948 principals and teachers (164 principals and 784 teachers) were drawn using proportionate random sampling technique. A validated questionnaire instrument titled "Principals" Technical and Conceptual Skills for Effective Administration of Public Secondary Schools Questionnaire' (PTCSEAPSSQ)" was used to generate data. The instrument had reliability index of 0.83 using Cronbach alpha statistical test. The research questions were analyzed and answered using mean and average mean, whereas the research hypotheses were tested using z-test statistics at 0.05 alpha level. The findings of the study among others revealed that principals in the public secondary schools in Delta State applied technical and conceptual skills to high extent in the performance of their administrative functions. Recommendations made included that school principals should learn how, when and where to apply the appropriate leadership styles in varying situations that arise in dynamic school environment. The study also recommended that principals should assist teachers properly in terms of extracting schemes of work from the curriculum and in providing or improvising appropriate instructional materials for different topics.

Keywords: Technical, Conceptual, Management, Skills, Administration.

# **INTRODUCTION**

The rate of growth and development witnessed in the various sectors of the world economy in the 19th and 20th centuries has been credited to massive educational researches. Being a catalyst for accelerated development and instrument of social freedom, education has stupendously helped in building human capital relevant for socio-political and economic emancipation. Harnessing the gains of education to facilitate development across board has generated considerable discourse over the need to ensure effective school management and administration.

Principals are the managers of secondary schools, the managerial skills they possess play critical role in ensuring operational efficiency of their respective schools. Secondary education occupies strategic position in the nation's education system. It is characterized by consumer and producer status and determines the pace of education in primary and tertiary levels. Secondary schools are established by the society to serve as a vehicle for bringing to reality, the realization of the objectives and goals of secondary education. Secondary schools function to reinforce the social relations in production and establish link between economic and social structure as well as empowering the minds of the students. However, the reports of

poor management of secondary schools have been raising doubt about the prospects of attaining these objectives.

Management is the process of utilizing organizational human and material resources prudently in order to achieve the organizational objectives. The task of leading and managing a secondary school is hardly simple; be it big school, small school, private or public school. The principals have numerous functions subsumed into planning, organising, directing, controlling and evaluating the activities of the school with the aim of utilizing the available resources optimally in order to achieve school objectives. It is believed that when these functions are performed effectively, it will hasten the realization of the goals of education (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013).

An effective school administration is concerned with the ability of the school principal's collaboration with other administrative officers to ensure smooth operation of the school in terms of teaching, sporting, and other activities in such a manner that the objectives of the school are realized. In other words, the school is said to be effective when resources are optimally utilized, with enduring operational efficiency, adapting to change to routine activities, managing and harmonizing changing situations, flexibility in coping with emerging and unpredictable situations and responding to the needs of the school properly (Adebayo, 2004). However, to ensure effective performance of managerial functions require pertinent managerial skills that aid the principal and other administrative officers in performing their functions.

Skill is the capacity and ability to do something well. Capacity and ability are usually acquired or learned through systematic and organized effort involving pragmatic exercises and adaptive activities tailored to teach the learner to be able to perform complex tasks in areas of job functions, evolving ideas and solutions to problems and handling human behavioural and attitudinal complexities.

Studies have conclusively revealed that leadership and managerial skills are learnt and not inborn as previously held in certain quarters (Katz, 2002). This implies that leadership skills can be learned and increased by all schools administrators. This they can achieve by attending conferences, seminars and reading books, journals and magazines on leadership and management development. The responsibility of managing people and material resources is a challenging one; combining material resources and managing people is not a simple exercise. Given this fact, scholars have identified some of the skills that managers should acquire, develop and apply in order to facilitate the performance of managerial functions

Okeke (2007) argued that productivity of the staff will be significantly enhanced if the principal can strive to develop themselves along the line of their duties. This will help them to skilfully manage the secondary schools operation and facilities in order to enhance students learning. The principals should see continuous self-development as part and parcel of their work; they should go further in terms of reading management books, attending conferences and seminars on educational management and leadership. The skills required by educational administrators are quite sizable. Katz (2002) stated that technical, conceptual and interpersonal skills are the three fundamental skills that guarantee effective management. Whereas Wilson (2003) contends that the effective administrator uses diverse managerial skills to achieve organizational goals. However, this study focused only technical and conceptual skills.

Technical skill is the ability to perform task satisfactorily in a specialised area or discipline. Katz (2002) defined technical skills as the capability and competency to carry-out work or job in a particular specialty. This can be viewed as the principal's abilities, knowledge and expertise acquired through training, education and experiences that can be applied to solve management problems in the school. "Special abilities" and "expertise" are the two focal words for understanding the concept of technical skills. They highlight the importance of specialised training for principals to equip them to perform their duties efficiently. Oluremi (2013) reasoned that the rationale behind the adequate training of administrators is to prepare them to perform their administrative functions excellently. Technical skill is crucial for increased productivity of the school principal; the extent to which a principal knows and applies technical skill in solving managerial problems goes a long way in determining the success of the school.

Ghalandari, Ghorbani, Jogh, Imani and Nia (2012) opined that technical skills enable the school principal to supervise and effectively coordinate instructional aspect of school administration. Technical skill include the ability to conduct structured interview during recruitment, ability to engage in short and long term strategic planning, ability to work on curriculum and extract the required scheme for the terms and sessions, ability to analyze and set-out rules and regulations, procedures and protocols governing the school's operations, ability to forecast and project the income and expenditures of the school in the light of economic and political realities, budgeting and costing and controlling capabilities as well as the ability to resolve conflict in the school among others. These abilities aid the principal in handling administrative matters smoothly (Robinson, Judge, Millet, & Waters-March, 2009).

The importance of technical skill calls for professionalization of principals in order to equip them properly for discharging their responsibilities effectively. This has become apparently imperative given the perceived poor or lack of technical ability demonstrated by some secondary school principals. This has evidently resulted in ineffective administration of such schools. Ndu (2004) observed with dismay, the poor administration of some secondary schools in the country and blamed it on poor technical skill among the principals. Oluremi (2013) stated that the prevailing situation in which appointment of heads mostly depends on the Bachelor's degree and rank requires a far-reaching upgrade, noting that master degree in education management should be made as a precondition for appointment into the position of secondary school principals. Ajayi & Oni (1992) in Oluremi (2013) asserted that administrators should not only be trained in the art of administration alone but also should be trained on principles of administrative control. This enables them to ensure efficient operations of the school. For instance, the process involved in curriculum interpretation, classification and tabulation require a considerable degree of technical skill in areas of child development and motivational psychology, in order to accurately match child's developmental characteristics with the learning contents. It is crucial that administrators should collaborate with other staff in ensuring that learning content or experiences are consistent with the learner's interest. Learning experiences should be tailored to suit the future needs of the student —functional education.

Conceptual skill is the mental capabilities to initiate, organise, interpret and harmonise ideas and constructs related to the workings of the organisation and in keeping with the visions and goals of the entity. Katz (2002) opined that conceptual skill allows the leader to think through ideas, abstractions and theorise on hypothetical conditions as well as making insights, strategizing via long and short term plans and putting them into action.

Peretomode (2012) maintained that conceptual skill is mainly related to knowledge in as much as managerial effectiveness is strongly related to high-level intellectual and mental exercise requiring extensive access to organised knowledge and information. Babatunde (2014) further stated that conceptual skill is required by all top-level managers to enable them to arrive quickly at true nature of situations and make timely decisions.

Consequently, the principals are expected to be creative individuals possessing divergent thinking ability, information processing and synthesizing capabilities as well as good memory. Okeke (2007) posited that conceptual skill enables the principal to perform the functions of building relationships, diagnosing the situation and generating an alternative course of action. Okeke further stated that innovations and changes in the school are only possible when the change itself has been conceptualized— establishing a relationship for effective implementation of the modification. Changes or innovations in school should be from simple to complex; sweeping changes do not always lead to effectiveness. For instance, changes may be from a change of school belt or tie to switch to the whole uniform. Okeke (2007) lamented the conspicuous shortage of individuals possessing conceptual skill within the ranks of principals in secondary schools, emphasizing that conceptual ability has become increasingly necessary given the soaring diversity of contemporary management functions.

However, Arikewuyo (2009) observed that despite the increasing call for adequate training of principals via the use of in-service training, seminars etc to enhance their managerial skills, Nigerian secondary education managers are yet to accord principals' training the desired attention. The importance of training principals properly can hardly be overstretched considering the increasing functions of principals in contemporary secondary schools. As a matter of fact, the quality of education students receive in schools is directly dependent on the quality of persons heading the schools.

In view of the above, it is self-evident that duties of the principals in a dynamic environment like the school is widening in complexities, requiring passionate and energetic personality with technical and conceptual skills to handle the mantle of leadership. It was therefore imperative to examine the secondary schools principals in Delta State, with a view to ascertaining the real status of their technical and conceptual competences.

# STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In secondary schools, management is headed by the principals and assisted by the vice-principals and other administrative staff. The principal does his managerial work by considering his own activities in connection with activities of other staff in the school, with overall aim of ensuring proper functioning of the schools. The task of managing the school could be insurmountable when the pre-requisite skills needed to perform certain task are lacking. Although the skills required of principals to perform their jobs are many, yet many of the skills are rooted in technical skill and conceptual skill. Empirical evidences have lent credence to the efficacy of these key skills in fostering productivity and effectiveness in an organization when applied properly.

However, the mounting reports of disenchantment among parents and well-meaning citizens over the poor academic performance of students in examinations have added to the concerns about the quality and qualification of the principal managing these schools. More so, observations indicate that lack of commitment to duty among secondary school teachers might be responsible for ineffective administration of secondary schools in the state. When the principals are not performing their work effectively, using appropriate skills at the

appropriate time, the academic achievement of students will be negatively affected. Consequently, the researchers are bothered whether the principals have been applying the aforementioned managerial skills to enhance productivity of staffs under them. However, in view of the sizeable number of these managerial skills, the study will focus on two key skills namely, technical skills and conceptual skills.

#### AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to examine principals' technical and conceptual skills for effective administration of Public Secondary Schools in Delta State. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- 1. ascertain the extent to which principals apply technical skills in performing managerial functions in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State.
- 2. determine the extent to which principals apply conceptual skills in performing managerial functions in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study;

- 1. To what extent do the principals apply technical skills in performing managerial functions in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State?
- 2. To what extent do the principals apply conceptual skills in performing managerial functions in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State?

#### **HYPOTHESES**

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of principals and teachers on the extent principals apply technical skills in performing managerial functions, in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State.

 $H_{02}$ : There is no significant difference between the mean scores of principals and teachers on the extent principals apply conceptual skill in performing managerial functions, in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of all the 15,183 principals and teachers (438 principals and 14,745 teachers) in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. A sample size of 948 principals and teachers (164 principals and 784 teachers) were drawn using proportionate random sampling technique. A validated 32 items questionnaire instrument titled "Principals' Technical and Conceptual Skills for Effective Administration of Public Secondary Schools Questionnaire' (PTCSEAPSSQ)". The two sectioned instrument was patterned after the modified 4 points rating scale and had reliability index of 0.83, using Cronbach alpha statistical test. Data generated were analysed with the aid of SPSS version 21. Research questions were answered using, mean and aggregate mean. The criterion for acceptance was  $x \ge 2.50$  whereas z-test statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level

#### **RESULTS**

**Research Question One:** To what extent do the principals apply technical skills in performing managerial functions in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State?

Table 1. Mean and average mean of principals and teachers on extent to which principals apply technical skills in performing managerial functions in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State.

1 Principals set goals to be achieved in a term.	S/ No	Description of items	Principals	Teachers ×	Average Mean	Remark
Principals plan weekly activities ahead of time.  3.25 2.74 3.00 extent High extent Principals plan termly activities ahead of time.  3.25 3.01 3.13 High extent Staff.  Principals plan termly activities ahead of time.  3.26 2.86 3.06 High extent Staff.  Principals and staffs come to school on time.  Principals have the ability of keeping school stautory records.  Principals occasionally visit classes for supervision.  Principals help in interpreting curriculum to the teachers.  Principals possessed the ability to improvise instructional materials.  Principals assist teachers when in difficulty in interpreting of school interpretation of scheme of work.  Principals assist teachers when in difficulty in interpretation of scheme of work.  Principals assist teachers when in difficulty in relationship with host community.  Principals ensure that lesson notes are marked before they are used by teachers.  Principals sessue that elesson notes are marked before they are used by teachers.  Principals and staffs come to school rules and regulations.  Principals engage in strategic short and long term planning.  Principals have the ability to conduct structured interview during recruitment.  Principals have the ability of resolving conflict between staff and students.  Principals have what if takes to mentor and evaluate teachers' performance to ensure effectiveness.	1	Principals set goals to be achieved in a term.	₹3.16		3.16	-
Principals plan weekly activities ahead of time.  Principals plan termly activities ahead of time.  Principals plan termly activities ahead of time.  Principals plan termly activities ahead of time.  Principals are regularly communicated to the staff.  Principals and staffs come to school on time.  Principals have the ability of keeping school statutory records.  Principals occasionally visit classes for supervision.  Principals help in interpreting curriculum to the teachers.  Principals possessed the ability to improvise instructional materials.  Principals assist teachers when in difficulty in interpretation of scheme of work.  Principals display capacity to maintain healthy relationship with host community.  Principals set and enforce school rules and regulations.  Principals are used by teachers.  Principals engage in strategic short and long term planning.  Principals have the ability of resolving conflict between staff and students.  Principals have the ability of resolving conflict between staff and students.  Principals have what it takes to mentor and evaluate teachers' performance to ensure effectiveness.	2	Principals clarify goals to be achieved in a term.	3.19	3.02	3.11	•
Frincipals have the ability to improvise interpretation of scheme of work.  Principals assist teachers when in difficulty in interpretation of scheme of work.  Principals ensure that lesson notes are marked before they are used by teachers.  Principals set and enforce school rules and regulations.  Principals set and enforce school rules and regulations.  Principals have the ability of conduct structured interview during recruitment.  Principals nate the ability of improvise and expenditure.  Principals assist takes to mentor and evaluate teachers' performance to ensure effectiveness.  Principals have what it takes to mentor and evaluate teachers' performance to ensure effectivenes and solvain relevant data for research purposes.	3	Principals plan weekly activities ahead of time.	3.25	2.74	3.00	High
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Principals engage in strategic short and long term planning.  Principals forecast and project school's income and expenditure.  Principals have the ability of resolving conflict between staff and students.  Principals have what it takes to mentor and evaluate teachers' performance to ensure effectiveness.  Principals engage in structured observation to obtain relevant data for research purposes.  2.56  2.48  2.52  High extent  3.26  3.12  3.19  High extent  2.87  3.01  High extent  2.53  2.54  4.54  High extent	15	Principals have the ability to conduct structured	2.52	2.32	2.42	Low
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Principals have what it takes to mentor and evaluate teachers' performance to ensure effectiveness.  20 Principals engage in structured observation to obtain relevant data for research purposes.  21 Principals engage in structured observation to extent e	18	Principals have the ability of resolving conflict	3.26	3.12	3.19	•
Principals engage in structured observation to obtain relevant data for research purposes.  2.53  2.54  High extent	19	Principals have what it takes to mentor and evaluate teachers' performance to ensure	3.14	2.87	3.01	High
	20	Principals engage in structured observation to	2.53	2.54	2.54	•
<u> </u>		Aggregate	2.94	2.79	2.74	

Table 1 shows that the respondents are in accord with the itemized statements bordering on the technical skills of the principals for items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20. Whereas item 9, 10, 11 and 15 with means scores of 2.43, 2.27, 2.36 and 2.42 were disagreed respectively. The aggregate means of 2.74 implies that principals of secondary schools in Delta State applied technical skill to high extent in schools administration.

**Research Question Two:** To what extent do the principals apply conceptual skills in performing managerial functions in public secondary schools in Delta State?

Table 2. Mean and average mean scores of principals and teachers on extent to which principals apply conceptual skills in performing managerial functions in public secondary schools in Delta State.

S/N o	Description of items	Principals	Teachers ×	Average Mean	Remark
21	Principals engage in strategic thinking.	3.24	2.84	3.04	High extent
23	Principals are always coming forth with practical ideas on how to solve problems.	3.11	2.90	3.10	High extent
23	Principals communicate fluently and effectively.	3.07	3.08 3.08		High extent
24	Principals think divergently to arrive at best option.	3.06	2.93	3.00	High extent
25	Principals observe educational laws in carrying out school operations.	3.07	3.05	3.06	High extent
26	Principals have good negotiation ability.	3.27	2.86	3.07	High extent
27	Principals present reports very well	3.20	3.00	3.10	High extent
28	Principals present speeches very well	3.15	3.01	3.08	High extent
29	Principals ensure that oral communication is in agreement with non-verbal cues.	2.76	2.92	2.84	High extent
30	Principals listen even when what is been said seems unreasonable.	2.70	2.86	2.78	High extent
31	Principals provide all the information teachers need to perform their duties.	2.83	2.83	2.83	High extent
32	Principals are characterized by their ability to build efficient and effective team.	3.05	2.95	3.00	High extent
	Aggregate	3.04	2.93	3.00	-

As shown in table 2, all the statements that assessed principals' conceptual skills were agreed to high extent by the respondents. The aggregate means scores of principals (3.04) and teachers (2.93) produced aggregate mean score of 3.00 points, which indicates that principals applied conceptual skills to high extent in administration of their respective schools.

# **Test of Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference between the mean assessment of principals and teachers on the extent of principals' application of technical skills in the administration of Public Secondary Schools in Delta State.

Table 3. z-test analysis of the difference between principals and teachers on the extent of principals' application of technical skills in administration of Public Secondary Schools in Delta State

S/No	Comparing Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	z- cal.	z-crit.	Sig. Level	Remark
1.	Principals	164	2.94	0.84					Significant
					946	2.10	1.96	0.05	(H <sub>o</sub> rejected)
2.	Teachers	784	2.79	0.79					, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,

As shown in table 3 above, the data analysis showed that at 946 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level, the z-calculated yielded 2.10 and z-critical of 1.96. Based on the fact that the z-calculated is higher than the z critical, the above null-hypothesis is rejected

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant difference between the mean assessment of principals and teachers on the extent of principals' application of conceptual skill in the administration of public secondary schools in Delta State.

Table 4. z-test analysis of the difference between principals and teachers on the extent of principals' application of conceptual skill in administration of public secondary schools in Delta State

S/No	Comparing Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	z- cal.	z-crit.	Sig. Level	Remark
1.	Principals	164	3.04	0.72					Not
	•				946	1.76	1.96	0.05	Significant
2.	Teachers	784	2.93	0.76					(H <sub>o</sub> accepted)

As shown in table 4 above, the data analysis showed that at 946 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level, the z-calculated yielded 1.76 and z-critical of 1.96. Based on the fact that the z-calculated is lower than the z critical, the above null-hypothesis is accepted.

#### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATION

As already established, the findings of the study showed that principals in the public secondary schools in Delta State applied technical skill to high extent in the performance of their administrative functions. This finding validates the fact that principals in Delta State public secondary schools possess technical skills. This implies that principals in the helm of affairs of secondary schools in the state have been properly trained or educated in school administration. This finding is in line with Nadi, Saeedian and Abadi (2013), which associated administrators' efficiency in application of technical skills to educational qualification. Given that the respondents of this study rated the extent to which principals apply technical skills high, it is reasonable to assume that principals in the various secondary schools in Delta State are technically efficient. In the light of earlier studies that have validated the positive relationship between managerial skills and administrative effectiveness (Ghalandari et al, 2012), it is arguable to assume that with this high ratings of principals managerial skills in Delta State improves the quality of education service delivery. However, the views of teachers and principals with respect to the extent principals apply technical skills was found to be significantly different. The reason for this variation is not precisely clear, however, it can be deduced that the higher aggregate mean score of principals to that of the teachers accounts for the differences

This finding is in congruence with Oluremi (2013) assertion that principal technical skills ensure effective coordination and supervision of instructional activities of the school. This finding also emphasises more training and retraining of principals in order to enhance their technical skills and application in school administration.

Furthermore, the findings of the study have shown that administrators of public secondary schools in Delta State apply conceptual skills to high extent in carrying out their administrative functions. This is evident in aggregate average mean score of principal (3.04) and teachers (2.93) rated high extent. This finding shows that majority of principals in the state schools have analytical mind and good thought processing skills that enable them to originate ideas, make abstractions and theorize in insightful manner with respect to planning,

organizing and coordinating school activities for the purpose of realizing set objectives. The fact that the principals have and apply conceptual skills is not a misnomer considering that majority of them was rated high in technical competency in earlier text. In table 4.2 for instance, all the means and average means are rated high, just like the aggregate of average mean which is 3.00 (high extent). The reason for this could be as a result of the fact that majority of the principals in the state schools are experienced, plus the possibility that many of them may have gone through series of trainings and retraining in order to acquire or develop conceptual abilities. This finding is in consonant with the study of Babatunde (2014) who reported that significant relationship exists between conceptual skills and effective school administration. These findings apparently indicate that principals in Delta State secondary schools are competent in conceptual skills application. However, Okeke (2007) disagreed on this, citing that principals in secondary schools in Nigeria lack conceptual skills. The study also revealed that the views of the principals and that of the teacher did not differ with the principals' application of conceptual skills. All the same, conceptual skills are vital for conceptualization of issues, ideas and synchronization of the various aspects of schools department for more effective coordination (Ghalandari et al, 2012). One key aspect of conceptual skills is communication skills; principals must endeavour to maintain good and working relationship between them and their teachers; when this is missing, productivity of the teacher might be negatively affected (Onyeike, 2013: Okorie, 2012).

#### **CONCLUSION**

The importance of principals' technical and conceptual skills for effective administration of public secondary schools in Delta State has been enunciated and its application investigated. Based on the findings, the study concluded that principals in the public secondary schools in Delta State applied technical and conceptual skills to high extent in performance of their duties.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

- 1. School principals should learn how, when and where to apply the appropriate leadership styles in varying situations that arise in dynamic school environment.
- 2. Principals should assist teachers properly in terms of extracting schemes of work from the curriculum and in providing or improvising appropriate instructional materials for different topics.

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