

SOCIAL SKILLS AS PREDICTORS OF LEADERSHIP COMPETENCE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated social skills as predictors of leadership competence among secondary school principals in Rivers State. The study used the correlational research design. Two research questions and two corresponding hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study consisted of 1,653 principals in all private and public schools in Rivers state. A sample of 525 principals (231 public school principals and 294 private school principals) were drawn using multistage sampling techniques which include stratified random sampling, simple random sampling by balloting and proportionate random sampling. Two instruments were used to collect data for the study; Social Skills Questionnaire (SSQ) and Principal's Leadership Competence Questionnaire (PLCQ). The Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instruments and the reliability coefficients obtained were 0.82 and 0.81 respectively. The data collected were analyzed with multiple regression, t-test and ANOVA. The findings of the study showed that social skills (Social Presentation, Social Scanning and Social Flexibility) jointly and independently predict leadership competence significantly among secondary school principals in Rivers State. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that Principals should pay attention to teachers and students body language or nonverbal behaviours as this will make him read between-the-line and be in a better position to keenly identify subtle cues or to identify exactly what to do in any given social circumstances.

Key Words: Social Skills, Social Presentation, Social Scanning, Social Flexibility, Leadership Competence.

Introduction

In the world of work and in general social life, one's social conduct may be considered more vital than the individual's educational or occupational skill, especially in trying to establish whether one is an experienced person. The success or failure of secondary schools with respect to achieving educational goals largely depends on the performance or

skills of the principal. It requires an exceptional leader with excellent leadership and interpersonal skills which are inextricably linked with effective leadership. Besides controlling, planning, and inspecting the general operation of the school, school principals, who are also leaders, should, as of necessity, be motivational and inspire others, advance positive attitudes, and generate a spirit of

involvement and sense of belonging among teachers and students (Hogan, Curphy & Hogan, 1994). It has been observed that the roles of principals, especially their leadership skills seem to be generating concerns, particularly with respect to school management. There seems to be an increasing public apprehension as regards principals' leadership effectiveness and social skills.

Principals' leadership competence can be seen as a close communication flow or a proper channel that gives room for individual participations (Tobin, 2014). As a leader, the principal must have the ability to perform his/her functions concerning leadership activities such as planning, organizing and controlling, actuating and also control all the resources at his disposal for the purpose of achieving school goals. However, principal social or psychological competences are skills, knowledge and belief in the behaviour which relate to instructional leadership, organizational development and creating a positive school culture. Leadership competence has significant functions for principals to perform their work effectively in any school system. The principal is the actual organizational head who decides the strategies to follow in order to achieve educational goals. Holmes and Fillary (2000) averred that workers who have low intellectual abilities, but exhibit competence in social skills are usually perceived more positively than those who lack such skills, irrespective of the educational or occupational skill levels related to the task.

Some Secondary school principals lack some basic social skills that will enable them function effectively. As such, most of them see their subordinates and teachers as less human and dish out directives in a manner that is indicative of their lack of required social skills. The consequence of this is that most teachers and students are not comfortable with

them. As a result, teachers display a lukewarm attitude towards their job which results in a downward spiral in the educational standard. However, negligence to duty, non-chalant attitude to work, lack of interaction from the principal has poised a lot of concern which makes some teachers only execute task when the principal is around and see little reason in carrying out other responsibilities beyond their job description. As leaders, principals ought to radiate confidence and the ability to motivate teachers, students and other members of the school community to work together for the achievement of goals (Muraina, 2014). He further noted that school principals are therefore, expected to be multifaceted in the delivery of their duties moving from instructional leadership to guiding students and managing the school as a whole. An effective principal is one who contributes to the formulation and attainment of school goals. A principal should have good interpersonal relation and staff discipline, which are the yardsticks for measuring his/her leadership effectiveness and competence. Thus, social skills that are well-developed help in developing positive and strong relationships with peers, employees, colleagues, and society as a whole which enhance administrative effectiveness.

On the other hand, social skill prepare a principal for a lifetime of healthier interaction in all aspects of life by displaying good manners, communicating effectively with others and expressing personal needs but all these attributes are deficient in social interaction. The roles of principals require brilliance, good organisational communication skills and perseverance. They should be capable of working with people of various characters and under pressure. At times, he/she must be ready to work at some periods of the session where he is expected to put in more time in order

to meet the target and handle heavy workloads. He ought to be self-inspired and well-organized. Without a well balance social skill, principals cannot perform effectively.

According to Libert and Lewinsohn as cited in (Wu 2008) defined social skill as a complex ability that produces behaviour that will be positively reinforced and not produce behaviour that will be punished. In addition, (Riggio, 1992) defined social skill as individual differences in communication pattern while (Wu, 2008) states that social skill is a learnable social behaviour used to achieve social goals. Riggio, (1992) observed that persons with strong social skills are more likely to be successful at keeping and sustaining intimate, high quality relationships, and are equally more likely to be given higher performance evaluations from their supervisors. The study focused on social skills of social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility to predict principal administrative competence.

However, social presentation is a skill which one possesses that enables him to recognize proper social rules and present oneself in a manner that is socially appropriate. Individuals with high social presentation skill have the ability to properly pass across both verbal and nonverbal communication as their social roles and social norms demand (Wu, 2008). Apart from helping the school principal convey both verbal and non-verbal communication, social presentation also entails the skill to abide by general social rules, which will in turn direct the school principal on how to guide others keep to the rules. Social rules equip an individual with proper social behaviour and when people derail from the social rules, it lowers their interaction in a socially acceptable manner. The importance of social presentation to the effective execution of job roles of

principals cannot be overemphasized. In addition, nonverbal messages are very crucial in establishing a relationship while verbal messages are for eliciting messages for a specified task. Social presentation is the type of a skill that an individual has to enable him/her bein constant communication with other members of the school system such as teachers, students, administrators in the ministries and school board. For proper social presentation to exist, it must follow general social rules. The different pattern of presenting messages across to different category of people in a social context entail social presentation framework.

Also, social scanning is a skill which vigorously examines and identifies both verbal and nonverbal messages from other persons. Wu (2008) refers to it as the skill to listen actively to what other social parties are saying and to also read 'between-the-lines.' Social scanning helps the principal understand nonverbal messages and enhance social interactions. A principal with the ability to keenly identify subtle cues is in a better position to know what exactly to do in a given circumstance. According to Wu (2008), this skill involves paying attention to what people and other social groups are saying and at the same time listens to what they are not saying. The ability to recognize subtle cues will allow an individual to know the appropriate social roles to play in any given social context. This will allow the principal to detect hidden messages and alter their behaviour accordingly. More so, people utilize nonverbal cues to manage when they enter and leave a social interaction, when to speak and how to change topics of discussion. Simply having the skill to scan the changing environment is not sufficient to achieve socially effective behaviour because individuals also need the skill to adjust their behaviour according to the changing environment. The verbal components of social skills

originate from working involving communication and relational competence, social abilities and social intelligence.

Furthermore, social flexibility is a skill to easily regulate one's behaviour from one social role to another so as to blend in any social circumstances. Ferris, Davidson, and Perrewe, (2005) averred that people's success in carrying out their tasks may be influenced by the extent to which they can change their behaviour to fit in any social situation. For effective social interactions to be achieved there is need for principals to have strong belief in social situations, be flexible in a dynamic environment (school) and scan it by making use of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills in order to carry out their jobs effectively. However the step a principal takes from one behaviour to another to stay put in a social interaction will determine how successful or unsuccessful the interaction will be. So for a principal to be socially affective, he/she required enough knowledge to have a good insight on how to play a right social role in any social context. Social roles refer to the part an individual plays within a social context. People behave according to their assigned roles. Also people may be inadequate in performing the social roles because of lack of good model on which to learn from or as a result of their own choice in life. These individuals may be seen as difficult human beings to associate with which leads to lack of ineffectiveness in social interaction. In other words, the social role a principal plays depends on the situation and the response of other people that are involved. Nevertheless, the existing social skills framework tends to focus on different skills. It is against this background that the researchers conceived the idea to investigate social skills as predictors of leadership competence among principals.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study examined social skills as predictors of leadership competence among secondary school principals in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. Ascertain the extent social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) jointly predict leadership competence among secondary school principal in Rivers state.
2. Investigate the extent social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) independently predict leadership competence among secondary school principals in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. To what extent do social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) jointly predict leadership competence among secondary school principal in Rivers state.
2. How do social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) independently predict leadership competence among secondary school principals in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

1. Social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) jointly do not significantly predict leadership competence among secondary school principals in Rivers State.
2. Social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) independently do not significantly predict leadership competence among Secondary school principals in Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted the correlational research design. The population of the study consisted of 1,653 principals in all private and public schools in Rivers state. A sample of 525 principals (231 public school principals and 294 private school principals) was drawn through multistage sampling which includes stratified random sampling, simple random sampling by balloting method and proportionate random sampling. To draw the sample, three Senatorial Districts in the 23 Local Government Areas in Rivers State were randomly stratified. Then, simple random sampling by balloting method was used to draw 3 Local Government Areas in two Senatorial Districts to make up 6 Local Government Areas in Rivers State.

Furthermore, proportionate sampling was used to draw 294 principals from private schools and 231 principals from public schools making a total of 525 principals. Two instruments were used for the study. They are Social Skills Questionnaire (PSQ) and Principal's Leadership Competence Questionnaire (PLCQ). The instruments were structured on a modified Likert 4 point response options of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree respectively. The Cronbach's Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instruments, the reliability coefficients obtained were 0.82 and 0.81. The data collected were analyzed with multiple regression, t-test and ANOVA.

Results Presentation

Research Question 1: To what extent do social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) jointly predict leadership competence among secondary school principal in Rivers state.

Table 1: Multiple regression analysis showing the prediction of social skills on leadership competence among secondary school principal

R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std Error of the Estimate
0.507	0.257	0.252	3.586

Table 4.1 shows the model regression summary indicating that the correlation coefficient R is 0.507, R-square is 0.257 and adjusted R square value is 0.252 respectively. This shows that social skills variables (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) jointly predict leadership competence with a

regression coefficient R of 0.507. This shows that the predictor variables (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) contribute 25.2% to the prediction of administrative competence among secondary school principals in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 1: Social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) jointly do not significantly predict leadership competence among secondary school principals in Rivers State.

Table 2: (ANOVA) associated with multiple regression showing prediction of social skills on leadership competence among secondary school principals

	Sum of sq.	df	Mean Square	F	α	p-value	Decision
Regression	2312.880	3	770.960	59.956	0.05	0.0005	Significant (Rejected)
Residual	6699.432	521	12.859				
Total	9012.312	524					

Table 4.2 shows the sum of squares are 2312.880 and 6699.432 while the mean square are 770.960 and 12.859 respectively. The calculated F value of 59.956 at df of 3 and 521 is significant at 0.0005 level of probability. Since the p-value ($p=0.005 < 0.05$) is less than 0.05

alpha level, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that social skill (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) jointly do significantly predict leadership competence among secondary school principals in Rivers State is upheld.

Research Question 2: How do social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) independently predict leadership competence among secondary school principals in Rivers State?

Hypothesis 2: Social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) independently do not significantly predict leadership competence among Secondary school principals in Rivers State.

Table 3: Beta and t-values associated with multiple regression showing the distribution of social skills on leadership competence among secondary school principals in Rivers State.

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	p-value
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	13.440	1.514		8.878	.000
	Social presentation	.035	.034	.041	1.040	.299
	Social scanning	.395	.039	.406	10.204	.000
	Social Flexibility	.182	.039	.189	4.679	.000

Table 3 revealed that Social presentation had a standardized beta value of 0.41, Social scanning 0.406, Social Flexibility 0.189 respectively. From the analyzed data, the results showed that social scanning contribute most to leadership competence, followed by Social Flexibility and then social presentation among secondary school principals in Rivers state. The unstandardized coefficient (B) value of social presentation

had a value of .036, Social scanning .395 and Social Flexibility .182 with standard error estimate of .034, .039 and .039 respectively. The B value reveal that as the values of social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) increases by a unit, there will be a corresponding .036, .395 and .182 increase or decrease in the values of leadership competence among secondary school principals for their social skills (social

presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) respectively.

Furthermore, Table 4.9 also shows that social scanning and social flexibility had t-test values of 10.204 and 4.679 with p-value of .000 and .000 respectively which are significant at 0.05. However, social presentation had t-test value of 1.040 with a p-value of .229 which is not significant at 0.05. Therefore, social scanning and social flexibility are significant independent predictor of leadership competence since the significant value ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) is less than 0.05 alpha level while social presentation is not significant predictor of leadership competence among secondary school principals in Rivers State

Discussion of Findings

The result of the study shows that social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) predict leadership competence among secondary school principals in Rivers State. This present study is in line with Segrin (2003) who confirms that the use of social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) is necessary for maintaining social, psychological, and in many cases, occupational well-being. He further notated that socially, it was observed that individuals with poor social skill are not known even among their contemporaries than those with good social skills. Poor social skill makes one to be insatiable, unsuccessful especially in the area of Administration, relationship and marriage than those with good social skills (Flora and Segrin 2004).

In agreement, Wu (2008) asserted that social skills (social presentation, social scanning) one possesses enables him to recognize proper social rules and present oneself in a manner that is socially appropriate. He further notated that Individuals with high social presentation skill have the ability to properly pass

across both verbal and nonverbal communication as their social roles and social norms demand

Conclusion

The educational system is besieged with myriads of problems whose root are not far from effective leadership of school heads. Some Secondary school principals lack some basic social skills that will enable them function effectively. The personal skills needed for successful communication and interaction are suffering. Principal's poor leadership or leadership skills and competencies often lead to negative attitudes of the teachers and poor academic performance of the students in secondary schools. As a result, teachers display a lukewarm attitude towards their job which results in a downward spiral in the educational standard. This study has shown that Social skills (social presentation, social scanning and social flexibility) jointly and independently predict leadership competence significantly among secondary school principals in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommended the following;

1. Principals should pay attention to teachers and students body language or nonverbal behaviours. As this will make him read between-the-line and be in a better position to keenly identify subtle cues or to know exactly what to do in any given circumstances
2. To improve the leadership competency of principals, seminars, workshops and conferences have to be organized by school management and ministry of education. Principals need training and re-training to improve and reshape their mind psychologically and socially in the leadership of secondary schools teachers and students.

3. Principals should periodically organize interactive sessions with staff, students and parents. Feedback from such sessions will help them improve their leadership and task performance skills.

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