

Principals' Personal Variable and Administrative Practices in Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the difference in administrative practices in Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State based on principals' personal variable. The ex-post facto design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all the 274 principals in Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State. The sample size of this study comprised 163 Principal General, which represents 59.5% of the population. Two instruments entitled, "Principals' Personal Variable Questionnaire (PPVQ) and Administrative Practices Questionnaire (APQ)" were used to gather data for the study. The instruments were validated by three experts. The reliability of the instruments was determined using Cronbach Alpha Analysis with reliability coefficients of .86 for PPVQ and .87 for APQ. Mean and Standard Deviation were used in answering the research question while T-Test was used in testing the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The finding of the study revealed a significant difference in administrative practices in Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State based on principals' gender. Based on this finding, it was concluded that principals' gender is significant predictor of administrative practices in Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State. It was recommended, amongst others that, female principals should always be engaged to work as they are more effective in administrative practices in public secondary schools than male principals. [215 words]*

INTRODUCTION

Secondary school is not only the place where learners go to be educated but also a secondary agent of socialization and it occupies a critical position in the Nigerian educational system. Structurally, secondary education was and is still the second level of Nigerian education system (FRN, 2013). The broad goal of secondary education is preparation of the individual for useful living within the society and preparation into higher education. Public secondary schools are owned by governments and are used for training and educating learners between the ages of 11 and 18+. In public secondary school organization, there is organizational structure which helps the school to function as an institution of learning. For the sake of effectiveness, secondary school must be controlled and managed by school administrator formally known as "The Principal."

Principals are responsible for promoting high-quality instruction, supporting professional development, setting clear vision for the school and monitoring students' progress (Gurley *et al.* (2015). They are also saddled with the responsibilities of establishing good teaching and learning conditions in the schools. Among these roles include providing effective leadership, maintaining the welfare of teachers and managing instructional facilities in secondary school. The principal is also entrusted with the responsibility of improving the quality of administration and instructional activities through effective use of various practices to influence the teachers in carrying out their respective duties for enhanced productivity and quality output (Nwabueze *et al.* 2018). All these activities, roles and duties performed by school principals are referred to as administrative practices. This is to say that, the achievement of the secondary education goals is dependent on the extent to which the principals are able to apply appropriate administrative practices in the school operations.

As applied in this study, administrative practices are principals' performance functions and activities mapped out towards ensuring effective management of school resources and the maintenance of safe and orderly learning environment. For principals to be effective and excellent in their administrative practices in secondary school,

they are expected to carry out assigned administrative duties, render service, prioritize teaching, support student development and establish positive relationships with students, colleagues and parents. Ukala *et al.* (2018) maintained that administrative practices principals should carry out in school are allocation of schedule of duty or subjects, arranging school time table, maintaining interpersonal relationship, establishing school discipline, evaluating teachers' performance, helping in solving staff and students' personal problems and supervision of the school programmes which include curricula and extra curricula activities. The reverse is the case in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State where it was observed that some principals exhibit poor management of school resources, poor instructional supervision, poor professional development, poor planning and negative attitude about government policies on education. Most of them fail to set achievable goals, engage in dishonest practices such as falsification of data and unethical office practices. It was also observed that some principals in most secondary schools seemly lack the management skills in managing attendance register, exhibit poor attendance in the school and poor communication with the staff and students. All these seem to suggest poor administrative practices. It is also a clear observation that some principals seemingly do not motivate their staff to work. This has become a problem not only to the school but to students, parents and teachers as can be witnessed in students' poor academic performance, indiscipline, disruptive behaviours in terms of cultism, vandalism, stealing, bullying, poor educational attainment, mental illness, etc. Parents, academic community and the entire society have observed with dismay the negative effects of this problem. The primary cause of these behaviours could be attributed to principals' personal variables. For instance, Emanghe and Udedeh, (2018) observed that principals' variable such as educational qualification and gender of principals influence their administrative practices in terms of record keeping. Nwankwo (2015) also noted that professional qualification, years of experience and academic training influence principals' administrative effectiveness. This is to say that principal personal variables can determine the level of administrative practices in secondary schools.

Principal personal variables on the other are individual characteristics and qualities that can affect the way principals perform their administrative duties. Emanghe and Udedeh (2018) listed the principals' personal variables to include educational qualification and gender of principals. Other examples of principals' personal variables according to Owo, (2014) are: personality traits (assertiveness, empathy, or openness to new ideas), values, beliefs, cultural background, experience, emotional well-being, external factors (family obligations, health concerns, or financial challenges), personal interests, passions, vision and aspirations. In this study, an index of principals' personal variable considered is gender. Gender refers to the social and cultural roles, expectations and behaviors associated with being male or female. It encompasses the societal and cultural constructs of masculinity and femininity, which goes beyond biological sex. Offem and Otun, (2021) described gender as the state of being male or female. It's often closely tied to biological sex (the physical characteristics that distinguish males and females), but it can also be influenced by cultural, social, and historical factors. In other words, it's a combination of how people identify themselves and how they are perceived and treated by others. Carrington and James (2016) suggested that female principals may demonstrate higher levels of administrative duties due to their communication and relationship-building skills, as well as their ability to collaborate and seek support. Similarly, women generally are more emotionally expressive and attuned to the emotion of others as they are often expected to take on care giving roles. However, it is essential to note that these are general trends and not absolute differences. Many men are highly emotional intelligent and many women may struggle with emotional intelligence.

The success of secondary education could be hinged on the personal variables of principals. A lot of scholars have observed this over time and have attempted finding solutions to the problem using variables other than principals' personal variables, but the problem still persists. It is against this backdrop that the study aims at establishing a predictive relationship between principals' personal variable and administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The question therefore is, to what extent does principals' personal variable predict administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

Statement of the Problem

The role of principals in public secondary schools is vital in ensuring effective leadership and promoting school improvement. Principals are faced numerous challenges and complexities due to rapid changes, emerging trends in education, evolving students' needs, technological advancements, policy shifts and societal influences on

education. Their ability to adapt, cope, thrive and perform their duties effectively in such environment is crucial for fostering a positive school climate, culture and overall performance in the school. However, some factors like gender and emotional intelligence may be responsible for inefficiency in principals' administrative practices in public secondary schools.

It is believed that if principals are effective in their administrative practices, it may likely lead to a disciplined school environment, increased profitability, improved productivity, students' satisfaction and assessment of progress and students' attendance in school. The outcomes of effective principals' administrative practices are improved learning outcomes, greater parental involvement, enhanced academic achievement, healthier school climate, enhanced professional development, greater community involvement, better decision-making, stronger leadership and management, higher employee morale, improved public perception, enhanced safety and security.

For principals to demonstrate proficiency in administrative practices they are required to possess pedagogical knowledge, manage budgets, foster good relationships in school, create a welcoming and inclusive school environment, oversee facility maintenance, provide feedback to teachers, create a culture of continuous improvement, make informed decisions and be good managers of both human and material resources. But the reverse seems to be the case in public secondary schools, in Akwa Ibom State where most principals do not seem to be efficient in their work. This is evidenced in most of them displaying lack of or poor leadership and weak direction, poor communication, poor resource management, unprofessional behavior and limited professional development. Most of them neglect student needs while others are ignorant of technology and so resist changes. All these problems as highlighted show poor administrative practices by principals in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. This seemingly poor administrative practices by principals in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State could be attributed to principals' personal variable characterized by gender.

Parents, academic community and the entire society have observed with dismay the negative effects of this problem. This has raised the concern of scholars to attempt finding solutions to these problems through studies conducted at different places and time. It was observed from several studies that none was done specifically on principals' personal variables and administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Also, in studies by previous authors, some of the variables used in the present study were not considered. This has therefore created a gap in knowledge and information and has raised the concern of the present study to establish the influence of principals' personal variables on administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The question therefore is, to what extent does principals' personal variable predict administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State?

Purpose of the Study

Specifically, the study sought to examine the difference in administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State based on principals' gender.

Research Question

What is the difference in administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State based on principals' gender?

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State based on principals' gender. This null hypothesis was formulated and tested at .05 level of significance.

Research Method

This study adopted ex-post facto research design. The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State. The population of the study comprised all the 274 principals in all the 274 public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State as at 2024/2025 academic session. Multi-stage sampling approach was used for the study. At first, cluster sampling technique was used to cluster the population into 3 Senatorial Districts which are: Akwa Ibom North East, Akwa

Ibom North West and Akwa Ibom South Senatorial Districts. Simple random sampling with replacement was used in selecting 163 (59.5 %) schools in the 31 L.G.A I Akwa Ibom State. Purposive sampling approach was used to select 652 teachers as raters. Four teachers rated each principal's practice. A researcher developed instruments titled "Principals' Personal Variable Questionnaire (PPVQ) and Administrative Practices Questionnaire (APQ)" was used for data collection in the study. The instruments were scored on four points rating scale. The developed instruments were face validated by three experts.

The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha Reliability Coefficient Statistic. The reliability coefficient of .86 was obtained for PPVQ and .87 for APQ. The instruments: PPVQ and APQ were administered to the respondents in their various schools by the researcher with the help of 3 research assistants who were properly briefed before embarking on this exercise. Out of 815 instruments (163 PPVQ and 652 APQ) sent out, 810 (162 PPVQ and 648 APQ) were returned. This represents 99.3% return. 5 out of 810 returned instruments were wrongly filled and were not useful for the analysis. Mean and Standard Deviation were used in answering the research question while T – test was used to test the null hypothesis at .05 level of significance. The decision rule by Schober *et al.* (2018) was applied while answering the research questions and testing the null hypotheses.

RESULTS

Research Question: What is the difference in administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State based on principals' gender?

Table 1: Mean Analysis for Difference in Administrative Practices in Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State based on Principals' Gender

		N	Mean	Std. Dev	Remark
coordinates teaching activities in the school	Male	77	3.65	0.64	A
	Female	85	3.56	0.50	A
prepares school budget	Male	77	3.53	0.82	A
	Female	85	3.42	0.73	A
keeps accurate financial record	Male	77	3.53	0.85	A
	Female	85	3.46	0.87	A
has cordial relationship with the staff	Male	77	3.64	0.93	A
	Female	85	3.66	0.76	A
maintains moral standard in the school	Male	77	3.55	0.85	A
	Female	85	3.61	0.79	A
appoints students into leadership positions	Male	77	3.52	0.90	A
	Female	85	3.54	0.59	A
provides incentives to motivate staff at school	Male	77	3.77	0.54	SA
	Female	85	3.72	0.67	SA
manages the school's schedule	Male	77	3.90	0.48	SA
	Female	85	3.66	0.80	A
enforces school discipline	Male	77	3.92	0.55	SA
	Female	85	3.87	0.41	SA

puts policies in place to ensure safety of teachers	Male	77	3.56	0.99	A
	Female	85	3.67	0.81	A
recognizes hard working staff	Male	77	3.70	0.78	SA
	Female	85	3.61	0.90	A
provides a healthy working environment for teachers	Male	77	3.69	0.92	A
	Female	85	3.78	0.56	SA
provides instructional materials for teaching	Male	77	3.40	1.00	A
	Female	85	3.53	0.63	A
check teachers' lesson notes for corrections	Male	77	3.52	0.77	A
	Female	85	3.54	0.63	A
exhibits fairness in evaluating staff	Male	77	3.51	0.94	A
	Female	85	3.60	0.68	A
accepts constructive criticisms from staff	Male	77	3.14	1.24	A
	Female	85	3.41	0.86	A
is quick to adapt to changes in the school environment	Male	77	3.12	1.28	A
	Female	85	3.67	0.73	A
maintains a high level of service quality for students	Male	77	3.53	1.10	A
	Female	85	3.39	1.21	A
ensures effective channels of communication	Male	77	3.26	1.14	A
	Female	85	3.73	0.45	SA
is prompt in decision-making	Male	77	3.65	0.64	A
	Female	85	3.56	0.50	A
Average	Male	77	3.55	0.87	A
	Female	85	3.60	0.70	A

Mean Summary = 3.58 – high extent of relationship

Table 1 presents the summary of the item-by-item analysis of administrative effectiveness based on gender. The result shows that, the 20 items on administrative practices have the mean range of 3.14-3.87. The standard deviation range is 0.45-1.24. This shows that the items are not too dispersed from the mean. The result shows that all the items have mean responses above 3.0 (the weighted mean). On coordinating teaching activities in the school, it was found that male principals have a mean response of 3.65, while female principals have a mean response of 3.56. This indicates that they both perform well, however, male principals coordinate teaching activities in the schools more than the female principals. On preparing school budget, the result found that male principals prepare school budget more than their female counterparts, with the mean of males being 3.53 and females being 3.42. While the mean of male principals is 3.55 for maintaining moral standards, the mean of females is 3.61. This indicates that both female principals maintain moral standard in the school more than their male counterparts. When assessed based on appointment of student leadership positions, the mean of male and female principals is 3.52 and 3.54 respectively. This implies that female principals appoint students into leadership positions in the school more than their male counterparts. The result shows that the mean for male principals is 3.77 as against 3.72 for female principal son provision of incentives to motivate staff at school. This means male principals provide incentives to teachers more than their female counterparts. The result further

shows that the mean for male principals is 3.90 as against 3.66 for female principals on managing the school's schedule. This means that male principals managed the school's schedule better than female principals.

On enforcing discipline, male principals have a mean 3.92 and female principals have a mean of 3.87. This shows that they both enforce school discipline to a great extent, however, male principals enforce more discipline than female principals. On putting policies in place to ensure safety of teachers, male principals have a mean 3.56 and female principals have a mean of 3.67. This shows that they both put policies in place to ensure safety of teachers to a great extent, however, female principals are better than male principals on safety of teachers. On recognizing hard working staff, male principals have a mean 3.70 and female principals have a mean of 3.61. This shows that they both recognizes hard working staff to a great extent, however, male principals are better at recognizing hard working staff than female principals. On provision of a healthy working environment for teachers, male principals have a mean 3.69 and female principals have a mean of 3.78. This shows that they both provides a healthy working environment for teachers to a great extent, however, female principals are better at providing a healthy working environment for teachers than male principals. The result further shows that the mean for male principals is 3.40 as against 3.53 for female principals on provision of instructional materials. This means that female principals provide instructional materials better than male principals. The mean for male principals is 3.52 as against 3.54 for female principals on assessment of lesson plans. This means that female principals assess of lesson plans more than male principals. The mean for male principals is 3.51 as against 3.60 for female principals on fairness in evaluating staff. This means that female principals exhibit fairness in evaluating staff more than male principals. The mean for male principals is 3.12 as against 3.67 for female principals on adaptability to change. This means that female principals are more adaptable to changes in the school environment than male principals. The result further reveals that the mean for male principals is 3.53 as against 3.39 for female principals on maintaining a high level of service quality for students. This means that male principals maintain a high level of service quality for students than female counterparts.

On ensuring communication channels within the school are highly effective, male principals have a mean 3.65 and female principals have a mean of 3.56. This shows that they both ensure communication channels within the school are highly effective to a great extent, however, female principals are better at ensuring communication channels than their male counterparts. On prompt decision-making during times of uncertainty, male principals have a mean 3.26 and female principals have a mean of 3.73. This shows that they are both prompt in making decisions to a great extent, however, male principals are better at prompt decision-making during times of uncertainty than their female counterparts. The summary of the average of difference in principals' administrative practices based on gender shows that for female principals, the average mean is 3.60, while that of male principals is 3.55. The result shows that female principals are more effective in administration than their male counterparts.

Ho: There is no significant difference in administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State based on principals' gender

Table 3: Summary of T-test Analysis for difference in Administrative Practices in Public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State based on Principals' Gender.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev	tcal	p-value
Administrative Practices	Male	77	3.55	0.87	2.144	.001*
	Female	85	3.60	0.70		

*Significant at $p < .05$

Table 3 presents the summary of the t-test analysis of difference in administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State based on principals' gender. The result shows that the calculated t-value is 2.144. The probability of t is .001. Since the p-value is less than the alpha level ($p < .05$), the result is statistically significant. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is a significant difference in administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State based on principals' gender.

Finding of the Study Based on Research Question

Female principals are more effective in administration than their male counterparts.

Finding of the Study Based on Research Hypothesis

The null hypotheses tested revealed significant a difference in administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State based on principals' gender.

DISCUSSION OF FINDING

Difference in Principals' Administrative Practices Based on Gender

Findings from the analysis of the research question shows that female principals have average mean of 3.60, while male principals have average mean of 3.55. The result showed that female principals are more effective in administrative practices than their male counterparts. The hypothesis tested revealed a significant difference in administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State based on principals' gender. This result seems to have come out this way probably because women are not extravagant in their spending of financial resources and they are good at multitasking. They are strong communicators and are motivated by challenges. Also, female principals, through their unique blend of empathy, understanding and intuition, possess rare and invaluable skills that perfectly suit the complex and dynamic world of secondary school leadership. It is also believed that women nourish students' growth with compassion and care and forge a path of progress and innovation through collaboration and teamwork.

This finding of this study is in line with the findings of Hang (2015) who asserted that female principals are perceived to be higher than male principals in leadership capacity. Matheri *et al.* (2015) also agreed that woman institutional heads are more effective than their male counterparts, because they are well organized, caring and at establishing relations with others and good at communicating, although these qualities contradict their nature. Another survey also revealed essential ties between principals' gender and the accomplishment of secondary school management tasks. A recent report showed that only professionally experienced female managers are linked to greater quality of management, confirming the existence of obstacles to female progression (Martínez *et al.* 2020). Nworgu, (2015) observed that female principals are more effective and efficient in school administration because they extend their motherhood roles to the school environment. From the results seen, having females as principals in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State will bring about a complete positive turn around in effective administrative practices of schools that in turn will impact positively in all sectors in education.

CONCLUSION

This study was able to make various discoveries and observations about the influence of principals' personal variables on administrative practices in public secondary schools in Akwa Ibom. If administrative practices public secondary schools are to be enhanced, personal variables of principals should be considered before appointing principal as the head of school. It is through professional development through workshops, seminars, and conferences, build a positive school culture, communicating effectively, delegation of power and encouraging student engagement that will improve principals administrative practices. Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that: principals' gender significantly influences principals' administrative practices in public Secondary Schools in Akwa Ibom State. Leadership effectiveness is a function of the personality or personal variable of the leader. Therefore, administrative practices can be effective based on personal variables of principals in secondary schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Akwa Ibom State Government through Ministry of Education should always engage female

principals to work as they are more effective in administrative practices in public secondary schools than male principals.

2. Similar studies should be carried out in other organizations and private secondary school in order to ascertain whether or not the interplay between these variables are similar.
3. Government should consider personal variable of principals like gender before promoting or appointing principals in public secondary schools
4. Other principal personal variables like age, work experience, academic qualification and marital status should be studied to ascertain if they could also influence principals' administrative practices.

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