

## Use of Communication and Problem-Solving Skills in Supervision of Teachers for Quality Assurance in Technical Secondary Schools

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**Abstract:** This study investigated the use of communication and problem-solving skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in technical secondary schools in Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design with a sample of 1,980 teachers and principals using purposive sampling. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled “communication and problem-solving skills questionnaire”. The data collected were analysed using mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics. The result indicated that principals were deficient in the application of accepted communication and problem-solving skills. Based on the findings, it was concluded that government, through states Ministry of Education should work in collaboration with the technical school boards to organize meaningful training on communication and problem-solving skills for principals for effective supervisory skill acquisition and utilization for quality assurance in public secondary schools in Nigeria.

**Key words:** Principals, teachers, communication skills, problem-solving skills, quality assurance, descriptive

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### INTRODUCTION

Communication is the basic thing that promotes inter-personal and group relationship and the development of every society, firm or establishment. Communication is the only thing that can lead to the transfer of knowledge from one source to another. It is also basic to putting ideas into practice. According to Kindiki (2009), communication is the means of imparting and exchanging attitude, ideas and information through human and technological media. Zhao (2006) defined communication as the process of creating and interpreting ideas, facts and feelings using communication skills. Communication serves a lot of purposes in every organization. According to Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011) communication is used for sharing and exchanging information, expressing feelings and controlling members of an organization. Therefore, good communication skill is needed in every organization among the employees and their employer. For effective communication to take place, Mgbodile (2013) noted that the principle of effective communication demands that communication system be maintained in the classroom as it enhances awareness, enlightenment involvement and performance effectiveness. This is because it helps the principal to relate his ideas to teachers.

Hence, Odumodi (2011) noted that by virtue of their position in the school system, the principals are the managers of all school activities done within the school. Therefore, as suggested by Onuma (2016), Onumah (2016) it is important in this regards for principals to provide teachers with needed management supports through different communication skills that will permit them to effectively function in their professional practice. Therefore, principals need to make their communication skill stronger through speaking, writing or other medium of receiving or expressing feelings. The persistent difficulty with verbal and nonverbal communication makes principal’s office relationship mere war zone which lacks cognitive ability recognition; with a proof of difficulty in the acquisition and use of spoken and written language as well as problems with inappropriate responses in conversation which limits effective communication, social relationships, thorough supervision and quality assurance. There are many elements of communication skills. According to Murray (2010), communication skill is composed of four elements which are grammatical competence (concerned with the well-formed language), sociolinguistic competence (the ability to be appropriate with language), discourse competence (knowledge of the connections between utterances in a

text to form a meaningful whole) and strategic competence (the ability to compensate for imperfect language knowledge). De Dykstra (2008) gave the idea that communication skills, both written and oral are the most important quality employers seek in the ideal candidate. In school administration, however, this is also needed. This is because a good communication skill possessed by the principal can at best ensure more effectiveness and efficiency in instructional delivery.

This could further be because as pointed out by Ayeni (2012), the principal is the instructional leader who by his position, supervises, monitors, assesses, evaluates and disseminates relevant and current information on educational issues and modern teaching techniques to teachers in order to motivate them to effectively implement the school curriculum. Also, Onuma (2016a, b) observed that the primary function of the school principal is to showcase his/her effectiveness in being an instructional leader for the improvement of diversified curriculum implementation for the attainment of the school set goals. Although, there are many administrative skills that can be used by principals to supervise teachers, communication and problem-solving skills are very important to this regard.

Studies have shown that the teaching profession is a challenging one. Therefore, in order to tackle the challenges in the profession, teachers' competency is of paramount importance. Thus in regard to this assertion, Orgovanyi-Gajdos (2016) insisted that problem-solving (including decision making) remains the basic characteristic in the teaching profession. However, the school principal has a vital role to play in making sure that teachers adopt adequate problem-solving skills in carrying out their professional duties, especially in technical schools. This is because in the technical schools, a lot of students would like to create new ideas and objects of which teacher's close monitoring would greatly influence their ideas.

It is germane, therefore, to note at this juncture that problem-solving skill is one of the skills which are expected to be utilized by principals for effective supervision. Hasegawa *et al.* (2015) noted that there is trait rumination associated with the ability to generate effective problem-solving strategies. According to Nolen-Hoeksema (1991), the utilization of appropriate problem-solving skill is the way forward to achieve organizational expected goals/objectives. Nolen-Hoeksema (1991) outlined problem-solving test as depressive rumination and social problem solving and that they are instrumental tools to facilitate difference in a working place. Therefore, the use of problem-solving skill can only impart quality assurance in secondary schools if principals can utilize the aforementioned problem-solving skills. According to Nolen-Hoeksema (1991) depressive rumination is the behaviour and thoughts that focus one's

attention on one's depressive symptoms and the implications of these symptoms. Thus, for one to solve organizational problems or supervise effectively; there is a need to read every message of depressiveness and know its consequence. Thus, principals could express their problem solving only if they advance passive comparison of their current situation with some unachieved standard and reflective pondering into issues before a decision.

As observed by Orgovanyi-Gajdos (2016) and Murray (2010), four barriers often impede the integration of communication and problem-solving in education. First, principals often are not trained in communication and problem-solving methodology. Second, few instructional materials provide communication and problem-solving resources. Third, both teachers and students have preconceptions about the content that blocks their ability to explore the problems at hand. Fourth, time constraint is a barrier to integrating communication and problem-solving skills in the classroom.

However, it could be argued that that fallen state of quality of technical education in South-Eastern Nigeria could be due to the poor communication and problem-solving skills among the school principals. This is because as already aforementioned, the principal has the administrative role to update the teachers with the recent innovative ideas and information about instructional delivery and even instructional materials. Thus, their neglect of using effective communication and problem-solving skills could mar the effectiveness of the classroom teacher in carrying out his/her professional duty in the learning environment. Nevertheless, it is important to find out on the other hand how best principals in the technical schools make use of communication and problem-solving skills in carrying out their administrative duties. This will help to establish a basis for either total overhauling or improvement in the administrative qualities of school principals in the technical schools in South-Eastern Nigeria. Hence, the present study focused on the use of communication and problem-solving skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in technical secondary schools in Nigeria.

**Research questions:** To what extent do principals use communication skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in public secondary schools in South-East, Nigeria? What is the extent to which principals use problem-solving skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in public secondary schools in South-East?

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design and was carried out in technical secondary schools in

South-Eastern, Nigeria. This area was chosen for this study because of the lukewarm attitude of secondary school principals and heads of departments towards supervision of teacher’s instructional delivery in the area as observed by the researchers. Also, the students’ poor performance in internal and external examinations in the area of the study motivated the researchers to choose the area. The sample for this study was 1,980 teachers and heads of departments/principals selected through purposive sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was researchers-developed questionnaire titled “Principal’s Communication and Problem-Solving Skills Questionnaire.” The questionnaire was validated by experts and overall reliability value of 0.83 alpha was determined. Data were collected from the participants and were analysed using mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Research question one:** To what extent do principals use communication skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in public secondary schools in South-East, Nigeria?

The results presented in Table 1 show the mean scores and standard deviations of teachers and principals and teachers on the extent to which principals and teachers use communication skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in technical secondary schools. The mean responses of items 1-9 show that the respondents indicated that principals, to a little extent make good presentation of reports, offer teachers the opportunity to express themselves, motivate teachers

using encouraging praises, capture audience attention as a result of eloquence of speech, maintain friendly tone while speaking, clearly organize their thought before sharing them and use clear language at the level of audience. These indicate that principals use these communication skills at a low extent in the supervision of teachers. However in items 3, 4, 5 and 7 the respondents indicated that principals to a great extent make their points clear when speaking and listening and understand the teacher’s point of view. The table showed a cluster mean of 2.21 with a standard deviation of 0.40 (for teachers) and 2.24 with standard deviation of 0.42 (for principals). This implies that teachers and principals concur to a little extent that principals make use of communication skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in technical secondary schools in South-East of Nigeria.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals and teachers on the extent to which principals use communication skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in public secondary schools in South East, Nigeria.

The results presented in Table 2 showed that the p-value (sig.) of 0.42 was <0.05 level of significance. This indicated that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of teachers and principals on the extent to which principals use communication skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in public secondary schools in South East, Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference between the mean ratings of teachers and principals is accepted.

Table 1: Mean scores of principal and teachers on the use of communication skills in supervision of teachers for quality assurance in technical secondary schools

Items	Teachers			Principals		
	$\bar{X}_1$	SD <sub>1</sub>	Dec <sub>1</sub>	$\bar{X}_2$	SD <sub>2</sub>	Dec <sub>2</sub>
Capture audience attention as a result of the eloquence of speech	1.80	0.39	LE	1.84	0.40	LE
Offer an opportunity for teachers to express themselves	1.89	0.30	LE	1.90	0.29	LE
Motivate teachers using encouraging praises	2.21	0.35	LE	2.23	0.36	LE
Make a good presentation of reports and addressing the audience well	2.25	0.34	LE	2.34	0.35	LE
Make his/her point clear when speaking	2.51	0.45	GE	2.53	0.46	GE
Maintain a friendly tone while speaking	1.59	0.49	LE	1.60	0.48	LE
Listen to the teacher’s point of view	2.60	0.40	GE	2.62	0.42	LE
Clearly organizing her thought before sharing them	1.59	0.49	LE	1.60	0.48	LE
Use clear language at the level of the audience	1.69	0.45	LE	1.70	0.44	LE
Grand mean	2.21	0.40	LE	2.24	0.42	LE

$\bar{X}_1$  = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; GE = Great Extent; LE = Little Extent; N = No. of respondents; Dec<sub>1</sub> = Decision for teachers; Dec<sub>2</sub> = Decision for principals

Table 2: Summary of t-test analysis of the mean ratings of teachers and principals on the extent to which principals use communication skills in supervision of teachers for quality assurance in public secondary schools in South East, Nigeria

Groups	$\bar{X}$	SD	N	df	SE	t-cal	t-Tab	p-value sig.	Rmk
Teachers	2.21	0.40	1,393	-	-	-	-	-	-
Principals	2.24	0.42	530	-	-	0.88	1.96	0.42	NS

$\bar{X}_1$  = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; N = No. of respondents; DF = Degree of Freedom; NS = Not sig.

**Table 3: Mean scores of principals and teacher’s use of problem-solving skills in supervision of teachers for quality assurance in secondary schools**

Items	Teachers			Principals		
	$\bar{X}_1$	SD <sub>1</sub>	Dec <sub>1</sub>	$\bar{X}_2$	SD <sub>2</sub>	Dec <sub>2</sub>
Solve the instructional problem of teachers	1.49	0.66	VLE	1.54	0.69	LE
Resolve problems effectively	2.51	0.65	GE	2.54	0.65	GE
Generate alternatives in problem-solving	1.49	0.68	VLE	1.50	0.73	LE
Evaluate alternative solutions to problems	2.48	0.75	LE	2.51	0.78	GE
Implement solutions to problems properly	1.95	0.63	LE	1.94	0.63	LE
Get to the root of problems before offering a solution	2.60	0.97	GE	2.62	0.94	GE
Use information gathered effectively for problem-solving	1.90	0.88	LE	1.89	0.87	LE
Monitor the outcome of the decision taken	2.04	0.84	LE	2.05	0.90	LE
Are creative in handling problems	1.94	0.77	LE	1.97	0.81	LE
Grand mean	2.04	0.75	LE	2.06	0.77	LE

$\bar{X}$  = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; GE = Great Extent; LE = Little Extent; N = No. of respondents; Dec<sub>1</sub> = Decision for teachers; Dec<sub>2</sub> = Decision for principals

**Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis of the mean ratings of teachers and principals use problem-solving skills in supervision of teachers for quality assurance in public secondary schools in South East, Nigeria**

Groups	$\bar{X}$	SD	N	df	SE	t-Cal	t-Tab	p-value sig.	Rmk
Teachers	2.04	0.75	1,393	-	-	-	-	-	-
Principals	2.06	0.77	530	-	-	-	-	-	-
				1,921	0.044	0.35	1.96	0.56	NS

$X_1$  = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; N = Num. of respondents; DF = Degree of Freedom; NS = Not Significant

**Research question two:** What is the extent to which principals use problem-solving skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in public secondary schools in South East?

The results presented in Table 3 show mean ratings and standard deviations of the responses on the extent to which principals use problem-solving skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in secondary schools in South-East, Nigeria. From the table, items 1 and 3, show that the teachers indicated that to a very little extent, principals solve the instructional problem of teachers and generate alternatives in problem-solving. On the other hand, the principals indicated that principals solve the instructional problem of teachers and generate alternatives in problem-solving to a little extent. Regarding items 2 and 6, the mean responses indicate that to a great extent principals resolve problems effectively and get to the root of problems before offering a solution. As regards items 4, 5, 7, 8 and 9, both the teachers and principal’s mean responses indicate that principals to a little extent implement the solution to problems properly, use information gathered effectively for problem-solving. On the other hand, the mean responses of teachers and principals vary in item 9. While teacher’s mean responses indicate that principals evaluate alternative solutions to problems, principal’s mean responses indicate that to a little extent principals evaluate alternative solutions. The table showed a cluster mean of 2.04 with a standard deviation of 0.75 (for teachers) and 2.06 with standard deviation of 0.77 (for principals). This implies that teachers and principals’ mean responses indicate that to a little extent, principals make use of problem-solving skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in public secondary schools in South-East of Nigeria.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of teachers and principals use of problem-solving skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in public secondary schools in South-East, Nigeria.

The results presented in Table 4 revealed that the p-value (sig.) of 0.56 was greater than 0.05 level of significance. This indicated that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of the responses of teachers and principals on the extent to which principals use problem-solving skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in public secondary schools in South East, Nigeria. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference between the mean ratings of teachers and principals is accepted.

From the analysis of the study, the researchers found out that principals to a little extent make good presentation of reports and address audience well, capture audience attention as a result of eloquence of speech, maintain friendly tone while speaking, offer opportunity for teachers to express themselves, motivate teachers using encouragement, praises, clearly organize their thought before sharing them and equally use clear language at the level of audience, make their point clear when speaking, listen and understand teachers point of view. The finding that principals to little extent use communication skills in supervision of teachers for quality assurance in technical secondary schools agree with the result of the study conducted by Armstrong (2011) on the use of communication for teachers’ supervision in public schools in rural Kenya where the researcher found that communication competencies used by teachers supervisors are ineffective in improving teachers’

performance, productivity, motivation and competence, hence, they affect the teacher's performance in discharging their duties.

Also, the results of this study further agree with the findings of Obizoba (2008) who found out that principal's use of communication skills is comparatively low as most of the teachers are not motivated and encouraged to work due to ineffective communication skills of the supervisors. The situation above may not likely to be different in Nigeria where Onasanya (2006) emphasized the need to supervise teachers closely to enable them to work harder no matter their level of devotion and experience. The implication is that without the use of problem-solving skill in supervision, both teachers and school administrators will decline rapidly in their performance of duties.

In another development, the study found out that principals use of problem-solving skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in technical secondary schools but in a low extent. This is because to a little extent, the principals solve the instructional problem of teachers, resolve problems effectively, implement solutions to problems properly use information gathered effectively for problem-solving, monitor the outcome of decisions taken and are creative in handling problems. This agrees with that of Ekundayo (2010) and Onuma (2016a, b) who found that the school principals lacked supervisory skills, hence, teacher's supervision is left in the hands of the external supervisors. Thus, supervision of teachers in solving instructional problems are not effective as principals do not make available for teachers all vital instructional (educational) information; do not visit classrooms often to observe their teachers teaching; inspect teacher's lesson notes and class registers, diaries and teaching aids and as well offer professional advice for their improvement.

Equally, the result showed that both groups of respondents share the view that the principals to a little extent generate alternatives in problem-solving, evaluate alternative solutions to problems and get to the root of problems before offering a solution. The cluster means of both groups of respondents showed that principal's to a little extent utilize problem-solving skills in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance in technical secondary schools.

In addition, the result agreed with that of Adedeji (2013) who found that secondary school administrators in Osun state are ineffective in problem-solving competencies which oftentimes result to the poor performance of the teachers in public schools in the state. Thus, there is a need for the development of adequate problem-solving skills among principals/heads of departments if quality assurance must be maintained in technical secondary schools.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is undeniable that communication and problem-solving play an important role in the supervision of teachers for quality assurance. The skills are indispensable skills that help principals to carry out supervision effectively. The study found out that principals do not utilize communication and problem-solving skills effectively in the supervision of teachers. Based on the findings, the study concluded that such factors could be contributing to the poor educational output of public secondary schools in South-Eastern Nigeria.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study. The government through the Ministry of Education should work in synergy with the school boards to organize training for principals on supervisory skill acquisition and utilization for quality assurance in public secondary to thrive. The government and school management should ensure adequate provision for the required resources to ensure that the principals carry out their supervisory roles and responsibilities for improved performance of teachers in technical secondary schools in South-East, Nigeria. Principals in South-East, Nigeria should be subjected to compulsory in-service training on effective supervision of teachers in the states which the government should sponsor.

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