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PROBLEMS OF DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC PLANS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS' IMPROVEMENT IN ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study investigated the extent of problems of strategic plans development for secondary schools' improvement in Anambra State, Nigeria for quality education provision.

Method: The study used a descriptive survey design paradigm. Respondents comprised 217 principals. There was no sampling. All the principals were used. Data were collected using 'Schools' Strategic Plan Development Problems Questionnaire' (SSDPQ).

Result: Findings indicated that the mean responses on the problems associated with the development of strategic plan ranged from 3.52 to 4.50 showing respondents agreement.

Conclusion: The study showed that strategic plan development and quality education provision fall within average level in secondary schools and needed propping up. Principals and staff need further enlightenment on strategic planning practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of teaching/ learning in education both at the state and national levels has always been the major goal of most developing countries in the world, including Nigeria. In Nigeria, efforts for improved educational systems has become of great interest to her and this has resulted in some kind of shift in educational management and specific efforts on the part of the governments to develop policies for transforming education. Over the past few decades, different governments have shown interest in transforming Nigerian education system and have come up with various educational policies and programmes to ensure that they achieve their goals. Such efforts generally led to the introduction of the universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1976 and 6-3-3-4 system in 1985 (Six years in primary school, three years in Junior, three years in senior secondary school respectively and four years in the university), yet the desired educational goals have not been met.

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Recently the Federal Government of Nigeria in her National Policy on Education emphasizes the need to promote the effective use of strategic planning among others to improve the quality of education provision and service delivery (FRN, 2013). Education is widely accepted by many nations to be one of the most important needs for the well-being of any society. Kansanen (2004) asserted that because of its paramount importance, there is need for good schools, good teachers and effective administrators. The Federal Government of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) adopting education as an instrument par excellence for national development places much emphasis on it, as a necessary condition for realizing the five national goals. To actualize this, in the secondary sector Nigeria (FRN, 2008) in her National Policy on Education stated the following-

"it is to prepare the people for useful living in the society and their participation in higher education". These well articulated objectives of secondary education can only be achieved if all the issues involved in development and implementation of policies and programmes at secondary education level are addressed squarely. The stated broad and specific objectives clearly outlined the role and services secondary education in Nigeria has to perform for each student that comes into it. It

has the duty to reveal to each student his dominant powers and develop them to the highest degree possible within the time the student is in school. The expectation is that secondary education should develop in each Nigerian child the knowledge, interests, ideals, habits, and powers whereby he will find his place and use that place to shape both himself and society towards nobler ends. The provision of resources, facilities and funds in right quantity and quality and the effective management of these resources are major determinants for the achievement of these broad goals. Teachers commitment to duty, discipline, and regularity in attendance are some of the ways the school undertake to ensure the existence of an environment that will be germane for the achievement of these goals. Others include supervision, provision of instructional materials, curriculum coverage/delivery, malpractice-free examinations, moral and career counseling, effective community relations, functional library, Information Communication Technology (ICT) amongst others. Strategic planning, education reform and school improvement have been the common strategies utilized in schools across the country. The emphasis is on the development and implementation of transformational management, the shift from quantity to quality and the achievement of system-wide transformation as desirable goals.

While these efforts are in progress authors (Ajobiwe, 2008; Iyamu, 2005) have continued to worry about the continued public outcry about the deterioration of the quality of education being offered to the citizens. Babalola, (2009) & Onwuliri (2008) noted that over the years there have been several salient problems and challenges eroding the very high standards which the Nigerian educational system was known for. These include inadequate staffing, poor quality assurance owing to various training limitations, poor quality entrants (higher level), too much emphasis on paper qualification, poor funding which led to a disparity between educational philosophy and objectives on the one hand, and the practice on the other; contextual problems of rapid transformation, improper mission interpretation, inappropriate curricula, students' unrest, incessant strike which often led to tuggery, armed robbery, gangsterism, cultism, paucity of academic staff as well as problem of staff retention, lack of quality assessment, poor infrastructural facilities for teaching and research, unsuitable policy environment and other organizational/management issues pertaining to school administration and the phenomenon of students' migration to foreign countries, among others.

These problems call for strategic planning which the Nigerian educational system stands to benefit immensely from. In other words, strategic planning is an indispensable tool for the success of any educational programme. Following this view the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013 p.10) strongly emphasized the need to promote effective management strategies such as the development of strategic planning to improve the quality of education provision and service delivery. The term strategic planning when mentioned immediately brings to mind a disciplined and thoughtful process that links the values, mission, and goals of a school system with a set of coherent strategies and tasks designed to achieve those goals (Reeves, 2007). Its aim is to develop a better road map to guide the organization to a place through

focusing on the institution's mission, objectives, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Strategic planning according to (Fehnel, 2000; Goodstein, Nolan & Pfeiffer, 2008), is a systematic process in which an organization envisions its future and assesses its basic reason for being (i.e. its purpose or mission), what are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) it might face in the immediate and foreseeable future. Bryson, (2011) has it as a set of concepts, procedures and tools, designed to assist leaders and managers with their tasks. It is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization or other entity is, what it does and why it does it with a focus on the future. Strategic planning he maintains can facilitate communication and participation, foster wise and analytical decision making, and promote a successful implementation and accountability. Yepwi, (2007) basically views strategic planning as a comprehensive statement for an organization's mission objectives and strategies, a 'detailed road map' of the direction and course that an organization intends to follow in conducting its activities.

As an organizational process of defining its strategy or direction of making decisions, on allocating its resources to pursue this strategy it is necessary to understand its current position and the possible avenues through which it can pursue a particular course of action. It is noteworthy that strategic planning is seriously advocated for now because many institutions and organizations find themselves in circumstances where old methods of planning and management are no longer effective in dealing with the future. The components of strategic planning include: setting a vision for the organization; scanning the external environment; assessing internal capabilities; and establishing goals, performance measures, development of plan documents and implementation of plans. It is pertinent therefore that if improved and qualitative education is desired by any government for its citizens, adequate attention should be given to strategic planning in the education system ensuring that adequate resources (human and material), equipment, facilities and funds are provided to enable the principals to plan effectively and strategically.

The idea and effort to engage in strategic planning is principally to improve students' learning. Strategic planning is a very important tool for school improvement. Many empirical studies have approved the supporting role of strategic planning in creating better long term competitive positions and better organizational performance. As Hopkins (1995) posits, school improvement is an ongoing process, cyclical by nature and are embedded in a wider process of overall school development. According to Schmoker (2004 p. 424) "...the most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is building the capacity of school personnel to function as a professional learning community". Schools with favourable culture of improvement will start and continue improvement efforts to better the school environment. To address these challenges and other problems of education sector, the Minister of Education in 2008 developed a 4 - Year Strategic Plan for the Development of Education Sector which took off from 2011 and to last till 2015.

It is expected that at the end of this period, the Nigerian Education system will be able to effectively support “Nigeria’s human capacity needs and meet developmental objectives” (FRN, 2008 p. 10). To this effect, the government of Anambra State, empowered the Anambra State Education Sector to initiate a Strategic Plan in which the entire secondary schools in the State will participate for the purpose of salvaging the system (Anambra State Government, 2010). The Post-Primary School Service Commission (PPSSC) Anambra State is at the forefront as the agency that manages the secondary school sector and has therefore developed a strategic plan in line with the State’s Strategic Education Sector Plans (SESP) and in turn mandates the secondary schools to develop and implement their own strategic plan which took bearing from the commission’s strategic plan.

Concepts of Strategic Planning Development

Issues management precede plan development and this is concerned with the identification of strategic issues that may impact the strategic directions of the organization, the likelihood of their occurrence and the development of appropriate responses to these issues. These steps guide the identification of the strategic issues that will necessitate strategic plan development. (1) scanning the external environment to identify strategic issues; (2) analyzing these issues for their strategic impact and probability of occurrence; and (3) developing suitable responses for managing them. The development of appropriate responses to strategic issues is left to the following step “development of strategies and plans” The issues covered under this step are those with strategic implications, as Freeman (1984) pointed out: “The key to success for issue management must be its ability to surface and track real issues that affect the strategic direction of the corporation or business unit”. Perrott (2008) described strategic issues as events or forces (with either positive or negative effects) either inside or outside an organization that are likely to alter its ability to achieve its objectives. When this is established the next step is developing suitable responses for managing strategic issues. The development of appropriate strategies and the evaluation of alternative strategies depends highly on the effectiveness of conducting the strategic issues.

Mintzberg (1991) defines strategy as “the pattern or plan that integrates an organization’s major goals, policies, and action sequences into a cohesive whole” Mintzberg’s discussion of strategy considers factors such as the internal competencies and shortcoming of an organization, anticipated changes in its environment, and “contingent moves by intelligent effectiveness of conducting the strategic issues components”. According to Poister (2003); Millar, Simeone, & Carnevale (2001), every organization evidences some sort of pattern or logic across its purposes, policies, programs, and resource allocations although it may not be a good pattern or logical. The task of strategy formulation involves highlighting what is good about the existing pattern, what is bad about it, and modifying it when necessary to bridge the gap between the organization and its environment (Nutt, Backoff, & Hogan, 2000). Despite the fact that every strategy is almost always both emergent and deliberate (Mintzberg *et al.*, 1998), the intention of this step in the SPFP is to focus on developing deliberate strategies that deal with strategic issues identified.

Bryson (2004), added that the purpose of this step is to create a set of strategies and associated plans that will effectively link the organization to its environment to achieve organizational goals and vision. Plans are there to serve as tools to communicate and control. Plans can help internalize a new programme, budget or culture. However, coordinated action among organizational actors over time according to (Bolman and Deal, 2003; Daft, 2004) usually requires some kind of reasonably formal plan so that people can keep track of what they should do and why. For one thing, people forget and the plan can remind them of what has been decided. The plan also sets a baseline for judging strategic performance. Such written record of the strategic plan and the process provides a valuable reference tool for monitoring and evaluation (Bryson, 2004). He refers to the document as an executive summary.

The expected benefits of identifying an organization’s strategic issues are: focusing attention on what is truly important to the organization; clarifying the problems or potential problems that the organization may face to create public value (Bryson, 2004); and promoting organizational change. The identification of strategic issues will justify organizational required changes and plans are developed (Fiol, 2002, Kotter, 1996). Second, enhancing organizational learning and early implementation of strategies will enable an early detection of the suitability of strategies used, and the ability to revise strategies before being fully implemented (Patton, 1997). Third, enhance organization members’ commitment and create emotional bonding to the new reality (Fiol, 2002). Fourth, improve communication across the organization. Strategy development requires a high level of coordination between various units from which new channels of communication may emerge. Fifth, constructing a coalition with external stakeholders to facilitate the implementation of strategies and plans (Bryson, 2004).

Statement the of the Problem

The Nigerian education system faces many challenges. There have been repeated complaints that the education sector in Nigeria has been poorly funded resulting in poor quality performance of our educational products (Onwuliri 2008 & Babalola 2009). The state of some secondary schools in Anambra State is worrisome, as manifested by dilapidated buildings, shortage of classroom accommodation, shortage of qualified personnel, inadequate staffing, shortage of school furniture for students and teachers, lack of essential facilities such as water, light, toilet facilities and low levels of teacher productivity. The ultimate goal of secondary education is to develop the individual’s mental capacity and character for higher education and useful living within the society (FRN, 2008). It would seem impossible to achieve these goals in the face of these strategic issues listed above. Again, in spite of the societal demand for quality assurance in education and the need for thorough policy implementation there is still the problem of ineffective strategic plan development. A significant challenge for principals today is their ability to develop a meaningful and realistic strategic plan which will enable effective strategic implementation to the school situation for overall education provision and service delivery. Strategic planning is a major tool which school administrators use to address strategic issues to bring improvement to the

Table 1. Principals' Mean Responses on the Problems schools encountered in the development of their strategic plans

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Goal conflict among stakeholders	217	3.84	1.08
Goal ambiguity among stakeholders	217	3.52	1.12
Constraint of financial practices	217	4.50	.66
Conflict between individual and organizational goals	217	3.88	.77
Little or non-involvement of relevant Stakeholders	217	3.84	1.04
Inability to set meaningful measures of performance for strategic planning.	217	3.59	1.06
Unwillingness of key organizational leaders to embrace strategic change.	217	3.96	.95
Lack of experienced professionals in strategic planning.	217	4.07	.93
Valid N (listwise)	217		

Table 2. T-test Analysis of the problems schools encountered in the development of strategic plan by location of schools

	Location	N	Mean	SD	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Goal conflict among stakeholders	Urban	112	3.86	1.08	215	.26	1.96	Not Rejected
	Rural	105	3.82	1.08				
Goal ambiguity among stakeholders	Urban	112	3.57	1.09	215	.69	1.96	Not Rejected
	Rural	105	3.47	1.16				
Constraint of financial practices	Urban	112	4.53	.66	215	.56	1.96	Not Rejected
	Rural	105	4.48	.67				
Conflict between individual and organizational goals	Urban	112	3.84	.78	215	-.99	1.96	Not Rejected
	Rural	105	3.93	.75				
Little or non-involvement of relevant stakeholders	Urban	112	3.89	1.00	215	.79	1.96	Not Rejected
	Rural	105	3.78	1.08				
Inability to set meaningful measures of performance for strategic planning.	Urban	112	3.60	1.03	215	.186	1.96	Not Rejected
	Rural	105	3.57	1.09				
Unwillingness of key organizational leaders to embrace strategic change.	Urban	112	3.95	.97	215	-.19	1.96	Not Rejected
	Rural	105	3.97	.93				
Lack of experienced professionals in strategic planning	Urban	112	3.99	1.01	215	-1.27	1.96	Not Rejected
	Rural	105	4.15	.84				

school system. The current education system of our nation with particular reference to Anambra State needs an urgent successful and sustainable transformation and improvement. In the face of these problems, secondary school principals ability to develop meaningful strategic plans as well as identify the problems schools encounter in the development of their school strategic plans, are the problems of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to find out the problems principals in Anambra State encounter in developing their schools' strategic plans. Specifically, the study seeks to identify: The problems schools encounter in the development of their schools' strategic plans.

Research Questions

What problems do schools encounter in developing and implementing strategic plans?

Hypothesis

Urban and rural schools will not differ significantly in terms of the problems they encounter in the development strategic plan.

METHODS

The study employed the descriptive survey design. This design was adopted in this study to elicit responses from the principals in order to find solutions to the problems identified. The target population comprised 217 principals of Anambra State public secondary schools.

There was no sampling technique as all the schools from the six educational zones in Anambra State of the 21 Local Government Areas formed the population of the study. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire. The questionnaire called 'Schools' Strategic Plan Development Problem Questionnaire' (SSDPQ) is an 8-item questionnaire eliciting information on the extent of the problems schools encountered in the development of their schools' strategic plans.

RESULTS

Research Question

What problems do schools encounter in developing strategic plans?

As indicated by the mean responses in table 1, all the eight listed problems that could constraint the development of strategic plans were endorsed by the principals as the problems they experienced in the development of their schools strategic plans. The mean responses range between 3.52 and 4.50 and are above the acceptance value of 3.00. Financial constraints (Mean = 4.50), lack of experienced professionals in strategic planning (Mean = 4.07) and unwillingness of key organizational leaders to embrace strategic change (3.96) were the top three strategic plan development constraints faced by the schools.

Hypothesis

Urban and rural schools will not differ significantly in terms of the problems they encounter in the development strategic plan.

Urban and rural secondary schools principals do not differ significantly in terms of their mean rating of the problems schools encounter in the development of their strategic plans as the t-values for the entire eight (8) problem areas were less than the table value of 1.96. Therefore the null hypothesis of no significant difference between urban and rural schools in terms of problems of development of strategic plan was not rejected. The researcher concludes that schools in urban and rural schools do not differ significantly in the problems they encountered in the development of their strategic plans.

Conclusion

This study showed that the strategic development and quality education provision still fall within average level in secondary schools. It also reveals that principals have inadequate understanding of strategic planning process. This revelation calls for the attention of the Planning, Research and Statistics Unit to attempt organizing for educational managers (principals) and staff members, periodic capacity development workshops - regular short courses and seminars, on strategic planning to enable them grasp the fundamentals and have confidence in planning strategically to bring about positive change in their institutions.

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