

SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING: A STRATEGIC TOOL FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract: *The challenge of improving secondary education to achieve the goals defined in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) remains a daunting task. This study addressed the role of school development planning as a strategic tool for the improvement of secondary education in Rivers State, Nigeria. Three research questions and three hypotheses were used to guide the study. Stratified sampling technique was used to select 200 teachers from rural and urban schools in five local government areas of Rivers State. The Teacher Perception of School Development Planning and Improvement Questionnaire (TPSDPIQ) was used to collect data. The findings showed that, in general, teachers' perceptions about the significance of school development planning factors for secondary school improvement were strikingly similar. Specifically, the findings showed that: (a) teachers' perceptions about school development significantly predicted their perceptions about school improvement, (b) there was no significant difference between teachers' perception of school development planning across urban and rural schools, and (c) there was no significant difference between teachers' perception of school improvement across urban and rural schools. Recommendations included the development of a policy requiring all secondary schools in the state to have a school development plan for a specified period, as well as, having head-teachers, teachers, and community engage in developing the school plan.*

Keywords: secondary education, school development planning, school improvement

Introduction

As a developing nation, education remains a fundamental instrument in the quest for national development in Nigeria. In Nigeria's National Policy on Education, education is described as "instrument par excellence" and is accepted as the foundation for its national aspirations [Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), 2013]. The importance of education also is underscored by the United Nations' emphasis for Universal Basic Education (Ogbonda, 2016). Countries without strong educational foundations, especially at the basic level, run the risk of increased dependence and instability. United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, "confirms this when he noted that when young people have decent jobs, political weight, negotiating muscle and real influence in the world, they would create

better future" (Ogbonda, 2016, p. 77). Assisting young people to achieve those lofty aspirations is closely tied to countries' existing educational programs. In Nigeria, basic education leading up to junior secondary education is free and compulsory. Laws establishing the Universal Basic Education Programme (UBE), confirmed education as a right of all children and made it mandatory for every government in Nigeria to make educational programming available (FRN, 2004; Ogbonda, 2016).

In consolidating Universal Basic Education, secondary education (consisting of 3 years of senior secondary school) was targeted for preparing individuals for meaningful living within society and engagement in higher education (FRN, 2013). Specifically, secondary education should accomplish

the following:

- i. Provide primary school leavers with opportunity to access education at a higher level;
- ii. Offer diversified curriculum to cater for various talents, opportunities and future roles;
- iii. Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and commerce at professional levels;
- iv. Inspire students to achieve excellence;
Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills. (FRN, 2004, p. 18)

Secondary education, defined as the education that children receive after primary education and before tertiary education, is expected to equip pupils for survival in the society and beyond.

Reforms associated with Universal Primary Education launched in 1976, Universal Basic Education launched in 1999, and the Millennium Development Goals launched in 2000, profoundly impacted the provision, access, quality, and management of secondary education in Nigeria. Secondary schools were required to admit more pupils without corresponding increases in the number of teachers, spaces, equipment, facilities, and funding. This situation created a crisis in which secondary education in Nigeria was ranked 120-out-of-144 in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report Index (Adamolekun, 2013). The massive enrolment of pupils came with enormous challenges that threatened the ability of secondary education to achieve its goals. Today, the crisis remains visible. In Nigeria, where five credits (including English and Mathematics) are the baseline for admission to tertiary institutions, there has been a decrease in tertiary admissions. This is because candidates were unable to obtain the requirements needed to qualify them for entry. For instance, Adamolekun (2013) and Adawo (2011, p. 46) observed that secondary school students were not

able to perform well on the *West African School Certificate Examination (WASCE)*. They further observed that only 23% of students had five credits in 2008, 26% in 2009, 24% in 2010, 31% in 2011, and 39% in 2012. These yearly performances in the school certificate examinations are considered poor. By implication, these were the only students qualified to gain entry into tertiary education, with few people gaining further qualifications. Adawo (2011) observed that human capital acquired from primary school education was statistically more significant for the growth of Nigeria's economy than was human capital acquired from secondary education. By extension, graduates of secondary education are not positioned to gain meaningful employment more than graduates of basic education. Taken together, secondary education seems not to be achieving its goals of preparing graduates for the workplace, meaningful living, and tertiary education (Tenebe, 2011).

Decline of Secondary Education

Decline in secondary education in Nigeria is a concern for educational managers, parents, policy makers, and politicians (Agi & Yellowe, 2013; Ololube, 2009; Tenebe, 2011). There are a number of factors that can either be held accountable or contribute to the downward trend in the performance of secondary education in Nigeria including challenges related to teacher quality (Ololube, 2009), educational leadership (Keller, 2015; Okeke, 1986), equipment and infrastructure, policy implementation (Okoroma, 2000) and school location (urban and rural). According to Ogbonda (2016), policies are not implemented in the same way across the two strata. This dichotomy has contributed to poor implementation. Other factors include lack of strategic planning (Okeke, 1986; Okoroma, 2000) and lack of curriculum quality and delivery (Agi & Yellowe,

2013; FRN, 2013; Okeke, 1986; Ololube, 2009; Tenebe, 2011).

While all these factors may be important in improving secondary education, there is a need to prioritize planning in secondary education. This is because planning any activity before action ensures that decisions are reached only after considered and careful analysis of the situation and all relevant factors. In other words, a school plan arrived at through decision making takes account of the factors identified as contributing to school improvement.

This study explored the use of school development planning as a strategic tool for improving secondary education in Rivers State.

School Development Planning

School development planning is a strategic roadmap used for addressing school improvement and effectiveness in order to achieve school goals. It is a process in identifying priorities, and determining the human and material resources needed for school improvement (Agi & Yellow, 2012). School development planning is a useful guide for sustainable and progressive schools. School development planning involves developing a quality framework for school governance instead of school management (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Schools initiating development planning work under the following assumptions:

- a) That schools are best placed to identify areas needing improvement;
- b) That quality education results from a mix of factors that are deliberately planned;
- c) That education is a partnership venture requiring input from quality representation; and
- d) That school requires committed leadership that possesses expertise and collective experience (Department of Education Ireland, 1999; Department of

Education, Northern Ireland, 2010; National High School Centre, 2013).

School development planning primarily focuses on curriculum delivery, school environment, and parental involvement. The Government of Ireland (1999) defined school development planning (SDP) as “a process undertaken by the school community to give direction to the work of the school in order to ensure that all pupils receive quality education in terms of both holistic development and academic achievement. School development planning promotes school improvement in several ways including:

- a) Supporting systematic self-evaluation that enables the school community to identify priorities, progress, and prepare adequately for the future;
- b) Directing school efforts for quality education and schooling;
- c) Supporting professional development for school staff;
- d) Partnering in school development;
- e) Mobilizing and optimizing school and community resources; and
- f) Supporting change and innovation [Department of Education, National High School Centre, 2013; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005; Stringer & Hourani, 2016].

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Many researchers, parents, teachers, administrators, educational practitioners, and other stakeholders believe that the standard of secondary education in Rivers State has declined dramatically, with many students failing to pass school certificate and qualifying examinations (Agi & Adiele, 2011; Ogbonda, 2016). This has led to the question as to whether proper preparation and planning of educational activities takes place in secondary

education. School development planning may be a fundamental step to reverse this trend and achieve the goals of secondary education, as it is a holistic process that prompts the school community to use its available resources to focus on its mission. Therefore, the focus of the paper is to investigate the effectiveness of school development planning strategy in improving schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What are teachers' perceptions about school development planning?

RQ2: What are teachers' perceptions about school improvement?

RQ3: Do teachers' perceptions about school development planning predict their perceptions about school improvement?

RQ4: Do teachers' perceptions of school development planning differ across urban and rural schools?

RQ5: Do teachers' perceptions of school improvement differ across urban and rural schools?

Hypotheses

The following null research hypotheses were tested in the study:

H₀₁: Teachers' perceptions about school development planning do not significantly predict their perceptions about school improvement.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between teachers' perceptions of school development planning across urban and rural schools.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between teachers' perceptions of school improvement across urban and rural schools.

Methodology

This research study involved the use of descriptive survey. The population consisted of all 10056 public secondary school teachers in Rivers State. A sample size of 200 was selected through stratified random sampling techniques. First, the schools were stratified into urban and rural schools, with 10 schools selected from each strata. The simple random sampling technique then was employed to select 10 teachers from the 20 selected schools in the five local government areas in Rivers State, Nigeria. A researcher-designed questionnaire entitled, *Teachers' Perception of School Development Planning and Improvement Questionnaire (TPSDPIQ)* was used to collect data from respondents.

The instrument consisted of a 4-point Likert scale where 4 = strongly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree. The scoring format involved provided a response of SA with 4 points, with scores of A, D, and SD being provided 3 points, 2 points and 1 point respectively. The instrument consisted of three sections: Section A, Section B, and Section C. Sections A included questions about teacher demographics while Sections B and C included questions assessing teachers' perception of school development and school improvement respectively. The instrument contained 25 items. The instrument was validated by lecturers in the Department of Educational Foundations/Management in the Faculty of Education at Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Port Harcourt Rivers State Nigeria. The Cronbach's alpha for the *TPSDPIQ* was 0.80. Means and standard deviations were used to determine teachers' perceptions.

Findings and Discussion

Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for participants' responses to

the *TPSDPIQ* are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Regression analyses were carried out to determine whether there was a significant predictive relationship between teachers' perceptions about school planning and their perceptions about school improvement (Figure 1). Finally, independent *t*-tests were carried out to determine if there were significant differences in teachers' perceptions of school planning and school achievement across urban and rural schools (Tables 3 and 4 respectively). All tests were set at 0.05% level of significance.

Teachers' Perceptions of School Development Planning

Table 1 lists teachers' response frequencies and related descriptive statistics for their perceptions of school development planning. The results from Table 1 indicate teachers' mean rating of perception of school development planning ($M = 3.07, \pm 0.46$). The 95% confidence interval ranged from 3.01 to

3.14. The findings showed that 113 (57.07%) respondents strongly agreed and 65 (32.8%) agreed that their school has a clearly defined mission statement ($M = 3.42, SD = 0.81$). One hundred and nine participants (55.05%) strongly agreed and 70 (35.35%) agreed that their schools had a clearly defined vision. One hundred and five (53%) teachers strongly agreed and 78 (39.39%) agreed that their schools focused on curriculum delivery strategies, school environment, and parental involvement ($M = 3.41, SD = 0.76$). Seventy-eight (39.39%) teachers strongly agreed and 95 (47.98%) agreed that the school has clearly defined priorities ($M = 3.20, SD = 0.82$). Fifty-six (28.28%) participants reported strongly agreeing and 86 (43.43%) reported agreeing that their schools had clearly defined policies on students and staff welfare (guidance/counseling) ($M = 2.82, SD = 1.03$). Eighty-four (42.42%) participants strongly agreed and 75 (37.88%) agreed that schools involved parents, students, teachers and PTA in their planning.

Table 1
Frequencies, Means, and Standard Deviations for Teachers' Perceptions of School Development Planning (N=198)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	M	SD	LB ^a	UB ^b
The school has a clearly defined mission statement.	113	65	10	10	3.42	0.81	3.31	3.53
The school has a clearly defined vision.	109	70	8	11	3.40	0.81	3.29	3.51
The school has clearly defined policies on admission, access, special needs students, discipline, bullying, learning and teaching processes, human rights.	62	96	14	26	2.98	0.96	2.85	3.11
The school has clearly defined policies in participation, involvement, stake holding, collaboration.	56	99	29	14	2.99	0.85	2.88	3.11
The school has clearly defined policy on students and staff welfare (guidance/counseling).	56	86	21	35	2.82	1.03	2.68	2.97
The school is focused on curriculum delivery strategies, school environment and parents' involvement.	105	78	6	9	3.41	0.76	3.30	3.52
The school has clearly defined priorities.	78	95	12	13	3.20	0.82	3.09	3.32

The school has clearly defined action plan.	42	125	16	15	2.98	0.77	2.87	3.09
The school has performance targets.	71	102	12	13	3.17	0.81	3.05	3.28
The school has strategies for implementing plan.	49	110	20	19	2.95	0.86	2.83	3.07
School has timeline for action and priorities.	66	97	20	15	3.08	0.86	2.96	3.20
School has defined responsibilities for implementation of development plan.	76	89	14	19	3.12	0.91	2.99	3.25
School has phase for action plan.	32	120	30	16	2.85	0.79	2.74	2.96
School has indicators of success/status update.	44	112	20	22	2.90	0.87	2.78	3.37
School has opportunities for revision.	82	96	10	10	3.26	0.78	3.15	3.37
Subject planning issues, learning outcome, assessment procedures and learning support are clearly defined and outlined.	82	97	11	8	3.28	0.75	3.17	3.38
School involves parents, students, teachers and PTA in planning its programmes and effort towards success.	84	75	15	24	3.11	0.99	2.97	3.24
School synergizes with industry and civil society for physical environment.	23	86	38	51	2.41	1.00	2.27	2.55

Notes: ^a = Upper Beta ^b = Lower Beta

The findings revealed that teachers were aware and approved of the nature of school development planning in secondary schools in Rivers State. Secondary education depends on, and adheres strictly to, national guidelines for curriculum implementation and delivery (Agi, & Yellowe, 2012; FRN, 2004). Onojerena (2014) noted that curriculum implementation in Nigerian secondary schools includes program implementation and change strategies that are essential for growing and improving schools. Secondary development planning is part of the leadership construction as schools engage in curriculum reforms, which according to Olibie (2010), involves “increasing the focus on school visions, decisions, communities, communication processes and students’ outcomes by improving the capacity of teachers and others to work together” (p. 86). Teachers’ responses suggested that school development planning is prevalent in secondary schools in Rivers State

irrespective of school location. However, a deliberate policy in school development planning may be lacking.

Teachers’ Perceptions of School Improvement

Frequency and mean scores for teachers’ perceptions of school improvement are listed in Table 2. Teachers’ perception about school improvement was $M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.53$. The 95% confidence interval ranges from 2.86 to 3.01. One hundred and sixty (80.80%) respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that their schools were identified by school board and educational authorities as models to be copied ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.87$). Fifty-one (25.75%) teachers strongly agreed and 115 (58.08%) agreed that there was sustained increase in academic achievement as a result of school development planning ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 0.82$). Sixty-one (30.80%) participants strongly agreed and 97 (48.99%) agreed

that the emphasis on school culture and values created an orderly atmosphere for studies ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 0.96$). Sixty-six (33.33%) participants strongly agreed and 82 (41.41%) agreed that students, teachers, parents, and the school community were highly motivated to participate in school

development programs ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.99$). Seventy-five (37.88%) strongly agreed and 85 (42.92%) agreed that their schools were identified by educational school boards and authorities as models.

Table 2
Frequencies, Means, and Standard Deviations for Teachers' Perceptions of School Improvement (N=198)

Item	SA	A	D	SD	M	SD	LB ^a	UB ^b
There is sustained increase in academic achievement resulting from school development planning.	51	115	15	17	3.01	0.82	2.89	3.13
The emphasis on school culture and values has created an orderly atmosphere for studies.	61	97	13	27	2.97	0.96	2.84	3.10
Students, teachers, parents, and school community are highly motivated to participate in school improvement.	66	82	24	26	2.95	0.99	2.81	3.09
Staff professional development and leadership capacities are noticed.	53	91	26	28	2.85	0.97	2.72	2.99
Staff and students take responsibility for their actions and ownership for program successes and failures.	40	103	17	38	2.73	0.99	2.59	2.87
School is noticed as outstanding within and outside the school district.	53	103	16	26	2.92	0.93	2.79	3.06
School is identified by educational school board and authorities as a model.	75	85	25	13	3.12	0.87	3.00	3.24

Notes: ^a = Upper Beta ^b = Lower Beta

These findings corroborate the assumption that strategic plan developed by the school in the process of attaining school goals and objective is critical to school improvement. (Hanover Research, 2015; Pipkin, 2015) Properly articulated plans define school vision, mission, goals and objectives through sincere assessment of school needs, challenges, and strength (Hanover Research, 2015; Pipkin, 2015). Strong school culture and climate that motivates teachers and students to achieve derives from the missions and visions that schools pursue (Hanover Research, 2015; Hoy & Miskel, 2008). School improvement therefore depends on the strategic plans the school community has put in place.

Perceived Relationship Between School Development Planning and School Improvement

There was a significant, positive relationship ($r = .35$) between teachers' perceptions of school development planning and school improvement (Figure 1). Multiple regression was used to test whether the teachers' perceptions of school development planning predicted their perceptions of school improvement. The results of the regression indicated that school development planning (SDP) and school improvement planning (SIP) explained 35.1% of the variance, $R^2 = .35$, $F(1,196) = 106.02$, $p = .001$. It was found

that school development planning (SDP) significantly predicated school improvement planning ($\beta = .592$, $p =$

.001). The null hypothesis was rejected at .05 alpha level.

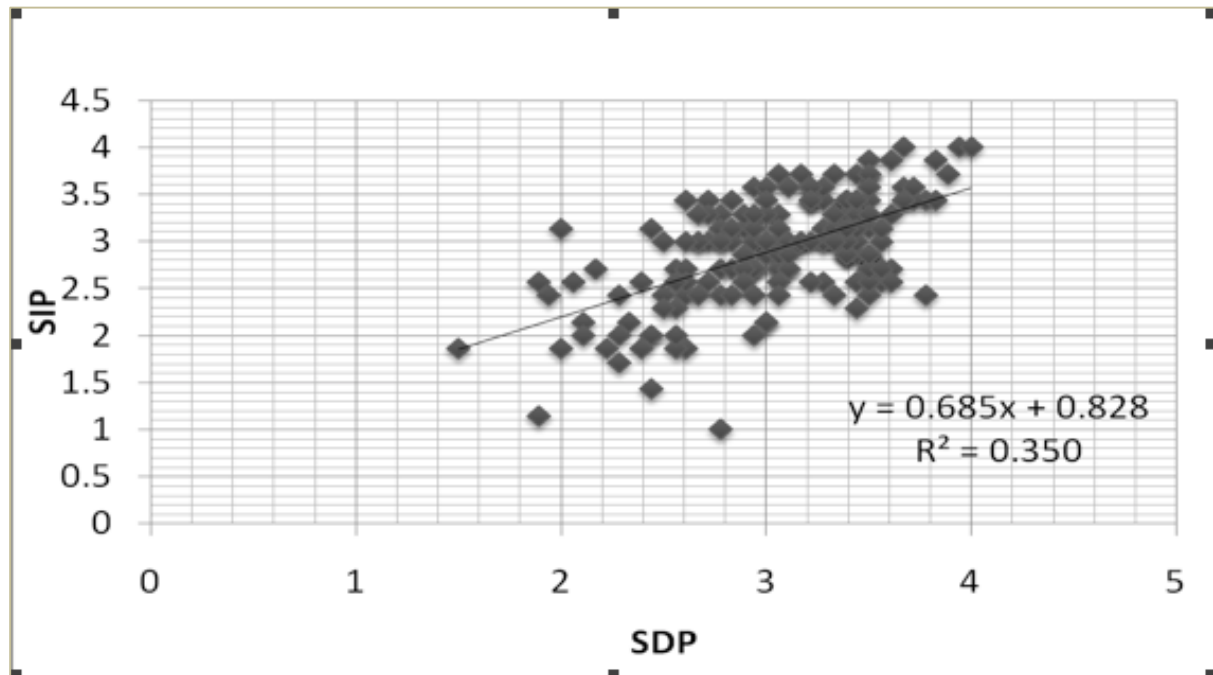


Figure 1. Relationship between teachers' perceptions of school development planning and school improvement.

The finding supporting the link between school development planning (sometimes referred to as strategic planning) and school improvement is well established (Agi & Yellowe, 2012; Hanover Research, 2015; Hoy & Miskel, 2008; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Pipkin, 2015). School strategic plans provide schools with clear pathways to operationalizing curriculum and achieving specific school objectives and goals within a specifically defined environment. This pathway depends on the model(s) for school improvement that schools choose to adopt in context of their peculiar circumstances (Hanover Research, 2015). Arguably, every school requires a development plan just as

planning is essential for the sustainability of every organization.

School Location

One hundred teachers in urban settings ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.47$) and 98 teachers in rural settings ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.46$) agreed about the importance of school development planning. The results of an independent sample t-test (Table 3) indicated that urban and rural teachers did not differ significantly in their perceptions of school development planning, $t(196) = .176$, $p = .860$. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected at .05 alpha level.

Table 3

Summary of t-test of Teachers' Perceptions of School Development Planning by School Location

Location	N	M	SD	t-value	df	p
Urban	100	3.07	0.47	-.176	196	.86
Rural	98	3.08	0.46			

One hundred teachers in urban settings (M = 2.99, SD = 0.49) and 98 teachers in rural settings (M = 2.88, SD = 0.57) agreed about the importance of school improvement planning (Table 4). The results of an independent sample t-test

indicated that urban and rural teachers did not differ significantly in their perceptions about school improvement, $t(196) = 1.49$, $p = .139$. Thus, the null hypothesis was not rejected at .05 alpha level.

Table 4

Summary of t-test of Teachers' Perceptions of School Improvement by School Location

	N	M	SD	t-value	df	p-value
Urban	100	2.99	0.49	1.485	196	.14
Rural	98	2.88	0.57			

The implications of the findings Tables 3 and 4 are significant for the curriculum and training for teachers and suggests that teachers everywhere, when well equipped, can be engaged and motivated to participate in leadership, curriculum initiative, learning improvement, and school planning (Bell & Stevenson, 2015; Gruenert, & Whitaker, 2015; Obanya, 2004).

Recommendations and Conclusion

Secondary education remains a critical level of Nigeria's educational system. Its role in preparing pupils for meaningful engagement in society and for tertiary education is well defined in the National Policy on Education. The ability of secondary education in achieving these noble goals is in doubt and remains a major challenge for stakeholders. A number of issues, including those internal and external to schools, are usually identified as contributing to challenges related to secondary education effectiveness and performance. Lack of

emphasis on school development planning is identified as one of those problems (Agabi, 1999; Agi & Adiele, 2011).

This study explored the perceived impact of school development planning on school improvement from the perspective of practicing teachers. The findings of the study revealed that teachers from urban and rural locations perceived that their schools included some elements of school development planning but that more planning is vital for secondary school improvement in Rivers State. What is now required is a deliberate policy that enshrines school development planning for school improvement in the education policy document of the country.

It is therefore recommended that school development planning at the secondary education level must be a deliberate policy and enshrined in laws governing education in Nigeria. The Federal Ministry of Education should have a deliberate policy requiring schools to create a school development plan for specified intervals.

Teachers' job descriptions should include involvement in the cooperative production of school development plans. Government should allow significant autonomy to reside in the schools, to enable school principals to initiate school development plans. District school boards should be responsible for no more than ten secondary schools for proper supervision and participation in school development

(vicinity management). Government should provide secondary schools with all resources needed for long-term planning. Head teachers and teachers in secondary schools should engage regularly in refresher courses in school redevelopment and improvement. Finally, the roles of community and other relevant stakeholders should be defined and mobilized in the school development and planning process.

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