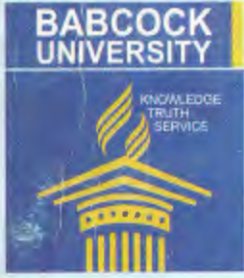


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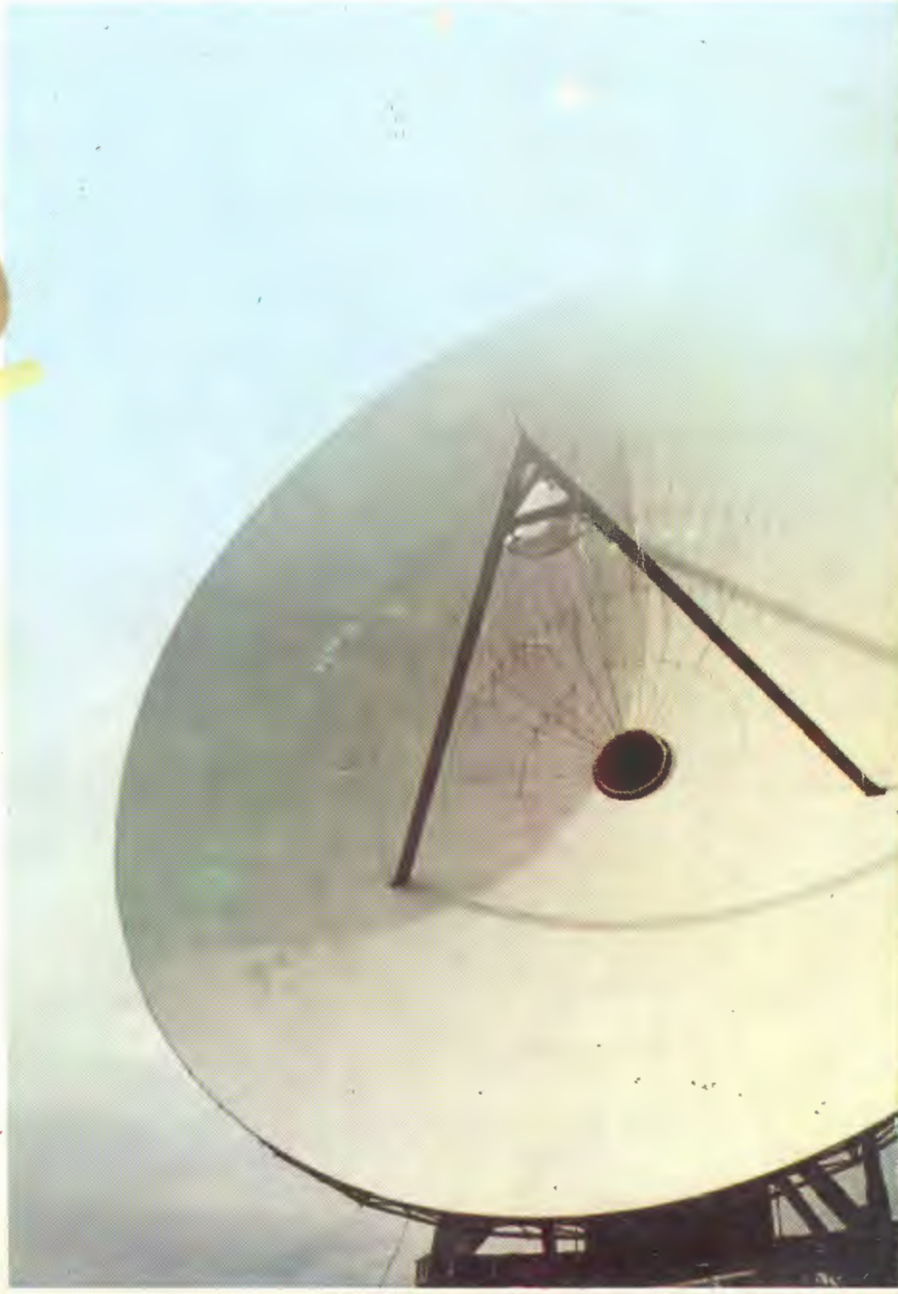
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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: AN IMPERATIVE FOR SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION IN AN INFORMATION AGE

** Nicholas-Omoregbe Olanike S., Adejumo Gbadebo O. & Ikhu-Omoregbe Nicholas (PhD)*

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the important nature of communication in modern practice for school administrators. It looks at examples of the different types of technological means to facilitate effective communication. Two hypotheses were developed to examine the relationship between successful administration and effective communication. This study adopted the descriptive research of the ex-post facto type and multi-stage sampling technique was used to select participants for this study. In all 325 participants were selected made up of 125 staff and 300 students. One survey instrument was used in this study – Communication Effectiveness Rating Scale (CRES) developed by these researchers. The findings of this study indicate that students do not value importance of communication in school and students perceived more problems militating against effective communication in school than staff.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is anticipated for passing on information, instructions, advice, feelings, opinions and facts correctly and accurately from one person to another person or group of people. Good communications help to inspire enthusiasm and raise the interest and motivation of those to whom they are aimed at such as staff, students, parents, friends and so on. Communication is not an inborn thing, it is learnt, which implies that every school administrator has to learn how to communicate and in this information age (Shibanda, 2001).

Instituting communication ought to be the first task of the administrator. Communication involves two people – *a sender and a receiver*. An administrator communicates not with himself alone, but with the public, students, teachers and other employees. Communication has not taken place except the receiver interprets precisely the information being transmitted.

Enhanced leadership, achievement and success in education all need good communication: the community/parents to schools, administrators with teachers, and teachers with children. Administrators require skills and knowledge that will allow them cope with changes in the communication and information services industry today (Shibanda, 2001). Reforming schools in the perspective of an information-based society have made communication an important skill and have provided broad roles for school administrators. Despite the fact that communication has been identified as an essential area of practice, the discipline has basically been disregarded in the study of school administration (Nicholas-Omoregbe and Adejumo, 2007).

Certainly, communication has always been vital to educational leaders. Nevertheless, this information age in which contemporary leaders find themselves makes developing

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communication skills more important than ever.

Okon (2005) asserts that the administrator must be conscious of management techniques, communication technologies and principles, and be competent at using the right one at the right time. As Madu (2000) puts, the need for paper may vanish in communication.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Okon says that recent developments in the field of information and communication technologies, as a result of the convergence of computing and telecommunication technologies have had significant impact on education and information center management. Communication is an essential concept in the study of educational administration since it proffers an added concept for exploring the school as a social organization. The objectives/mission of the school become known and useful when they are communicated.

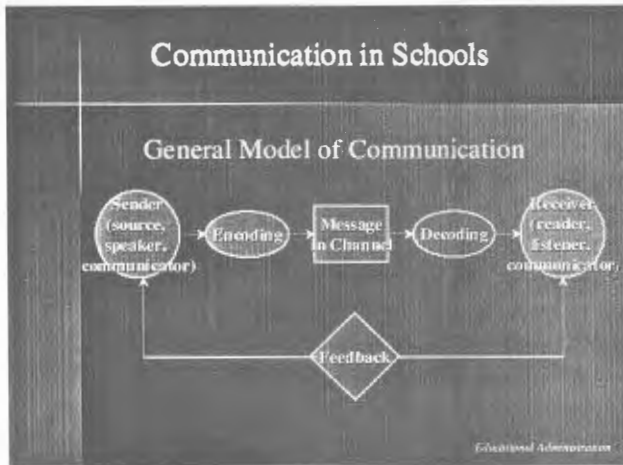
As a result, ascertaining communication is the first task of the administrator. Communication involves two people – a sender and a receiver. An administrator does not communicate with himself alone, but with students, teachers, parents, staff, and the community. Also, there must be meaning; communication does not take place unless the receiver interprets precisely the information being transmitted.

The administrator for instance, wants such receivers as parents, teachers, and students to be aware and accept the proposed ideas and the information being transmitted.

Communication is regarded to be effective if the results for which it is intended are realized. Successful communication makes people feel contented, motivated, empowered, demonstrate understanding, respect, trust, and love towards the leadership; do their jobs well; work as a team, share information; listen and take directives; save time and willingly achieve organizational goals without being forced.

Effective communication is the livewire of any organization. Planned communication programmes help school administrators accomplish their education goals and build ongoing support for programmes, initiatives and staff. Connections between the school and the home enable students to achieve at higher rates by engaging parents in the learning process. Increased public involvement in the school programmes leads to better understanding and support.

Effective communication is an essential instrument for the school head in managing the school especially in this information age. The model in figure 1 shows the flow of communication within school setting.



TECHNOLOGICAL MEANS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Some technological means for effective communication are discussed as follow:

Electronic Mail: This is a store and forward method of sending, storing and receiving messages over a communication system. It is used to facilitate communication by allowing users within a school to e-mail each other. It is the first e-revolution in business communications and helps to address two basic problems of communication: The problem of traveling which could be difficult, time consuming and expensive and the problem of synchronization.

Teleconferencing: This is used to enhance effective communication in school administration by providing audio, video and data services by one or more means such as telephone, telegraph, radio, and television. These days, computers have given more meaning to teleconferencing, because apart from allowing a group to participate in a discussion at a time, they could also share application and mark up a common whiteboard. This feature is available with Microsoft's NetMeeting on the Internet.

Multimedia Communication: This provides a means where multiple forms of information content and processing (e.g text, audio, graphic, animation, video, interactivity) are used to inform or entertain school administrators. Multimedia presentation can be used to present live or recorded information to the school administrator as occasion demands. The reason for diverse formats of digital multimedia is to enhance the administrators experience, and make it easier and faster to convey information.

THE BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE/GOOD COMMUNICATIONS IN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Precision: It is imperative in communication to know precisely what to say. For example, as a school administrator, one may want to interpret school policies and instructions, initiate new programmes, ensure that one spell out all one's ideas on the subject before attempting to

communicate to others. For instance, if a principal is going to talk about the school regulations, he/she ought to know those regulations comprehensively and be aware of their implications for the growth of the school.

Preparation: Earlier preparations, require complete reflection of the purpose of communication, the addressees, the scope of the subject, where, when and how best to present the message; is it orally, in a face to face communication, staff meeting, sign posts and pictographic representations, email or printed in a memo, website, suggestion box, school assembly, letter or newspaper? The use of alternative and diverse means of communication makes preparation essential.

Cultivate a natural style of delivering communication: Use easy, clear-cut language, at all likely times; ensure and recheck whether your message/instruction has been correctly understood; try to be understood always and also to understand others Musaaazi (1982) said that communication is a two-way process. Therefore, it is essential to be a good listener, too. After all, communication is purposive. Its main administrative functions are informing, instructing, or directing someone, evaluating someone or something, and influencing another's thought or behaviour.

Communication Principles for School Administration

1. **Integrity:** An administrator must be honest, open and frank when passing on information because it will be difficult to regain credibility once it is lost. Lean toward sharing more information, not less, or people may think you are hiding something.
2. **Simplicity:** Keep explanations easy, avoid ambiguous and technical language and jargon as much as possible. Endeavour to always carry your audience along. Use images and visual representation when necessary to drive in your message.
3. **Responsive listener:** Create rooms for responses and feedback so as to know people's opinions rather than just assuming. Tailor communication strategies to your addressees. Emphasize the positive and learn from your mistakes. Counter gossips with truths.
4. **Mass media usage:** Use appropriate tools to provide and present information, and adopt interpersonal techniques for changing attitudes.
5. **Involve teachers and other staff:** Carry your staff along because an informed staff is likely to be a supportive staff.
6. **Involve parents/Guardians:** Carry parents along in the administration of the school and do not fail to provide clarifications when demanded for some actions taken.
7. **Involve the school board:** Be accountable to the school board and encourage them to observe the process of administration.
8. **Engage and seek the cooperation of units that provide services to the school:** (e.g., supplier, contractors, etc.).
9. **Keep promises:** Do not say things to impress others. Ensure that your promises are kept. This would help to build the confidence of others in your administrations.

HYPOTHESES

Two hypotheses were tested in this study as stated below:

1. There will be no significant difference in the perception of staff and students on the importance of communication in the school administration
2. There will be no significant difference in the perception of staff and students on the problems mitigating against effective use of modern communication gadgets in the schools

METHODS

Design

This study adopted the descriptive research of the ex-post facto type. This approach was employed because the researcher had no control nor intended to manipulate any of the independent variables. The independent variable was staff and students perception while the dependent variable was importance of communication in school administration.

Sample and Procedure

Ogun State is one of the thirty-six (36) States in the Nigerian Federation and is located in the South Western part of the country. Its population growth rate is presently 2.75% per annum (NPC, 2002). There are 245 Public Secondary Schools with 10,634 Secondary School teachers in Ogun state. The State has 20 LGAs and Abeokuta as its capital city. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select participants for this study. In the first stage of this multistage random sampling, Ogun State was divided into Local Government Areas and a random sample of these LGAs was collected Abeokuta South and AdoOdo/Ota. In the second stage, a random sample of four schools were selected within each of the LGAs chosen in the first stage and five schools were randomly selected. Then, in the third stage, a random sample of 60 students and 25 staff were randomly selected from each school. In all, 325 participants were selected made up of 125 staff and 300 students.

INSTRUMENTS

One survey instrument was used in this study – Communication Effectiveness Rating Scale (CRES) developed by the researchers. Besides this, a personal information (PI) questionnaire was used. PI measured the demographic variables of the participants. Communication Effectiveness Rating Scale (CRES) contained two separate sub-scales – Communication Gadget Availability (CGA) sub-scale and Communication Usefulness (CU) sub-scale. There were 10 items in each sub-scale. CGA items asked for responses to statements such as "There is a well designed mode of communication in my school and "There is electricity power supply in my school." And 10 items of CU sub-scale asked for responses to statements such as "Communication is highly essential to smooth running of the school administration and "Frequent communication in the school prevents conflicts."

Participants indicated their agreement with these items on a 4-point scale. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded and measure was computed for each participant by adding items in each sub-scale together. To test the reliability of the instrument used, the items

generated Cronbach's alpha of .63, the generally accepted lower limit for Cronbach's alpha (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black, 1998). Two-week test-retest correlations Alpha reliability scores of .62 was found. The instrument has demonstrated high concurrent validity of .87 with other measures of communication effectiveness. The personal information questionnaire elicited the demographic characteristics. This part of the questionnaire i.e. Section A contained items: Gender, Age, Marital Status, Educational Qualification, Employment status. This questionnaire is close-ended and response to the items was by ticking (/)

DATA ANALYSIS

Hypothesis 1 There will be no significant difference in the perception of staff and students on the importance of communication in the school administration

Table 1: Summary of Mean, Standard deviation and t-test of participants' perception

| Sources | N | df | Mean | Standard Deviation | t-observed | p-value |
|----------|-----|-----|-------|--------------------|------------|---------|
| Staff | 125 | 423 | 36.46 | 0.51 | 18.54* | <.05 |
| Students | 300 | | 26.83 | 1.20 | | |

*Significant at <0.05 (two tailed test)

Table 1 revealed that the unpaired t-test result showed a significant difference between perceptions of staff and students, with staff having higher mean which implies that staff value communication in school administration than students. The first null hypothesis is, therefore, rejected with (df= 423, t-observed=18.54 and p<.05)

Hypothesis 2 There will be no significant difference in the perception of staff and students on the problems mitigating against effective use of modern communication gadgets in schools

Table 2: Summary of Mean, Standard deviation and t-test of staff and students on the problems mitigating against effective use of modern communication gadgets in schools

| Sources | N | df | Mean | Standard Deviation | t-observed | p-value |
|----------|-----|-----|-------|--------------------|------------|---------|
| Staff | 125 | 423 | 28.11 | 0.56 | 16.69* | <.05 |
| Students | 300 | | 34.13 | 0.36 | | |

*Significant at <0.05 two tailed test

Table 2 revealed that the unpaired t-test result showed a significant difference between perceptions of staff and students with students having higher mean which implies that students identified more problems mitigating against effective use of modern communication gadgets in schools than staff. The second null hypothesis is therefore rejected with (df=423, t-observed=16.69 and p<.05)

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that students do not value importance of communication in schools. The implication of this is that they have not seen the usefulness of communication because they are either neglected or ignored completely in the channel of communication in schools. If students take this kind of stand it means that their parents are equally neglected. Verbal communication with parents builds relationships and can be more effective than written communication. It allows, in theory at least, a greater opportunity for educators to listen to parents' views.

The fact that this did not take place in all schools included in this research is cause for concern. Parent meetings during which the school formally reports on the child's progress are held twice a year at one of the schools. A member of staff in one of the schools explains that parents are given the option of choosing a time most suitable for them for interaction which many parents may never explore because of their rather tight schedule. One of the principals emphasizes the value of these meetings: "A lot of things that come out of those meetings are not necessarily school related but they have a huge impact on the child's development and how they are coping at school."

Two tiers of communication are found in the schools. Firstly, parents communicate with educators; secondly, they communicate with the principal. The discussion with educators focuses on the child and problems concerning the child, whereas the communication with the principal focuses on the parents' problems as individuals, which may or may not be school related. Good school-home communication is critical to good school-home relationships.

Moreover, parents make inferences about the extent to which schools want parents to be involved by the ways in which they reach out to families and parents in the community (Scott Stein & Thorkildsen 1999). Catron and Allen (1993) and Kostelnik, Soderman and Whiren (1993) agree and argue that in Early Childhood programmes, close contact and regular communication between the home and the school improve the consistency with which parents and educators work towards the desired goal of promoting the child's development.

In addition, it promotes parent identification with the learning programme, which increases parents' satisfaction and children's success. This success should be available to all children irrespective of the racial group or socio economic grouping they belong to. Most schools lack electricity power supply and many teachers did not see this as a problem as findings on second hypothesis revealed. The communication process in many schools can be described as archaic. Often, this communication process lacks timeliness, clarity, completeness, appropriateness of level of detail. In addition, too many official modes of communication are used. Should the individual pay attention to email, verbal communications, memos, assemblies, meetings, etc.?

Also, there must be a better way to balance what truly is confidential with that which should (could) be shared. One dichotomy involves achieving the perception of openness to all voices and having the tight, invisible, highly effective chain of command necessary to run the complex operation that even the smallest school represents. Another dichotomy is the fact that the buck stops at the head's desk always. Yet, the other administrators need to have real responsibility and real decision-making capability. For many people in management,

communication in the traditional world means "to talk to someone." It is seen primarily as the transmission of information. It is top-down, and one-way. This is not communication. Communication involves listening as well as talking. And this means active listening, where the listener shuts up, sits quietly, focuses on the other person, reflects back to the other person what was said to them, and does this until the two (or more) people in the conversation have arrived at a mutual agreement that each understands the other.

They can agree to disagree. They cannot leave until each understands the other. This takes time. Administrators often do not have time (or feel like they don't). They have many competing demands for their attention. The ones I know also are very flustered when the control slips away from them. This doesn't deny that sometimes there are too many, contentious people in the room who are trying to argue a policy that cannot be changed and the Head must take charge. But, even then, a Head needs to explain that he understands the concern and explain why it is not an input issue. Faculty members want input.

More importantly, they want to know that their opinion and expertise are valued, heard, and understood. They want follow-up. They want leadership: forward-thinking that trusts them to be part of the process and understands that these are the people in the trenches who have the ability to see the details of what's happening and the ability to sound warnings in advance of the problems. When faculty members try to "fix things," and there is no acknowledgement, much less any solution, they shut up. What is the point? They become frustrated, then resentful. Then they grumble that there is no communication.

Finally, it is crucial that people in positions of school leadership take seriously their need to communicate. The challenges our schools face at the dawn of the 21st Century are formidable, and their resolution requires the constructive engagement of every stakeholder group. "Failures to communicate," whatever their origins, are an avoidable toxin affecting schools' capacities for change, advancement, and a thriving future.

CONCLUSION / RECOMMENDATIONS

Technology is fast changing the way administrators and schools pass on information. Stakeholders: such as administrators, teachers, students and parents must be current and keep learning how to use the modern communication tools.

Communication with the community is very important. Administrators should use technological tools to disseminate information about events such as school's achievements, projects, progress reports and so on. A community of learners should communicate at every level. This would encourage more volunteers, financial supporters and gain political encouragement.

The extent to which how well an administrator is able to integrate the information and communication technology (ICT) into the general functions and activities of the school would determine his level of success as an administrator.

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