PRINCIPALS PROVISION OF STUDENT SUPPORT PRACTICES: A PANACEA TOWARDS CURBING TEACHERS' ATTRITION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

[1]Anachuna, Obinna Nonso, PhD, [2]Okeke-James Ndidiamak Jacinta, PhD, [3]Ugwu ifeanyichukwu, [4]Innocent chiawa Igbokwe

[1&2]Department of Educational Management and Policy, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria.

[1]Email: [1]on.anachuna@unizik.edu.ng, [3]if.ugwu@unizik.edu.ng, [4]ic.igbokwe@unizik.edu.ng
[1]Phone: +2348063260029.

Abstract

The seemingly high rate of teachers' attrition in both public and private secondary schools in Nigeria gave rise to this study. This paper x-rayed how principals' application of students' support practices can curb the high rate of teachers' attrition in secondary schools in Nigeria. The study gave an insight into teachers' attrition in schools. The theoretical and schematic frameworks were presented and thereafter the main variables of the study were discussed. Conclusions were made and the paper recommended among others that principals of public and private secondary schools in Nigeria should apply students' support practices as a means for curbing the high rate of teachers' attrition in secondary schools in Nigeria.

Keywords: Teachers' Attrition, Students' Support Practices, Secondary Schools.

Introduction

Education is the instrument for human development. It is a process by which a person acquires necessary skills, abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour that will enable the individual to be useful to himself and contribute positively to the society in which he lives. Education is a highly needed social service in every country, especially a developing nation like Nigeria. The skills and potentials of individuals for self-reliance and actualization could be developed through education. Nigeria, just like other countries of the world acknowledges the fact that education is a vital instrument for national development and social change and as such has joined other countries of the world in the match towards worthwhile educational investments and reforms. Consequently, one of the goals of education according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), (2013) is the development of appropriate skills, mental, physical, and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society.

The purpose of any of the three levels of formal education (Basic, Secondary or Tertiary) in Nigeria is to effect changes in children's behaviour by exposing them to relevant experiences through systematic presentation of skills, attitudes, concepts and principles. Secondary school education is the concern of this study and is the form of education children receive after nine years of basic education and before the tertiary stage. Secondary education is concerned with the acquisition of fundamental principles and knowledge for the study of different disciplines at tertiary level of education (Ofojebe & Nnebedum, 2016). The importance of secondary education lies in its position both as the bridge between the basic and tertiary education and also as the agent for preparing individuals for useful living in the society (FRN, 2013). There are two categories of secondary schools in Nigeria; public and private secondary schools.

Public secondary schools are schools that are owned by the government and its agencies. Such schools are controlled and managed directly by public education authority, governing agencies or by a governing body (council, committees among others), most of whose members are appointed by public authority or are elected by public franchise (UNESCO, 2001). Private secondary schools, on the other hand, are schools owned, financed and managed by private individuals, missions, corporate organizations and non- governmental organizations (NGO's). Private secondary schools, according to Etuk (2005), were set up for the reason of providing better teaching and learning conditions than that obtained in the public secondary schools.

Irrespective of the ownership, secondary schools in Nigeria have common aims and objectives for which they are set to achieve as stated by FRN (2013, p.17-18) as follows:

a. Provide holders of the Basic Education Certificate and Junior Arabic and Islamic Studies Certificate with opportunity for education of a higher level, irrespective of gender, social status, religious or ethnic background;
b. Offer diversified curriculum to cater for the differences in talents, disposition, opportunities and future roles;
c. Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and commerce at sub-professional grades;
d. Provide entrepreneurial, technical and vocational job specific skills for self-reliance and for agricultural, industrial, commercial and economic development;
e. Develop and promote Nigerian Languages, art and culture in the context of world's cultural heritage;
f. Inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence;
g. Foster patriotism, national unity and security education with emphasis on the common ties in spite of our diversity; and
h. Raise morally upright and well-adjusted individuals who can think independently and rationally, respect the views and feelings of others and appreciate the dignity of labour.

The achievement of the above objectives has been the priority of secondary school education in Nigeria whether public or private. The secondary education level is managed by the principal who is responsible for utilizing the available school resources to enhance the attainment of stated goals of the school. The success or failure of a particular secondary school will be attributed to the principal. However, principals alone cannot work in isolation towards the achievement of the goals; they therefore should work together with their teachers. No educational level in Nigeria (Secondary education inclusive) could rise above the quality of its teachers (FRN. 2013). Therefore, to be able to achieve the goals and objectives of secondary education in Nigeria, the hiring and retention of qualified and experienced teachers are of utmost importance because they are the cornerstone upon which the excellence of education rests. Teachers play important roles in the achievement of stated educational objectives and in the task of nation building for sustainable development because they turn educational policies into practice in a normal classroom setting.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that the goals of secondary education in Nigeria cannot be achieved without the retention of adequately trained and motivated teaching staff. There is therefore the need to keep teachers satisfied with their jobs and careers so that they remain in the teaching profession. Teaching is a highly stressful career, and teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate (Hanushek, 2007; Ingersoll, & Smith, 2003). This is not a welcome development because as observed by Faremi (2017), the retention of highly qualified teachers is of great importance if the objectives of secondary education in Nigeria are to be achieved.

Teacher retention according to Masood (2011) is the act of keeping teachers on the job without being moved from one school to another and or leaving the teaching profession entirely for other professions. Retention is about how a particular school manages its workforce or more specifically its relationship with its workforce. Retention is conceptualized in terms of teachers staying and teachers leaving. The main purpose of retention is to prevent competent teachers from leaving the school organization as this could have adverse effects on productivity and service delivery. Retention is also an action of holding something in position or containing it, hence the researcher defined teachers' retention as a state or a condition of attracting and enabling teachers to work and remain with the school organization before retirement

Every school, whether public or private, strives to retain a pool of qualified, committed and talented teaching staff that can deliver quality education to its students and in turn produce students of high quality. When qualified teachers, for any reason, have intentions of leaving the school system or teaching field, it would portend a negative impact on students and the institution's overall performance as well. Thus, it is essential to retain highly qualified teachers in the school system on continuous basis for quality education delivery viz-a-viz the achievement of the objectives of secondary school education. It is important for schools through the employment process, to attract quality teachers, however, it is more important for principals to devise practices which will help to retain the talented teachers in the service of schools in order for teachers to benefit from the investment already made in them (Michael, 2008). Brown and Wynn (2009) emphasized that unless schools, specifically administrators (principals), begin to take a more proactive approach in supporting their new and veteran teachers, teachers are going to continue to leave the field and all schools and children will suffer. Therefore, retaining teachers in schools, most especially the new ones is an important and powerful force for the betterment of schools, students, and education as a whole (Gurule-Gonzales, 1995 & King, 2004).

Ladd (2009) maintained that the perspective of new teachers begin to form immediately they enter a new educational environment. This includes how they perceive those in authority and those who nurture and direct them through their initial experiences, as well as how they perceive the school culture. Specifically, principals are not just supervisors within the school, but are also the leaders looked up to by teachers to listen to them, assist them, and value them (Jiang & Chan, 2007; Ladd, 2009). The principal is the central leader who sets the tone and culture of the school, serves as a role model to the teacher, and shapes the professional image of the future for the teachers (Ladd, 2009). Principals' involvement with teachers, therefore, can be a significant factor in retaining teachers and in inspiring the passion that keeps beginning teachers from dropping out (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Although principals are not the ones paying teachers and may not have much influence over the reasons for entering teaching, but still principals are critical players on whether teachers decide to stay in the profession or not (ASCD, 2000; Lieberman & Miller, 1994). In line with this, Akudo and Oni, (2016) maintained that salaries are not the most important factor in teacher retention, but that teacher retention is a major function of the principal. This supports, Loeb and Page (2002) who revealed that teachers who begin to work transfers to other schools and to other professions often appear to be influenced only modestly by salaries and more by other factors such as working conditions, school leadership, teacher support, resources, facilities and safety. Archie (2005) maintained that when competent and qualified teachers leave schools for another profession, transfer to another school, it becomes an issue of quality in education opportunity.

Public and private school teacher attrition (teachers leaving the teaching profession) has become such a critical issue that has come to the attention of policymakers, educational planners and administrators (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). The ugly trend seems to be high in private secondary schools than in public secondary schools. The disparity could be in the type of students support practices adopted by principals in both categories of schools. When a teacher leaves a school, the school not only loses the teacher, it also loses the investments made in him, including workshops, in-service training, and teacher socialization activities (Dworkin, 1987). An effort towards retaining experienced and qualified teachers therefore is imperative if the objectives of secondary education are to be achieved. Retaining highly qualified teachers should be a top priority for school principals. Principals need to implement programme and have incentives to retain highly qualified teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Fullan (2003) reported that effective leaders have the ability to change organizational culture which in turn, can create an atmosphere of job

satisfaction that produces high retention rates. This tallied with Sparks (2002) who maintained that teachers are far more likely to remain in their positions when they feel supported by principals as well Hanushek and Luque (2000) who stated that secondary school principals need to engage some practices towards ensuring the retention of teachers, due to the fact that teachers might be persuaded to take lower salaries in exchange for better working conditions.

Some of these practices that the principal can engage in towards curbing teachers' attrition include; professional development, mentoring, collaborative culture, administrative support and students' support practices (Darling-Hammond, 2010 & Faremi, 2017). For the purpose of this study, the practices that will be considered towards curbing teachers' attrition in public and private secondary schools is students' support practices.

Students' support practices are those services put in place by principals to ensure effective students' personnel management which in turn will help teachers to control students most especially regarding classroom disruptive behaviours. Such practices include among others establishing clear school wide behavioural rules and regulations, having personal interactions and meetings with the students and involving the students in decision making process. Engaging in these practices to a very high extent will help the teachers to be in control of the students thereby reducing stress given to students by teachers which in turn will help to reduce high rate of teachers' attrition in public and private secondary schools in Nigeria.

Public and private secondary school principals in Nigeria seem not to be employing adequate students' support practices towards curbing high rate of teachers' attrition and this seems to make almost every teacher to be looking for a better opportunity to leave the teaching profession for other professions. Building a professional teacher corps is a process that only begins with recruiting highly qualified teachers. Once recruited, these teachers need to be backed up by the principals most especially in handling the students. Regrettably, the rate at which secondary school principals engage in these students support practices is not known. Teachers' consistently leaving the teaching profession or seeking transfer from one school to another are quite alarming and has become a global phenomenon. There are many reported cases of teachers either seeking transfer from one school to another or leaving the teaching profession entirely before their retirement age. Brain drain of qualified teachers has been recorded in many public and private secondary schools in Nigeria and hence raised a human resource capacity concern which has a

negative effect on the overall student academic achievement due to lack of continuity. It was in the light of these and other related problems that this study became imperative.

Hierarchy of Needs Theory

The hierarchy of needs theory was propounded in 1943 by Abraham Maslow. Maslow (1943) recognized that man is a complex and changing being, and that motivation must reflect man's nature. Maslow held that the source of motivation is certain needs which often influence man's behavior consciously. The theory supposed that human needs could be arranged in a hierarchy based on the priority with which each emerged as a determinant of behavior. The hierarchy ranges from the physiological needs, through safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and self- actualization needs at the highest level. The assumptions of the theory are that: human beings are motivated by a hierarchy of needs; needs are organized in a hierarchy of potency in which more basic needs must be more or less met (rather than all or none) prior to higher needs; the order of needs is not rigid but may be flexible based on external circumstances or individual differences and most behavior is multi-motivated, that is, simultaneously determined by more than one basic need. When the physiological needs are unsatisfied, no other need will serve as a basis for motivation but once a need has been satisfied, it is no longer a motivator and the higher need becomes the motivator.

In the school system, the salary a teacher earns enables him/her to satisfy physiological needs, but if they are unfulfilled then it could result to dissatisfaction, which affects productivity and quality performance in the work place. Safety needs include that for security, protection from physical or psychological harm, economic disaster and the unexpected. It also includes the desire for stability and absence from pain and illness. These needs are often met in educational institutions by granting teachers such programs as fringe benefits, promotion, retirement or pension schemes, insurance benefits, welfare benefits, free medical and health services, job security and safe- working conditions. The hierarchy theory of needs is shown in figure 1 below:

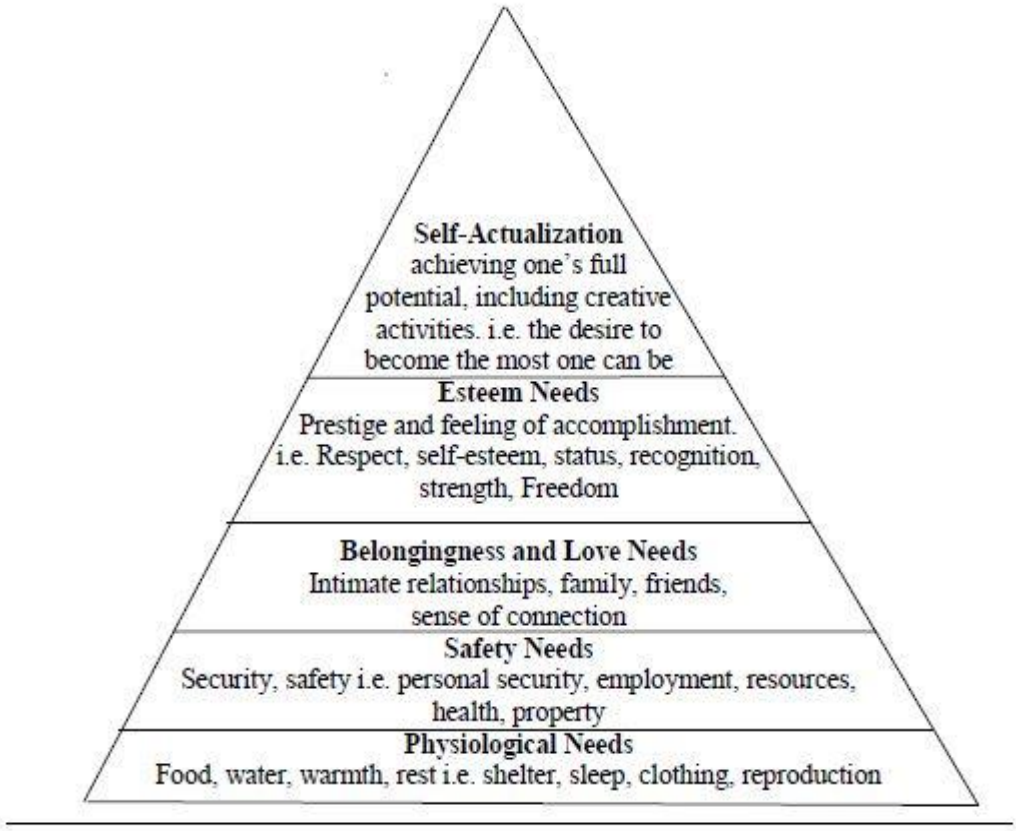

Fig 1: Maslow Hierarchy of Needs: Adopted from Maslow (1943). A theory of Human Motivation

This study is hinged on the hierarchy of needs theory because there is strong connection between job satisfaction and needs fulfillment that compel teachers to leave, stay or transfer from the teaching profession. Therefore this study on principals' students support practices towards curbing teachers' attrition in secondary schools will be hinged on this theory for instance by fostering positive and strong relationship with students teachers fulfill their needs to be loved, and accepted. Teachers develop the sense of belonging and care with others, and such strong social connections help them stay longer in the profession. However, teachers not only need to have social interactions, but they also seek respect from their students, fellow teachers and principals. They want to have a status that encourages them to continue in the profession. They need recognition

and rewards from the principals on their improved performance. Furthermore, when principals activates students support practices, it will help to satisfy the teachers' need for security because most times, teachers are being threatened by their students.

Schematic Framework

Below is the schematic framework linking the variables of the study:

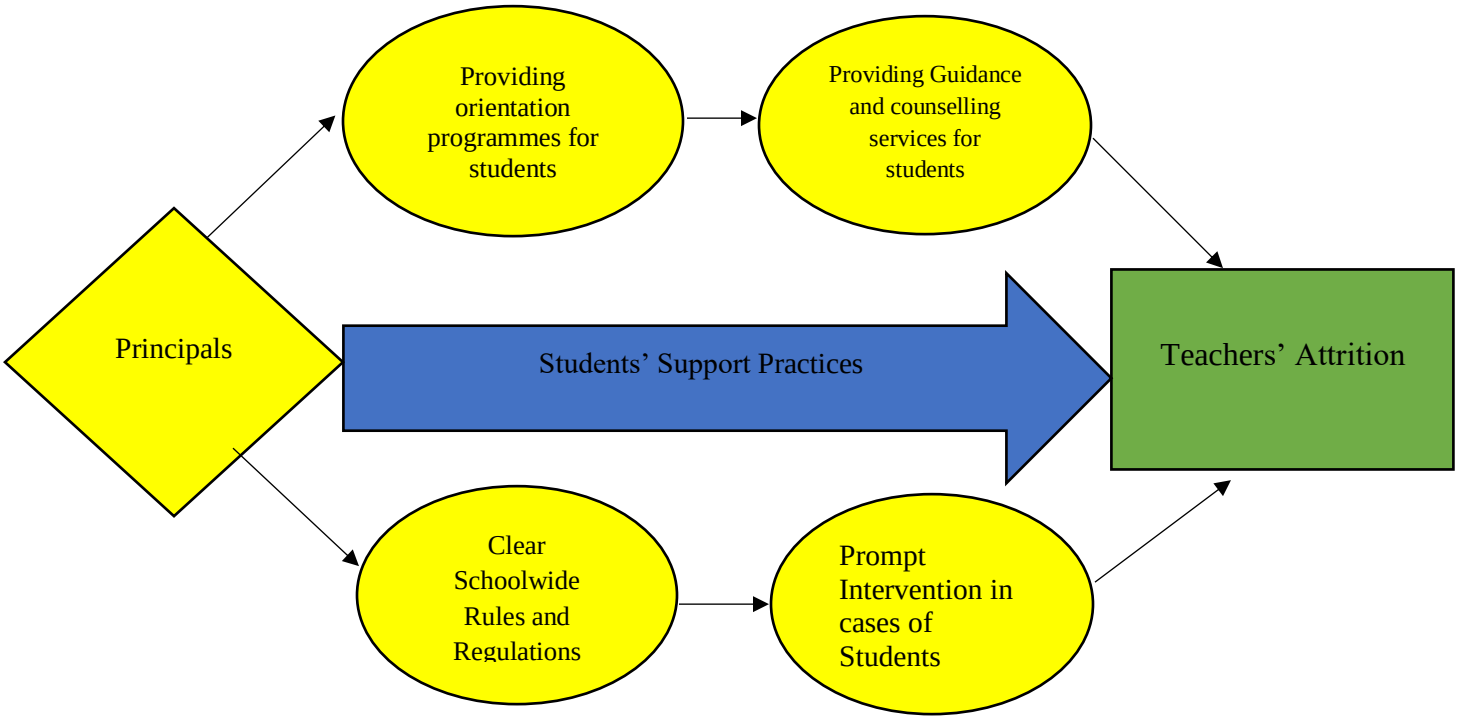

Figure 1: Schematic Framework linking Principals' Students Support Practices to Teachers' Attrition

The diagram above is a schematic presentation linking the students' support practices of principals and teachers' attrition in secondary schools. The activation of these students' support practices by the principals will to a very high extent curb teachers' attrition because some teaches leaves the school because of the principals' inability to provide them with such services. These variables will be discussed in details subsequently.

Student Support Practices Towards Teachers' Attrition in Secondary Schools

One of the reasons why teachers, most especially the newly recruited teachers leave the teaching profession before their retirement age is because of the inability of the principal engaging in students support practices that will make it easier for teachers to handle the students. According to many researches and personal observations, some of students' disruptive behaviour include: include; absenteeism, disobedience, fighting fellow students, students fighting teachers, noise making in the class, waylaying of teachers among others. It is the responsibility of Secondary school principals to help the teachers to control students' classroom misbehavior towards making sure that teachers do not leave as a result of students' hostile behaviour towards them. The principal should ensure that students are well behaved by providing some supportive services that will help the teachers to take in-charge of the students in and outside the classroom.

These students' support practices that the principals can provide towards curbing teachers' attrition include; training students to learn the techniques of self-control, monitoring and evaluating their behavior, training the students to monitor themselves, providing an orientation services for the students regarding school wide rules and regulations and classroom procedures, principals consistently responding to students' misbehaviours, developing clear behaviorial rules and regulations, having personal interaction with the students and involving the students in decision making process (Gottpetterson, 1988). Others include the provision of guidance and counseling services for the students, a process where students receive assistance from professionals who assist them to overcome emotional and social problems which may interfere with learning resulting in exhibiting misbehaviours in the classroom, provision of health services for the students which will is a process to address medically related health and safety issues. This will allow students to remain in the classroom well comported and increase opportunities for their academic success thereby not

giving the teachers much stress. This will make the teachers to remain in the teaching profession thereby reducing the attrition rate of teachers.

Cotton (1990) added reinforcement (verbal, symbolic, or tangible) as an effective support practice in improving the classroom conduct of misbehaving students. The principal can as well provide supports to students by teaching self-control skills modeling plus teaching self-instruction, self-monitoring, and self-reinforcement to improve the conduct of misbehaving students. Brophy (1986) maintained that contemporary behavior modification approaches involve students more actively in planning and shaping their own behavior through participation in the negotiation of contracts with their teachers and through exposure to training designed to help them to monitor and evaluate their behavior more actively, to learn techniques of self-control and problem solving, and to set goals and reinforce themselves for meeting these goals.

The students are coming from different background; cultural, religious, socio-economical among others and as a result differ in the ways they behave in the classroom in particular and the school at large. Principals therefore should help the students control their classroom behavior because no meaning learning will take place in a class full of disciplinary problems. Teachers like to feel that someone (principal) cares about their work, support and appreciates it which in turn motivates them to work more effectively and continue working without seeking for transfers to other institutions or leaving the teaching profession entirely These students' support practices once adequately provided can to a very high extent curb teachers' attrition in secondary schools in Nigeria.

Conclusion

An inference that is drawn from this study is that the application of students' support practices by the secondary school principals will go a long way in curbing high rate of teachers' attrition in both public and private secondary schools in Nigeria. This will automatically lead to the retention of highly qualified and experienced teachers which will ultimately lead to improved quality of secondary education in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The study made the following recommendations:

1. Principals of public and private secondary schools in Nigeria should apply students support practices in their various schools towards curbing teachers' attrition.
2. The government should organize workshops and seminars for principals where they will be trained on how to effectively apply students supports practices in their various schools.
3. The government should make funds available necessary to facilitate students support practices by the principals.

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