

ASCENSION, FUNCTIONS AND PERFORMANCE STANDARDS OF PRINCIPALS IN AN ERA OF COVID-19

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Abstract

The role of a principal is crucial to the survival of every school. As the chief administrator of the school, the principal is saddled with the responsibility of driving the school to the right direction. Sadly, the recent outbreak of corona virus (COVID-19) has further heightened the challenges a principal faces in management of the school. It is therefore necessary that a review be made on how principals are appointed in Nigerian schools as well as the way of ensuring that they discharge their duties properly in this era of COVID-19. It is on this note that this paper is geared towards ascertaining how principals are appointed, the functions of principals in this era of COVID-19 and the performance standards to be used as a yardstick in assessing the functionality of a principal.

Keywords: Principal, Functions, Performance Standards

Introduction

Education has been seen by many as the process of facilitating learning, knowledge, and a means through which skills are acquired. Fafunwa (1975) sees education as the aggregate of all the processes by which the child or young adults develop abilities, attributes and other forms of positive values to the society which they live.

However, according to Babalola (2007), it is the proper nurturing, transmission and application of such knowledge that guarantees the development and sustenance of every society from day to day.

Thus, for the aims and objectives of education to be effectively realized, there must be someone duly appointed to see to the day to day running of the school. This individual, will be entrusted with the responsibility of planning the activities of the school and ensuring that teaching and non-teaching staff work harmoniously work to achieve set goals. The individual entrusted with this task is referred to as the principal.

The Principal

The principal is the chief administrator of the school. His basic role is to provide leadership, direction and co-ordination within the school. The principal's main focus should be to develop and maintain effective educational programs within his/her school. The role of the principal becomes more important in this time of corona outbreak. There is need for the principal to be proactive and acquainted with the various means of transmitting lessons so as to maintain social distancing.

Typically, each secondary school has a single administrative officer, a principal, who is responsible for the operation of the school. In very small secondary schools, the principal may teach on part-time as well. In large schools however, there may be one or more assistant principals. Although his functions vary by location and size, the principal is primarily responsible for administering all aspects of a school's operations. Abraham (2003) stated that the school is a complex organization that has goals it has set out to achieve, and that the products of the school last longer than the products of any other manufacturing industry. Hence, the principal must possess good leadership traits capable of driving the organization to its destination. According to Maduagwu & Nwogu (2206), the products of the school are fluid and as such move into various parts of the society. It therefore means that the success and stability of the society is largely hinged on the output of the school. In essence, as the chief administrator of the school, the principal must carefully plan instructional activities in such a way that the needs of the society would be met. In view of this, only competent persons should be appointed as principals. Appointment of a principal should not be based on the years of service the individual have put in, but should be based on the criteria duly spelt out for appointment to such positions.

Ascension as Principal

Shifts in school formation and educational administration also changes roles of school principals. Akbasli & Balikci (2013) stated that School principals have to train and improve themselves in order to fulfill the expectations of students, teachers, and parents and to improve school productivity particularly in this era of COVID-19. In developed countries, principal candidates are trained not to acquire traditional management skills but to acquire leadership skills. Akin (2012) opined that School principals have responsibility in improving school quality, and as such they should be adequately trained. With gradually increasing expectations, principals should not only be well trained but also their selection and

appointment criteria are required to be based on professional knowledge and skills necessary for success in the administrative processes. The following criteria should be considered when considering an individual for the position of a principal. Although, the list is not exhaustive, it can serve as guide;

1. **Master of Educational Administration:** For one to ascend to the position of a principal, it should be made compulsory for people vying for the position to have a master's degree in the field of Educational Administration. Since the role of a principal is very tasking, it's necessary for them to have good knowledge of leadership theories, and principles of management.
2. **Bachelor's Degree:** Since the principal is the chief administrator of the school, he should possess a university degree. This knowledge will increase his/her knowledge bank and make him more versatile. A principal should be able to comprehend simple concepts and proffer solutions to basic problems.
3. **Teaching Experience:** The responsibilities of a principal are very tasking. It requires one to have a measure of experience in order to efficiently manage a school system. Since the job of a principal involves managing both the human and material resources, it is necessary that a principal be well grounded in the resources he will be dealing with. On this note, for one to ascend to the position of a principal, he should have reasonable years of experience in the teaching profession.
4. **Managerial Experience:** As mentioned above, the responsibilities of a principal is tasking. In view of this, it is necessary that an individual vying for the office of the principal be trained in other managerial levels before being appointed to the position of the principal. This will enable him to be adequately prepared to undertake a higher responsibility.
5. **Discipline and Sanctions:** sanction and other disciplinary measures are used to maintain law and order in an organization. These sanctions could range from suspension, demotion, salary deductions to outright sack. An individual under any form of sanction should not be appointed to the position of the principal.
6. **Trainings:** The field of education is a very dynamic one. There are new innovations every day. A principal should have a strong quest for knowledge. His quest for knowledge should drive him to avail himself for in-service trainings, as well as move him to attend conferences/workshops that would enhance his chances of being appointed to the position of a principal.

Functions of the Principal

As the chief administrator of the school, the principal performs many functions. The Principal is part of the **Administrative Team** whose function is to support and assist the school in meeting the overall objectives of the school system. The role of the Principal is to provide leadership, direction and co-ordination within the school.

The Principal's main focus should be to develop and maintain effectively educational programs within his/her school and to promote the improvement of teaching and learning within his/her school.

The functions of the principal are inexhaustible, but for the purpose of this work, we will concentrate on a few of the functions a principal performs to ensure school goals are attained. They include the following;

1. **Planning:** Generally, Parker (2011) opined that planning defines where the school wants to be in the future and how to get there. Plans and the goals on which they are based give purpose and direction to the school, its subunits, and contributing staff. For example, in order to control disciplinary problems, the principal states rules and

regulations of the school and the class teacher does same in his/her class. Also, suppose the principal in a large urban secondary school decides to increase the number of students operating computer at junior secondary I by 20 percent by the year 2023, the goal and the methods needed to attain computer literacy would then serve as the planning framework for the school, Gardiner (2011). Planning is important because it provides students and staff with a sense of purpose and direction, outlines the kinds of tasks they will be performing, and explains how their behavior activities are related to the overall goal of the school, Oosterlynck (2011).

2. **Organizing:** Once principals have developed workable plans and the methods for attaining them, they design an organization that will successfully implement the plans. Such plans would include plans on how to maintain social distancing during classroom instructions. Argyris, (2011) Opined that organizing involves three essential elements, i.e developing the structure of the organization, acquiring and developing the right staff, and establishing common patterns and networks. The principal establishes policies and procedures for authority relationships, reporting patterns, the chain of command, departmentalization, and various administrative and subordinate responsibilities. The principal at times may set up different committees to care for various activities. When necessary, the principal establishes programs for training new personnel in the skills necessary to carry out their task. The principal equally builds formal communication and information networks, including the types of information to be communicated, direction of communication flows, and reductions in barriers to effective communication.
 3. **Leading:** Once plans to be achieved are formulated and patterns of behavior are organized, the next step is leading students and staff members to achieve the school's goals. Although planning tells principals what to do and organizing tells principals how to do it, leading tells principals why the student and staff member should want to do it. Recently, the leading function is also called facilitating, collaborating, or actuating. No matter what it is called, leading entails guiding and influencing students (people) to behave in an acceptable manner Northouse, (2010). The principal's role can be defined as getting things done by working with all school stakeholders. The principal and other stakeholders must, therefore, influence the behavior of students in a positive direction. To influence students' behavior to be a disciplined person, the principal must act as role model. He needs to understand something about leadership, motivation, communication, and group dynamics. Leading means communicating goals to students and staff members. It also has to do with imparting students with the desire to perform at a high level. Schools are composed largely of groups. Leading the groups involves motivating entire departments or teams as well as individuals toward the attainment of goals.
 4. **Monitoring:** When principals compare expected results with actual results, and take the necessary corrective action, they are performing the monitoring function. Monitoring completes the cycle of leadership functions. Monitoring is the responsibility of every principal. It may simply consist of walking around the building to see how things are going, talking to students, visiting classrooms, talking to heads of departments, or it may involve designing coordinated information systems to check on the quality of behavior and performance. As Blankstein, Houston & Cole, (2010) puts it, monitoring must be done if the principal is to be successful (Monitoring also means an art of giving reward for good behavior and providing correction for disciplinary problems using various techniques.
- For principals to perform their functions effectively and efficiently, they require specific skills. Katz (1974) mentioned three necessary skills for planning, organizing,

leading, and monitoring which principals require to perform their functions adequately. They are conceptual, human, and technical skills.

Effective school leaders have the ability to view the organization as a whole and solve problems to the benefit of everyone concerned. This is a conceptual skill. Allie (2001) maintains that conceptual skill draws on one's mental abilities to acquire, analyze, and interpret information received from various sources of information and to make complex decisions in order to achieve the school's goals. In essence, conceptual skill concerns the ability to see how the different parts of the school fit together and depend on each other, and how a change in any given part can cause a change in another part. This skill support principals to monitor behavior of students and staff. It also helps them to react appropriately and reflectively to situations as they arise. In applying this skill, principals must consider environmental forces such as culture, resource flows, staff and administrative concerns, ministry of education policies, reform mandates, expectations from parents and changes in school organization. These are significant inputs into the internal environment of the school.

In terms of human relation skills, principals spend considerable time interacting with people. These times are on scheduled and unscheduled meetings, telephone calls, classroom tours, and other face-to-face contacts. All these activities involve other people. For obvious reasons, the principal needs human skills such as the ability to motivate, facilitate, coordinate, lead, communicate, manage conflict, and get along with others. More so, the ability to use knowledge, methods, and techniques of a specific discipline or field is referred to as a technical skill (Locke, 2010). The principal, heads of departments, bursars and other heads in secondary schools are examples of people with technical skills. They are recognized as experts in their disciplines and are presumed to have the ability to supervise others. To successfully run an academic department, the chairperson must know how to teach the subject, how to organize the group, how to acquire resources, how to evaluate performance, and the like. The principal superintends on all team leaders and heads of the secondary school.

5. Leadership and Climate: The principal continually endeavours to improve the operating effectiveness of the school for which he is responsible. He should be informed of current practices and techniques relating to school programs, teaching and administration by attending meetings and professional development conferences, and reading professional materials. He devotes as much time as possible to the supervision of the school; observing methods of instruction and endeavouring to improve the efficiency of the staff and the school in general. He Suggests appropriate changes in and ensure adherence to approved policies, practices and procedures within his area of responsibility.

6. Programming: The principal co-ordinates and fosters the development of programs within the school to best meet the needs and interests of the students. This includes the establishment, supervision, and evaluation of special education programs where a child needs one. Assist the teaching staff in the development, implementation, modifications, and selection of curriculum materials. He also develops and supports a high degree of student morale through curricular and extracurricular activities and services and co-ordinate the participation of all members of the teaching staff in the extracurricular program.

7. Professional Development: As the administrator of the school, the principal promotes the professional and academic growth of his staff through staff meetings, in-service training and personal contact. He plays an active role in the selection, planning, and implementation of professional development activities for the staff in cooperation with the ministry of education.

8. Staff Supervision and Evaluation: As the key administrator, the Principal is responsible for the daily supervision of the school, its students, facilitators, professional and support staff, volunteers, and personnel from outside agencies. He ensures that every teacher shall be on duty at the right time and evaluates the effectiveness of each member of the staff in accordance with the established plans and shall forward written reports to the ministry. He is responsible for the development and conduct of an orientation program for all new staff.

9. Student Evaluation and Reporting: The principal familiarizes himself with the progress of each child and equally co-ordinates and directs the evaluation of student progress and achievement and the provision of regular reports to parents as required by the ministry of education.

10. Communication and Public Relations: The principal maintains communications with parents or guardians regarding the total school program, student achievement, placement and behavior, and equally informs parents of the school activities through newsletters, parent/teacher conferences, etc.

11. Budgeting and Buying: The principal is responsible for the administration of the instructional supplies budget for school and the safe keeping of money or materials that belong to the school. He establishes procedures for the purpose and receipt of materials and supplies necessary to support the instructional program. Ensures that there is a system of accounting for money from student activities, student fees, gifts or other funds belonging to school or to any student group within the school.

12. Health, Safety, Plant Supervision: The principal develops and fosters a sense of pride and respect for school property so that the facility is an attractive place. He equally ensures that all reasonable precautions are taken to safeguard the health and general well-being of staff and students of his school especially during this era of corona virus. To this end he shall see that students and staff are adequately trained to make effective any plans necessary for their safety. He establishes procedures whereby the access of visitors to the school can be monitored and controlled. This would include access by salespersons, guest speakers and former students, inspects the school grounds and school buildings to see that they are free from hazards which might cause accidents and he shall notify the proper authorities of any conditions which need to be remedied. In the event of where damage is serious and appears to have been deliberate, it shall be reported to the police department in addition to the ministry of education. He conducts fire drills as required by regulations and sees that all personnel within the school are familiar with all procedures to be followed in case of a fire outbreak. Fire exit signs shall be placed in each room. He assumes responsibility for the general cleanliness and maintenance of his school.

Principals Performance Standards

A performance standard is a management approved expression of the performance threshold(s), requirements, or expectations that must be met to be appraised at a particular level of performance. They describe the accepted level of performance by an employee on the job. They are based on the position, not the individual. They describe the specific indicators of success for each skill within a competency map. They illustrate what a good job looks like.

Clearly defined professional responsibilities for principals constitute the foundation for the Principal Professional Growth and Effectiveness System. Performance standards define the criteria expected when principals perform their major duties. For all principals, there are six basic performance standards that guide the performance of the principal. These performance standards are contained in the document released by the University of Washington (2017). Below is a list of these standards;

Performance standard 1

S/N	PERFORMANCE STANDARD	EXPECTATION
1.	MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES	The principal fosters effective human resources management by assisting with selection, induction, supporting, evaluating, and retaining quality instructional and support personnel

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN MANAGEMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCE

INEFFECTIVE	DEVELOPING	ACCOMPLISHED	EXAMPLARY
The principal inadequately assists with selection, induction, supports, evaluates, and retains quality instructional and support personnel.	The principal inconsistently assists with selection, induction, supports, evaluates, and retains quality instructional and support personnel.	The principal fosters effective human resources management by assisting with selection, induction, supporting, evaluating, and retaining quality instructional and support personnel.	The principal consistently demonstrates expertise in human resources management, which results in a highly-effective workforce (e.g. high teacher and staff efficacy, increased student learning, teacher leaders).

Performance standard 2

S/N	PERFORMANCE STANDARD	EXPECTATION
2.	ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT	The principal fosters the success of all students by supporting, managing, and overseeing the school's organization, operation, and use of resources

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT

INEFFECTIVE	DEVELOPING	ACCOMPLISHED	EXAMPLARY
The principal inadequately supports, manages, or oversees the school's organization, operation, or use of resources.	The principal inconsistently supports, manages, or oversees the school's organization, operation, or use of resources.	The principal fosters the success of all students by supporting, managing, and overseeing the school's organization, operation, and use of resources.	The principal excels at organizational management, demonstrating proactive decision-making, coordinating efficient operations, and maximizing available resources.

Performance standard 3

S/N	PERFORMANCE STANDARD	EXPECTATION
3	INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP	The principal fosters the success of all students by facilitating the development, communication, implementation, and evaluation of a shared vision of teaching and learning that leads to student academic growth and school improvement

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

INEFFECTIVE	DEVELOPING	ACCOMPLISHED	EXAMPLARY
The principal rarely fosters the success of all students by facilitating the development, communication, implementation, or evaluation of a shared vision of teaching and learning that leads to student academic growth and school improvement.	The principal inconsistently fosters the success of all students by facilitating the development, communication, implementation, or evaluation of a shared vision of teaching and learning that leads to student academic growth and school improvement.	The principal fosters the success of all students by facilitating the development, communication, implementation, and evaluation of a shared vision of teaching and learning that leads to student academic growth and school improvement	The principal actively and consistently employs innovative and effective leadership strategies that maximize student academic growth and result in a shared vision of teaching and learning that reflects excellence.

Performance standard 4

S/N	PERFORMANCE STANDARD	EXPECTATION
4	SCHOOL CLIMATE	The principal fosters the success of all students by developing, advocating, and sustaining an academically friendly, positive, and safe school climate for all stakeholders.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN SCHOOL CLIMATE

INEFFECTIVE	DEVELOPING	ACCOMPLISHED	EXAMPLARY
The principal rarely promotes the success of all students by developing, advocating, or sustaining an academically friendly, positive, or safe school climate for all stakeholders.	The principal inconsistently promotes the success of all students by developing, advocating, or sustaining an academically friendly, positive, or safe school climate for all stakeholders.	The principal fosters the success of all students by developing, advocating, and sustaining an academically friendly, positive, and safe school climate for all stakeholders.	The principal seeks out new opportunities or substantially improves existing programs to create an environment where students and stakeholders thrive and the rigor of academic expectations has significantly increased as evident through results.

Performance standard 5

S/N	PERFORMANCE STANDARD	EXPECTATION
5.	COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION	The principal fosters the success of all students by communicating and collaborating effectively with stakeholders.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION

INEFFECTIVE	DEVELOPING	ACCOMPLISHED	EXAMPLARY
The principal demonstrates inadequate and/or detrimental communication or collaboration with stakeholders.	The principal inconsistently communicates and/or infrequently collaborates with stakeholders.	The principal fosters the success of all students by communicating and collaborating effectively with stakeholders.	The principal seeks and effectively engages stakeholders in order to promote the success of all students through productive and frequent communication.

PERFORMANCE STANDARD 6

S/N	PERFORMANCE STANDARD	EXPECTATION
6.	PROFESSIONALISM	The principal fosters the success of all students by demonstrating professional standards and ethics, engaging in continuous professional learning, and contributing to the profession.

CRITERIA FOR ASSESSING THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN PROFESSIONALISM

INEFFECTIVE	DEVELOPING	ACCOMPLISHED	EXAMPLARY
The principal shows disregard for professional standards and ethics, engaging in continuous professional learning, or contributing to the profession.	The principal is inconsistent in demonstrating professional standards, engaging in continuous professional learning, or in contributing to the profession.	The principal fosters the success of students by demonstrating professional standards and ethics, engaging in continuous professional learning, and contributing to the profession.	The principal demonstrates professionalism beyond the school district through published works, formal presentation(s), involvement in state and national committees and/or leadership opportunities and/or formal recognition(s) or award(s).

THE WAY FORWARD

Although the Federal and state Ministry of Education has specific conditions that must be met before one can be appointed as a principal, as well as ways of monitoring the performance of school principals, there is need to grant assiduity to the following suggestions:

1. A principal should possess a master's degree in the field of educational administration.
2. He should have held a management position for some time.
3. He should have been trained on safety
4. He should have worked as a teacher for some reasonable number of years.
5. He must not be under any form of discipline before his appointment as a principal.
6. He must possess good leadership skills
7. He should be a good resource manager

Conclusion

As the chief administrator of the school, the principle is saddled with the role of leading, directing and coordination of the school. His role becomes more essential particularly in this era of corona pandemic. He should ensure adequate safety precautions are adhered to in the school, and ensure compliance of COVID-19 guidelines. In view of this only competent persons should be appointed to the position of a principal. The performance standards outlined above should be equally used to assess the performance of a principal.

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