



Communication and Staff Performance in Secondary Schools in Benue State, Nigeria

Dr YAWE, A.A. & *BUA, F.T

**Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education,
Benue State University, PMB102 119, Makurdi, KM1 Mkd-Gbk Road, Benue State, Nigeria.
08036356481.**

**E-mail of corresponding author: felixbua@yahoo.com*

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the impact of communication on staff performance in secondary schools in Benue State, Nigeria. In all, two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The literature review which was done, under various subheadings, namely, the conceptual framework, identified formal and Informal communication variables as tools for effective staff performance. The survey design was adopted for the study. The study population was 5,650 teachers in 245 grant aided schools out of which four hundred (400) teachers from 30 grant aided secondary schools constituted the sample of the study. A structured 10-item four point scale questionnaire titled Communication and Staff performance questionnaire (CSPQ) was constructed by the researchers and used to collect data for the study. Data obtained for the study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Means and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions while the chi-square (χ^2) test of goodness of fit was used to test the hypotheses. The null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study were as follows: that formal and Informal communication significantly affects staff performance in secondary schools in Benue state. It was recommended that Formal communication is fundamental to any successful administration therefore; communication techniques and guides should be established to educate and guide employees on the proper and appropriate channels to use in the formal communication process. Finally that the school administration should adopt and encourage cordial interpersonal relationship between staff especially in the informal way for a harmonious work performance.

Keywords: Formal and Informal Communication, Staff Performance, Information.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the central focus in all organizations which are set to achieve specific objectives. Indeed, organizations cannot function without communication. It is an important tool in co-coordinating organizational activities which if effectively used could lead to wonderful results. The importance of communication to the success of any organization can be illustrated with the help of the Biblical account of the building of Babel (tower) in Genesis chapter 11 verses 7-8. The effort was easily coordinated because the whole lot of people could communicate with one another. One understood what another said without difficulty. Work therefore, progressed unabated. However, when God saw the effort as rebellious, he scattered them by disrupting communication among them. God set in barriers in such a way that communication broke down. What one said was no longer understood by another. This brought confusion and the subsequent break down of the whole organization effort. What was that 'element' that God removed from among the people in order to ensure this natural break-down? That was nothing but communication. This equally applies that, if an organization has no effective communication, it would breakdown naturally.

Communication may be looked upon as the means by which behavior is modified, change is effected, information is made productive and goals are achieved. The transfer of information from one individual to another is absolutely essential, whether we are considering a church, a family, a business enterprise or a school, etc. Communication is therefore a necessary evil in the life of any school or organization because without it, co-ordination within an organization will be impossible. Communication is highly essential in

administrative functions such as planning, organizing, decision-making, allocating resources, evaluation and leadership.

Statement of the Problem

Communication is the most important area of management yet the most neglected as evidenced by observations made by several stakeholders in education industry. Bua (2014) said the success or failure of the teaching and learning process depends largely on the way and manner in which the communication process is initiated, developed and maintained in educational institutions. Today, the situation in secondary schools seem worst because it is speculated that educational personnel administrators pay very little attention to effective communication in the formal and informal channels. In many schools there are problems of lack of planning to communicate; unclarified assumption, semantic distortions, badly expressed messages, loss by transmission, poor retention and poor listening and premature evaluation.

It is evidenced that without good communication it is doubtful whether meaningful teaching and learning can take place. Teachers are most times discouraged by the nature of school communication process. The researchers observed that communication in the school has been neglected and this more than any other thing, may have created negative impact on staff performance and on teaching and learning in secondary schools in Benue State. It is against this background that the researchers feel there is the need to investigate into the impact of formal and informal communication on staff performance in Benue State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to find out the impact of communication on staff performance in secondary schools in Benue State. Specifically, the study will address the following objectives;

- i. To examine the impact of formal communication on staff performance in secondary schools
- iii. Determine the impact of informal communication on staff performance in secondary schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

- i. What is the impact of formal communication on staff performance in secondary schools?
- ii. How does informal communication impact on staff performance in secondary schools?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance;

- i. Formal communication does not significantly impact on staff performance in secondary schools.
- iii. Informal communication does not significantly impact on staff performance in secondary schools.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Communication

There is general agreement about the necessity of effective communication, yet there is less agreement on an exact definition, various writers have defined it in different ways. The word communication comes from the Latin word 'communis', meaning "common" (Peretomode, 1991). Thus to communicate something means to make it common or to share it. Every improvement in communication has therefore been an answer to some definite social needs and has in turn brought about social change, either by drawing men closer together or by enabling them to do their work more efficiently.

Ayatse (1998) looks at communication as "the process through which two or more persons exchange ideas among themselves". He emphasizes that communication is not complete until the response to it has been observed. Opubor (1985) defines it briefly as "the sharing of information". This is vital for the effective and efficient running of the school since it enhances membership participation.

Olusola and Egbe (1985), define communication as "a process of transmitting or receiving information". They say further that communication could be one-way or two-way. One -way in the sense that there is transmission of information from one person to another who only listens without responding to the transmitted message; and two-way if it involves the transmission from one person to another who not only listens, but also responds to the message transmitted. They caution that the one-way type could breed autocracy, organizational stress, nomethism and lack of productivity whereas; the two-way type is healthy and capable of achieving democratization, mutual confidence and harmony among the participants. The former

could therefore be a bottleneck in school management while the latter promotes the efficient and effective management of the school system.

Jones and George (2009), consider communication as the sharing of information between two or more individuals or groups to reach a common understanding. Emerly (1968) looks at communication as “the art of transmitting information, ideas and attitudes from one person to another by a variety of means such as spoken or written word or gestures”. Akpakwu (2012) looks at communication as “a dynamic process by which someone, who has a purpose to accomplish, tries to get someone else to do something for accomplishment of that purpose”. He further explains that communication is a purposeful act and as such, its success or failure is to be judged in relation to the purpose itself. When we attempt to convey our thoughts, ideas, intentions, opinions, desires and so on, to another person, we use such a wide variety of means such as spoken word, printed word, graphs and pictorial representations, facial expressions, bodily movements, gestures, actions, and so on. The purposeful use of all these means is imperative in any organization like the school, because people act on the basis of communication received.

To Amatokwu (2000), a proper conception of the term ‘communication’ means “a set of known and determined preferred ways of making something to occur such that a desired effect will result”. Any action that achieves a desired result is communication. Inyang-Abia (1998) considers communication as “the process of affecting the behavior of a target audience (an individual, a group or the masses) through interaction and information exchange”. As a process, it involves generating, interpreting, transmitting and evaluating the effects of encoded messages which are directed towards a specific audience. Sharing information, experiences, feelings, emotions and so on, to effect a change or action is part of communication.

Moemeka (1999), is of the view that whatever connotation is attached to the word ‘communication’ or whichever words are used to describe it boil down to the following central things: exchange of information, experiences, ideas, emotions and feelings; it occurs only when the message transmitted is commonly understood by the participants engaged in it and a feedback is sent.

All these definitions draw our attention to four essential issues: that communication involves people; that understanding what is communicated therefore involves the understanding of how people relate to each other; that communication involves shared meaning, that is people must give the same meaning to the words they use; and that communication is symbolic (i.e. it involves gestures, sounds, letters, numbers, and words which can only represent or approximate the ideas they are meant to communicate.

Concept of Staff Performance

Staff performance entails the task or responsibilities that are effectively carried out by teachers or workers in a school for the realization of set goals and objectives. According to Sofoluwe (2000), staff performance is a measure of how effectively teaching and non-teaching staff, managerial and non-workers carry out their duties or responsibilities in order to accomplish specific and desirable results. Staff performance also takes into cognizance both the quality and quantity of the results or human output or efforts achieved. For staff to be performing, it implies that it is not just the number of graduates of the system that matters but how relevant and competent the graduates are in meeting the societal needs and aspirations (Fadipe 2000).

The Role of Communication in School Management

Before management could take place there must be an organization. Organization cannot exist without people. An organization of people without communication is a moribund absurdity, totally devoid of any meaningful managerial activity. Communication is the “nervous system” of any organized group like a school, providing the information and understanding necessary for effective school organizational behavior (Amatokwu, 2000). Communication serves as a transporter of information needed for results achievement. It can make an organization or school miss its road to results-achievement. It is also capable of bringing about organizational paralysis and managerial collapse. Communication delicacy is behind all managerial success while communication failure is behind most human and organizational catastrophes.

Chester in Asemah (2010) viewed communication as the means by which people are linked together in an organization to achieve a common purpose. Indeed, group activity is impossible without communication because co-ordination and change cannot be effected. Communication is essential for the internal functioning of school organization because it integrates the managerial functions. Specifically, communication is needed;

a. To establish and disseminate goals of the school organization;

- b. To develop plans for their achievement;
- c. To organize human and other resources in the most effective and efficient way;
- d. To lead, direct, motivate, and create an environment in which people want to contribute;
- e. To select, develop, and appraise members of the school organization;
- f. To control performance;
- g. Relates the school organization to its external environment.

Formal Communication and Staff Performance in Secondary Schools

According to American Library Association (2003), communication that takes place in most organizations could be classified into two categories, namely - formal and informal communication. This type of communication takes place through the formal channels of the organizational hierarchy. In many organizations, formal communication follows the line of authority through the various levels. There is also what is called procedural communication which goes hand in hand with all formal communications. It simply implies communication that follows prescribed procedures set down by precedent. In this type of communication three categories exist i.e downward, upward and horizontal (across-wise or diagonal).

Downward communication refers to the type that starts from the top to the bottom levels of the school organization. This type of communication is usually in written form and takes place in a routine manner, is implemented by regular staff releases, memoranda, personal direction, telephones and any other system at the disposal of the management.

Traditionally, downward communication was emphasized but there is ample evidence that if this is the only direction of communication, problems will develop. Drucker in Jones and George (2009) is even more emphatic when he states that downward communication does not work because it ignores the receiver of the communication. For instance principal to clerk.

Upward communication refers to the flow of communication from the subordinates to the superiors at the top. Most organizations in this country are likely to overlook the great importance of allowing information to pass from the lower to the higher levels of the organizations. As a result, the organization may not provide adequate means for persons in different organizational units to communicate with each other on this level. In addition, subordinates may hesitate to even bring matters to the attention of their superiors particularly if the news is not good. Furthermore, some subordinates may not be articulate enough to express their thoughts. In spite of these, there is much to be gained if upward communication is encouraged in our organization. Akpakwu (2012) said this type of communication provides a "Feedback" of the effectiveness of downward communication. Through it, management could see how well, its plans, policies and objectives are understood by those at the lower levels. Management could also be brought closer to the attitudes and problems of lower-level personnel that are at the operational level which 'too often they are oblivious of. Furthermore, upward communication could increase morale by giving employee an opportunity to participate in organizational matters or rather in decision-making. This participation often yields a harvest of good ideas from the operative level.

According to Bua (2014:11) among the various means by which this upward communication could be established are the followings:

1. Open-door-policy: The practice of always being ready to talk to subordinates.
2. Committees: If committees are properly composed and used, could yield excellent results.
3. Interviews: Interviews are used in counsellings, developing, rating, beginning and terminating employment. Grievance Systems: A means by which employee's complaints can be resolved by appealing to superiors.
4. Suggestion system.
5. Staff Service: This helps to maintain a two-way communication as both superior and subordinate staff are able to report their findings to the appropriate quarter.
6. Internal Audits and Surveys: This is to determine whether major functions of the organization are meeting its objectives.
7. Horizontal Communication: This is communication between people on the same or similar organizational levels, always diagonally, involving persons from different levels who are not in direct reporting relationships with each other.

Informal Communication and Staff Performance in Secondary Schools

This type of communication according to Bua (2014) does not follow channels of authority as done in a formal communication. Instead, it is channeled through the social contacts among the people in the school, company or group. It is known as the 'grape vine'. The grape vine is surprisingly fast in its distribution of information but it is distressingly inaccurate in keeping the original fact straight. Management must appreciate that this form of communication is very powerful. Management must also recognize that informal communication contributes in same way to the effectiveness of reaching organization's goals and as such cannot be eradicated as Keith Davis in Sev (2012) advised: "Managers may try to cultivate the grape vine themselves; they may as well know that grape vine cannot be abolished rubbed out, hidden under a basket, chopped down, 'tied or stopped'" one way of keeping facts straight therefore is to make sure that the grape vine gets accurate information in the first place. This could be done by keeping informal leaders aware of organizational matters, and by avoiding a policy of secrecy on anything not absolutely necessary. Care must however, be taken in the use of informal channel for it can damage the morale of employees, since all or most information it paddles is based on hear-say.

Communication is either written or oral, and non-verbal, (gestures, facial, expressions). However, in selecting the media, the communicator, the audience, and the situation must be considered. An executive who feels uncomfortable in front of a large audience may choose written communication rather than a speech; on the other hand, certain audiences who may not read a memo may be reached and become motivated by direct oral communication. Situations also may determine a specific medium to use. For communication to be effective, it must be precise, accurate, less ambiguous, short, appropriate and straight to the point.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used for the study was the survey design. The population of the study was made up of 5,650 teachers from the existing 245 secondary schools in Benue State. The simple random sampling method was used to select the sample of 30 secondary schools representing 12% of the schools and 400 teachers representing 8% of the total number of teachers for the study. The instrument adopted for the collection of data was a structured questionnaire. The questions were framed on fixed responses based on a four point rating scale with the following weights as assigned below: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaire was constructed by the researcher and validated by experts in the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Benue State University; Makurdi. Questionnaires were administered to respondents in the sampled schools and collected back. The descriptive statistics of frequency, percentages, mean scores and the standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The chi-square test of goodness of fit was used to test the hypotheses. All these were computed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research Question One

What is the impact of formal communication on staff performance in secondary schools?

The data for providing answers to the above research question are presented on Table 1.

The data presented on table 1 shows that teachers rated all the items from 1 to 5 and the cluster well above the cutoff point of 2.50. Their ratings of items 1 to 5 are 3.20, 3.45, 2.70, 3.00 and 3.35 with corresponding standard deviations of 0.90, 0.93, 0.87, 0.83 and 0.75.

Based on the data respondents' views are that, formal communication motivates teachers towards effective performance that the level of formal communication of teachers in a school depends on the leadership style and policy of the school management. The respondents also agreed that Staff in school with proper formal communication performs better academically than staff in school with no effective formal communication. Furthermore that financial benefit, recognition, and appreciation of staff through formal communication motivate them to work effectively. There opinion is that Performance is a function of both ability and formal communication. Without formal communication, the most capable worker performs poorly. The cluster mean is 3.20 and standard deviation 1.17 which indicates that they share the view that formal communication impact on staff performance in secondary schools.

Table 1: Mean ratios and standard deviations of responses of teachers on Formal Communication on staff performance

S/No	Items Description	SA	A	D	SD	Mean X	ST.D	Decision
1	Formal communication motivate teachers towards effective performance	185	171	31	13	3.20	0.90	Accepted
2	The level of formal communication of teachers in a school depends on the leadership style and policy of the school management	191	166	13	30	3.45	0.93	Accepted
3	Staff in school with proper formal communication performs better academically than staff in school with no formal communication.	153	171	32	15	2.70	0.87	Accepted
4	Financial benefits, recognition, and appreciation of staff though formal communication motivate them to work effectively	144	202	34	20	3.00	0.83	Accepted
5	Performance is a function of both ability and formal communication, without formal communication, the most capable worker performs poorly.	168	189	15	28	3.35	0.75	Accepted
Cluster mean and standard deviation						3.18	1.17	Accepted

Research Question Two

How does informal Communication impact on staff performance in secondary schools?

Table 2: Mean ratings and standard deviations of responses of teachers on informal Communication on staff performance

S/No	Items Description	SA	A	D	SD	Mean X	ST.D	Decision
6	Informal communication especially grapevine enhances dedication to school functions by all stakeholders	231	115	31	23	3.38	0.79	Accepted
7	Creates a good harmonious conductive trust and open-mindedness among members of the school	210	143	21	26	3.20	0.93	Accepted
8	Informal communication is another source of information to prepare administrators for better performance.	170	200	20	10	3.17	0.79	Accepted
9	Informal channel of communication can damage the morale of employees, since all or most information it paddles is based on hear-say	210	160	15	15	3.16	0.84	Accepted
10	The informal communication from school-host community is important for effective school management	115	185	50	50	2.75	0.95	Accepted
Cluster mean and standard deviation						3.13	0.86	Accepted

The data presented on table 2 show that teachers rated items 6 to 10 above cut off point. In other words, according to the respondents, informal communication especially grapevine enhances dedication to school functions by all stakeholders. Also that it creates a good harmonious, conducive, trust and open-mindedness among, members of the school. The respondents agreed that informal communication is another source of information to prepare administrators for better performance. The respondents recognize that informal channel of communication can damage the morale of employees, since all or most information it paddles is based on hear-say. Finally, the respondents agreed that the informal communication from school-host community is important for effective school management. The cluster mean was 3.13 and standard deviation 0.86 in a four point rating scale which means that informal communication impact on staff performance in secondary schools.

Test of Hypotheses.

Research Hypothesis One

Formal communication does not significantly impact on staff performance in Secondary schools.

Table 3: Chi-Square Test of Formal Communication on Staff Performance.

Opinions	Observed frequency	Expected frequency	df	X^{2-cal}	X^{2-tab}	Sig	Decision
No impact	90(22.5%)	200 (50%)	3	49.12	7.81	0.05	Significant
Impact	310(77.5%)	200 (50%)					

Values in parentheses are percentages (X² 49.12, df= 3, p 0.05>0.05)

On Table 3 the descriptive and inferential statistics were used to test the impact of Promotion on staff performance in secondary schools. The result shows that 77.5% of the respondents agreed that Promotion have positive impact on staff performance as against 22.5% respondents who disagreed.

Table 3 above shows further that the chi-square calculated value of 49.12 is greater than the chi square tabulated value of 7.81 at 0.05 levels of significance and 3 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis which states that formal communication does not significantly affect performance in secondary schools is rejected. This implies that the alternative hypothesis is accepted indicating that formal communication significantly affect staff performance in secondary schools.

Research Hypothesis Two

Informal communication does not significantly impact on staff performance in secondary schools.

Table 4: Chi-Square Test of Informal Communication on Staff Performance.

Opinions	Observed frequency	Expected frequency	df	X^{2-cal}	X^{2-tab}	Sig	Decision
No impact	63 (16%)	200 (50%)	3	50.00	7.81	0.05	Significant
Impact	337 (84%)	200 (50%)					

Value in parentheses are percentages (X² 50.00, df= 3, p 0.05>0.05)

On Table 4, the descriptive and inferential statistics were used to test the impact of informal communication on staff performance in secondary schools. The result shows that 84% of the respondents agreed that informal communication have impact on staff performance in secondary schools as against the 16% respondents who disagreed.

Table 4 above also shows that the chi-square calculated value of 50.00 is greater than the chi-square tabulated value of 7.81 at 0.05 levels of significance and 3 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis which states that informal communication does not significantly affect staff performance in secondary schools is rejected. This implies that the alternative hypothesis is accepted indicating that informal communication significantly affect staff performance in secondary schools.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The first finding of this study after analysis revealed that formal communication significantly affects staff performance in secondary schools. The result shows that 81.75% of the respondents agreed that formal communication have positive impact on staff performance as against 18.25% respondents who disagreed. The finding is in agreement with the views of American Library Association (2003), who posited that communication that takes place in most organizations could be classified into two categories, namely - formal and informal communication. That formal communication takes place through the formal channels of the organizational hierarchy. In many organizations, formal communication follows the line of authority through the various levels. There is also what is called procedural communication which goes hand in hand with all formal communications. It simply implies communication that follows prescribed procedures set down by precedent. In this type of communication three categories exist i.e downward, upward and horizontal (cords-wise or diagonal).

The second finding revealed that, interpersonal relationship significantly affects staff performance in secondary schools. The result shows that 84% of the respondents agreed that interpersonal relationship have impact on staff performance in secondary schools as against the 16% respondents who disagreed. The finding agrees with the views of Bua (2014) who said informal communication does not follow channels of authority as done in a formal communication. Instead, it is channeled through the social contacts among the people in the school, company or group. It is known as the 'grape vine'. The grape vine is surprisingly fast in its distribution of information but it is distressingly inaccurate in keeping the original fact straight. He further stated that management must appreciate that this form of communication is very powerful. Management must also recognize that informal communication contributes in same way to the effectiveness of reaching organization's goals and as such cannot be eradicated

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, it has been established that, formal and informal communication significantly affect, secondary school staff performance in Benue State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Formal communication is fundamental to any successful administration. Communication techniques and guides should be established to educate and guide employees on the proper and appropriate channels to use in the formal communication process.
- ii. The school administration should adopt and encourage cordial interpersonal relationship between staff especially in the informal way for a harmonious work performance.

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