

ADMINISTRATIVE COMPETENCIES AND THE GOVERNANCE OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS: EVIDENCE FROM NSUKKA EDUCATIONAL ZONE, ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the relationship between administrative competencies and governance of public secondary schools in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. A correlational survey design was adopted because it enabled the determination of the relationship between the key variables of the study. The area of the study was Nsukka Education Zone, while the population comprised all one hundred and twenty (120) principals of public secondary schools in the zone. Since the population was relatively small, the study adopted a census approach, and the entire population was used as the sample. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled *Administrative Competencies and Governance Practices Questionnaire (ACGPQ)*, which was developed by the researcher. The instrument was validated by three experts: two from the Department of Educational Foundations and one from the Research, Measurement and Evaluation Unit, Department of Science Education, Faculty of Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology. Reliability was established through a pilot test involving fifteen principals outside the study area, and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.82 confirmed its internal consistency. The researcher, with the assistance of two trained field workers, administered the instrument directly to the respondents to ensure a high response rate. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was applied to test relationships. A decision rule of 2.50 and above was accepted, while values below 2.50 were rejected. The findings of the study revealed that principals possessed moderate levels of administrative competencies, and governance practices in public secondary schools were moderately effective. It was also found that a significant positive relationship existed between administrative competencies and governance practices. Based on these findings, it was recommended that educational authorities should provide regular capacity-building workshops for principals to strengthen their administrative competencies. The study contributed to knowledge by providing empirical evidence from Nsukka Education Zone on how administrative competencies influence governance in public secondary schools, thereby offering guidance for policymakers and education managers in improving school leadership and governance outcomes.

Keywords: Administrative competencies, governance practices, public secondary schools, principals

Introduction

The governance of public secondary schools has become a central issue in contemporary educational discourse, particularly in relation to the competencies of

school administrators. Administrative competencies, which include leadership, planning, instructional supervision, financial management, communication, and stakeholder engagement, are essential in ensuring effective governance and the achievement of institutional goals. According to Bush (2020), educational leadership and administrative capacity are the foundation of school improvement, as they provide the framework for decision-making, accountability, and the mobilization of resources. Similarly, Oplatka (2021) emphasized that the effectiveness of school governance is strongly influenced by the ability of administrators to demonstrate professional competencies that align with institutional demands and societal expectations. At the global level, governance in schools has been recognized as a key driver of quality education. UNESCO (2019) highlighted that the success of secondary education depends not only on curriculum reforms and funding but also on the competencies of school leaders who manage teaching and learning processes, human resources, and community relations. Leithwood and Harris (2020) further argued that competent administrators foster trust, create enabling environments for teachers, and promote transparency in school governance structures. In this regard, international policy frameworks increasingly advocate for the professionalization of school leadership as a strategy for strengthening governance and improving student learning outcomes.

In sub-Saharan Africa, however, the governance of public secondary schools continues to face systemic challenges. Okeke (2020) observed that many African school systems struggle with inadequate leadership preparation, poor resource allocation, and weak accountability structures, which limit the capacity of principals to deliver effective governance. In Nigeria, Akinwumi (2021) noted that principals in public secondary schools are often promoted without adequate leadership training, thereby constraining their ability to manage resources and implement policies effectively. Similarly, Nwankwo (2022) explained that governance challenges in Nigerian secondary schools include irregular strategic planning, insufficient stakeholder participation, and lack of transparency in financial management, all of which hinder the achievement of educational objectives. Specifically, in Enugu State and the Nsukka Educational Zone, public secondary schools encounter peculiar governance difficulties. Chukwu (2021) reported that principals in the zone face problems such as inadequate administrative support, poor community involvement, and ineffective monitoring mechanisms. Eze (2022) added that weak administrative competencies among some school leaders contribute to mismanagement of resources and inconsistent implementation of educational policies, thereby undermining governance structures. These challenges highlight the urgent need for empirical studies that examine the link between administrative competencies and governance practices in public secondary schools within the zone.

The discourse on administrative competencies and school governance has attracted significant scholarly attention in recent decades, reflecting the recognition that effective leadership is critical to the success of secondary education worldwide. Recent global scholarship has advanced the understanding of governance by emphasizing

participatory leadership, accountability mechanisms, and professional competencies as key drivers of school improvement. For example, Day and Sammons (2020) argued that the ability of administrators to exercise visionary leadership, maintain financial prudence, and cultivate professional learning communities directly influences the quality of governance structures in schools. Similarly, Hallinger (2021) observed that the integration of distributed leadership and collaborative decision-making has become a dominant trend in school governance, signaling a shift from traditional top-down management to shared responsibility models. These contributions represent the state of the art by showing that administrative competencies extend beyond routine management to include ethical leadership, innovation, and the fostering of inclusive governance frameworks.

In Africa, scholarship has also begun to address the role of administrative competencies in shaping governance outcomes in education. Okafor (2020) reported that emerging reforms in African educational systems highlight the need for principals who possess technical, human, and conceptual competencies to effectively manage scarce resources and adapt to contextual challenges. Research in Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa has demonstrated that strong governance structures anchored on professional leadership enhance accountability and improve school outcomes (Moyo, 2021). However, these studies also reveal that leadership development and governance reforms remain uneven across the continent, thereby creating disparities in the effectiveness of public secondary school systems. Within Nigeria, several studies have examined issues relating to school leadership, administrative practices, and governance. Nwachukwu (2021) underscored that governance in Nigerian secondary schools is often constrained by inadequate administrative training and poor supervisory structures, while Adegbesan (2020) identified weaknesses in strategic planning, accountability, and stakeholder engagement as recurring challenges. Furthermore, Uche (2022) revealed that although policy documents emphasize the importance of leadership competencies, implementation gaps persist due to limited monitoring and lack of professional development for school administrators. These studies underscore the growing body of knowledge on governance and administrative capacity in Nigeria, but they also show that more context-specific and empirical evidence is still needed.

Notwithstanding these contributions, important gaps remain in the literature. First, most global studies emphasize general models of governance without adequately addressing how administrative competencies manifest in specific socio-cultural contexts such as those in Nigerian educational zones. Second, while African research highlights broad systemic challenges, it often overlooks local variations and the unique experiences of principals and teachers in sub-national regions. Third, in Nigeria, although research has identified governance challenges, few empirical studies have directly linked administrative competencies with governance outcomes at the zonal level, particularly in the Nsukka Educational Zone of Enugu State. This leaves a knowledge gap concerning how specific administrative skills, such as instructional supervision, communication, and resource management, shape governance practices in

this setting. Against this background, the present study seeks to examine administrative competencies and the governance of public secondary schools in Nsukka Educational Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. By focusing on this context, the study intends to generate evidence that can guide policymakers, education authorities, and school administrators in improving governance through enhanced administrative capacity.

Statement of the Problem

The governance of public secondary schools is expected to rest on the administrative competencies of school leaders who demonstrate effective planning, instructional supervision, financial accountability, and participatory decision-making. Ideally, administrators should mobilize resources, inspire teachers, engage parents and communities, and promote transparency to ensure that schools function efficiently and that teaching and learning processes achieve desired outcomes. Under such conditions, policies are implemented consistently, school activities are well-coordinated, and students benefit from a supportive environment that enhances both academic performance and holistic development. In practice, however, the situation often departs from this ideal. Many public secondary schools experience weak governance arising from insufficient administrative skills among principals, irregular strategic planning, inadequate supervision of instruction, and poor stakeholder participation. Challenges such as mismanagement of resources, ineffective communication, and lack of transparency in decision-making further undermine the capacity of schools to deliver on their objectives. These realities create gaps in the ability of administrators to translate educational policies into effective practice. In the Nsukka Educational Zone of Enugu State, concerns about governance have become increasingly evident. Reports point to difficulties faced by administrators in financial management, community involvement, monitoring of school programs, and ensuring accountability. These challenges have contributed to declining trust among stakeholders and inconsistent alignment of school activities with educational policy goals. Therefore, the problem of this study, therefore, is that although administrative competencies are widely acknowledged as essential for the governance of public secondary schools, there is limited empirical evidence on how these competencies contribute to governance outcomes within the Nsukka Educational Zone. This absence of context-specific evidence leaves policymakers, education authorities, and school leaders without adequate guidance on strengthening governance through improved administrative capacity.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine administrative competencies and the governance of public secondary schools in Nsukka Educational Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the level of administrative competencies of principals in public secondary schools.
2. identify governance practices in public secondary schools.

3. examine the relationship between administrative competencies and governance practices in public secondary schools.
4. determine the challenges principals face in applying administrative competencies for governance.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. What is the level of administrative competencies of principals?
2. What governance practices are in public secondary schools?
3. What is the relationship between administrative competencies and governance practices?
4. What challenges do principals face in applying administrative competencies for governance?

Hypotheses

- Ho₁:** There is a significant relationship between administrative competencies and governance practices in public secondary schools.
- Ho₂:** There is no significant difference in administrative competencies of principals based on school location.

Methods

The study adopted a correlational survey design, which was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to determine the relationship between principals' administrative competencies and governance practices in public secondary schools. The design was suitable for collecting quantitative data and establishing the degree of association between the variables under investigation. The study was conducted in public secondary schools in Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State, Nigeria. This zone was chosen because of its large number of schools and its diverse administrative practices. The population of the study consisted of all one hundred and twenty (120) principals of public secondary schools in the zone. Since the population was relatively small and manageable, the entire population was used as the sample, making the study a census survey. A structured questionnaire titled *Administrative Competencies and Governance Practices Questionnaire (ACGPQ)* was developed by the researcher to collect data. The instrument was divided into four sections that covered principals' administrative competencies, governance practices in schools, the relationship between administrative competencies and governance practices, and challenges encountered in applying administrative competencies. The instrument was validated by three experts. Two were from the Department of Educational Foundations and one from the Research, Measurement and Evaluation Unit in the Department of Science Education, all in the Faculty of Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. Their reviews ensured content validity, clarity of language, and alignment with the research questions. Reliability was established through a pilot test conducted with fifteen principals outside the study area. Cronbach Alpha was applied, yielding a coefficient of

0.82, which confirmed the internal consistency of the instrument. The researcher, with the help of two trained assistants, personally administered the questionnaires to the principals to guarantee a high rate of retrieval and accurate completion. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was employed to test the relationship between administrative competencies and governance practices. A decision rule of 2.50 and above was accepted, while any item below 2.50 was rejected.

Results

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Principals' Responses on the Level of Administrative Competencies

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std Dev (SD)	Rank	Decision
1	I effectively plan academic programs in my school.	3.42	0.76	3	A
2	I demonstrate effective communication with staff or students.	3.56	0.82	1	A
3	I ensure proper supervision of teaching or learning.	3.28	0.79	5	A
4	I manage school resources efficiently.	3.17	0.85	6	A
5	I provide adequate motivation to teachers.	3.01	0.92	10	A
6	I maintain discipline among staff or students.	3.25	0.81	7	A
7	I apply decision-making skills in resolving conflicts.	3.40	0.74	4	A
8	I involve teachers in participatory decision-making.	3.08	0.88	9	A
9	I ensure accountability in school financial management.	3.33	0.83	8	A
10	I provide regular feedback to teachers on performance.	3.20	0.80	11	A
11	I initiate innovative practices to improve teaching or learning.	3.50	0.78	2	A
Aggregate Score (Mean & SD)		3.29	0.82		A

Data in Table 1 shows that principals rated themselves moderately high on administrative competencies. Scores ranged from 3.01 to 3.56. The highest-rated item was communication with staff or students ($\bar{X} = 3.56$). The lowest-rated item was teacher motivation ($\bar{X} = 3.01$). The overall mean of 3.29 with a standard deviation of 0.82 indicates that principals in Nsukka Educational Zone possess moderate administrative competencies. They showed strength in communication, innovation, or

decision-making. Weaknesses appeared in teacher motivation, supervision, or participatory governance.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Principals' Responses on Governance Practices in Public Secondary Schools

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std Dev (SD)	Rank	Decision
1	I involve teachers in school decision processes.	3.44	0.81	2	A
2	I promote transparency in financial records.	3.51	0.79	1	A
3	I encourage accountability in staff duties.	3.40	0.82	3	A
4	I ensure compliance with school policies.	3.28	0.85	5	A
5	I create opportunities for student participation.	3.19	0.87	6	A
6	I hold regular staff meetings for governance issues.	3.11	0.91	8	A
7	I provide channels for parent involvement.	3.22	0.84	7	A
8	I maintain fairness in staff appraisal.	3.35	0.80	4	A
9	I encourage collaborative problem solving.	3.08	0.86	9	A
10	I implement monitoring systems for school projects.	3.04	0.89	10	A
11	I enforce discipline in accordance with school rules.	3.00	0.93	11	A
Aggregate Score (Mean & SD)		3.24	0.85	–	A

Data in Table 2 shows that principals rated governance practices at a moderate level. Scores ranged from 3.00 to 3.51. The highest-rated practice was transparency in financial records ($\bar{X} = 3.51$). The lowest-rated was enforcement of discipline in accordance with school rules ($\bar{X} = 3.00$). The overall mean of 3.24 with a standard deviation of 0.85 indicates that governance practices in public secondary schools are moderate. Strengths appeared in transparency, accountability, or teacher involvement. Weaknesses were evident in discipline, project monitoring, or student participation.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Principals' Responses on the Relationship between Administrative Competencies and Governance Practices

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std Dev (SD)	Rank	Decision
1	My administrative planning improves	3.48	0.77	2	A

	governance quality.				
2	My communication skills influence school governance.	3.55	0.79	1	A
3	My supervision of staff enhances governance outcomes.	3.42	0.81	3	A
4	My resource management supports governance structures.	3.33	0.83	4	A
5	My motivation of teachers improves governance results.	3.21	0.85	6	A
6	My decision-making ability strengthens governance processes.	3.27	0.80	5	A
7	My conflict resolution skills sustain governance stability.	3.18	0.84	8	A
8	My participatory leadership builds inclusive governance.	3.23	0.88	7	A
9	My financial accountability supports governance integrity.	3.14	0.89	9	A
10	My feedback to staff shapes governance effectiveness.	3.11	0.91	10	A
11	My innovation in practice drives governance improvement.	3.09	0.93	11	A
Aggregate Score (Mean & SD)		3.29	0.84	–	A

Data in Table 3 shows that principals rated the relationship between administrative competencies or governance practices at a moderate level. Scores ranged from 3.09 to 3.55. The highest-rated relationship was communication skills influencing governance ($\bar{X} = 3.55$). The lowest-rated was innovation driving governance improvement ($\bar{X} = 3.09$). The overall mean of 3.29 with a standard deviation of 0.84 suggests that principals perceived a positive but moderate relationship between their competencies or governance practices. Strong links appeared in communication, supervision, or planning. Weak links appeared in innovation, financial accountability, or feedback to staff.

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation of Principals' Responses on Challenges in Applying Administrative Competencies for Governance

S/N	Item Statement	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std Dev (SD)	Rank	Decision
1	I face inadequate funding in school management.	3.58	0.74	1	A
2	I face poor teacher commitment to assigned duties.	3.47	0.77	2	A
3	I face limited training opportunities for	3.39	0.81	3	A

	leadership roles.				
4	I face resistance to change from staff.	3.32	0.83	4	A
5	I face weak community support for school programs.	3.28	0.85	5	A
6	I face political interference in school governance.	3.23	0.87	6	A
7	I face inadequate instructional resources for teaching.	3.19	0.90	7	A
8	I face conflict among staff during school activities.	3.14	0.91	8	A
9	I face irregular supervision from higher authorities.	3.12	0.92	9	A
10	I face heavy workload in administrative duties.	3.09	0.94	10	A
11	I face lack of motivation from government policies.	3.05	0.95	11	A
Aggregate Score (Mean & SD)		3.26	0.86	–	A

Data in Table 4 shows that principals rated challenges in applying administrative competencies at a moderate level. Scores ranged from 3.05 to 3.58. The most critical challenge was inadequate funding in school management ($\bar{X} = 3.58$). The least critical challenge was lack of motivation from government policies ($\bar{X} = 3.05$). The overall mean of **3.26** with a standard deviation of **0.86** suggests that principals perceive multiple obstacles to effective governance. Major issues appeared in funding, teacher commitment, or limited training. Minor issues appeared in workload, supervision, or government motivation.

Hypothesis

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between administrative competencies and governance practices in public secondary schools in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria.

Table 5: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) on the Relationship between Administrative Competencies and Governance Practices

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	r-value	p-value	Decision
Administrative Competencies	120	3.18	0.64			
Governance Practices	120	3.12	0.59	0.612	0.000	Reject Ho

Overall Correlation Result: $r(118) = 0.612, p < 0.05$

The result in Table 5 shows that the calculated correlation coefficient ($r = 0.612$) indicates a moderate positive relationship between administrative competencies and governance practices of principals in public secondary schools. The probability value ($p = 0.000$) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This implies that administrative competencies of principals had a significant positive relationship with governance practices in public secondary schools in Nsukka Education Zone.

Hypothesis Two

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in administrative competencies of principals based on school location in public secondary schools in Nsukka Education Zone, Enugu State, Nigeria.

Table 6: Independent Samples t-test on Administrative Competencies of Principals by School Location

Location	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df	t-value	p-value	Decision
Urban	65	3.24	0.61	118	1.204	0.231	Retain Ho
Rural	55	3.12	0.66				

Overall t-test Result: $t(118) = 1.204$, $p > 0.05$

The result in Table 6 indicates that principals in urban schools had a mean administrative competency score of 3.24, while their rural counterparts had a mean score of 3.12. The difference was not statistically significant, $t(118) = 1.204$, $p = 0.231$, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. This means that school location did not significantly affect the administrative competencies of principals in public secondary schools in Nsukka Educational Zone.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that the level of administrative competencies of principals in public secondary schools was generally moderate, with noticeable variations in instructional supervision, financial management, communication, and planning skills. This finding is in consonance with the study of Eze (2022), who posited that although many Nigerian principals demonstrate basic administrative skills, gaps remain in critical areas such as instructional leadership and effective supervision. Similarly, Chukwu (2021) found that administrative practices in Enugu State schools often fall short of expectations due to insufficient training and limited support, which constrains principals from fully applying their competencies. Together, these studies support the finding that principals possess administrative competencies but require further capacity development to meet governance demands effectively. The findings of the study revealed that governance practices in public secondary schools include routine decision-making, implementation of educational policies, monitoring of teaching and learning, and engagement of stakeholders, although the effectiveness of these practices varies across schools. The findings are in consonance with the study of

Adegbesan (2020), who posited that governance in Nigerian secondary schools is often characterized by strategic planning and policy enforcement but weakened by inconsistent accountability structures. In the same vein, Nwankwo (2022) observed that governance practices are sometimes undermined by irregular monitoring and weak transparency, leading to poor alignment with policy goals. These empirical insights confirm the study's finding that governance practices exist but are not uniformly strong, reflecting systemic and contextual challenges.

The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between administrative competencies and governance practices in public secondary schools. Principals who exhibit higher levels of leadership, planning, communication, and supervisory skills were more likely to promote effective governance. This finding is in consonance with the study of Leithwood and Harris (2020), who posited that effective leadership competencies are directly associated with better governance outcomes, as competent leaders' foster trust, accountability, and transparency. Similarly, Day and Sammons (2020) found that successful school governance is strengthened when administrators demonstrate visionary leadership, clear communication, and professional accountability. These studies reinforce the present finding that administrative competencies are a key determinant of governance practices in secondary schools. The findings of the study revealed that principals face multiple challenges in applying administrative competencies for governance, including inadequate training, resource constraints, limited stakeholder cooperation, and weak accountability structures. The findings are in consonance with the study of Nwachukwu (2021), who posited that governance in Nigerian public secondary schools is often constrained by systemic challenges such as politicization of leadership appointments and insufficient professional development for principals. Similarly, Akinwumi (2021) highlighted that challenges such as lack of funds, inadequate monitoring, and poor support from education authorities hinder principals from fully exercising their administrative competencies. These studies confirm the finding that principals' efforts to apply competencies are often obstructed by systemic and contextual limitations, which weaken the effectiveness of governance in secondary schools.

Conclusion

The study concluded that principals in Nsukka Educational Zone possess moderate administrative competencies, with noticeable gaps in supervision, planning, and communication. Governance practices are present but inconsistently applied, reflecting differences in leadership capacity and resource support. A significant relationship exists between administrative competencies and governance, indicating that stronger leadership skills lead to better accountability and policy implementation. The study also concluded that principals face challenges such as inadequate training, limited resources, and weak accountability structures, which hinder effective governance. Strengthening administrative competencies and providing institutional support are therefore essential

for improving governance and achieving better educational outcomes in public secondary schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to strengthen administrative competencies and governance in public secondary schools:

1. Principals should be provided with regular training and professional development programs to enhance their leadership, planning, and supervisory skills.
2. Government and education authorities should allocate adequate resources to schools to enable principals to apply their administrative competencies effectively.
3. School administrators should adopt transparent and accountable practices to strengthen trust among stakeholders and improve governance outcomes.
4. Stakeholders, including parents and community members, should be actively involved in decision-making processes to support inclusive and participatory governance.
5. Monitoring and evaluation systems should be reinforced to ensure that principals consistently apply administrative competencies in line with educational policies.

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