Developing Quality Strategic Plan In Secondary Schools   For Successful School Improvement

Fides Okwukweka Chukwumah

Dept. of Educational Management/Policy, Nnamdi Azikiwe   University, Awka, , Nigeria.

Abstract

The study examined the extent to which development of quality strategic plans for Anambra State secondary schools' improvement had been done by schools. The research design used was a descriptive survey. Respondents comprised 217 principals. There was no sampling since all the principals were used. Data were collected using 'Schools' Strategic Plan Development Questionnaire' (SSPDQ) and these were analyzed using frequency, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Chi-square was used to test the null hypotheses. Findings indicated that the mean responses on the availability of strategic plan document in the schools was 85.4% showing that greater proportion of schools developed their strategic plan document to a high extent. The study also showed that the components of strategic plan were included to a high extent. On the other hand, some essential and requisite components like Targets, Expected Outputs and Performance Indicators were found only in 41(18.9%), 13(6%) and 86(39.6%) respectively, of the 217 strategic plans examined thereby indicating a low extent. The level of commitment by principals and staff need to be propped up in order that their goals will be achieved. Principals were advised to be purposeful and more committed in developing their schools strategic plans.

Keywords: Development, Strategic Planning, Quality, Improvement, Secondary School.

1. Introduction

One management tool that has been acclaimed internationally as effective in improving the performance of state owned enterprises as well as government departments is the use of strategic planning. Strategic planning is important to any organizational work performance because it determines the organization's success or failure. According to Bryson (2011) a strategy is a plan that is intended to achieve a particular purpose. It is a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does and how it does it with a focus on the future. These days there is an increasing need for effective and efficient development of strategic plan for secondary schools. Many organizations around the globe have also started taking interest in developing strategic plans because many policies and programmes which they initiated at different times have failed them. Introducing strategies and plans have been to acquire quality education and improve standard and bring the school to effective self-management. A school's strategic plan is the physical document that embodies the guiding orientation regarding how to manage the school within a larger national and local development perspective. Such a plan can lead to school effectiveness, improvement and development when properly implemented.

According to Chang (2008) a strategic plan is a living document that includes policy direction, implementation strategies, actions and benchmarks for implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as the expenditure framework which allows adjustments in areas for developments during implementation. This plan entails the school's analysis of its strategic issues for development, prioritization, planning to address such issues and, finally, implementing a plan to address these identified issues for development. It ensures that the learners receive quality education in terms of holistic development and academic achievement. This explains that School Developed Strategic Plan is a live document which automatically links to the whole school self-evaluation reports and Performance Appraisal Objectives where relevant. In this regard some governments therefore made it mandatory for institutions to develop strategic plans in line with the national strategic plan. It becomes a requirement that public organizations including educational institution have to develop strategic plans as a means of enhancing results based management and efficiency in their operations. The plans provide direction in regard to resource targeting and programme implementation. The Federal Government of Nigeria (2013) in her National Policy on Education enjoins all educational institutions to engage in strategic planning to promote education provision and service delivery. Even Australia has gone a step ahead and made a guideline of what schools should include in their strategic plan (State of Victoria, 2010). Bell (2002) equally reported that the UK

government did come up with a system of deriving targets for schools from the national targets set for different categories of schools.

Education systems must have a powerful and coherent educational improvement strategy in order to improve student academic achievement (Childress, Elmore & Grossman, 2006; Childress, Elmore, Grossman & Johnson, 2007). The strategic management of human capital and the education system's educational improvement strategy are inextricably linked. According to Pearce & Robinson (2013) implementation involves three key activities; (1) developing short term objectives which are implementable, (2) developing functional tactics, and (3) developing policies that empower action. Aldehyyat, Al Khattab, and Anchor (2011) pointed out that a school that formulates and implements strategic plan derives benefits such as having negotiated and agreed clear goals and objectives, communication of the set goals to various stake holders, providing a base upon which progress can be measured, building strong and functional teams in management staff who have clear vision on how the school will be in future, providing the school management with new ideas which can steer the school to greater heights of excellence and commits the school funds to a well-organized and coherent development agenda. The sole aim of this Strategic Plan is to provide leadership and direction to all those within the education sector in Anambra State by setting out a clear and agreed agenda for action.

It is painful however to note that many schools that have adopted strategic plan, as a mechanism of putting schools on a pathway of development and effectiveness over a period of time, failed because of carelessness in the development of these plans. Their problem does not lie in creating visions of their future and the strategies needed to get to their target but often they fail to deliver the expected strategic results. This makes the executive team to wonder the reason behind the failure. They tend to repeat the strategic planning cycle expecting to do better, but they still fail. One wonders how they developed the plans they implement. The Federal Government Education Sector Diagnosis (2005) in its analysis pointed out the omissions of some of the components in the strategic plans schools developed, indicating that most secondary school principals do not have school vision statement, student target and strategic plan. In a recent study by Vergert (2010) in Twente, the purpose of which was to find out how two universities implemented strategies, eight (8) faculties were examined using both interview and document analysis. He found that most of the faculties did not develop targets for their performance indicators. For him, it seemed that faculties do not care much about measures and targets.

 The major objectives of this study, is to assess the strategic planning development process of Anambra State secondary schools, which is the strategic plan document they were mandated by the Post Primary School Service Commission (PPSSC) to produce and implement. The public outcry about the deterioration in quality of public education necessitated the mandate for schools to develop strategic plans for school improvement. This allegation was supported by these scholars (Ajobiewe, 2008; Iyamu, 2005 & Titilayo, 2002) who noted with gross dissatisfaction this lack of quality education delivery and output in Nigerian education sector today. However planning and the ability to think strategically by planners, managers and employees alike, feed into the strategic plan document. Although the strategic plan document is not the most valuable output of the strategic planning formation process, neither is it a definite output, it is however tangible evidence that includes most of the planning efforts. The document is expected to provide well-justified answers to the strategic questions by stakeholders and should be used as a basis for communication.

2. Literature Review
The education sector, like the economic sector, needs the use of human, material and financial resources to function. Secondary school sector is the springboard of all educational institutions where students are prepared to take a lasting decision of who they will be in the society tomorrow as they prepare to undertake a university study career. This calls for the need to engage in strategic planning to meet this expectation. Research has shown that strategic planning is one of major steps that schools can take to address the challenges they face in enhancing the quality of their programmes in provision of Education (Bell, 2002). Most times many organizational leaders walk around with a virtual strategy locked in their heads—they know where their organization needs to be and the key activities that will get it there but unfortunately, the strategy isn't down on paper and hasn't been communicated thoroughly. As a result, few people are acting on it. Therefore there is need to develop strategy to get to the goals. Wilkinson (2011) gives these reasons why organizations must develop plans. It is to set direction and priorities; to get everyone on the same page; to simplify decision-making; to drive alignment and to communicate the message. Developing a workable strategic plan means dissecting the organization's objectives and strategies and determining which takes precedence. Strategic plan becomes a management tool that serves the purpose of helping an organization to do a better job, because a plan focuses the energy, resources, and time of everyone in the organization in the same direction. According to Mittenthal (2002) strategic plan is a tool that provides guidance in fulfilling a mission with maximum efficiency and

impact. If it is to be effective and useful, it should articulate specific goals and describe the action steps and resources needed to accomplish them.

2.1 Components of a developed strategic plan
A strategic plan components at a minimum, should generally include the following sections:

- a vision statement

- a mission statement

- an outline of goals, objectives, and activities

- an assessment of current resources, and

- a strategic analysis.

The PPSSC strategic plan components under assessment encompass these: vision and mission statements, goals/policy objectives, strategy, time-frame, targets, output, outcome and indicators of performance. These components formed the benchmark of assessment of this study for the researcher. In advanced countries such as USA for instance (Cook, 2006) explains that Strategic planning follows a four step process for planning a school wide programme, conducting a comprehensive needs assessment, managing the inquiry process, designing the school wide programme, and evaluating the programme. In Europe, schools are still faced with major challenges such as learning skills and attitudes in planning education and practice, role of new technologies in planning education (e-learning, e-tools and e-networking) and place of ethics in planning education however, there have been some major strides made in the sector of school development planning (Deal, 2008).

The importance of a strategic plan document cannot be over-emphasized as a document used to communicate with the organization, the organizations goals, the actions needed to achieve those goals and all of the other critical elements developed during the planning exercise. Kiprop & Kanyiri (2012) contend that plans contain practical guidelines, precise goals and targets and a timetable for attainment. Targets can be articulated without ambiguity and measurements of attainment against them set out. The central role of planning is the projection of targets looking and thinking forward in time. In this view Chemwei, Leboo & Koech (2014) explained the importance of institutions evaluating the conditions in their operating environments, examine competitive pressures, carry out Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis and identify strategic issues. These identified strategic issues require that the institution develop a strategic orientation and execution of strategies capable of moving the institutions to their desired future states. This equally   implies that the institutions aiming at improving their situation need to engage in practical strategic planning. As (Pearce and Robinson, 2007) put it strategic planning and thinking involve making choices and decisions about the long–term future of the organization. A well developed strategic plan facilitates proper implementation. Finally it is worth mentioning that schools that are operating without strategic plans is an indication of lack of commitment of quality management, which may jeopardize the provision of quality education
services, leading to low student achievement. This study aims at investigating the extent secondary schools have developed quality strategic plans in Anambra State.

3. Statement of the Problem
Strategic planning is key to school success. Poor planning is often worse than no planning at all. The school should meet the expectations of the stakeholders. Strategic planning helps school managers to acknowledge the future, spot out significant trends and tendencies, and the need to respond to them skillfully, adapt, modify systems and structures so as to tackle new challenges and circumstances. It is the requirement of Ministry of Education that all schools formulate strategic plans with a time frame of 3 years. The poor performance of schools at various times and levels necessitated the Federal Government of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) to compel school to engage in strategic planning. Available data show that many schools though, developed their strategic plans but omitted some essential and requisite components of strategic plan which together make the plan a complete working document. This is confirmed by the Federal Government Education Sector Diagnosis (2005) which showed that most secondary school principals do not have school vision statement, student target and

strategic plan document. The absence of some essential components of the plan renders plan incomplete thus poor implementation. This situation disqualifies the plan as a guiding road map for action and implementation. It seems also that some schools did not develop strategic plans thereby leading to poor school management hence lowering the academic standards and poor school environment. This cast some doubts on the extent of development of quality strategic plans and its implementation by secondary schools. According to Pearce & Robinson (2013) implementation involves three key activities; developing short term objectives which are implementable, developing functional tactics, and policies that empower action. This is to say that poorly developed plan document will bring about poor implementation and low achievement of goals. This study therefore aims at examining the extent to which secondary schools in Anambra State developed their strategic plans document for proper implementation.

4. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to ascertain the extent of strategic plan development and the quality of the developed strategic plans for secondary schools improvement in Anambra State. Specifically the study aims at finding out:

(1) The extent to which secondary schools developed strategic plans for school improvement.

(2) The percentage of the schools' strategic plans that have the required components of the PPSSC's strategic plans

4.1 Research Questions

(1) To what extent do secondary schools develop their strategic plans for schools improvement as directed by the PPSSC?

(2) What percentage of Schools' Strategic Plans have the required components of the PPSSC's strategic plans?

4.2 Hypotheses

(1) Urban and rural secondary schools will not differ significantly in terms of the development of their strategic plans for schools improvement as directed by the PPSSC?

(2) There will be no significant difference between urban and rural secondary schools in terms of the percentage of the required components of the PPSSC's strategic plan.

5. Method

The survey research design was adopted for the study. This design is used in this study to collect data from secondary school principals in order to determine the extent of the strategic plans development of secondary schools in Anambra State. The target population comprised 217 principals of Anambra State public secondary schools. There was no sampling technique as all the schools from the six educational zones in Anambra State formed the population of the study. The instrument for data collection were percentage and questionnaire. The first research question was meant to find out the availability of strategic plan document in the school while the questionnaire called 'Schools' Strategic Plan Development Questionnaire' (SSPDQ) is a 10-item questionnaire used in eliciting information on how many of the required components schools included in their of their school strategic plans.

6. Results

6.1 Research Question 1

To what extent do secondary schools develop their strategic plans for schools improvement as directed by the PPSSC?

Table 1:   The Availability of secondary schools strategic plan development

Availability		
	Frequency	**Percent**
Available	217	85.4%
Not Available	37	14.6%
Total	254	100%

Table 1 shows that 217 (85.4%) secondary schools developed a strategic plan out of the 254 secondary while 14.6% did not. It is an indication that greater proportion of the schools developed a strategic plan as directed by PPSSC.

6.2 Research Question 2

What percentage of Schools' Strategic Plans have the required components of the PPSSC's strategic plans?

Table 2: Percentage of Schools' Strategic Plans with Components Required by PPSSC's Strategic Plan Design

Components of PPSSC's Strategic Plan Design	Yes		No		Total
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	
Vision Statement	144	66.4	73	36.6	217
Mission Statement	143	65.9	74	34.1	217
Objectives/Goal	194	89.4	23	10.6	217
Targets	41	18.9	176	81.1	217
Activities	196	90.3	21	9.7	217
Strategies	195	89.9	22	10.1	217
Time Frame	197	90.8	20	9.2	217
Expected Outputs	13	6.0	204	94.0	217
Expected Outcomes	196	90.3	21	9.7	217
Performance Indicators	86	39.6	131	60.4	217

As shown in table 2, seven (70%) out of the 10 stipulated components were contained in the strategic plans of greater proportion of 217 strategic plans examined. It was decided that the schools' strategic plan conformed to

the PPSSC's design to a high extent. More specifically, Vision Statement was contained in 144(66.4%) of the strategic plans, Mission Statement in 143(65.9%), Objectives/goals in 194(89.4%), Activities in 196(90.3%), Strategies in 195(89.9%), Time Frame in 197(90.8%) and Expected Outcomes in 196(90.3%) of the strategic plans. On the other hand, Targets, Expected Outputs and Performance Indicators were found only in 41(18.9%), 13(6%) and 86(39.6%) respectively, of the 217 strategic plans examined.

Considering that:

i)   over 85.4% of the secondary schools in Anambra developed strategic plan,

ii) the strategic plans developed had 70% of the components stipulated by the PPSSC

It was therefore decided that secondary schools in Anambra State developed their strategic plans to a high extent.

6.3 Hypothesis 1

The Strategic Plans developed by urban and rural schools for school improvement will not differ significantly in terms of conformity to the PPSSC design approved.

Table 3. Chi-square Test on Availability of Strategy Plan by School Location

	School Location	Availability		df	X^2	X^2	Decision
		Available	Not Available		(Obtained)	(Table)	
Availability of	**Urban**	112(114.5) *	22(19.5)	1	.78	3.84	Not Rejected
Strategic Plan	**Rural**	105(102.5)	15(17.5)				

As shown by table 3, there was no significant difference between urban and rural secondary schools in terms of the proportion of urban and rural schools that have strategic plans and those that do not have as the calculated chi-square value (.78) was less than the critical value (3.84). Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significance was sustained.

6.4 Hypothesis 2

Urban and rural schools will not differ significantly in terms of the development of quality strategic plans they encounter in the implementation of strategic plan.

Table 4: Chi-square Analysis of Urban and Rural Schools' Strategic Plans developed for school improvement in line with components of PPSSC's Approved Design

	School Location	Availability		df	X^2 (Cal)	X^2 (Crit)	Decision
		Yes	No				
Vision Statement	Urban	102 (74.3)*	10 (37.7)	1	63.32	3.84	Rejected
	Rural	42 (69.7)	63(35.3)				
Mission Statement	Urban	102(73.8)	10(38.2)	1	65.27	3.84	Rejected
	Rural	41 (69.2)	64(35.8)				
Objectives/Goal	Urban	106 (100.1)	6(11.9)	1	6.71	3.84	Rejected
	Rural	88 (93.9)	17(11.1)				
Targets	Urban	16 (21.2)	96(90.8)	1	3.21	3.84	Not Rejected
	Rural	25 (19.8)	80(85.2)				
Activities	Urban	105(101.2)	7(10.8)	1	3.11	3.84	Not Rejected
	Rural	91(94. 4)	14(10.2)				
Strategies	Urban	105(100.6)	7(11.4)	1	3.84	3.84	Rejected
	Rural	90(94.4)	15(10.6)				
Time Frame	Urban	106(101.7)	6(10.3)	1	4.12	3.84	Rejected
	Rural	91(95.3)	14(9.7)				
Expected Outputs	Urban	0(6.7)	112(105.3)	1	14.75	3.84	Rejected
	Rural	13(6.3)	92(98.7)				
Expected Outcomes	Urban	106(101.2)	6(10.8)	1	4.94	3.84	Rejected
	Rural	90(94.8)	15(10.2)				
Performance Indicators	Urban	63(44.4)	49(67.6)	1	26.72	3.84	Rejected
	Rural	23(41.6)	82(63.4)				

As shown by table 4, there was significant difference between urban and rural secondary schools in terms of the proportions of their strategic plans that conformed to the PPSSC's approved design of the strategic plan as all, except two; of the calculated chi-square values were greater than the critical value (3.84). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

6.5 Discussion

The study found out that as much as 217 (85.4%) of secondary schools out of 254 (100%) in Anambra State developed their strategic plan. The conformity to the PPSSC approved design was to a high extent. However, very significant number of the developed strategic plans omitted some essential and requisite components of the strategic plan, like; targets, expected outcomes and performance indicators as shown in table two. This indicates that strategic plan development is sub-standard related to

unexpected poor performance and which will likely bring about poor performance. The omission of targets in most of the strategic plans agrees with the finding in the Nigerian Education Sector Diagnosis, (2005) which found that, on national level, that most principals fell short in students target setting.   Recently the study by Ten Vergert (2010) also found that most of the faculties in the universities he studied did not include targets in their strategic plans. Omission of target in any set up is a purposeless venture. It is a clear sign of lack of commitment of both the management and other significant stakeholders. The importance of school developing a plan and having it at hand agrees with Bryson (2011) who points out that strategic planning and its implementation should have a written record or document of the strategic plan as the process which provides a valuable reference tool for monitoring and evaluation. According to Wilkinson (2011) the plan sets direction and priorities; to get everyone on the same page; to simplify decision-making; to drive alignment and to communicate the message. Developing a workable strategic plan means dissecting the organization's objectives and strategies and determining which takes precedence. Thus coordinated action among a variety of organizational actors over time would require some kind of reasonably formal plan so that people can keep track of what they should do and why. For one thing, people forget and the plan can remind them of what has been decided, (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Daft, 2004).

The statistical findings in tables three and four of the study indicated that there was no significant difference between urban and rural schools in terms of the proportion of urban and rural schools formulating and having strategic plan document. The null hypothesis of no significance was therefore sustained as indicated by the calculated chi-square value (.78) which is less than the critical value (3.84). However table four indicated that there was significant difference between urban and rural schools in terms of conformity to the PPSSC plan format of the strategic plan as the calculated chi-square values were greater than the critical value (3.84). Principals should appropriate the use of strategic planning as a veritable tool in their school management and as the Federal Government of Nigeria (2013) emphasized in the National Policy on Education. One of the cardinal managerial tasks is for principals to take advantage of the numerous opportunities available to secure the resources needed to execute educational programmes. Commitment of all stakeholders to school improvement will ensure good plan preparation for implementation.

7. Conclusion

Secondary schools in Anambra State developed their schools' strategic plans for school improvement to a high extent. There was significant difference in the conformity to the PPSSC of their schools' strategic plans for school improvement between urban and rural secondary schools. The researcher noted that though schools developed their strategic plans to a reasonable extent, they however lacked the skills, leadership qualities and commitment to strategic planning practices that school managers and administrators should possess for effective management of their institutions. This accounted for the haphazard way the plans were developed thus the omission of some requisite components in the developed plans. Schools which operate without properly developed strategic plans is an indication of lack of commitment of quality management, which may jeopardize the provision of quality education services, leading to low student achievement. Principals are expected to commit themselves to strategic endeavours, as they are the key overseers of all activities in the school. The principal plays a very vital role in bringing about school improvement and effectiveness. Therefore the principals however are charged with numerous responsibilities that make it hard to lay down strategic plans that would improve the performance of the schools. The process of strategic planning is an essential element in school development and focuses on improving the quality of learning by strategizing, setting priorities, targets and resource allocation which school administrators must learn to come to terms with. The commitment of all stakeholders to school improvement through application of best planning practices can go a long way in improving the quality of education in schools.

8. Recommendations

The findings indicate that there is need for the Research Statistics Unit of the PPSSC to organize a comprehensive in-service training for all secondary school principals and staff to enable them adjust to new challenges of developing and implementing strategic plans with available resources. There is need also to actively involve all stakeholders in strategic planning development in order to successfully effect school level change. School management should seek collaboration with other stakeholders such as NGO, civil society, government and other development agencies that are good at resource mobilization.

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