

**Principals Administrative Skills for Ensuring Conducive Learning Environments during Covid-19 Pandemics in Secondary Schools in Bayelsa State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract.** The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an unprecedented crisis for schools around the world. Caught in the eye of this storm, school principals have been responsible for leading their schools through this crisis. This study identified the principals' administrative skills as most pressing in the early days of the pandemic and how they acted in response. This study examined principals' administrative skills for ensuring conducive learning environment in secondary schools in Bayelsa State. One (1) research question and hypothesis was answered and tested in the study, respectively. The design of the study was the analytic descriptive survey, with the population as the 192 public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. These schools have a staff strength of 4579 (3,543 – teaching and 1,036 – non-teaching) from where 400 (227 – teaching and 173 – non-teaching) were selected as sample, using the purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. The instrument for data collection was a “*Principals' Administrative Skills Questionnaire (PASQ)*,” which consists of 10 structured items designed by the researchers and validated by experts. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was obtained using Kuder-Richardson formula (KR21), and a reliability index of 0.83 was obtained and considered appropriate for the study. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question, while z-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The results of the study revealed that principals' administrative skills for ensuring conducive learning environment during COVID-19 pandemics in Bayelsa State are that principals adequately planned for resumption during COVID-19 by given serious consideration to the available space and resources to cater the stipulated protocols, assigning duties to school members according to their abilities and with the aim to achieve effective coordination, ensuring that the different workgroups are effectively coordinated to achieve the set goals, continuously ensuring that school members are carried along in the decision making process as it has to do with attaining zero COVID-19 case, effectively directing the different work groups to ensure no conflict during the pandemic era, ensuring that all incentives/resources such as provision of hand sanitizer, facemask, and other controls were provided to achieve zero COVID-19 case, adopting a periodic evaluation technique of the staff members to ensure maximum compliance, ensuring that staff personnel administration was maintained during this period, and adopting a budgetary control practice that adequately catered for the needs of the season. It was therefore recommended that school principals and other stakeholders in school administration should continue to use existing administrative skills in order to ensure conducive learning conditions in schools.

**Keywords:** Principals, administrative skills, pandemics, learning environment, conducive

## Introduction

Education in its ideal frame of mind is committed to the realization of positive changes in the society. Education and educational institutions mobilize, radicalize, revolutionize and sensitize a people for those behaviours that are conducive for progress and harmonious living. Education develops in people positive qualities that enable them to acknowledge their limitations while at the same time belt up or crave to transcend their limitations. People who have acquired the right education are great assets to their societies in all ramifications. They make governance easier for their state but very problematic to be enslaved or marginalized. What the foregoing suggests is that education is instrumental in being the platform upon which all problems of man can be addressed. This may account for why Shively (2015) noted that the most basic service that most responsible governments are expected to offer their people is education. In support of the above, Nwaokugha and Kalu (2014) reported that education is one concept that ranks high in acting as an article of faith in addressing social, moral, scientific technological, economic, political and ecological problems of man.

COVID-19 is the infectious disease caused by the most recently discovered corona virus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China in December 2019. The most common symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, tiredness, dry cough, difficulty in breathing and it is highly contagious. The COVID-19 pandemic has presented an unprecedented crisis for schools around the world. Caught in the eye of this storm, school principals have been responsible for leading their schools through this crisis (WHO, 2020).

Peretomode (2013) defined administration as the component part of the management concerned with facilitating accomplishment of the objectives of an organization like school through the systematic management of constraints and careful utilization of the available limited resources like human, material, finance and so on. From the above definitions we summarize administration as a discipline concerned with facilitating the accomplishment of goals through systematic utilization of available human and material resources. Kalagbor (2017) defined school administration as the process of identifying, mobilizing, and utilizing scarce human and material resources relevant in education for the purpose of achieving specific educational goals efficiently and effectively. Maligida (2020) described it as the managerial skills needed for smooth functioning and execution. Omoregie (2015) defined it as the arrangement of human and material resources and programmes available to education for the attainment of educational objectives. Umoh and May-Amawhelu (2020) see school administration as the coordination of both human and material resources within the school for the optimal achievement of the predetermined objectives of education. Also, school administration is the school main governing body which plays a major part in making and taking decisions related to students and the school's overall status (Japhet-Nwapi, 2016). From the above definitions we can conclude that school administration involves a systematic utilization of available human and material resources to implementing educational programmes within the guidelines of educational polices in order to achieve the goals of education.

Secondary school is the intermediate level of education which is an inevitable bridge between the primary school and higher institution. It can only be productive if there is effective and efficient management of human and material resources available to it. The term school administration, when used in secondary education discussion, draws attention to the direction of an organization, control and supervision of schools in Nigeria. The school administrator on appointment are clothed with authority and responsibility of developing and implementing the education programmes of the school, providing facilities and equipment, keeping school records as well as creating a conducive teaching and learning atmosphere in schools. The school principals are therefore held responsible for the effective organization and administration of the school in which they have been appointed. School administrators are

change agents and as such they must be current with the new trends in classroom management and supervision (Japhet-Nwapi, 2016).

The Principal is the person male or female in charge of the school that plans, directs, controls, coordinates, organizes, advises and solves different problems in the school (Maduabuchi, 2012). The Principal also identifies and sets goals and objectives in the school, analyses tasks and shares responsibilities to the staff, according to area of specialization and expertise, which is in accordance with the national objectives of secondary education (Ugochi, 2017). The ultimate goal, in the administration of schools, at all levels, is to provide an all-inclusive quality education that is accessible and relevant for self-reliance. Administration is seen as a collection of processes that deals with the various methods, in which human and material resources are utilized to achieve set goals and objectives in an organisation. This cannot be achieved without effective application of administrative competencies needed by the principal for ensuring a conducive learning environment.

In school system, instruments in the school setting could be defined as a guide showing how various methods or strategies can be adopted to solve issues and receive positive results and changes that are capable of meeting the expectations of the society. The Principals' administrative skills therefore, are the different principles principals apply to smoothly coordinate the affairs of the school, so as to ensure a more conducive, friendly, inspiring and peaceful learning environment. For Ogbonnaya, Oboegbulem, Onwura and Enyi (2013), these administrative instruments are the sum total of various processes, which include planning, decision making, organizing, coordinating, motivating, directing, evaluating, staffing, budgeting, stimulating and communication. A good Principal should try as much as possible to champion the course of a peaceful learning environment. The teaching and non-teaching staff are needed by the school principal to achieve educational goals hence Abdulrahman (2014) noted that responsibilities of the principal include determining the personnel needs of the school, satisfying personnel needs, maintaining and improving services of the staff and all this can be properly achieved through budgeting.

The available ones include that of Wikipedia (2020) who submitted that the 2019–20 corona virus pandemic has affected educational systems worldwide, leading to the widespread closures of schools and universities. As of 3 April 2020, over 421 million learners were out of school due to school closures in response to COVID-19. According to UNESCO monitoring, over 200 countries have implemented nationwide closures, impacting about 98% of the world's student population.

In a bid to overcome the impact of school closure on the education sector, the FGN through its relevant agencies such as Education in Emergencies Working Group in Nigeria (EIEWGN), Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 and Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) formulated guidelines and recommendations that will ensure safe and protected learning environment. The guidelines for the safe reopening of schools and learning facilities during the COVID-19 are:

1. Ensuring adequate preparedness of schools and learning facilities for reopening and resumption of academic and other ancillary activities without placing the health, safety, and security of learners, teachers, administrators, and other education personal at risk;
2. A systemic, phased, safe reopening that factors resource availabilities to meet basic requirements and differentials in COVID-19 effect (e.g., fumigation and disinfection of schools; provision of learning material; impact and vulnerabilities across schools, learning facilities, communities, localities, local governments, and states); and
3. Continued safe and quality teaching and learning activities by learners, teachers, and administrators that meet prescribed standards through remote and e-learning platforms with adequate safeguarding of their health, safety, and security during school shutdown period;

4. Entrenching and institutionalizing good practices in health, safety, and security in the nation's education sector in the long term to strengthen systems and make them resilient against future similar occurrences. (FRN, 2020 p; 4).

In addition some alternative learning models were also suggested to minimize isolation risk and such models are

**Outdoor learning:** This can limit transmission and also allows for safe distancing between learners and teachers. The use of shelter outdoors is necessary for the protection and safety of learners and teachers. In addition, safety in all weathers and security measures are required for each location.

**Staggered attendance:** Learners may arrive and depart at different times to avoid overcrowding; schools may reopen gradually (e.g., starting with particular grade levels).

**Alternate attendance:** schools may alternate attendance days per week, with learners at the secondary level (or equivalent) and above having fewer in-person classes, since these learners can better manage independent learning (e.g., junior secondary learners attend on Tuesdays and Thursdays while primary school learners attend classes on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays).

**Platooning:** classes may be divided into morning and afternoon shifts.

These guidelines and recommendations posed new challenge on how well principals could effectively administer the secondary schools during the COVID-19 pandemics.

Ogunode (2020) examined the effects of COVID-19 schools close down on academic programme of senior secondary schools in Abaji Area Council of Federal Capital Territory Abuja, Nigeria. A survey research design was adopted for this study. This research work was carried out in Abaji area council of FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. There are a total number of eight (8) secondary schools in the area of study. Out of the entire teacher population in the area council, (80) teachers were sampled because of the school close down problem. A structured questionnaire, titled the 'Effects of COVID-19 Schools Close Down on the Senior Secondary School Academic Programme Questionnaire' (ECSCDSSAPQ) was used for obtaining information for the study. Simple random techniques were used to select the sample size. The reliability of the instrument was determined through the test re-test method. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage. Result collected revealed that 80 (100%) of the respondents strongly agreed that COVID-19 Schools close down would affect the academic programme of Senior Secondary Schools; 80 (100%) of the respondents strongly agreed that COVID-19 schools close down has led to suspension of internal and external examinations reduction in investment on education; 80 (100%) of the respondents strongly agreed that COVID-19 schools close down has led to suspension of teaching and learning in Schools; 80 (100%) of the respondents strongly agreed that COVID-19 schools close down has affected the academic calendar of senior secondary schools and 80 (100%) of the respondents strongly agreed that COVID-19 schools close down has led to the suspension of all extra-curriculum activities in Senior Secondary Schools. The study recommends that the Minister of education should direct all Senior Secondary Schools administrators to come up with strategies to cover up the one month teaching and learning gap created as result of the COVID=19 schools closed down.

Afangideh and Abaiola (2020) examined principals' administrative instrumentalities and social responsibility involvements for sustaining peaceful learning environment in secondary schools in Bayelsa State. Two (2) research questions and 2 hypotheses were answered and tested in the study, respectively. The design of the study was the analytic descriptive survey, with the population as the 192 public secondary schools in Bayelsa State. These schools have a staff strength of 4579 (3,872 – teaching and 707 – non-teaching) from where 371 (321 – teaching and 50 – non-teaching) were selected as sample, using the purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. The instrument of the study was a 19 item researchers' designed

scale, titled Principals' Administrative and Social Responsibility Instrumentalities for Sustaining Peaceful Learning Environment Scale, with a reliability index of 0.83, obtained using the Cronbach Alpha model. Mean scores and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions while z-test was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The results of the study show that Principals' administrative instrumentalities and social responsibility involvements help in sustaining peaceful learning environment in secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

There is a dearth of empirical evidence on how principals' skill can enhance smooth running of the secondary school system amidst this new normal posed by the COVID-19 pandemics in Bayelsa state. Hence, this study is geared towards filling this gap.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine principals' administrative skills for ensuring conducive learning environment during pandemics in secondary schools in Bayelsa state, Nigeria.

### **Research Question**

The research question below was raised to guide the study:

What are principals' administrative skills for ensuring conducive environment during pandemics in Bayelsa state?

### **Research Hypothesis**

The null hypothesis below was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant difference between the mean responses of teaching and non-teaching staff on principals' administrative skills for ensuring conducive learning system during pandemics in Bayelsa state.

### **Methodology**

The design of the study was a descriptive survey. According to Nworgu (2016) a descriptive survey design is a type of research design in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of entire group. The use of this research design was considered appropriate because it established the options of principals' administrative instrumentalities for ensuring conducive school environment during pandemics. To this extent, these variables were not manipulated as the influence (either positive or negative) of the independent variable on the dependent variable had already occurred.

The population of the study comprises of all the three thousand, five hundred and forty three (3543) principals' and teachers' in the one hundred and ninety two (192) Government Secondary Schools in Bayelsa State. Stratified random sampling techniques based on the three senatorial districts in the state, was used to sample 3 out of the 8 local government areas. Simple random sampling was used to select two (2) schools each from the local government areas. The 3 model schools in the local government areas of interest were purposively selected because they are the only urban schools in the area, making it a total of nine (9) schools. All the one hundred and twenty (227) teaching staff' and one hundred and seventy three (173) non-teaching staff from the nine (9) schools formed the sample of the study.

The instrument for data collection was a “*Principals’ Administrative Instrumentalities Questionnaire (PAIQ)*”, developed by the researchers. The instrument had 10 items structured on a four-point rating scale of: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) and were weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was made up of two sections—Section 1 and Section 2. Section 1 contained items bothering on the demographic variables of the respondents while Section 2 contained three sections namely; A, B and C. These sections elicited information based on the research question. The face and content of the instrument was validated by one expert in measurement and evaluation, one expert from educational management and planning. Their criticisms and corrections was included in the final draft used in the study. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained through test-retest method. 40 teachers’ in secondary schools in Ahoada West Local Government Area of Rivers State were administered the instrument twice within a time lag of 10 days. The scores collected from each of the tests were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and this yielded a coefficient score of 0.80 which was deemed as reliable for the study.

The researchers administered the questionnaire through the permission of the school principals’ to the respondents. The respondents were informed of the purpose of the research. They were assured of confidentiality in the responses they would give as the data were for research study only. The researchers collected back all the distributed copies of the questionnaire from the respondents. The data gathered was analyzed using mean and standard deviation for research question, while z-test analysis was used to test the research hypotheses. The decision rule for answering the research questions was arrived at by finding the average of the 4-point scale,  $\frac{4+3+2+1}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.50$ , thus, any item with mean of 2.50 and above was interpreted as agreed, while mean score below were interpreted as disagreed. For the hypothesis, the decision rule is that if the calculated z-value is greater than the critical or table value, the null hypothesis would be rejected, otherwise, it would not be rejected.

## Results and Analysis

**Research Question: What are Principals’ Administrative Skills for Ensuring Conducive Environment during Pandemics in Bayelsa State?**

**Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of responses on the principals' administrative skills**

S/N	ITEMS	X <sub>1</sub>	SD <sub>1</sub>	Remark	X <sub>2</sub>	SD <sub>2</sub>	Remark
1.	Principals adequately planned for resumption during COVID-19 by given serious consideration to the available space and resources to cater the stipulated protocol.	2.75	1.08	Agreed	3.02	1.06	Agreed
2.	Principals assigned duties to school members according to their abilities and with the aim to achieve effective coordination.	2.85	1.05	Agreed	2.67	1.19	Agreed
3.	Principals ensured that the different workgroups are effectively coordinated to achieve the set goals.	2.86	1.16	Agreed	2.59	1.02	Agreed
4.	Principals continuously, ensured that school members are carried along in the decision making process as it has to do with attaining zero COVID-19 case.	2.91	1.02	Agreed	2.78	0.94	Agreed
5.	Principals effectively directed the different work groups to ensure no conflict during the pandemic era.	2.85	1.05	Agreed	2.59	1.22	Agreed
6.	Principals ensured that all incentives/resources such as provision of hand sanitizer, facemask, and other controls were provided to achieve zero COVID-19 case.	2.96	1.06	Agreed	2.63	1.18	Agreed
7.	Principals adopted a periodic evaluation technique of the staff members to ensure maximum compliance.	2.48	1.08	Disagreed	2.67	1.06	Agreed
8.	Principals ensured that staff personnel administration was maintained during this period.	2.45	1.19	Disagreed	2.43	1.05	Agreed
9.	Principals adopted a budgetary control practice that adequately catered for the needs of the season.	2.83	1.06	Agreed	2.76	1.21	Agreed
10.	Principals ensured that the channels of communication amongst staff and students created room for the achievement of zero COVID-19 cases.	2.91	1.05	Agreed	2.85	1.16	Agreed
GRAND MEAN		2.71				2.73	

Data in Table 1 indicated that items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 10 had mean ratings above the criterion mean of 2.50 and were adjudged as the Principals' administrative skills for ensuring conducive learning environment in secondary schools in Bayelsa State. On the contrary, item with serial number 8 and 9 had a mean rating below the criterion mean of 2.50 and was denied agreement as the Principals' administrative skills for ensuring conducive learning environment in secondary schools in Bayelsa State. Therefore, with an aggregate mean of 2.73, above the criterion mean of 2.50, teaching and non-teaching staff agreed that principals' administrative

skills for ensuring conducive learning environment in secondary schools in Bayelsa State are principals adequately planned for resumption during COVID-19 by given serious consideration to the available space and resources to cater the stipulated protocols, assigning duties to school members according to their abilities and with the aim to achieve effective coordination, ensuring that the different workgroups are effectively coordinated to achieve the set goals, continuously ensuring that school members are carried along in the decision making process as it has to do with attaining zero COVID-19 case, effectively directing the different work groups to ensure no conflict during the pandemic era, ensuring that all incentives/resources such as provision of hand sanitizer, facemask, and other controls were provided to achieve zero COVID-19 case, adopting a periodic evaluation technique of the staff members to ensure maximum compliance, ensuring that staff personnel administration was maintained during this period, adopting a budgetary control practice that adequately catered for the needs of the season and adopting effective communication channel for easy flow of information.

### Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the mean responses of teaching and non-teaching staff on principals' administrative skills for ensuring conducive learning system during pandemics in Bayelsa state.

**Table 2. Z-test analysis on the mean responses of teaching and non-teaching staff on principals' administrative skills**

Category	N	Mean	St.D.	df	p	Z <sub>cal</sub>	Z <sub>crit</sub>	Decision
Teaching staff	227	3.05	0.53	398	0.05	0.740	1.960	Accept H <sub>03</sub>
Non-teaching staff	173	3.19	0.76					

Results in Table 2 indicate the summaries of mean responses, standard deviation and z-test of difference between the mean ratings of teaching and non-teaching staff on the Principals' administrative skills for ensuring conducive learning environment during pandemics in secondary schools in Bayelsa State. The calculated z-test value, used in testing the hypothesis, stood at 0.740 while the z-critical value stood at 1.960, using 398 degrees of freedom, at 0.05 level of -significance. At 0.05 level of significance and 398 degrees of freedom, the calculated z-value of 0.740 is less than the critical value of 1.960. This suggested that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the respondents. Based on these observations, the researchers upheld the null hypothesis, hence there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of teaching and non-teaching staff on the Principals' administrative skills for ensuring conducive learning environment during pandemics in Bayelsa state.

### Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that the Principals' administrative skills for ensuring conducive learning environment during pandemics include planning principals adequately planned for resumption during COVID-19 by given serious consideration to the available space and resources to cater the stipulated protocols, assigning duties to school members according to their abilities and with the aim to achieve effective coordination, ensuring that the different workgroups are effectively coordinated to achieve the set goals, continuously ensuring that school members are carried along in the decision making process as it has to do with attaining zero COVID-19 case, effectively directing the different work groups to ensure no conflict during the pandemic era, ensuring that all incentives/resources such as provision of hand sanitizer, facemask, and other controls were provided to achieve zero COVID-19 case, adopting a periodic evaluation technique of the staff members to ensure maximum compliance, ensuring that staff personnel administration was maintained during this period, adopting a

budgetary control practice that adequately catered for the needs of the season and adopting effective communication channel for easy flow of information.

This finding agrees with Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011), Enyi as (cited in Abdulrahman, 2014), Abraham (2003), Nwankwo (as cited in Abdulrahman 2014), Peretomode (2014), Agabi and Okorie (2007), Abudulrahman (2014) and Ogbonnaya (2012), who in their scholarly and empirical academic contributions give information on the efficacy of Principals' administrative instrumentalities for sustaining peaceful learning environment. However, a corresponding finding from hypothesis testing found no significant difference between the mean ratings of teaching and non-teaching staff on the Principals' administrative instrumentalities for sustaining peaceful learning environment in secondary schools in Bayelsa state. This finding however disagrees with the positions taken by Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011), Enyi as (cited in Abdulrahman, 2014), Abraham (2003), Nwankwo (as cited in Abdulrahman 2014), Peretomode (2014), Agabi and Okorie (2007), Abudulrahman (2013) and Ogbonnaya (2012) and does not invalidate the fact that Principals' administrative skills create and sustain peaceful learning environment in secondary schools in Bayelsa state. This alternative finding could be the result of the rigorous statistical tools used in the analysis of data or the disposition of the respondents at the time the instruments were administered to them.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is concluded that administrative skills for ensuring conducive learning environment during pandemics in secondary schools are principals adequately planned for resumption during COVID-19 by given serious consideration to the available space and resources to cater the stipulated protocols, assigning duties to school members according to their abilities and with the aim to achieve effective coordination, ensuring that the different workgroups are effectively coordinated to achieve the set goals, continuously ensuring that school members are carried along in the decision making process as it has to do with attaining zero COVID-19 case, effectively directing the different work groups to ensure no conflict during the pandemic era, ensuring that all incentives/resources such as provision of hand sanitizer, facemask, and other controls were provided to achieve zero COVID-19 case, adopting a periodic evaluation technique of the staff members to ensure maximum compliance, ensuring that staff personnel administration was maintained during this period, adopting a budgetary control practice that adequately catered for the needs of the season and adopting effective communication channel for easy flow of information. Also, the mean response of teaching and non-teaching staff on principals' administrative skills does not differ significantly.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1) School Principals and other internal stakeholders in school administration should continue to use existing administrative strategies in managing schools while also looking out for other proactive ways for use in managing schools for the enthronement of conducive environment for learning.

2) School Principals other internal and external stakeholders in school administration, should continue to identify better ways to manage the school system in the midst of this pandemic called COVID-19.

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