# UPSKILLING TEACHERS IN THE DIGITAL ERA: PANACEA FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN CALABAR EDUCATION ZONE, CROSS RIVER STATE

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**Abstract**

*The paper examined upskilling teachers as a panacea for sustainable secondary education in cross river state. The survey research design was adopted for the study. Three (3) research questions were raised and two hypotheses formulated to guide the study. The total population for the study was 118 consisting 46 public secondary school principals and 72 private school principals in Calabar education zone. The 118 principals were purposively selected. The instrument used for data collection was Up skilling teachers sustainable questionnaire (UTSSEQ), with reliability 0.86 using the Croubach Alpha The mean score and t test statistics was used for data analysis. The results revealed areas of teacher competency that needs upskilling. Also, there is no significant difference between perception of both public and private school principals about up skilling teachers and sustainable secondary education in Calabar education zone. Principals are admonished to organize training programmes for teachers on periodic basis.*

**Keywords:** Upskilling, sustainability, Secondary education, Teacher

**Introduction**

Education is recognized as a veritable tool for national development and transformation. This is the reason why developed economies are continuously earmarking substantial portion of their national budget to education system. However, teachers education play a crucial roles in the entire educational process. Nwogu (2022) views the teacher as the first of the educational process. Teachers are seen as the implementers of education policy and curriculum. It is the teacher who transfers knowledge to the learners using appropriate pedagogical styles that best suites the learners (Okon and Nnaji 2014). Teachers perform a plethora of roles in the school system. These roles range from lesson delivery, classroom management, students' evaluation, record keeping, communication with parent and many other relevant roles which culminates to transforming the learner into a better and useful member of the society. The tasks performed by teachers are vast and all-encompassing such that no education system can be sustained without teachers and their competencies.

Teachers are employed into the school system with relevant skills and capabilities. For the teachers to perform their duties satisfactorily and effectively, they must possess skills and attain remarkable level of competence (Tafiq, 2020). Teachers of the 21$^{st}$ century must be engaged in continuous training and retraining in order to be able to meet goals and objectives of education in their respective schools. Miseri (2018) posited that in the preset world where every facet of human existence is being transformed by information and communications technology, the education sector must endeavor to remain sustainable.

Sustainability has become the vision of virtually every meaningful human endevour. Sustainability in its broadest sense refers to the ability to maintain or support a process continuously overtime (Mollenkamp, 2023). In the business and policy contexts, sustainability seeks to prevent the depletion of natural or physical resources so that they will remain available for the long term. In the education cycle, sustainable education refers to quality formal education and learning that continuously gives lasting value to the learners in the future. Education system that is sustainable will go a long way to encourage and inculcate in the students the desire for lifelong learning (Uko & Nnaji, 2016). The United Nations sustainable development goal number four noted that we must "Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning". This implies that sustainable secondary education is that which provides diverse learners with all round skills development, desire for continuous learning and the potential to achieve success in their future endeavours. The curriculum of sustainable schools are rich in content, student centered and facilitated by competent, self- driven and motivated teachers (Meroko, 2020). Healthy, safe and supportive teachers as well as conducive learning environment is

another hallmark of schools that are committed to preparing students for a sustainable future (Melosi, 2021).

To prepare students for the future, teachers also need to prepare themselves in terms of subject mastery and other related tasks. Riman (2019) noted that in the world of digital transformation, teachers need to build their capacity in order to meet the demands of modern teaching and learning. The teacher is the heart and soul of the educational programme (Nnaji, Ofem, Anashie & Bassey, 2023). Wodu (2020) pointed out that developing capacities through acquisition of modern knowledge and skills is the way for educational institutions to go in order to realize the laudable goal number four of the United Nations. This implies that secondary school teachers need to keep abreast of new innovations in education by upskilling.

Upskilling is the process of providing employee with more relevant advanced skills through additional education and training (Drake, 2004). Rapid changes and innovations in the process of education delivery have necessitated teachers and other workers in education sector to upskill. Allan (2022) stated that upskilling an employee may result to higher productivity, efficiency in resource use and competence of organizations staff leading to organizational sustainability. Based on the emerging tasks of teachers, they may need to upskill in the areas of use of digital resources, curriculum design, teaching styles and social support. Akin (2021) argued that it's only through upskilling teachers that they will be well positioned to meet the needs of teaching and learning of the 21st century.

Interest in teachers' job performance has drawn researchers to embark on researches related to this area. Migonla (2020) in a study on teachers and students' achievements in primary schools in Adoki local government area of rivers state discovered that poor mastery of subject matter, poor communication in English language and inability to use computers in the computer laboratory characterized the newly employed teachers. These also poses a challenge in the performance of their duties. The study concluded that there is a relationship between quality education and teacher competence and recommended that new teachers should be retrained before assigning duties to them. In a related study, Mbidi (2018) investigated the causes of job related stress among teachers in private secondary schools in Niger State. Using 335 teachers randomly drawn from population of 1,455 teachers, the result showed that job stress among teachers was caused by incompetence in the use of modern pedagogies and technology tools such as computers, smartphones, emails, internet and the likes. Results also indicated that inability to use these modern tools made teachers struggle with large workload of manual recording, writing, counting,

teaching and documentation. The study conducted that there is a significant relationship between stress and capacity building.

Further studies indicate a link between training and teacher's competency. Olimi, (2017) concluded after a study on capacity building and teachers' competence that there is a significant relationship between capacity building and teacher's competence. This shows that training teachers through advanced studies, seminars or workshops enhance their competencies. Igwe (2021) in his study on the assessment of teachers' job effectiveness discovered that periodic training of teachers will equip them with relevant skills and competencies. Kadoki (2018) reported after a study that computer illiteracy is one of the hindrances to teachers' effectiveness in primary schools. The study therefore recommended that school principals, proprietors and the government should endeavor to sponsor and provide ICT training for teachers. Teachers can use their laptop and desktop computers to prepare lesson notes, set tests and examinations, send messages to their peers and even communicate with students if they have the skill to do that. David (2020) suggested that teachers at all levels should as a matter of urgency be trained in digital skills because of its many benefits.

However, the question that bugs the mind of the researchers and those who have concern for the sustainability of secondary education is "what are the upskilling needs of teachers? Answer to this question can be provided from this research. It is based on this premise that this research is carried out to identify the skilling needs of secondary school teachers and how upskilling teachers relates to achieving sustainable secondary education in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State.

**Statement of the Problem**

The sustainable development goal four of the United Nations is the achievement of quality and inclusive education for all and to promote lifelong learning. This implies that the learners must be taught by competent, skilled and motivated teachers. Unfortunately, students' poor performance in both internal and external examinations as well as their lack of desire for continuous or lifelong education irrespective of the abundance of teachers employed to teach in schools calls into question the future of the secondary education system whose sustainability is being threatened. This situation has raised a lot of concern in the minds of stakeholders in education as to whether secondary school teachers employed possess appropriate skills for effective job performance that can lead to sustainability of secondary schools. In the light of this, this study is poised to identify the upskilling needs of secondary school teachers and determine whether there is any

relationship between upskilling teachers, the digital era and sustainability of secondary schools in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study.

(1) What is the perception of principals on the upskilling needs of secondary school teachers in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State?

**Hypothesis**

(1) There is no significant difference between the perception of public and private school principals about teacher competency that teachers need upskilling.

(2) There is no significant difference between the perception of public and private school principals about upskilling teachers and sustainability of secondary schools in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State.

**Methodology**

The study adopted a survey research design. The population of the study comprised all 46 principals in the public secondary schools and 72 private secondary schools in Calabar education zone. Purposive sampling technique was employed in this study. The instrument used for data collection was a constructed questionnaire titled "Upskilling teachers questionnaire (UTSSEQ)". The instrument was divided into two sections A and B. Section A contained information on areas of teacher competency that need upskilling. The section B contains 10 items that elicited principals' perceptions on the extent upskilling of teachers can predict sustainability of secondary schools. The section B was a modified 4 point likert type built on a scale of Strongly Agree (SA) - 4 points, Agree (A) - 3 points, Disagree (D) – 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1 point. The instrument was validated by two experts in Educational Measurement and evaluation, faculty of educational foundations, University of Calabar. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha. The reliability coefficient value yielded 0.85. A total of 118 copies of the questioner were distributed personally by the researcher to the respondents. The researcher choose one week for this distribution so as to have ample time to cover all the schools used for the study. The researcher gave the respondents two days to fill the questionnaires after then revisited the schools to retrieve them. All 118 questionnaire distributed were returned. The data collected was analyzed using mean and t-test statistics for the research question and hypotheses respectively.

**Results**

Research question 1

What is the perception of principals on the areas of competency that secondary school teachers in Calabar education zone need upskilling?

**Table 1: Mean rating on the perception of private and public school principals on the areas of competence that teachers need upskilling.**

| S/N | Item (area of competency) | Public school principal | | | Private school principal | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | $\bar{X}$ | SD | Decision | $\bar{X}$ | SD | Decision |
| 1. | Use of computer for record keeping | 3.86 | 0.46 | Accepted | 3.80 | 0.81 | Agreed |
| 2. | Use of computer for information search on internet | 3.98 | 0.58 | Agreed | 3.92 | 0.96 | Agreed |
| 3. | Use of projector for lesson delivery | 3.20 | 0.66 | Agreed | 2.78 | 0.39 | Agreed |
| 4. | Use of smartphones for information search and communications | 3.22 | 0.68 | Agreed | 3.00 | 0.62 | Agreed |
| 5. | Time management | 2.83 | 0.50 | Agreed | 3.42 | 0.31 | Agreed |
| 6. | Use of modern teaching styles | 2.88 | 0.49 | Agreed | 3.21 | 0.67 | Agreed |
| 7. | Conflict management skills | 3.42 | 0.71 | Agreed | 3.93 | 0.57 | Agreed |
| 8. | Classroom management skills | 2.78 | 0.38 | Agreed | 3.01 | 0.63 | Agreed |
| 9. | English diction | 2.93 | 0.52 | Agreed | 2.91 | 0.31 | Agreed |
| 10. | English spelling | 3.00 | 0.61 | Agreed | 3.08 | 0.63 | Agreed |
| 11. | Presentation skills | 3.62 | 0.82 | Agreed | 3.10 | 0.65 | Agreed |

Table 1 revealed that all the items in the table has means that are higher than the mean of the decision rule. However, item 1, 2, 3, 4, 8 and 10 obtained higher mean scores for both public and private school principals. This implies that both public and private secondary school principals agreed that using computer for record keeping, use of computer for information search on the internet, use of projector for lesson delivery, use of smartphones for information search, time management, use of modern teaching styles, conflict management, classroom management, English diction, spelling and presentation skills are the areas of competency where teachers needs upskilling.

**Hypothesis 1**
There is no significant difference in the perception of public and private school principals on the areas of teacher competency that teachers need upskilling.

**Table 2: T-test analysis of the perception of public and private secondary school principals and on the areas of teacher competency that needs upskilling.**

| Respondents | N | $\bar{X}$ | SD | Df | t-cal | Prob. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public school principals | 46 | 3.02 | 0.40 | | | | |
| | | | | 116 | 0.13 | .05 | H$_0$ Accepted |
| Private school principals | 72 | 3.55 | 0.46 | | | | |

Table 2, the analysis the above table shows that calculated t-value of 0.13 is less than t-critical value of 1.97. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This means that there is no significant difference between public and private school principals in their perception on areas of teacher competency that needs upskilling.

**Hypothesis 2**
There is no significant difference in the perception of public and private school principals on the upskilling teachers and sustainability of secondary schools in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State.

**Table 1: T-test analysis of the perception of public and private school principals on the relationship between upskilling teachers and sustainability of secondary school**

| Respondents | N | $\bar{X}$ | SD | Df | t-cal | Prob. | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Public school principals | 46 | 3.40 | 0.51 | | | | |
| | | | | 116 | 0.17 | .05 | H$_0$ Accepted |
| Private school principals | 72 | 3.58 | 0.41 | | | | |

Table 2 above shows that the calculated t-value of 0.17 is less than t-critical value of 1.97. The null hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is no significant difference in the perception of public and private school principals on the relationship between upskilling of teachers and sustainability of secondary education in Calabar south local government area.

**Discussion of Findings**

The results of the research question in table 1 revealed that both public and private school principals agreed that the use of computer for record keeping and lesson planning, use of computer for information search on the internet, use of projector for lesson delivery, use of smartphones for information search, time management, classroom management, diction, English spelling and presentation are the areas of teachers' competencies that needs upskilling. This result was confirmed in the table by the high mean scores obtained in all the 10 items that represents areas of teacher competency. This result is in agreement with Igwe (2021) who found out in his study that periodic training of teachers will equip them with relevant and practical skills in specific areas to effectively meet the demands and challenges of classrooms of the digital era. This implies that principals who are sole school administrators should endeavour to identify the areas of teacher competencies that their teachers are lacking and make arrangement or recommendations for their training. Emphasis on teacher training should also be in the use of modern information and communications technology such as computers, smartphones, modern pedagogies, conflict resolution techniques, classroom management skills, English diction and spelling as well as the techniques of presentations.

Furthermore, the results revealed that there is no significant difference in the perception of principals of public and primary schools on the areas of teacher competency that needs upskilling. This finding is in consonance with Enuigo (2005) who stated that private and public school teachers are optimistic to receive training for improving their proficiency so that their performance rate will not be regarded as low quality. This finding shows that the principals who directly supervise teachers knows that regardless of whether a teacher is in private or public school, all teachers need upskilling.

In addition, the results that there is no significant difference between the perception of public and private school principals on the relationship between upskilling teachers and sustainability of secondary education in Calabar education zone. This finding is in agreement with Migonla (2020) who concluded in a study that there is a relationship between teacher competence and quality education. This implies that when teachers' competence is enhanced through upskilling, they will put in their best to ensure the sustainability of their schools. This finding also aligns with Allan (2022) who stated that upskilling employees may result to higher productivity, efficiency in resource use, competency of organization staff and organizational sustainability. This finding also agrees with that of Tasmi (2018) who discovered in his study that poorly performing schools improved after sending their teachers on training workshop in phonetics,

computer usage, classroom management and modern pedagogies. This shows that upskilling teachers in the various areas of their job roles will perfect their skills and competency, thus, leading to sustainable secondary education in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State.

## Conclusion

The paper examined upskilling teachers as a panacea for sustainable secondary education in cross river state. It has been established that both public and private school principals did not differ in their perception on the relationship between upskilling teachers and sustainability of secondary education. It is therefore concluded that sustainability of secondary education in Calabar Education Zone of Cross River State is possible through the upskilling of teachers in their various professional roles to equip them with requisite skills, knowledge and expertise needed to effectively carry out their roles.

## Recommendations

1) Principals of schools should recommend or organize training programmes for their teachers on periodic basis.
2) Government should prioritize teacher upskilling by earmarking special funds for sponsoring teachers training.
3) Teachers should always be willing and desirous of upskilling themselves in areas where they are not performing up to expectations.

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