Information Use for Staff Collegiality in Public Secondary Schools in Nigeria: Barriers and Enhancement Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Information use is vital for enhancing staff collegiality in this information age. The main purpose of this research was to investigate to what extent information use has enhanced staff collegiality in secondary schools in Anambra State. Based on three research questions, the study employed a descriptive survey designed with a questionnaire in collecting data. Six hundred teachers and sixty principals in Anambra State were selected using simple random sampling technique. Data collected were analysed using mean scores. Results indicate that secondary school staff in Anambra State has not been able to use information to enhance staff collegiality among their staff. Some barriers and strategies for enhancing information use for staff collegiality were identified. Among the recommendations was that staff should cultivate good information exchanges among themselves and reduce every barrier to information use for enhancing staff collegiality.

INTRODUCTION

The information age has been characterized by information implosion and explosion which keeps extending the frontiers of knowledge and making some hitherto impossible information exchanges, possible. It is an age of information through telecommunications, media, internet, satellites and digital machines (Telem,1996) Therefore, at this crucial time in history, resistance to collegial information use in secondary schools would improve not only schools but also society in general.

Information use is vital to enhancing staff collegiality. Staff collegiality is the existence of good working relationships between principals and staff of a school (Little, 2002). The focus is on what they do, to improve school

processes and students' learning (Mader & Mader, 1993). Bhengu (2005) described staff collegiality as an interactive relationship that exist among school administrators and staff whereby they discuss problems and seek solutions together, advice one another, learn from one another, exchange ideas and information, and think about school improvements in terms of communal action rather than individual actions.

Collegiality among staff within a school has been shown to have a greater influence on the quality of information in the school and on student accomplishment, than anything else (Moloi, Grobler & Gravett, 2002; Barth, 2006). Evidence of collegiality in information use among teachers and administrators includes: discussing information with one another, sharing their knowledge, and observing one another; and rooting for one another's success (Davies, Kingerly & Lynch, 2007). Schmoker (1999:1) found the following evidence of the benefits of information use for collegiality:

- remarkable gain in achievement;
- higher-quality solutions to problems;
- increased confidence among all school community members;
- teacher's ability to support one another's strengths and to accommodate weaknesses;
- the ability to examine information and test new ideas, methods, and materials;
- more systemic utilization of reliable sources of information; and
- an expanded pool of information ideas, materials, and methods.

Where staff exchange and utilise reliable information sources and channels, their input in the school system cannot be over-emphasised (Brown, 2003). Conversely, a culture of privacy (staff working in isolation) in schools prevents teachers from gathering useful information for effective teaching (Mugunda, 2003). Hence school staff must be able to foster collegial information use in providing a cooperative nature, setting team norms and protocols, and establishing instructional focuses.

Despite the indispensable value of information use for staff collegiality in schools, it appears that there are some barriers to the use of information to enhance staff collegiality. For instance, Udoye (2004) found that there are cases of non-utilization of reliable information sources in communication and hoarding of vital information among staff. Chukwukelu (2007) also found that school staff often experience information over load, whereby too much information is sent out and is beyond the capacity of the staff members to process within the available time. It thus appears that information use for staff collegiality has not been achieved in many secondary schools in Anambra State. It is against this background that the present study investigates the use, barriers

and strategies for using information to enhance staff collegiality in secondary schools.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to determine the use for information for enhancing staff collegiality in secondary schools in Anambra state secondary schools. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1) Determine to what extent staff use information to enhance collegiality among them.
2) ascertain the barriers to the use of information for enhancing staff collegiality, and
3) Find out some strategies for using information to enhance staff collegiality in the schools.
4)

Research Questions

Three research questions were formulated. These are:

1. To what extent does staff use information to enhance staff collegiality in secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What are the barriers to the use of information in enhancing staff collegiality in the schools?
3. What strategies could be used to improve information use for enhancing staff collegiality in schools?

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

The descriptive survey research design was used in carrying out the study. This design was used to collect data from a sample of principals and teachers in secondary schools in Anambra State on their use of information to enhance staff collegiality in the schools.

Population of the Study

The population of the study is made up of 261 principals and 5672 teachers in secondary schools in six education zones in Anambra State.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample of six hundred teachers and sixty principals in Anambra State were selected for the study using simple random sampling. From each of the six

education zones in Anambra State, ten schools were randomly selected, yielding 60 schools. All the principals in these schools were chosen to participate in the study. Then ten teachers were randomly chosen from each of the 60 schools, making the sample of teachers to be 600. Total number of respondents selected was six hundred and sixty.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument that was used in collecting data for this study is questionnaire. The title of the questionnaire is "Information Use for Staff Collegiality Questionnaire (IUSCQ)". The questionnaire consisted of 39 items on a four-point scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

Validation of the Instrument

Two experts in educational administration and planning from University of Nigeria Nsukka, validated the instrument. These experts after scrutinising the instrument made very important and useful suggestions and corrections, which were reflected, in the final modification of the items of the questionnaire.

Reliability of instrument

The reliability of the instrument was tested using the responses of ten (10) principals and 20 teachers from secondary schools in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State. The data collected were analysed using Cronbach Co-efficient alpha method to determine the reliability of the instrument. Reliability coefficients of 0.81; 0.86 and 0.82 were obtained indicating that the instrument was reliable.

Method of Data Collection

Copies of questionnaire were administered and retrieved with the help of six research assistants trained by the researcher on how to administer the instrument. The research assistants visited the schools, distributed and retrieved copies of the questionnaire to the principals and teachers. A hundred percent (100%) rate return of the questionnaire was obtained.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were organised and analysed using mean scores. Based on the 4-point rating scale, the midpoint for the scale is 2.50. Therefore, only items with mean ratings of 2.50 and above were accepted as agree, while mean ratings below 2.50 were regarded as disagree. For research question one, an average mean of 2.50 and above was regarded as great extent while an average mean of less than 2.50 was regarded as low extent.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean ratings of staff use information to enhance collegial relationships among staff.

S/NO	ITEMS	X̄	Decision
1	Staff exchanges information on institutional problems.	2.68	Agree
2		1.52	Disagree
3	Staff discuss and exchange information on innovations		
4		1.02	Disagree
	Staff uses e-mails to chat with one another.		
5		2.22	Disagree
	Teachers share journals and conference papers on Information technology with principals.		
6		2.24	Disagree
7	Staff observe one another using instructional technologies and give feedback.		
8		1.62	Disagree
	Principals and teachers always disclose school vital information among themselves.		
9		3.28	Agree
10	Staff freely relay to one another, written information of professional.		
		2.13	Disagree
	Principals receive and relay to the teachers any change of grade to be made on a teacher		
		3.00	Agree
	Staff use teacher forum as an opportunity to discuss information of mutual interest.	3.29	Agree
	Principals visit teachers in staff rooms and talk with them.		
11	Staff use grapevine information to facilitate communication and mutual support, and help to one another	2.23	Disagree
12	Teachers often discuss with principals on how information on their improvement and performance appraisal are generated and analyzed.	2.26	Disagree
13		3.11	Agree
	Principals liaise with staff to gain support for all critical information flows in the school (student services, instructional design/delivery, etc.).		
	Average mean	**2.34**	**Low extent**

In Table 2, the mean ratings of items 1, 7, 9, 10, and 13 are above 2.50. This is an indication that staff agreed that they use information to enhance collegiality as reflected in those items. The rest of the items have mean ratings less than 2.50. The average mean for the entire items is 2.30 indicating that there was a low extent of information use to enhance collegiality among staff in secondary schools in Anambra State in this information age.

Table 2: Mean ratings of barriers to information use for staff collegiality.

S/N	ITEMS	X̄	Decision
	Pressure due to principals' power status	3.19	Agree
	Downward flow of information through the organizational hierarchy	2.79	Agree
	Insufficient time to comply with information directives in schools.	3.01	Agree
	Inadequate training on innovations in interactive information technology	4.00	Agree
	Non-decentralised school information networks (E.g. lack of intercoms, internet)	3.52	Agree
	Non-availability of information guidelines on instructional technologies supplied to staff	3.55	Agree
	Lack of capacity to use internet in chatting	3.51	Agree
	Too many information memos lead to boredom	2.01	Disagree
	Teachers feel frightened to communicate with strict and harsh principals.	3.48	Agree
	Some teachers go the principal to confirm information from their departmental heads due to lack of trust.	3.44	Agree
	Principal's sole setting of school goals using information available to him/her.	2.42	disagree
	Too much grapevine information.	3.12	agree
	Insufficient time to hold staff meetings regularly for briefing on school affairs	2.18	disagree

Table 2 above showed that only items 8, 11 and 13 have mean ratings below 2.50. This means that the respondents agreed that the issues stated in these items are not among the information barriers to staff collegiality in schools. The rest of the items scored above 2.50 showing that they constitute information barriers to staff collegiality in secondary schools in an information age.

In table 3, the mean rating of items 1, 9, 10 and 13 are below 2.50. This indicates that in the opinions of staff, the strategies in these items cannot be used for improving information use for enhancing staff collegiality in the information age. The rest of the items scored above 2.50. This indicates that items such as staff should be trained and encouraged to use internet to send and obtain information from one another; principals should encourage information exchange among staff by some sort of incentive or bonus scheme based on the importance of the information, and staff must always acknowledge grievances to keep the channels of information among them open, as some strategies for enhancing information use in enhancing staff collegiality in secondary schools.

Table 3: Mean ratings of strategies for information use for enhancing staff collegiality.

S/N	ITEMS	X	Decision
1	Staff suggestion schemes in which workers can submit information should be introduced in schools.	2.42	disagree
2	Staff should be trained and encouraged to use internet to send and obtain information from one another.	3.59	agree
3	Principals should encourage information exchange among staff by some sort of incentive or bonus scheme based on the importance of the information	3.24	agree
4	Staff must always acknowledge grievances to keep the channels of information among them open.	3.38	agree
5	Principals should use open-door policies and set aside times when other staff can go directly to them and discuss whatever information is on their minds.	3.60	agree
6	Over-reliance on memory information should be reduced. Complex information delivered orally need to be followed up with written material.	3.75	agree
7	Staff need to pay attention to the choice of an appropriate information channel and avoid the use of jargon.	3.42	agree
8	Every inter-staff information needs to be put into a clear context before moving onto detail.	3.36	agree
9	Staff should give information to obtain favour from principals.	2.42	disagree
10	Every information on goal implementation should always be documented and timely communicated to teachers.	3.99	agree
11	Grapevine communication should be stopped as a source of information for school staff.	2.11	disagree
12	Principals should delegate communication tasks to only competent staff to avoid contamination of information.	2.48	disagree
13	Vital information should always be pasted on the notice boards where every staff could read it.	3.67	agree

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

It was found that there was a low extent of information use for staff collegiality in secondary schools in Anambra state. This finding is in line with Chukwukelu (2007) who reported a low extent of principal-staff relationship in secondary schools in Anambra State. Perhaps, the staff do not understand the role of information in staff collegiality. By so doing staff do not maximise the use of information to foster a cordial relationship among them, forgetting that collegiality promotes a sense of belonging, a sense of team, a connecting to one another and, therefore, to one's work unit. In a related study, Mungunda (2003) found that collegial culture do not exist in many South African secondary schools as teachers have had relatively little influence over the broader spectrum of school information and have experienced little involvement in decision-making. The result is that deeper school problems are ignored. Teachers become isolated, their perspectives marginalized and their opportunities for professional discourse compromised. Both teacher and principal's curiosity are likely to be discouraged, along with

the desire to take risks, explore and speculate on a range of information. In the absence of use of information to foster collegiality, interpersonal relations among staff of secondary schools in Anambra state may lack a sense of order, roles and responsibilities may not be clearly articulated and performance expectations may not be explicit (information reflecting accepted values, mores and ethics).

One would have expected staff to collectively manage information well; make data-based decisions that will lead to collegiality without disadvantaging any group. It comes as a surprise that in this information age, staff do not increasingly rely on integrated information systems to foster collegiality. How then can such staff manage information and respond to community demands for immediate access to information about curricula and scheduling, costs, academic programmes, students' qualifications, and so on?

 Another interesting finding of this study is that several barriers hinder the use of information to enhance staff collegiality in schools. Such barriers identified in this study range from principals' power status, downward information flow, time limitations, lack of capacity, lack of trust among staff to lack of decentralized information systems. Eisner (2001) similarly found that several information barriers lead to strained staff relationships. Where these barriers prevail, there is not likely to be a strong sense of belonging and mutual trust; values, vision and fulfilment.

Finally some strategies for using information to enhance staff collegiality were identified. One of these strategies is staff suggestion schemes in which workers can submit ideas. Just as Bhengu (2005) noted, information use could be encouraged by some sort of incentive or bonus scheme based on the amount of importance the suggestion produces. This can lead to innovations but a drawback is that the suggestion system may be used to voice complaints about conditions management is unable to change. Another strategy involves the use of grievance systems. These as Brown (2003) stated are designed to change existing negative situations and must be handled delicately to protect the employee from retribution. It requires staff to acknowledge the receipt of the grievance to keep the channels of communication open and make it clear what action has been taken. The issue of open-door policies is also identified. This involves setting aside times when employees can go directly to managers to discuss whatever is on their minds. This, as Eisner (2001) stated bypasses the intermediate steps in the upward organisational chain ensuring important messages do indeed get to the top intact. An obvious drawback is the danger of using manager's time on what may be a trivial matter.   Feedback from management is essential to give the staff the impression that it was not a waste of time. Then staff need to pay attention to the choice of an appropriate channel and avoid the use of jargon. Improvements to communication include dealing with any factors that produce loss of clarity such as noise, haste, over-reliance on memory. In this wise, complex messages delivered orally need to be followed up with written material. Information needs to be put into a clear context before moving onto detail as a way of enhancing staff collegiality.

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RECOMMENDATIONS.

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

1. Regular seminars and workshops should be organized for principals and teachers, aimed by the government. This will assist in explaining and inculcating in them, the importance of information use for enhancing staff collegiality.
2. Staff should cultivate good communal relationships among themselves and reduce every barrier to information use for enhancing staff collegiality.
3. Principals and teachers should learn to make their staff rooms a place where information exchange and collegial culture thrives to improve staff performance rather than a place where gossips and grapevine information destroys schools' image.
4. The strategies identified in this study should be implemented for staff collegiality to thrive in schools.

CONCLUSION

Information use is essential for staff collegiality in schools. Collegiality is likely to exist in a school management with an open door policy, where principals and teachers exchange a great deal of information for personal and school goals. This study revealed that information use for staff collegiality in secondary schools in Anambra State was poor possibly because of identifiable barriers. This situation does not portend a good omen for educational development in an information age. It is therefore very necessary for principals, teachers and other relevant persons implement the strategies identified in this study to enhance the use of information for staff collegiality in this information age.

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