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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PRINCIPALS' WORK ENVIRONMENT, AUTONOMY AND SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP AND THEIR ADMINISTRATIVE EFFECTIVENESS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between principals' work environment, autonomy and school-community partnership and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South-East Nigeria. Three research questions guided the study while three null hypotheses were formulated. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study comprised all the 1,015 public secondary school principals in South East Nigeria. A sample size of 751 principals was selected for the study using the purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique was considered appropriate because the study required respondents with specific characteristics and relevant administrative experience. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part was titled "Principals' Work Environment, Autonomy and School-Community Partnership Questionnaire (PWASCPQ)", while the second part was titled "Principals' Administrative Effectiveness Questionnaire (PAEQ)". The instruments were subjected to face and content validation by three experts, two from the Department of Educational Management and Policy and one expert from the Department of Educational Foundation, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient to determine their internal consistency and an overall reliability coefficient value of 0.82 was obtained for the three clusters of PWASCPQ respectively. In addition, a reliability coefficient value of 0.82 was obtained for PAEQ. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to answer the research questions. Simple linear regression analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The finding revealed that a weak positive and significant relationship exists between principals' work environment and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria. Additionally, a moderate positive and significant relationship was found between principals' autonomy and their administrative effectiveness in the same context. Based on the findings, it was recommended amongst others that principals, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), and community leaders should work collaboratively to establish clearly defined roles and expectations.

Keywords: Administrative Effectiveness, Autonomy, Principals, School-Community Partnership, Work Environment.

Introduction

Secondary education is a crucial stage in a child's educational progression in Nigeria, providing opportunities for further education and vocational development after the completion of primary education. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) defines secondary education as the bridge between primary and tertiary education, designed to prepare students for useful living within society and for higher education. It serves as the foundation for academic advancement and career development while contributing significantly to national growth and human capacity building. The realization of these objectives depends largely on the effectiveness of school leadership. Consequently, the success of secondary education in Nigeria is closely tied to the effectiveness of school principals who are responsible for the administration and management of schools.

The principal is the chief executive and administrative head of a secondary school. As both an educator and an administrator, the principal occupies a strategic position in the school system and is responsible for coordinating activities and programmes to ensure the attainment of educational goals. Principals organize human and material resources, supervise staff, maintain discipline, foster academic excellence, and create an enabling environment for teaching and learning. Their ability to perform these responsibilities effectively determines the extent to which schools achieve their intended objectives. However, the successful execution of these multifaceted responsibilities does not occur in a vacuum; rather, it is contingent upon the administrative frameworks and policy guidelines that govern educational practice.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) emphasized the importance of effective administration at all levels of education. Educational administration involves the integration and coordination of human and material resources to achieve educational goals. It encompasses planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, budgeting, controlling, and evaluating educational activities. According to Sapre (2019), effective school administration requires collaboration among various stakeholders, including teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, community members, school boards, and education authorities. This collaborative process enhances the achievement of educational objectives and promotes school improvement.

Administrative effectiveness refers to the ability of an administrator to achieve desired goals and produce expected outcomes through efficient utilization of available resources. Mustafa (2021) described effectiveness as the ability to produce desired results and identified it as a reflection of good administrative practices, teamwork, staff morale, effective teaching, a conducive social climate, counselling services, and adherence to rules and regulations. Ogbo, Obiekwe and Emere (2020) perceived administrative effectiveness as the achievement of operative goals, capabilities, experiences, energy goals and value. It involves functions such as planning, decision-making, supervision, communication, and evaluation, all aimed at ensuring that instructional programmes are delivered effectively and institutional objectives are met. The administrative effectiveness of principals is therefore measured by their capacity to perform leadership roles successfully, make informed decisions, manage resources prudently, and create conditions that facilitate quality teaching and learning. Principals who demonstrate high levels of administrative effectiveness are more likely to achieve educational goals and improve students' academic outcomes. Several factors can influence principals' administrative effectiveness.

One factor that may influence principals' administrative effectiveness is the work environment. In this regard, Musa and Ibrahim (2019) conceptualized work environment as the totality of physical, social, and psychological conditions under which employees perform their duties, encompassing factors such as infrastructure, interpersonal relationships, organizational culture, and available resources. Similarly, Adamu (2018) defined a conducive work environment as one that is safe, healthy, and free from hazards that may impede performance. A supportive work environment provides opportunities for individuals to utilize their skills, acquire new knowledge, and perform their duties effectively. Tamunoniebi (2018) highlighted the interaction between the work environment and personal needs, noting that favourable working conditions enhance productivity and job performance. In educational institutions, principals require functional offices, adequate instructional facilities, sufficient teaching resources, and supportive working conditions to effectively coordinate school activities. Yusuf and Metiboba (2012) asserted that poor physical conditions such as overcrowded offices, inadequate facilities, and poor ventilation can negatively affect work performance.

In many secondary schools across South East Nigeria, the working environment has remained a source of concern. Oparaji, Uzoamaka and Nneka (2023) observed that many schools lack adequate facilities such as functional offices, instructional materials, staff rooms, and other essential infrastructure required for effective school administration. Such deficiencies may place additional burdens on principals and limit their ability to effectively discharge their administrative responsibilities. Consequently, the nature of the work environment may either facilitate or hinder principals' effectiveness in managing schools.

Another factor that may influence administrative effectiveness is autonomy. Morgeson and Humphrey (2016) described autonomy as the degree of freedom and independence employees possess in carrying out their duties and making decisions related to their work. Similarly, Modise (2023) emphasized that autonomy is an important job characteristic that enhances motivation, efficiency, and performance. In the school system, principals are expected to make decisions concerning staff management, discipline, resource allocation, and instructional supervision. The extent to which they are allowed to exercise independent judgment and authority may significantly affect their effectiveness in carrying out administrative functions.

Nwogu and Unuigbe (2018) reported that principals in Anambra State are granted considerable autonomy in areas such as delegation of duties, decision-making, and leadership practices. However, they are still subject to certain restrictions regarding financial accountability and the management of government-provided facilities. While such controls are necessary for accountability purposes, excessive limitations may constrain principals' capacity to respond promptly to school needs. Therefore, autonomy remains an important variable that may influence the effectiveness of school administration.

School-community partnership is another important factor that may influence principals' administrative effectiveness. According to Leiter and Maslach (2016), community involves the quality of social interactions characterized by mutual support, teamwork, cooperation, and shared commitment to organizational goals. Schools operate within communities and depend on the support of stakeholders such as parents, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), old students' associations, community leaders, religious

organizations, and government agencies. Effective collaboration between schools and communities promotes the provision of resources, enhances communication, strengthens accountability, and facilitates the achievement of educational objectives.

The success of a school is often linked to the quality of relationships that exist between the school and the community it serves (Obi, 2018). Principals who maintain positive partnerships with community stakeholders are better positioned to mobilize support, address school challenges, and implement educational programmes successfully. Through regular communication and collaboration, school-community partnerships create opportunities for shared decision-making and collective responsibility for school development. Such partnerships may therefore contribute significantly to the administrative effectiveness of principals (Ogbonna, 2018)

The motivation for this study stems from the growing concern regarding the ability of some principals in South East Nigeria to effectively manage secondary schools amidst challenges associated with inadequate working conditions, varying levels of decision-making authority, and limited collaboration with community stakeholders. Although principals are expected to provide effective leadership and ensure the achievement of educational goals, observations suggest that these contextual factors may influence their administrative performance. This situation has created the need to investigate how work environment, autonomy, and school-community partnership relate to principals' administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria

Empirical studies have provided evidence supporting the importance of these variables in educational administration. Nwogu and Unuigbe (2018) found that principals in Anambra State continue to improve their administrative roles, with the state maintaining a strong performance record in public examinations. Abubakar and Ajadi (2025) identified school-community relations and provision of facilities as significant predictors of effective school administration in Kwara State. Similarly, Ereh, Ekerete and Albert (2025) reported that inadequate support systems, poor interpersonal relationships, and limited autonomy negatively affect principals' administrative practices in Akwa Ibom State. Oparaji, Uzoamaka and Nneka (2023) also highlighted the adverse effects of poor working conditions on school leadership effectiveness. Despite these findings, there appears to be limited empirical evidence examining the combined relationship between principals' work environment, autonomy, school-community partnership, and administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria. This gap in knowledge necessitated the present study. On this premise the following research questions were raised:

1. What is the relationship between principals' work environment and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria?

2. What is the relationship between principals' autonomy and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria?

3. What is the relationship between principals' school-community partnership and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria?

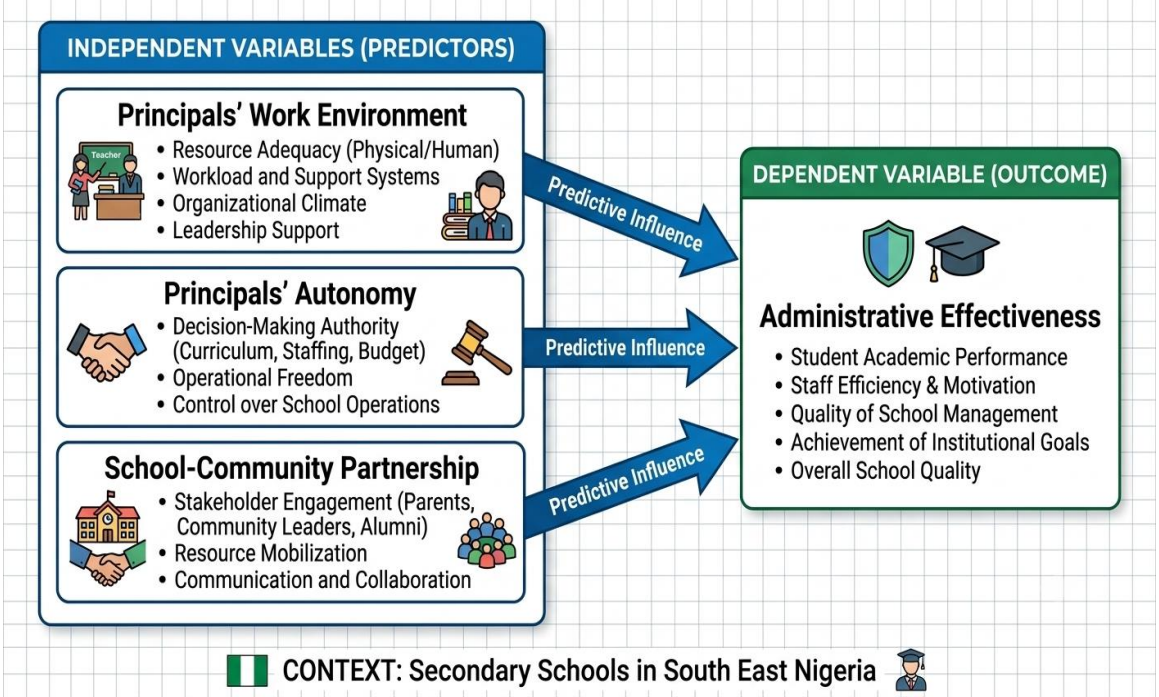
Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between principals' work environment and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria

2. There is no significant relationship between principals' autonomy and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria

3. There is no significant relationship between principals' school-community partnership and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria

Conceptual Model



Source: Authors compilation, 2026

The model above emphasizes the predictive relationships between the three independent variables; principals' work environment, autonomy, and school-community partnership and the dependent variable; administrative effectiveness. As illustrated by the directional arrows indicating a correlational influence, these distinct institutional dimensions directly correlate with the capacity of school heads to effectively manage their organizations. The administrative performance within these synthesized dimensions of the occupational landscape creates a conducive working ecosystem designed to accomplish core institutional goals and objectives, ultimately enhancing subordinate performance for overall school success. This conceptual link underlies the study's empirical investigation into how these primary workplace predictors correlate with multidimensional administrative effectiveness within the specific contextual environment of secondary schools in South East Nigeria

Methods

The study adopted a correlational research design. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to determine the relationship between principals' work environment, autonomy, school-community partnership, and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria without

manipulating any of the study variables. The population of the study comprised all the 1,015 public secondary school principals in South East Nigeria. A sample size of 751 principals was selected for the study using the purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling technique was considered appropriate because the study required respondents with specific characteristics and relevant administrative experience. Specifically, the study purposively selected public secondary school principals who had served in their current position for at least five years, possessed direct responsibility for school administration, staff supervision, decision-making and implementation of educational policies, and were actively involved in the day-to-day management of their schools. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The first part was titled "Principals' Work Environment, Autonomy and School-Community Partnership Questionnaire (PWASCPQ)", while the second part was titled "Principals' Administrative Effectiveness Questionnaire (PAEQ)".

The Principals' Work Environment, Autonomy and School-Community Partnership Questionnaire (PWASCPQ) was developed by the researcher. The instrument consisted of 28 items structured into three clusters corresponding to the independent variables of the study, namely: Work Environment, Autonomy, and School-Community Partnership. Respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement with each item using a four-point Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

The second instrument was titled Principals' Administrative Effectiveness Questionnaire (PAEQ). The instrument was adapted from the works of Arikewuyo (2007), Orange County Schools (2008), and Grissom and Loeb (2009). The instrument consisted of 42 items designed to measure principals' effectiveness in the administration of secondary schools. The respondents were required to indicate their responses using a four-point Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

The instruments were subjected to face and content validation by three experts. The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient to determine their internal consistency. Reliability coefficient values of 0.78, 0.87, and 0.85 were obtained for the three clusters of the Principals' Work Environment, Autonomy and School-Community Partnership Questionnaire (PWASCPQ), respectively. In addition, a reliability coefficient value of 0.82 was obtained for the Principals' Administrative Effectiveness Questionnaire (PAEQ). These values indicated that the instruments possessed adequate internal consistency and were suitable for data collection.

A total of 751 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the sampled principals across public secondary schools in South East Nigeria. Out of these, 732 copies were successfully completed and retrieved, representing a high return rate considered adequate for data analysis. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to answer the research questions. Simple linear regression analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The statistical analyses were carried out using Statistical Package for Social Science, version 27

Results

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between principals' work environment and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria?

Table 1: Pearson r on principals' work environment and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools

Sources of variance	N	Work environment (r)	Admin effectiveness (r)	Remark
Work environment	732	1.00	0.35	Weak positive relationship
Administrative effectiveness	732	0.35	1.00	

Table 1 shows that there is a weak positive relationship of 0.35 existing between principals' work environment and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between principals' work environment and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria

Table 2: Linear regression on significant relationship between principals' work environment and their administrative effectiveness

Linear	R	R^2	Df	T	a.level	p-value
Regression	.348[a]	.121	730	22.930	0.05	0.101

a. Predictors: (Constant), work environment
b. Dependent: administrative effectiveness

Table 2 indicated that at 0.05 level of significance and 730 df, the calculated t 22.930 with p-value 0.101 which is greater than 0.05 (t= 22.930; df 730; p > 0.05), the null hypothesis is not rejected. This means that there is no significant relationship between principals' work environment and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria. The R^2 value of 0.121 means that about 12.1% of the variation in administrative effectiveness can be explained by principals' work environment.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between principals' autonomy and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria?

Table 3: Pearson r on principals' autonomy and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools

Sources of variance	N	Autonomy (r)	Admin effectiveness (r)	Remark
Autonomy	732	1.00	0.58	moderate positive relationship
Administrative effectiveness	732	0.58	1.00	

Table 3 shows that there is a moderate positive relationship of 0.58 existing between principals' autonomy and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between principals' autonomy and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria.

Table 4: Linear regression on significant relationship between principals' autonomy and their administrative effectiveness

Linear	R	R^2	df	t	a.level	p-value
Regression	.583[a]	.339	730	6.627	0.05	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), autonomy
b. Dependent: Administrative effectiveness

Table 4 indicated that at 0.05 level of significance and 730 df, the calculated t 6.627 with p-value 0.000 which is less than 0.05 (t= 6.627; df 730; $p < 0.05$), means that the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between principals' autonomy and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria. The R^2 value of 0.339 means that about 33.9% of the variation in administrative effectiveness can be explained by principals' autonomy.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between principals' school-community partnership and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria?

Table 5: Pearson r on principals' school-community and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools

Sources of variance	N	school-community partnership (r)	Admin effectiveness (r)	Remark
school-community partnership	732	1.00	-0.19	Weak negative relationship
Administrative effectiveness	732	-0.19	1.00	

Table 5 shows that there is a weak negative relationship of -0.19 existing between principals' school-community partnership and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between principals' school-community partnership and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria.

Table 6: Linear regression on significant relationship between principals' school-community partnership and their administrative effectiveness

Linear	R	R^2	df	t	a.level	p-value
Regression	-.019[a]	.0003	730	9.005	0.05	0.523

a. Predictors: (Constant), School-community partnership
b. Dependent: administrative effectiveness

Table 6 indicated that at 0.05 level of significance and 730 df, the calculated t 9.005 with p-value 0.523 which is greater than 0.05 (t= 9.005; df 730; p > 0.05), means that the null hypothesis is not rejected. Therefore, the result analysis indicates that there is no significant relationship between principals' school-community partnership and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria. The R^2 value of 0.0003 means that about 0.036% of the variation in administrative effectiveness can be explained by principals' school-community partnership

Discussion of the Findings

The finding revealed that there was a weak positive relationship between principals' work environment and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria. This finding agreed with that of Nebo and Afianmagbon (2025) that environmental factors such as the physical condition of school buildings, availability of academic facilities, and quality of school–community relationships showed a positive correlation with principals' administrative effectiveness. The finding of Bojadijiev, Stefanovska, Misoska and Stojanovska (2015) revealed that work environment had a positive, but not very strong, impact on job satisfaction among public administration staff in Macedonia. On the other hand, this finding opposed that of Adelotan and Gbesoevi (2021) that although there was a positive link between principals' administrative task performance and school effectiveness, the influence of working conditions tended to be moderate. The corresponding hypothesis revealed that there is no significant relationship between principals' work environment and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria. This finding disagreed with that of Bojadjiey et al (2015) that organizational climate and its components significantly predict job satisfaction among public administration staff.

The finding revealed that there is a moderate positive relationship between principals' autonomy and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria. This finding indicates that the degree of autonomy principals have in their roles such as decision-making authority, flexibility in resource allocation, and freedom to implement innovative practices has a noticeable but not overwhelmingly strong impact on their ability to effectively manage their schools. This finding agreed with the finding of Madiha and Azhar (2019) that there is a positive and moderate relationship between job autonomy and job stress among secondary school principals. On the other hand, the finding opposed that of Oparaji et al (2023) that teachers in secondary schools in Imo State agree that work autonomy results to their job effectiveness. The respondents agreed that all the items point to the fact that work autonomy can enhance or make for teachers' job effectiveness. The corresponding hypothesis revealed that there is a significant relationship between principals' autonomy and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria. It indicates that the degree of autonomy principals have in their role has a meaningful and statistically notable impact on their ability to manage their schools effectively.

This finding revealed that there is a weak negative relationship between principals' school-community partnership and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria. This indicates that the extent to which principals engage with the

community through activities like collaborating with parents, local organizations, or community leaders has a slight adverse effect on their ability to manage their schools effectively. This finding opposed that of Igoni, Ineye-Briggs and Ihechi (2025) that school–community relationships had a very strong positive influence on sustainable administration in public secondary schools. More so, the finding of Ogundele, Sambo and Gambo (2019) found that school–community partnerships were significantly and positively correlated with quality education delivery in senior secondary schools. The corresponding hypothesis revealed that there is no significant relationship between principals' school-community partnership and their administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria. This finding opposed that of Owan (2019) that high statistical relationship exists between community school relations and principals' administrative effectiveness, school management plant provision and maintenance and instructional development of secondary school.

Conclusion

The study concluded that principals' administrative effectiveness in secondary schools in South East Nigeria is influenced to varying degrees by work environment, autonomy, and school-community partnership. The findings revealed that a conducive work environment contributes positively, though weakly, to principals' effectiveness in carrying out administrative responsibilities. Principals' autonomy emerged as a more important factor, demonstrating a moderate and significant positive relationship with administrative effectiveness, suggesting that greater decision-making freedom enhances leadership performance. However, school-community partnership showed a weak negative and non-significant relationship with administrative effectiveness, indicating that existing partnership structures may not be sufficiently effective in supporting school administration. Overall, the study underscores the importance of strengthening principals' autonomy and improving working conditions while re-evaluating community engagement strategies to enhance administrative effectiveness in secondary schools.

Recommendations

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

1. Educational planners and infrastructure units within SUBEBs should prioritize the improvement of principals' working conditions. This includes providing well-equipped offices, administrative support staff, digital resources, and safe school facilities.

2. School authorities and education policymakers should delegate more decision-making powers to principals, especially in areas such as budget allocation and disciplinary procedures. Autonomy must be balanced with accountability mechanisms to ensure responsible leadership.

3. Principals, Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), and community leaders should work collaboratively to establish clearly defined roles and expectations. Community engagement should be strategic, focusing on areas such as resource support, infrastructure development, and student mentorship.

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