



Cost-effective Employee Appreciation Strategies in Schools: A Review of Literature

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Abstract

In every organization, be it profit or service oriented, administrators seek out the most direct avenues to success. The school as a service provider is no exception. This paper thus aims to identify cost-effective strategies used by administrators to demonstrate employee appreciation in schools. As such, this paper discusses the definition of cost in an educational context, indices of cost in schools, the concept of cost-effectiveness, cost-effective strategies in schools, and the advantages of such strategies. This paper concludes that school administrators looking to improve employee performance must identify low-cost strategies for appreciating and consequently motivating their employees. In addition to being low cost, the various strategies adopted should be assessed based on their ability to cultivate loyalty, commitment and hard work among employees.

Keywords: school administration, cost-effective education strategies, employee appreciation, Nigeria.

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INTRODUCTION

Analyses of cost-effectiveness, especially in education, are relatively rare and yet they offer powerful and valuable insights for school administrators, evaluators and policy makers. Such analyses can provide information that is counter to common sense, popular appeal, and traditional ideas (Levin, 2001) in an atmosphere often characterized by unrelenting worries about the efficiency of educational effectiveness (Ololube, 2011a, b).

As highlighted by Owen (2004, p. 406), “we will not have better schools without better teachers, but we will not have better teachers without better schools in which teachers can learn, practice, and develop”. Moreover, “we will not have better schools without the effective administrative machinery needed to run the school system properly and achieve positive results” (Ololube et al., 2012). These quotes bring to mind many questions about the structure and success of modern schooling and highlight the complexity and importance of effectiveness as an educational value. Such questions include, how do students learn? What should we be teaching students? How can teachers help students to learn more with greater ease, depth, or speed? How should a curriculum be structured to maximize student learning? How should teachers deliver the curriculum (Stringfield, 1994)? How can a school be run cost-effectively so as to maximize the benefits of education (Ololube et al., 2012). In other words, how can schools be organized and operated to make the most of the curricula and instruction offered to students?

When attempting to answer these questions, it becomes apparent that school administrators are closest to the centre of the educational process and to the personnel problems that arise from this process. Administrators are the executive or the heads of schools. They develop and implement programmes that guide the actual education of the school as well as staff attraction, placement, retention and performance. In addition, they maintain school facilities, keep school records and ultimately create an atmosphere that should enable both teaching and learning (Mgbodile in Ocho, Okeke & Ndu, 1997, p. 52). The professional role of educational administrators can be thus grouped into five operational zones:

- (A) Management of instructional programmes
- (B) Staff personnel administration
- (C) Student personnel administration
- (D) Financial and physical resource management
- (E) School community relationship management.

Given the very broad scope of this work, it is clear that administrators cannot successfully achieve school goals specifically and education goals more broadly without the help of their staff. Stressing the importance of school staff, Casterter (1981, p. 4) notes that the extent to which public education succeeds in delivering services with efficient use of scarce inputs depends largely upon the quality of the personnel engaged in the educational process and the effectiveness with which they discharge individual and group responsibilities. While Casterter acknowledges that there are other important factors in school success, facilities, funding, well-designed programs and school leadership, the single most important element in the educative process is the staff charged with effecting desirable changes in children and youth (p. 4).

Nigeria’s Committee on Human Resource Development and Utilization (1967) described capital and natural resources as passive agents of development. Only human beings, the committee emphasized, are capable of accumulating capital, exploiting natural resources and building political and social organizations (Ojo, 1997). Earlier, the Ashby Commission (1960) as cited in Ojo (1997) noted in its report on investment in education, that the most critical (and complimentary) factors in Nigeria’s development were capital and high level labour (employees or staff). The committee concluded that of all the resources require for economic development, high level labour requires the longest lead time for its creation.

Similarly, in the first work force report of the United States Government in 1963, the late President John F. Kennedy observed that “employees are the basic of all resources and the indispensable means of converting other resources to mankind’s use and benefit. How well we develop and employ human skills is fundamental in deciding how much we will accomplish as a nation. The manner in which we do so will, moreover, profoundly determine the kind of nation we become” (Ojo, 1997, p. 13). The above clearly highlights that employees are the heart of any organization. They are the most potent resources and weapons in the hands of school administrators when it comes to achieving educational goals.

Not surprisingly, cost-effectiveness studies in education are both much in demand and much in supply. On closer inspection, however, there is less than meets the eye in terms of quality and usefulness. In particular, there seems to be neither an abundant database of literature on cost-effectiveness in education nor much of a demand for such studies in Nigeria. This paper focuses on the famine of cost-effectiveness studies in education in Nigeria. Despite the large numbers of studies that use a cost-effectiveness lens globally, cost-effectiveness has not been widely promoted or used in education as it has been used in other sectors of the economy. Regardless, the concept of cost-effectiveness remains a central tool in the evaluation of overall school effectiveness. Given this, the present paper is anchored in an exploration of cost effective strategies used by administrators to motivate employees in schools. This

paper thus examines the meaning of cost in schools, indices of cost in schools, concepts of cost effective, cost effective strategies, and the problems and advantages of cost-effectiveness. The question around which this study has been based is: what strategies with minimal or no cost can be used by administrators to motivate their staff?

CONCEPTUALIZATION/LITERATURE REVIEW

Meaning of Cost in Schools

Costs estimates pertain to the total cost of each of a number of alternatives being considered. In education, these are normally viewed on a per-student or per-participant basis (average cost) to compare the effectiveness per unit of cost among alternatives. Simultaneously it is important to analyze the distribution of the burden of costs among different sponsoring entities and/or clients so as to determine who pays the costs for each. Cost information is then combined with measurements of effectiveness to make cost-effectiveness comparisons. The same type of cost analysis can be used to compare alternatives on a cost-benefit or cost-utility basis (see Belfield, 2006) if appropriate data on benefits or utilities are available. The main point here is that cost analysis must be treated methodically just as effectiveness analysis is. It is not a casual activity or a rhetorical one (Levin, 2001). Glautier and Underwood (1996) cited in Besson, (2005) define cost as the monetary measurement of the sacrifices an organization has to make in order to achieve its objectives. Igwe (1990), on the other hand, explained cost as the alternative possibilities that are given up when any expenditure or course of action is decided upon.

In this context, cost is the amount of expenditure (actual or nominal) incurred on, or attributable to a specific thing or activity. Cost in schools is often used to mean the investment made in the education system to generate an educated human being (Belfield, 2003; Belfield & Levin, 2007). Nwadiani (2002) likewise defines cost in schools as the real resources (material, human and time) used up in the production of an educated individual. Ogbonnaya (2005) conceptualized cost in schools from two perspectives—direct and indirect. Direct cost includes the cost of all items purchased for or used in the school system while indirect cost in schools is expressed in terms of alternative opportunities in the use of resources. Conversely, Nakpodia and Okiemute (2011) combined cost-benefit, efficiency and effectiveness analysis into mean terms, which is measured in the utilization of resources (Nakpodia & Okiemute, 2011).

Cost-effectiveness analysis refers to a method for combining appropriate measures of outcomes with costs so that program and policy alternatives can be ranked according to their effectiveness relative to resource use. Presumably, the alternatives with the least cost relative to their results (or best results relative to costs) are the ones that are most attractive for adoption. This information should be viewed as helpful in guiding, but not determining, decisions. Other issues such as implementation feasibility need to be considered in the decision process as well (Levin and McEwan, 2000; 2001).

Indices of Cost in schools

Indices of cost in schools can be expressed as capital cost and recurrent cost. Capital costs are those durable school inputs which are finite in the expenses they require. Such capital costs include land, utilities, buildings, and furniture or equipment. On the other hand, recurrent costs incorporate expenses on such nondurable items as salaries and allowances, stationeries, consumables, repairs and maintenance, water and electricity bills (Ogbonnaya, 2005).

The Concept of Cost–Effectiveness

Cost-effectiveness analysis provides a method of comparing alternatives for their relative costs and results and in this way provides guidelines on which of the alternatives provides the most impact relative to cost. It differs from its close relation, cost-benefit analysis, which requires monetary measures of impact relative to costs. Most endeavours to improve education are unable to use cost-benefit analysis because it is difficult to measure the value of the improvements in market terms. It is however, possible to measure academic achievement and other indicators of school quality and effectiveness. Accordingly, cost-effectiveness enables measures of learning and other contextually-appropriate indicators to assess educational outcomes relative to costs (Levin, 2011). The comparative performance of alternate strategies is described using the incremental cost-effectiveness ratio, defined as the additional cost of a specific strategy divided by its additional clinical benefit, compared with the next least expensive strategy (Hu et al., 2007).

Cost-effectiveness is thus the least costly way of reaching an objective or getting the greatest value for a given expenditures. In line with the above, Ogbonnaya (2003) sees cost effectiveness in schools as a technique of educational policy analysis concerned with the determination of the least costly alternative to achieve policy objectives. To attain cost-effectiveness, Okeke (2001, pp. 112-113) proposes that the following steps be followed:

- (a) Operational statement of objectives;
- (b) Enumeration of alternatives for achieving operational objectives;
- (c) Determination of costs, benefits, and impacts of each alternative and the quantification of costs in achieving the stated objectives;
- (d) Comparison of alternatives in relation to the objectives – the alternative that is most effective is preferred.

The above suggests that cost effectiveness focuses on the results of a programme, helps weigh the potential benefits of each alternative against its potentials cost, and involves a comparison of the alternatives in terms of their overall advantages.

Cost-Effective Strategies

There is no general agreement on the most cost-effective strategies school administrators should use to demonstrate appreciation of school employees. However, the following have been cited as possible methods or alternatives:

- (1) Staff awards: staff will appreciate that their activities or actions are noticed and appreciated by their supervisor. For the administrator to achieve this, one option is offering a “behind the scene” award at the end of the year for humble employees who perform well. A teacher whose students excel in his or her subject in public examinations could, for example, be rewarded with such a prize. Similarly a teacher who makes a successful outing with students on an inter-school competition may deserve an award.
- (2) A surprise achievement celebration: quite simply, this can be achieved by providing a special lunchtime treat to an employee or team of employees whose actions deserve recognition. Alonge in Wali (2002) is of the opinion that administrators who give small gifts for special occasions (birthdays, weddings, etc.) or give free tea, coffee and snacks to their employees also makes them feel appreciated and motivated. In all of these cases it is the act of acknowledging the contributions and value of the employees.
- (3) Pass on praise: if a school administrator hears or is made aware of a positive remark about a staff person, he/she should repeat it to that employee as soon as possible, perhaps via email or send a thank you note to the employee’s home address, copying the Dean and Head of Department. This will show that the administrator understands how much the employee may have sacrificed or given to complete their assignment with excellence.
- (4) Publish a *Kudos Column* in the school newsletter and ask employees to submit kudos for their peers. Similarly set up a suggestion programme by either establishing a suggestion box or completing school-wide questionnaires so that employees feel that their opinions and ideas are taken seriously.
- (5) Express interest in your employee’s professional development. Ornstein and Levine (2006) observed that teachers’ training does not end when they begin teaching, but that teaching demands rigorous and continuous training. Employee professional development and training should be seen as a continuum. School administrators should ensure that their employees attend programmes that will increase their professional growth and capacity. Even if a school cannot fund professional development opportunities, employees will still appreciate an administrator’s interest and guidance in this regard.
- (6) Recognize employee value by delegating functions according to levels of competence: Wali (2010) observed that delegation is necessary for an organization like a school to exist and grow. Employees who are neglected in the distribution of functions often become apathetic to the achievement of school goals.
- (7) Make teaching jobs challenging: Nwankwo (1982) has suggested that in order to make teaching jobs challenging and less boring, school administrators should not allow teachers to stay too long in one assignment. In other words, classes and responsibilities should be rotated. A form master could, for example, rotate with house master and vice versa. School administrators should avoid saddling a willing staff with too many responsibilities, since a heavy work load has been identified as a major source of stress (Ngoka, 2002).
- (8) Ensure that existing school policies are not frustrating: obnoxious school policies can be an obstacle to an employee’s competence at work. There are, for example, schools where employees must fill out forms or wait

for “visiting hours” before seeing their principal. Enyi (2004) notes that unless such rigid bureaucratic arrangements are dismantled and more open systems of administration are adopted, employees will continue to face unnecessary frustration at work.

Problems Associated with Cost-Effectiveness Analyses

Levin (2001) has identified a number of factors that may impede the use of cost-effectiveness analysis in decision making. These include:

Lack of Training: cost effectiveness evaluations in education are often done by persons considered to be evaluation specialists. Evidence suggests however that training programs in educational evaluation do not require preparation in cost-effectiveness analysis and that the tool is probably not familiar to those teaching or working in the field of educational evaluation. This conclusion is confirmed by the cursory treatment or complete absence of cost effectiveness analysis in evaluation textbooks used for courses in educational evaluation.

Lack of Effects: A second plausible reason for the absence of cost-effectiveness analysis in educational evaluation is that most educational research does not provide an unambiguous estimate of effects. Many, if not most, rigorous studies seem to find statistically insignificant results or differences in effect sizes that are so small they lack practical significance. That is, there is a huge stock of educational research, but much of it is of poor quality or idiosyncratic and so cannot be generalized. Nevertheless, there are still a substantial number of good studies that show at least some potential for replication.

Lack of Demand by Policymakers: interestingly, few inquiries or policy decisions in education use information on cost-effectiveness analysis as a criterion. Even government units with responsibilities for budgetary analysis rarely use this as a tool. It is possible that not only do decision makers ignore cost-effectiveness analysis in their resource allocation decisions, but perceive it as a distraction they wish to avoid.

Advantages of Cost-Effective Strategies in Schools

The first advantage of cost effective strategies is that they are useful to school administrators and other proprietors of schools given the limited and often inadequate resources at their disposal. Cost effectiveness strategies can help to make the best use of the resources that are available. Secondly, cost effective strategies are useful where budget allocation or funds to perform certain activities are fixed and administrators are considering alternatives that may use the given level of funds in a new way so to achieve greater benefits or greater effectiveness. Finally, cost effective strategies are useful to school administrators, policy makers and planners in situations where the objectives and benefits of a programme and accomplishment are fixed. Cost-effectiveness analyses can enhance and complement national strategies to garner new political commitments and evidence-based action (Hu et al., 2007).

CONCLUSION

This paper has drawn on the wealth of literature in the economics of education to consider the role that administrators can play when it comes to cost-effective strategies to appreciate employees in schools. Given the literature that was reviewed, it is possible to conclude that one of the major concerns of any school organization, whether public or private, is controlling cost. Employees are production costs that have to be monitored regularly. School administrators looking to improve employee performance will thus often look for strategies to appreciate and motivate staff at minimal cost. This reflects the fact that employees who feel they have a positive personal relationship with their superiors are more likely to be engaged, while disgruntled or apathetic employees can drain the energy from the teaching functions they perform. Engaged teachers on the other hand pass their enthusiasm for the subject matter and for learning onto the students. In fact, students are more likely to become and remain engaged if they are served and taught by passionate teachers.

This paper recommends that teachers be appreciated and motivated so as to enhance their commitment to teaching and the school system. As Obi (1997) has noted, any organization that has a programme for helping workers to meet their needs is more likely to enjoy their loyalty, commitment and hardwork. The management of human resources is an inevitable and crucial task of administrators in Nigeria’s education system (Ololube, 2007). Adequate

and proper human resources cost-effectiveness analysis will go a long way to reducing and correcting all form of maladministration in the system (Nakpodia & Okiemute, 2011).

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