



## **BARRIERS TO SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' EFFECTIVENESS IN MANAGING RURAL PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AHIAZU MBAISE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, IMO STATE**

**Ndidi Loretta Okeke**

Department of Educational Management and Policy

Faculty of Education

Nnamdi Azikiwe University

on.loretta@unizik.edu.ng

### **ABSTRACT**

*This research examines the obstacles hindering the effectiveness of school principals in rural public secondary schools located in Ahiazu Mbaise Local Government Area, Imo State, Nigeria. Acknowledging the critical importance of school managers in facilitating quality education, the study concentrates on three primary areas of challenge: inadequate facilities, insufficient funding, and staffing inadequacy. A descriptive survey design was adopted, using structured questionnaires to collect data from school principals and teaching personnel. The results indicate that rural schools are struggling with deteriorating infrastructure, a scarcity of teaching materials, inadequate government funding, and a significant deficiency of qualified teachers. These issues severely restrict the administrative and instructional abilities of school managers, thereby affecting students' academic achievements and the overall advancement of the school. The research suggests that increased governmental assistance is necessary, including enhanced funding, improved infrastructure, strategic initiatives for recruiting and retaining teachers, and greater community involvement.*

**Keywords:** Rural School, Ahiazu Mbaise, Barriers to School Principals' Effectiveness, School Facility Constraints, Funding Constraints.

### **Introduction**

Education is widely acknowledged as a crucial foundation for social advancement and national development. That is why every child, irrespective of whether they live in rural or urban areas, is entitled to receive qualitative and inclusive education. However, rural schools frequently encounter numerous obstacles that have resulted in a notable disparity between them and urban schools. These difficulties underscore the vital importance of school principals, whose effectiveness in overseeing rural schools is key to improving teacher performance and student outcomes. Managing rural schools requires strong leadership, and creative approaches to tackle the challenges, such as insufficient resources, lack of funds, inadequate infrastructures, and a lack of teachers (Isa et al, 2019).

Principals' effectiveness is the ability of school leaders to perform their roles and achieve school goals. These roles include providing support and guidance in establishing best practices in teaching, in addition to setting school goals with the staff (Okeke et al, 2023). Effective Principals focus on how teachers deliver instructions in their classes, they monitor teachers' progress to ensure quality instruction (Grissom et al, 2021). They also manage personnel and resources well and build



a productive school environment (Grissom et al, 2021). While ineffective principals do the opposite. It is also possible that the efforts of school principals to achieve school goals could be wasted if there are no resources to back them up.

Research conducted by Shikalepo (2020) revealed that rural secondary schools face several challenges, including poverty, insufficient funding, and a lack of qualified teachers. Furthermore, Ibadin (2010) noted that teachers in rural schools in the mid-western states are often overburdened with teaching responsibilities due to a shortage of teachers capable of covering various subjects (Ibadin, 2010). Could this issue be a significant obstacle to the effectiveness of school principals?

### **Statement of the Problem**

The effectiveness of school administrators is crucial in shaping the overall performance and quality of education in secondary schools. They require resources to function effectively, but in the absence of these resources, what actions can the principal take? In rural public secondary schools, particularly in areas such as Ahiazu Mbaize Local Government, school leaders face a multitude of complex and interconnected challenges that significantly obstruct their ability to lead effectively. While these challenges are not exclusive to Imo State, they are particularly pronounced due to the socio-economic and infrastructural realities of the area. Even though school leadership is strategically significant for enhancing teaching and learning, principals in rural schools frequently find themselves in environments lacking essential resources and support systems necessary for peak performance. Numerous schools experience persistent underfunding, leading to inadequate physical infrastructure, a lack of teaching materials, and limited access to technology. These challenges not only hinder the learning atmosphere but also impose significant pressure on school leaders who must act as both educational guides and crisis managers amid continuous limitations. Against this backdrop, this research is conducted to pinpoint the key obstacles impacting the effectiveness of school principals in rural areas.

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Identify school facility-related constraints that affect the effectiveness of school principals in managing rural public secondary schools in Ahiazu Mbaize LGA.
2. Determine funding-related constraints that hinder the effectiveness of school principals in overseeing rural public secondary schools in Ahiazu Mbaize LGA.
3. Investigate staffing-related constraints that influence the effectiveness of school principals in managing rural schools in Ahiazu Mbaize LGA.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the school facility-related constraints that affect the effectiveness of school principals in managing rural public secondary schools in Ahiazu Mbaize Local Government Area?
2. What are the financial challenges that hinder school principals' effectiveness in managing rural secondary schools in Ahiazu Mbaize LGA?
3. What are the staffing challenges that influence the school principals' effectiveness in managing rural public secondary schools in Ahiazu Mbaize Local Government Area?



## **Review of Related Literature**

### **The Function of School Principals in Educational Effectiveness**

School leaders, especially principals, are fundamental to the operation of educational institutions. They oversee academic and administrative tasks, cultivate a positive learning environment, manage personnel, and ensure that the school aligns with national educational objectives. Effective school leaders are transformational visionary figures who motivate their staff, maximize available resources, and later transform the school (Okeke, 2019)). However, according to Osegbue (2021), the ability of school leaders to perform their roles successfully is largely influenced by the context in which they work. Rural environments, in particular, pose distinct challenges that greatly limit the effectiveness of school leadership. In numerous rural public secondary schools throughout Nigeria, school leaders face significant issues, including persistent underfunding, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient staffing, and sociocultural obstacles (Okeke et al, 2024). These challenges are not simply administrative hassles; they represent systemic barriers that undermine rural education (Isa et al, 2019). Nonetheless, the calibre of leadership often plays a crucial role in determining whether schools succeed or struggle. Therefore, Hallinger and Heck (2010) proposed collaborative leadership, which involves engaging a diverse range of leaders (including staff and students) to enhance instructional delivery, improve school quality, and promote overall school advancement.

### **Challenges Facing School Administrators in Rural Areas**

One of the most significant obstacles to successful school management in rural regions is insufficient funding (Okeke et al, 2024). Financial constraints severely limit the ability of school leaders to maintain facilities, acquire educational resources, or implement innovative teaching methods. With restricted budgets, principals frequently prioritize essential needs over growth objectives in managing schools. Darling-Hammond (2010) explains that a lack of funding not only affects the upkeep of infrastructure but also restricts access to professional development for both educators and school administrators.

Another barrier to principals' effectiveness is inadequate infrastructure which exacerbates the situation. Numerous rural schools do not have necessities such as electricity, clean water, and functional sanitation facilities (Klocko et al, 2019). These shortcomings disrupt daily operations, decrease student attendance, and reduce retention rates. Inadequate access to water, sanitation, and hygiene in schools can affect health, and educational outcomes (Morgan et al, 2017). Insufficient or lack of toilet facilities can lead to open defecation by students and teachers thereby making schooling unbearable for students. Such an environment becomes disheartening for both students and teachers, undermining the fundamental purpose of education and principals' efforts.

The challenge of staffing is yet another significant issue. Rural schools frequently struggle to attract and keep qualified teachers due to non-competitive salaries, limited career advancement opportunities, and poor living conditions. High teacher turnover and the employment of unqualified individuals jeopardize the consistency and quality of teaching. As Shikalepo (2019) noted, a stable and well-prepared teaching staff is vital for the effective operation of any school, and its absence is a significant barrier to educational achievement in rural regions. Additionally, the lack of qualified teaching staff continues to be a persistent challenge in rural communities.



School administrators find it hard to recruit and maintain competent personnel due to inadequate incentives, adverse living conditions, and the perceived isolation associated with rural jobs (Klocko et al, 2019). This instability in the workforce undermines the continuity and quality of instruction while adding extra administrative pressures on already overburdened managers.

Sociocultural factors also create subtle yet impactful barriers to educational leadership (Klocko et al, 2019). Rural populations may give precedence to agricultural labour over education, resulting in seasonal absenteeism, particularly during planting and harvesting times. Furthermore, traditional gender roles may deter girls from pursuing their education, while economic difficulties compel many students to leave school for work opportunities. These social and economic realities create a complicated landscape for school managers, who must navigate educational requirements while considering community expectations and limitations (Rana et al, 2020).

Moreover, the geographical remoteness of rural schools constrains their access to support systems and educational resources. School leaders in these contexts often function alone, with minimal opportunities for collaboration or guidance. Research conducted by Oyeleye, (2023) revealed that the location of schools notably affects the administrative effectiveness of principals. High rates of absenteeism among principals in rural schools are attributed to insecurity, poor road conditions, expensive transportation costs, and official obligations that keep them out of school (Oyeleye, 2023). Tackling these issues necessitates a comprehensive strategy, involving increased financial support, enhanced infrastructure, teacher incentives, and engagement strategies that are adapted to the local context.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in transformational leadership theory, initially proposed by Burns (1978) and later expanded by Bass (1985). The theory focuses on leaders' capacity to inspire, motivate, and transform their organizations through visionary guidance, intellectual stimulation, and individualized attention. In rural areas, school managers must go beyond mere administrative tasks by encouraging staff, cultivating a shared vision, formulating strategic plans, empowering stakeholders through staff development, and innovatively managing limited resources (Okeke, 2019). This framework is essential for understanding how effective leadership can address systemic challenges and enhance school performance, especially in resource-limited rural settings.

The significance of school managers in rural public secondary schools cannot be overstated. Their leadership profoundly influences the extent to which schools fulfil their responsibility of delivering quality education. Nonetheless, as noted by Onyekwelu (2024), this leadership often takes place in severely constrained environments characterized by insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructure, staffing shortages, and sociocultural barriers. In the case of Ahiazu Mbaise L G A, these obstacles have collectively hindered education's potential as a vehicle for rural development. Tackling these issues requires not just policy changes but also a collaborative approach involving government, communities, educators, and development partners. This study emphasizes the challenges undermining school principals' effectiveness in rural schools and provides evidence-based proof for policymakers, stakeholders, teachers, and researchers to develop tailored strategies for theory and practice in education.



### Research Method

This research utilized a descriptive survey design to collect data regarding the challenges faced by school principals in Ahiazu Mbaise L G A. The study area is mainly rural, with several public secondary schools encountering educational difficulties. The target population consisted of principals, vice-principals, and senior teachers from public secondary schools in Ahiazu Mbaise. The study employed a random sampling technique to select 12 schools out of 26 public secondary schools in Ahiazu Mbaise L. G.A. The principals and vice principals of selected schools served as participants. Additionally, five teachers with a minimum of ten years of teaching experience within each selected school were purposively selected. A sample size of 12 principals, 12 vice principals and 60 senior teachers giving a total of 84 respondents was utilized for the study.

A structured questionnaire titled "Principals Challenges in Effective Administration" was used to gather data. Respondents with ten years and above working experience were used for the study. Responses were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The questionnaire underwent validation by three education experts. Reliability was established through a pilot test, resulting in a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.81, indicating strong reliability. The questionnaire was distributed and collected by the researcher and research assistants. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were utilized for data analysis. A mean score of 2.50 and above signified agreement with the items.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

**Table 1:** Mean rating of respondents on the school facilities constraints affecting principals' effectiveness

s/n	ITEMS	M	SD	DECISION
1	My school physical infrastructure is inadequate for effective teaching	3.83	0.90	Agreed
2	Overcrowded classrooms are major constraints in my school	3.04	1.22	Agreed
3	My school lack laboratory facilities for arts and science students	3.53	0.70	Agreed
4	My school lack instructional materials for teaching and learning	3.50	0.63	Agreed
5	My school lack adequate and required syllabus	3.82	0.82	Agreed
6	My school lack recreational facilities	3.06	0.58	Agreed
7	My school lack pipe-born water	3.60	1.02	Agreed
8	My school has poor sanitation facilities for comfort and health of students	3.80	1.0	Agreed
9	My school has ill equipped library system	3.75	1.06	Agreed
10	My school lack dispensary services for emergency health cases	3.28	1.2	Agreed
	Total	3.52		Agreed

The data presented in Table 1 reveals a grand mean of 3.52 for school facility items which indicates that it is a major constraint to principals' effective administration of rural schools. The standard deviation scores of 0.58 to 1.22 show homogeneity of the respondents' opinions.



**Table2:** Mean rating of respondents on the funding constraints affecting principals' effectiveness

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD	DECISION
1	Inadequate funding prevents the school from maintaining existing structures	3.08	0.87	Agreed
2	My school does not receive sufficient fund for purchasing teaching materials	3.13	0.96	Agreed
3	Lack of funds hinder extracurricular activities in my school	3.53	0.85	Agreed
4	Insufficient grant from government prevents my school from engaging in improvement projects.	2.95	0.99	Agreed
5	My school struggles to raise funds.	2.82	0.67	Agreed
6	Delay in disbursement of funds affect my schools' operations.	2.53	0.71	Agreed
7	Inadequate funding negatively affects staff motivation in my school.	3.33	0.86	Agreed
8	Budgetary constraints reduce the availability of essentially teaching materials in my school	3.77	0.56	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.10		Agreed

Table 2 above indicates a grand mean of 3.10, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating that respondents agree that the items in Table 2 are constraints to principals' effective school management. The standard deviation scores that range from 0.56-0.96 indicate homogeneity in the opinions of respondents.

**Table 3:** Mean rating of respondents on the staffing constraints affecting principals' effectiveness

S/N	ITEMS	X	SD	Decision
1	There is shortage of qualified teachers in my school.	3.38	0.88	Agreed
2	Many subject specialist teachers are lacking in my school.	3.53	0.85	Agreed
3	There is high teacher turnover which affect my school effectiveness.	3.14	0.94	Agreed
4	Teachers are often overburdened with work load in my school.	3.28	0.84	Agreed
5	Experienced teachers don't stay long in my school.	2.95	0.99	Agreed
6	Principals' absenteeism is a common occurrence in my school.	2.17	1.07	Disagree
7	Inadequate support staff to assist in my school improvement.	2.72	0.69	Agreed
8	Many of our teaching staff are under qualified.	3.01	0.93	Agreed
	Grand Mean	3.02		Agreed

Table 3 reveals a grand mean of 3.02 which indicates that staffing is a major issue in principals' effectiveness in managing rural schools. However, item 6 (principals' absenteeism from school) rates 2.17 which means that it is not a major factor in principals' effectiveness. The standard deviation ranges from 0.69-0.99 showing the homogeneity of respondents' opinions.

### Discussion of Findings

The data shown in Table 1 indicates a widespread deficiency in both physical and instructional infrastructure within rural secondary schools. With an overall mean of 3.52, all items exceeded the benchmark mean of 2.50, reflecting consensus among respondents. Specific challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, absence of laboratories and instructional resources, inadequate sanitation facilities, and poorly equipped libraries were unanimously recognized as barriers to effective school administration. These shortcomings not only hinder students' academic performance but also complicate principals' efforts to foster supportive learning environments. These results resonate with the findings of Isa et al (2019), who underscored the necessity of sufficient school infrastructure for improving educational outcomes, particularly in underserved areas.



Table 2 highlights funding difficulties as another significant limitation, with a grand mean of 3.10. Respondents concurred that insufficient government grants, delays in fund disbursement, and overall financial instability hinder schools from undertaking improvement projects or maintaining the current infrastructure. Furthermore, limited financial resources restrict the procurement of teaching materials and lower staff morale, ultimately diminishing the overall effectiveness of school management. This observation is consistent with Shikalepo (2019) and Rana et al (2020), who have identified persistent underfunding as a major obstacle to achieving educational equity in rural contexts. The inability to secure funds internally or from external sources points to a broader systemic issue that necessitates immediate attention through policy and stakeholder engagement.

Table 3 shows a grand mean of 3.02, indicating that staffing challenges notably impact principal effectiveness. The findings indicate that schools are grappling with shortages of qualified teachers, high turnover rates, a lack of subject specialists, and an overloaded workforce. Interestingly, the only statement on which respondents disagreed was regarding the issue of principals' absenteeism, which recorded a mean of 2.17, signalling disagreement. This suggests that while principals are typically dedicated to their responsibilities, the support they receive falls short. This is in line with Shikalepo (2020) and Rana et al (2020), who contend that rural schools face difficulties in attracting and retaining experienced personnel due to poor incentives and unfavourable working conditions.

In conclusion, the study uncovers a complex network of challenges that diminish the effectiveness of school managers in rural public secondary schools. In the absence of adequate infrastructure, consistent funding, and a stable, qualified workforce, principals are limited in their capacity to provide strategic leadership and meet educational objectives. These findings underscore the urgent requirement for comprehensive interventions, including increased financial support, infrastructure development, targeted teacher recruitment strategies, and professional development initiatives.

The findings from this study carry several significant implications; they indicate that the persistent inadequacies in facilities, funding, and qualified staff point to systemic shortcomings in the implementation of educational policies. These results suggest that current policies may not be effectively responding to the specific conditions faced by rural schools. Consequently, there is an urgent need for policy reforms focusing specifically on enhancing the learning environment and leadership framework in rural public secondary institutions. Strategic investments in both infrastructure and human resources must be prioritized.

The findings also reveal a disconnect between the requirements of rural schools and the resources allocated to them. Educational planners need to understand that rural schools need differentiated support. Resource allocation models should take into account factors like geographical remoteness, student population, and existing infrastructure deficits to ensure equitable and impact-oriented resource distribution. Moreover, considering that principals play a crucial role in school effectiveness, there is a clear necessity to bolster leadership capabilities through professional development programs. School leaders must be trained to manage limited resources effectively, engage with communities, and advocate for their institutions. This necessitates the development of leadership training modules tailored to address the unique challenges of rural education.



## Conclusion

This research explored the various challenges faced by school principals in rural public secondary schools within the Ahiazu Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State. The findings indicated that school leaders encounter major obstacles related to inadequate facilities, lack of funding, and shortages of staff. These issues impede their ability to effectively manage educational institutions, which in turn undermines the quality of education available to students in rural areas. The study also highlighted that the absence of fundamental infrastructure, teaching materials, and recreational facilities, along with budget constraints and delays in fund allocation, significantly limits school operations. Additionally, the challenges of attracting and retaining qualified teaching personnel, along with the heavy workloads for existing staff, exacerbate these difficulties. Despite these challenges, school leaders are crucial to enhancing educational outcomes. Their success largely hinges on how effectively these systemic issues are addressed.

## Recommendations

In light of the findings from this research, the following suggestions are made:

1. The government should enhance budgetary support for rural schools to rectify infrastructure shortcomings and supply necessary teaching and learning resources.
2. Immediate efforts should be made to refurbish dilapidated school infrastructures, ensuring the provision of functional laboratories, libraries, water supply, sanitation facilities, and recreational areas.
3. Policies that promote the assignment of qualified teachers to rural regions should be established, incorporating incentives like rural allowances, housing provisions, and opportunities for professional development.

## REFERENCES

- Bass, B. M. (1985). Leadership and performance beyond expectation. *Human resource management journal*, 25(3), 461-484
- Burns, J. M. (2008). Developing tomorrow's transformational leaders, (2nd Ed). New York Harper, Collins.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). National policy on education (4th Edition). NERD
- Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research. The Wallace Foundation, 115, <https://doi.org/10.59656/EL-SB1065.001>
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2010). Collaborative leadership and school improvement: Understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning. *School Leadership & Management*, 30(2), 95-110.
- Ibadin, O. V. (2010). An analysis of teachers' utilisation in urban and rural secondary schools in mid-western states of Nigeria. *European journal of educational studies*, 2(2), 87-92.
- Isa, A. A., Bashayi, L. M., Umar, A. S., & Babayo, A. (2019). Restructuring school education in rural Nigeria: Issues and challenges. *International journal of research and innovation in social science*, 3(12)289-291



- Klocko, B. A., & Justis, R. J. (2019). Leadership challenges of the rural school principal. *The rural educator*, 40(3), 23-34, <https://doi.org.10.35608/ruraled.v40i3.571>
- Morgan, C., Bowling, M., Bartram, J., & Kayser, G. L. (2017). Water, sanitation, and hygiene in schools: Status and implications of low coverage in Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zambia. *International Journal of Hygiene and Environmental Health*, 220(6), 950-959
- Osegbue, G.C. (2019). Perceived impact of effective educational planning on education system for national cohesion and global competitiveness. *International Journal of Educational Practice (IISTE)*, 10(11), 108-117.
- Osegbue, G.C. (2021). Principal' management of students' personnel services for attainment of educational goals in Anambra State. *Journal of Educational Research and Development*, 4(1), 85-92.
- Okeke, N. L. (2019) School technology leadership: A new concept. *International Journal of Innovative Development and Policy Studies*, 7(20), 50-56
- Okeke, N. L., Amaonye, C.B., & Anyaeji, A. V. (2024). Funding sources and challenges in private secondary schools in Anambra State. *Global Research for new world order*, 5(1), 45-57
- Okeke, N. L., Obilor, P. U., Nwogbo, M. O., & Ubah, C. G. (2023). Influence of school leadership styles on teachers' performance in public secondary schools in Anambra State, Nigeria. *Africa Journal of educational management, teaching and entrepreneur studies*, 9(2), 69-77
- Onyekwelu, R. A. (2021). Principals' administrative Measures for Enhancing Instructional Effectiveness in Anambra State Public Secondary Schools. *COOU Journal of Educational Research*, 6(1).
- Onyekwelu, R. A. (2024). Enhancing the Quality of Secondary Education Through Professional Development of Teachers in Nigeria. *British Journal of Multidisciplinary and Advanced Studies*, 5(1), 194-205.
- Onyekwelu, R. A. (2024). Students' use of Search Engines as Correlate of Students Academic Performance in Senior Secondary Schools in Ogidi Education Zone. *Multi-Disciplinary Research and Development Journals Int'l*, 5(1), 11-11.
- Oyeleye, B. O. ((2023). Effects of school location on principals' administrative performance in secondary schools in Ondo State, Nigeria. *European Journal of Education and Development Psychology*, 11(2), 7-13
- Rana, S., Kanwal, N., & Fiba, S. (2020). Factors affecting challenges of teachers' retention in rural schools. *Journal of policy research*, 8(3), 371-375
- Shikalepo, E.E. (2020). (Challenges facing teaching at rural schools: A review of related literature. *International journal of research and innovation in social sciences*, 6(5) 211-218