Principals' Perceptions on Admission Services in Kwara State Secondary Schools, Nigeria: A Phenomenology Approach

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Abstract

Admission service is an essential service that is needed for the implementation of school programmes and for students' academic success in secondary schools. Therefore, this study investigated principals' perceptions on admission services in secondary schools. The research design adopted for the study is phenomenology approach. The participants of the study consist of all principals in Kwara state secondary schools. Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used to select 20 principals as participants needed for the study. Instrument titled "Interview Protocol on Admission Services IPAS" was used to elicit views on admission services from the participants. Findings of the study revealed that effective admission service had a link with students' academic achievement in school. Specifically, it indicated that students who went through initial admission screening, such as entrance examination and oral interview performed excellently when given admission. Also, their views revealed that admission service was one of the fundamental services in school system and its importance cannot be underestimated. Finally, it was suggested that proper planning of admission process should be put in place to ensure good admission service exercise in the school system.

Keywords

Admission services, principal, phenomenology approach, secondary school

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Introduction

Admission service is a systematic process of admitting qualified students who have satisfied the entrance requirements designed by the school. It is also the process by which candidates seeking for admission to schools are selected based on their intellectual ability using the school's requirements in selecting the prospective students (Archibong, Jude, & Etudor-Eyo, 2011; Hsie & Hu, 2006; Israel & Israel, 2014; Juradja & Munich, 2010; Lewin, 2015). The presence of admission services in school is key to overall academic success in the education system. Applicants' desire for education often put an enormous pressure on secondary schools concerning candidates to be selected for placement in schools (Adnett, McCaig, Slack, & Bowers-Brown, 2011; Welsh, 2002; Yusuf, Zahayah, & Tanslikhan, 2016).

According to Corcoran and Baker-Smith (2010), the admission unit of the school determines the eligibility of the applicants, as it is saddled with the responsibilities of dealing with those seeking admission. The strategists used for selecting are a quota system, gender, politics, and influence. Okoroma (2008) opined that the rate of admission seekers in the Nigerian education system is increasing on a yearly basis due to the passion that people have for education. This becomes problematic for schools in deciding on what strategy to adopt for the selection of the applicants. The most common strategy for selection of applicants in the Nigerian education system is test and interview. Ludeman (2002) and Juradja and Munich (2010) highlight functions of admission services to include; doing research on demographic trends in school-going population; evaluating the credentials of students of the school; notifying the students about the deferment and termination of students and strategies to recruit new students. Sawyer (2013) is of the view that scores of the applicants are the best method that admission personnel can use to screen out those that got the lowest score during the test. Before applicants can be screened out, certain benchmarks must be put in place to serve as a standard. It makes it easy for a school to take decision on who to be admitted and who not to be admitted.

Furthermore, there is a double standard in admission and selection process in the education system, which hinders quality education in Nigeria (Okoroma, 2008). According to Asuru (2002), poor admission policies/unqualified candidates are a common feature in Nigerian education system. Okoroma (2008) regrets the level of nepotism, favouritism and other vices have beclouded the admission and selection process at all levels of education, which has allowed unqualified candidates to get admission, leaving eminently qualified candidates to be denied admission. Israel and Israel (2014) confirmed that the poor quality of education in Nigeria can be attributed to poor quality of students admitted into schools and that some students got admitted without going through a proper admission process. In the same vein, Okoroma (2008) and Yusuf (2017) submit that non-adherence to admission standards allow poorly qualified candidates to be admitted into education system in Nigeria.

Moreover, studies suggest that the principal has the responsibility of ensuring efficient and effective services (including admission services) in secondary schools (Yusuf, 2017). Specifically, school's principal, in conjunction with the admission section, set out the

strategies to be used for the selection of qualified applicants who are seeking placement in a school.

In view of the above, the present study investigated principals' perceptions on admission services in Kwara State Secondary Schools, Nigeria. Specifically, it aimed to inquire from the principals their views on issues relating to admission services. Since principals are saddled with the responsibility of ensuring effective implementation of admission services, it is believed that their views would shed more light on how admission services influence students' academic success in secondary schools with a view to offer a better understanding of the study phenomenon. Thus, this study is to investigate principals' perception of admission services via a phenomenology approach. This following questions guide the study:

1. What is principal's view concerning contemporary issues on admission service in secondary schools?
2. What is principal's perceived problems militating against admission services in school?
3. What is principal's perceived solutions to the problems of admission services in school?

Literature Review

Theoretically, student development theory, which is also known as the student services theory, is seen as the part of educational psychology, which theorizes that students gain in a post-educational environment, has been used to explain the importance of admission services in school. The theory articulates that there are certain needs that should be provided for students to improve their knowledge. It is assumed that student needs are influenced by their environment and genetics). This theory can be classified into five groups, namely psycho-social theory, cognitive structural theory, person-environment, humanistic existential and student process models (Astin, 1984). The most significant aspect of the group is the psychosocial theory, which has to do with future issues that are related to sequential age which concentrate on individual's advancement through a series of stages which is in consonance with the students' needs (Moore & Upcraft, 1990). Cognitive structural theory has to do with the way students see and rationalize their school experiences. Person-environment talks on the relationship between conceptualization of students and environment. It specifically looks into student and its environment. Also, humanistic existential theory focuses on some conceptualization of human student nature, responsibility, self-actualization and freedom and that personal growth is driven by self-awareness, self-disclosure and self-acceptance. Similarly, the student development model means the practical and abstract of the needs of the student in school (Moore & Upcraft, 1990), and part of the need is admission services. Basically, psychosocial theory is synonymous with the admission services because it helps to test the intellectual acumen of the students before placement. Student development theory helps to understand that development of students starts from the aptitude and interview test that are conducted by the school before their admission. In applying students' development theory to this study,

this theory provides a framework for better knowledge on how students' needs (including admission services) should be provided in school so that school can actualize its aim and objectives of establishment. Also, the theory enables students to explore variety of services provided for them in order to excel in their academic endeavor (Renn, 2008).

A reasonable number of quantitative studies have established a relationship between admission service and academic achievement in schools (Buchanan & Jones, 2010; Clinedinst & Hawkins, 2011). For instance, Archibong, Jude, and Etudor-Eyo (2011) examined the relationship between admission based on gender and students' academic achievement in Federal Government Schools in Nigeria. The outcome of the study found a significant relationship (high) between admission and academic performance. They were of the view that writing and interview are the most reliable ways for determining students that are to be enrolled for school programs. They concluded that admission of new students should be subject to thorough scrutiny. If the applicants are subjected to due process of admission, it would definitely have a positive relationship with their academic performance. Future studies were suggested on admission service and academic performance.

In the same vein, Sackett, Kuncel, Arneson, Cooper, and Waters (2009) worked on the relationship between admission service and academic achievement in colleges and universities. Their study found a positive significant relationship between admission services and academic performance. Likewise, Shaw, Marini, and Mattern (2013) studied the relationship between admission, placement tests, and students' academic performance.. Their first year results were used to determine whether a relationship exists between admission services and academic performance in schools. They reported that, admission service do not highly significantly correlate with academic achievement. In another related study, Juradja and Munich (2010) worked on the gender gap, competitive pressure and admission performance in Czech Republic schools. They found that admission services influenced academic performance of students.

Additionally, Albanese, Snow, Skochelak, Huggett, and Farrell (2003) conducted a study on admission and students' academic performance of medical students. Their study showed high correlation between admission and academic performance of students. Similarly, Adnet et al. (2011), Hoefer and Gould (2000), Kuncel, Kliegger, Connelly, and Ones (2013) all found highly significant relationships in their separate studies. They agreed that admission service is the first service to be provided to the prospective applicants. The admission service personnel should be proactive in dealing with the applicant seeking for admission in schools. Asuru (2002) and Yusuf, Zahayah, and Thanslikan (2016) confirmed that admission service is needed to achieve school success. Kuncel, Crede, and Thomas (2007) also conducted study on graduate admission test and grade points as the predictive indicators. The findings of their study explained that, admission test conducted for applicants seeking for admission in the school made students to perform excellently when they were admitted. Lamadrid-Figueroa, Castillo-Castillo, Fritz-Hernández, and Magaña-Valladares (2012) focused their research on the nexus of admission service and academic performance in school. They are of the view that although admission service is a good predictor of students' academic performance but future studies is needed to confirm or disconfirm the current findings. Agboola, Adeyemi, and Ogbodo (2014) examined admission

service as a predictor of students' academic achievement. Their study revealed a significant relationship between students admitted through criteria policy and academic achievement of such students. They recommended that stakeholders in admission process procedure should assess the helpfulness of admission policies with a view of making a decision on whether to review the admission policy or abolish it.

Moreover, Fan, Tsai, Su, Kosik, Morisky, Chen, and Lee (2010) investigated the impact of admission services by using interviews on medical students' admissions as it correlates with academic performance in Taiwan. The outcome of the study found a low relationship between interviews and academic performance. Yusuf (2017) investigated the relationship between admission services and students' academic achievement in secondary schools. An adapted questionnaire was used to elicit data on admission services. The outcome of the study found a positive relationship on admission and academic achievement. The study suggests that a qualitative study should be carried out to support or discountenance the findings. Studies suggest that the role of the school principal covers many different areas including teacher evaluation, student discipline, leadership, and many others. Being an effective principal is hard work and is also time-consuming. A principal is well-adjusted within all the roles and works hard to ensure he/she is doing is best for all constituents involved (Akkary, 2014; Amanchukwu & Ololube, 2015; Rinne, Järvinen, Tikkanen, & Aro, 2016). School principal plans, organize, direct, control, and manage the educational and administrative aspects of secondary schools including physical and human resources. On admission services in school, the school principal plays a vital role in deciding upon the strategies to be used for the selection of applicants. Principal, vice-principals, and personnel of the admissions unit brainstorm on the tactics to be used to select qualified applicants (Akkary, 2014).The principal determines the admission strategies to be used with head of the admission unit which is called "Admission Officer". The admission officer superintends the unit in conjunction with other admission personnel of the unit (Adeyemo, 2010; Juradja & Munich, 2008; Okoroma, 2008; Israel & Israel, 2014; Lewin, 2015; Sawyer, 2010; Soares, 2012).

In view of the above studies, it can be deduced that majority of the studies agreed that students who are admitted through proper admission process do well in the school system. Taken together, it can be said that the phenomenology approach is yet to be fully explored to investigate admission services in school.

Methodology

Research design

The research design adopted for the study is a phenomenology type of research. According to Creswell (2013), the main goal of the foregoing type is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon. The basis for conducting this study via this approach is to avail us an opportunity of getting a better understanding of how principals' perceptions on admission services because the issue on admission services are key to

achieving the goals of secondary education as enshrined in the National Policy of Education (Creswell, 2013; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013; Wikiversity, 2015).

Sampling techniques and participants

The study participants consist of all principals of secondary schools from the three senatorial zones in Kwara State. In order to select the needed participants for the study, we employed three sampling techniques: stratified, purposive and convenience techniques. First, stratified was used to group schools according to three senatorial districts (Kwara South, Kwara Central, and Kwara North) in the state. Second, we adopted the purposive technique to select secondary schools across the three. Third, convenience sampling technique was used to select 20 schools principals out of the schools selected for the study (Creswell, 2013). Table below shows how 20 schools' principals were selected from the three senatorial districts using stratified, purposive and sampling techniques.

Table 1. *Selection of principals for the study*

S/N	Senatorial District	Number of School Selected	Number of Principal Selected
1	Kwara South	10	10
2	Kwara Central	6	6
3	Kwara North	4	4
	Total	20	20

Data collection, codification and transcription, and analysis procedure

According to Turner (2010), interview protocol is a document is used to conduct an interview session. It contains an introduction, the questions to be asked of the interviewee and topic to focus on in observation. It is also a set of questions to facilitate and guide semi-structured open-ended interviews. In view of the foregoing, we developed an instrument titled "Interview Protocol on Admission Services (IPAS)" to enquire information from the school principals. The interview protocol has five items; the items were formulated based on research questions of the study. We have valid reasons for the use of interview for the study. First, interview protocol covers vital information that can be used to collect relevant information from the interviewees on admission services. Second, interview protocol helps to get an in-depth view, in which an inference can be made from it.

The interview protocol was checked by experts in the School of Education and Modern Languages, Universiti Utara Malaysia, to ensure that the questions contained therein suit the purpose of the study. A pilot study was conducted in one secondary school principal that was not selected for the main study. The essence of the pilot study was to ensure the dependability of the interview protocol before the main data collection. The pilot data were transcribed and given back to the principal to check the field-notes and recorded interview to be sure whether what we wrote and recorded are exactly what was taken from him. The

pilot study's findings helped to address and adequately prepare for the main study (Creswell, 2013; Silverman, 2016; Wikiversity, 2015).

During main data collection, the selected 20 principals were told to check the field-notes and recorded interview to be sure whether what the researcher wrote and recorded are exactly what was taken from them. The interviewees were given adequate time to respond to the questions contained in the interview protocols. The interviewees were successfully interviewed with the use of digital tape recorder, iPad phone, laptop, pencil, biro, and jotter. The interview sessions were conducted by the authors of this study (Creswell, 2013; Turner, 2010). To ensure the accuracy of the interview conducted, we carefully and meticulously paid attention to the tape recorder which was used to grant the interviewees from the school principals (Silverman, 2016). The interviews we conducted were transcribed; we did the transcription so as to ensure proper transcription of all the interviews granted. The transcription of the interviews produced 16 data pages. The minimum time spent on informants during the interview was 15 minutes while the maximum lasted for 37 minutes. All the interviewees' interviews were used for the study. Before the analysis of the transcribed interviews, codification and categorization of the themes were done. We jettisoned the idea of manual analysis in qualitative research because we believe that using sophisticated software will help to understand the work better (Blismas & Dainty, 2003). After the transcription of the interview, the transcribed interviews were carefully coded thematically. Below is the code assigned to the 20 selected principals.

Table 2. *Informants and code assigned*

Code Assigned	Code Assigned
Informant 1	Informant 11
Informant 2	Informant 12
Informant 3	Informant 13
Informant 4	Informant 14
Informant 5	Informant 15
Informant 6	Informant 16
Informant 7	Informant 17
Informant 8	Informant 18
Informant 9	Informant 19
Informant 10	Informant 20

Note: Informant connotes principal

Ethical consideration

Ethical consideration can be identified as one of the most essential parts of the research. Research may be condemned to failure if this part is missing (Turner, 2010). Silverman (2016) defines ethical consideration as a fundamental issue in research, which investigator needs to comply with to ensure truth and prevent errors. Thus, ethical consideration requires trust, accountability, fairness, and mutual respect among all parties involved in research. To ensure that this study is free from ethical issues, therefore we

obtained an introductory letter from the Awang Had Salleh Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, University Utara Malaysia. The letter was taken to all the selected schools used for the study. The school principals agreed to be part of the study by given their approval before the commencement of the study. This foregoing is consistent with the recommendation of Creswell (2013) on the need for ethical consideration in research. Specifically, he opined that research participants should not be exposed to harm in any ways whatsoever, respect for the dignity of research participants should be prioritized as well as full consent should be obtained from the participants prior to the study. Additionally, the protection of the privacy of research participants has to be ensured. Adequate level of confidentiality of the research data should be ensured while anonymity of individuals and organizations participating in the research has to be ensured.

Findings

After data collection, transcription and thematic codifications, three main themes and ten sub-themes were generated in line with the three research questions and objectives of the study. Theme one of the study is based on the issues on admission services, theme two is on problems of admission services while theme three is on solutions to the problems of admission services in secondary schools. Specifically, table below shows the three main themes and their sub-themes.

Table 3. *Thematic coding of the transcribed interview*

Theme One: Issues on Admission Services

Sub-themes:
1. Meaning of admission services
2. Nature of admission services
3. Provision of admission services
4. Importance of admission services

Theme Two: Problems of Admission Services

Sub-themes:
1. High number of applicants
2. Improper planning of admission process
3. Politicization

Theme Three : Solutions to the Problems of Admission Services

Sub-themes:
1. De-politicization
2. Proper admission planning process
3. High priority on merit

Theme one: Contemporary issues on admission services in school

Informants' views on issues of admission services form the theme as displayed in the general model of the study. Specifically, the sub-themes under theme include meaning of admission service, nature of admission services, provision of admission service, and importance of admission service.

Sub-theme one: meaning of admission services, according to informant 5, "…admission service is the process of admitting students into the school by following certain procedures that are in line with admission guidelines. It is a process of admitting students that have the certain criteria for admission into the school system. Similarly, informant 7 and 19 were of the view that:

> "Admission can define as the service that takes care of selecting qualified candidates that are seeking placement in school. It is an integral part of the input in the education system. It is the first services that students get before other services." (Informant 7)

> "Admission service is the service provided to recruits the best of the applicants seeking admission placement in the school system." (Informant 19)

Furthermore, informant 14 opined,"…. Admission service is a process which involves selecting candidates who are duly qualified for admission". Informant 16 who support the view of the foregoing expressed, "… Admission services are services provided for applicants seeking placement in the school system." According to informant 17, it is a process of selecting the right candidates for placement in school". In the same vein, informant 13 understood admission services as:

> "It can be seen as the process of selecting the suitable candidates for placement in school. Admission services are meant to pick the students who are academically ready for academic rigor in school. Admission services are essential for the development of the school. Admission is a process where prospective students will undergo before getting admitted into the school system. It is a valuable service in the school. It can also be defined as the services that deal with the process of admitting applicants seeking placement in the school system."

Likewise, the views of informants 9, 2 and 8 are also in consonance with the position of other informants; they described admission services as:

> "Admission service is a process in which applicants are selected through certain procedures. Admission service is an important service in the school. It is the first service that students get before other services." (Informant 9)

> "Admission is about recruiting students into the school for academic excellence. It can be defined as the method used in selecting applicants for admission. It is a kind of service rendered to students seeking placement in school." (Informant 2)

"It is an essential service that is needed for the development of the education system. Admission services are done purposely to recruit students into the school system." (Informant 8)

In summary, it has shown that admission services in the school system are akin to the development of the education system. Virtually, all the informants interviewed unanimously agreed that admission is a unique service that is first given to prospective applicants seeking placement in the school. It is the cornerstone of the education system at all levels of education (primary, secondary, and tertiary).

Sub-theme two: nature of admission services, response from informant 10 also revealed that "… State government through the ministry of education is responsible for admission into the junior section. The ministry spearheads the conduct of common entrance examinations…They usually send those that passed the examinations to us for consideration based on a benchmark that the ministry sets out.   Similarly, the response from informant 20 revealed,

"The admission into junior section is usually decided by the state ministry of education. The Ministry conducts entrance examination for applicants and has benchmarks which schools will use in admitting students. On senior section, the admission is usually based on the performance of students in secondary examinations conducted examination body (NECO). Students who pass with five subjects (including Math and English) will be admitted to senior classes."

Supporting the views of other informants, the view of informant 13 on the nature of admission services in the school shows that:

"Like other public schools, the ministry of education takes care of the entrance examination of applicants for admission into JSS1; they only send those that passed the examinations in various schools of their choice based on the benchmark for admission. On senior section, their admission is based on the performance of students in Junior Examinations conducted by NECO. Students who passed with five credits and above will be admitted to various classes of their choice based on their subjects."

The response from informant 15 said that "… We have an admission committee who is responsible for the placement in our school…We advertise, conduct examination as well as interviews with prospective students in our school. Informant 19 reported,

"Like other public schools, the admission here is being conducted the state ministry of education. Firstly, an examination called common entrance is usually conducted for applicants seeking placement in our school. After that, successful candidates would be picked based on the score obtained in Common entrance. In junior section, the admission is always based on the junior examination results."

Sub-theme three: provision of admission services in school, interview conducted for schools' principals confirmed the adequate provision of admission services in their respective schools. They point out that the non - provision of the service is a disservice to students. The majority of the informants used for the study were very sure of the delivery

of the services above in their schools. For instance, informant 14 expressed that "admission services are well provided in their school… A school that does not provide it is not a normal school… A school is known by the nature of admission services offered for her students". In support of the foregoing statement, informant 19 said, "… the provision of admission service is a necessity in education sector, so the provision of it cannot be compromised."

Similarly, informant 4 affirmed that "… admission services should be provided at all levels of education (primary, secondary, and higher institution), therefore we provide admission services in our respective schools."   Also, informant 12 is of the view that "… provision of admission services for students is carried out in our schools. However, schools should provide admission services for the development of the education system.   Likewise, informant 10 admitted the provision of admission services for their students in school.

Sub-theme four: importance of admission services on students' academic achievement, according to informant 16, admission services help to select qualified candidates for admission. It shows the academic excellence of the school. It helps to fulfill the essence of education. Informant 6 also lends credence to the importance of admission in the school that "… admission services help to select the best students to the school and that it creates competition amongst the candidates… It also ensures academic assurance in the school". In support of the other informants, informants 16 admitted,

> "Admission service helps to admit qualified applicants for admission. It promotes excellence and it eradicates mediocre in the school system. It also helps to promote the image of the school. It promotes academic excellence." (Informant 16)

> "It helps students to perform better when admitted into the school. It helps to fulfill the essence of education. It is an essential service in the school system." (Informant 14)

The above on importance of admission into the school system shows the level of magnitude of importance in which admission stands for. About what others have said, there are expected positive responses are emanating from the informants of the study. Informant 7 said, "… to recruit the best students among multiple applicants seeking placement in the school." Informant 5 expressed,…" admission services is meant to fulfill the essence of education because it helps in selecting the best applicants for admission". Similarly, informant 6 opined that it ensures quality assurance in education. Also, informant 11 is of the view that…"it helps to determine the number of students to be admitted." Likewise, informant 18 expressed,

> "The importance of admission is to get students into the school system. Another purpose of admission is to fulfill the essence of education which is a social service which government is providing to all interested candidates in the state. Another important is for the students to be able to finish his/her in time so as to allow such students to get admission into the university system. The importance of admission service is also to test the intellectual ability of the students." (Informant 18)

In the same vein, the more responses emanating from the informants revealed the significance of admission services in school settings. Informant 1 said, "… it helps to pick

select the best candidates for admission and that it promotes academic excellence as well as ensures quality assurance in education". Buttressing this point, informants 17 asserted, "…It makes admitted students perform better and it changes the tone of the school… It also helps to select the right candidates for admission to the school. Informant 11's view concerning the importance of admission is that"… the importance of admission is to scout for the best brains for placement in our school, and it helps to promote academic excellence so as to enhance the academic performance of students."

Theme two: Problems of admission services in school

After codification of the transcribed interview, codification, problems of admission services in school emerged as theme two of the study. Precisely, high number of applicants, improper planning of admission process and politicization of admission emerged as the sub-themes of the theme two.

Sub-theme one: high number of applicants, according to informant 1 …"high number of applicants is one of the problems that schools in Nigeria face when selecting new students to be enrolled." In the same vein, informants 1 and 2 expressed,

> "People's flair for qualitative education is on the rise. Due to this, we often battle with high demand for admission placement in school. Since we have limited space in our school, we used admission guidelines to edge out unqualified candidates with a view to admit those that are well qualified among them." (Informant 1)

> "Generally, high number of applicants for admission is a serious concern when it comes to admission services in education system." (Informant 2)

In the same vein, there are other informants who hold similar view concerning the high number of applicants that are seeking admission in secondary schools in Kwara State. Informants 7 and 8 asserted,

> "The rate at which applicants are seeking placement, most especially in public schools is high. High number of applicants is one of the factors that are militating against effective admission services in secondary schools." (Informant 7)

> "Even though the state ministry of education does the conduct of the entrance examination for the prospective applicants, the number of applicants that scaled through the entrance examination that the ministry of education sends to us which we are to consider for admission is high." (Informant 8)

Furthermore, informant 10 bare his mind on the issue concerning the high number of applicants as a problem affecting admission services in secondary schools in kwara State, Nigeria. He opined,

> "High number of applicants is a common feature when discussing the issue of admission services in school. We receive high number of applications on yearly basis due to the standard that our school is known for. In order to reduce trim down the applicants, we used different admission process techniques to select the best

candidates among them. Those selected will then be admitted into various classes in our school." (Informant 10)

Sub-theme two: politicization, politicization encompasses getting what, when and how in an organization. In view of the interview granted in this study, politicization of admission emerged as sub-theme of theme two. The view of the informants 8 and 15 expressed,

> "Generally, the issue of admission services in school is a sensitive issue due to the nature of the services. Since education cannot be separated from politics, then politics cannot be disjointed from admission services at all levels of education (primary, secondary and tertiary institutions." (Informant 8)

> "It is a known fact that some applicants get admitted into school through connections, this cannot be rule out considering the nature of our society. Politics and education cannot be separated because sometimes it's through politics that some schools got established and get its resources to function (Informant 15).

In the light of the above statements, it shows that politicization of admission is common in schools because education and politics cannot be separated from each other.

Sub-theme three: improper planning of admission process, planning is an essential ingredient to achieve the desired goals and objectives in education system. If the school programs are not properly planned, then the goal set by the school will not be achieved. In view of the data collected for this study, informants are of the view that improper planning is one of the problems of admission services in education system. They opined,

> "Improper planning includes inadequate registration and documentation of admission seekers, inadequate preparation for entrance examination to be conducted for admission seekers, and lack of preparation for interview to be conducted for admission seekers." (Informant 6)

> "This issue is a common feature in both public and private schools in Nigeria. Thus, improper planning of admission process leads to improper selection of applicants to be admitted into the school." (Informant 18)

Theme three: solutions to the problems of admission services in school

Solutions to the problems of admission services emerged as theme three based on research question three of the study. The sub-themes of theme three includes: de-politicization, proper admission planning process, and high priority on merit.

Sub-theme one: de-politicization, de-politicization means to remove from the arena or influence of politics from something. It can also be defined as a way of doing something without having political coloration (Informant 12). Informant 13

opined that…"de-politicization of admission and selection services in schools will go a long way in ensuring effectiveness in education system." Similarly, informant 19 expressed,

> "Selection of applicants seeking for admission at all levels of education (primary, secondary, and tertiary institution) should be devoid of politics. Since selection of applicants is a very sensitive issue, then it is outcome should not be influenced by external factors (Politicians, parents, traditional rulers, etc.). It is advisable that these external factors should steer clear of admission selection." (Informant 19).

Sub-theme two: proper planning of admission process, the interview conducted in this study confirmed the above submission on the need to ensure that proper planning of admission process is indeed needed to stem the problem of admission services in the school system. Informants 1, 4 and 8 are of the view,

> "The solution to the problem of admission services is to ensure that proper planning of admission process is put in place to ensure the objectives of which admission services seek to achieve." (Informant 1)

> "Since the state ministry of education and public schools involve in admission process in public secondary schools in Nigeria, the processes involved should be well planned to ensure quality assurance in our education system." (Informant 4)

> "Proper planning of on how to conduct the entrance examination as well as interview to be used for the applicants should be well deigned, this would enable them to ensure that the aim of education is achieved." (Informant 8)

Informant 10 expressed,

> "Proper planning of admission process increases the efficiency of the school. It reduces the risks involved before, during and after the admission and selection activities. Thus, effective planning of admission such as entrance examination and interview should be properly coordinated by the school principals in conjunction with the state ministry of education. It utilizes with maximum efficiency the available time and resources." (Informant 10)

Sub-theme three: high priority on merit, on high priority on merit in admission, informant 10 expressed,

> "Academic success is determined in view of the success recorded by students in terms of grades obtained in their various examinations. Thus, merit is an important yardstick for determining students who have done well in the school system. Thus, in this study, the interview conducted for informants (school principals) show that high priority on merit when selecting applicants for placement in school will help to promote academic excellence." (Informant 10)

In the same vein, informant 2 is of the view that:

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"Admission services in school should be based on merit. Applicants with high grades in entrance examination and interview should be selected first in line before considering those with those grades below high grades. Instilling merit in the process of admission services is a factor that promotes academic excellence and ensures quality assurance. Sincerely, the importance merit cannot be over-emphasized, hence the need for merit in school system." (Informant 2)

The above statement confirms that merit should be used in selecting the applicants for admission.

Discussion

In line with the first research objectives of this study, our objective was to analyze the contemporary issues on admission services in school. Thus, evidence from our study revealed that there were issues on admission services, they were: meaning, nature, provision, and importance. These issues formed the sub-themes under theme one. On the meaning of admission services as explained by the informants, they gave an insight into what admission services is all about. Thus, they saw it as a careful selection of applicants for placement in the school system by using various selection procedures. The foregoing finding is similar to the studies of Juradja and Munich (2010) and Lamadrid-Figuera, Castillo-Castillo, Fritz-Hernandez, and Magana-Vallandares (2012) who opined that admission service is the process of selecting qualified applicants to be admitted in the school system. Concerning the nature of admission services in secondary schools, our study established that the nature of admission services differs. We found that admission and selection procedures in public secondary schools were jointly carried out by the state ministry of education and schools. For applicants to be admitted into junior secondary school level, the state ministry of education conducts the entrance examination (on Mathematics, English and General Paper), and interview (oral examination) for the applicants. The school chooses the candidates to be admitted based on benchmark set by the school. In similar vein, for admission into senior secondary section, National Examination Council (NECO), which is a government's education agency, is saddled with the responsibility for conducting an examination for applicants who had completed their junior secondary schools and are interested in going to senior section. The nature of admission services is in congruent with the work of Agboola, Adeyemi, and Ogbodo (2014), who are of the view that the nature of admission in public schools is the same. On provision of admission services in the school system, we found that admission services were provided in schools. This finding is similar to the work of Adnett et al. (2011) who observed that the provision of admission services helps to fast track the development in the education system. This will, in turn, manifest in the academic achievement of students. Also, we found that admission service was an important service that influences students' academic achievement in secondary schools. Students who passed through the admission and selection process (i.e., examination and interview) tended to do well when admitted into school. This finding is congruent with the earlier studies conducted by Albanese et al. (2003) Archibong et al. (2011), Shaw et al. (2013) and Yusuf, Zahayah, and Thanslikan (2016) who conducted studies on the relationship between admission services

and students' academic performance and found that the importance of admission cannot be underestimated because it helps to determine the success of the school. Likewise, the finding is in line with the studies carried out by Kuncel, Crede, and Thomas (2007) and Sacket et al. (2009) who concurred that good admission and selection procedures help to promote academic achievement in secondary schools.

For the second research objective of the study, which sought to identify the problems militating against admission services in secondary schools, three key problems were found to be militating against admission services in secondary schools. They are high number of applicants, politicization of admission, and improper planning of admission process. High number of applicants was an important factor that militates against effective admission services. The number of applicants seeking for placement was more than the number of applicants that schools can accommodates. This study is in consonance with the work of Okoroma (2008) who opined that the high number of applicants seeking for admission in schools is alarming. This trend is applicable to primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. Also, the politicization of admission was a factor that affects an effective admission service in secondary schools as expressed by the school principals selected for the study. The selection of applicants for admission is often influenced by external factors (e.g., applicants' parents, politicians, etc.). This affects the proper selection of applicants to be admitted into the school system. Another problem facing admission services in schools is the improper planning of admission process. Improper planning process entails inadequate planning on how to execute admission process such as examination and interview. This finding is in line with the study of Okoroma (2008) who is of the view that lack or inadequate planning of admission services is one of the banes of education in Nigeria.

On last research objective of the study, we sought to proffer solutions to the problem of admission services in the school system. Three important solutions (de-politicization, proper admission planning process and high priority on merit) were offered by the school principals which they believe can help to ensure effective admission services in education system. Firstly, de-politicization of admission in this context as explained by the school principals encompasses separating politics from services in education system. Politics of any kinds should not be mixed with the issue of admission services in school, if the school's goals and objectives are to be achieved. The selection of process of the applicants should not be influenced by external factors. Admission issue should not be tampered with or manipulated because it may lead to ineffectiveness in school (Okoroma, 2008). Secondly, proper planning of admission process is suggested by the school principals as a way of providing efficient and effective admission services in school. Since planning is a crucial and paramount function of school principals, effective admission planning process gives the school principal a sense of direction, and brings a clear idea of what need to be organized. In order to achieve the purpose of admission services in school, the objectives laid down in planning become guiding post for directing and mobilizing the activities involved in admission services. The quality of leadership, motivation and communication displayed by school principals to a large extent is conditioned by these objectives. Thirdly, high priority on merit is given by the school principals as another possible solution to the problem of admission services in education system. Applicants who

perform brilliantly during the entrance examination and interview and obtain high score should be given admission in view of their sterling performance in the selection process. Admission in schools should be based on merit because merit often leads to academic excellence. This finding is in line with the study conducted by Killgore (2009) who averred that applicants should be admitted according to their success in entrance examination and interview conducted by the school. Selective admissions practices mean that the "best" students are rewarded with admission to the best schools. Meritocratic values should be incorporated into admission practices in education system. The finding is also in tandem with the student psychosocial aspect of student development theory, which postulates that admission services helps to test the intellectual acumen of the students before placement. Student development theory helps to understand that development of students starts from the aptitude and interview test that are conducted by the school before their admission (Renn, 2008).

Taken the research objectives achieved in this study together, thus our study contributed to the body of knowledge from three perspectives, namely practical, theoretical, and methodological perspectives. From practical perspective, our study will serve as a guide to government at all levels to have a better understanding of admission services with a view to improve it. It will also assist educational planners, policy makers and school administrators in how to implement the various activities involved in admission services so as to ensure effectiveness in school. From theoretical perspective, our study extends the existing studies by validating students' development theory, which helps to understand the importance of admission services to students' academic achievement. From methodological perspective, we increase the body of knowledge in view of the interview protocol developed for this study, which helps to investigate principals' perception on admission services because literature indicates that studies on admission services are often investigated using quantitative approach.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on evidence from our study, it can be said that admission service is one of the fundamental services in school system. Its importance cannot be underestimated. Being the first service that students will first experience before other services, it should be well provided so as to ensure that the aims and objectives of secondary education are attained. Based on the findings of the study, we recommend (1) entrance examination and interview should always be used to select applicants that are seeking placement in secondary schools, (2) proper planning of admission process should be put in place to ensure an itch free admission service exercise in the school system, (3) admission services in the school should be devoid of internal and external influence, and (4) merit should be the watchword of the school principals when providing admission services in the school system, this will ensure efficient and effective admission service in school; and lastly, admission services should be well provided in secondary schools.

This study has several limitations which we believe future studies should be able to address. Firstly, we selected only secondary schools' principals as our informants for the

study.   Therefore, future studies should include admission personnel unit in the school with a view to getting comprehensive information as regard the admission services in school. Secondly, since this study focused on students' admission in school, inquiries should be made from students so that adequate information about their views on admission will help researchers to draw conclusion. Thirdly, we used interview to gather relevant information from the informants. Thus, the use of other methods of data collection in research, such as focus group discussion (FGD) will help to get information which will assist to know more about admission services in school. Lastly, a mixed-method approach of data collection will help to get comprehensive information on admission services.

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